

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

December 2005

Monthly highlights

- Israel pulls out of negotiations on Gaza-West Bank bus convoys agreed under Agreement on Access and Movement ([8 December](#))
- IDF begins offensive operation against Palestinian-launched Qassam rockets by establishing a “buffer zone” in the northern Gaza Strip. ([28 December](#))
- The Quartet welcomes the upcoming Palestinian Legislative Council elections; calls on all participants to renounce violence, recognize Israel’s right to exist, and disarm. ([28 December](#))

I

Israeli forces shot and wounded two Palestinians in an arrest raid in Nablus. Four Islamic Jihad activists and another militant were arrested in Nablus, a Fatah activist in Rafat, south of Ramallah, and a “wanted” Palestinian in Beit Rima, northwest of Ramallah. (*Ha’aretz*)
 IDF troops discovered a large explosive device near the fence surrounding the Gaza Strip. It was defused safely. Troops also arrested two members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, south of Nablus. (*Ha’aretz*)

Israeli forces arrested an Islamic Jihad member in Burqin, west of Jenin. Also, two Palestinians carrying knives, aged 18 and 19, were arrested at the Hawara checkpoint, south of Nablus. (www.idf.il)

Speaking to Israeli news editors in Tel Aviv, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he would “make every effort to advance the peace process,” repeating his commitment to the [Road Map](#) . However, he said Israel would keep large West Bank settlements in any peace deal and suggested that Israel would find it difficult to give up the West Bank’s Jordan Valley, calling it a “security zone”. He added that he did not foresee additional unilateral withdrawals. He also said settlement construction was continuing in some areas and that he would not encourage settlers living on the Palestinian side of the separation barrier to move back to Israel. Moreover, he stated, “If a Hamas member wants to move from place to place, from one checkpoint to another, he will be immediately arrested.” (*AP, Reuters*)

Israel’s Justice Minister Tzipi Livni was quoted as saying Israel’s border with a future Palestinian State would approximate the route of the separation barrier. (*AP, Ha’aretz*)

The removal of thousands of tonnes of rubble from the demolished settlements in the Gaza Strip was to begin within a month, UNDP Special Representative in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip Timothy Rothermel said after a UN-Israeli agreement was signed on funding. (*AFP*)

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he would exclude the Gaza Strip from the joint customs agreement if “it becomes clear the Rafah crossing agreement was not honoured”. Rashid Abu Shbak, the security chief of the Gaza Strip, said Israel’s complaints were unfounded. He said, “Under the Agreement [on Movement and Access], we transmit footage to a joint operation room in southern Israel. The Israelis want to link that room to their computer, and we objected because this is a breach of the accord.” (*AP, Ha’aretz*)

The Israeli human rights groups B’Tselem and Binkom charged in a report that Israel had deliberately routed the separation barrier or wall to expand settlements. “One of the primary reasons for choosing the route of many sections of the barrier was to place areas intended for settlement expansion on the ‘Israeli side’ of the barrier. ... In some of these cases, the expansion in effect constitutes the establishment of a new settlement. ... It is clear that contrary to the picture portrayed by the State, the settlement-expansion plans played a substantial role in determining the barrier’s route,” the groups stated in the report. (*AFP*)

The General Assembly [adopted](#) six resolutions on the Middle East. (*UN press release GA/10428*)

Four protestors against the wall were hurt in clashes with the IDF in Bil'in, a village between Ramallah and Jenin. (*Ha'aretz*)

A Qassam rocket landed in an open field, in the western Negev, causing no damage or casualties. Also, Palestinians fired at an IDF patrol north of the Kerem Shalom crossing in the Gaza Strip, according to *Israel Radio*. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israeli forces arrested two "wanted" PFLP members in the village of Awarta, east of Nablus. (www.idf.il)

Israeli troops shot three Palestinians climbing the border fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel, killing one of them. Palestinian security officials identified the dead as Sayid Abu Libdeh, 15, and said the three had been trying to enter Israel to find work. (*AP, Reuters*)

PA President Mahmoud Abbas said he would end the violence that disrupted primary elections and promised "security and transparency" in the upcoming parliamentary elections. After meeting with Italy's President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, he stressed that "the issue of security, of public order and of the end of violence represents a vital interest to our people." In a joint news conference, Mr. Ciampi said that to achieve peace and independence for his people, Mr. Abbas must "maintain public order, fight subversive and terrorist movements and make them lose strength." He urged Palestinians and Israelis to abide by the [Road Map](#) and not to seek unilateral solution to the conflict. Mr. Abbas also met with Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

Israeli officials said Palestinians had allowed up to 15 militants wanted by Israel to return to the Gaza Strip. Among those allowed entry was Ahmed Al-Malah, one of the founders of Hamas, and Fadel Sahhar, brother of Gaza Strip Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar. Palestinian security officials said they could not prevent the entry of people with Palestinian citizenship and that the militants "do not intend" to return to armed activity. Israel had complained to the United States that the Palestinian Authority was evading its obligations under the Agreement on Movement and Access.

