

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

Monthly Highlights

- Consultations on forming a new Palestinian Authority Cabinet commence. ([4 February](#))
- "Targeted killings" resume. ([7 February](#))
- PA President Abbas asks Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh to form a Government. ([21 February](#))

I

Israeli forces injured two Palestinians during a raid targeting a leader of the Al-Quds Brigades in Arraba, south-west of Jenin. Also, Israeli forces penetrated the Aida refugee camp, north of Bethlehem, and arrested three Palestinians. (*International Press Centre (IPC)*)

The IDF said it had arrested overnight six "wanted" Hamas members and an Islamic Jihad member in the West Bank. (www.idf.il)

Five Molotov cocktails were thrown at Israeli vehicles travelling south-east of Bethlehem. There were no injuries or damage. (*Ynet*)

The evacuation of "Amona", an illegal outpost in the West Bank, was completed after clashes between Israeli troops and thousands of resisting Jewish settlers who were forced from rooftops and behind barbed wires. Medics said they had treated 162 people wounded in the clashes and the police said 58 officers had been hurt. The evacuation was executed after the Israeli Supreme Court rejected a final appeal by the settlers. The court ordered nine houses in "Amona", built on private Palestinian land, to be demolished. The remainder of the outpost, inhabited by about 35 families living in cramped trailer homes, had not yet been cleared. (*AP*)

An explosion rocked the home of Suleiman Abu Mutlak, a former security chief of the Palestinian Authority (PA), in Khan Yunis. The explosion blew out walls but caused no deaths or injuries. Mr. Abu Mutlak blamed Hamas militants for the attack, but Hamas denied it. (*AP*)

In Cairo, PA President Mahmoud Abbas met Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. After the meeting, Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman told reporters that Hamas was urged "One, to stop the violence. Two, it should become a doctrine for them to be committed to all the agreements signed with Israel. Three, they have to recognise Israel," adding, "If they don't do it, Abu Mazen [President Abbas] will not ask them to form the government. Abu Mazen will [instead] form the government with other parties." President Abbas is expected to meet a delegation of Hamas officials in Egypt before more talks in Gaza on 3 February to discuss the formation of the next government. Nabil Abu Rudeineh, President Abbas' spokesman, did not say that recognition of Israel would be a precondition for Hamas' participation in the Cabinet, but confirmed that the movement would be expected to respect all previously signed agreements. (*AFP*)

Hamas rejected US President Bush's latest call to disarm following the group's victory. Sami Abu Zuhri, a Hamas leader in Gaza, said, "Our resistance is legitimate self-defence in the face of aggression." (*Reuters*)

The deputy head of the Hamas political bureau in Syria, Moussa Abu Marzouk, said, "I believe that [a renewed ceasefire with Israel] is one of the options which we could propose in the future to cooperate with the international community to bring about peace and tranquillity to this region." (*AP*)

PA Civil Affairs Minister Mohammed Dahlan said, "There will be no major changes in the Palestinian security establishment... Any changes in the security establishment must be approved by President Abbas and the PLO. No one would be able to change the status of any security officer." (*The Jerusalem Post*)

Israeli officials said they were suspending the monthly transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority while Israel reviewed the issue in light of Hamas' victory in the PLC elections. (*AP, Reuters*)

Saudi Arabia and Qatar pledged to transfer US\$ 33 million to the Palestinian Authority to ease a severe budget crisis, a senior PA official said.

Saudi Arabia promised \$20 million and Qatar pledged \$13 million in quick aid to help the PA pay January salaries to 137,000 employees, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. (*AP*)

In an [update](#) on the Palestinian economy and fiscal situation released, the World Bank said, "Today's Palestinian economy still operates at well below its potential, with real GDP per capita almost 30 percent lower than in 1999. The inability of the Palestinian economy to fully use its productive potential is first and foremost the result of restrictions on the movement of people and goods." (www.worldbank.org)

Paul Wolfowitz, President of the World Bank, said the Palestinian Government should continue to receive international aid despite concerns over last week's election victory by Hamas. He urged the Quartet to allow the Bank to continue working in the region. (*The Financial Times*)

Austria's Deputy Foreign Minister Hans Winkler told the European Parliament that the European Union (EU) continued to be concerned about Israel

activities in and around East Jerusalem, including the expansion of settlements and the demolition of Palestinian houses, and that such activities contradicted international law. (AP)

After the Government of Belgium suspended two new aid projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territory worth over €4 million in light of Hamas' victory in the PLC elections, PA Minister Ghassan Khatib met with Belgian Development Cooperation Minister Armand De Decker to discuss the matter. (www.lalibre.be)

2

Israeli troops, backed by tanks and armoured vehicles, stormed several neighbourhoods in Nablus and arrested 54 Palestinians, including four members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The army also arrested five Palestinians affiliated with Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah in Tulkarm, two Islamic Jihad members in Hebron, a Fatah member in Ramallah, and five Palestinians in Salfet. (Xinhua)

A Qassam rocket fired from the northern Gaza Strip landed in an open area south of the Israeli city of Ashkelon. Another Qassam rocket landed near the southern Israeli town of Sderot and a third one landed near the Al-Muntar (Erez) crossing. There were no injuries or damage resulting from the strikes. (Ynet, www.idf.il)

Molotov cocktails were hurled at Israeli vehicles travelling near Qalqilya, causing damage to the vehicles. There were no injuries. (Ynet)

Israeli officials said the Government was considering pulling down two settlement outposts in the West Bank ahead of the elections on 28 March. (AP)

More than 50 Palestinian militants surrounded the EU office in Gaza City. They said that the Governments of Germany, France, Norway and Denmark must apologize for the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed published in various newspapers by evening; otherwise they would target citizens of the four countries and shut down their media offices. (AP, DPA)

A German national was briefly kidnapped in Nablus. (AP, Ha'aretz)

A senior Palestinian official said the Palestinian Authority would have to delay paying the January salaries of 137,000 government employees for at least two weeks because of a severe budget crisis. (AP)

3

Four Israelis were wounded when Palestinian militants fired a Qassam rocket from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel. Islamic Jihad had claimed responsibility for the attack. Two more rockets landed near Ashkelon, causing some damage. IDF artillery shelled the northern Gaza Strip. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

IDF troops at a checkpoint outside Nablus arrested two Palestinians carrying explosive belts, an IDF spokeswoman said. Elsewhere in the West Bank, IDF troops arrested seven "wanted" Palestinians belonging to Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

The IDF foiled a suicide attack after soldiers at the Beit Iba checkpoint at the northern exit from Nablus stopped two Palestinian men who had aroused suspicion. Search of the men's belongings found two explosives belts, which were detonated by remote control. (Ha'aretz)

Demonstrations were held in several cities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as Palestinians protested against the cartoons of Prophet Mohammed.

Palestinian militants threw a bomb at a French cultural centre in Gaza City. (AP)

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal told the *al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, "We will never recognise the legitimacy of the Zionist State that was established on our land" adding "If you [Israel] are willing to accept the principle of a long-term truce then we will be ready to negotiate with you over the conditions of such a truce." (Reuters)

Palestinian sources reported that PA President Abbas would meet the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip to discuss the formation of a new government. (International Press Centre (IPC))

PA Prime Minister Qureia called on the Government of Israel to pay its financial arrears to the PA, rejecting what he termed the Israeli policy of collective punishment against the Palestinian people and the PA. He said that the new government would be formed after the first session of the newly elected Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). (IPC)

Israeli defence officials said they would recommend to Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on 5 February that funds that had been withheld from the PA be transferred "next week" as they felt that "it is in Israel's interest that the PA continue to function and provide essential public services", government sources said. (Ha'aretz)

A European Commission spokeswoman, Emma Udwin, said that the EU had no plans to stop aid to the Palestinians despite protests by armed men at EU offices in the Gaza Strip. "If the situation gets more complicated, then obviously it will not be easy for us to deal with it," she said. (AP)

The Danish Foreign Ministry said that all Danes, except for two diplomats, had left the Occupied Palestinian Territory in recent days. The Danish representative office in the West Bank would be closed, a local diplomat said, and the situation reassessed after the weekend. Norway had closed its representative office in the West Bank to the public the previous day because of the threats, but the staff remained on the job. (Ha'aretz)

The EU border control monitoring mission in Rafah had evacuated its Danish and French police officers to Israel, spokesman Julio de la Guardia said. (DPA)

Israel spent more than \$14 billion on West Bank settlements over the past four decades, according to a new study by the Israeli Research Institute for Economic and Social Affairs. (AP)

Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim said Brazil would collaborate with Hamas if it formed a "cohesive and economically viable Palestinian State," worked for peace and recognized Israel's right to exist. He denied published reports that Hamas had already asked Brazil for financial and political support. (AP)

"If Hamas wants to establish a government, Hamas must recognise Israel," Egyptian President Mubarak told the daily *Yediot Ahronot*. "We must hear Fatah; we must listen to Hamas and mediate between them. I hope we find a solution that brings about a coalition in which each side knows what is expected of it." (AFP)

Egypt wanted to deploy additional security personnel in the Sinai to patrol the Gaza Strip-Egypt border, Israeli government officials said. (The Jerusalem Post)

4

About 30 Palestinian students hurled stones at the European Union headquarters in Gaza City in protest over the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. Two Palestinian policemen were wounded. The protestors replaced the EU flag with a Palestinian flag, before the PA police brought them under control. On the same day, Palestinian protesters stormed the German Cultural Centre in the city, smashing windows, breaking doors and burning the German flag. (AFP, AP)

PA President Abbas met with Hamas leaders including Ismail Haniyeh and Mahmoud al-Zahar to begin consultations on forming the new PA Cabinet. Israel's *Channel 1 TV* reported that Mr. Abbas sought in the meeting to maintain control of Palestinian police, but Mr. Haniyeh said he had not made any demands concerning that question. Mr. Haniyeh said before the meeting, "We will not enter the Cabinet under just any condition.

