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Jewish settlers rampage through West Bank village

Wed Apr 8, 2009 8:50am EDT

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By Haitham Tamimi

SAFA, West Bank (Reuters) - Dozens of Israelis from a Jewish settlement where a Palestinian killed a youth last week rampaged on Wednesday through a West Bank Arab village, smashing car windows and damaging homes, residents and medics said.

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At least five Palestinians were injured in violence that included confrontations between stone-throwing villagers and Israeli soldiers who arrived at the scene after the settlers, from Bat Ayin, entered neighboring Safa.

"A large number of settlers came at 7:30 in the morning and started to smash car windows and throw rocks at houses," said Abu al-Abed, a resident of Safa, where 300 Palestinians live.

An Israeli military source said the violence started when Palestinians threw stones at Bat Ayin settlers praying on a nearby hill before the Jewish Passover holiday.

Safa residents said about 200 settlers, some of them carrying weapons, entered the village.

Soldiers fired rubber-coated metal bullets and also used tear gas during the clashes with Palestinian stone-throwers, villagers said. There were no reports of any injuries or arrests among the settlers.

Last Thursday, a Palestinian wielding an axe killed a 13-year-old youngster and wounded a boy, aged seven, in Bat Ayin. The attacker, who was not identified, fled.

Some 1,000 Israelis live in Bat Ayin, near the Palestinian towns of Hebron and Bethlehem.

In 2002, three settlers from Bat Ayin were sentenced by an Israeli court to prison terms ranging from 12 to 15 years for trying to set off a bomb near a Palestinian girls' school in Arab East Jerusalem.

The injured seven-year-old boy is a son of one of the three jailed settlers.

(Writing by Jeffrey Heller and Joseph Nasr, Editing by Katie Nguyen)

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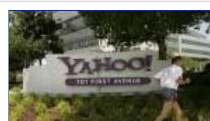
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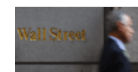
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