(*AP, Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA), Ha'aretz*)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced that she would be sending a senior envoy to monitor the implementation of the Rafah crossing agreement. State Department Counsellor Philip Zelikow would expedite parts of the agreement that have not yet been implemented such as upgrading the Al-Muntar (Karni) and Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossings from the Gaza Strip to Israel and running convoys between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. (*Ha'aretz*)

Fatah called off primary voting in the towns of Salfit and Qalqilya in the West Bank after gunmen fired into the air and burned ballot boxes. Fatah officials said the voting had been cancelled due to the violence and disputes over voter eligibility. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

Israeli Cabinet Minister Meir Sheetrit said Israel would withdraw from most of the West Bank and allow the Palestinians to establish an independent State. In the meantime, "not a single additional house" should be built in West Bank settlements, Mr. Sheetrit said. He added that if Israel wanted to remain a democracy with a Jewish majority, it would eventually "have no choice but to leave most of the territories and let the Palestinians establish a State next to us." (*AP, The Jerusalem Post*)

PA President Abbas met with Italy's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in Rome. "Italy is willing to do anything the two sides consider useful so that the peace process may continue and lead to a positive outcome," Mr. Berlusconi said after the meeting. He also reiterated his offer to host an international conference on the Middle East, or peace talks between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel. (*DPA*)

Commenting on an earlier comment by Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni that Prime Minister Sharon envisaged the 425-mile wall as the border between Israel and a future Palestinian State, PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said, "This is a very dangerous development and undermines the chances of permanent status negotiations. This proves Israel wants to dictate and not negotiate." (*The Independent*)

3

An Israeli navy vessel sank a Palestinian boat off the coast of the Gaza Strip, killing a fisherman. The boat had entered a no-fishing zone from the direction of Egypt and not responded to warning shots from the navy vessel, the IDF said. Instead, shots were fired from the boat and from the Gaza Strip coast at the Israeli vessel, which then fired at the boat, sinking it. PA security officials said the Israeli ship had opened fire at several fishing boats without provocation. The fishermen were in an authorized fishing area, and the navy vessel attacked without firing any warning shots, the Palestinian officials said. The dead fisherman was identified as Ziad Dardawel, 22. (*AP, Reuters*)

Palestinians fired homemade rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, the IDF said. The army responded by firing artillery rounds into the Gaza Strip. No injuries were reported. (*AP*)

The Palestinian Central Elections Commission had opened registration for candidates for the Palestinian Legislative Council elections. The registration was to be closed on 14 December. (*AFP, Reuters*)

Three Palestinian political factions, the Palestinian People's Party, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Al-Fida Party, announced that they would form a coalition under the name Badil to compete in the PLC elections. (*DPA*)

PA security advisor Jibril Rajoub reportedly won the Fatah primaries in Hebron, although the results had not yet been officially confirmed. Hebron is the largest electoral district, and the winner there stands to receive the second-place position on Fatah's parliamentary list. (*DPA*)

PA Civil Affairs Minister Mohammed Dahlan ordered an inquiry into personnel suspected of violating the Agreement on Movement and Access after reports of 15 militants entering the Gaza Strip. (*AP*)

PA President Abbas met with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican. Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said in a statement, "The situation in the Middle East was reviewed. ... In particular, the need to integrate all components of the Palestinian people into the peace process was stressed." Mr. Abbas told the Pope, "You will be very welcome in Jerusalem and all the holy places." He later told journalists that the Pope had "responded positively" to his invitation but indicated no date for a visit. (*AP*)

The following is an excerpt from a [statement](#) issued by Group of Seven finance ministers after their two-day meeting in London: "Finance Ministers met with Ministers Fayyad and Olmert and the Quartet's Special Envoy, James Wolfensohn. Economic development of the West Bank and Gaza is an indispensable element of lasting peace in the region and all parties have a role to play. We welcome recent progress on access issues and encouraged the authorities to build the foundations for sustained economic growth in the Palestinian economy. We affirm our commitment to supporting the Palestinian Authority in the context of its medium-term development plan. The regional and international private sectors have a crucial role to play. This will be the focus of the Investors Conference to be held in London on 13th December. We will return to these issues at our next meeting." (www.hm-treasury.gov.uk)

