

Division for Palestinian Rights
***Chronological Review of Events Relating to the
 Question of Palestine***
 Monthly media monitoring review
 January 2006

Monthly Highlights

- Israeli Cabinet decides to allow limited number of Palestinians to vote in East Jerusalem. ([15 January](#))
- Palestinians vote in PLC elections, with Hamas winning majority of seats. ([25](#), [26](#), [29 January](#), [CEIRPP Bureau statement](#))

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Two armed Palestinian members of Saraya Al-Quds, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad, were killed and a third seriously wounded when an Israeli aircraft fired two missiles at their car in the northern Gaza Strip, security sources reported. The IDF said one of the two killed was Saed Abu Al-Jidian, commander of the group in northern Gaza and responsible for launching rockets at Israel. (*Xinhua*)

While in Doha on a visit, PA President Mahmoud Abbas said the upcoming Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections due on 25 January may be delayed if Israel banned Jerusalem Arabs from voting, *Al-Jazeera* television reported. Mr. Abbas also appealed to Palestinian factions to continue observing the truce with Israel. (*Xinhua*)

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Several Hamas leaders and members gathered in front of the house of the late Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in Gaza City and formally announced the start of their campaign for the January elections. (*Xinhua*)

A rocket fired from Gaza hit a gas station in the Israeli town of Sderot, the IDF said, causing light damage but no casualties. Israel responded with artillery barrages aimed at the open areas where the militants launched the rockets, the IDF and witnesses said. (*AP*)

Alaa al-Hams, leader of a faction of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, suspected of last week's kidnapping of a British aid worker and her parents, had been arrested by Palestinian security officials in the Gaza Strip, a security source said. (*AFP*)

Israeli settlers were given notices to leave Palestinian-owned buildings in a market in the centre of the West Bank city of Hebron. (*Reuters*)

Mustafa Barghouti, a former presidential candidate and leader of the Independent Palestine movement, was arrested by Israeli police while campaigning in Jerusalem's Old City and detained for roughly five hours. Barghouti did not have the proper permit to enter East Jerusalem. Israeli police also dispersed a rally for the Third Way movement outside the Old City's Damascus Gate. Hanan Ashrawi, a member of parliament from the Jerusalem district, was speaking at the event when police intervened. Mrs. Ashrawi said police briefly arrested one of her aides for obstructing a police officer.

"I'm seriously concerned over how this campaign has begun, and not only because of the high-handed manner of the Israelis," Ashrawi said in a telephone interview. "I'm also worried about our own domestic realities and the breakdown of law and order. There appears to be an emerging anarchy." Israeli officials had banned voting and electioneering in East Jerusalem because of Hamas' participation. An Israeli official in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office said, "This time Hamas, a terrorist group, is participating. Because of this we cannot cooperate with the elections. This is our policy not only in East Jerusalem but throughout the process." (*The Washington Post*)

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Israel's Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said Israel was ready to open talks with Hamas if the movement won the Palestinian general election and agreed to disarm. "Israel was prepared to have negotiations with Hamas if it wins the elections and if it announces that it has disarmed", Mr. Mofaz was quoted as saying by *Israel Army Radio*. (*AFP*)

The IDF dismantled three out of eight new settlement outposts set up by young Jewish right-wing activists, the "hilltop youth", in the West Bank. "The army, backed by police, dismantled three outposts set up near the settlements of Paduel, Efrat and Bat Ayin, the first of which is located north of Ramallah and the other two, south of Jerusalem," an IDF spokesman said. He said the operation was carried out without incident. The outposts consisted mainly of swiftly-erected wooden structures. The settlement watchdog Peace Now, however, believed that nearly 100 were still in place. (*AFP*)

Israeli soldiers had shot and killed Mustafa Mohammed, an armed Palestinian in the village of Tarameh, near the West Bank city of Hebron, the army said. (*AP*)

Members of Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, allegedly angered by the Palestinian Authority's detention of one of their members, Alaa al-Hams, broke through the Rafah crossing border wall with tractors, which had been hijacked at the site, killed two Egyptian soldiers, and enabled hundreds of civilians to stream across. (*AP*)

Israel's Prime Minister Sharon suffered a massive brain hemorrhage and underwent critical surgery, doctors said, plunging Israel into uncertainty before an approaching election. (*AP*)

King Abdullah II of Jordan called for a halt to lawlessness in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as he held talks with PA President Abbas in Amman. The King urged "all Palestinian factions to work together to end the deterioration of security and unite Palestinian efforts," a Palace statement said. He voiced Jordanian support for the Palestinian leadership's efforts to restore order, saying they were "essential," with parliamentary elections due in just three weeks. "The next two years will be decisive for the future of the Palestinian State," King Abdullah said. He backed Palestinian demands

for Israel to remove all obstacles to participation in the 25 January vote by residents of East Jerusalem. (AP)

Egypt's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Egypt "strongly condemned" the actions of "an irresponsible group of Palestinians" at the Rafah crossing. The statement appealed to the Palestinian Authority to ensure there was no recurrence of the incident, and thanked the Palestinian police for taking steps to restore order at the crossing. The Ministry said the riot constituted "unwarranted and unprecedented violence" that not only harmed the Palestinians, but also "weakened efforts to support the Palestinian people in their efforts to establish an independent State." (AP)

The IDF said nearly 15 Qassam rockets had been from the Gaza Strip at the northern Negev and the area south of Ashkelon. No injuries were reported. The Israel Air Force in turn shelled eight roads in the area of Beit Hanoun, in the northern Gaza Strip. A Fatah faction sent photographs to television networks showing Qassam rockets being launched from vehicles. (Ha'aretz)

The European Parliament said that it would send a mission to monitor the parliamentary election in the Palestinian territory later this month. The 25-member team will be led by the European Union Parliament's vice president, Edward McMillan-Scott, a British Conservative. The team planned to be on site from 22 January for meetings with candidates and election officials, before deploying across the West Bank and Gaza for the 25 January election, the Assembly said in a statement. The team would be observing the election in the Jerusalem area, Jericho, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqilya, Jenin, Hebron and the Gaza Strip. It would work alongside another 172-member observer mission made up of experts and representatives from other EU institutions, including the European Commission. (AP)

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Calm was restored to the Rafah crossing, a day after Palestinian militants broke through the border wall. More than 60 Palestinians had been arrested and charged with illegal entry, Egyptian security officials said. It was not disclosed whether any of them were suspected of being involved in the previous day's riot. Palestinian security officials said the PA had deployed about 300 police officers at the Rafah border point the day before and restored control. (AP)

Palestinian security officials released Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades militant Alaa al-Hams, whose detention had provoked the riots of the previous day. (AP)

Two teenage Palestinians were wounded when settlers opened fire in the northern West Bank, medical sources and witnesses said. The two men, aged 18 and 19, were hurt in the leg when settlers travelling in a car opened fire in their direction near the village of Hawara, south of the city of Nablus, the sources said. The settlers escaped and the two Palestinians were attended to by medics. (AFP)

The following statement was issued by the Spokesman for Secretary-General Kofi Annan:

The Secretary-General is deeply concerned about the health of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. He is following developments closely and very much hopes that the Prime Minister will make a speedy recovery. His thoughts are with Mr. Sharon and his family, as well as with the Government and people of Israel.

(UN press release SG/SM/10295)

PA President Abbas' aide, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, told reporters that Mr. Abbas voiced his concerns about Prime Minister Sharon's health in a phone call to senior Israeli officials. (Xinhua)

Japan's Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi postponed his trip to Israel due to the health situation of Prime Minister Sharon, Japan's Foreign Ministry announced. (AP)

The United States believes the Palestinian elections, scheduled for 25 January, should be held despite the deterioration of Prime Minister Sharon's health. "This is a schedule that was set by the Palestinians, and we believe it's important to move ahead on schedule," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said. (DPA)

The Palestinian Elections Commission (CEC) resigned to protest a Government decision to allow 60,000 security men to vote in their own barracks instead of voting in their districts. Its letter of resignation was sent to PA President Abbas' office the previous day. Commission officials later said they were told that Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia's cabinet was rescinding the decision, clearing the way for the CEC to cancel its resignation. (Reuters)

B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, said in a report that 197 Palestinians, including 54 children, had been killed in 2005. The report said 118 of those killed had not participated in any violence. Since 29 September 2000, 1,815 of the Palestinians killed had not participated in any fighting while 1,008 had, with 563 unknown. The report also said that 490,500 Palestinians would be directly harmed by the separation wall in its current route whereby 21 villages would be separated from the rest of the West Bank. The current route of the wall would isolate 9.5 per cent of the West Bank and connect it to Israel. (Wafa)

US Deputy National Security Adviser Elliott Abrams and Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch were to arrive in the region this weekend to try to settle a dispute that was threatening to derail the 25 January PLC election in the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian officials said. The envoys were scheduled to meet with Palestinian leaders and Prime Minister Sharon's Special Advisor, Dov Weissglas. At issue are voting procedures in Jerusalem. Israel had threatened that it might not allow voting in the disputed city, and Mr. Abbas had responded that such a ban might prompt him to call off the vote. (English General News)

Turkey's Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul promised economic support for the Palestinians as he toured the "Erez Industrial Zone" in the Gaza Strip, which Turkish businessmen were planning to revive. The previous day, Mr. Gul had signed an agreement with the PA to open and operate the "Erez Industrial Zone" in the northern Gaza Strip under the management of Turkey's Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges. He had signed a similar deal with Israel's Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom seeking Israel's support for the project, diplomats said. (AFP)

Norway's Finance Minister Kristin Halvorsen said in an interview with the daily *Dagbladet* that she was in favour of a boycott of Israeli products in a show of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Her party, the Socialists, had joined several organizations last year in a pro-Palestinian campaign called "Boycott Israel", aimed at denouncing "Israel's scandalous policy towards the Palestinians which violates human rights." Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, of the Labour Party, stressed however that a boycott of Israeli products was not official Government policy. (AFP)

6

Prime Minister Sharon had a second emergency brain surgery for five hours after doctors detected further bleeding and rising blood pressure, a Hadassah Hospital official said without giving details on the Prime Minister's condition. (AP)

The main armed Palestinian factions issued a joint appeal for an end to the security chaos in the Gaza Strip. At a press conference held at Rafah, a statement, signed by the armed wings of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Resistance Committees as well as Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and Ahmed Abu Rish Brigades, armed offshoots of Fatah, was read out to reporters: "We condemn the death of the two Egyptian border guards and the kidnapping of the foreigners by people who are breaking the national consensus." The groups also pledged to establish "a communal force to ensure the security of the motherland and its citizens if the Palestinian Authority does not fulfill its duties." (AFP)

8

The IDF arrested five Palestinians in Hebron and Bethlehem. (Wafa)

Hamas, together with all Palestinian factions, signed an accord that would serve as a code of conduct in the period leading up to the PLC elections. The pact was signed by Ismail Hania, the first on Hamas' parliamentary list. The accord limits campaign expenditures to US\$1 million per list, and

requires the parties to disclose the sources of their campaign funding in a detailed report to be submitted to the Central Election Committee. It requires that the various factions cooperate with the Central Election Committee and follow its directives. It calls for the ballot to remain secret, and defines the role of foreign observers. Other rules forbid weapons near balloting stations, prohibit the use of symbols similar to official PA symbols and the use of PA offices for electioneering. (*Ha'aretz*)

Palestinian factions signed an agreement with European representatives in which they pledged to keep the peace on the Gaza-Egypt border. Following the signing, the Egyptians reopened the Rafah crossing, which they had closed on 5 January after armed Fatah members commandeered two bulldozers and then opened fire, killing two Egyptian border guards and wounding about 20 others. All Palestinian factions denounced the incident and demanded that those responsible be brought to justice. The Egyptians, who increased their presence along the border following the incident, said they would not open the border until the PA took control of the situation. (*Ha'aretz*)

In a telephone call, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice congratulated PA President Abbas on the occasion of Eid al-Adha. Ms. Rice and Mr. Abbas discussed the upcoming elections. (*Wafa*)

9

Hamas launched a television station in the Gaza Strip, a first step toward setting up a satellite station, Hamas officials said. The Al-Aqsa Television station was being set up just weeks before the Palestinians' 25 January parliamentary election. The station only broadcasted half an hour of readings from the Holy Quran the previous day due to technical difficulties. (*Ha'aretz*)

The High Court of Justice rejected the appeals filed by Israelis from the municipality of Maccabim-Reut and Palestinians from the villages of Beit Sirah and Shuqba against the planned route of the separation barrier in the Modi'in area. Following the rejection, the court also lifted the temporary injunctions issued against the construction of the fence in that area. Residents of Beit Sirah were also offered 13 dunums of land in exchange for some of their land, which was placed on the west side of the barrier. Justices Aharon Barak, Dorit Beinisch and Ayala Procaccia wrote in their ruling: "We have agreed that under existing circumstances, the military's decision falls within the limits of reason." (*Ha'aretz*)

PA Information Minister Nabil Sha'ath said the United States had informed the PA that East Jerusalem residents would be able to vote in the city, despite Israeli misgivings. Mr. Sha'ath said US officials informed the Palestinian Government that campaigning and voting in Jerusalem would go ahead. "We have not received anything yet from the Israelis to confirm that, but we will go on this assurance", he said. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israel's Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said an agreement on Palestinians' voting procedures in East Jerusalem had not yet been reached.

