

## IN THE NEWS

## U.S.: Killing of Yassin is 'troubling'

The Bush administration called Israel's assassination of Sheik Ahmed Yassin "deeply troubling."

"We find the consequences of this action, in terms of raising tension and making it harder to pursue peace efforts — those are things of concern to us," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Monday.

But White House officials also said they recognized Yassin was a terrorist.

## Sharon-Bush summit in April

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will present a finalized withdrawal plan to President Bush on April 14.

A senior Israeli official traveling with Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, who is in Washington to meet with top U.S. officials, said the dimensions of the withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank would depend on the "political payoff" Israel gets from the Americans. That apparently was a reference to Israeli demands that the United States recognize Israel's right to keep three West Bank settlement blocs.

The official said the April 14 date was contingent upon U.S. and Israeli negotiators finalizing details of the withdrawal.

## Palestinians react to Yassin assassination

Two Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces in clashes following Sheik Ahmed Yassin's assassination. Witnesses said one man was shot dead by Israeli troops in the Gaza town of Khan Yunis, and another one was killed outside Nablus in the West Bank on Monday.

The deaths came as Palestinians took to the streets to vent their rage at the Israeli air strike that killed the Hamas founder.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah forces in southern Lebanon fired rockets at Israeli outposts stationed along Israel's northern border.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Israel defends killing of Yassin as the public braces for revenge

By DAN BARON

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli leaders are making no apologies for killing Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin, likening him to Osama bin Laden.

"The State of Israel hit the first and foremost leader of Palestinian terrorist murderers," Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told reporters after Israeli helicopter gunships killed Yassin in a predawn airstrike in the Gaza Strip on Monday. "I want to make it clear that the war on terrorism is not over and will continue daily everywhere."

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz called Yassin Israel's bin Laden.

Yassin, a 67-year-old wheelchair-bound cleric who was sworn to Israel's destruction, was killed around 5 a.m. Monday by three missiles fired from helicopter gunships as he was taken home from morning prayers in Gaza City.

Two bodyguards and five other Palestinians were killed in the strike and 17 people were reported wounded, including two of Yassin's sons.

Within hours, tens of thousands of mourners jammed Gaza City streets for the funeral procession.

Twenty-one Palestinian Authority police officers formed an honor guard as the coffin holding Yassin's mangled body was carried out of Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, Ha'aretz reported.

"Sharon has opened the gates of hell and nothing will stop us from cutting off his head," the Hamas leadership said in a statement announcing the death of Yassin, the movement's spiritual leader.

The Israel Defense Forces said Yassin had

been directly responsible for dozens of terrorist attacks. Hamas has killed hundreds of Israelis in suicide attacks during the last three and a half years.

Yassin founded Hamas in 1987, soon after the start of the first Palestinian intifada. He emerged from the ranks of the Egyptian-based Muslim Brotherhood to found the group.

In 1989, Yassin was jailed by Israel and sentenced to a life term for inciting Palestinians to attack Israelis as Hamas' founder.

But Israel released Yassin in 1997 as a goodwill gesture to Jordan's late King Hussein after a bungled Israeli attempt to assassinate Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal in Amman, the Jordanian capital.

An Israeli assassination attempt on the sheik last September resulted in minor injuries to Yassin.

Most recently, Hamas claimed joint responsibility for a double bombing that killed 10 Israelis in the strategic Israeli port of Ashdod a week ago. The group also claimed responsibility for an attack over the weekend that toppled an Israeli tank, leaving four soldiers injured.

Israel had threatened a harsh response to the Ashdod attack. It also is seeking to incapacitate Hamas ahead of a planned Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. The Islamic terrorist group's power base is in Gaza's teeming refugee camps — and Israelis, Palestinians and international observers alike have expressed concern about a rise in Hamas' power there after an Israeli military pullout.

According to security sources, Yassin was targeted as part of Israel's plans for

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**ISRAEL  
STRIKES  
HAMAS**

## ■ Israel defends killing of Sheik Yassin as the public braces for revenge

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disengagement from the Palestinians, in the hope of cowing Hamas and offsetting the prestige it would gain from any Israeli pullback.

Sharon told a meeting of his Likud Party's parliamentary caucus that the Jewish people had a "natural right" to pursue those seeking to destroy it.

Yassin's ideology "was killing and murdering Jews, wherever they were, and the destruction of the State of Israel," Sharon said. "The war against terror has not ended and will continue day after day, everywhere."

The rest of the Israeli political establishment was divided on the assassination of Yassin. The centrist Shinui and left-wing parties and groups were against it, and right-wing Knesset members and organizations supported it.

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Around the globe, much of the international community condemned the attack.

The European Union said, "Not only are extrajudicial killings contrary to international law, they undermine the concept of the rule of law, which is a key element in the fight against terrorism."

In the United States, however, President Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, refrained from criticizing Yassin's killing.

