

9/11 planners set for US trial

BBC ONLINE

The US yesterday formally sent to trial five suspected al-Qaeda militants believed to have planned the 9/11 terror attacks.

The five Guantanamo Bay inmates, including alleged mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, will be tried by a military commission.

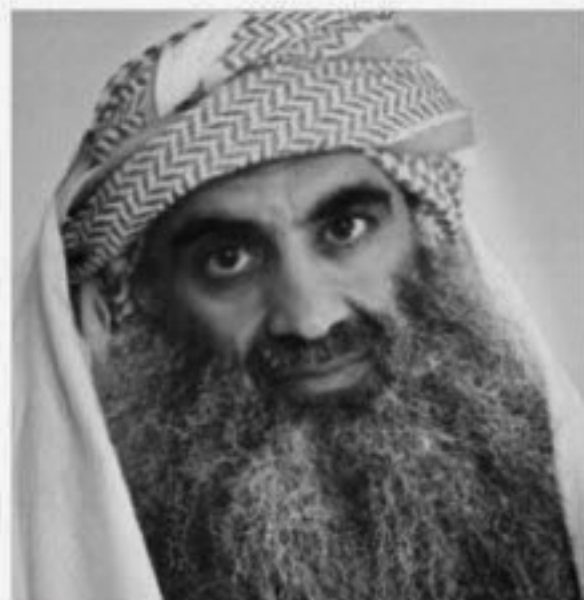
They will face charges including terrorism, hijacking, conspiracy, murder and destruction of property.

They could face the death penalty if found guilty, the Pentagon confirmed.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and the four others - Waleed bin Attash, Ramzi Binalshibh, Ali Abd al-Aziz Ali and Mustafa Ahmad al-Hawsawi - are expected to be tried together, the Pentagon added.

They are accused of planning and executing the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, which saw hijacked planes strike New York, Washington and Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

A total of 2,976 people died in the attacks.



Khalid Sheikh Mohammed



Ramzi Bin al-shibh

The five suspects are to hear their charges read out before a military court within 30 days, and are expected to be asked to enter a plea.

The decision to refer the charges to a military commission comes after a lengthy legal wrangle over where the five men would face justice.

In 2009 the Obama administration tried to move their trial into US civilian courts, but reversed its decision in April 2011 after widespread opposition.

The five were eventually charged in June 2011 with offences similar to

those they were accused of by the Bush administration.

US President Barack Obama came into office in 2009 pledging to close Guantanamo Bay and try high-value

terror suspects in US civilian courts.

But he was forced to abandon the closure plans as it became apparent that the issue of where to imprison and try al-Qaeda suspects had no easy resolution.

The Pentagon has previously said Khalid Sheikh Mohammed admitted he was responsible "from A to Z" for the 9/11 attacks.

In a previous court hearing he has said that he intended to plead guilty and would welcome martyrdom.

He was captured in Pakistan in March 2003 and has been detained

at Guantanamo Bay since 2006.

US prosecutors allege that he was involved with a host of other terrorist activities.

These include the 2002 nightclub bombing in Bali, Indonesia, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl and a failed 2001 attempt to blow up an airliner using a shoe bomb.

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed has alleged that he was repeatedly tortured during his detention in Cuba. CIA documents confirm that he was subjected to simulated drowning, known as waterboarding, 183 times.

Also facing trial are: Waleed bin Attash, a Yemeni; Ramzi Bin al-shibh, a Yemeni who allegedly helped find flight schools for the hijackers; Ali Abd al-Aziz Ali, accused of helping nine of the hijackers travel to the US; and Mustafa Ahmad al-Hawsawi, a Saudi, accused of helping set up the hijackers with money, clothes and credit cards.

Israel plotting to 'wipe out' Iran

Gunter Grass 'sick of the hypocrisy of the West'

AFP, Berlin

Controversy-courting German Nobel literature laureate Gunter Grass published a poem yesterday in which he accused Israel of plotting Iran's annihilation and threatening global security.

The 84-year-old longtime leftist activist wrote in "What must be said" that he worried Israel "could wipe out the Iranian people" with a "first strike" due to the threat it sees in Tehran's disputed nuclear programme.

"Why do I only say now, aged and with my last ink: the atomic power Israel is endangering the already fragile world peace?" reads the poem, which was published in the daily *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*.

Grass answers that Nazi Germany's "incomparable" crimes against Jews and fears of accusations of anti-Semitism kept him from openly criticising Israel.