We will not give up the principles of our election platform to enter the Cabinet." Sources in the PA and Hamas said that the two sides were to agree at the meeting only on the date for the swearing-in of the new members of parliament, probably at midweek, with consultations on a new

Cabinet expected to be prolonged. (AP, Ha'aretz)

Hamas published a statement announcing its opposition to PA President Abbas' plan to transfer control of the Palestinian security forces to the PA Presidency. The statement said Mr. Abbas' move was designed to "empty the Cabinet of content" and to leave the Cabinet "bearing only the heavy burden left by the previous Government." (Ha'aretz)

5

The IDF arrested five Palestinians in Nablus and Hebron. Security sources said the IDF went into the Askar refugee camp, east of Nablus, and arrested Tamer Qandeel, 25, Nour al-Shalabi, Sameh Al-Sairafi and Mohammad Al-Kharraz, 15. In Hebron, the IDF searched houses in Bani Na'im town and Tarama village, southeast of the city arresting Mohamed al-Khaddour, 24. (Wafa)

Israeli artillery shelled various places in the Gaza Strip, targeting a juice factory, the Al-Sarqya cemetery and the Abu Saffya area, east of the Gaza Strip. (Wafa)

A Palestinian man stabbed an Israeli woman to death and wounded five other people in a knife attack aboard a minibus in Israel. The attacker, described as 22-year-old from al-Sawia, a student living in East Jerusalem, killed the 60 year-old woman when he stabbed her in the stomach in Petah Tikva, east of Tel Aviv. (DPA)

A Palestinian man was killed in an explosion in the village of Silwad, near Ramallah, hospital officials said. Mamoun Nitham, a man in his 20s, was killed when a bomb he was handling went off. (AFP)

About 30 Palestinian gunmen defaced the entrance to the French Cultural Centre in Nablus in a protest against caricatures of Prophet Mohammed published in some European newspapers. One of the gunmen, who did not give his name, said they would not allow the centre to be reopened until European leaders apologized for the caricatures. (AP)

Palestinian medical sources said Israeli air strikes killed two Islamic Jihad members and wounded two others in the al-Zaytoun neighbourhood, south of Gaza. The deceased were identified as Adnan Bustan, 39, and Jihad al-Sawafiri, 31. Hours earlier an Israeli air strike had killed three members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in Gaza City. Sources said that Israeli helicopters had fired several rockets on the al-Sabra area in the Gaza Strip, targeted the al-Shams Sport Club and a car, killing Naseer Marshoud, 18, Hani Al-Qayid, 25, and Yassin Barghout, 30, and wounding five others. About 2,000 people attended their funerals. Israel sources said that the air attacks were in retaliation for rocket attacks on 3 February that wounded four people, including a baby. (AFP, Wafa)

Israeli Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert authorized the transfer of NIS 250 million in tax revenues to the PA, which had been withheld following Hamas' victory in the PLC election. Mr. Olmert said that the transfer would be completed by 15 February. However, he decided that future transfers of the VAT and customs duties that Israel collected for the PA under an agreement reached in the 1990s, would be examined on a monthly basis. The Acting Prime Minister had instructed Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz to coordinate the discussions on the transfers. "We are not interested in harming the Palestinians' day-to-day fabric of life," Mr. Olmert said at a meeting. "The current Palestinian Government is the same one which has received the money up till now, and the successive Israeli Governments have transferred all the money," he said, adding, "We have ways to guarantee that the money goes where it is supposed to go". (Ha'aretz, Wafa)

Palestinian security sources confirmed that Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing, which the IDF had closed since 15 January, had reopened. (Wafa)

The PA Attorney-General, Ahmed al-Meghami, said that in the course of an inquiry into official corruption, he had uncovered the misuse of US\$ 700 million of PA funds and suspected that much more had gone missing. Mr. Meghami said that billions of dollars in total may have been misappropriated and that his office had ordered 25 arrests and issued 10 international warrants relating to fraud within the PA. He said that in December 2005, PA President Abbas, who was not accused, had asked him to delay the public announcement about the investigation until after the election. He said that the inquiry included the PA-owned oil, tobacco and broadcasting corporations. The cases also included payments of \$4 million of PA funds and \$2 million of Italian aid money to a fictitious pipe factory. "The factory existed only on paper, and the investigation is under way to find out where the money went," the Attorney-General said. (The Guardian)

Speaking to reporters in Damascus, Hamas official Moussa Abu Marzouq stressed that Hamas was not obliged to recognize Israel, but added, "We are starting Sunday [5 February] with a meeting with Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman to discuss a range of issues, including Hamas' position on the recognition of Israel". He said, "Israel exists, everybody knows that, it is the most powerful country in the region and it is an Occupying Power in the Palestinian territory," Mr. Abu Marzouq said. (AFP)

6

Israeli artillery pounded the northern Gaza Strip after carrying out further air raids which left five Palestinian militants dead in the worst cycle of violence since Hamas' election victory. Palestinians responded to the artillery by firing rockets into Israel throughout the night. (AFP)

Israel's Shin Bet security services arrested six Palestinians from Hebron, who had been "wanted" since June 2005 for their involvement in the killing of six Israelis in the Hebron Hills area. Authorities believe the assailants opened fire on hitchhikers in the settlements of "Beit Haggai" and "Gush Etzion". (Ha'aretz)

An Israeli soldier was shot and slightly injured by an unknown Palestinian while he was on patrol near the Qalandiya crossing, the main checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah, a military source said. The Palestinian gunmen fled. (AFP)

Hassan Asfur, 25, and Rami Hanuna, 28, were killed when an Israeli aircraft fired two missiles at their car in northern Gaza. The two were members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and Israel had targeted them several times before. The IDF said that the men were en route to fire rockets into Israel. Five bystanders were wounded, including two children, doctors said. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

PA police broke up a rally outside the EU offices in Gaza City where hundreds of Palestinian students had been protesting against the publication of cartoons of Prophet Mohammed. (AP)

Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert said that Israel would for the time being continue its cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, through President Abbas. He stressed, however, that Israel would have no contacts with Hamas, unless it recognized Israel, disarm and accept previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements. Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar said Hamas would not accept Israel's right to exist because that would be "dangerous" for the rights of the Palestinian people. "We cannot recognize Israel," he told al-Arabiya satellite TV. (DPA)

A Hamas delegation led by Khaled Mashaal was due to review with Egyptian officials candidates for the position of PA Prime Minister, some of the delegation members said. Mr. Mashaal held consultations with Hamas' Gaza leadership before a scheduled meeting with Egyptian Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman. Hamas officials, on condition of anonymity, said that the two frontrunners were Mahmoud al-Zahar and Ismail Haniya.

Another key issue to be discussed in Cairo will be power-sharing arrangements between PA President Abbas and the future Prime Minister. (AFP)

Israeli Defence Minister Mofaz, who is also a senior Kadima official, stated while touring settlements in the West Bank that his party would carry out further unilateral withdrawals from Palestinian land if it wins next month's elections. Israel's final borders, he said, would be drawn in the next two years. "Immediately after the elections, the Government will deal with the final borders. The first priority will be to set them in agreement with the Palestinians. If we cannot reach agreed permanent borders, we will take different action, which it is not appropriate to detail now," Mr. Mofaz told Ma'ariv, adding, "We don't need to wait for someone else to impose our fate." (AP, DPA, Reuters)

Shin Bet Chief Yuval Diskin, in comments to a closed forum a month ago, said he opposed unilateral withdrawals from territory where the PA did not have firm control. "The political echelon can decide whatever it wants," Mr. Diskin said, according to comments first broadcast on Channel 10 TV. "Security-wise, I am against transferring the territories to the Palestinians ... unless we are confident that there is someone on the Palestinian side

to take control in that area.” (AP)

The Governor of the Israeli central bank, Stanley Fischer, a former official of the International Monetary Fund and former senior manager of Citigroup Corp, said that formation of a Hamas government would not necessarily mean a return to violence, noting that the group has largely honoured a ceasefire over the past year. If the situation remains calm, he said, economic relations, including continued entry of Palestinian labourers and trade through Israeli cargo crossings, could continue. Mr. Fischer also signalled that the financial transfers to the PA could continue as long as the security situation permitted: “Until there’s a reason to do otherwise, I think the payments should be transferred.” However, the decision was in the hands of the Government, not the central bank. (AP)

Peace Now released its annual report saying construction in West Bank settlement outposts had continued in 2005 and that the overall population of the settlements grew despite Israel’s pullout from Gaza, although no new settlements and no new outposts had been created. The group counted 102 outposts, and said that permanent housing had been built in 33 of them. No outposts had been evacuated in 2005. According to Peace Now figures, at the end of December 2004, 243,900 Israelis lived in 146 settlements. A year later, the number of settlements had decreased to 121, but the population had increased to 253,748. The report said most of the new construction had been in settlements on the “Israeli” side of the barrier. It said Israel also continued to build bypass roads for use by settlers in the West Bank, with the largest project meant to serve just 2,500 settlers in isolated enclaves south of Jerusalem. (AFP, AP, www.peacenow.org.il)

7

Israeli forces killed Ahmed Radad, 28, in a lengthy gunbattle during an arrest operation in Nablus. Mr. Radad was reportedly the West Bank commander of the Islamic Jihad’s Al-Quds Brigades. Two Israeli soldiers were wounded in the raid, an IDF spokesman said. Abu Marshoud, an Islamic Jihad leader in Nablus, vowed revenge, telling AP, “The response will be ghastly in Tel Aviv”. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

Rami al-Sheikh Khaleel, 23, a member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, died from injuries he sustained on 4 February in an Israeli air strike on a Fatah centre in Gaza City. Three other members of the Brigades were killed in the strike and seven other Palestinians, four of them security service members, were wounded. (AFP)

Israel carried out an air strike and fired artillery rounds at the northern Gaza Strip where the IDF said Palestinian militants had launched rockets against southern Israel. In the latest attack, a Palestinian rocket hit a house in the town of Sderot, causing damage but no injuries. Israeli air force bombed six roads and a bridge linking two northern Gaza towns, badly damaging it, and cutting electricity and telephone cables. One shell hit a home in northern Gaza, wounding a 15-year-old girl. Defence Minister Mofaz told *Israel Army Radio*, “We will continue to carry out these essential operations as long as they are needed against all organizations who dare to threaten the security of Israeli citizens”. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

Four Qassam rockets landed in Israel, north of the Gaza Strip. They damaged buildings, but there were no injuries. (Ha’aretz)

Two members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades were killed in an Israeli air strike in Gaza City. The IDF said that they were involved in Qassam rocket attacks. Medics said that three bystanders were wounded in the blast. (AFP)

Masked Palestinian gunmen riddled a picture of Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen with bullets and set fire to a mock Danish flag in the Gaza Strip town of Rafah as protests against last year’s cartoons published in Denmark continued. (AP)

Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert, in his first media interview since taking power last month, said that Kadima intended to hold on to the three major West Bank settlement blocks – “Ariel”, “Gush Etzion” and “Maale Adumim” – and smaller settlements on the border with Jordan. (AP)

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, the spokesman of PA President Abbas, strongly condemned what he called Israel’s “escalation, continued assassinations and aggressions against our Palestinian people”. “Its aim is to put obstacles in front of the new Government and Palestinian national dialogue. We are asking the international community to immediately halt incursions in the West Bank, the assassinations and air strikes in Gaza.” (AFP)

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

“The Secretary-General has noted with concern that in recent days Israel has conducted several targeted killings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

While recognizing Israel’s right to defend its citizens, targeted killings place innocent bystanders at grave risk and amount to executions without trial.

“The Secretary-General has also noted with concern the repeated rocket attacks against Israel emanating from the Gaza Strip. He underlines to all parties the need to respect international humanitarian law, and to refrain from actions that could lead to an escalation of violence.”

(UN press release SG/SM/10341)

Julio LaGuardia, spokesman for the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), told reporters that the EU monitors had celebrated the 100,000th passenger passing through the Rafah crossing on the Gaza-Egypt border since it was reopened on 26 November 2005. Around 51,000 people have crossed from the Gaza Strip into Egypt, while around 49,000 have crossed from Egypt into the Gaza Strip. A EUBAM press release said the Head of Mission, Lt.-Gen. Pietro Pistolese, together with the General-Director of the Rafah Crossing Point, Samir Abu Nahla, would award passenger number 100,000 with a certificate commemorating this special event. (ue.eu.int, Xinhua)

Asked whether a Hamas member would become the new Prime Minister, Hamas leader Ismail Haniya told *Reuters* in Cairo: “This is highly expected.” Asked if Hamas could form a Government without Fatah or other Palestinian political forces, he said: “It can, but it wants to strengthen participation”. He said Hamas hoped it would convince others to join the PA Cabinet and was planning to formally ask Fatah to participate.

