

## **US House allows 9-11 victims to sue Saudi; bill forwarded to Barack Obama**

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**Washington:** Approval of a bipartisan bill that would allow families of September 11 victims to sue the government of Saudi Arabia puts Congress on a collision course with President Barack Obama on the eve of the 15th anniversary of the attacks.

The US House of Representatives passed the legislation, which was passed by the Senate unanimously in May. It would require votes from two-thirds of the members in the House and Senate to override a veto.

"Given the concerns we have expressed, it's difficult to imagine the president signing this legislation," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said when the bill passed the Senate in May.

"This legislation would change long-standing, international law regarding sovereign immunity," Earnest said, adding that Obama continues to harbour "serious concerns" that this legislation would make the US vulnerable in other court systems around the world.

House Resolution 3815, also known as the "Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act" or JASTA, creates an exception to sovereign immunity created by a 1976 law, thus allowing US citizens to sue foreign countries for terrorism that kills Americans on US soil.

The law has been invoked to shield Saudi Arabia from lawsuits over the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Fifteen out of 19 men who hijacked commercial airliners and used them as missiles to target the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon were Saudi subjects.

The legislation has also drawn criticism from the Saudi government.

Saudi Arabia has told the Obama administration and members of Congress that it will sell off hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of American assets held by the Kingdom if Congress passes the bill, The New York Times reported in April.

Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi Foreign Minister, delivered the Kingdom's message personally in March during a trip to Washington, telling lawmakers that Saudi Arabia would be forced to sell up to \$750 billion in treasury securities and other assets in the US before they could be in danger of being frozen by American courts, The New York Times reported.

Families of the September 11 victims have used the courts to try to hold members of the Saudi royal family, Saudi banks and charities liable because of what the plaintiffs charged was Saudi financial support for terrorism. These efforts have largely been stymied, in part because of a 1976 law that gives foreign nations some immunity from lawsuits in American courts.

Saudi officials have long denied that the kingdom had any role in the plot of the 2001 terror attacks which killed nearly 3,000 people in New York, Washington D.C area and Pennsylvania.

- (With IANS inputs)