"Let's remember that Hamas is a terrorist organization and that Sheik Yassin has himself, personally, we believe, been involved in terrorist planning," Rice said Monday on NBC's "Today" show.

Rice also said the United States had no

advance knowledge of the attack.

But the State Department took a different tone.

"We find it deeply troubling," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said of Israel's strike. "We find the consequences of this action, in terms of raising tension and making it harder to pursue peace efforts — those are things of concern to us."

Later, White House spokesman Scott McClellan, who earlier Monday had said "Israel has the right to defend herself," called journalists to clarify that the White House agreed with Boucher.

In an effort to strengthen Israel's public relations, Israel's Foreign Ministry is planning to make available to members of the foreign media Israeli victims of Hamas terror attacks and their relatives, Ha'aretz reported.

An Israeli Cabinet minister said Israel now needs to get rid of P.A. President Yasser Arafat.

"The Palestinian Authority is slow to understand that Israel will keep hitting all those who carry out terrorist attacks and are responsible for harming innocents," Health Minister Danny Naveh said.

"The next stage needs to be getting rid of Arafat and his gang," he said, and then Israel should "extend its hand to a moderate leadership that will rise up instead and reach a negotiated peace."

Arafat declared three days of mourning in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for Yassin and opened a mourning tent outside his Ramallah compound.

■  
Egypt, meanwhile, said it was pulling out of planned celebrations of the Camp David peace accords with Israel in protest over the Yassin assassination. Friday, March 26, marks 25 years since Egypt became the first Arab nation to make peace with Israel. Before Monday's airstrike, Egypt had agreed to take part in celebrations at the Knesset and Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem.

The government of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has assiduously tried to keep ties with Israel to the minimum necessary, particularly in the last three and a half years of Palestinian intifada.

Mubarak scoffed when asked how the assassination of Yassin would affect the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. "What

peace? The world's on fire," he said.

Yassin's killing reverberated almost immediately among Palestinians.

Aside from angry protests, an axe-wielding Palestinian wounded three Israelis in one apparent revenge attack Monday. Police arrested the man after he got out of a car in Ramat Gan, near Tel Aviv, and attacked a group of people outside an army base. Two men and a woman were lightly wounded before the assailant was overpowered.

In the Palestinian-populated areas, two Palestinians were killed in confrontations with Israeli forces. Witnesses said one man was shot dead by Israeli troops in the Gaza town of Khan Yunis, and another was killed outside Nablus, in the West Bank, as Palestinians took to the streets to vent their rage at Yassin's killing.

Clashes were reported throughout the Palestinian-populated territories and in eastern Jerusalem. Israeli security forces, already wary of suicide bombings by Hamas, went on high alert, closing off the West Bank and Gaza.

An Israeli Arab organization designated Tuesday as a day of mourning and called for protests against "terrorist acts perpetrated by the Israeli government."

In the streets of Israel, people were tense.

"I think it was the right thing to do," said Merav Donin, 30. "Although I am not for killing people, Yassin was a murderer and it had to be done," said Donin, a clerk at a spiritual therapy store.

Echoing the view expressed by several political observers, Donin said, "In the short term we are going to be hit back, but it won't be any worse than what we are already going through today."

Eyal Tabib, a philosophy student, said he was concerned that someone else simply would replace Yassin. "It concerns me because many people, many families are about to suffer now," he said.

Roni Avraham, a merchant at the Mahane Yehuda outdoor market in Jerusalem, said the market was quiet.

"Today there is no one at the souk," he told Army Radio. "Those who do come buy what they need and quickly leave. There is tension in the air and people feel like something is about to happen." ■

(JTA correspondent Dina Kraft in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

Israeli politicians were divided on the Yassin assassination.

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# The life of Hamas leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin

By GIL SEDAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As a journalist, I met Sheik Ahmed Yassin twice during my visits to the Gaza Strip.

The first time was when I attended a military court hearing in 1984, when Yassin was sentenced to 13 years in prison for anti-Israel activities. Only a year later Yassin was released in a prisoner-exchange deal, and a few years after that I visited him at his home in Gaza.

On both occasions I was left with the impression that this seemingly vulnerable quadriplegic was as strong as a rock, outwardly unmoved by the course of events.

He set a target — the establishment of a Muslim state in all of historic Palestine — and was determined to achieve it at any cost. When he appeared in court, he wore an indifferent smile on his face, clearly despising his captors.

When I visited his home in the late 1980s, Yassin did not speak about eliminating the Jewish state, a call he later would adopt with great frequency. Instead, he spoke of the need for an unconditional Israeli withdrawal from all "occupied territories."

Later, however, Yassin served as the inspiration for young Palestinians willing to die killing Jews. He promised that suicide bombers willing to die for the Palestinian cause would achieve martyrdom.