4

The IDF arrested a 16-year-old Palestinian carrying a knife at the Hawara checkpoint, south of Nablus. Also, Palestinians threw an explosive device at a border police patrol near the Al-Aida refugee camp, north of Bethlehem, causing no injuries or damage. (www.idf.il)

Israeli aircraft fired missiles at an Islamic Jihad charity and a rocket-launching ground in the northern Gaza Strip. The military said that the charity was a front for the disbursement of payments to the families of dead militants and other terrorist activities, and that missiles had also hit open fields used to launch homemade rockets in recent days. The military said no one had been injured in either strike, but Palestinian security officials said a bystander had been slightly wounded by flying shrapnel in the strike against the charity. Palestinian security officials said an abandoned metal workshop had also been hit, but the military did not confirm the report. Despite the air strikes, Palestinians fired two rockets at the Israeli village of Shuva, four miles from the Gaza Strip border fence, damaging a house but causing no injuries. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

IDF soldiers beat up and wounded a Palestinian driver transporting 10 school children at a checkpoint in Al-Tuwani village, south of Hebron. Also, Israeli soldiers, backed by tanks and armoured vehicles, moved into Al-Khader town, south of Bethlehem, and arrested a 40-year-old Palestinian. (Wafa)

The Israeli military announced it would allow 6,000 more Palestinian labourers into Israel, for a total of 16,000 from the West Bank and 7,000 from the Gaza Strip. An additional 1,500 Palestinian merchants will also be let in, for a total of 12,500 from the West Bank and 2,000 from the Gaza Strip. (AFP, AP)

Islamic Jihad leader Sheikh Zeyad al-Nakhallah said in a statement that his movement might not renew the ceasefire with Israel due to the ongoing Israeli attacks on its members. (Xinhua)

PA President Abbas told reporters in Ramallah on his return from a three-day trip to Italy and the Vatican, "The Italian Prime Minister offered to host negotiations between us and the Israelis in Italy and I accepted. ... The important thing now is whether the Israelis will accept this." (AFP)

PA Economic Affairs Minister Mazen Sonokrot said Palestinian and Turkish companies intended to establish an industrial zone in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. "This new industrial zone will employ thousands of Palestinian workers [and] aims at increasing individual income and getting rid of the phenomenon of unemployment that prevails on the Palestinian street," Mr. Sonokrot said. (DPA)

5

A Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up at a shopping mall in the northern Israeli town of Netanya, killing at least five people and wounding more than 50 others, including four seriously. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility and identified the attacker as 21-year-old Lutfi Amin Abu Salem from the village of Kafr Ra'i, south-west of Jenin. Deputy police chief in the northern area Avi Sasson said, "A suicide bomber who tried to enter Hasharon mall in Netanya was spotted by passers-by after he raised their suspicions. ... Two policemen at the scene pulled out their guns and ordered him to halt and to take his hands out of his pockets. At that stage, he blew himself up." (AFP, AP, Ha'aretz)

In response to Palestinian rocket attacks into Israel on the previous night, the IDF fired artillery towards the launching areas in the northern Gaza Strip. Also, the army arrested two PFLP members in Bir Zeit, north of Ramallah, an Islamic Jihad member in the Al-Jalazun refugee camp, north of Ramallah, and another Islamic Jihad member in Hebron. Palestinians opened fire at the Awarta checkpoint, south of Nablus, causing no injuries or damage. (www.idf.il)

The Israeli army arrested seven members of Hamas, according to Palestinian security sources and witnesses. Around 30 army vehicles stormed Jenin, detained a Hamas member intending to run in the PLC elections, and two others running for the fourth round of municipal elections on 14 December. Israeli soldiers raided other towns and villages in the West Bank and arrested four other Hamas members. (Xinhua)

Israeli warplanes carried out at predawn five sonic air strikes on the Gaza Strip in retaliation against resumed rocket fire by Palestinian militants over the weekend. Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for firing several homemade rockets at Israeli Sderot and at areas close to Ashkelon. (Xinhua)

Islamic Jihad gunmen fired at PA police in Jenin, after policemen tried to arrest a member suspected of being involved with the suicide attack in Netanya. (Ha'aretz)

Speaking on *Israel Radio*, Israeli Deputy Defence Minister Zeev Boim said it was time for the army to increase the use of its heavy guns against Palestinian rocket attacks. "We shall need to use artillery, with the appropriate warnings, against areas that will be evacuated, to signal that we will not allow unhindered fire against Israeli communities," Mr. Boim said. He also confirmed media reports that Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz had authorized troops to resume targeted killings of known Palestinian militants in response to the rocket attacks. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

PA President Abbas condemned the suicide bombing in Netanya and issued strict instructions to arrest those involved in the attack. "These operations against civilians cause the greatest damage to our commitment to the peace process, and the Palestinian National Authority will not show indulgence towards anyone who is found responsible for this operation," Mr. Abbas' spokesman said in a statement. EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also released statements condemning the attack.

