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## Failed Palestinian **suicide bomber** gets life in Israeli prison

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An Israeli military court has sentenced a 16-year-old Palestinian from the militant Hamas movement to life in prison for trying to blow himself up when confronted by Israeli police, the first time a would-be bomber was brought to trial.

The teen-ager, whose name was not released, pressed a button and pulled at electrical wiring on an explosives belt he was wearing as he was approached by police in early February, but the device did not explode and no one was injured.

A three-judge panel at a military court in the northern West Bank on Thursday decided that the teen-ager was a danger to the Israeli public and that he must pay the "highest price."

The teen, who had confessed that under Hamas instructions he planned to blow up an Israeli commuter bus, was convicted of attempted manslaughter.

The judges in Thursday's sentencing rejected arguments from the teen's lawyer, Ahmed Sharab, who asked for a five-year prison term because of his client's young age, the fact that no one was hurt and because he had expressed regret in his confession.

"This is an absurd situation - that someone who agreed to lose his life is suddenly showing interest in life and excitedly demanding a short jail sentence," the judges wrote.

In his confession, the youth said he had joined Hamas at age 12 and was asked by an activist in the militant Islamic movement in February to carry out a suicide bomb attack.

Israeli police stopped the taxi he was riding in Feb. 6 and asked him to step out of the car. As he approached the police, he pushed a button that failed to activate the explosives then tried to detonate the load by tearing at the wiring, according to his confession.

Several Palestinians have failed in their attempts to blow themselves up or backed out of planned attacks and have been detained and questioned by Israeli intelligence officers, but none had been brought to trial.

In their decision, the judges called the youth's failed plan "monstrous" and "cowardly" and wrote that they sought to set a precedent by handing down the maximum term of life in prison.

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"Suicide attacks have, with great tragedy, become a cursed routine in our lives, but they are still something unusual in the courtroom," they wrote.

Military prosecutor Hiron Averbuch sought a stiff sentence to discourage other young people from seeking to carry out attacks.

A 16-year-old from BethLehem, Issa Bdeir, was the youngest **suicide bomber** in the last 21 months of fighting. He blew himself up in a crowd of elderly Russian immigrants playing cards in Rishon Letzion, just south of Tel Aviv on May 22. Two Israelis died.

Since fighting began in September 2000, 71 suicide attacks have killed 251 Israelis.

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