However, Israel's Public Security Minister Gideon Ezra said Israel would allow candidates for the elections to campaign in East Jerusalem as long as they do not belong to militant groups. "All those who want to campaign will submit requests in advance to the Jerusalem police, and only those who don't represent extremist groups will receive permission," Mr. Ezra told *Israel Radio*. The ease on campaign restrictions did not include Hamas. But Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said, "We will carry out our electioneering campaign whether the occupation agrees or not. We have the means and the ways to do so despite the Israeli decision." (*Ha'aretz*)

PA President Abbas told reporters in a news briefing at his Gaza Headquarters: "Today I received American guarantees that the legislative election and the election campaign would be held in East Jerusalem following the same measures which were implemented during the 1996 legislative elections." Mr. Abbas said the guarantee came in a letter he received earlier from President George W. Bush saying that the US did not object to the holding of the elections in East Jerusalem. Israel's Defence Minister Mofaz announced that Israel had agreed in principle to allow Palestinians to vote in Jerusalem. (*AFP, DPA*)

David Welch, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern affairs, and Elliot Abrams, Deputy National Security Adviser, were to leave the following day on a trip to the region but put off earlier because of Prime Minister Sharon's stroke. Secretary of State Rice announced the trip in a phone conversation with the Quartet representatives. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the two officials would meet with both sides to discuss security, the Palestinian elections and follow-up to an accord on freedom of movement for Palestinians. (*AFP*)

PA President Abbas told a news conference that he had ordered Palestinian security to use force if necessary to prevent militants in the Gaza Strip from disrupting the upcoming parliamentary elections. (*Reuters*)

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev criticized the launching by Hamas of its TV station, Al-Aqsa TV, saying the international community should act to "close down propaganda organs of terrorist organizations". (*AP*)

The Government of Japan decided to extend assistance totaling \$5,276,745 to a project entitled "Isolated and Disenfranchised Communities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory", which will be implemented by UNSCO, UNRWA, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNIFEM, UNDP, WHO and UNFP. (www.mofa.go.jp)

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The Office of James Wolfensohn, the Middle East Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, submitted its [Fourth Report on the Implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access](#), covering the period 24 December 2005 to 6 January 2006 inclusive. (www.lacc.ps)

Pope Benedict XVI delivered his annual foreign policy [speech](#) to Vatican-based diplomats. Among other things, he commented on "that nerve point of the world scene, which is the Holy Land", saying, "There, the State of Israel has to be able to exist peacefully in conformity with the norms of international law; there, equally, the Palestinian people has to be able to develop serenely its own democratic institutions for a free and prosperous future." (*AP, www.vatican.va*)

Israel's Defence Minister Mofaz said that Jerusalem's Palestinians would be permitted to vote along the same lines as previous Palestinian elections, when it permitted some residents to cast "absentee" ballots at five post offices. The remainder of voters cast ballots in West Bank suburbs. A Defence Ministry official said the proposal bars Hamas voting slips in the booths. Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in a phone conversation that the Cabinet would vote on the matter at its weekly meeting on 15 January, according to a statement from Mr. Olmert's office. Mr. Mofaz also reportedly stressed that Israel must enable the proper running of Palestinian elections and not allow itself to be accused of causing their failure. At the same time, Foreign Minister Benny Shalom said the Prime Minister had already decided that East Jerusalem Palestinians must vote in nearby West Bank villages and not in Jerusalem. (*AP, BBC Monitoring, Reuters*)

US State Department spokesman McCormack said [Secretary of State Rice](#) had had a "good discussion" by telephone with acting Prime Minister Olmert but did not push for voting to proceed in East Jerusalem. "She underlined the fact that she understood this was an issue that was currently being discussed within the Israeli Cabinet and between the Israelis and Palestinians. And she underlined the fact that it was an issue between the Palestinians and the Israelis to resolve. She's not trying to put her finger on the scale, if that's the question." During the conversation, Ms. Rice also renewed US support for the establishment of a Palestinian State. (*AFP, AP, www.state.gov*)

Israel's Defence Minister Mofaz had ordered a "provisional" barrier be built in three areas around East Jerusalem, Israeli state TV reported. The

three sections for which the High Court of Justice had ordered in 2005 for work to be suspended lie near the Bir Nabala neighbourhood and Shuafat refugee camp to the city's north and the Sheikh Said neighbourhood to its south. Mr. Mofaz insisted that those three sections "could be removed when the High Court of Justice issues its final ruling." (AFP)

Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin told the Knesset's Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee that the smuggling of weapons and explosives from Egypt into the Gaza Strip had increased since Israel had withdrawn from the territory. Some 2,000-3,000 rifles had been smuggled into Gaza each month, up from 200 to 300 in the months preceding the September pull-out, as well as dozens of rocket-propelled grenades and two tonnes of explosives. The Committee chairman, MK Yuval Steiniz (Likud) accused Egypt of making no effort to clamp down on the smuggling. Mr. Diskin also discussed the recent uprooting of Palestinian olive trees in the West Bank, referring to it as a phenomenon that reoccurred on an annual basis. He added that the Shin Bet was aware of who was behind the act and had transferred this information to law enforcement, which had done nothing about it. (AFP, www.ynetnews.com)

Brig.-Gen. Adel Fawzy, an Egyptian security official in El Arish, the provincial capital of north Sinai, said that Egyptian authorities had ordered the release, for "humanitarian" reasons, of Palestinians arrested after a riot on Egypt's side of the border with Gaza. Two Egyptian security troops died in the violence on 4 January, when Palestinian militants used tractors to break through the border wall. The release order, covering 64 Palestinians held on the Egyptian side of Rafah, was issued the previous day. (AP)

11

Israeli forces began dismantling seven concrete foundations and one home at the outpost of "Sde Boaz", near the "Neveh Daniel" settlement, part of the "Gush Etzion" block in the West Bank. About 300 settlers protested against the demolition, temporarily forcing a bulldozer to stop its work. Israeli authorities arrested six people for interrupting the demolition, said police spokesman Mickey Rosenfeld. After using tear gas to evacuate settlers from the home, forces resumed their demolition work. (AP, *The Jerusalem Post*)

Six Palestinians were arrested by Israeli police and fined for hanging campaign posters on billboards in East Jerusalem for the PLC elections. (Ha'aretz)

PA President Abbas told Fatah members: "If Israel says no to Jerusalem participation even on 24 January, the election will be cancelled". (AP)

Hamas published its official platform for the upcoming Palestinian elections, which was seen as being more moderate than either its 1988 charter or public statements made by its leaders throughout the ensuing years. The platform introduction comes out strongly in favour of armed struggle, but does not mention the destruction of Israel nor the establishment of a Palestinian State on all territory west of the Jordan River in its place. (Ha'aretz)

"It remains the view of the United States that there should be no place in the political process for groups or individuals who refuse to renounce terror and violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and disarm," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a [statement](http://www.state.gov). (www.state.gov)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert had told Secretary of State Rice by telephone that terror organizations and their representatives would not be able to participate in the vote in Jerusalem, Israeli officials said. Government sources said that any "wanted" Hamas members who showed up at the polls or ran a campaign in East Jerusalem would be arrested. Nonetheless, Israel would not ban ballot slips for parties or candidates associated with Hamas. (Ha'aretz)

EU observers were concerned about the security situation during the 25 January parliamentary election, but said they had contingency evacuation plans if the situation got out of control. Mathias Eick, spokesman for the EU's 186-member election observer mission, said his mission was coordinating with security commanders. "What we need is an early warning," he said. "It is not a matter of stopping (the violence)." PA Interior Minister Nasser Yousef told Cabinet on 8 January he would not be able to secure polling stations. (AP)

Norway's Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg rejected opposition calls for a formal vote denouncing a consumer boycott launched last week by the Socialist Left Party (SLP), telling Parliament: "This Government opposes a consumer boycott of Israel." Finance Minister Kristin Halvorsen, SLP head, apologized last week after saying she favoured the boycott, aimed at adding pressure on Israel to allow for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. She said a boycott of Israeli oranges and other goods was not Government policy, merely that of her party. However, the party said it stood by the boycott. Norway's imports of Israeli goods like oranges totalled US\$8.22 million in 2005. (Reuters)

Rising concern was reported over a Human Rights Watch [letter](#) to President George W. Bush saying that "settlement activity is a violation of international humanitarian law, United Nations Security Council resolutions and Israel's own commitments under the US-sponsored [Road Map](#) of April 2003". The letter referred to multiple Israeli announcements of its plans to continue expanding settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and urged the President "to use US diplomatic and financial influence to stop this trend in 2006". (New York Sun, www.hrw.org)

12

IDF heavy artillery fired several shells at the northern Gaza Strip after a Qassam rocket had been launched at Israel overnight. *Israel Radio* reported. (Ha'aretz)

A Palestinian blew himself up and Israeli troops shot dead another in a shoot-out during an arrest raid in Jenin. Israeli troops targeting Islamic Jihad militants entered the town and surrounded two houses. Three men in one house had surrendered, said Maj. Sharon Esman, a spokesman for the IDF's Central Command. The men in the other house opened fire and the soldiers killed one of the gunmen in the ensuing shoot-out. A second man came out with an explosives belt – which the IDF believed was meant for an attack in Israel – and blew himself up, causing no injuries to the soldiers. Islamic Jihad identified the dead as Moutaz Khalil and Ali Abu Hazne from the village of Atil near Tulkarm. Earlier reports quoted witnesses as saying that a third Palestinian was killed by Israeli forces in the area. (AFP, AP)

Fatah gunmen, demanding PA security jobs, opened fire at PA Interior Minister Nasser Yusef's house and the Palestinian Cabinet building in Ramallah. Two gunmen and two bystanders were wounded in the exchange of fire, Mr. Yusef's spokesman said. The Ministry statement followed earlier reports that the Minister's guards had opened fire on a vehicle which had failed to stop but whose occupants had been unarmed.

Mr. Yusef was not at home at the time of the incident. (AFP, AP)

PLC candidate Salah Hikmat al-Masri was prohibited by Israel from entering the Gaza Strip to meet with supporters. (Wafa)

The PA Ministry of the Interior announced the death of a policeman wounded last week during a security campaign in the Gaza Strip. The Ministry added that 10 other policemen had been wounded, two critically. (Wafa)

The IDF arrested 23 "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank. (Ha'aretz)

Some 150 settlers clashed with Israeli police during the demolition of the "Neveh Daniel" unauthorized settlement outpost near Ramallah. Eleven settlers were detained. (www.ynetnews.com)

Expressing frustration over the failure of the security forces to stop Israeli extremists from uprooting Palestinian olive trees, an unnamed senior IDF officer warned that extremist Jewish groups operating in northern West Bank posed a far greater threat to the people of Israel than terrorism. He

likened the actions of the extremists to "a volcano waiting to erupt". (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Hamas spokesman Mushir al-Masri told reporters that his movement was ready for campaigning, rallying and lobbying in East Jerusalem despite Israeli opposition. (*Xinhua*)

Israel's Defence Minister Mofaz told David Welch, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, that PA President Abbas would be required to present a detailed plan for dismantling the militant organizations on the day after the PLC elections. Mr. Mofaz also said that the plan to allow the passage of Palestinian convoys from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank could not be implemented because of attempts to smuggle capabilities for the production of Qassam rockets. (*Ha'aretz*)

Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, speaking on the phone with President George W. Bush about possible results of the upcoming Palestinian elections, said there "can be no progress with an administration in which there are terrorist organizations as members", according to a [statement](#) from the Prime Minister's Office. (*AP*)

13

Palestinian militants had launched six rockets from the northern Gaza Strip, with one exploding near an IDF base and another south of Ashkelon, an IDF spokesman said. No injuries or damage were caused. Israeli artillery responded by bombarding a "no-go" zone, which incorporates three former settlements. (*AFP*)

