

Division for Palestinian Rights
***Chronological Review of Events Relating to the
 Question of Palestine***
 MONTHLY MEDIA MONITORING REVIEW
March 2005

Monthly Highlights

- The London Meeting on Supporting the Palestinian Authority, convened by the UK, sets out the participants' political vision, Palestinian Authority's plans for institutional renewal and international community's commitments in support of the Palestinian Authority. ([1 March](#))
- The Quartet, at the principals level, meets on the sidelines of the London Meeting, saying, "A state of scattered territories will not work." ([1 March](#))
- The Secretary-General visits Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Mr. Sharon says Israel would evacuate "unauthorized" settlement outposts built since March 2001 "in accordance with its previous commitments". ([13 March](#)) The next day, the Secretary-General meets with PA President Abbas and FM Al-Kidwa in Ramallah whom he tells the process establishing a registry for wall-related claims was "going ahead". ([14 March](#))
- The IDF withdraws from Jericho ([16 March](#)) and Tulkarm ([22 March](#)), handing over security responsibility to the Palestinian Authority.
- The LAS summit, convened in Algiers, revives its 2002 Beirut peace initiative. ([23 March](#)).

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The Israeli army said it had arrested four wanted Fatah members east of Qalqilya and three wanted Islamic Jihad militants north-east of Tulkarm. (www.idf.il)

The Quartet issued a [statement](#) after its principals met on the sidelines of the London Meeting on Supporting the Palestinian Authority convened by the United Kingdom. "Quartet members agree on the need to ensure that a new Palestinian state is truly viable, including with contiguous territory in the West Bank. A state of scattered territories will not work," the statement said. (www.ue.eu.int)

The London Meeting on Supporting the Palestinian Authority was [chaired by Prime Minister Tony Blair](#) and attended by the US, the Russian Federation, the EU and the UN Secretary-General; European, Arab and other countries; and the donor community. The meeting issued "[Conclusions](#)" setting out the political vision expressed and supported by the participants, the PA's own plans for institutional renewal, and a set of clear commitments by the international community in support of the PA's programme. PA President Mahmoud Abbas [said](#) in his speech, "The most important message is our complete readiness to exert 100 per cent effort in the domain of security. ... To that end, we deployed our troops on the ground and we took a final decision concerning the consolidation of the security agencies." Mr. Abbas said his plan would include "eliminating multiple lines of authority and reinforcing political plurality." US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice [said](#), "The Palestinian Authority needs to reform its security institutions in order to fight terrorism and lawlessness effectively. The United States is prepared to work with partners in the region and around the world to realize this essential goal. General Ward ... will soon relocate to the region to lead our efforts." Ms. Rice further said, "Israel must also take no actions that prejudice a final settlement, and must help ensure that a new Palestinian state is truly viable. A state of scattered territories will not work." Statements were also made by [Secretary-General Kofi Annan](#), [EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana](#), and others. At a joint press conference with Secretary Rice, France's Foreign Minister Michel Barnier offered to host a follow-up conference stating, "[We must] think about, and I suggested this in the name of the French Government, [holding] an international conference in the second semester of 2005 with the Israelis, the Palestinians and the entire international community in order to take the next steps after this meeting." (*AFP, AP, BBC, Ha'aretz, Reuters, www.ue.eu.int, www.fco.gov.uk, www.state.gov, UN press release SG/SM/9743-PAL/2021*)

The office of Palestinian National Security Advisor Jibril Rajoub announced he would travel to Damascus in coming days to meet with representatives of Palestinian factions based in Syria, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Officials said talks would focus on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the upcoming dialogue among Palestinian factions in Cairo, which had been postponed from 5 March to 15 March. (*Deutsche Press-Agentur (DPA), Xinhua*)

PA President Abbas made his first visit to the European Union headquarters and held talks with senior European Union officials. Mr. Abbas said he was serious about implementing reforms and expressed his optimism that Palestinians and Israelis could take advantage of a "new era of peace and hope" to reach a final peace deal that would see the realization [of] Palestinian statehood. Mr. Abbas told officials it was unfortunate that until then, the dream of a Palestinian State had not been possible, and "We will continue to work to get this as soon as possible". Mr. Abbas met with [EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana](#) before holding talks with European Commission President José Manuel Barroso. Mr. Solana told reporters, "The EU is going to be behind the peace process for the realisation of a dream ... a Palestinian State". When asked when the Palestinians might get statehood, Mr. Solana said, "The sooner the better." Mr. Abbas also met with European Parliament President Josep Borrell. Mr. Borrell said if the Israeli-Palestinian peace process made sufficient progress, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which he would chair from that month, could hold a special session in the Palestinian territories in November. (AP, DPA, Ha'aretz)

Israel's Vice Prime Minister Ehud Olmert expressed Israel's disappointment about the London meeting of 1 March. He told *Israel Radio* the meeting skirted the real issue of urging the Palestinian Authority to deliver on its promise to fight terrorism. "The fact is that terrorism is continuing, and we have yet to see any genuine effort by the Palestinian leadership. This is certainly worrisome and cannot be ignored," Mr. Olmert said. (Xinhua)

Sakhr Habash, a high-ranking Fatah official, said the PA would not take any action against Islamic Jihad, which had been responsible for the suicide bombing in Tel Aviv the previous weekend. Instead, it had asked Islamic Jihad to carry out its own investigation and take action against whoever prepared the attack. "Since Islamic Jihad has announced it was against the operation, which was carried out against its knowledge, it was agreed that it would carry out an internal investigation and take action against those responsible for it," he said. (DPA)

Sheikh Sa'eed Seyam, a senior Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, said the group might participate in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections due to take place on 17 July. He said a final decision was up to the group's Shoura Council. He said some Christian Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank, who had asked to be included in the Hamas list, would run in the elections. Mr. Seyam reiterated that the movement's decision to halt attacks "was made after an in-depth discussion with all Hamas institutions, including Hamas prisoners in Israeli jails." (Xinhua)

Sheikh Nafez Azzam, a senior Islamic Jihad leader, said the members of the movement's delegation that would participate in the planned 15 March Palestinian dialogue meeting in Cairo would all be from abroad, mainly from Syria. Mr. Azzam said that the meeting's agenda included discussion of issues such as political partnership, agreeing on a comprehensive national programme and organizing the internal Palestinian structure. (Xinhua)

The Israeli army was dropping plans to build a wide moat along Egypt's border with Gaza to thwart the construction of tunnels, favouring instead a less invasive barrier of concrete fences and underground walls, military officials said. The original plan, which would have required the large-scale demolition of Palestinian homes, was dropped after it became clear Attorney-General Menachem Mazuz would most likely have opposed those plans. (AP)

The IDF discovered a makeshift bomb factory near Jenin. The troops found several pipe bombs and raw ingredients used to manufacture dozens more, the army said. (AP)

A top aide to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Israel has warned PA President Mahmoud Abbas of a bleak future unless he crushed militants. "If the Palestinian Authority will not start acting against the terrorists, the future will be very bleak for Abu Mazen," he said. (AFP)

In its third quarter 2004 report, "Statistical Monitoring of the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Palestinian Society", the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) stated that the Israeli blockades (closures, separation barrier) represented a main obstacle to health, educational and living services. It said the Occupied Palestinian Territory unemployment rate in the third quarter of 2004 rose to 26.8 per cent, as compared to 10 per cent in the third quarter of 2000. Concerning the impact of the separation barrier and other Israeli measures on education and health sectors, PCBS mentioned that 48 per cent of households resorted to taking alternative roads to get to schools and 81.5 per cent to universities. (PCBS, Wafa)

At the building site of the separation barrier, dozens of Palestinian youths and left-wing Israelis clashed with border police in the "Har Adar" area, *Israel Radio* reported. The protestors pelted the police officers with stones and the police responded with stun grenades and tear gas. There were no injuries.

Two of the demonstrators were arrested. (The Jerusalem Post)

A 16-year-old Palestinian, Fadi Qneira, who had been shot in the chest and the back by Israeli soldiers in January 2004 during an army incursion into Jenin, died from his wounds, according to a medical source. (AFP, www.ipc.gov.ps)

Security forces arrested a Fatah activist near Nablus on suspicion of planning to carry out a terrorist attack. (Ha'aretz)

The Israeli army stormed the village of Attil, north of Tulkarm, raided several houses and arrested an Islamic Jihad member. Also, witnesses said the army had raided the village of Al-Yamun, north-west of Jenin, conducting a house-to-house search amid heavy gunfire. Israeli forces stormed the village of Tubas, north-east of Nablus, and set up a military checkpoint north of the city. Near Qalqilya, Israeli forces stormed the towns of Azzun and Kafir Thulth amid heavy gunfire and set up a checkpoint between the towns. Another checkpoint was set up between Azzun and Jayyus in the province. (AFP, www.idf.il, www.ipc.gov.ps)

Israeli forces wounded several Palestinians during a demonstration against the separation wall in the village of Beit Surik, north-west of Jerusalem. Eyewitnesses told the *Wafa* news agency that Israeli forces had opened fire and had thrown gas canisters at a peaceful demonstration, wounding and suffocating dozens of Palestinians. Israeli forces had declared they would expropriate hundreds of dunums of land in the village for the construction of the separation wall. (www.ipc.gov.ps)

Israeli forces imposed a curfew on the towns of Al-Eizariya and Abu Dis, east of Jerusalem. Israeli forces also besieged the campus of Al-Quds University. (www.ipc.gov.ps)

At UN headquarters in New York, UK Permanent Representative to the UN Emyr Jones Parry gave a briefing on the London Meeting on Supporting the Palestinian Authority, held on 1 March. (www.un.org/news)

The Israeli army issued orders to seize some 10,000 dunums of land in the towns of Al-Sammu, Yatta and Al-Thaheriyya near Hebron for the construction of the separation wall, the *Wafa* news agency reported. (Wafa, www.ipc.gov.ps)

Israeli Vice Premier Shimon Peres and PA Civil Affairs Minister Mohammed Dahlan met in Tel Aviv to discuss economic and civil cooperation during and

after Israel's expected pullout from the Gaza Strip. It was the first official meeting between the two sides since a Palestinian suicide attack in Tel Aviv on 25 February. The two reportedly discussed the possibility of transferring functioning businesses and greenhouses to the Palestinians after the evacuation. (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, www.mfa.gov.il)

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Medical sources and witnesses in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip said Israeli forces stationed at the border with Egypt had opened heavy gunfire at residential houses in the city, and a 13-year-old Palestinian had been seriously injured in the head. Several houses were damaged by the Israeli shelling. (www.ipc.gov.ps)

The Israeli army said it had arrested four Islamic Jihad militants in Jenin and a Fatah operative north of Nablus. (AFP, Ha'aretz, www.idf.il)

Two explosive devices were detonated near Israeli troops operating close to the Balata refugee camp near Nablus, causing no injuries. Also, a car bomb exploded some two kilometres from the Joseph's Tomb shrine in Nablus, as hundreds of Israeli worshippers prayed at the shrine. The bomb went off near Israeli soldiers tasked with protecting the worshippers. No injuries were reported, but adjacent cars and buildings were damaged. (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, Reuters)