Outgoing Deputy Prime Minister Nabil Sha’ath, a member of Fatah’s Central Committee, said, “If they do ask us, they must present their political programme and all the details about their Government and then we will discuss this issue among the Fatah leadership. So far, the majority has been against the idea of joining the Government.” (AFP, Reuters)

“We expect the Hamas-led Government to control the security services which according to the law fall under the responsibility of the Minister of Interior,” said Hamas spokesman Mushir al-Masri. Another Hamas official listed those agencies as the civil police, the civil emergency service and the Fatah-dominated Preventive Security agency, which had some 20,000 men between them. (Reuters)

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal told reporters in Cairo that Egypt had “put no conditions on Hamas” in talks with President Mubarak’s adviser Osama el-Baz and Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman the night before. “Hamas will continue resistance and will at the same time be able to discuss with other Palestinian factions the ways to fulfil the people’s rights, and we will show the necessary flexibility,” Mr. Mashaal said after talks with Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa. (AP, Ha’aretz)

Asked about the funding from the US and EU that might be stopped unless Hamas renounced violence and recognized Israel, Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar said in an interview in the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, “In six months the EU will talk to us; the world need not be afraid of Hamas”. (AFP)

Jordanian King Abdullah II met Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in Washington. “King Abdullah stressed the importance of dealing with the new realities created by Hamas’ victory in the Palestinian elections,” the Jordanian Embassy said in a statement. “He stated that Jordan will deal with the new Palestinian Government once it is created, and that Jordan will continue to support the Palestinian National Authority. He said that Jordan shall remain committed to its position advocating the return of both sides to the negotiating table.” (AFP, www.jordanembassyus.org)

Cutting aid to the PA would jeopardize the creation of a Palestinian State and the credibility of EU policy in the region, Leila Shahid, the top Palestinian diplomat to the EU, warned. What is at stake is “whether you want the survival of a national institution that can be the Palestinian State one day,” Ms. Shahid told a conference. She added that the EU should distinguish between funding the PA and funding Hamas, saying that it should not confuse a single political party with the State. *(Reuters)*

Kong Quan, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, said at a regular press conference that China hoped that the smooth completion of Palestinian parliamentary elections would help achieve an early realization of peace and stability in the Middle East. He said that China believed that no matter what party was in power in Palestine, it should advance the fundamental interests of the Palestinian people and solve the disputes with Israel through peaceful means and political negotiations. It should use relevant UN resolutions and the principle of “land for peace” as bases for reaching a peaceful settlement. *(Xinhua)*

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told Parliament, “None of us have any interest in ... punishing the Palestinian people for giving the ‘wrong’ answer in those elections.... We are not expecting [Hamas] to ... abandon every position they have held in the past overnight. We are expecting from them, however, clear indications of the direction in which they [will] travel.” *(AP)*

An advisory board of the Church of England said that its members had voted to “heed the call ... for morally responsible investment in the Palestinian occupied territories and ... to disinvest from companies profiting from the illegal occupation.” *(AP)*

8

Two members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades were killed in an exchange of gunfire with Israeli troops near the Al-Muntar (Karni) border crossing in the Gaza Strip, PA officials and the group said. The dead men were identified as Mohammed Al-Hur and Idris Al-Sharif. *(AFP, BBC)*

A Qassam rocket fell near Ashkelon. No injuries or damage were reported. *(Ha'aretz)*

The Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) said that it was leaving Hebron temporarily after Palestinians attacked their office in protest at the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad. *(Reuters)*

Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said it was “deplorable” that peace monitors stationed in Hebron had been forced to pull out due to violent protests over cartoons of Prophet Mohammed. “It is very serious when this force, which is supposed to contribute to peace and reconciliation, is itself forced to pull out.” The decision by the TIPH to withdraw from Hebron came after about 100 demonstrators hurled stones and bottles at its offices. *(AFP, Reuters)*

The IDF arrested 10 Palestinians in Nablus and Hebron, PA security sources said. *(Wafa)*

Hamas decided to name Jamal al-Khudairi, a Gaza Strip businessman who had run for the PLC as an independent with Hamas backing, as its candidate for PA Prime Minister, a Hamas official said on condition of anonymity. The alternative candidate would be PA Economic Affairs Minister Mazen Sonokrot. *(AP)*

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal said that Hamas could “possibly give a long-term truce [to] Israel. This is a position that Hamas could take, but not now; only after Israel recognizes the rights of the Palestinians, [and] to show and confirm its willingness to withdraw to the 1967 borders.” *(BBC)*

James Wolfensohn, the Middle East Quartet’s Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, was expected to discuss with PA President Abbas and other senior officials aid to the PA for the coming three months – the time it would take Hamas to form a new Government, PA Economic Affairs Minister Mazen Sonokrot said. *(Xinhua)*

Islamic Jihad group leader Khaled Batch said that the group rejected a long-term truce with Israel and would not join a Hamas-led PA Cabinet. *(AP)*

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told reporters after talks in Washington with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, “No one should try and unilaterally predetermine the outcome of a final status agreement.” Earlier, Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert had said that Israel would retain “larger settlement blocks” in the West Bank and a “reunified Jerusalem” in a final peace deal. Ms. Livni said that after Hamas formed the PA Cabinet, the PA could be designated a “terrorist state.” *(AFP, AP, Ha'aretz)*

In a report, the PA Agriculture Ministry said that the financial losses in the Palestinian agricultural sector between 28 September 2000 and 31 December 2005 had been approximately US\$ 1 billion, caused mainly by the consequences of the Israeli occupation. According to the report, some 139,000 trees, mostly under cultivation, had been uprooted and thousands of dunums of land bulldozed. *(IPC)*

9

A 23-year-old Palestinian was shot dead by IDF fire in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, according to medical sources. Tareq Abu Harbid was killed by several gunshots, not far from the barrier separating the Gaza Strip and Israel. An IDF spokesman said that Mr. Abu Harbid and another Palestinian had been planting an improvised explosive device near the barrier. The other Palestinian was seriously wounded. *(AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, Xinhua)*

Israeli soldiers shot dead two Palestinians as they threw hand grenades and opened fire on Israeli soldiers at the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing in the northern Gaza Strip. A third Palestinian was believed to have escaped. The Popular Resistance Committees and Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed joint responsibility for the attack. IDF closed the Erez side of the checkpoint. *(AFP, AP, Ha'aretz)*

A Qassam rocket launched from the Gaza Strip landed in an open field in southern Israel. No injuries or damage were reported. *(Ynet, www.idf.il)*

Israeli troops arrested 19 Palestinians in the West Bank. Soldiers entered the villages of Beit Ommar and Yatta, south and west of Hebron, as well as Qalqilya, where they searched houses. In the village of Al-Khader, south of Bethlehem, Ahmed Ibrahim was arrested, suffering severe injuries from beatings. *(Wafa)*

Two masked men shot at the tyres of a diplomatic vehicle and kidnapped the Egyptian military attaché to the PA, Hussam Almousaly, just outside the Egyptian Mission in Gaza City. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry said it was working to determine how the abduction happened and to “expedite the release of the kidnapped diplomat.” PA President Abbas ordered an urgent manhunt for the captors of the diplomat. “This action is foreign to the traditions of the Palestinian people,” he said. Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip Sami Abu Zuhri said, “Those who carry out such acts are seeking to hurt our people and damage the distinguished relations that link the Egyptian and Palestinian peoples.” *(AFP, AP, DPA, Xinhua)*

The PA released 46 Palestinian prisoners from a prison in Jericho. Thirty-nine of them were members of Islamic Jihad and seven were members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The prison is being guarded by US and British forces. The prisoners had been arrested by the Palestinian security forces in late 2005 throughout the West Bank, after claiming responsibility for several bombing attacks inside Israel that killed several Israelis.

The release came after several meetings between Islamic Jihad and PA President Mahmoud Abbas. *(AFP, Xinhua)*

PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia said that the first meeting of the elected Palestinian Legislative Council would be held on 18 February in accordance with a presidential decree, and stressed that the current PA Cabinet would continue its work until a new one had been formed. *(Wafa)*

PA officials said that they would begin paying PA employees their overdue January salaries, despite a severe budget crisis. The PA had borrowed some of the money for the payroll from banks after several Arab countries failed to transfer promised funds, according to PA Deputy Finance Minister Jihad Al-Wazir. *(AP, Ha'aretz)*

Palestinian Attorney General Ahmed Al-Meghani said that he had frozen the bank accounts and assets of dozens of PA officials suspected of having embezzled hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds. (AP)

At a working lunch with Secretary-General Kofi Annan and ambassadors of the five permanent members of the Security Council, hosted by the Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Dan Gillerman, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni reportedly said that it was very important that the Council keep insisting on the four planks in the [statement](#) it had issued the previous week after Hamas' victory in the PLC elections: recognizing Israel's existence, stopping terror attacks, returning to dialogue and the peace process, and respecting past Palestinian agreements with Israel. Afterwards, Ms. Livni held a separate meeting with Mr. Annan and discussed, inter alia, his [statement](#) on 7 February in which he had expressed concern at recent Israeli targeted killings of Palestinians. Ms. Livni told the Secretary-General that Israel had an obligation to ensure the security of its citizens, according to an Israeli spokesperson. (AP)

Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin told a news conference in Madrid, "Russia is maintaining contacts with the Hamas organization and intends in the near future to invite the leadership ... to Moscow." He also said, "Today, [we] must recognize that Hamas came to power via legitimate, democratic elections in the Palestinian National Authority, which is why we must respect the choice of the Palestinian people." A senior Hamas leader said its leaders would visit Russia if President Putin issued a formal invitation. (Ha'aretz, RIA Novosti)

The EU Presidency (Austria) called "upon Iran to join the international consensus on the need for a two-State solution to the Middle East conflict." The Presidency criticized a meeting between Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and 10 "radical" Palestinian groups, including Islamic Jihad and Hamas. (AFP)

At a press conference in Ramallah, Francine Pickup, representative of the Office of the UN Special Coordinator (UNSCO), citing its latest report said poverty and unemployment in the rural West Bank were bound to increase unless Palestinians could regain access to markets cut off by Israel. In particular, the increased Israeli restrictions on the movement of Palestinian workers on security grounds had led to many labourers losing their jobs in the northern West Bank, where the bulk of the rural population was based. (AFP)

The Austrian Foreign Minister, Ursula Plassnik, whose country holds the current EU Presidency, held a meeting with Mustafa Barghouti, a newly elected PLC member. "The elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council and the forthcoming elections in Israel are changing the fundamentals in the region. I hope that after this the two sides will be able to actively re-engage in the efforts to find a peaceful solution in the interest of their people," Ms. Plassnik said. She also emphasized that the renunciation of violence and the recognition of Israel's right to exist were essential preconditions for the EU to work together with the new PA Cabinet. (www.eu2006.at)

10

A Qassam rocket landed in an open area in Moshav Nativ Ha'asara. No injuries were reported. (Ha'aretz)

Russian Middle East Envoy Alexander Kalugin said his country would try to persuade Hamas leaders to shun their radical programme and engage in peace efforts when they visited Moscow at President Putin's invitation, adding, "We want them to respect all previous agreements in order to prevent terrorist attacks.... Of course, it is also necessary to embark on the road toward recognition of Israel's right to exist." (AP)

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov, who was attending a meeting of NATO defence ministers in Sicily, said that while his country, like other nations, was critical of Hamas' ideology, it considered it practical to maintain contacts with the group. "Hamas is in power, this is a fact....