Defence Minister Mofaz had delayed the evacuation of the "Amona" outpost near the "Ofra" settlement, north-east of Ramallah, after settlers filed an appeal with the High Court of Justice, the Defence Ministry said. The Court will hear the appeal on 18 January, adding that Mr. Mofaz wanted to wait until after the PLC elections on 25 January. However, Mr. Mofaz had ordered the dismantling of three other outposts near Nablus next week, the Ministry said. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

Since the second week of December 2005, the IDF isolated the northern part of the West Bank from other areas, prohibiting residents from travelling to Ramallah and points further south. The IDF had also cut off certain traffic links within the northern West Bank. The ban affected some 800,000 people and applied to residents of Jenin, Tulkarm and, from 2 January, Nablus area residents. This measure, that the IDF calls "differentiation", was implemented several times last year, for varying lengths of time and sometimes in both directions. (*Ha'aretz*)

Fatehi Hammad, a Hamas PLC candidate from the northern Gaza Strip, told reporters that Hamas would continue with the same style, would develop its army by recruiting more members, and carry on with manufacturing rockets and bombs. (*DPA*)

US aid to the PA would be reviewed and possibly reduced if it gave Hamas a role in the Government after the PLC election, US diplomatic sources said. (*Ha'aretz*)

US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch had a 90-minute meeting with PA President Abbas in Ramallah. He told reporters after the meeting: "We welcome statements by President Abbas that elections will proceed on time. The US strongly supports President Abbas in this decision and supports the right of Palestinians to vote 'everywhere', including in East Jerusalem." "Groups and individuals who refuse to renounce terror and violence, who refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist and who refuse to disarm have no place in the political process," Mr. Welch also stressed. Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erakat said the US envoy "told us they will exert every possible effort to have free elections according to the '96 arrangements". Mr. Welch and Deputy National Security Adviser Elliot Abrams earlier met in Jerusalem with Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. "The meeting centred on the upcoming PA elections, various post-election possibilities and the PA's obligation to meet its commitments to fight terrorism", a [statement](#) from the Prime Minister's Office said. (*DPA*)

14

"We'll negotiate [with Israel] better than the others, who negotiated for 10 years and achieved nothing," Sheikh Mohammed Abu Tir, second on the Hamas list of candidates for the PLC elections, told *Ha'aretz*. (*Ha'aretz*)

PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat told the Voice of Palestine radio that international election observers would be present in East Jerusalem. (*Xinhua*)

Mahmoud Zahar, a prominent Hamas leader and candidate for the upcoming PLC elections, said in a statement: "We will not negotiate, because there is an experience in front of us. Some sides negotiated [with Israel] during the last 10 years and they brought just mirage." (*Xinhua*)

PA President Abbas said that Hamas' possible participation in the Palestinian Government was "not an American issue ... If Hamas wants to participate in the Palestinian Authority, we have no objection to that ... If Hamas wants to participate in the Government, it has to abide by this basis ... upon which we returned to Palestine in 1994, based on the Oslo accords." Ismail Haniye, who tops Hamas' list of PLC candidates, said in a statement that he "does not rule out Hamas' participating in the Government or forming a Government itself if it gets a majority in parliament."

(*AFP, AP*)

15

IDF artillery units shelled the northern Gaza Strip following Qassam rocket fire. (*Ha'aretz*)

Some 150 Israeli settlers clashed with Palestinians in Hebron after trying to occupy a Palestinian-owned house. The IDF said the settlers then clashed with police and soldiers who tried to disperse them, lightly wounding one soldier. (*Reuters*)

IDF troops had shot and killed a Palestinian mother and her armed 20-year-old son near Nablus, witnesses said. (*AP*)

Israeli police scuffled with Hamas members and raided a Hamas office in East Jerusalem that Israel believed was being used for election-related activities. Police detained six people, including Mohammed Abu Tir, a Hamas candidate. (*AP*)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert oversaw a unanimous Cabinet decision which would allow Palestinians to vote in the PLC elections in East Jerusalem.

The [decision](#) stated, inter alia: "Due to the participation of Hamas, Israel has announced that it will not cooperate with these elections and will not coordinate them on a political level with the PA. However, Israel will not prevent the elections from being held... Opening hours at the crossings will be expanded on Election Day... Freedom of movement and passage will be allowed for those involved in the elections, candidates and activists except for those identified with terrorist organizations. The presence and freedom of movement of international observers and local observers not identified with terrorist organizations will be allowed. Election propaganda by persons identified with terrorist organizations will not be permitted within Jerusalem; The Communications Ministry will prepare to operate five post office branches [in East Jerusalem] as was done in the past." (www.pmo.gov.il)

In a phone conversation with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, PA President Abbas complained about Israel's electoral restrictions. "All candidates should have freedom of movement, freedom to campaign," he said, according to his office. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri termed the Israeli decision "unacceptable," but said it would not delay the elections. EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana welcomed the decision in a [statement](#). "The European Union expects Israel to facilitate electoral operations, including movement of

candidates and voting officials, as well of local and international observers,” he said. (AP, www.eu.int)

PA President Abbas said that he did not intend to seek re-election once his term ended in three years. (DPA, Ha'aretz)

16

At least 20 gunmen had stormed the PLC compound in Gaza City, and then left quickly without making any demands, witnesses said. (AP)

The IDF arrested nine Palestinians in Qalqilya, Tulkarm and Nablus. (Wafa)

Two Qassam rockets, fired from the Gaza Strip, landed in an open field near the southern Israeli town of Sderot, causing no injuries. (Ha'aretz, Ynet)

The IDF said it had arrested overnight eight "wanted" Hamas members in the Jalazun refugee camp, north of Ramallah, and an Islamic Jihad member near Bir Zeit, north of Ramallah. (www.idf.il)

Israeli forces conducted an arrest raid in Kafr Dan, north-west of Jenin, firing live ammunition and rubber-coated bullets at residents. Two Palestinians were wounded. (International Press Centre (IPC))

Israeli police raided the Fida party's offices in East Jerusalem, arresting five people. The police claimed the offices harboured political activities of the Democratic Front movement, which Israel considers a terrorist group. (Ha'aretz)

PA Interior Minister Nasser Yousef said militants in the Gaza Strip had rejected the PA's plan to put their weapons in storage during the PLC elections. (Reuters)

The Islamic Jihad urged its supporters to boycott the PLC elections. (Xinhua)

Mohammed Abu Tir, number two on Hamas' candidates list for the PLC elections, and seven other members of the group were released from Israeli custody, after being detained by Israeli police in East Jerusalem the day before. (AP, DPA, Ha'aretz)

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner flew to the Middle East to express support for the upcoming PLC elections and announce the launch of \$24 million worth of EU aid projects in the Gaza Strip. She is scheduled to meet PA President Abbas and acting Israel Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. "This is a testing moment for leaders in both Israel and the Palestinian territories," she said in a statement. "Neither the situation arising from Mr. Sharon's illness, nor the challenges to law and order in the Gaza Strip, should distract them from the goal of seeking peace." (AFP)

At a press conference with PA Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Kidwa in Ramallah, Spain's Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos said Europe would have to re-evaluate its links with the Palestinians in the event of a Hamas victory in the PLC elections. Asked about how a Hamas victory would have an impact on future European financial aid to the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Moratinos said that "the necessary evaluations" would have to be made and "a decision would be taken" with regard to funding. But he added, "We will respect the result of these democratic Palestinian elections in which we believe all political groups should participate." Mr. Al-Kidwa said that it was one thing for Hamas to win seats in the PLC but it was another thing for the group to form part of the Palestinian Authority. "For that, they will need to first stick to the political line taken by the Palestinian Authority," Mr. Al-Kidwa told reporters. (AFP)

Israeli police and Anti-Drug Authority officials met with the heads of the PA Anti-Drug Department at the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing between Israel and the northern Gaza Strip in order to discuss heightened cooperation in the war on drugs. The two sides had agreed to increase their cooperation on the matter at a meeting held in Cairo in late November 2005, facilitated by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. (Ha'aretz, www.unodc.org)

17

Israeli troops killed a 24-year-old leader of Hamas' military wing in Tulkarm, Thabet Ayyadeh, during an exchange of fire. Soldiers surrounded a hideout used by Mr. Ayyadeh to arrest him, and when he stormed out of the hideout and opened fire, the soldiers shot him dead. (AFP, AP, DPA, Reuters)

The IDF said it had arrested overnight nine Fatah members, eight Hamas members and a PFLP member. (www.idf.il)

Amidst protests against an Israeli order to evict nine Jewish families squatting in an area taken from Palestinians in Hebron after the start of the intifada, Israeli police forcibly removed a handful of settler youths from the squat to try to end days of unrest. Late the previous day, the military had declared the area "a closed military zone" to non-residents. (AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

The Temporary International Presence in Hebron said dozens of Israeli settler youths attacked five of its members, mostly US citizens, near the "Beit Hadassah" settlement on 14 January. The workers were slightly injured, and two required medical treatment. Police informed the organization that it would be required to leave the area by 22 January, as all Jewish sections of the city would be closed as a military zone. (Ha'aretz)

In talks with EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Israel's Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said that Hamas had to be disarmed whether the group was in the PLC or the PA and that Europe could play an important role in pressing the Palestinians to disband terrorist organizations. (AFP, www.pmo.gov.il)

EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner said the EU had suspended €35 million donated to the Palestinians through the World Bank in November 2005, citing their lack of budgetary discipline. "There has to be a credible finance minister, but there also has to be a budget and the budget should also remain within the limits of what the budget has foreseen," said Ms. Ferrero-Waldner, who was visiting the region. (Reuters)

Acting Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met with Spain's Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos and told him that Hamas was a terrorist organization and must be treated as such, and said it was important for PA President Abbas to deal with the issue immediately after the elections according to a clear timetable. (AFP, www.pmo.gov.il)

Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told reporters, "I hope that based on the results of [the PLC] elections, and after that the results of our elections, I will be able to enter negotiations with [PA President Abbas] ... for a permanent settlement between us and the Palestinians. That depends on whether he will uphold his commitments to disarm the terror groups," he added. (AP, DPA, Reuters)

Jordan's King Abdullah II, speaking in a meeting with a Council on Foreign Relations delegation headed by Brent Scowcroft, said the only alternative to the creation of a Palestinian State was more chaos, violence and instability in the Middle East. The King said that the next two years were particularly critical, and urged Israel to continue withdrawing from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Later in the day, the delegation met with Prime Minister Marouf Bakheet, who said that the international community should work to promote the Middle East peace process in order to achieve the goal of ending Israeli occupation and creating an independent Palestinian State. (AP, Petra, Xinhua)

Israel's President Moshe Katsav told *Israel Army Radio*, "If Hamas recognizes Israel's right to exist, and ceases terrorism and is elected by the

Palestinians to their parliament, under these conditions I think it would be possible to conduct political negotiations with them.” (*Reuters*)

A haemophiliac from Gaza City who has the AIDS virus was denied entry by the IDF for treatment in Israel on three occasions, despite warnings by doctors that his life was in danger. The patient, who is in his twenties, contracted HIV from a blood transfusion during childhood and had been treated regularly at the Tel Hashomer hospital in Beersheba before the outbreak of the intifada. He had since been receiving standard treatment in Gaza City but six AIDS experts said in a petition that his condition had deteriorated so sharply in recent weeks that he needed to be transferred back to Tel Hashomer. (*AFP*)

Aff Safieh, Palestinian Ambassador to the US, said he hoped the EU or another third party “would step in decisively” to help end the impasse in Middle East peace negotiations. “Europe was often disappointed that it was relegated to the status of payer and not player,” Mr. Safieh said at a private seminar held at the US Congress and sponsored by the Council for the National Interest, an independent policy group focusing on the Middle East. “We need international mediation, but some international mediation with some muscle,” which might hold Israel accountable and ensure it fulfils commitments, he said. “The Israeli Government still wants to get as much of our geography as possible with as little of our demography as possible,” Mr. Safieh stressed. (*AFP*)

18

Three IDF raids in the West Bank – in Jenin, the village of Tzurif near Bethlehem and in the village of Kalil near Nablus – had left four Palestinians and two Israeli soldiers injured, according to the IDF and Palestinian security officials. An Israeli spokesman said 13 Palestinian activists had been arrested in the West Bank overnight, most of them Islamic Jihad members. (*AFP*)

Israeli police broke up a PFLP campaign meeting at a hotel in East Jerusalem and arrested seven party activists. Mickey Rosenfeld, an Israeli police spokesman, said other groups outlawed by Israel would also be stopped from campaigning in East Jerusalem. (*AP, Reuters, Xinhua*)

The IDF killed Thabet Salahedin, a senior Hamas activist in Tulkarm. Mr. Salahedin, a Nablus resident, was “wanted” by the IDF allegedly for taking part in a number of failed attempts to dispatch suicide bombers. (*Ha’aretz*)

Several Palestinian militant groups announced that they had fired home-made rockets at Israel. The Palestinian Resistance Committees said in a statement that its armed wing had fired two rockets at the “Sufa” border crossing east of Rafah, in response to the killing by Israel of a Hamas commander in Tulkarm the day before. Fatah-affiliated Ahmed Abu Al-Rish Brigades claimed responsibility for firing two home-made rockets at Sderot. Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades said in a press statement e-mailed to reporters that its activist had wounded an Israeli soldier near Beit Hanoun.