An Israeli motorcyclist was wounded by Palestinian stone throwers on the Jerusalem-"Modi'in" road and several cars were damaged. Dozens of Palestinians threw stones at a construction site of the separation barrier near Beit Surik, north-west of Jerusalem, wounding an Israeli police officer. Israeli border police arrested four Palestinian stone throwers at a construction site of the separation barrier near the "Har Adar" settlement. (Ha'aretz)

PA President Abbas met with Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak in Sharm el-Sheikh to brief him on the London Meeting. Egypt's presidential spokesman Suleiman Awad said, "President Mubarak ... promised to maintain his efforts with all parties, including Israel, to keep the current momentum alive." Mr. Abbas also met with [Egypt's] intelligence chief Omar Suleiman. (AFP, Reuters, Xinhua)

PA Civil Affairs Minister Mohammed Dahlan said Israel was violating the terms of the agreement reached between him and Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz by not removing checkpoints around Palestinian cities. (Ha'aretz)

Yemen is planning to host talks this month between PA President Abbas and Hamas political bureau chief Khaled Mashaal on a ceasefire with Israel, the Yemeni state news agency SABA reported. "President Mahmoud Abbas will visit Yemen with Khaled Mashaal in the next few weeks to bring the points of view of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority closer," the agency quoted Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh as saying. (DPA, Reuters)

The Israeli army said Palestinians had opened fire at an IDF outpost near the "Gush Katif junction". No injuries were reported. (www.idf.il)

The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) said it would provide £10 million directly to the Palestinian Authority's budget through the World Bank-led Financial Management Reform Trust Fund. DFID said the £10 million would bring total UK financial assistance to the Palestinians that year to £61 million. (www.dfid.gov.uk)

France's former Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, who headed the 260-member EU observer team that monitored the Palestinian presidential election, presented to Israel his final report on the election. He had submitted the report to the Palestinian Authority the day before. In a meeting with Foreign Minister Director-General Ron Prosor, Mr. Rocard suggested that new arrangements be made in Jerusalem to allow more Palestinians to vote there in the upcoming PLC elections in July 2005, beyond the few thousand who had been allowed to vote in the presidential election. Among Mr. Rocard's suggestions were to set up temporary polling places or to allow the voting to take place in buildings belonging to international organizations. Mr. Prosor said Israel would look into the possibility of creating new arrangements but would not do anything that would undermine Israel's "sovereignty" over Jerusalem. In addition to the Jerusalem issue, Mr. Rocard said there had been some problems regarding movement and access to polling places, and closures and blockades had had a negative impact on the election campaigns. Mr. Rocard also met with Prime Minister Sharon's Special Advisor Dov Weissglas.

(The Jerusalem Post)

4

Three Palestinian children were seriously injured when an explosive device left by the IDF in previous incursions exploded in the Rafah refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip, Palestinian medical sources and witnesses said. Al-Najjar hospital sources said Ibrahim Al-Najjar, 14, was critically wounded and lost a leg, while two others, Amjad Nofal, 9 months, and Ahmed Qoffa, 12, were also wounded (AFP, AP, Wafa)

In the village of Al-Khadir, east of Bethlehem, the IDF set up a new checkpoint at the main street of the town and prevented pedestrians and vehicles from passing. The IDF had also established a new checkpoint at the entrance of the town of Tammun, north of Nablus, witnesses said. (Wafa)

According to a survey published in Ha'aretz, 68.5 per cent of Israelis would vote for the disengagement plan if it were put to referendum, while 27.6 per cent would vote against it. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

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The IDF, backed by tanks and armoured vehicles, went into the town of Yatta, south of Hebron, and launched a house-to-house search campaign, arresting Mohammed Abu Zahra, 26, leading him into an unknown place. Israeli soldiers also raided a house and forced its inhabitants to leave. Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers stormed the Zeita village, north of Tulkarm, where eyewitnesses reported a school was besieged and students prevented from reaching their classrooms. Three schoolboys were held for more than three hours and finally released. (Wafa)

Members of the High Islamic Committee in Jerusalem and the Supreme Council of Islamic Judiciary (SCIJ) denounced Israel's detention of SCIJ chief, Sheik Tayssir Al-Tamini, calling it an attack against an Islamic and national symbol. They said his detention enabled extremist Jewish groups in Jerusalem to fulfil their plans against Christian and Moslem shrines in the holy city. (Wafa)

Jordan's Foreign Minister, Hani Al-Mulki, embarked on a trip to the West Bank and Israel. He met with PA President Abbas in Ramallah, where he discussed the Sharm el-Sheikh recommendations and the demands of the Palestinians ahead of his meetings with the Israeli side. In Israel, he met with Prime Minister Sharon, Vice Premier Peres and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom. In his meetings with the Israeli leaders, Mr. Al-Mulki called for intense peace efforts. A statement issued by his office indicated that Mr. Sharon told the visiting Jordanian Foreign Minister that President Abbas had made positive moves but had yet to take active steps against militants, and indicated that, "As long as we make progress because of temporary calm, we are held hostage by the (violent) groups, which will destroy the process as they did in 2003." After meeting with Mr. Sharon, Mr. Al-Mulki said, "We have been saying for a long time that we want peace for future generations." Mr. Al-Mulki spoke of Jordan's desire to resume the diplomatic process with Israel and promoted cooperative ventures such as the construction of a Dead Sea-Red Sea canal and a joint Eilat-Aqaba airport. He also suggested moving the Jordanian Al-Bader Brigade, part of the Palestinian Liberation Army, from Jordan to the West Bank to help maintain security. (AP, AFP, Ha'aretz, Xinhua)

Sources in Jerusalem said Israel was considering the release of two or three Jordanian prisoners who were two and a half years away from completing their prison sentences. Israel also intended to release about 40 other Jordanians imprisoned for lesser offenses. The visiting Jordanian Minister Al-Mulki, who met with Israel's Foreign Minister Shalom, said the prisoners' release was a top priority for Jordan, stressing that the prisoners "must be released as part of

implementing the peace agreement.” (*Ha’aretz*)

6

Palestinian security forces arrested and interrogated five Palestinians from Tulkarm suspected of involvement in a Tel Aviv suicide bombing, security sources said. The five men were being held in Jericho. (*Reuters*)

Israeli and Palestinian officials said the commander of the Israeli forces in the West Bank, Gen. Gadi Eizenkopf, met with his Palestinian counterpart, Hajj Ismail Jabber, to discuss the planned handover of Tulkarm to the PA. Mr. Ismail Jabber said, “It was agreed in principle that the Israeli army will begin on 8 March withdrawing from Tulkarm and the areas around the town, and afterward we will discuss the Israeli withdrawal from the other towns in the West Bank.” Israeli and Palestinian officials said the commander of the Israeli forces in the West Bank, Gen. Gadi Eizenkopf, met with his Palestinian counterpart, Hajj Ismail Jabber, to discuss the planned handover of Tulkarm to the PA. Mr. Ismail Jabber said, “It was agreed in principle that the Israeli army will begin on 8 March withdrawing from Tulkarm and the areas around the town, and afterward we will discuss the Israeli withdrawal from the other towns in the West Bank.” (*AP, AFP, DPA, Ha’aretz*)

Jordan’s King Abdullah II made a brief visit to Saudi Arabia, where he reiterated the need to activate the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut summit to help end the conflict with Israel and establish peace in the region. During his visit to Riyadh, Saudi King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah expressed support for the Palestinian leadership in its efforts to entrench security, build efficient national institutions and establish a viable and independent State. (*Petra*)

The Associated Press published a count of 514 Palestinian and 97 Israeli children, aged 16 and under, who died during 4 years of conflict, providing a breakdown by age as follows:

Under 5 years:	26 Israelis, 38 Palestinians
Ages 6 to 11:	15 Israelis, 94 Palestinians
Ages 12 to 15:	37 Israelis, 259 Palestinians
Age 16:	19 Israelis, 123 Palestinians

In a telephone conversation, PA President Abbas discussed with President Jacques Chirac of France the conclusions of the London Meeting held on 1 March, and what had been implemented since the Sharm el-Sheikh summit held on 8 February. President Chirac reiterated France’s commitment to supporting the peace process and assisting the Palestinian people. (*Wafa*)

Villagers of Jerusalem’s Beit Surik defied the IDF bulldozing their land for the construction of the separation barrier, when hundreds of residents organized several peaceful rallies. “The wall of death kills our daily life. It separates us from our villages and farms,” said a protestor. (*Wafa*)

In its meeting, headed by PA President Mahmoud Abbas, in Ramallah, the PLO Executive Committee asserted the importance of implementing the London Meeting commitments, and welcomed its conclusions concerning the rebuilding of the PA’s economic and security institutions. It reiterated the necessity to revitalize the Quartet’s role. The Executive Committee called on the United Nations, the Security Council and the Quartet to stop Israel’s policy of building the wall and settlement expansion in Jerusalem. (*Wafa*)

Palestinian security sources said Palestinian gunmen had shot and killed in Ramallah 30-year-old Ahmad Al-Tarifi, a taxi driver, accused of collaboration with the enemy. (*UPI*)

PA Minister of Civil Affairs Mohammed Dahlan said Palestinian security forces had taken all steps necessary to prevent attacks by Palestinian militants on Israel. He said, “Palestinian security forces would not only prevent attacks against Israel,” but authorities would also take “legal measures against those who carry them out or stand behind them.” Mr. Dahlan called upon Israel “to start immediately easing the daily life of the Palestinians, mainly (by allowing) free access for people and goods at crossings and checkpoints, as well as easing the process of export and import.” (*DPA*)

7

The PA Ministry of Prisoners’ Affairs said 310 Palestinian children, including 11 girls, were still in Israeli prisons. Of that number, 25 per cent were sick; 4 per cent were being detained without charges. (*Wafa*)

In Hebron, Palestinian militants wounded two Israeli border policemen in a shooting attack on a military post near the Tomb of the Patriarchs (Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi). One of the border policemen was seriously wounded. The army said the shots came from the Hebron city centre and that troops were searching for the attackers. After the attack, the IDF imposed a curfew on the old city of Hebron, rounded up about 100 people for questioning and conducted house-to-house searches, Palestinian officials said. Israeli military officials said the army had closed off certain areas of the city as part of their searches. (*AP, Ha’aretz*)

Palestinian police destroyed a tunnel linking the southern Gaza Strip and Egypt as part of a campaign to eliminate passages. Police officer Tarek Abu Hashem said the tunnel was the eleventh passageway that has been destroyed by Palestinian police in recent weeks. Mr. Abu Hashem said the operation was being conducted in coordination with Israeli forces. (*UPI*)

In the Bil’in village west of Ramallah, Israeli soldiers wounded several Palestinians protesting the razing of land. (*Wafa*)

Israeli troops advanced into several villages in and around Tulkarm and set up checkpoints, restricting residents’ movement. Israeli troops stormed the Tell village, south-west of Nablus, searched a number of houses, and arrested one resident in the village. Israeli troops also stormed the Al-Fawwar refugee camp south of Hebron to search for wanted Palestinians. (*International Press Centre*)

The Israeli army said it had arrested a wanted Hamas member in Ramallah. The army had also discovered an explosive device weighing 15 kg in Kfar Tel, south-west of Nablus. The device was detonated in a controlled manner. Palestinian gunmen opened fire at an army checkpoint west of Nablus, causing no injuries. (www.idf.il)

