

## Syrian leader refused 2001 nuclear offer

*by UPI*

DAMASCUS, Syria -- Syrian President Bashar Assad claimed Wednesday he was offered black market nuclear missiles from Pakistan in 2001, but decided against it. "In 2001, we received a letter from a man introducing himself as Khan. We do not know if the letter was genuine or if it was an Israeli trap," Assad said in an interview published in the Austrian newspaper Die Presse. "Anyhow, we rejected the offer. We are not interested in nuclear weapons or a nuclear facility and I never met Khan." Assad was referring to Abdul Qadeer Khan, considered the father of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, who in 2004 confessed to selling nuclear secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea, the Jerusalem Post reported. Khan remains under house arrest in Islamabad. Assad was evasive in speaking about the Sept. 6 Israeli airstrike in Syria on an alleged North Korean-supplied nuclear facility, the report said. "Since it was a military installation, I cannot go into more details but don't come to the conclusion that it was a nuclear facility," said Assad.

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