



Angry Palestinians vow revenge at funeral of "engineer"

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JERUSALEM (CNN) -- Thousands of angry supporters of the Hamas Islamic militant group rallied Saturday in Gaza at the funeral of Yahya Ayyash, the infamous "engineer" who allegedly planned a series of bus bombings in Israel.

Gaza erupted into a caldron of hatred and vengeance after the assassination of Ayyash, who was killed Friday when a cellular telephone packed with 50 grams of explosives blew up near his head. Palestinians are enraged, blaming Israel for the assassination.

Hated in Israel as a mass murderer, Ayyash is believed to have killed between 60 and 70 Israelis. But among militant Palestinians, Ayyash was a hero.

As Ayyash's body was carried through throngs of people in Gaza Saturday, his coffin was almost smashed by the press of mourners. (1.1M QuickTime Movie)

Hamas followers gave out leaflets at the funeral promising a new Jihad, a holy war against Zionist targets, as soon as possible. The same leaflet promised to cut out Zionist tongues and cut off their hands.

For PLO leader Yasser Arafat, the assassination triggers a political dilemma that could cost him votes in the upcoming elections. Arafat cannot be seen as taking the Israeli side here so he paid his respects by visiting leading Hamas activist, Mahmoud al-Zahhar.

The killing also embarrassed Arafat because it took place on Palestinian territory, after his own police had been unable to find the engineer who led the Israeli's most-wanted list.

Israel is bracing for another wave of bombings and radical Palestinian revenge. It has barred its citizens from entering Palestinian-run areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and has put its security forces on high alert. Observers are left to wonder whether Islamic fundamentalists will carry out their threats without the expertise of Ayyash and whether Arafat will work with the Israelis to stop a new wave of bombings.

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