Sometime in the future, many leading States will start maintaining some contacts with Hamas," Mr. Ivanov said. (AFP, Novosti)

French Foreign Ministry spokesman Denis Simonneau said Russia had not consulted its international partners about its initiative to invite Hamas members to visit Moscow, but added, "We believe that it is an initiative that can contribute to advancing our positions", adding, "We share with Russia the goal of leading Hamas towards positions that would allow for the goal of two States living in peace and security to be reached". (AFP, AP)

11

The Israeli Air Force (IAF) fired three missiles at a car near the central Gaza Strip town of Deir Al-Balah in what Palestinian sources said was a failed assassination attempt. Shortly afterwards, the IAF fired a missile that landed in an open area in the northern Gaza Strip. (Ha'aretz)

Two Islamic Jihad members were arrested in Jenin and a third detained in Kfar Silat Al-Dahar, south of Jenin. (Ha'aretz)

A Palestinian youth was shot and injured by IDF soldiers in the town of Dura. IDF sources said the youth had thrown an incendiary device at troops. Three Palestinian teenagers with knives were arrested at IDF checkpoints near the Bethlehem area. (Ha'aretz)

Egyptian diplomat Hussam Al-Musali was released by his captors in the Gaza Strip, more than 24 hours after he was kidnapped. According to an Egyptian diplomat in the Gaza Strip, "He's released and unharmed". (BBC, Reuters)

In a press release, Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov reaffirmed that the initiative to forge a dialogue with Hamas rested on the "platform of the Quartet of international mediators, as agreed upon in London on 30 January...." The statement said that "in the interests of providing an avenue for restoring the Palestine-Israel settlement process based on the [Road Map](#) it is necessary, without dragging it out, to begin to talk to Hamas as an influential force of Palestinian society." The previous day, Mr. Lavrov had telephone conversations with the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, and the Secretary-General of the Council of the EU and EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, on this issue. French Finance Minister Thierry Breton, in Moscow for the G-8 finance summit, supported efforts that would allow the recognition of the State of Israel and the pursuit of the peace process as going in the right direction. Qatar has expressed readiness to hold talks with Hamas. (<http://www.mid.ru>, Reuters, Xinhua)

12

The IDF opened the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing after having closed it on 9 February. (Ha'aretz)

Three Palestinians were wounded in riots that erupted in the West Bank over graffiti insulting the Prophet Mohammad scrawled on the wall of a mosque in the village of Nabi Ilyas, near Qalqilya. Local residents said settlers had painted the graffiti. Hundreds of Palestinians staged demonstrations in villages in the northern West Bank. IDF troops wounded three of the Palestinians who, according to troops, had thrown stones at Israeli cars. (AFP, Ha'aretz, Xinhua)

A Qassam rocket fired from the Gaza Strip landed south of Sderot in the Negev. Earlier, two Qassam rockets landed south of Ashkelon. No injuries or damage were reported. (Ha'aretz)

Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert said, "Once the Palestinian parliament is sworn in, the Palestinian Authority will turn into a Hamas authority."

Speaking at the weekly Cabinet meeting in Jerusalem, he added that the "rules of the game" will change. "We won't wink at anyone – our no is a no, and if we say yes, we will mean yes." According to Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz, the identity of the PA's new senior officials, including the new PA Prime Minister, Chairman of the PLC and the Head of the PA security services, would determine the future face of the PA and PA

President Abbas' future as well. (DPA, Ha'aretz)

The head of the Fatah faction in the newly elected Palestinian Legislative Council, Azzam Al-Ahmed, said that Fatah would never join a Cabinet with a strategy contradictory to Fatah's. He also said that Hamas "had positively changed and became more pragmatic than before" the PLC elections.

In Damascus, senior Hamas leader Moussa Abu Marzouq said Hamas would present its programme and its candidate for Prime Minister to PA President Mahmoud Abbas during the PLC session scheduled for 18 February. (Xinhua)

Reacting to the Russian Federation's invitation to Hamas, Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert reportedly said that the Russian position was a mistake. He added that Russia had said it would demand Hamas recognize Israel and give up terror. Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni urged the international community to stand firm in rejecting Hamas. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

13

Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian woman near the "Kissufim" crossing on the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel. Military sources said soldiers patrolling the Israeli side of the fence noticed two figures on the Palestinian side approaching the fence in a "no-go" zone. The victim was identified as 25-year-old Bedouin shepherd Nayfa Abu Musad. (DPA, Xinhua)

The outgoing PLC passed legislation giving PA President Abbas the power to appoint a constitutional court that could veto legislation passed by the incoming PLC to be sworn in on 18 February. Under the new law, the constitutional court could veto legislation deemed in violation of the Palestinian Basic Law. Mr. Abbas would appoint the nine judges to the new court without seeking parliamentary approval, according to the legislation. Incoming Hamas MP Said Siyam said the current PLC had no mandate and no authority to issue any new legislation. (AFP, AP, BBC, Ha'aretz, Xinhua)

The outgoing PLC decided to appoint all the incoming PLC members as members of the Palestinian National Council (PNC). The PNC, the Palestinian parliament in exile, is the most important institution of the Palestine Liberation Organization and headed by Salim Za'noon, the PNC speaker based in Jordan. (BBC, Xinhua)

Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat called on Hamas to respect the PA's commitment to the international community. He said, "The State of Palestine is an observer member of the United Nations and member of the Arab League, [and] Hamas should recognize all resolutions and initiatives made by those bodies. (Xinhua)

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal said Hamas would end its armed struggle against Israel if Israel withdrew from all occupied Palestinian territories. He added that Hamas did not feel bound by the Road Map for Peace since, in his view, no one else was abiding by it. (AFP)

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told reporters after he met President Bush at the White House, "I think there is an opportunity here for Hamas to transform itself into a political party and work with the international community and the Israeli Government". (AFP, Xinhua)

The New York Times reported that US and Israeli officials were discussing ways to destabilize the incoming PA Cabinet if Hamas failed to recognize Israel's right to exist and renounce violence. The paper said the goal of the campaign would be to ensure that newly elected Hamas officials failed and new elections were called. Starving the PA of money and international connections would make life so difficult for Palestinians that they would vote to return Fatah to office. (Reuters)

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, visiting Israel as part of a Middle East trip, said that Germany backed Israel's demand that Hamas be shunned by the international community unless the group renounced violence and recognized Israel. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said that Arab States would persuade Hamas to accept the land-for-peace principle for settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He also pledged support to Hamas and said it was the duty of Arab States to support Hamas if it formed a PA Cabinet, which would have "numerous duties related to the Palestinian situation and dealing with the force of occupation, and this calls for strong Arab support", he told reporters in Khartoum. (AFX)

Venezuela would welcome a delegation from Hamas "with pleasure" if it decided to visit the country, Vice-President José Vicente Rangel said. Hamas representatives would visit Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela, but no specific date had been set, he said, adding, "I think they are going to go to Russia, which will give them a special welcome". The Government of Venezuela had stated it would be among the first to recognize an independent Palestinian State. (AP, Xinhua)

Ha'aretz reported that Israel had completed a series of military procedures, which had started in 2005, to sever the Jordan Valley from the West Bank. Some 2 million Palestinians, residents of the West Bank, were prohibited from entering the area, which constituted around one third of the West Bank and included the Jordan Valley, the area of the Dead Sea shoreline and the eastern slopes of the West Bank mountains. Israeli military sources said the move had been "security measures" and had no connection to any political intentions. (Ha'aretz, Xinhua)

B'Tselem said that Israel had effectively annexed the Jordan Valley. The group pointed to a system of permits and checkpoints that had expanded over recent months to keep most Palestinians out of the valley: "Israel's permit regime in the valley, together with statements of senior officials, give the impression that the motive underlying Israel's policy is not based on military-security needs, but is political: the de facto annexation of the Jordan Valley." (AP, The Guardian, www.btsalem.org)

Israeli Acting Prime Minister Olmert, speaking at a special session marking the anniversary of the founding of the Knesset, said that the next parliament must determine the country's permanent borders. (AP)

14

Israeli troops arrested 19 Islamic Jihad and Fatah members throughout the West Bank. (Xinhua)

The IDF said Israeli tanks had shelled the Al-Awda neighbourhood in northern Gaza. The shelling came after two Palestinian rockets landed in southern Israel, one in an industrial zone south of Ashkelon. Military officials said that the homemade rocket had landed near a strategic installation.

The officials did not identify the installation, but several power plants exist in the area. (AP, Reuters, Xinhua)

"President Abbas will on Saturday ask [Hamas] to accept his political programme and implement the PA's international and peace commitments" an aide to President Abbas said, adding, "If Hamas responds by forming a Government with a different political programme, we will have a constitutional crisis. This could be a long and difficult process." (Reuters)

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal told a rally in Khartoum, "There will be no recognition of Israel and there will be no security for the occupation and colonization forces. Resistance will remain our strategic option." (AP)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert said, in comments to visiting Jewish American leaders, "The Palestinian Government, under the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas, whom we respect and support ... will now have to make a serious choice.... Do they want to become part of a terrorist organization, or do they want, even at this late stage, to take serious actions" to disarm Hamas? (AP)

White House Spokesman Scott McClellan said, "I saw the news reports earlier today about some sort of plan that was talking about forcing Hamas from power so that there could be new elections. There is no plot, there is no plan." (www.whitehouse.gov)

Israeli Ambassador in Washington Daniel Ayalon said, "There are no ongoing discussions with the US designed to bring down the Palestinian Government." (AP)

"The new [PA] Government should maintain the same method adopted by the former Government in a bid to establish peace in the region," EU High

Representative Javier Solana told reporters after meeting with Egyptian President Mubarak. "The EU will maintain its support of the PNA financially and economically, but the Europeans should wait and see until the formation of the new Government." (*Xinhua*)

French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin said in Moscow, "What I want, of course, is that in the course of these meetings [in Moscow] Hamas should recognize its responsibilities and the opportunity that it is being offered.... So it is a very important moment, it is a historic choice for Hamas." (*AP*)

Speaking in Athens after talks with Greek President Karolos Papoulias, Israeli President Moshe Katsav said, "Relations between Israel and the PA have reached a very crucial point. Over the past 12 years, Israel has taken great historic steps for the good of the Palestinians. But I am afraid ... Hamas' election victory will not help, but will instead take us 12 years back.... Israel will not put up with the continuation of terrorist acts by Hamas. If Hamas changes its policy then Israel will open contact with Hamas." Mr. Papoulias said, "We agreed that the main target must be the coexistence of two States," as well as a secure Israel and Palestinian democracy. (*AP*)

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier held talks with Palestinian officials in Ramallah, on the second leg of his Middle East tour. "Aid to the Palestinian people should continue whatever party is going to form the Government," PA Foreign Minister Al-Kidwa told a joint news conference. "The German position does not differ from the European position," Mr. Steinmeier said, stressing that, for the time being, the EU had decided to guarantee aid to the Palestinians until a new PA Cabinet emerged, but said that "for the time after, no decisions have been taken". PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat, who also met the German Foreign Minister, called for the "democratic choice of the Palestinian people to be respected" and for "threats of sanctioning the Palestinian people" not to be exacerbated. (*AFP*)

Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül said, "We should respect the decision of the Palestinians. Whoever will be the new leaders of the Palestinians should act in a democratic way and contribute to the peace process." (*Xinhua*)

President Abbas returned to PLO control the state-run Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), which runs *Palestine TV* and the *Voice of Palestine* radio station. In 2005, Mr. Abbas had transferred control of the PBC from his Office to that of the Information Minister, Nabil Sha'ath.