Speaking to reporters in Ramallah, PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia described Israel’s planned withdrawal from the West Bank city of Tulkarm on 8 March as “a very small step.” He expressed the hope that the Tulkarm pullout “will be followed by a pullout from the other West Bank cities and regions.” (*UPI*)

The Palestinian Legislative Council extended the mandate of parliamentary speaker Rawhi Fattouh by two months, ahead of legislative elections due later that year. (*AFP*)

PA Minister of Culture Yahya Yakhlef said Israeli authorities were hampering the holding of Palestine’s fourth book exhibition by denying publishers access to the PA territory. Mr. Yakhlef said his ministry was determined to hold the exposition on the fixed date 14 March, adding that the number of books to be displayed at the fair were expected to reach half a million. He pleaded with UNESCO to exert pressure on Israel to ease restrictions. (*The Palestinian Information Center*)

8

A large contingent of Israeli troops invaded Jenin early in the morning under a barrage of heavy gunfire and then imposed a curfew on the area. Local Palestinian sources said the troops had detained eight residents. Israeli troops also set up several checkpoints in and around Nablus. Israeli soldiers in armoured vehicles broke into Azzun, east of Qalqilya, where they arrested two Palestinians. (*International Press Centre*)

Wafa reported that Israeli troops had stormed the house of a Palestinian prisoner in Hebron, arresting 17 family members. (*Wafa*)

Israeli security sources disclosed that the Shin Bet security agency had arrested on 31 January a 28-year-old Palestinian police officer, Mohammed Abu Eida,

alleged to have taken part in the killing of two Israeli reserve soldiers lynched and killed by an angry Palestinian mob in Ramallah in October 2000. (AFP, AP, Ynet)

A 49-year-old Palestinian, Yusef Abu Jazar, was critically wounded by Israeli gunfire in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, according to medical sources. Mr. Jazar was shot in the abdomen when Israeli soldiers opened fire at Palestinian houses from their post on the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. (Xinhua)

IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon told a security conference that Israel's strategic goal was to phase out Palestinian labour in Israel by 2008. "This is our policy, this is our political directive and this is because of what has happened here over the last four and a half years," Mr. Ya'alon said. However, a military official said Israel would allow goods to flow freely through Israel's borders with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. (AP)

Israeli Defence Minister Mofaz told *Israel Radio* that Israel had not finalized a timetable for the transfer of security responsibility in five West Bank cities to the Palestinians. PA President Abbas, in his address to the Palestinian Legislative Council, accused Israel of undermining peace efforts by dragging its feet over promises to free Palestinian prisoners and pull back from West Bank cities. "The Israeli delay in implementing the commitments constitutes a threat to what we have succeeded in achieving and gives excuses to those who are plotting to sabotage the entire peace process," Mr. Abbas said. (AFP, Ha'aretz, Reuters, Xinhua)

After a meeting with PA President Abbas at the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing, Defence Minister Mofaz announced that Israel would turn over the security responsibility in Jericho and Tulkarm to Palestinian control in coming days, but disagreements remained over how much land around the towns would be transferred. PA President Abbas said, "We are not talking about towns, but also surrounding areas. ... If there are checkpoints, they must be removed." (AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

During a meeting with Defence Minister Mofaz and heads of security forces, Prime Minister Sharon decided that Jericho would be the first of the five West Bank cities to be handed over to Palestinian control. (Ha'aretz)

According to a report commissioned by the Israeli Government and compiled by former prosecutor Talia Sasson, unauthorized settlement outposts had spread in the West Bank with state funding. "It seems as if blatant violations of the law have become institutional and institutionalised," stated the report. It detailed involvement by the Housing Ministry, Israel's immigrants agency and the army in providing funds and infrastructure needed to erect outposts, some on Palestinian private property. "The process of outpost expansion is profoundly under way," the report said. (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

US President Bush said in a speech at the National Defence University, "In spite of attacks by extremists, the world is seeing hopeful progress in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. There is only one outcome that will end the tyranny, danger, violence and hopelessness, and meet the aspirations of all people in the region: We seek two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. And that goal is within reach, if all the parties meet their responsibilities and if terrorism is brought to an end. ... Israel must freeze settlement activity, help the Palestinians build a thriving economy, and ensure that a new Palestinian State is truly viable, with contiguous territory on the West Bank. Palestinian leaders must fight corruption, encourage free enterprise, rest true authority with the people, and actively confront terrorist groups." (www.whitehouse.gov)

The UN International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People opened at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The theme of the Meeting was "Implementing the ICJ Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory - The role of Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society." The Secretary-General's [message](#) to the Meeting was delivered by Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. (UN News Centre, Xinhua)

The [Knesset Forum on the Middle East](#) held a special hearing on the prospects for cooperation with the Palestinian Authority. More than 25 nations, represented through the diplomatic corps, were in attendance, along with Forum Chairman MK Yuri Shtern, MK Collette Avital, who heads international relations for the Labour party, former minister MK Ephraim Sneh of the Labour party, and Yakov Levi, head of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Knesset. Testifying on the panel of experts was Barry Rubin, Director of the [Global Research in International Affairs Center](#), which is part of the [Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya](#), and Lt.-Col Jonathan D. Halevi, from the [Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs](#). (IMRA)

9

A mortar shell was fired at the "Gadid" settlement in the southern Gaza Strip, *Israel Radio* reported. There were no casualties. (Xinhua)

The IDF had discovered an explosive device along the Egyptian border near Rafah. The device was detonated in a controlled manner. (www.idf.il)

Palestinian security forces discovered and destroyed a tunnel in Rafah along the Egyptian border. (Xinhua)

Israeli troops arrested three Palestinians at the Ennab checkpoint, east of Tulkarm. Armed settlers prevented several Palestinian farmers from reaching their lands in Kafr Qaddum, west of Nablus, and then attacked them, wounding two. At the Balata refugee camp in Nablus, Israeli soldiers fired sound grenades at Palestinian worshippers inside a mosque, damaging the mosque windows. The Israeli army also kept Hebron under curfew, according to local sources.

(International Press Centre)

Israeli troops stormed the Al-Siniya village, south of Hebron, amid intensive gunfire, and arrested Nayef Abu E'qeel, 45. (Wafa)

PA National Security Advisor Jibril Rajoub told *Israel Radio* that Palestinian militant factions had agreed to cease all attacks within Israel's 1967 border.

"There is a consensus among Palestinians: No more terror attacks against Israel inside the Green Line. ... And there is a second agreement on a hudna [temporary ceasefire] in order to allow negotiations between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority," Mr. Rajoub said. According to Mr. Rajoub, Hamas will participate in the [PLC] elections and is willing to join the PLO. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said, "Nothing encourages us to declare a truce while Israel continues to procrastinate and sticks to its policies of deception. ... The statements made by Jibril Rajoub are not exact. He was speaking in his name and the name of Fatah and he has no right to speak on behalf of all the factions." But he added, "We are going to listen to the proposals put forward in Cairo and decide on our position as a result," referring to a meeting between the PA and Palestinian factions scheduled to take place in Cairo on 15 March. Nafez Azzam, senior leader of Islamic Jihad, told reporters that his group was still weighing on reaching an enduring truce with Israel. "The decision depends on what Israel will offer for the Palestinians and the Israeli practices on the ground," Mr. Azzam said. (AFP, DPA, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, Xinhua)

Two meetings of Israeli and Palestinian security commanders on the transfer of the security responsibility in Jericho to the Palestinian Authority broke up without agreement. Leading the talks were Brig.-Gen. Tal Russo, commander of Israeli troops in the Jordan Valley, and Gen. Hajj Ismail Jaber, head of the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank. According to IDF reports, Israel refused to dismantle the checkpoints. Israel also refused to transfer responsibility for the village of Al-Auja north of the city. (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters, Ynet)

Former prosecutor Talia Sasson held a press conference on her government-commissioned report on West Bank outposts, which she had submitted to Prime Minister Sharon a day earlier. The report described the secret cooperation of various Ministries and official institutions in channelling money to outposts.

Ms. Sasson said the Housing [and Construction] Ministry, for example, had been actively involved in setting up outposts and supplied more than 400 mobile homes for them. "Some of the outposts, built by the Housing Ministry, were unfortunately built on privately owned Palestinian land," she stated. She also said the Ministry had created a budget for "various developments" amounting to US\$4 million in 2000 and \$8 million in 2001 and some of that money had been used for outposts. Ms. Sasson recommended that the Housing Ministry be stripped of authority over settlement construction in the West Bank, with that authority transferred to the Cabinet. She also recommended that the Attorney General decide whether investigations should be launched against some of those involved in the funnelling of resources to outposts. Prime Minister Sharon was to present the report to the Cabinet on 13 March at its weekly meeting to make a decision on recommendations in the report. (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post)

As a reaction to the Sasson report, US officials reiterated that they expected Israel to dismantle the outposts immediately, in line with the [Road Map](#). However, Deputy Defence Minister Zeev Boim said Israeli troops would be busy in the coming months evacuating Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements. "I don't think this report will be implemented immediately," he told *Israel Army Radio*. US Secretary of State Rice denied she had agreed to the delaying of the dismantling of outposts until after the planned Gaza withdrawal that summer. (AP) EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Marc Otte met with PA Interior Minister Nasser Yousef in Ramallah. Mr. Otte emphasized the need for Israel to withdraw from the West Bank cities and said, "This pullout must be considered as part of efforts aiming to achieve calm and stability." He also said that the EU would provide the Palestinian security apparatuses with the necessary equipment and vehicles, and that EU experts and Palestinian security officials would meet to evaluate the requirements. (Xinhua)

In a statement read out by its President, Ronaldo Mota Sardenberg (Brazil), the Security Council welcomed the conclusions of the London Meeting or Supporting the Palestinian Authority, held on 1 March, and expressed the hope that the occasion would be part of longer-term international support to the Palestinian people and Authority, as well as a contribution to the implementation of the [Road Map](#). (UN Press Release [SC/8330](#))

The UN International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held at Geneva from 8 to 9 March [concluded its work](#) with the adoption of a final document. (UN press release GA/PAL/983)

10

The IDF killed Mohammed Abu Khazneh, 28, after raiding his house and bulldozing his hideout in Tulkarm. Mr. Abu Khazneh was a member of Islamic Jihad. Israeli military officials said he was behind the recent Tel Aviv suicide bombing, was part of a cell that had built a car bomb the Israelis disarmed last week, and was planning further attacks. Nafez Azzam, an Islamic Jihad leader, warned the killing "does not encourage us to continue the state of calmness that currently exists on the ground." He said his group would discuss with President Abbas how to proceed. President Abbas told reporters that militants "have the right to feel worried" and urged Israel to honour its commitments made under last month's truce declaration in Sharm el-Sheikh. (AP, AFP, Ha'aretz, UPI)

An Israeli helicopter opened fire at a Palestinian car in Al-Bathan, east of Nablus. Ambulances were prevented from reaching the targeted car. Israeli forces reportedly wounded a Palestinian at the Balata refugee camp in Nablus and another in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. The condition of each Palestinian was said to be critical. Israeli forces gave house demolition orders to 50 families in Al-Thori and issued expropriation orders for 26 dunums of land in Al-Barid near Jerusalem. (International Press Centre)

The IDF imposed a closure on Jericho and arrested a militant of Islamic Jihad, Palestinian security sources said. The sources said troops had closed the two entrances to the city, checking what appeared to be a suspicious car at the checkpoint in the northern part of the city. The IDF also arrested two men, one of whom was a wanted Islamic Jihad activist, while the second was a taxi driver with no known affiliation, the sources said. An Israeli army spokeswoman confirmed the closure "due to a major security alert in the area". (AFP)

Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas' media spokesman in the Gaza Strip, said Hamas would not honour a formal truce to be worked out in Cairo next week if Israel did not meet the group's demands, the most important of which was the release of all Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons. He said, "We will go to Cairo and listen to the proposals, then we will adopt our position accordingly." (The Palestinian Information Center)

According to the results of a survey conducted by the Dahaf Institute, a representative sample of Israel's Jewish population was polled on whether, in exchange for a real final peace agreement, Israel should transfer control of a number of sacred sites to the Palestinians, be prepared for joint control, or keep the sites under sole Israeli control. None of those polled said they would agree to Palestinian control over the Western Wall, although six per cent were willing to see joint control. With regard to the Temple Mount, 46 per cent would agree to joint Israeli-Palestinian control, or sole Palestinian control.