(*Xinhua*)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert ordered the IDF to immediately remove nine Jewish families (some 50 people) squatting illegally on a Palestinian fruit and vegetable market in Hebron. The decision followed consultations with security officials and the new Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, who is also Justice Minister. The settlers have so far rejected the proposal. Five settlers there were arrested by security forces. (*AFP, Ha’aretz, The Jerusalem Post*)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert had asked Defence Minister Mofaz to draw up plans to dismantle all settlement outposts in the West Bank (20, according to *Ha’aretz*) and asked Attorney-General Menahem Mazuz to consider placing people routinely involved in violence under administrative detention. The High Court ruled that eviction orders calling for the dismantlement of the “Amona” outpost near Ramallah would come into effect within a week. The Government of Israel had announced its intention to clear the outpost by the end of the month. (*Ha’aretz, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post, Ynet*)

PA President Abbas told reporters in Ramallah, “I am very optimistic that the elections will take place. They will be conducted in a democratic and honest fashion and we will add to the Palestinian democracy that we have promised our people.” He said he believed in the Oslo process, and “if a Legislative Council or a Government or whatever comes and says: I refuse to implement this policy, then in this case I have failed.” Mr. Abbas said he would work with whomever wins the election, but if Hamas became part of the Palestinian political establishment, it had to abandon its military activities and lay down its weapons. “I believe a political party is in contradiction to having a militia,” he said, but added this was “not a condition” for any political movement to be part of the future Government. “Who knows, Hamas may change its policy,” Mr. Abbas said, stressing also that the PA had certain obligations in the political agreements and had to honour them. On the question of negotiations with Acting Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, he said, “I am ready to meet him as soon as possible and I hope to sit round the negotiating table immediately.” He denied some Israeli reports, saying, “I’m not depressed. I’m exhausted from working to stabilise the security situation and to ensure free and fair elections.” (*AFP, AP, DPA, Reuters*)

Fatah and Hamas announced that they had agreed to prohibit carrying arms on election day. Sa’eed Seyam and Samir Mashharawi, senior Hamas and Fatah leaders, respectively, told a joint news conference in Gaza City that the agreement had been reached in a “positive” and “encouraging” meeting the previous night. Mr. Mashharawi read out a written statement signed by the two movements, which said it was agreed to ensure calm elections and turn the election day on 25 January into a Palestinian “celebration of democracy.” He warned that any Fatah member who attempted to disrupt the elections would be ousted from the movement. (*DPA*)

Israel’s newly-appointed Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni started her term of office. In a press conference, she said, “This will be a critical period regarding the question of our ability to come to an arrangement with the Palestinians”. Ms. Livni criticized the upcoming PLC elections as undemocratic because of Hamas’ participation and criticized the PA for failing to disarm militant groups in the aftermath of Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. (*AFP, Ha’aretz*)

After meeting with the United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Washington, D.C., Israel’s Vice Premier Shimon Peres said Israel would be ready to open negotiations with the Palestinians on a permanent peace accord after the country’s elections on 28 March. He said the aim would be to end the conflict between the two sides and establish permanent borders. Mr. Peres told reporters, “We don’t think of Gaza last but Gaza first.” He said Prime Minister Sharon “really wanted to make a real try to bring an end to the conflict,” and that reports that Mr. Sharon intended to hold on to most of the West Bank, as well as all of Jerusalem, were wrong. “My impression is he was ready to go a long way,” Mr. Peres said. (*AP*)

19

Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in a fast-food restaurant in Tel Aviv that wounded 20 people, at least one seriously. The Palestinian attacker, who witnesses said posed as a peddler of disposable razors, walked into the Mayor’s Shwarma restaurant and blew himself up even though most customers were sitting outside at sidewalk tables, police said. After a late-night meeting with security officials, Defence Minister Mofaz said, “We have definitive proof that the financing of the terror attack ... came directly from Iran, while the planning was carried out in Syria.”

He said the findings would be shared with US and EU officials. Faisal Sayegh, the director of Syria’s state-run broadcast media, said Syria had “nothing to do with the operation.” Mr. Mofaz said Israel would tighten security around Nablus, where the bomber lived, and target Islamic Jihad militants in raids, but no major reprisals had been planned. (*AP*)

Israeli troops had shot dead a Palestinian teenager near Hebron as he was trying to throw a fire bomb at an IDF patrol near one of the settlements, the IDF and witnesses said. (*Xinhua*)

Israeli police raided a Hamas election office in East Jerusalem and shut it down for 15 days. Police spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby said the office had been closed to prevent Hamas from operating in Jerusalem. A sign the police had put up on the office door said the company, “Farouk Cultural Forum”, had been used as “a place for the activities of a terrorist group.” The police said it had detained one person for questioning and confiscated

computers, documents and Hamas flags. Adel Abu Duhem, a receptionist at the office, said the office was primarily used to teach women Islamic studies and had nothing to do with the elections. (*Xinhua*)

Israeli security forces suspended the military closure on Jewish areas of Hebron, removing roadblocks at the entrances to settlements and easing identity checks. The IDF said this was made possible as most of the non-residents, who entered Hebron to support the rioting settlers, had left the city. Israeli police in the West Bank said 22 right-wing Israeli activists had been indicted on suspicion of involvement in the riots or of violating the military closure. A total of 61 right-wing activists had been arrested in connection with the riots, and to date, 15 of them were still in custody. (*Ha'aretz*)

The IDF transferred responsibility for its side of the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing to the Administration for Crossing Points in the Ministry of Defence. The crossing will be operated by a civilian private company operating on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. The company awarded the contract was identified as "White Snow". The crossing will continue to service workers and merchants, humanitarian cases, diplomats, international organization workers and additional authorized groups. (*Ha'aretz*, www.idf.il)

European Union monitors and Palestinian Authority election officials said that the logistics provided by the Israeli Government to allow residents of Jerusalem to vote in the PLC elections would not provide a "free and fair" environment. Lack of secrecy, lack of space to accommodate enough voters and intimidation - even if unintentional - by Israeli security personnel were all problems that had yet to be addressed, PA Central Elections Committee chief officer Ammar Dwaik said. However, Veronique De Keyser, EU chief observer for the elections, said, "If the political issues can be worked out, so too can the technical ones". (*The Jerusalem Post*)

The following statement was issued by the Spokesman for the Secretary-General:

The Secretary-General is deeply saddened by the news of today's suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, in which a number of innocent civilians were wounded. No cause can justify deliberate acts designed to kill or maim civilians. The Secretary-General sends his deepest condolences to those who have been injured, and to the Government and people of Israel.

He calls upon Palestinians and Israelis to do their utmost to maintain calm at this difficult moment. Those who ordered and carried out this attack must not be allowed to undermine democratic processes, or to derail efforts to promote peace between the parties.

(*UN press release SG/SM/10308*)

Israeli security forces were planning to begin evacuating settlers from the "Amona" outpost and the Palestinian wholesale market in Hebron between 29 and 31 January, Defence Minister Mofaz decided in a meeting with the IDF and police officials. Some 4,000 security personnel would first evacuate the nine permanent residences in "Amona", then head to Hebron. (*Ha'aretz*)

Ahmed Abdel Rahman, 62, a prominent Fatah member and an adviser to PA President Abbas, was detained for illegally campaigning in Jerusalem, his campaign manager Ziad Hindi said. "We were in a meeting in Jerusalem, in the Christian Quarter," he said. "In 10 minutes, 30 or 40 Israeli security personnel and police arrived and took him." Mr. Hindi said Mr. Abdel Rahman, a West Bank resident, did not have permission to enter Jerusalem. (*AP*)

A [study](#), conducted by Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki for the US Institute of Peace (USIP) and published in Washington, D.C., suggests that the Palestinians are more willing than ever to compromise with Israel and that now is the time to move forward to a final-status solution. The study analyzes trends in Palestinian public opinion and finds that it "is not an impediment to progress in the peace process." (*The Jerusalem Post*, www.usip.org)

20

An Israeli police unit stormed a Fatah election rally in At Tur in East Jerusalem and arrested Othman Abu Gharbiyeh, a Fatah candidate in the PLC elections from the East Jerusalem district. (*Wafa*)

PA President Abbas condemned the suicide bombing in Tel Aviv and said it was an attempt to sabotage the upcoming PLC elections. Islamic Jihad was not participating in the election. (*AP*)

Israel's President Moshe Katsav said in an interview published in the Portuguese weekly *Expresso* that talks with Hamas could one day be possible if it abandoned its goal of destroying Israel. But until Hamas disarmed, Mr. Katsav said, European nations should avoid any dialogue with the group, saying this would help weaken it politically. Prime Minister Sharon's spokesman Ra'anana Gissin also said Israel would be ready to negotiate with Hamas if it renounced violence and disarmed after the election. "If that takes place, then we can consider or reconsider our position regarding Hamas.

If that does not happen, clearly Hamas cannot be a partner," he said. On the same subject, Vice Premier Shimon Peres told *Israel Radio*, "We will not sit with anybody who comes to negotiations with a gun or a bomb". But asked what would happen if Hamas disarmed and renounced its call for Israel's destruction, Mr. Peres said, "We are not fighting against a name. We are fighting against a situation," he said. "If the situation changes, then what difference does a name make?" (*AFP, AP*)

A poll published in *Ma'ariv* showed that 51 per cent of Israelis would approve a unilateral pull-out from land occupied since 1967 because they believed Palestinian leaders were incapable of negotiating a deal with Israel. (*Reuters*)

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, on a visit to Syria, pledged support to Palestinian factions at a meeting with their leaders in Damascus. "The Iranian President stressed that Iran strongly stands behind the Palestinian people and their just struggle," Maher al-Tajer, a senior PFLP official, said. "He said the Palestinian people will be victorious as a result of their steadfastness, sacrifices and heroism." Mr. Tajer said Islamic Jihad leader Abdallah Ramadan Shallah was among those who attended the 90-minute meeting, as well as Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal and Ahmed Jibril, leader of the PFLP-GC. Syria's President Bashar al-Assad did not attend the meeting. (*AFP, Reuters*)

Palestinian parliamentary candidates, gearing up for elections in five days, protested against Israel's West Bank separation barrier, scuffling with police and calling for an international boycott against Israel. The candidates protested along with some 5,000 other demonstrators in the village of Bilin, west of Ramallah. Several demonstrators were lightly injured as Israeli troops broke up the weekly protest and made arrests. (*AFP, AP*)

An additional 136 EU election observers were due to be deployed in the Palestinian areas the following day, a [statement](#) issued by the EU Election Observer Mission in the West Bank and Gaza said. The short-term observers would join 36 long-term observers, who were deployed in the West Bank and Gaza almost three weeks ago. (*DPA*, www.eueomwbg.org)

Ismail Haniyya, a Hamas leader and a candidate in the PLC elections, said that the Oslo accords were dead, and that the movement was participating in the elections for the sake of resistance. (*IMEMC*)

21

Israeli forces shot dead an 18-year-old Palestinian, Moomen Wishah, and wounded two others in the northern Gaza Strip close to the border with Israel. The army said three men had been spotted crawling towards the border fence and shot at after they did not heed calls to stop. Whether the men were armed or not was unknown. (*AFP, AP, DPA, Ha'aretz, IPC, Reuters*)

Israeli forces arrested three Palestinians near Hebron and two others near Bethlehem. (WFAA)

Early voting in the PLC elections was provided for 58,705 security officers until 23 January. The Palestinian Central Elections Commission said that more than 850 international election observers had been registered by the Commission, including 241 from the EU and 120 from the Carter Center. (www.elections.ps)

The Office of the Spokesman for Secretary-General Kofi Annan released the following statement:

I have a message to the Palestinian people as they approach the legislative election on 25 January: This will be an important milestone in your long and difficult history. I hope it will set you on the path to a more peaceful future, in which you at last have your own State and can live at peace with all your neighbours.

You deserve a free, fair and peaceful election. Your electoral commission is doing outstanding work under difficult circumstances. The international community is working with the Palestinian Authority to help it to ensure law and order. We believe that whether you live in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, you must be able to exercise your democratic rights.