The Ministry had also been given authority over the Palestinian news agency *Wafa*, which was also returned to the supervision of the PLO. (*AP*)

The Hamas military wing, Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, recently finished registering and collecting weapons used by its activists in the northern Gaza Strip, a process reportedly began at the order of the Hamas Political Bureau after Hamas' victory in the elections. The weapons collection in the central and southern parts of Gaza was hindered by fighting between Fatah and Hamas members. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israeli Defence Minister Mofaz, speaking in Cairo after talks with President Mubarak, said Hamas' control over the PA made it part of the "axis of evil", which began with "Iran, moving to Hezbollah in Lebanon, then on to Hamas in the Palestinian areas." Mr. Mofaz told reporters that for Israel to have dialogue with Hamas "they should recognize the State of Israel. They should accept all agreements signed with the PA. They should stop calling for the destruction of the State of Israel ... stop all kinds of terrorist activities and collect all arms from Hamas members." (*AFP, DPA*) "We are now examining the situation in the Palestinian territories. Contact with Russia is being considered, which should lead to an evolution of [Hamas]. It is a prerequisite for progress in the region," French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin said at a joint press conference after talks with his Russian counterpart, Mikhail Fradkov, in Moscow. "Concerning the situation with Palestine, France has reiterated its position ... on recognition of Israel, recognition of the accords between the Palestinians and the Israelis, the Oslo Accords in particular, and of course the renunciation of violence," (*AP, Xinhua*)

"The United States, which claims to be the mother of democracy, must respect the election results and the will of the Palestinian people," Hamas spokesman Mushir al-Masri said, condemning US and Israeli interference. He was referring to a report that US and Israeli officials had been discussing ways to destabilize a Hamas-led Government. PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat warned that "speaking of ousting Hamas could backfire." (*AP, Reuters*)

Israel is trying to persuade donor countries to sever support for the PA, starting this weekend. Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said that talks were under way with foreign ministers about the timing of a cut-off. "On Saturday, when the new Palestinian parliament is sworn in with a clear Hamas majority, a terrorist organization has taken over the Palestinian Government," Mr. Regev said. "According to international law, the minute a terrorist organization takes over a political entity, the international community has an obligation not to give direct or indirect support," he added, citing Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) which called for Member States to freeze funding to "entities or persons involved in terrorist acts". He said that the US, the EU, Japan, Canada and Australia were among the countries that classified Hamas as a "terrorist organization" and should now act. (*Reuters*)

Thirty-one international aid organizations, including Oxfam and Médecins du Monde, issued a joint appeal to Governments not to stop the flow of funds to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, saying that the local Palestinian population remained desperately in need of outside support. (*AFP*)

After 18 months of contentious debate over Middle East divestment, leaders of the Chicago Presbytery were to vote again on whether to push the Church to redirect its money towards companies or charities that worked for peace in the region. The latest proposal omitted the word "divestment". "We're trying to reframe the whole conversation in a way that has to do with positive investment of time, energy and money," said Rev. Nanette Sawyer, head of the inter-religious work group that had drafted the resolution. "It's time to move beyond nicely worded overtures that just sit on shelves and don't really do anything," said Don Wagner, a member of the Chicago Presbytery's Middle East Task Force. (*Chicago Tribune*)

15

The IDF arrested nine Hamas and one Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades members in Tulkarm, Palestinian witnesses reported. Seven Palestinians were arrested in Qalqilya, Nablus and Jenin. (*Wafa, Xinhua*)

IDF troops operating near Jenin killed a young retarded Palestinian man who was holding a toy gun, PA security sources said. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

Egyptian President Mubarak told *Israeli TV* on 14 February, "I won't come and tell them [Hamas] to recognize Israel. It will say no.... There is hope and we must not be pessimistic." (*Ha'aretz*)

Senior Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said a PA Cabinet would be in place by early March. (*AP*)

A senior PA official said that PA President Abbas would make a speech before the newly elected PLC on 18 February and ask Hamas to recognize the PA's commitments to pursue peace. (*Xinhua*)

Newly elected Hamas PLC member Ahmed Haj Ali was released by Israel after serving five months in prison without trial or charges. (*AP*)

"If the Palestinians chose a prime minister or parliament speaker identified with Hamas, Israel will immediately cut all contacts with the PA," Israeli Defence Minister Mofaz told *Yediot Ahronot*. (*DPA*)

PA President Abbas' security adviser Jibril Rajoub said, "Hamas is not required to recognize Israel as a condition for [inter-Palestinian] dialogue.... It is tactically wrong for Hamas to recognize Israel now." (*Ha'aretz*)

Hamas made its first parliamentary appointments, naming Mahmoud Al-Zahhar, from Gaza, as head of the Hamas majority faction in the PLC, which is expected to convene for its first session on 18 February. Abd al-Aziz Dweik, a professor at Al-Najah University in the West Bank, and Sheikh Ahmed Bahar, a professor at the Islamic University in Gaza and an MP for the Sheikh Radwan district, were the group's choices for the speaker and deputy speaker of parliament, respectively. It is speculated that Hamas would choose as Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, a Gazan viewed by Palestinians as a pragmatist who has forged good relations with rival factions. (*BBC, The Financial Times, Reuters*)

Speaking at the opening ceremony for the refurbished Jericho Police Academy, Gen. Tarek Zeid, the West Bank's PA police chief, said Hamas would not be able to fire any of his officers, adding that the new PA Cabinet would only be able to function if it secured the cooperation of the police. Gen. Zeid said, "I will not lose any of my sons; these institutions must be protected. And anyone who tries to mess with them will not serve the nation." If Hamas wanted to join the security forces, Gen. Zeid said, it would have to recognize the power of the "old guard". "[Hamas] are on the top of the tree now. We have the ladder," he said. The ceremony was attended by Western diplomats and European security advisers based in the West Bank. The Academy had received financial support from the British, Dutch, Swedish and Norwegian Governments. As part of the renovations, the Europeans provided US\$ 512,000 for computer rooms, living facilities and wells. The Academy first opened in 1994. (*Ha'aretz*)

The US House of Representatives passed a non-binding resolution "expressing the sense of Congress that no United States assistance should be provided directly to the Palestinian Authority if any representative political party holding a majority of parliamentary seats within the Palestinian Authority maintains a position calling for the destruction of Israel." The Senate passed the resolution on 1 February. (*Reuters*, <http://thomas.loc.gov>)

After talks with EU leaders in Vienna, Russian Federation Foreign Minister Lavrov said that Russia's invitation to Hamas was a realistic way to advance future peacemaking. "We will work toward Hamas accepting the Quartet's positions. This is not just the Quartet's opinion but also that of the majority of nations, including Arab nations," he said. Russian and Hamas officials had said on 11 February that the talks might be held in Moscow before the end of February. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, the current EU President, said, "There is no reason to doubt" that Russia would abide by Quartet policy—a Palestinian State on Israeli-occupied land coexisting with the Jewish State—in dealing with Hamas. (*Reuters*)

"Future assistance to any new Palestinian Government will be reviewed against that Government's commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map," Canadian Prime Minister Harper said. (*AFP*)

Russian Federation President Putin met with James Wolfensohn, Middle East Quartet Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, to discuss the situation in the region after last month's victory by Hamas in the Palestinian elections. (<http://www.vremya.ru/print/145617.html>)

A senior official with the PA Ministry of Finance announced that the World Bank had approved US\$ 60 million in financial aid to the PA. (*Xinhua*) At a consultation led by Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, it was decided that Israel would not oppose the transfer of international aid funds to humanitarian organizations in the OPT following the establishment of a new PA Cabinet led by Hamas. Israel will acquiesce to the transfer on the condition that the aid does not reach PA hands. Officials at the meeting decided that Israel would work towards delegitimizing the new Palestinian Cabinet as well as freeze the transfer of tax revenues which Israel collects for the PA. Dov Weissglas, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Special Adviser, said, "It's like a meeting with a dietitian; we need to make them lose weight, but not to die." (*Ha'aretz*) PA President Abbas met with the Head of TIPH urging him to bring his staff back to Hebron. (*Wafa*)

16

The IDF arrested a "wanted" PFLP member in Attil, north-east of Tulkarm, and another Palestinian in Qalqilya. Palestinians opened fire on an IDF post north of the Gaza Strip, causing no injuries or damage. Also, Qassam rockets were launched at Israel from the northern Gaza Strip, and the IDF responded by firing artillery at the launching sites. (www.idf.il)

Israeli forces shot and moderately wounded a mentally disabled Palestinian north of Beit Hanoun, near the border fence between the northern Gaza Strip and Israel. (*Wafa*)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert was expected to reach a decision tomorrow on what steps Israel would take in response to a Hamas-led PA Cabinet.

In anticipation of Mr. Olmert's announcement, Defence Minister Mofaz convened a meeting of Ministry officials to formulate recommendations to Mr. Olmert on measures Israel should take after the Hamas-controlled PLC was sworn in. The proposed measures include refusing entry to workers from the Gaza Strip into Israel and forbidding movement between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Defence Ministry had already laid the groundwork for the quick closure of the Beit Hanoun (Erez) and Al-Muntar (Karni) crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip. It was also recommended that Israel squeeze the PA financially by immediately stopping all tax revenue transfers and by exerting pressure on international donors to freeze all but humanitarian assistance. The Acting Prime Minister would need to determine whether the Government should immediately begin implementing punitive measures or move to present an ultimatum to PA President Abbas to abide by commitments to disarm Palestinian armed groups. (*Ha'aretz*, *Reuters*)

The Israeli Defence Ministry announced that it would begin constructing the southern section of the separation barrier between Israel and the West Bank in the coming weeks. (*Ha'aretz*)

In Jerusalem, visiting EU High Representative Javier Solana said that the EU had ruled out immediate contacts with Hamas. Mr. Solana also criticized Israel's plans to impose sanctions on the Palestinians. "I don't agree with that decision because I don't think by Saturday we will have a new [Palestinian] Government," Mr. Solana said as he met Israeli Foreign Minister Livni, after talks with PA President Abbas. (*AFP*)

In Turkey, Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal held talks with Turkish Foreign Ministry officials headed by Deputy Under-Secretary Ahmet Üzümcü. Before the meeting, the Foreign Ministry said it would repeat the "expectations of the international community". Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül told a Turkish TV station, "The peace process has to continue and for that, Palestinians should be able to live in their own independent State side by side with the independent Israeli state," adding, "The peace negotiations will be at the table; ... there should be no violence."