(Wafa, <http://ue.eu.int>, www.mid.ru)

Israel's Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said he would petition Attorney General Menachem Mazuz to sanction a renewal of the army's policy of demolishing homes of suicide bombers. The policy had been halted in February 2005 after an internal army review found it had little deterrent effect. "It is an essential step in order to show anyone considering continuing the suicide attacks that there is a price for it, beyond the price they will be made to pay by us," Mr. Mofaz told *Israel Army Radio*. "The infrastructure of Islamic Jihad, although it is a relatively small terror organization, is very extremist and I think we need to act with all the power we have to deter them as well as to foil attacks and one of those options is demolishing their homes," he added. (AFP)

The Quartet issued the following statement on the Middle East:

Representatives of the Quartet – UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, High Representative for European Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner – consulted today on the situation on the Middle East.

The Quartet condemns today's terrorist attack in Netanya in the strongest possible terms. Representatives of Palestinian Islamic Jihad have claimed responsibility for the bombing through al-Manar television. The Quartet repeats its demand that the Syrian Government take immediate action to close the office of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and to prevent the use of its territory by armed groups engaged in terrorist acts.

The Quartet denounces all acts of terrorism and urges all parties to exercise restraint, avoid an escalation of violence, and keep the channels of communication open. The Quartet encourages and supports the Palestinian Authority's efforts to take immediate steps to prevent armed groups from acting against law and order and the policy of the Authority itself. The Quartet reiterates its support for efforts to assist the Palestinian Authority in the reform and restructuring of its security services.

The Quartet believes it is imperative that all involved act decisively to ensure that terror and violence are not allowed to undermine

further progress in accordance with the [Road Map](#).

The Quartet will remain seized of these matters.

(UN press release SG/2102)

PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said the PA was holding intensive contacts with the Quartet to reinforce the truce with Israel. He said, "The aim of these contacts is to prevent more security deterioration and escalation of violence between Israel and the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank".

PA President Abbas convened a meeting of police and security chiefs in Ramallah and instructed them to bring all those responsible for the Netanya bombing to justice. (International Press Centre (IPC))

PA Planning Minister Ghassan Al-Khatib said the PA was waiting for the signing of an agreement to remove the settlement rubble from the Gaza Strip. He told *Voice of Palestine* radio that the agreement should be signed between Israel and UNDP, but Israel was delaying the signing. "We hope that Israel will finish soon transferring the needed money to the UNDP and we hope that Israel will sign soon on the protocol that allows the Palestinians to start removing the rubble", he said. (Xinhua)

6

The IDF raided the village of Illar, near Tulkarm, and arrested eight Palestinians, including four relatives of the suicide bomber who blew himself up in Netanya a day earlier. The army arrested the father and three brothers of Lutfi Abu Sadi (Salem). A total of 14 Palestinians were detained overnight. (AP, DPA, Ha'aretz)

PA police arrested four members of the Islamic Jihad in the city of Nablus. (AP, DPA, Ha'aretz)

Israel border police in Israel's Sharon region arrested a Palestinian woman who reportedly attempted to enter Israel using a forged Israeli identification card. (Ha'aretz)

A Palestinian man died in a Jordanian hospital of wounds he had sustained in the beginning of the intifada. Amjad Maher Al-Zara, 22, was hit with a live bullet in the head at Al-Jalama checkpoint, north of Jenin, in October 2000 and had been completely paralyzed. (Wafa)

The PA detained 13 Islamic Jihad militants in the West Bank for questioning. (Ha'aretz)

Israel announced the closure of the West Bank and of its crossings with the Gaza Strip, virtually banning all Palestinians from entering Israel. The Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing remained open for the passage of goods. The closure, which the army said would remain in effect indefinitely, prevented thousands of Palestinian merchants and labourers from reaching jobs in Israel. Israel had also withdrawn the VIP passes issued to senior PA officials allowing them to travel between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. (AP, Ha'aretz)

Israel's Cabinet approved a plan that included the resumption of assassinations of Islamic Jihad activists, militants and senior leaders, as well as the shelling of Palestinian populated areas in the Gaza Strip in the event Qassam fire continued. (Ha'aretz)

Prime Minister Sharon issued orders to halt preparations for the convoy link between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. (Wafa)

PA President Abbas met with militant leaders in Gaza City in efforts to prevent further attacks against Israel, Palestinian sources said. (Xinhua)

PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that the PA had sent letters to the United States, the EU and the Quartet urging them to prevent Israel from carrying out harsh military action against the Palestinians. (DPA)

