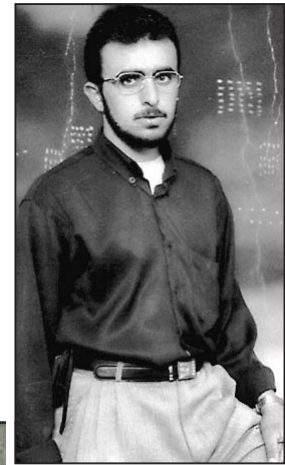


A militant fulfils his explosive destiny



One man's burning desire to become a martyr for his cause drove him to walk into a crowded pizza restaurant carrying a nail-packed bomb. WAEL al-AHMAD and NOMI MORRIS report from Jerusalem.

JUST 23 years old and driven by a mixture of despair and fanaticism, Izz-el-Din al-Masri had often spoken of his wish to be a suicide bomber.

He was deeply disturbed by the death last week of eight Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli military, his family said yesterday.

He realised his dream this week, taking along with his own the lives of 15 Jewish civilians, six of them children. Eighty more were injured of whom 44 remained in hospital last night.

Australian teenager Malki Roth, 15, from Melbourne, was among his victims.

She was waiting for friends at the intersection of Jaffa Rd and King George V St — one of Jerusalem's busiest — when the bomber struck nearby.

Al-Masri's murderous act typifies the nonsensical cycle of violence that has become the focus of life since the Palestinian uprising began 10 months ago.

The suicide bomber's father, Shuheil, said yesterday he was filled with pride and sadness over his son's act.

"When I heard about the operation in Jerusalem, I did not doubt that my son did this," he said. "I will weep for him all of my life."

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon hours later gave the green light to a "severe armed response" and a wave of retaliatory strikes began.

War planes blitzed Palestinian police headquarters in the West Bank and tanks moved into the Gaza Strip.

An F-16 fighter jet fired three missiles at the Ramallah police station.

In a simultaneous swoop, Israeli police occupied Orient House, the unofficial headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and searched files, said an official at the east Jerusalem site.

Al-Masri's mission began on Thursday as he left his father's own restaurant to head to the pizzeria where families were sitting down to lunch.

"We had just got a pizza and sat down," said Anat Talmar, whose three children were injured in the blast. "As I was cutting up the pizza I heard boom!" she said.

Witness Moshe Elkhat said he was standing across the street from the restaurant when the bomb went off.

"I turned and saw bodies everywhere," he said.



Izz-el-Din al-Masri, holding an M16 rifle and a Koran, is thought to be the bomber who blew himself up and killed at least 15 people.

Blast toll echoes around the world



Killed . . . Malki Roth

A MELBOURNE-born girl was one of those killed as she met her best friend for a pizza lunch in central Jerusalem.

Malki Roth, 15, and her friend were among the 16 dead.

She had met her friend at the corner of a busy Jerusalem intersection, not far from her home, when the suicide bomber activated kilos of explosives.

Malki's father Arnold Roth, a former student activist at

Melbourne University and solicitor before moving to Israel with his family in 1988, said he did not want his daughter to become another statistic.

"Today, here in Jerusalem, she was murdered by a fanatic who didn't know a thing about her," Mr Roth said. "My wife and I just don't have the tools to cope with this. We only want to do whatever we can so she does not turn into yet another statistic."

The bodies of the dead and wounded lay strewn across the intersection. The glass front of the pizzeria was blown out and twisted metal and concrete littered the area.

People, some with blood streaming from their faces, ran screaming from the scene.

It was the worst attack in the 10 months of the intifada since the June 1 bomb explosion near a Tel Aviv nightclub which killed 21 people.

Al-Masri's brother Eyad said: "This was a unique operation for its quality and suc-

cess. He always spoke of martyrdom. Now, Palestinians can hold up their heads."

The militant group Hamas said it ordered the bombing to avenge Israel's killing of two Hamas leaders and six others — including two children — in Nablus on July 31.

The suicide bomber's family said he had been deeply disturbed by that attack, as well as by Israel's crackdown on Palestinians since the start of the revolt, in which more than 500 Palestinians and nearly 150 Israelis have died.

"The Palestinians have no alternative to these [bombing] operations," Shuheil said. "We have no alternative way to reply to the Israeli aggression against our people."

"I hope that many others follow him."

Israel captured east Jerusalem in the 1967 war, along with the West Bank, Gaza Strip and other territories. Israel claims the whole city as its national capital.

The Palestinians claim east Jerusalem as the capital of the state they hope to create.



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