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Languages

'How I picked up a suicide bomber'

By Raffi Berg
BBC News website

An Israeli driver has told the BBC News website how he picked up a Palestinian suicide bomber, minutes before he blew himself up in a bakery in the town of Eilat, killing three people.



Saksak is thought to have entered Eilat from Egypt or Jordan

Yossi Woltinsky, 49, an auditor at a hotel in the town, said he stopped to give the man a lift, thinking he was a hotel worker.

Mr Woltinsky said he realised straight away that something was not quite right.

"When he got into my car, I had a bad feeling because he did not behave normally - his eyes, his nerves - and the fact he was wearing a big red jacket even though it was hot.

"I asked him where he wanted to go but he didn't say anything, just waved his hand.

"When I asked him again, he said only one word, "Haifa", in an Arab accent. Haifa is hundreds of kilometres away, so now I was almost 100% sure he was a suicide bomber."

Mr Woltinsky said the man was obviously not familiar with Eilat, because he could have easily walked into the town on foot.

Escape plan

Mr Woltinsky and his passenger were about seven minutes' drive away from the centre of Eilat, one of Israel's most popular tourist resorts with a chain of hotels, shopping centres, restaurants and cafes.

"It happened so quickly that I didn't have time to be frightened," said Mr Woltinsky.

"The police showed me his head, which was lying inside the bakery, and parts of his red jacket"

"I just knew I had to take him Yossi Woltinsky

far away from the middle of Eilat, so I drove him on to a bypass road."

Mr Woltinsky, a lieutenant colonel in the reserves, said he thought about crashing the car.

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But after a couple of minutes driving in the wrong direction, the bomber gestured towards Eilat, so Mr Woltinsky stopped the car but the bomber jumped out and ran off.

Mr Woltinsky called the police and gave them a description of the man as he tried to trail him in the car. He said he lost him and carried on to work.

When Mr Woltinsky arrived some five minutes later, a colleague told him she had just heard a bang and thought it might have been a suicide bomber.

Human remains

The bomber, 21-year-old Mohammed Saksak from Gaza, had blown himself up in Lehamim bakery, killing the owner and two employees.

"The police called me straight away and asked me to go to the bakery to see if I could identify him," said Mr Woltinsky.



Mr Woltinsky was asked to identify the bomber's remains

"When I got there I saw the bakery had been destroyed - there was glass everywhere, everything was black and there was a bad smell.

"The police showed me his head, which was lying inside the bakery, and parts of his red jacket - that was all that was left of him. I told them it was the man I had picked up."

Mr Woltinsky's actions may have prevented what could have been a much deadlier attack had the bomber reached a busier area.

"He realised he had been found out," said Mr Woltinsky.

"If he succeeded in getting into a hotel, shopping centre or supermarket, there could have been many more killed, like in Taba," just six miles (9km) away over the Egyptian border, where a suicide bomber killed dozens of people at a hotel in 2004.

The bombing on Monday was the first suicide attack in Eilat, and the first in Israel since April 2006.

"I am trying to get back into my work," said Mr Woltinsky, "but it is not easy. Three guys are being buried today so it's not an easy day, for me or Eilat."

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