The United Nations and the Quartet are committed to the [Road Map](#), of which these elections are a part. We are determined to help you to achieve, by peaceful means, what you are entitled to: an end to the occupation, and a viable, contiguous, democratic State of Palestine, living at peace with a secure Israel.

To achieve that goal, the Palestinian Authority must pursue the path of reform and peace. In particular, the Palestinian Authority must establish its monopoly on the use of force. This is a difficult challenge, but it must be tackled.

Your decision at the ballot box will help set the course for your future. Your vote is your decision and yours alone. It is not only your democratic right to vote, it is also your responsibility. I encourage you all to vote on 25 January. And I assure you that the United Nations will remain steadfastly committed to helping you to achieve a state of your own.

(UN press release SG/SM/10312-PAL/2039)

Israel's Defence Minister Mofaz said Israel would have to take further unilateral action in the West Bank if it concluded that the Palestinians were not a serious peace partner. "In a reality where there is no partner, Israel will have to take its fate into its own hands and create a reality that conforms to the national security interests," Mr. Mofaz said at a security conference in Herzliya. He said such moves would include reinforcing major settlement blocks, retaining all of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and demilitarizing areas under military control. (AP)

The Gaza Centre for Rights and Law said in its annual report that Israeli forces had killed 287 Palestinians, including 81 children, 15 women, 11 elderly and 3 disabled, and wounded 1,664 during the year 2005. (WFAA)

22

Palestinians opened fire at Israeli soldiers patrolling along the border fence with the northern Gaza Strip, causing no injuries. (Ha'aretz)

Israeli aircraft fired missiles at a car in the Gaza Strip, killing a member of the Popular Resistance Committees, Mahmoud Abad Al A'al, and wounding six other Palestinians. The targeted men had been spotted by the army making their way from Gaza City's Zeitoun neighbourhood towards the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing between the northern Gaza Strip and Israel. (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

Israeli forces stormed an election campaign rally in East Jerusalem and arrested an independent candidate in the PLC elections, Abdul Latif Ghaith, and seven other Palestinians. (WFAA)

Officials said that Palestinian security forces would begin a mass deployment to ensure order during the PLC elections. Tawfiq Abu Khousa, spokesman for the PA Interior Ministry, said all security personnel would be ordered to report to their units, and forces would be ready to take up positions at 7 p.m. on 23 January. PA Interior Minister Nasser Yousef said he had given "tough orders" to his forces "to stop any display of arms during the election day." (AFP, AP)

In an interview with the *Al-Arabiya* satellite channel, PA President Abbas rejected US pressure to exclude Hamas, saying, "It has to take part and to be part of the political institution and later part of the political decisions." In another interview, PA Information Minister Nabil Sha'ath said, "After the election, I think we will establish a Government in coalition with the leftist and the independent lists. ... With these people, we can agree on a joint programme that includes negotiations with Israel, the implementation of the Road Map and a ceasefire." He added, "With Hamas, it will be very difficult to reach a joint programme. ... We can't form a coalition with Hamas if it doesn't agree to this programme." (AP)

In interviews from an Israeli prison, Fatah's top candidate Marwan Barghouti said he hoped the vote in the PLC elections would produce "a national reform Government that enjoys a wide popular and parliamentary base." He welcomed participation by Hamas and said the group would be "part and parcel of the Palestinian Authority" the day after the elections. He also said, "The Palestinian people need a national salvation Government, a Government of national unity." (AFP, AP, Reuters)

In an interview, Hamas' top candidate Ismail Haniya said there was no contradiction in Hamas continuing its armed struggle while sitting in a democratically-elected legislature. "If the Israeli occupation ends, the Palestinian people recover their rights and enjoy an independent and totally sovereign State with Jerusalem as its capital, then weapons will no longer be necessary," Mr. Haniya said. He added that the future State should include "all of Palestine," including Israel, and be governed by laws "inspired by sharia" Islamic law. (AFP)

Israel's Labour Party declared that it would give up parts of Jerusalem in a final deal with Palestinians if it assumed power after the 28 March elections. "When there will be a final arrangement with the Palestinians, the Arab neighbourhoods [of Jerusalem] won't be part of the State of Israel," Labour Party candidate Ami Ayalon told *Israel TV*. Party leader Amir Peretz did not mention such a deal in his speech at a party convention where the party's platform was officially presented. "I will protect a united and strong Jerusalem with a Jewish majority," Mr. Peretz said. (AP, Reuters)

Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel's final borders would include East Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and other parts of the West Bank, if a Government run by him signed a peace accord with the Palestinians. "In a final peace deal, or even an interim deal, we will be willing to make significant concessions. ... In the framework of peace agreements, there will be concessions on both sides, including territorial concessions on the Israeli side," Mr. Netanyahu said at an annual policy conference in Herzliya, adding that Israel would not seek to control parts of the West Bank where large concentrations of Palestinians lived. Mr. Netanyahu also said he would move the separation wall farther into the West Bank to move Israeli cities and its main airport out of rocket range. (AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

In an [interview](#), Israeli Foreign and Justice Minister Tzipi Livni said, "Israel made clear in the last few months that the participation of Hamas in the Palestinian Authority elections is totally against any kind of democratic values. ... Israel cannot communicate with terrorist organizations. ... Abu Mazen says he is weak. When a leader is weak and cannot confront the terrorist organizations, this is the real importance of the international community - to say it will not accept terrorist organizations as part of any parliament, any government." (Newsweek)

23

The IDF said it had arrested 24 "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank overnight, including members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. (www.idf.il) Israeli soldiers shot dead a 13-year-old Palestinian boy near Ramallah, an army spokeswoman said. The initial report indicated that soldiers had opened fire in the direction of two children building a stone barrier across the road. The army opened an investigation. (DPA, Ha'aretz) Islamic Jihad called on supporters to boycott the PLC elections. "We appeal to our fighters and our followers not to participate in these elections in any way ... The pursuit of jihad is the best and only way to combat the forces of evil," the group said in a statement. (AFP, AP, Reuters) Military sources said Israeli forces would abstain from all but essential operations in the West Bank for three days for the PLC elections. Israeli forces would allow armed and uniformed Palestinian officers to circulate in "Area A" under autonomous Palestinian security control and to access polling stations in "Area B" under joint Israeli-Palestinian control, media reports said. Vehicles transporting ballot boxes would be able to travel freely through Israeli army checkpoints in the West Bank, according to media reports. (AFP, DPA, Reuters) Mahmoud Zahar, a Hamas leader in Gaza and a top candidate for the group in the PLC elections, said negotiation with Israel was "not a taboo" and the group would be willing to talk to Israel through a third party, similar to past negotiations between Israel and Hezbollah. (AP, Reuters) Campaigning for the PLC elections ended officially, with Fatah and Hamas exchanging harsh accusations but also considering working together after the voting. Polls showed the outcome of the 25 January elections as too close to call. Hamas officials said that even if they won a majority, they would prefer lower-profile Cabinet posts and would allow PA President Abbas to deal with the Israelis. At the same time, Hamas' exiled leader Khaled Mashaal said, "What is the point of negotiations when your enemy does not acknowledge your rights?" he told the *Al-Arabiya* satellite channel. "We should escalate the resistance." PA President Abbas told *Al-Arabiya* he hoped Hamas would tame its positions by joining the political process. He said he expected Hamas to accept peace talks and place its arms under Government control once it joined parliament. (AP) The Tel Aviv District Court issued a ruling stating that the Absentee Property Law could not be applied to West Bank lands abandoned by Palestinians during the 1967 Six-Day War. The ruling, handed down by Judge Boaz Okun, holds that the State could not declare Palestinian land abandoned following the 1967 war as "land under Israel's effective sovereignty." The ruling joins Attorney General Menachem Mazuz's February 2005 ruling which rescinded a Government decision to apply the law to property in East Jerusalem owned by Palestinians who lived elsewhere in the West Bank. (Ha'aretz)

24

Fatah gunmen shot to death Abu Ahmed Hassouna, 44, a Fatah leader in Nablus after he told them to stop shooting at campaign posters on his house, relatives said. About 1,000 people marched to the main police station in Nablus to protest the shooting, giving the police chief a letter demanding an end to lawlessness. (AP)

The IDF arrested at least eight Palestinian militants in a series of pre-dawn raids throughout the West Bank, Palestinian and Israeli sources reported.

More than 40 Israeli tanks and armoured vehicles stormed a neighbourhood in Ramallah overnight and besieged a building where "wanted" militants were hiding, Palestinian sources said, adding that one Hamas militant had been arrested. Abdullah Arar, a senior Hamas member suspected of being involved in the kidnapping and murder four months ago of Sasson Nuriel, had been arrested in the operation, *Israel Radio* said. The radio added that an Islamic Jihad commander, three activists and a woman accused of planning a suicide bombing against Israel had also been arrested in the West Bank operation. Another Israeli unit arrested Mahmoud Abu-Rob, an Islamic Jihad commander, claiming that he was planning to carry out a terror attack on the day of the PLC elections. (Ha'aretz, Xinhua)

The spokesman of the PA Interior Ministry, Tawfik Abu Khousa, in a press statement, announced a state of emergency in a bid to ensure a secure and smooth legislative election on 25 January. Some 13,000 Palestinian security forces and police will be deployed inside and around voting stations to protect the polls. He said the state of emergency would last until results of the elections were announced. (Xinhua)

PA President Abbas had issued orders for security forces to confront anyone who tried to disrupt the vote with an "iron fist". (AFP)

When questioned by reporters if the US would deal with a PA that included Hamas ministers, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said, "We do not deal with Hamas ... there are elected members of Hamas, I believe, in some city councils. We do not deal with those members of Hamas." (www.state.gov)

After meeting former US President Jimmy Carter, PA President Abbas urged voters to turn out en masse for the 25 January election. (AFP)

The main armed Palestinian factions pledged to ensure that the second Palestinian parliamentary elections took place peacefully. The factions, including the military wing of Hamas and Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, issued a joint statement which called for all Palestinians to take part in the vote.

"We call upon all our people, regardless of their preferences and political affiliations, to participate widely in this democratic festival," it stated.

"We assert that we will not allow any element to confiscate your right to vote and elect your representatives." (AFP)

Members of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee accused Defence Minister Mofaz of presenting misinformation about the agreement with the Palestinian Authority and Egypt on the Gaza-Egypt border crossing at Rafah. Committee Chairman MK Yuval Steinitz (Likud) said that Mr. Mofaz had misled the Committee. "The Rafah crossing agreement never existed," Mr. Steinitz said. On 7 December, the Committee unanimously adopted a resolution calling on the Government to release the text of the agreement, "after a previous demand was met with foot-dragging." Officials in the Defence Ministry replied that the Committee had not been misled, and that all the details of the agreement had been presented to Committee members. The officials, nevertheless, admitted that there had not been an official signing of the agreement of principles.