The Islamic Jihad said in a statement that it was still committed to a truce with Israel. "The movement, however, has the right to defend itself and respond to Israeli acts against our members and people", the statement said. It also called on PA security forces to stop the campaign against militants. (Xinhua)

US Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones said Israel "has every right to defend its people." He also called on the "Palestinian Authority to take action against these terror groups, in particular Islamic Jihad". (Ha'aretz)

The National Christian Gathering in Jerusalem condemned the seizure of Palestinians' lands in the Silwan neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Its Head Dimitri Diliani said the construction of the wall around East Jerusalem and the seizures of land were within Israeli plans of "judaizing Jerusalem". (Wafa)

Hamas condemned the cooperation agreement between the Palestinian Red Crescent and Israel's Red Shield of David, calling it "a dangerous step of normalization." (DPA)

The Security Council failed to agree on a statement condemning the suicide bombing in Netanya and urging the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to close the offices of Islamic Jihad, after a dispute between the United States and Algeria. (AFP, Reuters)

7

The IDF arrested three Palestinians in Nablus and Hebron, PA security sources said. In Jenin, the Israeli forces closed the Al-Bir Al-Ihsan Charitable Association. (Wafa)

The PA police discovered and destroyed two smuggling tunnels in the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah near the Egyptian border, PA security sources said. (AFP, Xinhua)

The IDF said it had arrested a "wanted" Palestinian in Hebron, an Islamic Jihad member in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus, and a Fatah member in Deir Dibwan, east of Ramallah. Palestinians opened fire at an Israeli force patrolling in Anabta village, east of Tulkarm, causing no injuries or damage. (www.idf.il)

IDF troops arrested two Islamic Jihad members after besieging a house near Jenin. (Reuters)

PA security forces arrested 11 members of Islamic Jihad in Tulkarm, according to Palestinian sources. (Xinhua)

An Israeli aircraft fired a missile at a car carrying Palestinian militants in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, killing 29-year-old Mahmud El-Arqan, a senior commander of Popular Resistance Committees, who allegedly had collaborated with Islamic Jihad in a series of recent attacks on Israeli troops and in weapons smuggling into the Gaza Strip. Medics said 10 others had been wounded, among them three children under 10 years old. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

At a State memorial ceremony marking the anniversary of David Ben-Gurion's death, Prime Minister Sharon quoted the former Prime Minister as saying, "When the question was posed as to whether we should choose the whole land without a Jewish State, or a Jewish State without the whole land, we chose a Jewish State without the whole land." (AP)

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and Popular Resistance Committees urged PA President Abbas to release the imprisoned Islamic Jihad activists, threatening to break the truce with Israel within 48 hours. "The campaign will continue. We are implementing an order and will fulfill our commitments," PA Interior Ministry spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khousa responded. (AP, Xinhua)

Hassan Yousef, Hamas leader in the West Bank who is held in an Israeli prison, told *Israel Radio* that calmness was an obligation for all the Palestinian factions, urging the Palestinians to be united and remain committed to the ceasefire. (DPA, Xinhua)

Speaking at the graduation of PA police officers from the Cyprus Police Academy, Foreign Ministry Permanent Secretary Sotos Zackheos said

Cyprus would continue supporting efforts in the Middle East peace process toward the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State alongside a secure Israel. (*Xinhua*)
“To date, only 35 per cent of the West Bank separation fence has been constructed”, IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Brigadier-General Moshe Kaplinsky told the Knesset. (*Ha'aretz*)

Following the announcement that Israel's Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz had requested the approval of Attorney General Menachem Mazuz to demolish the homes of suicide-bombers' families, *B'Tselem - The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories* requested the Attorney General to prevent the demolition policy from being reinstituted. (www.btselem.org)
The PA signed an agreement with the Government of Norway and the EU to support the Palestinian Civil Police development plan. The project, estimated to cost \$750,000, is part of the EU programme to assist the PA in developing a modern and effective civil police service “EU COPPS”. (*Wafa*)

