

Mideast leaders fear retaliation

Expect extremists to avenge Israel's killing of Hamas founder

Judith Sudilovsky/CNS

JERUSALEM — Middle East Catholic leaders said Israel's killing of Ahmed Yassin, founder and spiritual leader of the Islamic militant group Hamas, will put people at the mercy of extremists.

"There can be no positive outcome from such an 'act,'" said Ramze Zananiri, director of the Jerusalem office of the Middle East Council of Churches.

"We are heading toward a very deep slope which will have a negative impact on both peoples. This type of action and reaction does not bring the area to any possibility of peace," he said.

After Yassin's death, Israel closed the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and Palestinians called for a three-day general strike and mourning period.

"I don't want to be in the Israelis' shoes now," said Father Majdi al-Siryani, legal adviser of the Latin-rite Patriarchate of Jerusalem. "I am afraid (of what Hamas') answer will be. This is not the way to make peace."

Father al-Siryani called Yassin "one of the best (Palestinian) leaders" who acted as a "security valve" in that he was able to control the sentiments of the streets, something Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat could not do. Father al-Siryani added, however, that Hamas has "a different mentality, a different way of looking at things."

Yassin was killed early March 22 by missiles from Israeli helicopters as he left a mosque near his home in Gaza City.

Seven of his bodyguards — including two of his sons — also were killed. Palestinians said 15 other people were injured in the attack.

Tens of thousands of Palestinians streamed into the streets of Gaza City following the attack, and gunmen shot into the air while others threw pipe bombs, according to press reports. Violent demonstrations erupted elsewhere throughout the West Bank.

Israeli military sources called the killing "a significant strike against a central pillar in the Hamas terrorist organization."

"The perception that Yassin was the 'political' leader and left the management of terrorist activities to others is incorrect," the Israeli sources said. "In fact, there is no differentiation between the 'political' and 'military' wings of Hamas. Yassin, himself, often authorized and encouraged attacks and strongly preached against Israel. Yassin was directly responsible for a long list of terrorist attacks against both



Reuters/CNS

Palestinians carry the casket of slain Hamas leader Ahmed Yassin March 22 in the Gaza Strip. Israeli helicopters killed Yassin that day as he left dawn prayers at a mosque in Gaza City.

Israeli civilians and foreigners, as well as Israeli security forces."

Yassin, who was imprisoned in Israel in 1984 and 1989 and received a life sentence for involvement in the killing of two Israeli soldiers, founded Hamas in the Gaza Strip. He was released from prison in 1997 under the framework of an agreement with Jordan, and, according to the Israeli sources, he became involved in Hamas terrorist activities and personally authorized suicide attacks, bombings and missile attacks into Israeli settlements.

Palestinian militant groups vowed immediate revenge for Yassin's death not only against Israeli targets but also on all Zionist targets abroad and American targets, according to press reports. They charged the United States with approving the attack and, in a statement faxed to The Associated Press, vowed that all Muslims around the world would be "honored to join in on the retaliation for this crime."

The United States denied involvement and called for restraint on both sides.

Nazareth Lasers lose to Jefferson

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Section 5 champions Nazareth Academy were unable to overcome the offensive play of Section 3 champions South Jefferson March 19, as the Lasers fell to the Spartans 55-37 in the Class B state basketball semifinal at Troy's Hudson Valley Community College.

This was the third year in a row the Lasers lost in the semifinals, but their coach, Chris Belmont, said the young women on his team had a great season.

"The girls have nothing to hang their heads about," Belmont said. "Of course you're disappointed, but you can't base your season on one game. We're happy that we're Section 5 champions and that we're regional champions."

At one point, Nazareth led the Spartans by seven points, but in the third quarter of the game, the Spartans made a 15-2 run that apparently buried Nazareth's hopes of winning. Belmont said Jefferson's players looked like they had played together a long time.

"That team was very precise in their offensive set," Belmont said. "They would take as much time as they could off the 30-second clock, and were able to finish (with a basket)."

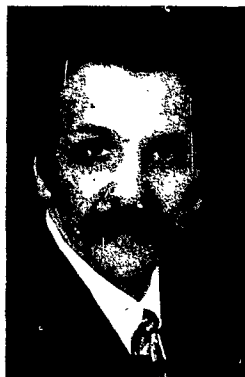
The Spartans outrebounded the Lasers 37-24 in the game, and made six three-pointers.

The Lasers (20-5) were plagued by

foul trouble and had to bench their two tallest starters, Rachel Boice and Nikki Lockhart, early in the first quarter after they both picked up two fouls apiece, Belmont said. The duo didn't come back into the game until well into the second quarter, he said, noting the long stretch at the bench affected their ability to get back into the flow. Boice ended the game with four points, and Lockhart had eight. Senior guard Brittany Hussong had eight points, while junior Heather Belmont had five points. Sierra Speed was Nazareth's top scorer with 10 points and hit a jumper in the third quarter that cut Jefferson's lead to 25-23. However, Jefferson's Lauren Sisco made a pair of free throws that began the Spartans' scoring spree, and in the fourth quarter, Nazareth missed 10 of their first 11 shots.

Consolation for the Lasers came in two forms, with Samantha Gaetano, a sophomore, picking up the tournament's sportsmanship award, and forward Lockhart being named to the all-tournament team, Belmont said.

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