Furthermore, a detailed annex was formulated together with the US, the content of which could not be revealed. (Ha'aretz)

James Wolfensohn, the Middle East Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, began a three-day mission to the region, to coincide with the PLC elections, in advance of the Quartet meeting in London on 30 January. He was scheduled to meet acting Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas. (The Jerusalem Post)

In a major policy speech at the Herzliya Conference, acting Prime Minister Olmert said, "We will not be able to continue ruling over the territories in which the majority of the Palestinian population lives. We must create a clear boundary as soon as possible, one which will reflect the demographic reality on the ground. Israel will maintain control over the security zones, the Jewish settlement blocks, and ... first and foremost a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty... The existence of two nations, one Jewish and one Palestinian, is the full solution to all the national aspirations and problems of each of the peoples, including the issue of refugees who will be absorbed solely in a Palestinian State. [Some] have asked whether... the present Government has already committed to another disengagement if future contacts with the Palestinians are not successful. We would prefer an agreement." (www.herzliyaconference.org)

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Israeli police blocked two right-wing Knesset members and about a dozen supporters from forcing their way into an East Jerusalem post office where Palestinians were voting. (AP)

Settlers boarded up nine permanent structures in the unauthorized "Amona" outpost in an attempt to forestall its evacuation. (The Jerusalem Post)

Palestinians cast ballots in the PLC elections in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem. Some 13,500 PA police were deployed at the

polling stations to enforce a weapons ban. Nearly 20,000 local observers and 950 international monitors watched the vote. PA President Abbas said the elections were proceeding smoothly, but complained of Israeli travel restrictions. Former US President Jimmy Carter, heading a team of international electoral observers, declared that "everything is going easy. We are so proud of what the Palestinians are doing today." (AP) PA President Abbas told reporters he was ready to resume peace talks with Israel, even if Hamas joined the Government. (AP, Ha'aretz) Israel should negotiate with the next PA Government even if it included Hamas, Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said. (Reuters) PA Prime Minister Qureia said, "If Hamas wins, they will win and we will stand behind them. This is democracy and we accept the results of the elections." (Ha'aretz) Top Hamas PLC candidate Ismail Haniyeh said Hamas had no intention of laying down its arms after the elections. Another prominent candidate, Mahmoud Zahar, said the group was "not going to change a single word" in its covenant calling for Israel's destruction. "We will first seek to establish a Palestinian State on any land we can recuperate, but without giving up any part of historic Palestine," he said. (AFP, AP)

Ahmed Al-Dweik, Director-General of the Central Elections Commission, told a press conference in Ramallah that around 1,035,000 Palestinians had voted in the general election, or some 77.69 per cent of the 1.35 million-strong electorate. The turnout in the Gaza Strip reached 81.65 per cent while the figure for the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, was 77.3 per cent. The electoral district of Rafah obtained the highest percentage of votes at 89 per cent, a [statement](#) from CEC stated. Voting had been extended for two hours in East Jerusalem after the doors were closed on polling booths in the West Bank and Gaza at 1700 GMT. The polling stations were heavily guarded, and there were no reports of violence. (AP, DPA, [www.elections.ps](#))

Acting Prime Minister Olmert told visiting US Senator Joseph Biden in a meeting, "Israel can't accept a situation in which Hamas, in its present form as a terror group calling for the destruction of Israel, will be part of the PA without disarming ... I won't hold negotiations with a Government that does not stick to its most basic obligation of fighting terror." Israel is willing to help the Palestinians and PA President Abbas "a great deal", but only if they crack down on militants, Mr. Olmert said. (AP)

President George W. Bush said that the US would not deal with Hamas until it renounced its position calling for the destruction of Israel. "A political party, in order to be viable, is one that professes peace, in my judgment, in order that it will keep the peace," the President said in an Oval Office interview. (AP)

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Israeli soldiers had shot dead a 9-year-old Palestinian girl in the Gaza Strip near the border with Israel, Palestinian medics said. The IDF said troops had spotted a Palestinian carrying a large bag near the border fence. Suspecting that it contained explosives, the troops called on the person to stop and fired warning shots in the air. After the person failed to heed the calls and moved closer to the border, the soldiers had fired again and shot the person dead, the army said in a statement. (AFP, AP, DPA, Reuters)

A mortar shell fired from the southern Gaza Strip landed in Israel near the border fence. ([www.idf.il](#))

Preliminary results, announced at the end of the day by the Central Elections Commission, showed Hamas winning 76 seats to Fatah's 43 in the 132-seat PLC. (AFP, Reuters)

Hamas officials said the group had won up to 75 seats, giving it a solid majority in the 132-member PLC. Hamas' showing was particularly strong in the district elections that fill half the seats in the PLC, with the other half going to the party lists. Fatah officials conceded that Hamas had won at least 70 seats, or enough to rule alone. Acknowledging the Hamas victory, PA Prime Minister Qureia and his Cabinet resigned even before the final results were officially announced. The Central Election Commission (CEC) issued [statement](#) "to confirm that it has not yet released preliminary elections results". "The CEC will officially declare the preliminary results at a press conference ... at its Media Centre based at the Ramallah Cultural Palace" the statement further stated. (AP, [www.elections.ps](#))

The following statement was issued by the Spokesman for Secretary-General Kofi Annan:

The Secretary-General telephoned President Mahmoud Abbas to congratulate him and the Palestinian people on the peaceful and orderly conduct of the legislative elections. He expressed his appreciation of the work of the Central Election Commission, which received assistance from the United Nations for the preparatory electoral work. The Secretary-General views these elections as an important step towards the achievement of a Palestinian state. He looks forward to the publication of the results of the elections over the coming days, and to discussing them with Quartet partners.

(UN press release SG/SM/10324-PAL/2040)

The head of the EU monitoring team, Veronique De Keyser, summed up the election as "fair and free under severe restrictions", criticising Israeli restrictions imposed by their occupation of Palestinian territory on the scope of the poll. "Obviously the EU will respect the vote of the Palestinians," she told reporters. Former US President Jimmy Carter said the elections were "completely honest, completely fair, completely safe and without violence." President Carter, who led an international observer team from the National Democratic Institute, also said he hoped that Hamas would act responsibly now that it appears to have been elected to power in the elections. (AFP, AP)

PA President Abbas will ask Hamas to form the next Government. Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal told Mr. Abbas that his group was ready for a political partnership, while another Hamas leader, Mahmoud Zahar, said that the group would extend its year-old truce if Israel reciprocated, adding, "If not, then I think we will have no option but to protect our people and our land". Saeb Erakat, who won re-election to the PLC in his home town of Jericho, beating back a challenge from a Hamas candidate, said his party did not want to join a Hamas Government. "We will be a loyal opposition and rebuild the party," Mr. Erakat said after meeting with Mr. Abbas. Nabil Sha'ath, another senior Fatah and PLC member, said the party's leadership would make a decision later in the day. (AP, DPA)

In a televised speech, PA President Abbas said he was committed to negotiations with Israel and suggested that future negotiations with Israel would be conducted through the PLO. (AP)

"The Fatah Central Committee has decided that Fatah will not join the next Government," Intissar Wazir, a member of the Committee, said after the group met to discuss the outcome of the PLC elections. Officials said the ultimate decision on whether Fatah could join a new Government would still depend on PA President Abbas. (Reuters)

Hanan Ashrawi, re-elected to the PLC on a moderate platform, said the Hamas victory was a dramatic turning point. She said she was concerned that the militants would now impose their fundamentalist social agenda and lead the Palestinians into international isolation. She further said Fatah's corruption, Israel's tough measures and international indifference to the plight of the Palestinians were to blame for Hamas' strong showing. (AP)

Acting Israeli Prime Minister Olmert held a security meeting with Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Defence Minister Mofaz, Public Security Minister Yehonatan Glick and other senior officials to discuss the results of the PLC elections. "The State of Israel will not negotiate with a Palestinian

administration if its members include an armed terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel,” a [statement](#) released after the meeting said. (www.pmo.gov.il)

The following statement was issued by the Middle East Quartet:

The Quartet consulted today on the Palestinian Legislative Council elections. It congratulates President Abbas and the Palestinian people on an electoral process that was free, fair and secure. The Quartet calls on all parties to respect the results of the election and the outcome of the Palestinian constitutional process so that it may unfold in an atmosphere of calm and security.

The Palestinian people have voted for change, but it is the view of the Quartet that their aspirations for peace and statehood, as articulated by President Abbas in his statement following the closing of polls yesterday, remain unchanged. The Quartet reiterates its view that there is a fundamental contradiction between armed group and militia activities and the building of a democratic State. A two-State solution to the conflict requires all participants in the democratic process to renounce violence and terror, accept Israel’s right to exist, and disarm, as outlined in the [Road Map](#).

(UN press release SG/2103-PAL/2041, <http://ue.eu.int>, www.state.gov)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called PA President Abbas to praise Palestinian democracy, according to Mr. Abbas’ adviser Nabil Abu Rudeineh. “She asserted to him that the US administration will continue supporting the elected president and his policies,” he said. “You cannot have one foot in politics and another in terror,” Ms. Rice told the World Economic Conference in Davos via a video link from the State Department.

“Our position on Hamas has therefore not changed ... You can’t have a peace process if you’re not committed to the right of your partner to exist,” she also said. Chief Hamas candidate Ismail Haniya said, “I call on the American administration to respect ... the will of the Palestinian people and the result of the ballot. Hamas is not going to work alone, but with the other groups who represent the Palestinian people.” (AFP, AP)

EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, commenting on the PLC elections, said, “These results confront us with an entirely new situation, which will need to be analyzed by [EU foreign ministers] next Monday”. “The EU will express its views and prospects for cooperation with the future Palestinian Government in the light of that discussion and of developments on the ground,” Mr. Solana, who was in Kosovo, said in a [statement](#). (AFP, ue.eu.int)

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, speaking at the European Parliament, said, “In case Hamas would win or be part of a Government, the most important thing is that we want to work with any Government – if this Government is ready to work for peace in a peaceful manner”. (AP)

Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik of Austria, current EU President, praised the Palestinians for holding peaceful elections and urged all factions to disarm, renounce violence and recognize Israel’s right to exist. In a [statement](#), she said the vote “shows that the Palestinian people have the will to decide democratically on their political future.” Ms. Plassnik said the EU remained committed to helping democracy take hold in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to helping the Palestinians establish a parliament. (AP, www.eu2006.at)

Russia urged Hamas to “speak in favour of a peaceful settlement and, as a result, of the creation of an independent Palestinian State that would live in peace with Israel,” Russia’s special envoy to the Middle East Alexander Kalugin said, adding that Hamas should “stick to the same principles as the Quartet”. Mr. Kalugin also said that Russia’s cooperation with the PA would not be affected by the make-up of the Government. (AFP)

“We are faced with a situation that causes me concern,” French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin told journalists in Paris, adding that he still hoped “that the conditions that are indispensable for working with the Palestinian Government, whatever it will be, will be fulfilled.” Mr. Villepin noted that, for France, these conditions were “of course, first, the renunciation of violence”, and second, “the recognition of the State of Israel and the recognition of international agreements”. (AFP, DPA)

Hamid-Reza Assefi, spokesman for Iran’s Foreign Ministry, told *IRNA*, “Today, hope has risen in the occupied Palestinian lands and we congratulate the Palestinians, Hamas and all other Palestinian resistance fighters in particular and the Islamic world in general world on this occasion and hope the powerful presence of Hamas will bring great achievements for Palestine”. Mr. Assefi said the results reflected “the Palestinians’ choice for resistance”, and termed the high turnout in the elections as indicative of the Palestinian will to continue struggle and resistance against the occupiers.

(DPA)

“Japan strongly expects that the PA, following the successful conduct of the elections, will make efforts for peace in accordance with the Road Map, such as to control the extremists,” Foreign Minister Taro Aso said in a statement, adding that accomplishing the elections as planned was “an important step toward building a democratic Palestinian State.” Japan had sent an election monitoring mission and provided US\$720,000 in assistance for the elections. (AP)

Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa spoke on the PLC elections at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland: “We cannot promote democracy then lament the results of democracy or object to the results of elections. ... If Hamas is going to form the Government, in the seat of authority, having the responsibility to govern, to negotiate, to reach peace, it’s different from Hamas the organization whose people are in the streets.” “We have to call on the other side, Israel, after the elections due in one or two months, to help ... the Palestinians, whoever is in Government, to move towards peace.” (Reuters)

King Abdullah II of Jordan called for a “rapid return” to Middle East peace talks and said whatever were the results of the elections, the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside Israel remained “the only solution for establishing peace and putting an end to violence and extremism”.

