

Prosecutors indict Palestinian leader for attacks

By Sudarsan Raghavan

TEL AVIV, Israel (KRT) — Vowing that the "uprising will be victorious," Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti raised his cuffed hands defiantly at a packed courtroom on Wednesday, minutes before he was indicted for masterminding the killings of dozens of Israelis.

Barghouti's courtroom outburst set the stage for a raucous, confrontational trial scheduled to start on Sept. 5.

Israel will attempt to prove complicity of senior Palestinian leaders in dozens of attacks on Israeli civilians, while Barghouti made clear his intention to turn the trial into a political indictment of the Israeli government.

The trial is the first civilian criminal proceeding against a senior Palestinian leader since the second Palestinian uprising began 23 months ago.

Pounding his clasped hands in the

air like a hammer, Barghouti yelled in a mix of Hebrew, Arabic and English for an end to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as if he was speaking at a political rally.

"The Israeli nation is paying a heavy price for its government's policies," declared the unshaven Barghouti, 43, dressed in brown Israeli prison overalls.

Barghouti was charged Wednesday with murder, attempted murder, and active participation in terrorist groups, among other allegations. He was not asked to make a formal plea.

The seven-count indictment alleges that he was behind 37 separate attacks on Israelis over the past two years, the deadliest of which was an attack in January that killed six people in a banquet hall in Hadera.

The indictment also said that Barghouti reported directly to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat,

suggesting that Arafat had knowledge of the attacks.

His lawyers denied the Israeli allegations.

Israel prosecutors say he is the main organizer of the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, a group linked to Arafat's Fatah faction that is behind many suicide bombings and shooting ambushes.

During the trial, Israeli prosecutor Devorah Chen said she would present testimony from Al Aqsa militants, many of them in Israeli jails, and activists, including two of Barghouti's deputies, Nasser Abu Hmeid and Nasser Awaid.

She would also present alleged confessions Barghouti made during interrogation, and documents that Israeli soldiers seized during raids of Palestinian offices earlier this year.

If convicted, Barghouti could face life in prison.

His lawyer, Jawad Boulos, denied that his client made any confessions. Boulos added that Israel had no jurisdiction to try Barghouti because as a Palestinian politician he has diplomatic immunity. Israel violated international laws by arresting him in a Palestinian city of Ramallah and taking him to Israel, he said.

"Marwan has prepared a list of charges against Israel and the Israeli occupation," Jawad Boulos, Barghouti's lawyer told reporters. "We will try to convince the world that the one that has to be brought to trial is the occupation."

Boulos said he did not plan to call any witnesses because an Israeli court had no authority to try Barghouti.

"Our position is that we will not recognize the competency of the court to try Marwan," said Boulos.

Chen said Israel had every right to bring charges against Barghouti.

"Barghouti is responsible for the murder of hundreds of Israeli civilians and soldiers of Israel," she said. "So it's quite obvious that the court in Israel has the authority to get an indictment."

Boulos told Judge Tzvi Gurfinkel that at the Sept. 5 hearing, his client would bring an indictment against Israel. The judge warned that he would not allow Barghouti to "turn this court into a political stage."

But Barghouti got up and demanded to be heard.

"When can I speak? I have a charge sheet with 50 clauses against Israel for the bloodshed of both peoples," he said in Hebrew.

The judge responded: "Right now you can't speak. You have excellent lawyers. When the time comes, you can speak."

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Nevada voters to decide whether to legalize recreational pot

By V. Dion Haynes

LAS VEGAS (KRT) — Nevada established its renegade reputation in the 1920s, when local leaders thumbed their noses at the federal ban on alcohol, with one mayor openly threatening to put "a barrel of whiskey with a dipper" on every street corner.

Now the state, regarded by many as the sin capital of America, is again pioneering a new frontier: the legalization of recreational pot smoking.

In November, Nevada voters will decide whether to become the first state to legalize the recreational use of marijuana, for quantities of 3 ounces or less, for adults 21 and older. If the measure passes in November and again in November 2004 as required for amendments to the state constitution, Nevada also would tax marijuana and establish a system for

distributing the drug.