Mr. Mashaal and other Hamas officials are on an international tour to rally support before forming the new Palestinian Cabinet. (*AP*)

The Russian Foreign Ministry said that a delegation of Hamas members would arrive in Moscow in early March. The Ministry said that agreement had been reached but did not specify who would head the delegation. (*RIA Novosti*)

In Damascus, Moussa Abu Marzouq, Hamas Political Bureau Deputy Chief, called on the United States to remove his group from the US list of terrorist organizations and to open a dialogue without preconditions. "Hamas is not the only side that wants peace. All the Palestinians want peace because they are the only people whose rights have been encroached upon and who have been expelled from their lands," he said. Mr. Abu Marzouq, who had recently been to Egypt, Sudan and Qatar, said Hamas found "all-out support" in the three countries, which backed "the choice of the Palestinian people and the budget of the Palestinian Authority" as in the past". (*AP*)

Former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, said that the US and Israel did not want the UN to play a part in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (*La Libre Belgique*)

17

Palestinians fired two Qassam rockets at Israel, causing no injuries. (*Ha'aretz*)

The IDF said its forces had arrested 18 "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank: 10 Islamic Jihad members in Kafr Ra'i, south-west of Jenin; a Fatah member in Zawata, north-west of Nablus; two Hamas members in Ramallah; a Hamas member north-west of Ramallah; a Hamas member west of Ramallah; two Fatah members and a PFLP member in Nablus. (www.idf.il)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert approved the defence establishment's advice to begin taking punitive steps against the PA, to be implemented as of Sunday, 19 February, the day after the inauguration of the new PLC. Israel also decided to prevent Hamas PLC members from travelling from the Gaza Strip to Ramallah for the swearing-in ceremony. (*Ha'aretz*)

Referring to a planned meeting with Hamas leaders in Moscow next month, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov told reporters, "We will be guided by the agreed position of the Quartet.... We will continue the work that leaders of many Middle East countries are conducting with the Hamas leadership.

And we are counting on all this to foster progress toward a situation in which Hamas will be a legitimate, integral and useful part of the peace process in the Middle East." Earlier in the day, Russian Middle East Envoy Alexander Kalugin had told *Interfax*: "A [Hamas] delegation's visit is due to take place during the first week of March.... During our meeting, we will not put forth any demands. They themselves should take a decision on steps that meet the interests of the Palestinian people and help resolve the issues on the agenda of Palestinian-Israeli relations." He added, "We want them to respect all previous agreements in order to prevent terrorist attacks.... Of course, it is also necessary to embark on the road toward recognition of Israel's right to exist." (*AP, Interfax*)

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov said in televised comments, "Supplies of military hardware to Palestine can only be carried out with Israel's consent and through its territory." A day earlier, Russian Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Yuri Baluyevsky had said that a plan to sell the PA 50 armoured personnel carriers, which had been put on hold since September 2005, could be revived if a visit by Hamas leaders to Moscow went well. (*AP, Reuters*)

18

Two Palestinians stabbed and critically wounded an Israeli man in the West Bank settlement of "Ma'aleh Adumim", Israeli police said. (*AP*)

Israel would now regard the PA as its "enemy" after the swearing-in of a new parliament dominated by Hamas, a spokesman in the Prime Minister's Office said. (*AFP*)

PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat criticized the Israeli Cabinet for its decision to cancel PA officials' VIP travel cards. (*Xinhua*)

The PLC was sworn in and Hamas legislator Abd al-Aziz Dweik, a professor from the West Bank, was elected Speaker. (*AP*)

Speaking at the swearing-in of the PLC, PA President Abbas said, "I would like to remind members of the Legislative Council and members of the future Government of the need to respect all signed commitments.... We, as presidency and Government, will continue our commitment to the path of negotiation as a realistic strategic political choice through which we will reap the fruit of our struggle and the sacrifices of our people over the long decades.... We have not and will not accept any questioning of the [Oslo] Accords' legitimacy. Indeed, from the hour [they were] endorsed, [they] became a political reality to which we remain committed." Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said, "We will deal with this difference in the political position ... through dialogue and understanding, to preserve the national unity of the Palestinian people and promote the higher interests of our people". PLC Speaker Abd al-Aziz Dweik said, "Whatever is good for our people, we will respect it." Hamas spokesman Mushir al-Masri said, "Negotiation is a choice that has failed to achieve the aspirations of the Palestinian people, and Hamas is not prepared to go into a failed experiment." (*AP*)

"Our position on Hamas has been quite clear on what they need to do. They must disarm, renounce violence, and recognize Israel's right to exist," said US National Security Council spokesman Frederick Jones. "We'll still continue to watch closely and wait and see. We'll see what approach they take as they govern." (*AP*)

President Putin's envoy for international cooperation in fighting terrorism and transnational crime, Anatoly Safonov, said, "It is counterproductive to close the door and say 'no' in advance [to Hamas]." (*Interfax*)

19

IDF troops killed two teenage Palestinian stone-throwers in the Balata refugee camp near Nablus, PA officials and witnesses said. (*AP*)

Two Popular Resistance Committees militants were killed in an IDF air strike in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip and the group vowed revenge. (*Xinhua*)

"The PA is in practice becoming a terrorist authority," Acting Prime Minister Olmert told the Israeli Cabinet. "Israel will not hold contacts with a Government in which Hamas takes part." The Cabinet decided to stop the transfer of some US\$ 55 million a month in taxes and tariffs to the PA, step up security checks at Israel-Gaza Strip crossings, tighten the restrictions on the movement of Hamas officials and ban the transfers of equipment to PA security forces. (*AP, BBC*)

Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa said that the foreign ministers of several Arab countries would meet on 20 February in Algiers to discuss a plan to provide \$50 million a month to the PA. (*AP*)

The PA faced a "serious financial crisis," PA President Abbas told reporters. (*AFP*)

The US Treasury Department ordered US banks to freeze the assets of KindHearts, a charity which the US accused of funding Hamas. (*AP*)

The PA had agreed to return \$50 million in aid given by the US Government, PA President Abbas said. (*AP*)

Swiss Foreign Affairs Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey expressed "concern about restrictive measures by Israeli authorities which could bring about a further deterioration of the economic and social situation of civilians." (*AFP*)

Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül defended his meeting with Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal, saying, "The title deeds and archives of Palestine, Israel and Jerusalem are in our hands, the truth is in our hands; should I not get involved?" (*AP*)

UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd said, "Humanitarian aid to UNRWA will not be cut off, but we have concerns that this aid won't increase in the future." (*Xinhua*)

20

The IDF killed the commander of Islamic Jihad in the Nablus region, PA security sources said. (*AFP*)

A Qassam rocket landed in the south of Israel. The IDF shelled the northern Gaza Strip. (*Ha'aretz*)

Nine "wanted" Palestinians were arrested during a wide-scale operation in the Balata and Nablus refugee camps. Among those arrested were Hamed Abu-Shariah, considered to be a bomb maker, and Ahmed Arausha Marshud, 22, a member of Islamic Jihad. Meanwhile, near the Fawwar refugee camp, south of Hebron, IDF soldiers shot a Palestinian youth who had thrown a Molotov cocktail at an Israeli bus. The youth and a Palestinian woman bystander were badly wounded and were taken to a hospital. (*Ha'aretz*)

A military order took effect last week barring Palestinians with entry permits to Israel from entering from the West Bank via the roads that Israelis use. (*Ha'aretz*)

"We presented to President Abu Mazen [PA President Abbas] the name of the nominee for the post of prime minister, which is brother Ismail Haniyeh, and he will see Haniyeh in Gaza today" to discuss the new Cabinet, PLC Speaker Abd al-Aziz Dweik told reporters. (*AFP, Reuters*)

PA Prime Minister-designate Ismail Haniyeh said that he regretted that Israel had labelled Hamas a terrorist group, adding that "it should have responded differently to the democracy expressed by the Palestinian people". On the withholding of foreign aid, he said, "We have other Arab and Islamic countries and members of the international community who are ready to stand next to the Palestinian people." (*DPA*)

The IDF demanded an immediate evacuation of all foreign UNRWA employees from the Balata refugee camp near Nablus. (*Xinhua*)

PA President Abbas met with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. Mr. Abbas said Fatah had still not decided to remain outside the Government and that Fatah would engage with whoever was tasked with forming the Government in a dialogue that would include all of the topics on the agenda. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

"All the decisions that were taken by the previous PLC since 25 January are now frozen and we will review these decisions in accordance with the Basic Law," the new PLC Speaker Abd al-Aziz Dweik said in a statement. (*AFP*)

Hamas opened formal talks in the Gaza Strip with leaders of the PFLP, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and Islamic Jihad on forming a coalition PA Cabinet. (*Reuters*)

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process Alvaro de Soto called Israel's decision to withhold PA tax funds premature and unhelpful.

"These are monies that belong to the Palestinians and should not be withheld." (*Ha'aretz*)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice talked to representatives of the Russian Federation, the EU and the UN covering "issues of support to the Palestinian people," State Department spokesman Noel Clay said. He added that those representatives had taken note of the Israeli Cabinet's statement of the previous day and the need to discuss with donors the continuation of humanitarian support. "The United States will continue consultation regarding the immediate financial situation of the interim Government," Mr. Clay said. (*AP*)

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told visiting Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal, "We must make a plan so all Muslims will be able to supply the Palestinians with a yearly financial aid package." (*AFP*)

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) planned to provide additional institutional and financial aid to the PA, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said. (*AP*)

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency said in a statement that it would provide 50 million kronor (\$6.4 million) to UN aid programmes in the OPT. (*AFP*)

21

Israeli troops shot and wounded three stone-throwing Palestinians, one of them seriously, and blew up what they said was a bomb-making factory during an ongoing operation in the Nablus refugee camp of Balata. One of the Palestinians, shot in the chest and stomach, was hospitalized.

(*AFP*)

Israeli forces arrested 11 Palestinians, including six from Hamas and four from Islamic Jihad. (*AFP*)

In a phone call to *Wafa*, sources said that Israeli soldiers had prevented an ambulance from Nablus from reaching a house belonging to Jameel Al-Tirawi to evacuate a sick Palestinian. Soldiers also stopped the delivery of milk for babies and medicine to the Balata refugee camp, near Nablus, according to Palestinian sources. (*Wafa*)

IDF troops evacuated the West Bank outpost of "Givat Ha'or," near "Bet El," northeast of Ramallah. (*Ha'aretz*)

IDF and PA security forces would maintain ties and continue coordination for the time being until Hamas took control of the PA, *Ha'aretz* reported.