On the same day, he held a meeting with Shimon Peres in Amman to discuss the Dead Sea - Red Sea canal project. King Abdullah affirmed the importance of the project that Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority would benefit from. (AFP, *Petra*)

Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak urged Fatah and Hamas to work together for peace and an independent State. “[President Mubarak] stressed the need to unite Palestinian ranks to promote peace efforts and realize the aspirations of the Palestinian people for an independent State,” the *Al-Ahram* newspaper said. (AFP)

President of Algeria Abdelaziz Bouteflika sent a message to PA President Abbas, hailing the PLC elections as an example of “political maturity”. He also said the vote was the fruit of the “heroic and historic” Palestinian intifada and “a bearer of hope.” “The elections that took place in a climate of democracy and of transparency allowed the children of the Palestinian people to express their aspirations for the building of legal institutions in a free and independent Palestinian state,” the President said, adding that Palestinians “demonstrated to the whole world their capacity and aptitude to manage the affairs of their country and that they are the sole master of their destiny.” (AP)

Syria’s official newspaper *Al-Baath* said, “The Europeans and especially the Americans, who have rejected this victory, have no other choice than to submit to reality and work with the new situation. ... Those who want stability in the region ... will have to accept the new context, the more so since Hamas has expressed its intent to develop political action conforming to the greater interests of the Palestinian people and steadfast demands, that is the rejection of occupation and the creation of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.” (AFP)

The IDF said it had arrested overnight 15 "wanted" Palestinians: a Hamas member and a Fatah member in Nablus, a PFLP member in Beit Furik south-east of Nablus, four Fatah members in the village north of Ramallah, seven Hamas members in Hebron, and a Hamas member in Yatta, south of Hebron. (www.idf.il)

Hamas and Fatah gunmen exchanged fire near Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. At least two people had been wounded in the clash, witnesses said, describing the incident as a feud over the election results. (Reuters)

Thousands of Fatah members burned cars and fired shots in the air in demonstrations demanding the resignation of certain high-level party officials and insisting that Fatah not form a coalition with Hamas. About 1,000 angry party activists, including 100 gunmen, drove by President Abbas' residence in Gaza. (AP)

Ismail Haniyeh, who headed Hamas' list of candidates in the PLC elections, said, "I telephoned President Abbas and we agreed to hold a meeting as soon as he arrives in Gaza, in about two days' time". (AFP, AP, Reuters)

Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said at the World Economic Forum that Hamas would have to accept the Arab League's Beirut initiative. (Ha'aretz)

Joseph Bachar, Director General at the Israeli Finance Ministry, said at the World Economic Forum, "We will face practical problems of how you deal with people that call for the destruction of Israel," referring to customs and value-added tax revenue that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinians under peace process arrangements stemming from the mid-1990s. (Reuters)

President George W. Bush, in a wide-ranging [interview](#) with *CBS Evening News* at the White House, said the US would cut aid to the Palestinian Government unless Hamas abolished the militant arm of its party and stopped calling for the destruction of Israel. "If they don't, we won't deal with them," Mr. Bush said. "The aid packages won't go forward. That's their decision to make, but we won't be providing help to a Government that wants to destroy our ally and friend." "The law and our policies state that no money goes to terrorist organizations," Sean McCormack, a spokesman at the State Department, said earlier in the day, adding that financial aid to the PA must be reviewed. (AP, CBS)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had spoken on the phone with his Israeli counterpart Tzipi Livni and agreed that "all the participants in the Palestinian electoral process should respect the principles of peaceful settlement stipulated in the Road Map", the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a [statement](#). They further emphasized that "the prospect of creating an independent, democratic Palestinian State imply, as was noted in the Quartet statement adopted on January 26, 2006, a renunciation of violence and terror, the disarmament of illegal armed militia groups and the acceptance of Israel's right to exist." (www.mid.ru, Xinhua)

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said at the World Economic Forum, "We could take on the role of some sort of an intermediary between Israel and Palestine." Mr. Erdogan said he had discussed the possibility with Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf, adding that the Organization of the Islamic Conference might also play a key role. (AP)

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Hamas gunmen had ambushed a Palestinian police patrol in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip, police said. A Hamas member and two policemen were wounded in the shooting. One of the officers had been shot in the head and remained in a coma, hospital officials said. (AP)

Thousands of Fatah activists marched in the West Bank demanding the resignation of party leaders. Some 40 Fatah gunmen climbed onto the roof of the PLC building in Ramallah, firing into the air. Hundreds of activists, angry at Fatah's election defeat, entered the PA presidential compound to pray at the grave of Yasser Arafat. The group, which included several gunmen, were allowed into the compound by guards to peacefully proceed towards the tomb in an empty lot inside. (AP)

Israel's Defence Minister Mofaz told *Channel 2 TV* that Israel was prepared to kill Hamas militants if the group resumed its attacks, saying "Those who head terror organizations and continue to engage in terror against the State of Israel will be liquidated". (AP)

Israeli police summoned Mahmoud Abu Teir, a leading Hamas politician and the No. 2 candidate in the PLC elections, to warn him not to carry out any Hamas activity in Jerusalem, spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby said, adding that Mr. Abu Teir had agreed to Israel's demands and was released. (AP)

Israel would prevent Hamas leaders, including newly-elected PLC deputies, from travelling between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Amos Gilad, a senior Defence Ministry official, told *Israel Radio*. (Xinhua)

Members of the Palestinian security forces, largely comprised of Fatah members, warned Hamas against trying to purge their ranks. (AFP)

Ameed al-Masri, General Director of the Agricultural Lands Development and Operations Project in the Gaza Strip, said 40 tonnes of tomatoes, peppers and strawberries had been destroyed by Palestinian farmers at the "Karni" crossing to protest Israel's closure of the crossing after claiming it had received warnings that Palestinian militants intended to carry out operations there and inside Israel. He said nearly 100 tonnes of products had been spoiled during the two-week closure, which had significantly damaged the Palestinian economy. The fruit and vegetables had been grown in the greenhouses formerly belonging to Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and rebuilt by the PA. (DPA)

Addressing a crowded press conference in Damascus, Khaled Mashaal, the exiled head of the Hamas Political Bureau, said the main strategic goals of the party were internal Palestinian reforms and "resistance". Asked if Hamas would recognize Israel and respect commitments made by the PA, he said the "Israeli occupation has no legitimacy" but that didn't mean "we abolish Israel". Hamas, he said, was open to Arab and Islamic initiatives with Israel that served the interests of the Palestinians. Consultation was one of the priorities of Hamas. Mr. Mashaal said that Hamas would not disarm and its military wing could be merged into a Palestinian army and "We are ready to unify the weapons of Palestinian factions, with Palestinian consensus, and form an army like any independent State." He also said that the exiled Hamas leadership would "return in the right time". (AP, DPA)

"Hamas is in contact with Fatah and [PA President Abbas]. If they refuse to join in a Hamas Government, we will try to form a Government of technocrats," Hamas official Ghazi Ahmed Hamad said, adding that the priority was still to "form a coalition Government with Fatah and all the political groups. That will enable stable conditions to be established and will give hope to people." Another Hamas official, Yahya Mussa, confirmed that elected candidates would not figure prominently in the Cabinet. Hamas "is heading towards setting up a Government in which the majority are not part of parliament," he said in a statement. Such a Government "will allow elected deputies to exercise their legislative functions and control" the institutions, he said, adding that "consultations are continuing to designate a Prime Minister". (AFP)

Senior Islamic Jihad leader Nafez Azzam said that his movement rejected joining any Palestinian cabinet which was based on the Oslo Accords and enforced principles similar to previous cabinets which included negotiations with Israel. "If the cabinet is based on keeping the principles of continuing the armed struggle against Israel, I believe at this moment we would seriously study the idea of joining the coming new cabinet," he further said. (DPA)

Jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti issued a statement saying Fatah must be "exemplary in showing responsibility ... transferring power according

to law and order”. (AFP)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and PA President Abbas urged adherence to a peaceful and political settlement with Israel during a telephone conversation, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a [statement](#). The two sides pointed out that “all participants in the Palestinian elections must adhere to political methods ... which implies renunciation of terror and violence and the peaceful, secure coexistence of independent and democratic Palestine and Israel”. ([www.mid.ru](#), Xinhua)

“The international community, especially from Europe, from the [United] States, Japan, the Arabs have been very supportive to the Palestinians,” PA Economy Minister Mazen Sinokrot said in Davos. “We have to give the new coming leaders a real coordination message. We have to give them a chance, and let us see what will happen”. (AP)

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EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said in an interview with *le Monde* that he hoped Hamas’ victory in the Palestinian elections would lead to positive developments in the region. He said he hoped that Hamas would take its victory seriously and fulfil its responsibility to negotiate and implement a political process. (DPA)

The Central Elections Commission [announced](#) the final results of the PLC elections showing that Hamas had won 74 rather than 76 seats in the election while Fatah’s tally was revised upwards from 43 to 45. A seat in Khan Yunis, which had initially been given to Hamas, had in fact been won by Fatah, an unnamed official told *AFP*. Fatah had also won one more seat on the national list of candidates. In its final breakdown of the voting on national lists, the results showed that a total of 440,409 people had voted for Hamas and 410,554 for Fatah. PFLP won 42,101 votes while Al-Badil secured 28,973 votes. Some 51,551 ballots, out of an overall total of 1,042,424, had either been spoiled or left blank. (AFP, [www.elections.ps](#))

Israel’s High Court of Justice rejected an appeal from settlers to halt their evacuation from the Hebron marketplace and the “Amona” outpost, clearing the way for the removal operation to proceed. About 7,000 Israeli security forces were training to dismantle the two outposts. Israeli police had handed restraining orders to 21 settlers, forbidding them from approaching the “Amona”, north of Ramallah, and from entering the market in Hebron, *Israel Army Radio* reported. (AP, DPA)

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades called for Fatah’s leaders to step down and set up an emergency replacement body after its election defeat to Hamas. “We ask the Central Committee to resign immediately and announce an emergency committee for the movement,” a spokesman for the organization, Abu Mohammed, told journalists in the Gaza Strip. He called for “all the armed wings of the Al-Aqsa Brigades to be under one command”. (AFP)

Fatah leaders in Rafah had resigned amid widespread protests following their election defeat at the hands of Hamas, a fax received by *AFP* the following morning stated, without naming those who had quit. “They call on the Fatah Central Committee and the Revolutionary Council also to resign ... and ask for the sixth party conference to be prepared quickly,” it added. (AFP)

After talks with PA President Abbas, PLC deputies from Fatah confirmed that their faction would not join Hamas in a coalition Government and would prefer to sit in opposition, despite calls by Hamas for a “political partnership”. Members of the Fatah Central Committee were to have ratified the decision, but the meeting ended close to midnight without any mention of the subject. However, in a statement released after the meeting, the Committee called for Hamas “to be able to ensure a smooth and peaceful transfer of Government”. (AFP)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert said that after Hamas sets up a Government, Israel would stop transferring to the PA custom duties and taxes it had collected on their behalf until it was satisfied that they would not end up in the hands of “terrorists”. NIS200 million (some US\$40 million) were due to be handed over to the PA on 1 February. (AFP)

Addressing his Cabinet, Acting Prime Minister Olmert said that he delivered the following message by telephone to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, French President Jacques Chirac, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Jordan’s King Abdullah and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan: “We clarified that without a clear abandonment of the path of terror, a recognition of Israel’s right to exist in security and peace ... Israel won’t have any contact with the Palestinians”. Mr. Olmert also said “These principles are accepted by the international community. On this issue, I don’t intend to make any compromises.” During the meeting, Defence Minister Mofaz said Hamas was “portraying policies of responsibility” and had even tried to restrain suicide attacks by the Islamic Jihad group. (AP, Reuters)

Speaking at a press conference after her meeting with Acting Prime Minister Olmert in Jerusalem, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, “Germany would not hold talks with Hamas until it recognizes Israel’s right to exist.” She also said that the EU would not fund the PA involving Hamas if the group did not renounce its commitment to the destruction of Israel. (Xinhua)

The United States wants other nations to cut off aid to a Hamas-led Palestinian Government, Secretary of State Rice said, ahead of the Quartet meeting, also ruling out any US financial assistance to a Hamas Government. Humanitarian help to the Palestinians is likely on a “case-by-case basis”, Ms. Rice said. She indicated that the Administration would follow through on aid promised to the current Palestinian Government. “The United States is not prepared to fund an organization that advocates the destruction of Israel, that advocates violence and that refuses its obligations”, under an international framework for eventual Mideast peace, Ms. Rice said. (AP)

In a [letter](#) to Hamas leaders, Human Rights Watch urged them to declare a permanent end to attacks targeting Israeli civilians, saying its election victory made such a pledge essential. HRW also urged any Government formed by Hamas to call on other Palestinian armed groups to halt violence against civilians. (AFP, [www.hrw.org](#))

US senators endorsed President George W. Bush’s position that US aid should be cut to a Hamas-led Palestinian Government unless Hamas abolished the militant arm of its party and stopped calling for the destruction of Israel. Cutting US aid to the Palestinian Government after Hamas’ election victory could push it closer to Iran and create further chaos in the Middle East, US Senator Chuck Hagel (R-Neb), a top member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said. Yet governing changes in the region could allow diplomatic efforts by the Bush Administration to move “in some quiet ways”, he said, adding, “I think we’re moving in the right direction, working with our allies, working with the United Nations, finding ways, with Hamas, to see where they’re going to go here in the next few weeks, to see if there’s something that we could do to influence that direction.” (AP)

Egypt’s Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said that the situation was not as “dim” as some feared after the election victory of Hamas. “This is only a new development and we should all follow it up to see what impact it will have on the situation between the Palestinians and the Israelis”, Mr. Aboul Gheit told reporters. He said the EU should not suspend its financial assistance to a Hamas-led PA. “This means too much for the stability of the Palestinian situation. I hope they will continue it”, he said. (AP)

Mahmoud al-Zahar, a Hamas leader in Gaza, said that the movement would seek funding from Arab and Muslim countries and rejected threats of an aid suspension as “blackmail”. “We’ll be able to open a new channel through our other Arabic and Islamic countries and the international community, to help the Palestinian people without condition. We are looking for this money, but this money should not be conditioned,” he told

CNN's Late Edition. "We are not taking money from Iran", he said, calling allegations that Hamas would turn to Tehran an attempt to "intensify this state of hatred against Hamas". Asked if a Hamas-led Government would accept Israel's right to exist, Mr. Zahar said: "The question should be answered first by Israel, because they are not accepting us, except as minority, not the owner of the land". In an interview with *The Sunday Telegraph*, Mr. Zahar said Hamas would not recognize Israel but may be able to reach a truce. (AFP, AP)

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The IDF raided the West Bank at predawn, arresting at least seven Palestinians. Israeli forces reportedly stormed the refugee camp of Qalandiya and Ramallah, detaining three Palestinians, followed by Nablus, where two alleged Islamic Jihad militants were taken away. The IDF also stormed Bethlehem and arrested two "wanted" Palestinians. *Israel Army Radio* said Palestinian gunmen had opened fire at Israeli soldiers in Ramallah, but no injuries had been reported in the incident. (Xinhua)

A Hamas military leader had been wounded in a drive-by shooting in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip, local witnesses and medics said. No claim was made for the shooting, but local Hamas leaders blamed Fatah for the attack. (Reuters)

Some 30 armed Palestinian policemen stormed the PLC building in Gaza City, firing in the air and shutting the gates behind them. They said their action was a message to the incoming Palestinian cabinet to bring to justice Hamas members accused of killing policeman Rajeh Abu Lehyah several months ago. The demonstrators also called for the resignation of the Fatah Central Committee, whom they blamed for the loss to Hamas in the elections. (AP, DPA)

Masked gunmen briefly took over an EU office in the Gaza Strip to protest the publication in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* of cartoons deemed insulting to the Prophet Muhammad. The gunmen demanded an apology from Denmark and Norway, where another paper republished the cartoons, and said citizens of the two countries would be prevented from entering the Gaza Strip. Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility.