8

An Israeli aircraft fired a missile towards a group of militants training with rocket-propelled grenade launchers in an open area near Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, according to Palestinian witnesses. The Israeli army said it was targeting suspected Palestinian rocket launching sites to prevent further rocket fire into Israel. There were no immediate reports of casualties. (*DPA, Reuters*)
Palestinians fired three rockets and one mortar shell from the Gaza Strip at Israel overnight, *Israeli Radio* reported. The IDF spokesman confirmed that one rocket had landed near the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing between the northern Gaza Strip and Israel. In response to the attack on the crossing, Israeli artillery fired shells at the north of the Gaza Strip, without causing casualties, the army said. Also, an Israeli warplane fired a missile at a target in the northern Gaza Strip, but it fell in an open area and caused no injury, according to witnesses. The IDF said the air force had attacked an access road to sites from which rockets had been launched to prevent further shooting from the area. (*AFP, AP, Reuters*)
An Israeli air strike killed two Palestinians and wounded six others, including an 11-year-old child, in Jabalya in the northern Gaza Strip. Witnesses said the air strike appeared to have been aimed at a group of three militants from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. Several houses were damaged in the attack, according to the PA Interior Ministry. Hospital officials identified the two men killed as Iyad Nasser, 27, and Iyad Qaddas, 21. The IDF said the strike had targeted a building where a senior Al-Aqsa Brigades militant, responsible for attacks on Israel, was staying. (*AP, Reuters*)
A Palestinian killed an Israeli soldier, stabbing him in the neck, at the Qalandiya checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility. (*AP, DPA, Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

The IDF said Israeli troops had arrested 23 “wanted” Palestinians in the West Bank overnight: 20 Hamas members in Beit Liqya, south-west of Ramallah, and three Palestinians in two other areas. (*AP, www.idf.il*)

Israeli political sources said Israel had suspended talks with the Palestinians on allowing bus convoys between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank under the US-brokered [Agreement on Access and Movement](#). Widening its response to the suicide bombing in Netanya, Israel notified the United States of its decision to pull out of the negotiations until PA President Abbas acted against militants, the sources said. (*AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

At a press conference launching the [2006 Humanitarian Appeal](#) in Jerusalem, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said the number of Palestinians living in poverty had risen to 64 per cent from 55 per cent last year. Half of those living in poverty, or 1.2 million Palestinians, lived on less than \$1.60 a day, 60 cents below the poverty line, said David Shearer, the Head of OCHA Jerusalem. In the Appeal, OCHA requested donors to provide approximately \$215 million in emergency assistance for the Palestinians. (*AFP, AP, www.ochaonline.un.org*)

The PA and USAID signed a memorandum of understanding to launch a land management project estimated to cost \$1 million. (*Wafa*)

The Third Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit Conference on "Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century, Solidarity in Action", held in Mecca, adopted a final communiqué stressing the “importance of the question of Palestine as the central cause of the Muslim Ummah.” (www.oic-oci.org)

The International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement welcomed the decision of the diplomatic conference held in Geneva to adopt a Third Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, creating an additional emblem alongside the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The emblem, known as the Red Crystal, would provide a comprehensive and lasting solution to the emblem question. It will appear as a red frame in the shape of a square on edge, on a white background, and is free from any religious, political or other connotations. The Movement expressed its gratitude to the Government of Switzerland, as the Depositary State to the Geneva Conventions. The signing of an agreement between the Palestine Red Crescent Society and the Magen David Adom on 28 November, also contributed to the successful outcome of the conference by defining operational arrangements that would enhance these Societies' cooperation when carrying out their humanitarian mandate, the Movement said. (www.icrc.org)

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

The Secretary-General was delighted to learn of last night's decision by the signatory countries of the Geneva Conventions to adopt a non-denominational humanitarian emblem, the Red Crystal, in addition to the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

He notes that this emblem will henceforth have the same legal significance, and enjoy the same legal protection, as both the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, which for over a century have symbolized the humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. He hopes that this will enable the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to become fully universal, and thus to bring aid and protection to the victims of war, natural disasters and other catastrophes more efficiently, wherever they may be. He hopes in particular that it will open the way for societies that are not yet formally part of the movement, such as the Israeli Magen David Adom (Red Shield of David), to be admitted as full members.

He also hopes that the Palestinian Red Crescent Society will in due course be admitted to membership. In this connection, he welcomes last week's agreement on operational arrangements between these two societies.

Palestinians filed a lawsuit against former Shin Bet chief Avi Dichter in a United States federal court, seeking millions of dollars in damages. They are relatives of the 14 Palestinians killed in the IDF air strike which targeted Hamas leader Salah Shehadeh in July 2002. (Ha'aretz)

9

IDF soldiers arrested 19 suspected Palestinian militants in the northern West Bank overnight, 10 of them alleged members of the Islamic Jihad, an IDF spokeswoman said. (DPA)

IDF troops arrested a 15-year-old Palestinian at a checkpoint near the West Bank city of Nablus who was attempting to smuggle explosives under his coat, the IDF said. (AP)

Palestinians fired a mortar shell from the Gaza Strip, which landed near an Israeli community in the western Negev area. No injuries or damage were reported. The IDF shelled the suspected launch sites. (www.idf.il)

Israel closed the Qalandiya checkpoint, except for humanitarian cases. (www.idf.il, Reuters)

