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Habib in Court for 'Defamation' Articles

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The average Australian could "read between the lines" and be influenced by a series of allegedly defamatory newspaper articles about former Guantanamo Bay detainee Mamdouh Habib, a court has heard.

Mr Habib is suing Nationwide News in the NSW Supreme Court for four articles published in 2002 and 2005 dubbing him a "suburban terrorist".

The former Guantanamo Bay detainee claims the four articles, published in The Daily Telegraph and Weekend Australian newspapers, have injured his reputation.

The largest of the articles is an April 2002 three-page spread in the Telegraph with a front-page photograph and headline: "The amazing journey of a suburban terrorist".

It was written after Mr Habib was arrested in Pakistan in October 2001.

The Egyptian-born man was held for more than three years as a suspected terrorist at Guantanamo Bay by US authorities, before being released January last year without charge.

Mr Habib's barrister Clive Evatt told the four-person jury the spread implied his client was an "extremist zealot who was swayed to the cause of the world's most wanted man, Osama Bin Laden".

It also said he was a suburban terrorist, "verging on the delusional about the Islamic cause", and that he illegally owned firearms and ammunition.

While the newspaper had used qualifying words such as "alleged" and "suspected" and attributed the comments to Mr Habib's family and friends, the fairness and balance of the articles were questionable, Mr Evatt said.

"The ordinary reasonable reader is entitled to be influenced by the screaming headlines ... (and) can read between the lines," Mr Evatt said.

"Is The Daily Telegraph being fair, presenting both sides of the story or is The Daily Telegraph ... paying lip service to a few words like suspected and alleged and putting statements into the mouth of Mrs Habib, family and friends?"

Mr Habib's supporters were all named in the articles, Mr Evatt said, while his detractors were referred to as "other acquaintances" or "unnamed".

Anyone who was accused of being a terrorist would be "despised by the community", Mr Evatt said.

"If you were a friend of Osama Bin Laden you wouldn't be welcome in this country or anywhere else in the world," he said.

The four-day hearing, before Justice David Kirby, continues on Wednesday.