Last week, the state's largest law-enforcement group, the Nevada Conference of Police and Sheriffs, endorsed the initiative, saying decriminalizing marijuana would free officers to concentrate more on "life-threatening and serious incidents." But Friday, the group reversed the endorsement and fired its president, Andy Anderson, citing a "misunderstanding."

"What this does is allow respectable people to use marijuana in their homes and bans it every place else," said Billy Rogers, spokesman for Nevadans for Responsible Law Enforcement, the measure's sponsor.

"This will allow law enforcement to concentrate on more serious criminals: terrorists, rapists, murderers," Rogers said.

"We want equal rights with people who use alcohol and tobacco," said Mikki Morris, director of the Northern California-based Cannabis Consumers Campaign.

Most states have lowered marijuana possession charges from a felony, punishable by a mandatory prison sentence, to a misdemeanor or a fineable offense. Yet in 2000, some 743,000 people nationwide were imprisoned for marijuana possession, the highest number ever.

No organized effort has yet formed in Nevada to oppose the measure. But the initiative is facing harsh criticism from the federal government.

"This is the wrong message to send, the wrong program for Nevada," said DEA spokesman Will Glasp. "We will respond to this in a way similar to the approach used

for the cannabis buyers clubs. This is still against federal law."

Other opponents say the Nevada measure is a well-orchestrated, well-financed attempt by proponents to achieve the eventual legalization of all drugs.

Robert Maginnis, vice president for policy at the Family Research Council, asserts that arguments about compassionate use of medical marijuana are merely a smoke-screen by proponents who want to liberalize laws to allow recreational use of pot.

"We've got to make sure we're not comparing age-old memories of Woodstock with what's going on today," Maginnis said.

"Today's cannabis is much more potent," he said. According to the DEA, the level of THC, the active ingredient in marijuana, has risen

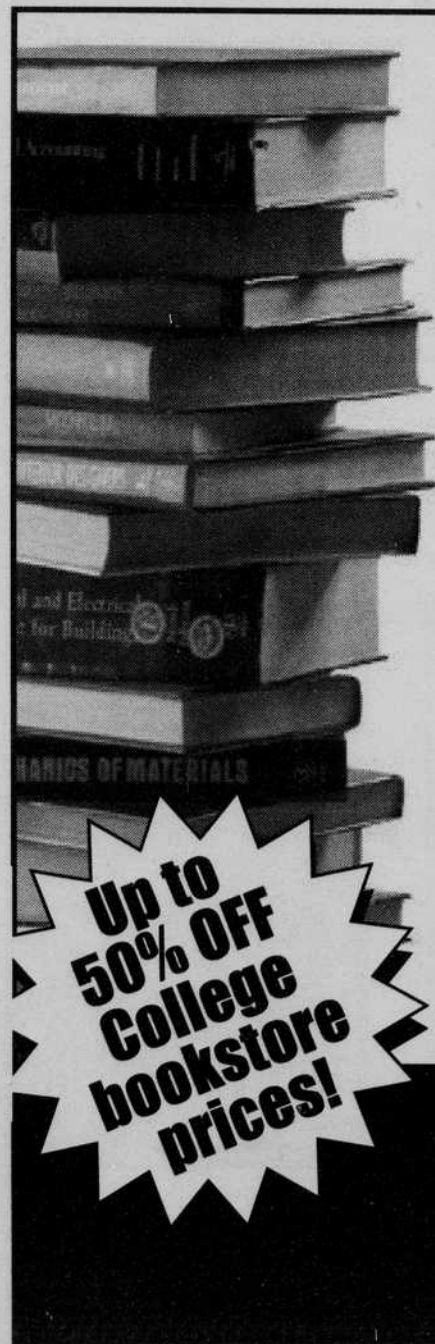
to 7 percent from less than 1 percent in 1974. "You'll get addicted much faster."

Along with the quality, the price of marijuana varies widely across the country — from \$400 to \$5,000 a pound. The Nevada initiative would require the state to establish a price, a tax structure and distribution system for marijuana. The issues of quality and purity aren't addressed, but that is something that the state most likely would have to consider.

"We spell out that it couldn't be sold in places that allow gaming ... and that the establishments would have to go through a licensing process," said Rogers of the initiative campaign.

"What (the distribution system) would look like is impossible to say."

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