Nine per cent of the sample were in favour of transferring control to the Palestinians, 36 per cent favoured joint control, and 51 per cent favoured Israeli control only. With regard to the Tomb of the Patriarchs (Al-Haram Al-Ibra According to the results of a survey conducted by the Dahaf Institute, a representative sample of Israel's Jewish population was polled on whether, in exchange for a final real peace agreement, Israel should transfer a number of sacred sites to the Palestinians, be prepared for joint control, or keep the sites under sole Israeli control. None of those polled said they would agree to Palestinian control over the Western Wall, although six per cent were willing to see joint control. With regard to the Temple Mount, 46 per cent would agree to joint Israeli-Palestinian control, or sole Palestinian control. Nine per cent of the sample was in favour of transferring control to the Palestinians, 36 per cent favoured joint control, and 51 per cent favoured Israeli control only. With regard to the Tomb of the Patriarchs (Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi) in Hebron, 13 per cent were in favour of giving control to the Palestinians, 33 per cent were for joint control, and 49 per cent were for sole Israeli control. Thirteen per cent of those questioned said they would agree to the Tomb of Rachel being in Palestinian hands, 30 per cent would opt for joint control, and 53 per cent wanted to see Israeli alone control. (Ha'aretz)

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat told *Voice of Palestine* radio from Madrid, "Israel is prevaricating over carrying out its Sharm el-Sheikh resolutions." Mr. Erakat appealed to the international community to pressure Israel to make good on its Sharm el-Sheikh promises. "We are asking them to respect their commitments," he said. PA Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh also said "Israeli prevarications are having negative repercussions on all Arab and international efforts on moving forward the peace process." (AP)

In Tel Aviv, Lt.-Gen. William Ward, US "security coordinator" in the Middle East, who is to coordinate international efforts to strengthen security in the Palestinian territories, began his first day at work. Gen. Ward is expected to focus on promoting reforms within the Palestinian security forces and improving security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians. Paul Patin, spokesman of the US Embassy in Tel Aviv, said it was "entirely possible" that Gen. Ward would intervene in the current Jericho dispute over the handing over of Palestinian cities. (AFP, AP)

PA President Mahmoud Abbas said that he expected militant groups to declare the following week a halt to the four-year-old uprising against Israel and accept a formal role in Palestinian decision-making. Egypt had invited Mr. Abbas and 13 militant groups to Cairo on 15 March. Mr. Abbas told reporters in Gaza City, "I expect this meeting in Cairo will conclude all the efforts that have been made by the Egyptian brothers," adding that he would personally participate in the meeting. "God willing, we could have a declaration," he said. (AP)

Egypt's President Mubarak met Israeli Defence Minister Mofaz at Sharm el-Sheikh. The talks were expected to focus on delays in implementing the

agreements reached at the past month's summit there. President Mubarak demanded a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and a border buffer zone.

He told Mr. Mofaz that Israel's withdrawal from Palestinian cities, the transfer of power to the Palestinian Authority and the release of prisoners should be concluded as soon as possible. Egyptian presidential spokesman Suleiman Awad told reporters after the talk, "President Mubarak believes the obstacles that bar the implementation of Sharm el-Sheik understanding are technical issues which can be solved if the two sides enjoy good intentions." President Mubarak and Mr. Mofaz agreed, in principle, that Israeli forces would evacuate the Salah al-Din area ("Philadelphi") corridor on the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip some time after the completion of disengagement from the Gaza Strip. One security source said, "It won't happen immediately, and apparently not as part of the disengagement, but the IDF will not remain on 'Philadelphi' for long. Assuming that the disengagement from the Strip is carried out in coordination with the Palestinians, that the Egyptians assist, and that the volume of smuggling declines, we will leave 'Philadelphi'." (AFP, AP, DPA, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post)

In Madrid, Israeli Vice Premier Peres praised the new Palestinian leadership for opposing terrorism. In an interview he said, "Finally the Palestinians came to the conclusion that terror brings them more damage than hope." Mr. Peres said that in the Middle East more was achieved with negotiations than with violence. Mr. Peres said Israel hoped to withdraw settlements from Gaza and part of the West Bank by the end of July and then move on to the [Road Map](#). (AP)

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi would meet with Israel's Vice Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian Prime Minister Qureia on 12 April in Tokyo. Jiji Press reported. Mr. Koizumi was preparing for a trilateral meeting with Prime Minister Sharon and PA President Abbas, who were expected to visit Japan in late May or early June. Mr. Olmert was invited to Japan by the Economic and Trade Ministry, while Mr. Qureia was invited by a private think-tank. (DPA)

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour met in Geneva with Israeli Minister of Diaspora Affairs Natan Sharansky to discuss the UN Human Rights Commission annual report. During the meeting, Ms. Arbour reportedly made, *inter alia*, the following remarks, "I hope Israel would receive a more balanced treatment in the framework of the changes slated to take place in United Nations institutions, especially in those dealing with human rights." (The Jerusalem Post)

11

A Qassam rocket, fired over night, was found in one of the "Gush Katif" settlement blocks in the southern Gaza Strip. There were no injuries. (Ha'aretz, [www.idf.il](#))

Palestinians opened fire at an Israeli army position near the "Kfar Darom" settlement in the central Gaza Strip. No injuries or damage were reported. (Ynet)

Israeli forces and police clashed with Israelis and Palestinians demonstrating against the construction of the separation fence in the West Bank village of Badrus near "Mod'in," north-west of Ramallah. One soldier was slightly wounded by rocks thrown by the protesters. (Ha'aretz)

An information kit on the disengagement plan, prepared by the IDF Education Corps for use by officers, describes all settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as "part of the historic continuum of Zionist settlement in the Land of Israel," most of which "were established by government decision." (Ha'aretz)

12

Israeli troops stormed the Kufir Ra'i village, north-east of Tulkarm, broke into several houses and arrested a 23-year-old Palestinian. (International Press Centre)

13

Israeli forces entered the towns of Seida, Allar and Attil, north of Tulkarm, raiding several houses and detaining residents. Wafa reported Israeli forces had stormed the villages of Al-Nazla al-Sharqiya and Al-Nazla al-Gharbiya near Tulkarm and set up several roadblocks at the entrances of the villages. (International Press Centre)

The IDF arrested four Islamic Jihad members in the town of Baqa Sharqiyya in the northern West Bank, according to army sources. The arrests were conducted as part of a wave of operations to find those behind the Tel Aviv suicide bombing on 25 February. (AFP)

Israel's public radio reported that Israel would begin work within weeks on a second security fence separating Israel from the Gaza Strip. The Defence Ministry was expected to appoint contractors to work on the project that week. Security devices, such as unmanned vehicles, cameras and sensors would be set up in the area between the two fences, the report said. Work on the fence was due to be completed before Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, expected to begin on 20 July. (AFP)

Israel permitted an additional 1,400 Palestinians to enter Israel, as part of a gradual easing of restrictions agreed at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit. The entry permits were issued to 900 Palestinian merchants and business people from the West Bank and 500 from the Gaza Strip, bringing the total of Palestinians allowed to work in Israel to 9,800. Also for the first time in more than a year, Israel allowed private Palestinian vehicles to cross a major checkpoint separating the northern and southern Gaza Strip. Palestinians had only been able to cross the checkpoint in taxis and buses. An Israeli army spokesman said a new terminal at the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing between the northern Gaza Strip and Israel was also opened. The spokesman said the new terminal, equipped with electronic surveillance, was designed to limit friction between Israeli soldiers and those passing through. (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, [www.idf.il](#))

At its weekly meeting, the Israeli Cabinet [discussed](#) recommendations made in a report on West Bank settlement outposts submitted by former prosecutor Talia Sasson. The Cabinet affirmed that 24 "illegal" outposts would be dismantled, without giving a timeframe. "The Government reiterated its commitment to take down the 24 outposts established since March 2001," said Minister without Portfolio Haim Ramon (Labour), but added that no timetable had been approved. Ministers of the Likud Party said removal would have to await completion of the evacuation of all 21 settlements in the Gaza Strip and four in the West Bank under the disengagement plan. The Sasson report noted that 71 outposts had been established prior to March 2001. Peace Now, an Israeli group monitoring settlements, had recently reported that about 50 outposts had been set up since March 2001. (AP, The New York Times)

Israeli officials said Prime Minister Sharon had approved at a meeting of Cabinet Ministers the "final" route for the construction of the separation barrier around Jerusalem that would encompass large parts of land in East Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Under the plan, the "Ma'ale Adumin" settlement would be included on the side abutting Israel. The Palestinian refugee camp of Shuafat, which straddles the Jerusalem municipal boundary, would be encircled by a separate fence. Near Bethlehem, the barrier would cut off Rachel's Tomb from the rest of the city. (AP)

IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon said that the army planned to build a "temporary" fence in disputed areas around Jerusalem by July 2005 while the courts considered legal challenges to the "permanent" route of the barrier. "The plan is to construct by July an improvised barrier, a temporary one, in those areas where a permanent one cannot be built at the moment, mainly because of legal reasons. ... We will establish fences in certain areas, patrol roads ... until the legal proceedings are completed," Mr. Ya'alon told *Israel Army Radio*. (AP)

The Secretary-General [met](#) with Prime Minister Sharon in Jerusalem. Mr. Sharon said Israel's disengagement plan would be implemented according to a timetable agreed upon by the Government, but said, "Without genuine action by the Palestinians against terrorism, [Israel] will be unable to move anything forward." He also told Mr. Annan that Israel would evacuate "unauthorized" outposts built since March 2001 "in accordance with its previous commitments." Mr. Annan commended Israel's desire to coordinate the disengagement plan with the Palestinians and said he hoped the disengagement would lead to a return to the [Road Map](#). (AFP, AP, [www.pmo.gov.il](#), UN News Centre)