The ties would come under review if and when Hamas took control of the PA's security forces. (*Ha'aretz, Xinhua*)

Hamas leaders have officially presented Ismail Haniyeh as their choice for Prime Minister, according to Hamas PLC faction head Mahmoud al-Zahar. PA President Abbas was expected to hand Mr. Haniyeh a formal letter authorizing him to form a Government. Hamas said it wanted a coalition, as it continued to meet with faction leaders to enlist their support. (*BBC*)

PA President Abbas presented a letter to Ismail Haniyeh, designating him as PA Prime Minister. In addition to the official appointment, the letter contained a one-page summary of Mr. Abbas' political positions, according to Palestinian sources. The letter asked the new Government to commit to agreements between Israel and the PA, including the principle of a two-state solution to the conflict. Mr. Haniyeh said, "We will study it ... we will answer soon to Abu Mazen.... President Abbas had asked Hamas to form a PA Cabinet and would have 35 days to do so." (*AFP, AP, BBC*)

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal said Iran would play an increasing role in Palestinian affairs and the political future of the Palestinians. "With respect to the challenges that we have ahead of us, Iran's role in the future of Palestine should continue and increase," he said at a joint press conference in Tehran with Iranian Foreign Minister Manoucherhr Mottaki. (*Ha'aretz*)

Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat criticized Hamas for not nominating a Christian as deputy speaker of the PLC. He said that during the last 10 years, the PLC had been strengthening its principle of partnership and that one of the two PLC deputy speakers had always been a Christian. (*Xinhua*)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert said that he did not rule out the possibility of holding peace talks with the Palestinians despite the decision to refrain from contacts with a Hamas-led Cabinet. "The chances of reaching a quick agreement with the Palestinians are smaller now that Hamas is in charge, but the hope has not disappeared...." (*Xinhua, Ha'aretz*)

The United States has backed Israel's move to withhold customs and tax monies collected by Israel on behalf of the Palestinians. "The US position is [that] this is a sovereign decision for the Government of Israel to make. We understand that decision," said State Department deputy spokesman Adam Ereli. (*AFP*)

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said, "The result of the Palestinian elections has brought a new structure. If we try to tame this new structure by economic methods, this cannot be called democracy. This would be controlled democracy which would be a disrespect to the Palestinian people." (*Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

US Secretary of State Rice arrived in Cairo for a five-day tour of the Middle East. A meeting was scheduled with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak focusing on regional developments, including the new Palestinian Government. (*BBC, Xinhua*)

22

A four-year-old Palestinian boy was seriously hurt by shrapnel from IDF shelling in the northern Gaza Strip. Sources said the boy was near a window in his home when he was struck. In south Jerusalem, two Palestinian youths carrying knives were arrested. Masked Palestinian gunmen stormed a government office in the southern Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, IDF troops near Jenin arrested a member of Islamic Jihad for possessing explosives. Qassam rockets landed south of Ashkelon. No injuries or damage was reported. Elsewhere, security forces arrested six "wanted" Palestinians. (*Ha'aretz*)

The IDF, using a bulldozer, destroyed a US-funded public park, including a children's playground and swimming pool, in Azzun, close to Qalqilya, on the grounds that it had been built without permission of the Israeli authorities. Construction had begun last November and was almost completed.

Azzun Mayor Ihssan Abdellatif said that the project had been financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The army also destroyed two other houses built "without permission" in two other villages in the Qalqilya area. (*AFP, Ha'aretz*)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert said that Israel would keep its commitment to evacuate illegal outposts. (*AFP, Ha'aretz*)

The IDF entered Kfar Qallil, a village in the northern West Bank, Palestinian security sources and witnesses said. The sources said that about 15 jeeps and one bulldozer had entered the village near the Balata refugee camp. The IDF took up positions around a house where members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades were present. An IDF spokesman confirmed the military activity in the village. (*AFP*)

Israel has barred all members of the Palestinian Legislative Council from travelling between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by cancelling their VIP travel privileges. Ministers of the PA would be allowed to continue to enjoy their VIP privileges for the time being. (*Xinhua*)

At a joint press conference with the head of the Hamas faction in the PLC, Mahmoud al-Zahar, the head of the Fatah section in the PLC, Azzam el-

Ahmad, announced that Fatah had agreed to join the new PA Cabinet led by Hamas. Mr. el-Ahmad said that there should first be an agreement on a "joint programme of the new Government." Mr. al-Zahar, who led the Hamas delegation at the talks in Gaza City, also said that "all the parties, including our brothers in Fatah, intend to participate in the Government". Both sides agreed to hold a series of coordination meetings in the coming days to study presentations given by each side. (AFP, Xinhua)

The head of Israel's central command, Gen. Yair Naveh, told reporters that the Israeli army had begun constructing a new road system across the occupied West Bank intended only for the use of Israeli settlers. He said that the roads, which Palestinians would not be allowed to drive on, "are an additional security measure" to separate the two communities living in the territory. Palestinians "would prefer to take separate roads in order to avoid delays and the humiliation they may go through at the military checkpoints," he said, vowing that "the road system used by the Palestinian population will by no means be inferior" to the Israeli one. (AFP)

Dozens of Fatah members and some employees of the PLC protested in front of the PLC building in Ramallah against Hamas' decision to fire PLC Secretary-General Ibrahim Khreisha. According to sources, Mr. Abd al-Aziz Dweik, the new PLC speaker, had made the decision. Mr. Dweik, along with 10 armed men, appeared at the PLC headquarters on 21 February to inform Mr. Khreisha of the decision. The office had been taken over by Mahmoud al-Ramhi, the Hamas MP designated to hold the post. Meanwhile, Fatah officials protested an announcement by Hamas that it would review all decisions made by the previous Government. Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that the move was unconstitutional and unacceptable. Hamas argued that the previous legislature had no right to pass new laws once the elections had taken place. (BBC, Xinhua)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during her five-day visit to the Middle East. According to Suleiman Awad, spokesman for President Mubarak, the President had reiterated to Ms. Rice that Egypt would not support efforts to cut off international aid to the Palestinian Authority. Mr. Mubarak had emphasized the importance of giving Hamas enough time to assess the current situation and define its positions according to the demands of President Mahmoud Abbas. (AP, BBC)

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak met with Israeli Labour Party Chairman Amir Peretz and party members Binyamin Ben Elizer, Ophir Paz-Pine and Isaac Herzog in Cairo to discuss how to transfer money to the PA without involving Hamas. The meeting focused on ways to strengthen the "moderates" in Gaza and to avoid taking collective punitive measures against the Palestinians. They discussed sending funds to PA President Abbas, who would commit to transferring the money to its intended destination, as well as sending money directly to non-governmental organizations in the Palestinian Territory. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa urged Hamas to recognize Israel by backing the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. "The Arab initiative is the proper door for Hamas to recognize the peace process in general with all its tenets," Mr. Moussa told a European Parliament hearing in Brussels.

He also urged the EU not to isolate Hamas and to continue giving aid to a Hamas-led Palestinian Cabinet. (AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters, DPA)

The Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani, announced an offer to finance the PA, after a meeting with Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal in Tehran, according to *Iranian State Radio*. Hamas has said it would accept money from any country or organization. Mr. Mashaal and a Hamas delegation were in Iran on their latest stop of a tour of Arab and Islamic nations to build support. According to Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev, Israel would block any money from Tehran. He warned the Palestinians against aligning with what he called "international pariahs." (AP, DowJones Select, Ha'aretz)

In Kuwait, the Salafi Movement, a Sunni group, called on Muslims and Arabs to offer financial support to Hamas, the "legitimate and elected representative" of the Palestinian people. The movement said Hamas was the target of "political blackmail" to force it to recognize Israel. (AP)

Israel joined forces with the PA to fight a possible outbreak of bird flu and foot-and-mouth disease, *The Jerusalem Post* reported. Uri Madar, the head of the agricultural division at the Erez District, was notified that 12 or 13 dead wildfowl had been found in Khan Yunis, where bird flu cases were reported for the first time on 17 February. Samples taken from the suspected livestock and dead wildfowl had been delivered by Palestinian officials from Gaza for tests in Israel. Mr. Madar said the outbreak of either disease would not only jeopardize Palestinians in Gaza but also the public in Israel. (Xinhua)

Capt. Yossi Tsemach, of the Israeli-Palestinian liaison committee at the Erez crossing between Gaza and Israel, said that the Israeli authorities were sticking to a ban on all meat imports from the Gaza Strip amid ongoing tests to determine whether suspect poultry was infected with bird flu. Israel had imposed the meat imports ban and the Agriculture Ministry had passed on recommendations to its Palestinian counterpart following the discovery of the deadly H5N1 virus in Egypt last week, Capt. Tsemach said. (AFP)

23

Five Palestinians were shot dead and six wounded in several incidents that occurred during an ongoing military operation in Nablus. Three of the Palestinians killed belonged to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The men died amid heavy shooting in the Balata refugee camp after more than 30 Israeli army jeeps and four bulldozers crowded into the area adjoining Nablus. According to *Ha'aretz*, Palestinians fired rocket-propelled grenades in the gunfight. Outgoing Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia strongly condemned the Balata incursion. In Gaza City, Sami Abu Zuhri, a spokesman for Hamas, condemned the "horrifying" Israeli operation, saying, "We urge the international community to live up to its responsibilities and stop this massacre instead of asking our people to stop resisting." (AFP, Ha'aretz)

In the village of Beit Sira, close to Ramallah, 10 demonstrators were wounded by rubber bullets fired by Israeli troops in skirmishes with Palestinian villagers protesting against the building of the separation barrier. About 150 villagers were trying to prevent two bulldozers from operating. (AFP)

The IDF said that it had arrested overnight 15 "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank: five Hamas members, two "Tanzim" members, four Islamic Jihad members, two weapon dealers and two other Palestinians. (www.idf.il)

Palestinians fired five Qassam rockets at Israel's western Negev region, one of which landed near the town of Ashkelon, causing no injuries or damage. The IDF responded by firing artillery at the rocket launching sites in the northern Gaza Strip. (Ynet, www.idf.il)

The IDF demolished structures that were part of a playground that was being built for the Palestinians by USAID in the village of Azzoun near Qalqilya, officials said. Israeli bulldozers had demolished structures the previous day at the site which was supposed to be a recreational park.

"USAID is funding a project called 'Parks', which is to build recreational areas," USAID spokeswoman Anna-Majja Litvak said. "This was one [project] within this programme and evidently the Israeli army has destroyed it," she added. The army confirmed that it had demolished a concrete structure, a concrete wall and a floor in Azzoun that had been built without permits, but said it did not know they were connected to a USAID project.

(AP)

Former PA Finance Minister Salam Fayyad held a first set of talks with Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar to discuss the possibility of joining a new coalition Government. (AFP)

Hamas said on its website that a top-level delegation headed by Khaled Mashaal would arrive in Moscow on 3 March for meetings with Russian officials. (AP)

British Prime Minister Tony Blair ruled out meeting leaders of Hamas to try to jump-start the stalled peace process between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. "I think that would cause confusion and it would make it appear that we were prepared to try to find a way forward without Hamas renouncing its desire to eliminate Israel. I don't think that would be sensible," he said, adding, "If they [Hamas] want our help ... it's got to be on the

basis that they recognize the existence of Israel and embrace a democratic and non-violent path." (AFP)

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said, "China advises the international community not to take any measures that might worsen the living situation of Palestinian people at this current stage". At this stage, China does not have plans to contact Hamas, Mr. Liu said. (Xinhua)

In Egypt, Muslim Brotherhood Supreme Guide Mehdi Akef urged Arab countries "not to succumb to pressure from the United States" pressing them to shun a Hamas-led Palestinian Government. Mr. Akef accused US Secretary of State Rice of travelling to "our Arab region to incite Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries so that they cut off their support for the Palestinian people." (AFP)

24

An Israeli tank opened fire and killed four unarmed Palestinians in the Gaza Strip who had approached the border fence with Israel near the Kissufim crossing. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

A Palestinian was killed by Israeli tank fire in the Gaza Strip when he attempted to plant an explosive device near the border fence with Israel south of the Kissufim crossing. (Ha'aretz, Ynet)

The Israeli Air Force fired several missiles at Palestinian militants in the northern Gaza Strip who, the army said, were preparing to launch rockets at Israel. The missiles hit a car containing Qassam rockets, which caused the car to explode. The occupants were unhurt, but two passers-by were slightly injured. (AP, DPA, Ha'aretz)

Four Qassam rockets fired from the Gaza Strip landed in Israel: the first two, in an open field near the southern town of Sderot, and the other two, south of Ashkelon. There were no injuries or damage. (Ynet)

Following the killing of five Palestinians in an IDF operation in Nablus the day before, PA President Abbas' spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina said, "[Mr. Abbas] has begun urgent contacts to ask the Security Council to meet as soon as possible to discuss the Israeli escalations and assassinations. ... President Abbas has sent messages to members of the Quartet to ask them to prevent the violations as soon as possible because they undermine the truce, which the Palestinian leadership is trying to maintain." (AFP, DPA)

The New York Times reported that the European Union was considering making direct payments to PA President Abbas as a way of supporting him while trying to maintain financial pressure on Hamas. The idea had been raised earlier in the week by EU High Representative Javier Solana after a conference call with other members of the Quartet, the paper said. (The New York Times)

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

"The Secretary-General is gravely concerned about the escalation of Israeli Defence Forces military operations in the past days, especially in Nablus and Gaza, which have resulted in a number of Palestinian deaths. Civilians are reportedly among the casualties. He also expresses concern about a marked increase in rocket attacks by Palestinian militants against Israeli targets.