Two Palestinians were injured in an anti-separation wall protest near the West Bank village of Bil'in, west of Ramallah. (Ha'aretz)

The IDF arrested a Palestinian girl who attempted to stab a soldier in Hebron. (Ha'aretz)

Israel's Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz threatened to restrict trade across the frontier with the Gaza Strip if the PA's security violations at the newly reopened Rafah Terminal were not addressed within two days. "This crossing is wide open to terrorists and weapons, and jeopardizes Israel's security," he told *Israel Radio*. PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat told reporters, "We reject these threats that coincide with assassinations, expansion of settlements, construction of a separation wall, incursions and collection punishments against the Palestinians." (DPA, Xinhua)

Sa'id Sheyam, a prominent Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, denied earlier reports which said Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal had announced at a rally in Damascus that the truce with Israel was over. "Mashaal's words have been distorted," he told reporters. (Xinhua)

In talks with representatives of the Quartet in Jerusalem, David Welch, the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, said that the United States Government was determined to see the convoys between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank run by 15 December, as called for in the Agreement on Access and Movement. United States officials also told the other Quartet members that the PA, contrary to Israel's claims, was honouring the Rafah agreement. The "violations" cited by Israel, an American diplomat said, were due solely to a technical problem. (Ha'aretz)

10

An Israeli naval patrol, under fire from the shore, killed a Palestinian in waters off the Gaza Strip. An IDF spokeswoman said he was trying to smuggle arms from Egypt. (AP)

IDF soldiers discovered a tunnel dug in the northern Gaza Strip by Palestinians, the IDF said. The tunnel, which ran under the border fence, was later destroyed. (DPA)

Five Israeli shells were fired at an area adjacent to Palestinian residential areas of the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Lahia, but no injury was reported, Palestinian security sources and witnesses said, after militants had fired three Qassam rockets at towns in Israel. (Xinhua)

A Palestinian militant, 27-year-old Khader Rayan, died of wounds sustained in an IDF air strike in the northern Gaza Strip town of Jabalya on 8 December, Palestinian hospital officials said. (AP)

A spokesman for Hamas leader Musher al-Masri announced that Hamas would refuse to renew the current truce after it expires on 31 December 2005. "Israel has never been committed to any calmness or truce with the Palestinians, therefore, we believe that if Israel continues rejecting to be committed to the truce, we will also refuse to declare another one", he said. (Xinhua)

Islamic Jihad leader Ramadan Shallah said in an interview with *Al Manar Television*: "We do not see that the results we obtained from the truce may encourage us to renew it for a single day at the end of this year". (AP)

PA President Abbas said, "We have agreed on a truce, therefore, we should continue with it until security prevails in order that citizens will not feel threatened by planes and tanks... All armed displays must end. Those who are still doing them are working against their people", he said. PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said, "There's a Palestinian national consensus agreed in Cairo on the calmness." (Reuters, Xinhua)

"We discussed the Agreement on Movement and Access negotiated by Secretary [of State Condoleezza] Rice during her visit here three weeks ago," Assistant Secretary of State David Welch told reporters following talks with PA President Abbas. "We have agreed to continue working to further all aspects of the understanding so that we can ensure that the other parts of the movement agreement... can remain on schedule as we all hope and expect." (AFP)

A Western diplomatic source said, "The Palestinians are clearly in compliance at Rafah... The Government of Israel's unilateral freezing of the Agreement's [on Access and Movement] continued implementation is unwarranted and may torpedo next week's AHLC donor conference in London. This could endanger Israel's diplomatic achievements following disengagement", (AFP)

11

A Palestinian militant was killed when a grenade he tried to throw at IDF troops in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus exploded prematurely, witnesses said. Three militants had been arrested, the army said. (Reuters)

Two Palestinian teenagers, who were trying to stone an IDF patrol in the Askar refugee camp in the Nablus region, were wounded after troops opened fire, medical sources said. (AFP)

"The Mujahdeen of Islamic Jihad and Al-Aqsa Brigades managed to fire their first ever rocket at the settlement of Zabed, west of Jenin, in response to the Zionists crimes against our people", the groups stated in a leaflet. An IDF spokesman confirmed that a homemade mortar shell had landed in the settlement, causing neither damage nor injuries, but expressed concern that militants had started launching mortars in the West Bank. (DPA)

Israel's Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz quit the Likud to join Prime Minister Sharon's new Kadima ("Forward") party. (AP)

Palestinians exported the first load of crops grown in the Gaza Strip greenhouses left behind by evacuated settlers. (Reuters)

Israel's Defence Ministry said that the cabinet's decision to freeze negotiations with the PA on the safe passage issue until the PA started taking action against the terrorist organizations still stood. (Ha'aretz)

Fatah would win 50 per cent of the vote in next month's Palestinian legislative elections, against 32 per cent for Hamas, while a further 9 per cent plan to cast their ballots for minor parties or independents, according to a poll released by the Ramallah-based Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research. The remaining voters were undecided. (AFP)

The PA Interior Ministry said in a press statement that the current calmness was a national consensus and that no power had the right to violate it.

