



MAKKAH: Muslim pilgrims circle the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque in this holy city yesterday. — AP

SAUDI KING SANCTIONS BINLADIN GROUP

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's King Salman sanctioned the powerful Saudi Binladin Group yesterday over the collapse of a construction crane at Makkah's Grand Mosque, which killed more than 100 people days before the hajj pilgrimage. An investigative commission had concluded that the company "was in part responsible" for Friday's tragedy, which killed at least 111 people and injured almost 400 during a severe thunderstorm accompanied by violent winds. The company had not "respected the norms of safety" at the site, the official Saudi Press Agency said.

The royal decree from King Salman said the Binladin Group should not have left the crane's arm up when it

was not in use. The royal decree also blamed the group for not using up-to-date safety measures and failing to coordinate with meteorological officials. The firm's executives have been forbidden from leaving the kingdom pending the completion of legal action against the company, SPA said. During the same period, the company will also be excluded from new public projects.

The construction firm belongs to the family of the late Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. It was founded more than 80 years ago by the father of Osama, and is run by Osama's brother Bakr. It had been working for four years on a 400,000-sq-m enlargement of the Grand

Mosque, to accommodate increasing numbers of pilgrims. That is the equivalent of more than 50 football pitches, and will allow the complex - Islam's holiest site - to accommodate roughly two million people at once.

After visiting the scene of the tragedy Saturday, Salman vowed to reveal what happened. It was the worst accident in a decade surrounding the hajj, which begins Tuesday and is expected to draw about two million faithful from around the world. Hundreds of thousands had already converged on the Grand Mosque when the red and white crane, one of several overlooking the site, crashed into a courtyard. Saudis, Iranians, Nigerians,

Malaysians, Indonesians and Indians and were among the dead.

King Salman also ordered 1 million riyals (\$267,000) be paid to the relatives of those killed, and the same amount to those permanently injured. Others injured will receive half that amount. The health ministry said Sunday that 394 people were treated after the collapse, and 158 remain hospitalized. "The state wants to show to both the corporates and the Islamic world that they will address any wrongdoing and that they are on top of things," said John Sfakianakis, regional director at Ashmore Group. — Agencies

7 SENTENCED TO DEATH OVER SADEQ MOSQUE...

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Others sentenced to death include two bedoon men who are believed to be fighting with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and a suspect whose identity has not been established. Eight people, including five women, were sentenced to jail terms ranging between two and 15 years for their roles in the bombing or for knowing about the attack and failing to inform authorities. The remaining 14 people including two women were acquitted. Among those acquitted was Jarrah Nimer, owner of the car used to drop off the bomber.

The judge delivered the verdicts while the male defendants were in a metal cage in court and female defendants seated in the courtroom. There were no reactions to the verdicts from the defendants. The rulings are not final and must be challenged in the appeals court because they include death sentences, as per Kuwaiti law. The bombing, the worst single terror attack in Kuwait's history, united the Kuwaiti people, who called for stern action against extremists. Judge

Duaij said before the verdict that the court would like to draw the attention to the dangers of extremist ideology which uses terrorism to carry out its plots.

Rights group Amnesty International criticised the sentences. "These death sentences are a misguided response to what was an utterly heinous and callous criminal act," said James Lynch, Amnesty's acting Middle East and North Africa deputy director. "The death penalty is not the way to tackle terror, and these sentences do nothing to build a culture of rule of law and tolerance which Kuwait needs now more than ever. They must be overturned," he said.

Including those still at large, the defendants comprised seven Kuwaitis, five Saudis, three Pakistanis and 13 bedoons, plus the unidentified fugitive. An IS-affiliated group calling itself Najd Province claimed the Kuwait City bombing as well as suicide attacks at two Shiite mosques in Saudi Arabia in May. Najd is the central region of Saudi Arabia. The Sunni extremists of IS consider Shiites to be heretics and have repeatedly attacked Shiite targets in the region.

'ABDALLY' SUSPECTS DENY ALL CHARGES, ALLEGE...

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Hassan said that he was a resistance member under the sheikh during the Iraqi invasion and that after the liberation, the sheikh asked him to store the arms and ammunition. He said he stored them at his father's residence in Rumaithiya until 2008, when he moved them to his own residence in Abdullah Al-Mubarak, where the weapons were discovered by authorities. Hassan however did not mention the arms found in a farm in Abdaly near the borders with Iraq. The interior ministry said last month it seized large amounts of arms and weapons including 144 kilograms of explosives.

The suspects said they were beaten mercilessly by security forces and repeatedly given electric shocks and forced to sign confessions to all the charges. Some of them said

security members threatened to kill them if they do not confess while some said interrogators threatened to arrest their mothers, wives or daughters.

The judge gave the suspects ample time to speak after lawyers complained that they were not interrogated fairly either at the state security or by the prosecutors. Lawyers demanded that the court should set a neutral medical commission from Kuwait University to examine claims of torture, although a majority of them said they had no traces of torture on their bodies. The lawyers also demanded that their clients be freed pending trial. The court rejected both requests and set Sept 29 for the next hearing after promising suspects to listen to their stories. The prosecutor charged that the suspects had received explosives and weapons training so they could "achieve illegal goals". Iran has officially denied any links to the suspects.

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