14

Israeli forces shot and wounded two unarmed Palestinians, Mahmoud Ibrahim, 17, and Fahad Agha, 16, after they entered a prohibited zone near the border fence between the northern Gaza Strip and Israel, according to Palestinian hospital officials. Mr. Ibrahim was treated at a local hospital for shots to the shoulder, chest and leg, and Mr. Agha was arrested by Israeli soldiers, the officials said. (AP, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, Xinhua, [www.idf.il](#))

A 20-year-old Palestinian, Adham Ashalan, who had been hit by Israeli gunfire 18 months earlier while throwing stones at Israeli troops, died of his wounds in a Nablus hospital, medical sources said. (AFP, AP, Wafa)

A 52-year-old Palestinian, Salih Ibrahim Mahmoud, was shot in the leg by Israeli soldiers in the Bal'a village, east of Tulkarm. His wounds were reported to be moderate. (Wafa)

IDF forces arrested four Palestinians in the Jordan Valley area, as they travelled on Highway 90. In another incident, one Palestinian student was arrested while another suffered injuries when Israeli forces stormed Birzeit University north of Ramallah, eyewitnesses said. (Wafa)

A large Israeli army contingent moved into Tubas, south of Jenin, setting up several roadblocks in the town. The Israeli army also commandeered eight houses in Attil town, north-east of Tulkarm. Witnesses said the soldiers had turned the houses into watch towers and interrogation facilities. Two people were also wounded by Israeli soldiers during a demonstration against the separation wall in the Bil'in village, west of Ramallah, attended by more than 200 Israeli and international women activists. (International Press Centre)

The IDF said Palestinians had opened fire at a military vehicle near an army outpost guarding the "Neve Dekalim" settlement in the southern Gaza Strip. No injuries or damage were reported. Also, Palestinians activated an explosive device against Israeli troops patrolling along the Israeli-Egyptian border near Rafah, causing no injuries. ([www.idf.il](#))

The IDF said it had arrested a senior Hamas member, Bassam Abdel Rahum, in the village of Silwad, north-east of Ramallah, and a Fatah member, Hatan Salim Kapisha, in Hebron. Five pipe bombs, rifles and other devices were found in Mr. Kaphisha's house. Two other Hamas members were arrested by Israeli troops near Shuqba, north-west of Ramallah. ([www.idf.il](#))

Israeli troops arrested four Palestinians in the Jordan Valley after seizing a truck carrying tank parts stolen from a nearby military base. (Ha'aretz)

Palestinian and Israeli officials said Israel had agreed to begin the handover of three West Bank cities to PA control. Israel Radio reported that Israel would hand over security control over Jericho to the PA on 16 March, a second West Bank town, Tulkarm, the following week, and a third, Qalqilya, the week after that. PA Chief Negotiator Erakat said Israel had also agreed to let PA police armed with pistols enter the village of Al-Auja, north of Jericho, and agreed not to pursue wanted Palestinians living in Jericho. Reuters reported that Israeli officials had said Israel would remove one of two disputed checkpoints near Jericho, and Mr. Erakat said Israel had indicated it would remove the other roadblock in another month, while Israeli officials said no commitment had been made yet. (AP, Reuters, Wafa)

In a statement issued by Prime Minister Sharon's office following his meeting with his Dutch counterpart, Mr. Sharon said, "... the ceasefire that the Palestinians are working towards does not mean the renunciation of the terrorism option and is no solution, therefore, we will not agree to it." Mr. Sharon also reiterated his call for Mr. Abbas to dismantle Palestinian militant groups instead of negotiating with them. "Any political agreement with the extremists Islamic bodies such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad could not lead to their disappearance," Mr. Sharon's statement said.

The Secretary-General The Secretary-General [met](#) with PA President Abbas in Ramallah. After the meeting Mr. Annan held a [press encounter](#) with PA Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Kidwa, where he said, "The international community is determined to work with both sides to press ahead with the peace process and the implementation of the [Road Map](#). ... I think that the possible developments give us a chance to re-energize the process and work to ensure that the day a Palestinian State will be established living side by side with Israel will not be too [distant]." Mr. Annan also told reporters that the General Assembly had been asked to establish a registry to register damages and claims and that the process was "going ahead," adding, "In fact I had a chance to discuss it this morning with President Abbas, and we are establishing that register to be able in time to help those with claims." (AFP, AP, Reuters, UN News Centre)

15

The IDF said it had arrested a PFLP member in the village of Salim, east of Nablus. The army also said a post guarding the "Kadin" settlement, south-east of Jenin, and an army vehicle in Nablus, were fired at by Palestinian gunmen. ([www.idf.il](#))

An Israeli settler was injured in the leg by Palestinian fire near the Tomb of the Patriarchs (Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi) in Hebron. (AFP, Ha'aretz, [www.idf.il](#)) Israeli soldiers patrolling along the separation wall in Qalqilya shot a 23-year-old Palestinian in the leg, medical sources said. Also, Israeli troops stormed the village of Hizma, near Jerusalem, and arrested 11- and 10-year-old Palestinians on suspicion of having assaulted an Israeli settler. (International Press Centre, Wafa)

Israeli sources said that after the Jericho handover, Israel might consider suspending further steps if the Palestinians went through with the release of PFLP leader Ahmed Saadat, accused of ordering the assassination of Israel's Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi in 2001, who was imprisoned in Jericho. "We will weigh carefully if there is any way of continuing the process when the message from [PA President Abbas] side is becoming so negative and so contrary to the new spirit we would like to see in our region," Israel's Foreign Minister Shalom told Israel Radio. (Reuters)

A new round of the intra-Palestinian dialogue is scheduled to start in Cairo, where PA President Abbas and the leaders of the main Palestinian factions will meet to discuss a declaration of a formal ceasefire. Delegates to the Cairo talks said they were reviewing a proposal put forward by Mr. Abbas and backed by Egypt for a one-year broad truce. The leaders of the Palestinian factions have said that they were ready to announce a ceasefire if Israel set free all Palestinian prisoners, stopped targeted assassinations and withdrew from Palestinian cities. At the opening of talks with Palestinian factions at the Cairo Dialogue, PA President Abbas said, "It is impossible for us to accept to implement our commitments in a unilateral fashion. We reject Israel going back to its policy of procrastination and as we are making progress towards quiet and a truce in the interest of our people, we ask that Israel fulfil its commitments."

PA Chief Negotiator Erakat told the *Voice of Palestine* radio, "We have to get an Israeli clarification of the statement because Israel accepted the ceasefire deal at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit ... I hope that Palestinian factions will continue the positive fruitful dialogue regardless of what Sharon has said," he added. (AFP, IPC, Xinhua)

Hamas would not join the PA after the PLC elections in July of 2005, Mr. Mohammed Nazzal, a senior Hamas official, said in Damascus. (AP)

According to Ha'aretz, Israel had not kept a promise that it had made to the United States in April of 2004 to demarcate the built-up areas of every West Bank settlement, for the purpose of setting limits on the settlements' growth. As a result, the US had halted the work of the Israeli-American task force that was supposed to deal with that issue. (Ha'aretz)

After a meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah, President Bush told reporters, "As for the Palestinian-Israeli issue, the role of the United States will be to continue to urge both parties to make the sacrifices necessary - sacrifice meaning that Israel must withdraw from the settlements, there must be contiguous territory for a Palestinian State, into which a Palestinian State can grow. The Palestinians, on their part, must continue to work hard to fight any terrorist activities within the territories, and the Arab world must continue to work together to help Palestine build the necessary structures for democracy." (www.whitehouse.gov)

16

The IDF said Palestinians had fired a mortar shell at an army post in the southern Gaza Strip, causing no injuries. Palestinian gunmen opened fire at Israeli troops in Nablus in two different incidents. No injuries were reported. The IDF arrested two Palestinians armed with machine guns south-west of Jenin, and a wanted Palestinian north-east of Ramallah. (www.idf.il)

Israeli forces entered the village of Al-Mughayir, north-east of Ramallah, conducted a house-to-house search and arrested three Palestinians. (Wafa)

During a demonstration against the construction of the separation wall in Saffa village, west of Ramallah, five activists, including an Israeli, were injured when Israeli soldiers clashed with demonstrators using live bullets and tear gas, according to witnesses. (Wafa)

Masked Israeli settlers attacked a Palestinian house in Hebron whose roof had collapsed as a result of the settlers' thrashing the building's walls with hammers. (Ha'aretz)

Israeli forces withdrew from Jericho and removed one of three checkpoints around the city. The other two were to remain in place during a month-long period in which the ability of the Palestinian forces to keep calm would be tested. The IDF changed regulations at one of the remaining checkpoints whereby soldiers would, from now on, only inspect Palestinian cars leaving the city and not those entering it. Israeli and Palestinian security commanders signed the agreement handing over security responsibility. (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

Zainab Al-Ghuneimi, deputy director of employment in the PA Ministry of Labour, told reporters that the Ministry had received from Israel a total of 2,488 work permits since the Sharm el-Sheikh summit on 8 February, at which Israel agreed to issue 5,000 such permits. (Xinhua)

In response to a question from a Member of Parliament, Denmark's Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller said his country was in favour of tasking NATO to play a part in a future Israeli-Palestinian peace accord. "NATO could in the future play a role, if both parties so wish, in pushing for a positive development in the peace process," Mr. Møller said. (AFP)

In a press conference with visiting Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, PA Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Kidwa said that it was impossible to speak about a serious peace process and genuine negotiations when Israel continued constructing the wall and expanding settlements in the West Bank. "Israel should withdraw from all Palestinian land occupied before 28 September 2000 if Israel wants to advance in the peace process," Mr. Al-Kidwa said. Mr. Moratinos said that Spain would seek solutions for the Palestinian issue. (Wafa)

17

Three Palestinians were wounded after a group of 30 youngsters from a settlement threw stones at a group of labourers in the West Bank, Israeli police said.

