

Lakhvi exempted from in-person appearance in 26-11 attack case

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Islamabad: A Pakistani anti-terrorism court today exempted the mastermind of the 2008 Mumbai attack Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi from appearing in-person after the LeT operations commander cited "serious threats to his life."

"The trial court (Anti-Terrorism Court Islamabad) has exempted Lakhvi from in person appearance in the court on security grounds," Raja Rizwan Abbasi, Lakhvi's counsel, told PTI after the hearing.

"The court has admitted Lakhvi's application after the report of Islamabad Inspector General that he (Lakhvi) is facing serious threats to his life," Abbasi said.

Abbasi had filed an application in the court requesting it to exempt his client from appearing in-person in the 2008 Mumbai attack case as Lakhvi, 55, faces serious threats to his life (from a foreign intelligence agency and a Taliban wing).

"Lakhvi may be assassinated while coming to or leaving the court," Abbasi said.

"Since the trial in the Mumbai attack case began in February 2009, Lakhvi and six other suspects had been attending the proceedings inside Adiala jail (Rawalpindi) but after his release Lakhvi will now have to appear before the court on his own thus putting his life in serious danger," he said and requested the court to exempt Lakhvi from personal attendance during the hearings till the case concludes.

The ATC-Islamabad judge who held the proceedings at the Adiala Jail Rawalpindi also recorded the statements of two witnesses. The judge adjourned the hearing till tomorrow.

The Mumbai attack mastermind, who was released from Adiala Jail on April 10 on bail, has skipped appearance in the court on several occasions in the past, though the law mandates for an accused on bail to appear in a court hearing.

He was released from Adiala Jail after the Lahore High Court suspended his detention under a security act.

The Islamabad High Court in mid April had ordered the trial court to conclude the Mumbai attack case in two months.

The two-month deadline has passed but the pace of the case had not yet picked up.

Lakhvi is living at an undisclosed location since his release.

Lakhvi and six other accused - Abdul Wajid, Mazhar Iqbal, Hamad Amin Sadiq, Shahid Jameel Riaz, Jamil Ahmed and Younis Anjum - have been charged in 2009 with planning and executing the Mumbai attack in November, 2008 that left 166 people dead.

The trial court has decided to hold the hearing twice a week - Wednesday and Thursday - to expedite the case.

- PTI