A senior Israeli intelligence officer said Monday that Yassin's death would create a vacuum in the Hamas leadership that would be difficult to fill. Abdel Aziz Rantissi — another target on Israel's hit list — was expected to succeed Yassin.

The contrast between Yassin's poor physical shape and his enormous political and spiritual power was astonishing.

Yassin was a frail quadriplegic who could barely see. His voice was thin and quavering. But to the ears of millions of Muslim supporters throughout the Middle East, it was thunder.

Born in 1938 in the village of Joura, near present-day Ashkelon, Yassin had a childhood accident during a soccer game that left him a quadriplegic.

During Israel's 1948 War of Independence, Yassin was among tens of thousands of Arab refugees who fled from the Ashkelon area to the Gaza Strip. The family settled in a refugee camp. Limited in his physical movement, Yassin devoted

himself to political activities.

He joined the Muslim Brotherhood while studying at Cairo's Al-Azhar University.

After returning to Gaza, Yassin became actively involved in politics. In 1979, he founded the Islamic Organization, a body Israeli military authorities initially hoped would reduce the political influence of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

But the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood fueled Yassin's activities, and the sheik gradually shifted from social and religious activity to clandestine activities against Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza.

In the mid-1980s, a military court in Gaza convicted him for illegal possession of arms, the establishment of a military organization and calling for the annihilation of Israel. He was sentenced to 13 years in jail in 1984. But a year later he was released in a prisoner exchange deal between Israel and the terrorist organization of Ahmed Jibril.

Yassin made his big plunge into national politics in 1987.

With the start of the first Palestinian intifada, Yassin transformed his Islamic Organization into a new body called Hamas. An acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas means zeal in Arabic. In biblical Hebrew, it means evil.

Hamas succeeded not only because it raised the banner of Islam in the battle against Israel, but also because it built an effective social welfare system of schools, clinics and hospitals that provide free services to Palestinian families.

In 1989, Yassin again was arrested and sentenced to life in prison for issuing a religious order to kill Palestinians who allegedly had collaborated with the Israeli army. He became one of the harshest critics of the Oslo Accords.

"The so-called peace path is not peace and it is not a substitute for jihad and resistance," he said repeatedly, insisting that no Arab leader had the right to give up any part of its territory.

Yassin eventually was released from jail in 1997 in a deal with Jordan for two Israeli agents involved in a botched assass-

ination attempt on a Hamas leader in the Jordanian capital.

Hamas gradually undermined the authority of the Palestinian Authority. Every now and then, police forces under the command of P.A. President Yasser Arafat put on a show of force against Hamas.

However, the armed militia of Arafat's own Fatah organization, the Al-Aksha Brigade, increasingly cooperates with Hamas, imitating its suicide bombing attacks and conducting joint attacks on Israelis.

The Israeli army attempted to kill Yassin on Sept. 6, 2003, while he was at the house of a Hamas colleague in Gaza. He was only lightly wounded, however, and promised revenge.

Last January, there was a flicker of hope that Hamas might adopt a more moderate course. Yassin suddenly announced that his movement was ready to accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as an interim measure.

"We are leaving the rest of the occupied territories for history," Yassin said in an interview with the London-based Arabic language newspaper Al-Quds al-Arabi.

However, hopes faded Jan. 15 when Rim a-Rishi, 22, a mother of two, pulled the trigger of her explosive vest during a security check at the Erez crossing from the Gaza Strip into Israel, killing four Israelis.

It turned out that the attack had taken place with Yassin's blessing — the first official Hamas endorsement of a female suicide bomber.

Two weeks later, on Jan. 30, Yassin said Hamas was trying to kidnap Israeli soldiers to use as bargaining chips for the release of Palestinians in Israeli jails.

Hamas also was behind last week's double suicide bombing at Ashdod's port, which killed 10. Some Israeli observers said the bombing actually was an attempt to set off a chemical explosion at the port with the potential for killing thousands.

Indeed, Hamas staged terrorist attacks whenever possible. It's not clear whether Yassin was actively involved in planning the attacks, but he openly gave his blessing for the strategy of terrorism.

The so-called peace path is not peace and it is not a substitute for jihad and resistance.

Sheik Ahmed Yassin

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### Anti-Semitism in Toronto

More episodes of anti-Semitic vandalism took place in Toronto. Unknown perpetrators broke seven stained-glass windows at the Pride of Israel Synagogue and spray-painted swastikas and anti-Semitic messages at various locations along Bathurst Street.

Also, United Jewish Appeals signs in the city were defaced and swastikas were painted on a clothing donation box. The damage was discovered Saturday morning. In a separate incident discovered early Sunday, 22 cemetery tombstones were toppled in the nearby Bathurst-Lawn Jewish Cemetery.

The incidents took place only days after vandals spray-painted swastikas and hateful messages in a Jewish neighborhood in the Toronto suburb of Thornhill.