The 30 attackers were pupils at a religious school in the settlement of "Nahniel", west of Ramallah. A 24-year-old youth leader was arrested on suspicion of inciting the students to attack the Palestinians, police said. (AFP)

Israeli security sources said three Islamic Jihad activists had been arrested near Tulkarm in the West Bank. Another Palestinian was arrested in the southern Gaza Strip and a Hamas activist was detained near Ramallah. (Ha'aretz, Xinhua)

Delegates from 13 Palestinian factions meeting in Cairo agreed to an open-ended calm of attacks against Israel as long as certain conditions were met, a participant said. Sakhar Habash, a member of the Fatah Central Committee, said all participants had agreed on the truce. "The truce will continue but it requires Israel to stop aggression against Palestinians and to release all the Palestinian detainees," Mr. Habash said. Hamas official Mohammad Nazzal told reporters in Cairo that the agreement among Palestinian factions on a conditional truce with Israel would expire at the end of 2005 if Israel did not meet the factions' demands, including prisoner releases. Senior Palestinian officials said factions would not retaliate for Israeli attacks during the period of the calm "to give the international community a chance to press Israel to implement its commitments." Nayef Hawatmeh of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine said the factions had agreed to "an open-ended calm." He added, "The behaviour of [Prime Minister] Sharon's Government will determine if it is possible for this calmness to be long-lasting or short." Mr. Habash said the factions also agreed on "rearranging the Palestinian house," saying they would appoint a committee to "reform the Palestinian [Legislative] Council to achieve unity." (AFP, AP, Deutsche Welle, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia warned that a fresh outbreak of violence would erupt if Jewish extremists went ahead with plans to force their way into the Al-Haram Al-Sharif (Temple Mount) in an attempt to protest Israel's planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank. "We warn the Israeli Government and the international community that if any attack targets Al-Aqsa, the situation will explode," Mr. Qureia told reporters. Avi Dichter, head of the Shin Bet security service said that, along with an assassination attempt on Prime Minister Sharon, the threat of an attack on the Al-Aqsa compound was the most worrisome of potential actions by extremists as Israel prepared to withdraw from Gaza. In the light of new threats, Jerusalem police chief Ilan Franco had ordered more patrols around the site. Some 700 officers, including regular police, paramilitary border troops and undercover forces, were regularly assigned to the Old City. (AP)

Rashid Abu Shbak, preventive security commander in the Gaza Strip, said a Palestinian special security task force would take over control of the settlements in the Gaza Strip upon their evacuation. "The task force was already formed out of several thousands of Palestinian policemen affiliated with various PA security apparatuses," Mr. Abu Shbak added. In the meantime, a group of "Gush Katif" settlement leaders were conducting negotiations with Prime Minister Sharon's office aimed at reaching a common understanding regarding the settlers' evacuation, according to Yediot Ahronot. (www.palestine-info.co.uk)

Prime Minister Sharon called the results of the Cairo meeting between PA President Abbas and 13 Palestinian factions a "positive step", adding that "the terrorist organizations cannot continue to exist as armed groups and certainly not as terrorist organizations." Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said that Israel would refrain from military offensives to help make the ceasefire a success. "Is it [the Cairo agreement] enough? Of course not," he told Israel Army Radio. "Is the significance here that the Palestinian Authority is carrying out a war on terrorism? Definitely not. But they are certainly making an effort.

We are interested that terrorism completely stop, and every step on the road to ending terrorism is positive from our perspective,” Mr. Olmert said. (*AP, Financial Times*)

Reacting to the Cairo meeting, US State Department Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli said, “What’s going to make a difference is a renunciation of violence, a dismantling of terrorist capabilities and a full and complete embrace of the notion of peaceful engagement and peaceful dialogue. The steps we’re seeing today, the steps that have been underway for some time are ... incremental progress toward that ultimate goal. But I would stress the word “incremental” and I would call them very provisional and therefore while certainly not negative, they don’t go as far as we’d like.” (www.state.gov)

The EU anti-fraud office [announced the conclusions](#) of an EU independent anti-fraud office investigation establishing that there was “no conclusive evidence” that European Commission aid to the Palestinian Authority had been used to finance armed attacks or unlawful activities. But the report did not rule out that some of the assets of the PA may have been used by some individuals “for other than the intended purposes”. It said that despite significant progress made by the PA since 2002 through the introduction of a single treasury account for the consolidation of revenues, “risks of misuse of the PA budget and other resources cannot yet be excluded. This is primarily due to the fact that the internal and external audit capacity in the PA remains underdeveloped.” (*AFP, Ha’aretz, europa.eu.int*)

18

Israeli troops stormed Tubas, north-east of Nablus, and a number of surrounding Palestinian villages, opening heavy gunfire. No casualties were reported. (*International Press Centre*)

The IDF issued a decree prohibiting Israeli citizens from relocating to the Gaza Strip as part of the Government’s disengagement plan. (www.idf.il)
The Popular Resistance Committees Organization said that it would not be bound by the open-ended truce with Israel agreed upon by Palestinian factions at their meeting in Cairo on 17 March. “We totally reject the results of the Cairo meeting, having not taken part, and we are not bound to respect the outcome,” the organization said in a statement. (*AFP*)

Russia’s Foreign Ministry said in a [statement](#) : “We note with satisfaction the positive disposition of all the Palestinian groups to constructively cooperate with the PNA leadership and support the ceasefire efforts in the region. Russia also welcomes the active mediatory role of Egypt in organizing the inter-Palestinian dialogue. Of particular importance at the upcoming stage is the strict observance by all the parties of the obligations assumed, and reciprocal Palestinian and Israeli steps to strengthen mutual trust.” (www.mid.ru)

19

Israeli forces set up military roadblocks at the entrance of the towns of Arraba and Kafir Ra’i, south-west of Jenin, and near the “Dotan” settlement. The *Wafa* news agency reported that Israeli forces had stormed the town of Azzun, west of Qalqilya, and set up several roadblocks inside. The forces raided several houses and arrested an 18-year-old Palestinian. Also, Israeli forces stormed the Nur Shams refugee camp, east of Tulkarm, and arrested three Palestinians. (*International Press Centre*)

PA Economic Affairs Minister Mazen Sonoqrot said that Arab countries had earmarked US\$440 million for rebuilding hundreds of Palestinian homes demolished by Israel during the intifada, as approved by Arab ministers of finance and economy during their meeting in Algiers, according to Mr. Sonoqrot. (*Reuters*)

20

Three Israeli soldiers were wounded, one critically, when Palestinian gunmen opened fire at them while they were escorting Israeli police searching for stolen cars in the Al-Amari refugee camp near Ramallah, an army spokesperson said. (*AFP, AP, Reuters, The Jerusalem Post, www.idf.il*)

A Palestinian man was shot and seriously wounded by Israeli border police at a checkpoint between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The man tried to grab a weapon of one of the Israeli guards conducting a routine patrol, provoking another security officer to open fire in the man’s direction, according to Israeli military sources. (*AFP, AP, Reuters*)

The IDF said it had arrested four Islamic Jihad members near Tulkarm. (www.idf.il)

As part of the disengagement plan, the IDF has issued a decree prohibiting Israeli citizens from relocating to four West Bank settlements: “Sanur”, “Ganim”, “Homesh” and “Kadin”. (www.idf.il)

Ha’aretz reported that an extensive aerial photography review carried out for the IDF had revealed there had been major settlement construction in West Bank settlements between the summer of 2004 and early 2005. According to the report, Defence Minister Mofaz had ordered the photography operation following a complaint by former Chief State Prosecutor Talia Sasson that, without detailed aerial photographs, she would have difficulty completing a report on unauthorized settlement outposts in the West Bank. (*AP*)

The PA Ministry for Prisoners Affairs, in a report, said that Israel had arrested nearly 100 Palestinians since 21 February 2005, when Israel released 500 Palestinian prisoners in a goodwill gesture to the Palestinian Authority. Currently, 8,469 Palestinians were being held by Israel in 28 prisons, detention centres and other facilities, including in Israel. (*International Press Centre*)

21

Two Palestinian teenagers, 16 and 17, were seriously wounded when Israeli forces fired live bullets and tear gas canisters at a group of students near the separation wall in the towns of Bil’in and Saffa, west of Ramallah. Also, Israeli forces arrested four children between the ages of 9 and 15 in the Jaba’ village, north of Jerusalem. (*International Press Centre*)

Palestinian security officials said the PA Interior Ministry had begun placing restrictions on the ownership and use of weapons by militants. The Ministry distributed a letter outlining weapons related restrictions to hundreds of militants in the West Bank and asked them to sign the pledge, a security official said. The restrictions limit militants to a single weapon and bar them from loading weapons or carrying them in public, according to the official. Leaders of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades said they were considering the request but would not sign the pledge until Israel withdrew from the five West Bank cities. (*AP*)
The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine announced that they would run in the PLC election to be held in July 2005. (*AFP*)

Israeli Government sources said Prime Minister Sharon had approved last week a plan to build 3,500 new homes for settlers in the area between the “Ma’aleh Adumim” settlement and East Jerusalem (“E-1”). Along with the home construction, Mr. Sharon also had ordered the use of Palestinian land for

the construction of a new highway to bypass the area and link the Palestinian cities to the north and south of Jerusalem. (AFP, DPA, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, Reuters, Xinhua)

At a daily [press briefing](#), US State Department Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli said in response to a question regarding Israel's recent decision to build 3,500 homes for settlers in the West Bank, "The [Road Map](#) calls for an end to settlement activity and action against terrorist infrastructure. Those are important commitments that both sides have made and that we look forward to both sides following through on." ([www.state.gov](#)) Israeli and Palestinian security officials have reached agreement on the handover of security control of Tulkarm, after a series of talks led by Col. Tamir Hayman, the Israeli commander in the area, and Said Abu Fashi, the Palestinian security chief in Tulkarm. Col. Hayman said Palestinian police would be in control of the area as of the evening, and the main roadblock in front of the city would be dismantled the next morning, completing the process. The main sticking points of the talks were two villages north of Tulkarm, where Israel said the Islamic Jihad cell responsible for the Tel Aviv suicide bombing on 25 February was ensconced. Israeli officials said Israel would remain in control of the two villages for now, and contacts would continue over the villages with the intent of handing them over later. (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz)

The Government of Japan and UNRWA [have signed](#) an agreement under which Japan would contribute 500 million yen (around US\$4.76 million) for UNRWA's food assistance programme to benefit Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. ([www.un.org/unrwa](#))

22

A 15-year-old Palestinian was shot in the hand with a rubber-coated steel bullet by Israeli forces when a group of Palestinian youngsters were protesting in the village of Bil'in, west of Ramallah, against the uprooting of olive trees by settlers. A 16-year-old Palestinian was also moderately wounded. In the southern Gaza Strip, Israeli soldiers stationed at the border with Egypt in Rafah opened heavy fire towards Palestinian houses, severely damaging the houses, according to Palestinian security sources. (International Press Centre)

Palestinians from the southern Hebron region reported that settlers had attempted to poison a flock of sheep owned by local shepherds. The settlers reportedly placed contaminated feed over nearly three square kilometres. (Ha'aretz)

The IDF declared a general closure of the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory, excluding East Jerusalem, that would last until 27 March, the end of the Jewish holiday Purim. Police have also increased their level of alert leading up to the holiday. Thousands of officers had been reinforced by Civil Guard volunteers and IDF soldiers had been deployed in crowded locations and vacation sites across the country. Some 10,500 Palestinians who have permits to work in Israel would not be allowed to leave the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (Ha'aretz, Reuters)

Israel completed its handover of security responsibility for Tulkarm to the Palestinian Authority, which had begun the previous night, by ceremonially unlocking a gate that had blocked traffic between the city and main points in the West Bank. The gate itself was to be removed at a later date. (AFP, AP, Reuters) Several thousand Hamas supporters marched through the streets of Nablus to mark the first anniversary of Israel's assassination of their spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, in 2004. (Ha'aretz)

Israeli military intelligence chief Brig.-Gen. Yossi Kuperwasser told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee that, over the preceding few weeks, security forces "have prevented no fewer attacks than the Israeli security services." However, Gen. Kuperwasser noted that the PA was not yet taking proactive steps to collect arms from the gunmen of armed organizations. (AFP, Ha'aretz)

A two-day Arab League summit opened in Algiers, attended by 12 heads of states, as well as the President of the Palestinian Authority and other senior officials, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Arab leaders were expected to endorse an abridged version of their 2002 peace initiative, which had offered Israel normal relations in exchange for withdrawal to pre-1967 borders. Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa said in his opening statement, "Israel believes that rights will be forgotten ... and that the Arabs will normalize with nothing in return. ... Commitments must be met with commitments and then we can reach balanced ties [in] parallel with a complete [Israeli] withdrawal and the establishment of a Palestinian State." (AFP, Reuters, Ha'aretz)