But now, "tomorrow could already be too late" and Germany could be a "supplier to a crime", referring to a deal sealed last month for Berlin to sell Israel a sixth nuclear-capable Dolphin-class submarine.

"I admit: I will be silent no longer, because I



Gunter Grass

am sick of the hypocrisy of the West".

Grass, author of the renowned anti-war novel "The Tin Drum" and a vocal critic of successive post-war German governments, sparked outrage

in 2006 when he revealed, six decades after World War II, that he had been a member of the notorious Nazi *Waffen SS*.

Such is Grass's status in German cultural life that Angela Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert was asked about his criticism of the submarine sales to Israel at a regular government press conference.

"In Germany, the freedom of artistic expression applies, as, fortunately, does the freedom of the government not to comment on every work of art," Seibert said.

Israel, the sole if undeclared nuclear power in the Middle East, has said it is keeping all options open for responding to Iran's nuclear programme, which it says is aimed at securing nuclear weapons, posing an existential threat to the Jewish state.

Iran, whose president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad frequently questions Israel's right to exist, has consistently denied that its nuclear programme is aimed at making weapons.

Powerful tornadoes strike Texas

AFP, Washington

At least two tornadoes ripped across northern Texas Tuesday, flipping huge trucks like toys, tearing off roofs and grounding flights but apparently causing only minor casualties.

One twister touched down in a parking lot full of tractor-trailers -- large trucks that move shipping-container sized cargos -- and television images showed several large vehicles twisting and flying dozens of feet up into the air.

The tornadoes caused major damage in several metropolitan areas, including Kennedale, Arlington and Lancaster, local media reported. But despite the powerful storm, casualties appeared to be minimal.



PHOTO: AFP

A group of leftist militants protest outside a courthouse in Ankara holding portraits of people slain or tortured during the September 12, 1980 military coup. A landmark trial of two surviving leaders of the 1980 military takeover began yesterday, more than three decades after the army seized power.

Israel plans 1,121 new settler homes

Netanyahu to meet Fayyad

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's construction and housing ministry yesterday published tenders for 1,121 new settler homes, most of them in annexed east Jerusalem, with others in the West Bank and the Golan Heights.

Meanwhile, Israeli and Palestinian officials yesterday said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet next week Palestinian premier Salam Fayyad.

They didn't elaborate the purpose of the meeting but hinted at the stalled peace process to be the subject matter.

Of that number, 872 are to be built in Har Homa, a contentious settlement neighbourhood in the southern part of Arab east Jerusalem, according to documents published on the ministry website.

Another 180 are to be built in Givat Zeev, just to the north of Jerusalem in the West Bank, while the remaining 69 are to be built in Katzarin in the occupied Golan Heights, the documents showed.

Contacted by AFP, a ministry spokesman dismissed the tenders as "nothing new," but settlement activists said it was the first time the offers had been made public.

The spokesman said the tenders were part of the punitive campaign Israel vowed to wage against the Palestinians after they won membership at the UN cultural organisation, UNESCO.

In early November, Israel said it would build 2,000 new settler homes in response to UNESCO's decision to accept Palestine as a member, of which 1,650 homes were to be built in east Jerusalem.

The announcement came as Israel took the surprise step of evicting 15 Jewish settlers from a disputed property in the southern West Bank city of Hebron, accusing them of not obtaining the necessary military permits for the purchase.

Israel captured east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Syrian Golan Heights during the 1967 Six-Day War.

The international community considers all Israeli settlement on occupied land to be illegal under international law.



Benjamin Netanyahu

LeT founder goads US over \$10m bounty

AFP, Rawalpindi

The founder of the Pakistani militant group blamed for the 2008 Mumbai attacks goaded the United States yesterday in a defiant public appearance mocking his \$10 million US bounty.

Hafiz Saeed, the founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba, the extremist organisation accused of masterminding the carnage that killed 166 people in Mumbai four years ago, said he was ready to face "any American court" to answer charges.

The 62-year-old former engineering and Arabic professor appeared on stage at a specially-convened press conference in the Flashman Hotel, close to the headquarters of the Pakistan army in the garrison city of Rawalpindi.

Saeed makes regular public appearances in Pakistan and he mocked the idea of offering a bounty for someone who lives so openly.

"These rewards are usually announced for people who are hiding in mountains or caves. I wish the Americans would give this reward money to me."

Saeed is a leading figure in the Defence Council of Pakistan, a coalition of right-wing, religious and extremist groups opposed to the government reopening Nato supply lines to Afghanistan, which have been closed since November.