### Federations aid Falash Mura

Several U.S. Jewish federations are giving financial aid to Ethiopians claiming Jewish ancestry.

The \$248,000 grant announced Monday comes in the wake of the death of Lloyd Rigler, a major Los Angeles-based funder of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry. The federation money will go toward Rigler's feeding program for children and pregnant and nursing women in Ethiopia.

"This will not complete all the funds we need for the program, but it will make a huge difference," said the group's executive director, Barbara Ribakove Gordon. Half of the grant comes from the UJA-Federation of New York; the remaining half will come from the federations of Boston, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Metrowest, N.J., Philadelphia and Washington.

### USA Today reporter lied about Israel

Among the stories former USA Today reporter Jack Kelley lied about were several concerning Israel.

An investigation by the newspaper, which announced recently that it had discovered that the veteran correspondent had fabricated large parts of his work, found that Kelley's eyewitness account of a suicide bombing in Israel was false. That story helped make Kelley a 2002 Pulitzer Prize finalist. Kelley also lied about meeting a vigilante Jewish settler named Avi Shapiro in 2001, falsely portrayed a Jerusalem businessman as an undercover Israeli agent, and was not in Israel when he said he was there reporting stories, the paper said.

### Shooting victim becomes rabbi

Nachum Sasonkin, shot in an attack by an Arab terrorist 10 years ago on the Brooklyn Bridge, was ordained as a rabbi.

Sasonkin was critically injured when he was 18 in the attack on a van full of Chasidic Jews in New York on March 1, 1994, which killed Ari Halberstam, 16. Doctors had not expected Sasonkin, who was declared brain dead and had extensive physical injuries, to survive.

But Sasonkin recovered his physical functions and his ability to speak, and the young Lubavitcher Chasid resumed his yeshiva studies. Now a father, Sasonkin received his rabbinical ordination Sunday from the Rabbinical College of America, in New Jersey.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Egypt pulls out of peace celebrations

Egypt is pulling out of celebrations of the Camp David peace accords in protest over the killing of Sheik Ahmed Yassin. "What peace? The world's on fire," Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said Monday after Israeli helicopters killed Yassin, Hamas' founder, in Gaza.

Friday marks 25 years since Egypt became the first Arab nation to make peace with Israel. Now, as then, many Egyptians favor downgrading ties with Israel until the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is resolved.

Before Monday's airstrikes, Egypt had agreed to take part in celebrations at the Knesset and Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem.

### Bereaved mother has twins

The 54-year-old mother of a slain Israeli soldier had twins.

Margaret Kikis, who underwent fertility treatment after her son Benny was killed by Palestinian snipers at a West Bank checkpoint in February 2002, gave birth to the two boys by caesarean section Sunday.

"We will not call either of them Benny, because there is only one Benny for us," said Yuri Kikis, the father.

Israel's daily Yediot Achronot said Monday that the wife of their other living child, Benny's older brother, was due to give birth soon, making the Kikis couple expectant grandparents as well.

### Class action against Dimona

Employees of the Dimona nuclear reactor who developed radiation-linked illnesses are suing Israel for negligence. Israel's daily Yediot Achronot said Monday that 17 former and current Dimona technicians had petitioned the High Court of Justice to order the government to pay them full medical compensation for illnesses they said were caused by radiation exposure.

The secrecy around Dimona — foreign analysts say it produces nuclear weapons — means such lawsuits move slowly.

According to Yediot, 20 similar cases filed in recent years are still in litigation.

## WORLD

### Desecration of Muslim stones condemned

The central organization of British Jewry condemned the desecration of Muslim gravestones in London.

Henry Grunwald, president of Britain's Board of Deputies, called the damage to about 40 headstones last week unacceptable.

"We send our deepest sympathy to the Muslim community," he said.

### Clashes in Sweden

Pro- and anti-Israel demonstrators clashed in Sweden on Sunday night. Swedish police arrested many of the anti-Israel protesters, some of whom threw rocks at police, Israel Radio said.

### Hungarian exhibit opens

An exhibit on the Holocaust in Hungary opened in Budapest.

The "Hidden Holocaust" exhibit, which opened late last week, focuses on all those persecuted by the Nazis: gypsies, gays lesbians, the mentally retarded and Jews.

The exhibit opened on the 60th anniversary of the German army's occupation of Hungary.

### Jewish museum nixes 'Maus' exhibit

The Sydney Jewish Museum declined an offer to house an exhibition focusing on Art Spiegelman's "Maus."

The Australian Association of Holocaust Survivors and Descendants advised the museum that the exhibition on the 1992 Pulitzer Prize-winning work would be too distressing for its members.

The museum also is home to a Holocaust museum. "Maus" is a two-volume cartoon work telling the story of the Holocaust, the events preceding it and its impact on survivors and their children.