The PLO Negotiations Affairs Department (NAD) reported that water-related negotiations were a very important element of a permanent status agreement, in part because a Palestinian State could not be viable in the absence of a robust agreement on water rights. On the occasion of International Water Day, NAD said Israel had taken a number of actions that detrimentally affected Palestine's ability to use the regional water resources. "Palestinians are denied all access to the lower Jordan River, and attempts [have been blocked] to develop most of the groundwater resources in the West Bank, and almost 40 per cent of the Palestinian population living in the Gaza Strip had no safe drinking water." (WFAA)

The Government of Japan [announced](#) that it had decided to extend a US\$30 million grant to the World Bank's West Bank and Gaza Public Financial Management Reform Trust Fund to assist the Palestinian Authority's financial reform. ([www.mofa.go.jp](#))

On Israeli plans to expand the West Bank settlement of "Ma'aleh Adumim", White House Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli said during a press briefing, "We are seeking clarifications from the Israeli Government on what its intentions are, what its plans are ... There needs to be an end to settlement activity. This is a vital, essential component of the [Road Map](#), along with commitments on the Palestinian side. ... We are opposed to unilateral acts by either side that create facts on the ground and that have the result of prejudging issues that are to be settled through negotiations between the parties." Prime Minister Sharon was scheduled to meet with two US envoys to the Middle East, Elliot Abrams, Deputy National Security Adviser, and David Welch, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. (AP, [www.state.gov](#))

23

Militants detonated a bomb adjacent to an IDF patrol in Nablus before dawn, damaging a vehicle but causing no injuries. Earlier, Israeli security forces arrested four Palestinians in the West Bank. Troops arrested three Hamas members in Qalqilya and a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was arrested east of Abu Dis. (Ha'aretz)

Arab leaders, at the conclusion of a two-day summit in Algiers, re-launched the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which had offered Israel normal relations in return for withdrawal to 1967 borders. A communiqué, read out at the summit's final session by Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa, said peace was the Arabs' strategic option to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict. The communiqué said conditions included full Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied in Palestine, the Syrian Golan Heights and the Shebaa farms to the lines of 4 June 1967; the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital; and a just solution to the problem of Palestine refugees based on General Assembly resolution [194 \(III\)](#) of 11 December 1948. Algeria, Tunisia and Sudan were appointed members of the committee that would monitor the Arab Peace Initiative in the coming year. (AP, Reuters, Ha'aretz)

Members of the Knesset's Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee approved a bill on the Basic Law referendum that would allow a national plebiscite on the Israeli disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank. The bill, which passed by a vote of 9-8, would be presented to the Knesset plenum for voting. Meanwhile, the spiritual leader of the Shas Party, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, was reportedly against a referendum. He told Shas legislators to vote against a pullout referendum. (AP, Ha'aretz)

John Dugard, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territories occupied by Israel since 1967, said in a statement to the press, "The response to Israel's ongoing expansion of Jewish colonies is a test of the international community's commitment to the rule of law. At last month's London Meeting on Supporting the Palestinian Authority, the participants agreed that the disengagement plan should take place without prejudice to final status negotiations, and in accordance with international law ... Ongoing Jewish colonization raises serious questions about whether a policy of constructive engagement alone will be sufficient to gain Israel's compliance with its obligations under international law, the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, and the Road Map." (Wafa)

Canada's Foreign Minister Pierre Pettigrew said, "Canada is disappointed by the Israeli Government's decision to build more housing units in the West Bank and urges the Israeli Government to reconsider this decision." (AFP)

24

IDF troops imposed a curfew on the villages of Husan, west of Bethlehem, and Beit Iba, north-west of Nablus, and arrested two Palestinians at the Rafal crossing in the southern Gaza Strip. (Wafa)

PA President Abbas said that Palestinian factions were committed to the recent Cairo declaration. Mr. Abbas told the *Voice of Palestine* radio that Islamic and national factions had condemned the Tel Aviv attack, adding, "even the Palestinian prisoners had also condemned it". (Xinhua)

PA Prime Minister Qureia affirmed that there was no solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict without solving the issue of East Jerusalem. Mr. Qureia made the remarks following Prime Minister Sharon's earlier statements reported by *Israeli Public Radio* that Israel would never withdraw from Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights. (AFP, Xinhua)

Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said he would ask visiting US envoys Elliott Abrams and David Welch to help block the expansion of the "Ma'ale Adunim" settlement in the West Bank, warning that the planned construction would cut off East Jerusalem from territory the Palestinians sought for a future state. State Department officials had said the envoys would seek clarifications from Israel on the expansion plans. However, according to an aid to Prime Minister Sharon, he had told the visiting US officials there was no question of freezing the expansion. (AP, AFP, Xinhua)

Reacting to the re-launching of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative by the Arab League summit at Algiers, a senior official from Prime Minister Sharon's office said that the Arabs were trying "to give this illusion of unity on the surface by adopting resolutions that contradict with all of the advances made, particularly by Egypt and Jordan, which is unacceptable ... The summit proved it is out of touch with reality and in a delicate situation regarding developments in the Arab world." Jordan's Foreign Minister Hani Mulki said that Israel's "quick and negative" reaction looked as if "they are not interested in peace, and we hope this is not the case." Hamas and Islamic Jihad had criticized the initiative, characterizing it as "the worst thing", the re-launching of an initiative to "reconcile with the enemy." (AFP)

The heads of the villages of Azzun and Kafr Thulth, east of Qalqilya, were handed military orders according to which some 224 dunums of land would be seized by the IDF for the construction of the West Bank wall. (Wafa)

The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B'Tselem) said that around half a million Palestinians would be negatively affected by the West Bank wall under construction. A report issued by the centre said that 14 Palestinian villages and towns with more than 24,000 Palestinians would be cut off by the wall from the rest of the West Bank. The wall would also surround from three sides at least 53 towns and villages populated by more than 230,000 Palestinians, and isolate some 220,000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem, occupied and expanded in 1967. Lands to be on the "Israeli side" of the wall would account for 9.5 per cent of the West Bank. (Xinhua)

The British Consulate's Palestinian neighbours in East Jerusalem expressed outrage at a security barrier being erected at the insistence of the British Government to protect its diplomats, saying it painfully reminded them of Israel's West Bank wall. (The Jerusalem Post)

Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy said in a statement: "The decision [by the Israeli Government to authorize construction in 'Ma'ale Adunim'] went against the commitment of the parties to abstain from all unilateral measures which could affect a definitive agreement." (www.eu.int)

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Kieran Prendergast briefed the Security Council on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question." (UN press release SC/8342)

25

Five Palestinians were lightly wounded near the northern West Bank town of Qalqilya after IDF soldiers fired rubber bullets to break up a demonstration against the West Bank wall. (AFP)

US Ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer told *Israeli Public Radio* that Washington supported Israel keeping large settlement blocks in the West Bank under a peace deal. "US policy is the support that the President has given for the retention by Israel of the major Israeli population centres as an outcome of negotiations," he said. PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat responded that "the United States cannot negotiate in the name of the Palestinian people. What Bush has promised Sharon is unacceptable. Settlement is illegal throughout the West Bank." (AFP)

In a *Los Angeles Times* interview, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "I think anything that raises the prospect that you're going to have an expansion of settlements in this way, particularly in a sensitive area, is not really a satisfactory response. But we're going to continue to talk to the Israelis about it and we've got some time before any of this would actually take place." (www.state.gov)

Russia's Foreign Ministry expressed concern over Israeli plans to expand settlements near Jerusalem in a statement that said, "... reports about the Israeli side's plans to build 3,500 new housing units between the 'Ma'ale Adunim' settlement block and Jerusalem cannot but cause concern. The implementation of this project would run counter to Israel's commitment under the Road Map, envisaging a freeze on any settlement activities, including the natural growth of settlements." (www.mid.ru)

Demonstrations by Orthodox Christian Palestinians against the Greek Orthodox Jerusalem Patriarch were held across much of the West Bank over the reported sale of patriarchate properties in East Jerusalem to Israeli-controlled interests. (ANA)

26

Settlers entered the village of 'Asira Qibliyya, south-west of Nablus, threw stones at houses and caused damage to property. Soldiers and policemen removed the rioters from the village and detained one of them. (BBC)

Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa received a donation of US\$ 101 million for the Palestinian Authority from Algeria, Kuwait and Qatar. (Xinhua, MENA)

27

The PA called for the Israeli Government to immediately stop its expansion of settlements in the West Bank. PA President Abbas said, "Any talk of settlements that is not a discussion of stopping them is unacceptable. Here I'm talking about the discussions of annexing settlement blocks. This is unacceptable because this affects final status issues. ... Our position concerning settlements activities in the Palestinian territories is known in advance and we consider it illegal," Mr. Abbas told reporters in Gaza. (AP, UPI)

Prime Minister Sharon told his Cabinet there was no need to clarify the US policy on Israeli settlements, saying Washington supported Israel's retention of West Bank settlement blocks as part of a final agreement, and merely opposed settlement building at this time. (AP)

In an interview with *Israeli Public Radio*, Secretary of State Rice said, "The American view is that while we will not prejudice the outcome of the final status negotiations ... the existing major Israeli population centres [settlements] will have to be taken into account in any final negotiation ... American policy remains unchanged in accordance with the [Road Map](#), but I just wanted to make certain that everyone understood what the April 14th [2004] agreement is," Ms. Rice said. (AFP)

Israel's Defence Minister Mofaz ordered the IDF to delay the planned handover of Qalqilya to PA security control, accusing the PA of failing to confiscate weapons from militants in Jericho and Tulkarm. He also said that PA security agents had recently smuggled anti-aircraft missiles into the Gaza Strip from Egypt. *Israeli Radio* quoted Mr. Mofaz as saying the presence of the missiles in Palestinian hands would cross a red line. (AP)

In an [interview](#) with *The New York Times*, Defence Minister Mofaz said that Palestinians had smuggled several "Strela" shoulder-fired missiles, which could be used against low-flying aircraft, into the Gaza Strip. (AP, *The New York Times*)

The Government of Paraguay established full diplomatic relations with "Palestine", Paraguayan Foreign Ministry officials announced. (EFE)

28

IDF troops raided the West Bank town of Jenin, carrying out house-to-house searches and arresting eight Palestinians, witnesses and the IDF said. During the incursion, one soldier was lightly wounded when an explosive device was thrown at the troops, the IDF said. Military officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the eight men were militants from Islamic Jihad and were attempting to build Qassam rockets. (AFP)

Israeli troops stormed the Ayda refugee camp, north of Bethlehem, shooting stun grenades and tear gas canisters. (International Press Centre)

In a statement published in the *Al-Quds* daily, Mahmoud Zahar, a Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, criticized Israel's announcement to expand the "Ma'ale Adumim" settlement. "What Israel is doing in Jerusalem is a great violation [of] the calm that was declared by the Palestinian factions," he said. (AP)

No workable Palestinian state could be established as long as Israel kept its settlements in the occupied West Bank, PA Prime Minister Qureia said. "Retention of these blocks is extremely dangerous because it would invalidate a viable state which President Bush has articulated in his vision," Mr. Qureia told reporters. (AFP)

