

5 of 68 DOCUMENTS

The Associated Press

These materials may not be republished without the express written consent of
The Associated Press.

March 20, 2002 Wednesday

Israeli **bus** victims tell of bearded man with no bag who got on **bus** and exploded

BYLINE: JACK KATZENELL, Associated Press Writer

SECTION: INTERNATIONAL NEWS

LENGTH: 598 words

DATELINE: MJSMUS, Israel

Commuter **bus** No. 923 had been targeted twice in the past four months by Palestinian **suicide bombers**, and Kamla Masalha, an Israeli Arab nurse, was fearfully waiting for the third strike on her regular route.

It happened Wednesday, during morning rush hour. Masalha, 42, rode the **bus** to work, as she had done for the past 17 years.

A heavysset bearded Palestinian man boarded the **bus**, looking nervously left and right as he headed toward Masalha at the back of the **bus**. The nurse said she suspected immediately that he was a **suicide bomber**.

Moments later, the assailant detonated explosives strapped to his body, sending passengers flying in the air and blowing out the sides of the pink-and-white **bus**.

"People were blown out of the windows and were lying on the road on both sides of the **bus**," said the **bus** driver, Yosef Ben-Yosef. "Inside, dead and wounded people were lying everywhere. ... It was ghastly, indescribable."

Nahum Borochoy was driving an army truck right behind the **bus**. "I saw everything go black," he said, "and seconds later the smoke cleared and I saw everyone screaming and crying."

After the blast, pieces of flesh stuck to the bloodied ceiling. Bodies lay strewn on the asphalt, among pools of blood and weeping wounded victims.

Seven passengers, including four soldiers, were killed, in addition to the attacker, a 24-year-old member of the militant Islamic Jihad group from the West Bank town of Jenin. Twenty-seven passengers were wounded. Media reports said many of those hurt were Israeli Arabs.

"Every morning I travel with fear," Masalha told Israel Radio from a hospital bed after suffering burns in the bombing. Masalha said **bombers** made no distinction between Arabs and Jews. "I know that they don't care who you are."

Israeli bus victims tell of bearded man with no bag who got on bus and exploded
The Associated Press March 20, 2002 Wednesday

Ben-Yosef, the driver, said the **bomber** got on along with three other Arabs - two elderly men with checkered head scarves and a woman student.

"He gave me 12 shekels (\$2.60) and told me he was going to Afula," said Ben-Yosef, who was slightly injured. "He was a totally normal guy. ... He was apparently carrying explosives on his body. It was cold this morning and everyone was wearing jackets."

"At first I could not see anything behind me because the **bus** was full of smoke," Ben-Yosef said after glass shards had been removed from his face. "One body was sprawled on the floor right behind me."

Borochoy said one of the wounded told him the attacker was chewing gum and smiling as he walked along the aisle to the back of the **bus** where soldiers sat.

Passenger Vadim Weinfuss said he noticed something bulky under the **bomber's** jacket as the man sat down. Weinfuss said he put a magazine clip in his gun as a precaution when the explosion went off.

The **bus** carried soldiers traveling between homes and bases, as well as Arab Israelis since it stops at all the villages along the way. Arab Israelis make up about 18 percent of Israel's population of 6.6 million.

Soldier Avi Maloul, who sat two seats behind the **bomber**, said he actually felt safe on the **bus**, thinking that Palestinian attackers would not hurt Arab Israelis.

"I never thought we would reach the situation in which they would blow up each other," said Maloul, who was slightly injured.

An Arab Israeli woman in the back of the **bus**, her leg smashed and bleeding profusely, had to be pried off the metal frames of the seats by two soldiers, one told Israel Radio.

On Nov. 29, a **suicide bomber** blew himself up on **bus** No. 823 traveling south, killing three people. On March 5, one person and the attacker were killed on the **bus** at the Afula station in another **suicide** bombing.

LOAD-DATE: March 21, 2002

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: AP Photos JRL101-108

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newswire

Copyright 2002 Associated Press
All Rights Reserved