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utureIsraeli ilers say raid kills 12

By Ibrahim Barzak THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip sraeli troops stormed a Hamas ronghold on Thursday, setting off the most intense gunbattle in the Gaza Strip in 2 1/2 years of fighting, just a day after media-tors presented a Mideast peace plan. Twelve Palestinians were killed, including two children and a top bombmaker.

Also Thursday, a Palestinian opened fire on a guard post outside a Jewish settlement in the West Bank, and soldiers killed the attacker, the military said.

Palestinian officials and opposition leaders accused Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of using the raid to undercut the new Palestinian prime ninister, Mahmoud Abbas, before he has a chance to fulfill a

romise to disarm militias. However, a Sharon adviser said Israel would not halt its anti-terror campaign and would not give Abbas, sworn in Wednesday, a grace period.

The Israeli incursion pitched nore than 200 Palestinian gunnen with anti-tank missiles, grenades and homemade exploives against Israeli soldiers who ired machine guns and tank hells. Sixty-five Palestinians were wounded, including 15

The violence came just a day after international mediators preented a new peace plan, the soalled "road map" to Palestinian statehood within three years. The alestinians have accepted the plan, while Israel has expressed

major reservations. The road map starts with a Palestinian crackdown on terror roups and an Israeli freeze on ish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, combined with a gradual Israeli pullout rom the autonomous Palestinian zones its troops have reoccupied uring 31 months of fighting.

In Madrid, Secretary of State Colin Powell urged both sides to take steps toward implementing the plan. "We need to see the end terror — and actions on the false tax forms Israeli side as well," Powell said at the start of a trip through Europe and the Middle East. non, Yeager and Powell was expected to meet with Sharon and Abbas next week.

The Gaza City incursion came a day after Hamas carried out a suicide bombing in a Tel Aviv pub that killed a waitress and two musicians. However, Israeli military officials did not link the raid to the bombing, sayng they were after three top Hamas fugitives in Gaza brothers Yousef, Mahmoud and Ayman Abu Hein.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Britain cancels N. Ireland election

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) -British Prime Minister Tony Blair anceled Northern Ireland's elecions Thursday, saying deepening divisions among Catholic and rotestant voters threatened to ring "complete and total chaos." Blair said he planned to move he May 29 election for Northern reland's dissolved legislature to he autumn. But he warned the tote could be delayed longer if he outlawed Irish Republican my doesn't explicitly renounce olence, cease all hostile activi-

lies and disarm. Gaining such an IRA commitment "goes to the very soul of he Good Friday agreement," he sid, referring to the 1998 pact hat proposed power-sharing between British Protestants and ish Catholics in the province. He cused the IRA's Sinn Fein party of a "point-blank refusal" to go eyond "general assurances" on

ture IRA actions. Northern Ireland legislators in 99 overcame deep Protestant isions to form a four-party ministration that included nn Fein.

But Britain, fearing a walkout by the main Protestant party, but down the crisis-prone coali-In last October after police plicated Sinn Fein in an eged IRA spy ring.



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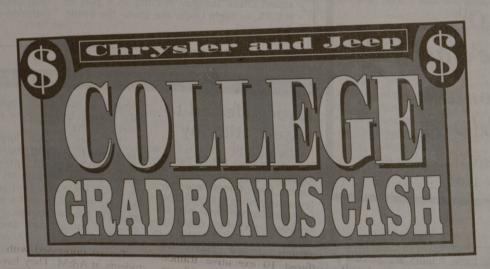


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