Hamas leaders pledged an "earthquake" retaliation if extremist Israeli activists attacked the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Several groups had threatened to break into the mosque on 10 April, should Prime Minister Sharon go ahead with the disengagement plan. (Xinhua)

Israel lifted the closure that had been imposed on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, excluding East Jerusalem, for almost one week because of the Jewish holiday of Purim, PA security sources and an IDF spokesman said. (Xinhua)

Fatah officials said that the 120-member Fatah Revolutionary Council had agreed to hold primaries to choose its candidates for the PLC elections, scheduled to take place on 17 July 2005. (AP, Reuters)

Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar said that his group was ready to join the PLO. "Our decision to participate in the PLO is not new. It is a longstanding and clear decision," he told reporters after talks with PA President Abbas in Gaza City. Mr. Zahar said that Hamas' participation did not mean that it had renounced its commitment to "a Palestine incorporating modern-day Israel". "We are renouncing not one iota of Palestinian land but we can reach a temporary compromise with other factions," Mr. Zahar said. During the meeting, Mr. Abbas agreed to a request by Mr. Zahar to form a committee with representatives from various Palestinian groups who would recommend how to distribute the land and property of the Gaza settlements, according to Ziad Abu Amr, a PLC member who participated in the meeting. (AFP, AP, Xinhua)

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi urged the global civil society to play a more important role in searching for Israeli-Palestinian peace when he officially opened the three-day Conference on Peace in Palestine in Putrajaya. "We have time and again witnessed how efforts for peace for Palestine invariably got stymied in the UN Security Council, for reasons which are familiar to us. Furthermore, I have been keenly aware that in the last two decades, global civil society has emerged as an important actor in the international arena," he said. Some 400 local and international civil society activists were participating in the conference, which was organized by "Peace Malaysia," an umbrella body of Malaysian NGOs. (Xinhua)

29

Israeli troops shot and seriously wounded two Palestinian brothers in the village of Kafr Qallil, south of Nablus, according to Palestinian security and hospital sources. (AFP, International Press Centre, Wafa)

The IDF said Palestinian gunmen had opened fire at an IDF post guarding the "Netzarim" settlement in the northern Gaza Strip. No injuries or damage were reported. (www.idf.il)

The IDF's Golani Brigade caught a Palestinian in the southern Gaza Strip area carrying a rifle and some 50 handguns in a sack. (DA)

Islamic Jihad attended for the first time a meeting of the PLO Executive Committee, chaired by PA President Abbas in Gaza City. Speaking before the meeting, Islamic Jihad leader Mohammed Al-Hindi said, "In this meeting, we will discuss mechanisms to rebuild the PLO and we will see whether we can agree. We will also discuss the PLO's political programme." (AFP, AP, BBC, Xinhua)

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) said in a statement, "Israel's decision to expand settlements is a new attempt to impose new realities on the ground aimed at hampering progress towards a final deal." Akmal al-Din Oghali, Secretary-General of the OIC, called on the international community to "assume its responsibilities in preventing Israel from damaging international and regional efforts to resume the peace process." (AFP)

A B'Tselem report said there had been almost no improvement in the movement of Palestinians to and from the Gaza Strip despite the easing of restrictions Israel had declared to implement following the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in February 2005. "Israel has cut off the Gaza Strip from the rest of the world to such an extent that it is easier for Palestinians in Israel or the West Bank to visit relatives in prison than visit a relative in Gaza," the report said. (AFP, Ha'aretz, www.btselem.org)

The Knesset had approved the 2005 state budget by a vote of 58-36 with one abstention and the absence of 25 Members, thereby allowing the Government to operate, including the implementation of the withdrawal plan. (AP, Reuters)

30

The IDF arrested three Palestinians suspected of arms smuggling at the Salah al-Din ("Philadelphia") area along the border of Egypt and the Gaza Strip. The soldiers found 13 rifles and 10 handguns in the smugglers' bags, military sources said. (DPA)

The IDF arrested 37-year-old Khalil Dofash in Hebron, after raiding the city and launching an all-out search campaign, witnesses said. Meanwhile, Israeli troops went into Yatta village of Hebron, searching the houses of five brothers and vandalizing their furniture. According to witnesses, large number of Israeli troops raided the village of Assira Al-Shamaliya near Nablus and searched several houses. The IDF also handed several military orders of house demolition to Palestinians from Al-Khader town of Bethlehem, house owners said. (Wafa)

Three Israelis were lightly wounded after Palestinians threw a fire-bomb and stones at their vehicle along a highway between Jerusalem and the "Mod'in Illit" settlement, Israel Radio reported. (Ha'aretz)

Members of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades demonstrated on the streets of Ramallah, firing shots at the *muqataa*, damaging several restaurants, and forcing a shopping centre to close, after being ordered to leave the *muqataa*. The PA President's office said "criminal acts" committed by "armed elements" would be punished. An Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades spokesman said the organization condemned the shooting attack on the PA headquarters and the subsequent violent incidents, Israel Radio reported. All those involved in the incident would be severely punished, the spokesman said, but added the group would not hand over their weapons to PA security forces. (AP, AFP, Ha'aretz)

The Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee called on the US Administration to help stop Israel's settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Committee insisted on rejecting Israel's justifications for expanding settlements, warning that Israel could take advantage of its planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip to cover settlement expansion elsewhere. (Xinhua)

PA Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Kidwa said the Palestinian Authority was prepared to exchange land for a lasting peace with Israel. "If the 1967 line has to be modified, it will be done under negotiations and in a reciprocal and fair way," Mr. Al-Kidwa told reporters after talks with visiting Chilean Foreign Minister Ignacio Walker. Mr. Al-Kidwa added, "Our position is not new, but illegal PA Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Kidwa said the Palestinian Authority was prepared to exchange land for a lasting peace with Israel. "If the 1967 line has to be modified, it will be done under negotiations and in a reciprocal and fair way," Mr. Al-Kidwa told reporters after talks with visiting Chilean Foreign Minister Ignacio Walker. Mr. Al-Kidwa added, "Our position is not new, but illegal *faits accomplis* must not be imposed on the Palestinians by force." He said, "We clearly and deeply disagree with the American position accepting the retention of settlement blocks. We call on the American Administration to respect international law and the Road Map; we cannot imagine a serious peace process if settlement continues. We have declared a cooling down period in the hope of giving a boost to the peace process but Israel is acting in the opposite manner". (AP)

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri told *Voice of Palestine* that the Occupied Palestinian Territory must be governed by a joint national committee to serve the Palestinians' interests. Mr. Abu Zuhri said that the territory had been freed by Palestinian resistance and martyrs' blood. He said public lands must be utilized to build houses for those whose homes had been destroyed by Israel, as well as hospitals and factories. Mr. Abu Zuhri said his movement had not made a final decision as to whether to join the PLO. Damascus-based Hamas political bureau chief, Khaled Mashaal, said his group would not join a Palestinian national unity government despite readiness to participate in general elections, *Al-Ahram* daily reported. "We will not even raise the issue of participating in the national unity government because Hamas does not accept most of the projects which are being considered by the Palestinian Authority at present," he was quoted as saying. He stressed, however, that Hamas was ready to be part of the effort to reshuffle and restructure the PLO before joining it. He emphasized the group's keenness to participate in legislative elections slated for July in order to boost democracy and power-sharing. (UPI, Xinhua)

Settler leader Effie Eitam proposed that Jewish settlers should voluntarily hand over their weapons to Israeli authorities ahead of the planned Gaza withdrawal.

Mr. Eitam said he feared that otherwise confrontations with the IDF over the dismantling of Gaza settlements would turn bloody. Mr. Eitam and another prominent settler, Bentsi Lieberman, said troops should also be barred from carrying firearms. Both leaders said they hoped to negotiate an agreement on banning weapons with the Israeli police minister. (AP)

Israel's Defense Minister Mofaz, visiting Washington, complained to the US Administration that Palestinian officials were defaulting on pledges to disarm militants in two West Bank towns. As a result, Mr. Mofaz said, Israel would slow down its schedule for turning over additional towns to PA security control. (AP)

31

IDF troops arrested two Hamas militants north of Ramallah. (Ha'aretz)

IDF troops invaded the West Bank villages of Wadi Rahhal, south of Bethlehem, and Seida and Illar, north of Tulkarm, conducting searches and imposing a curfew amid heavy fire. Medical sources at the Tulkarm hospital reported that a Palestinian girl and a young man had been shot and wounded during the shooting. (IPC)

PA police in the West Bank town of Tulkarm demanded the surrender of seven armed militants who had burned down a Palestinian checkpoint overnight. (AFP)

Settlers from "Kiryat Arba," east of Hebron, assaulted a Palestinian farmer working on his land 300 metres east of the settlement and forced him off the land. (www.palestine-info.co.uk)

Palestinian women had been suffering intimidation and violence at the hands of Israeli security forces and within their own community, Amnesty International said in a [report](#) entitled "Conflict, Occupation and Patriarchy: Women Carry the Burden". Palestinian women had borne the brunt of the escalation of the conflict and decades of Israeli occupation, the report said. (Reuters, www.amnesty.org)

A letter signed by PA Prime Minister Qureia gave Patriarch Irineos I of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem 48 hours to respond to charges that he had leased Church land in East Jerusalem to Israeli investors. During a meeting with Jordanian Interior Minister Samir Habashneh, Patriarch Irineos denied that the alleged sale had taken place, and pledged to cooperate with the Jordanian authorities to investigate the case. The Patriarch also "signed a commitment cancelling all power of attorney given to dispose of Church property in Jerusalem," according to the Jordanian news agency *Petra*. (AFP, AP, DPA, Reuters)

"Martyr Ayman Jouda's Group", a militant faction associated with Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, threatened to resume attacks on Israeli targets if the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem was attacked by Israeli activists. "If the enemy attempts to attack the Aqsa Mosque, we will withdraw from the ceasefire and the calmness and we will respond with armed attacks in every place in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as well as inside Israel," a spokesman said. (Xinhua)

Addressing a rally in Beirut to mark the one-year anniversary of the killing of Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Khaled Mashaal, chief of the

Damascus-based Hamas political bureau, warned that the current temporary truce would falter if Israel resumed its attacks on militants, failed to release Palestinian prisoners, or in any way harmed the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. *(AP)*

The Israeli High Court of Justice agreed to a request by the [Association for Civil Rights in Israel](#) to consider a petition demanding that the army tear down a section of the separation wall surrounding the “Alfei Menashe” settlement, south-east of Qalqilya. According to the petition, the section of the wall surrounds five Palestinian villages, cutting them off from their fields and essential services such as schools and medical facilities. *(The Jerusalem Post)*

In an open letter, the [World Council of Churches](#) (WCC) expressed concern that the Government of Israel had “intensified unilateral programmes to consolidate control over Jerusalem and other occupied territory.” “The WCC calls for an open and inclusive Jerusalem, a city of shared sovereignty and citizenship, a city of two peoples and three faiths, of Christians, Muslims and Jews. Now is the time to cease actions that pre-empt peace in Jerusalem and to begin negotiation of Jerusalem’s final status within the framework of international law,” the statement said. *(Reuters, www.wcc-coe.org)*