The coalition has staged noisy demonstrations in recent months and Saeed said the campaign had worried Washington.

FEAR OF DISUNITY Thailand bans Macbeth adaptation

AFP, Bangkok

Thai censors have banned a film based on William Shakespeare's "Macbeth", saying the tale could sow "disunity" in the politically divided kingdom.

In the play, a power-hungry general kills the King of Scotland to take the throne for himself.

"The committee agreed that the film 'Shakespeare Must Die' contains material causing disunity in the country," the culture ministry's office of film and video said in a statement released Tuesday.

The royal family is an extremely sensitive subject in Thailand, where 84-year-old King Bhumibol Adulyadej is revered by many as a demi-god.

Syria rebels will never defeat Assad's army

Says Russia; violence kills dozens

AFP, Moscow

Russia stepped up its backing of embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad yesterday by warning the West that the rebels would never be able to defeat his army even if "armed to the teeth."

The stark declaration marked a change in tone for Moscow amid earlier signs of it giving up support for a regime that relies on Russia for its weapons and in return offers the Kremlin diplomatic sway in the region.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the course now being taken by Western and some Arab nations was inciting the armed opposition to keep fighting despite a new peace plan from international envoy Kofi Annan.

"It is clear as day that even if the Syrian opposition is armed to the teeth, it will not be able to defeat the government's army," Interfax quoted Lavrov as saying while on a visit to the ex-Soviet nation of Azerbaijan.

"Instead, there will be carnage that lasts many, many years -- mutual destruction."

Lavrov said the "Friends of Syria" meeting held last weekend in Istanbul by the opposition's supporters undermined Annan's efforts by recognising the Syrian National Council (SNC) as a "legitimate representative" of all Syrians.

Analysts said Lavrov appeared to be voicing the limits to which Russia was ready to side with efforts to orchestrate a transition of power that could end a year of violence the United Nations says has claimed more than 9,000 lives.

Russia has backed Annan's peace plan and urged Assad to keep his commitment to withdraw the army from urban areas by April 10.

But it has also stressed the importance of the rebels putting down their arms within 48 hours of the deadline -- a move diplomats said is included in Annan's initiative.

Meanwhile 18 people were reported killed as Syrian forces pressed a crackdown on rebel bastions despite a truce pledge.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said troops stormed and shelled several towns or villages from early yesterday, following fierce assaults and clashes the previous day which left at least 80 people dead.

NEWS IN brief

US Marines arrive in Australia

AFP, Sydney

The first batch of 2,500 US Marines to be deployed in Australia began work yesterday as Washington bolsters its presence in the strategically vital Asia-Pacific, to the irritation of China.

Some 200 Marines touched down in tropical Darwin overnight as part of an enhanced defence cooperation outlined during a visit by US President Barack Obama in November that rankled Beijing.

The troops are in the Northern Territory on a six-month rotational basis and will be based at Robertson Barracks on the outskirts of the city, building to some 2,500 by 2016-17.

France arrests 10 more Islamists

AFP, Paris

French police swooped on suspected radical Islamists in pre-dawn raids for the second time in less than a week yesterday, arresting 10 people, a source close to the investigation said.

The raids were carried out in the southern port city of Marseille as well as Roubaix near the Belgian border, and in several other locations in the country's south and southwest, the source said.

They came less than a week after 19 alleged Islamists were arrested in similar anti-terrorist swoops on Friday.

Fuel in Gaza under new deal

AFP, Gaza City, Palestinian Territories

Fuel began arriving in Gaza yesterday as per a new deal between the territory's Hamas government and the Palestinian authority in the West Bank, an official said.

"Tanks of fuel holding 45,000 litres each entered through the Kerem Shalom crossing this morning," Raed Futuh, the coordinator on the Palestinian side of the crossing, told AFP.

Gaza has been in the grip of a severe power crisis for months now, with its sole electricity plant unable to function because of an interruption in the supply of fuel to the territory.

India inducts new nuke sub

AFP, New Delhi

India returned to the elite club of countries with a nuclear-powered submarine yesterday when it inducted a new vessel leased from Russia.

Indian Defence Minister AK Antony formally commissioned the INS Chakra II at its base in Visakhapatnam, a naval shipyard on the country's southeast coast in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The 8,140-tonne submarine, capable of firing a range of torpedoes as well as nuclear-tipped Granat cruise missiles, was offered to India by Moscow on a 10-year lease -- a deal greeted with alarm and anger by arch rival Pakistan.

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