

Crash that changed the world



There can be some dispute over whether the “Rise and fall of Communism” was the axis of the Twentieth century, but it is for certain that “Fall of the Twin Towers” in New York on Sept 11, 2001 will guide the course of the Twenty First century. The impact of its collapse was and is being felt world wide.



From business tycoon to world’s most wanted

WASHINGTON Osama bin Laden, who bashed global corporate capitalism in a new video attacking the West, could well have joined the world of high-flying businessmen if he had not encountered religion and politics at an early age.

As one of the many sons of a wealthy family in Saudi Arabia, life as a westernised playboy or a business-suited tycoon would have seemed more likely than becoming the symbol of anti-Western terrorism after the September 11 attacks.

But in 1979 at the age of 22, he discovered his true vocation, in what was to become a watershed in the Islamic world.

That was the year in which Egypt decided to sign a peace treaty with Israel, the year the Islamic revolution toppled Iran’s monarchy, and when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

The latter country was to become the first focus of the young bin Laden’s new-found zeal — ironically, as it turned out later, with a helping hand from the United States.

Born in Riyadh in 1957, Osama bin Laden was one of dozens of children of a construction magnate originally from

Yemen. His early years seem to have been unremarkable — photos which emerged much later showed him among a large crowd of smiling western-dressed siblings leaning on a flashy American car.

When the young man decided to turn to militant Islam, his gaze naturally moved to Afghanistan, where the Soviet occupation was facing growing Islamic resistance — funded among others by the US Central Intelligence Agency.

In 1984 bin Laden moved to the Pakistani city of Peshawar, a staging point for mainly Arab militants who were waging Jihad, or Islamic holy war, across the border in Afghanistan.

His Al-Qaeda organisation — the name means “the Base” in Arabic — was set up in around 1988, the year before the Soviets finally gave up the struggle and pulled out of Afghanistan.

With one victory under his belt, bin Laden soon found another cause back in Saudi Arabia, where the kingdom’s rulers had allowed in US troops after Saddam Hussein’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

The presence of the “infidel” forces in the kingdom — home to Holy Mecca and Medina, the holiest sites in Islam — galvanised his anger. His criticism

of the monarchy was so bitter that he found himself expelled from his own country.

Bin Laden next took his four wives and 10 children to Islamist-governed Sudan, where a regime fighting a war against non-Muslim rebels was happy to welcome him.

In five years there he consolidated Al-Qaeda’s operations and joined forces with Ayman al Zawahiri, the Egyptian militant who became his deputy.

His next move was to return to Afghanistan, where he found allies in the country’s new rulers, the hardline Taliban.

Bin Laden provided cash and fighters as the Taliban imposed

their strict version of Islam on the country. In exchange, they let him run the training camps that would turn Al-Qaeda into a global threat.

Well before 9/11, a series of devastating attacks — including one on New York’s World Trade Center in 1993, another in Africa in 1998 and the bombing of a US warship in Yemen in 2000 — established bin Laden and Al-Qaeda as forces to be reckoned with. And then in 2001, as the world saw on television, an airborne Al-Qaeda suicide squad comprising a majority of Saudi citizens flattened the World Trade Center and punched a hole in the Pentagon building in

Washington, DC, killing some 3,000 people in all.

“America has been hit by Allah at its most vulnerable point,” bin Laden said later.

The United States retaliated within weeks with its wide-ranging “war on terror,” but a massive hunt for bin Laden proved fruitless.

While Washington has made a high priority of capturing or killing bin Laden, he appears to believe Al-Qaeda will survive him.

Bin Laden himself told a Pakistani newspaper shortly after September 11: “Jihad will continue even if I am not around.”