"The Secretary-General renews his call to the parties to the conflict to abide by their obligations under international law, and in particular to ensure the protection of the civilian population, both Palestinian and Israeli."

(UN press release SG/SM/10358)

25

Israeli warplanes bombed eight roads in the northern Gaza Strip before dawn to prevent Palestinian militants from firing rockets at Israel. Even so, two rockets were fired later in the day, and Israeli artillery responded by shelling an uninhabited area near the border with Israel. (AFP, Xinhua, Ynet)

A 28-year-old Palestinian, Mussa Abu Shaluf, died of severe head injuries he had sustained on 9 February in Israeli tank shelling into the northern Gaza Strip. (AFP)

Israeli forces arrested two Palestinians in a raid on Jericho. The army said that one of them, an Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades member, had been involved in planning attacks against Israeli civilians and had recently been planning another. (AP, www.idf.il)

In a letter addressed to the Quartet members, Quartet Envoy James Wolfensohn said that the PA would face financial collapse within two weeks now that Israel had cut off tax transfers. "Without a better effort, public finances will not be stabilized and there will be no alternative but deterioration in the overall situation," Mr. Wolfensohn said. (AP, Reuters)

US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch met with PA President Abbas in Ramallah. Mr. Welch said that the United States would continue to give humanitarian aid to ease the plight of the Palestinians despite Hamas' election victory. "The United States has long been a supporter of the Palestinian people through a substantial contribution of our foreign assistance funds.... We continue to be devoted to the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people and it shall remain so," Mr. Welch said. He was to meet with Israeli officials on the following day.

(AFP, AP, IPC, Reuters)

26

The IDF fired artillery at open areas in the Gaza Strip from which Palestinians had been firing rockets at Israel. Palestinians opened fire at an Israeli vehicle south of Nablus, damaging the vehicle but causing no injuries. The IDF arrested 26 "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank: four Fatah members, three PFLP members, six Hamas members, and 13 "Tanzim" members. (www.idf.il)

Two Qassam rockets fired from the northern Gaza Strip landed in southern Israel, causing no injuries or damage. (Ynet)

Two Palestinian youths were shot and injured, one of them critically, by Israeli soldiers at a military checkpoint near Anata, north-east of Jerusalem, when they tried to stop the soldiers from harassing a Palestinian girl. (IPC)

Israeli Defence Minister Mofaz said during a Cabinet meeting that he had instructed the Army and Shin Bet to step up operations against Palestinian militant organizations, especially cells in the Gaza Strip responsible for Qassam rocket attacks. Mr. Mofaz also said, "The targeted killing strategy will continue in the West Bank, and we shall find our way to the doorstep of each terrorist and terror mastermind." (Ynet)

Speaking during a meeting with the residents of the settlement of "Oranit", Defence Minister Mofaz said that the Government planned to retain the settlements of "Karnei Shomron", "Rehan", "Kedumim" and "Shaked" in addition to the Jordan Valley, "Ariel", "Ma'aleh Adumim" and "Gush Etzion" settlement blocks, whether under a peace plan with the Palestinians or in a unilateral withdrawal. Mr. Mofaz made no mention of the future of the "Ofra-Beit El" settlement block, "Hebron", or "Itamar and Eilon Moreh". Mr. Mofaz's list went a little farther than Acting Prime Minister Olmert's list had detailed three weeks ago. (The Jerusalem Post)

27

A Qassam rocket landed in a kibbutz south of the Israeli town of Ashkelon, causing no injuries. The Israeli army fired artillery at the area from where the rocket had been launched. (Ynet)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said in interviews with Israeli media: "Since the elections to the Palestinian Council, Hamas holds a majority in the parliament and will form the next Palestinian Government. The ball is in the Palestinian court, and those who must put it in play are the members of

the future Hamas Government. Abu Mazen [PA President Abbas], in this context, is irrelevant." "I have no doubt that Hamas, out of a desire for legitimacy and fear that money will not be forthcoming, will be talking right now in terms of peace and friendship. Our job is to see to it that the international community doesn't embrace Abu Mazen or Hamas' moderate statements. I am going to Europe in order to bolster this message." (www.mfa.gov.il)

Hamas' Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem, telling reporters after the meeting that he had met with Mr. Moallem for "consultations on political issues" and on Syria's support for the Palestinians. Commenting on efforts to form a Palestinian Government, Mr. Mashaal said that Hamas was in the "consultation stage" with various Palestinian factions and personalities. (AP)

As EU foreign ministers met to discuss how to respond to the formation of a Palestinian Government by Hamas, EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner said that the European Commission would release €120 million (US\$ 142 million) to the Palestinians to help the PA's transition Government pay for its basic needs, such as energy bills and salaries, for about the next two months. Ms. Ferrero-Waldner said that €40 million would be used directly for the PA's energy bills, and there would be €64 million in direct aid channelled through UN agencies. Also, the Commission aimed to release €17.5 million from a World Bank trust fund to pay the salaries of the transition Government's officials. (AFP, AP, DPA, Reuters)

At the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Secretary-General Kofi Annan made the following remarks when asked about his recommendation to donors in light of the approval by the EU of aid to the Palestinian Authority, and what his hopes were for the new Palestinian Government:

"The Quartet Envoy, Mr. Jim Wolfensohn, is working very hard to ensure that we receive enough money to support the Palestinian Authority. I just came from Doha last night and in my contacts in the region, I also encouraged the Governments to make financial resources available to the Palestinian Authority. Of course, with Hamas, there are three requirements that the Quartet has made: that they should transform themselves into a political party, they should honour the commitments undertaken by the Palestinian Authority, including Oslo and the Road Map, and they should renounce the use of force. Obviously, we did not expect them to do it on day one, but you have three months of transition period which I think was fortuitous, because I think Hamas, I suspect, was as surprised as many people that they won, and won so massively, and they needed a bit of time also to organize themselves to govern. But the fact that they are being asked to transform themselves into a political party should not surprise anyone. History is replete with armed movements that have transformed themselves into political parties and are governing democratic countries today. Hamas should aim to join those groups of movements which have gone through that transformation. They won the elections, and we have to respect the choice of the Palestinian people."

(United Nations Office at Geneva)

A report published by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said Israel's tightening of security procedures had exacted a heavy humanitarian toll in the OPT since the Palestinian parliamentary elections last month. According to an advance copy of the report obtained by *Ha'aretz*, it also warned that Israel's withholding of VAT and customs duties intended for the PA would place the PA in danger of collapse, limiting its ability to provide basic services such as health, education, water and electricity, sewage and garbage collection, and policing to the population in the West Bank and Gaza. (*Ha'aretz*)

The United States welcomed a decision by the EU to grant US\$ 143 million in urgent aid to the Palestinians before a Government led by Hamas took over. "It is a sign that we are all working together," said State Department deputy spokesman Adam Ereli. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had spoken to senior EU officials the previous day, the spokesman said. "We are all working together to prevent a collapse of the interim PA Government and to support the Palestinian people," Mr. Ereli said. (*Ha'aretz*)

Acting Prime Minister Olmert said that he hoped PA President Abbas would stay in office, playing down remarks made earlier by Israeli Foreign Minister Livni branding Mr. Abbas as "irrelevant." (*Ha'aretz*)

Dor-Allon, a private Israeli firm that provides gasoline to the PA, said a check for more than \$22 million had bounced last week and announced that it had stopped deliveries. (AFP)

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin said that a Hamas delegation was expected to arrive in Moscow on 3 March. (Itar-Tass)

28

The IDF said that it had arrested overnight seven "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank: two Islamic Jihad members in Nablus; one Palestinian in Al-Judeida, south of Jenin; one Islamic Jihad member south-west of Bethlehem; two Hamas members in Hebron; and one Palestinian in Beit Fajjar, south of Bethlehem. (www.idf.il)

Two Qassam rockets launched from the northern Gaza Strip landed in an open area south of the Israeli city of Sderot, causing no injuries or damage. (www.idf.il)

A Palestinian man stabbed two Israelis near the "Gush Etzion" settlement block. One of the two, a 25-year-old man, was moderately injured and the other, a 17-year-old girl, slightly injured. The assailant was shot and seriously wounded by Israeli soldiers. (*Ha'aretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Ynet*)

A group of armed Israeli settlers severely beat up and injured a 49-year-old Palestinian woman in Yatta, south of Hebron. (Wafa)

UN Special Coordinator Alvaro de Soto briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. (UN press release SC/8652)

In a press release, UNRWA said that the European Commission had announced a donation of US\$ 76 million to the Agency for its annual budget. Karen AbuZayd, UNRWA's Commissioner-General, welcomed the European Commission's latest donation: "We are grateful for the Commission's timely contribution to UNRWA's 2006 regular budget. It will enable UNRWA to continue to deliver critically needed humanitarian services to Palestine refugees without interruption." (un.org/unrwa)

At the first meeting of UNRWA's newly expanded Advisory Commission in Amman, Commissioner-General Karen AbuZayd, said, "The overall security situation in the Gaza Strip has deteriorated further, and the situation as regards freedom of movement of Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has worsened". Referring to speculations about continuation of assistance following the Palestinian elections, the Commissioner-General emphasized that "UNRWA will continue to provide all the services under its mandate, in full and on time, for as long as the political and financial support of the international community is forthcoming, and security conditions allow". (un.org/unrwa)

In Paris, French President Jacques Chirac told visiting UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan that the new Palestinian Government to be formed by Hamas had to recognize Israel and renounce violence, his office said. (AFP)

Austrian and Israeli Foreign Ministers Ursula Plassnik and Tzipi Livni will meet in Vienna to discuss the role of Hamas and other Middle East issues the following day, according to media reports. Ms. Livni will also meet with President Heinz Fischer and Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel. (DPA)

Moussa Abu Marzouk, Hamas political Bureau Deputy Chief, dismissed reports in the Arab press that Iran would give as much as US\$ 250 million in aid to the PA after the expected halt in other aid. Mr. Abu Marzouk said that Iran had promised "to support the Palestinian people in general, without specifying the kind or amount of support," referring to a pledge made by Ali Larijani, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security

Council, in talks with Hamas Political Bureau chief Khaled Mashaal in Tehran on 22 February. *(AP)*

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said: “The negotiations with the Hamas delegation will be held in Moscow, and I will receive them,” adding that Russia would “move practically toward the implementation of the decisions made earlier by the Quartet.” *(Interfax)*