Jyllands-Posten refused to apologize for the drawings, citing freedom of speech. (AP)

Israeli settlers who took over a marketplace in Hebron four years ago said they would leave voluntarily by the end of the day, averting a potentially violent confrontation with thousands of troops preparing to remove them. But they won assurances they could return in a few months if a legal review determined the property was Jewish. (AP)

A statement issued by the Middle East Quartet said:

"The Quartet congratulated the Palestinian people on an electoral process that was free, fair and secure. The Quartet believes that the Palestinian people have the right to expect that a new Government will address their aspirations for peace and Statehood, and it welcomed President Abbas' affirmation that the Palestinian Authority is committed to the Road Map, previous agreements and obligations between the parties, and a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is the view of the Quartet that all members of a future Palestinian Government must be committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map. We urge both parties to respect their existing agreements, including on movement and access."

(UN press release SG/2104-PAL/2042)

A statement issued by the Saudi Arabia Cabinet said that the international community should accept the results of the Palestinian elections and pressure Israel to make peace. A Saudi official also told *Reuters*, "It's a democratic process that brought in a group of people who hopefully will have to adjust their direction and rhetoric in order to meet the obligations of peace". Saudi funding for the PA would continue in accordance with international norms, he said, adding, "We are guided by the United Nations. We don't give money to any group, just the Authority. It's all transparent." A recent security report written by Saudi security adviser Nawaf Obaid and obtained by *Reuters* said, "A victory by Hamas presents a challenge to Saudi Arabia in that this financial support will likely need to be increased if the US and EU reduce or refuse to support a Hamas-controlled Palestinian Government. In addition, private Saudi citizens and charitable foundations donate approximately US\$150 million per year to support the general social and economic programmes in the Palestinian territories. A Hamas victory will further complicate relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States since the Kingdom will continue to remain a chief supporter of Hamas." (Reuters)

"We call for dialogue without preliminary conditions and in a spirit of neutrality," Ismail Haniya, a Hamas leader in Gaza, told a news conference in Gaza City, reading out a message addressed to the Quartet. "We call on you to continue moral and financial support, and to direct all aid to the Palestinian treasury so it can be used in keeping with the priorities of the Palestinian people. We assure you that all the revenues will be spent on salaries, daily life and infrastructure." "Cutting off funds now will be a punishment of the Palestinian people, not of Hamas," said Mohammed Nazzal, member of the Hamas Political Bureau in Damascus. "Arab countries are committed to continue their assistance to the Palestinians according to the Arab summit resolutions until they will be able to set up their own independent State," said Mohammad Sobeih, Deputy Secretary-General of the Arab League. (AFP, AP, DPA)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel became the first foreign leader to meet PA President Abbas since Hamas won the election. Ms. Merkel said she would use her talks to put pressure on the PA to ensure that Hamas recognized Israel's right to exist, renounced violence and honoured previous agreements between the Palestinians and Israelis. The day before, she and Israel's Acting Prime Minister Olmert made a joint pledge not to deal with Hamas until it recognized Israel's right to exist and renounced violence. (AFP)

German Development Aid Minister Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul said further aid from Germany and the international community would depend on whether Hamas managed to transform itself. "We want to help the people in Palestine as we have done in the past years," she said in a *Deutsche Radio* interview. "But this requires Hamas to support the peace process, renounce violence and recognise Israel's right to exist." Berlin's annual aid package to the PA is €46 million (US\$56 million). (DPA)

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner reiterated that the EU would not have any contact with Hamas, unless it renounced violence and recognized Israel. "We have taken a very clear position, and now it is for them to react, but we have to give them some time," she told reporters as EU foreign ministers met in Brussels for regular talks. "Let's have a sort of transitional period. Let's give them a certain time frame. If it is 30 or 60 days, we'll have to see, but more or less," she added. "Hamas has now entered the political arena, and now we have to see whether Hamas, especially under the 'change and reform' platform, is really willing to transform into a political party. We are aware that the Palestinian Authority has financial difficulties. Everybody must make a concerted effort ... so that the PA continues to function," Ms. Ferrero-Waldner also said. (AFP, DPA)

"The onus is on Hamas to make its position clear. Is it a political force or is it committed to violence? It has to make its choice," British Prime Minister Blair's spokesman said. While adding that Britain recognised Hamas' "democratic mandate", there should not be "any doubt as to what we see the ultimate solution being [...] which is two States (Israel and Palestine) living side-by-side in peace". "The key facts remain that the solution remains a two-State solution. That is the common view of the international community and that remains the position of the Government," he said. (AFX)

"Maybe Hamas is well qualified to bring peace to the region, but for that the international community must give it a chance," Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri told the Institute for International Studies think tank, adding that the West had called for democratic elections in the region, so it should accept the choice of the Palestinian people. "You cannot have your cake and eat it," Mr. Kasuri said. "I think something positive could come out of it. Much depends on the Israeli elections (in March)," he said adding "I hope the extremists do not win in Israel."

(Reuters)

Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani said: "We have to accept and respect the desire of the Palestinians according to the

principles of democracy that the West has been demanding all this time, so why should we be afraid now.” (Reuters)

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IDF troops had killed two Islamic Jihad militants, including Nidal Abu Saada, an Islamic Jihad leader in the West Bank, during a shootout in a village outside Jenin, IDF and PA officials said. (AP)

Palestinians fired a Qassam rocket at the Western Negev in Israel. No damage was reported. (Ha'aretz)

A Palestinian was arrested trying to infiltrate the West Bank settlement of “Alon Shvut”. (Ha'aretz)

A rocket fired by Palestinian militants from Gaza had hit a street in the Israeli town of Sderot, causing damage to some cars, the IDF said. Israel Army Radio reported that Palestinians had fired seven rockets from Gaza. None of the rockets caused damage. (Ha'aretz)

In Bethlehem, IDF troops conducted a search campaign and wounded two Palestinians. Twenty-two Palestinians were arrested in the West Bank. (Ha'aretz, Wafa)

At the urging of Islamic Jihad, thousands of Palestinians demonstrated in Gaza City to denounce caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed that had recently appeared in Danish and Norwegian publications. (AFP)

Dozens of Israeli youths, protesting the planned evacuation of the unauthorized settlement outpost of “Amona”, broke into a nearby IDF base, clashing with troops before the demonstrators agreed to leave in an arrangement with local settlers. (Ha'aretz)

“The conditions imposed by the Quartet constitute pressure which serves the interests of Israel and not the Palestinian people,” Hamas spokesman and PLC member Mushier al-Masri told AFP. He said that if the international aid continued to flow, “the next Hamas Government will ensure that it is used according to the law and not allow corruption”. (AFP)

Cutting off funding for projects in the West Bank would harm Israel and the region because “pollution knows no boundaries,” said Ilan Nissim, head of the solid waste division of Israel's Environment Ministry at a conference in Jerusalem. (AP)

Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, briefed the Security Council on “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. (UN News Centre, UN press release SC/8624)

King Abdullah II of Jordan conferred with PA President Abbas on last week's PLC elections. Speaking before leaving for London and Washington for talks on the implications of the PLC elections, the King said: “Hamas' victory is the choice of the Palestinian people and their will should be respected ... All [groups] inside the Palestinian territories should realize the requirements of the present stage, should deal with it in a pragmatic manner and prove to the world that there is a Palestinian partner which can proceed towards the establishment of peace.” (DPA)

PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat told the Voice of Palestine radio that Hamas had to honour the PA's commitment to the Road Map. He said the PA had urged the Quartet and the international community not to impose collective punishment on the Palestinian people. (Xinhua)

Israel's Defence Minister Mofaz said Hamas' election victory gives Israel an incentive to decide in favour of a unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank. He believed such a decision would be made within a year. Mr. Mofaz thought that the diplomatic picture would become clear by the end of the year. If it seemed certain that there was no Palestinian negotiating partner, then Israel would have to set new defensible borders for itself. (Ha'aretz)

In his State of the Union address, President George W. Bush said, “The Palestinian people have voted in elections. And now the leaders of Hamas must recognize Israel, disarm, reject terrorism, and work for lasting peace.” (www.whitehouse.gov)

At the conclusion of its meeting in Brussels, the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council stressed the need for the continuous commitment of all parties to the Palestinian constitutional process, underlined that violence and terror were incompatible with democratic processes and urged Hamas and all other factions to renounce violence, to recognize Israel's right to exist, and to disarm. The Council indicated that “it expects the newly elected PLC to support the formation of a Government committed to a peaceful and negotiated solution of the conflict with Israel based on existing agreements and the Road Map as well as on the rule of law, reform and sound fiscal management. On this basis, the EU stands ready to continue to support Palestinian economic development and democratic state building”. (http://ue.eu.int)

EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said: “The moment the new Government is in place, if Hamas has not adapted its platform as required, it will be very difficult for the EU to continue funding the PA. For us, it is fundamental. We cannot cooperate with an organization that won't renounce violence and be able to negotiate with the other side.” (AP)

Egypt's Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman had visited Damascus to meet with Hamas leaders, an Egyptian official said. (AP)

Syria's Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Sharaa said Syria would propose to the Arab Summit, to be held in Khartoum in March, that the Arab nations compensate the Palestinians for any aid the US or other nations might cut after the election victory of Hamas. (www.sana.org)

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal told reporters: “The European Union insisted on having elections in Palestine, and this is the result of what they asked for ... Now to come around and say [they] don't accept the will of the people that was expressed through democratic means seems an unreasonable position to take.” (AFP)

The EU Head of Delegation to Israel, Ramiro Cibrián-Uzal said all members of the future PA Government “must be committed to non-violence, recognize Israel, and accept previous understandings and agreements, including the Road Map”. He said he was optimistic regarding the possibility of Hamas meeting these conditions and said that if they were met, the removal of Hamas from the EU list of terror could be considered. (Ha'aretz)

Speaking at the opening of the Kadima Party's election campaign, acting Prime Minister Olmert said Israel was “not frightened by outside threats, and not by the events of the past few days”. Outlining his party's goals, Mr. Olmert said, “The first [is] defining the final borders of the State of Israel as a State with a clear and solid Jewish majority.” (AP)

In a press conference, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, when asked about his position towards Hamas' victory in the PLC election, said that that was a big setback for Western countries. He went on to say, “Our position concerning Hamas differs from the American and Western European positions. The Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation has never declared that Hamas is a terrorist organization. But this does not mean that we approve and support everything that Hamas does and all the declarations that they have made recently. We think that it is one thing when this political force was the opposition and trying to get into power, and we know that throughout the whole world, very often, the opposition makes very radical statements. It is another thing when it receives the people's vote of confidence and must make sure that the people who believed in this movement feel the positive results of their authorities' work. And for this it is necessary to leave behind the extremist positions, to recognize Israel's right to exist and to have relations with the international community. We call on Hamas to do these things. In any case we would consider refusing to help the Palestinian people a mistake.” (www.kremlin.ru)