The statement stated, "Being committed to the calmness and launching homemade rockets at Israel are two contradicting issues." (*Xinhua*) Israel announced a \$15 million project to develop the "Western Wall" in East Jerusalem. The site "is part of the religious, cultural and historical heritage of the Jewish people, and these links should be strengthened under a five-year development plan to develop Jerusalem, the capital of Israel", the Government said in a statement. (*AFP*) The Roman Catholic Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, planted an olive tree on the planned route of Israel's separation wall. "This position [of the wall] and the confiscation of lands have no reason at all. [The wall] doesn't benefit the security of either Israel or anybody else. Our prayers are for the removal of this physical wall currently under construction and the return of our lands and your lands to you," he told a group of some 1,000 protesters and believers. (*AP, Wafa*)

12

Masked gunmen raided the election office in the central Gaza Strip town of Deir Al Balah and forced it to close to protest Fatah's plans to appoint candidates for the upcoming PLC elections instead of holding primaries. (*Ha'aretz*) A Qassam rocket landed near Sderot in Israel, damage was caused but no injuries sustained. (*Ha'aretz*) A total of 17 Palestinians had been arrested in the West Bank overnight, Palestinians and the IDF said. (*Ha'aretz*) A Palestinian labourer, who had been shot and wounded by Israeli settlers near Hebron more than four years ago, died of his injuries, medical sources said. (*AFP*) The IDF began shelling open fields in the northern Gaza Strip after Palestinian militants had fired a Qassam rocket at the Israeli town of Sderot. (*AFP*) Jenin has been under strict closure for three days by the IDF. (*Wafa*) The Government of Israel had promised in writing not to prevent cargo from entering and leaving the Gaza Strip, regardless of the security situation inside Israel, according to a paper prepared by the World Bank for the AHLC conference of donor nations that would take place in London on 14 December. The Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing would not be shut down completely, unless situations arose which posed a security threat to the crossing, to people in its area, or when it was suspected that it may be used as a passage involving security threats. (*Ha'aretz*)

The World Bank predicted in its [report](#) to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee that the Palestinian economy would have grown between 8 and 9 per cent in 2005, and that joblessness would fall to 22.5 per cent from 27 per cent. The number of Palestinian workers allowed into Israel each day increased to 64,000 for the first nine months of 2005, compared with 50,000 during 2004. But that number was less than half of the daily average in 1999. (www.worldbank.org) Israel opened the crossings on the eastern and northern borders of the Gaza Strip after a one-week closure, Palestinian security sources said. (*Xinhua*) EU foreign ministers agreed not to publish a report critical of Israel over East Jerusalem. Britain's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said, "We decided, given the changed circumstances in Israel and the Occupied Territories, that this would not be endorsed or published, and that instead, we would continue to make strong representations to the Government of Israel." (*AFP*)

IDF troops shot dead UNRWA staffer Iain Hook in 2002 after mistaking his mobile phone for a pistol, a British inquest heard. It was claimed that the troops prevented an ambulance from reaching Mr. Hook by blocking the entrance to the Jenin refugee camp where he lay dying. (www.mirror.co.uk)

13

A Palestinian was killed and 23 others wounded in a clash with IDF soldiers in the West Bank city of Nablus. An IDF spokesman said two soldiers had been wounded by a bomb blast during the operation. (*Xinhua*) The IDF arrested eight Palestinians in Tulkarm, Bethlehem and Hebron. (*Wafa*)

Gunmen stormed the offices of the Central Elections Commission in Nablus, Deir Al Balah and the northern Gaza Strip to protest the handling of Fatah primaries. PA officials then ordered all election offices closed until further notice. (*Reuters, www.elections.ps*)

At a checkpoint near Beit Iba, west of Nablus, the Israeli army detained a Palestinian woman carrying a knife. The woman admitted she had intended to stab Israeli soldiers at the checkpoint. Palestinians threw a fire bomb at an Israeli vehicle near Shuqba, north-west of Ramallah, causing no injuries or damage. (www.idf.il) Three Palestinians carrying four fire bombs were arrested at a checkpoint near Nablus. (*Ha'aretz*) "Israel has no intention of allowing passage of Palestinian convoys from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank... while the PA is not acting against Qassam rocket fire," IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz told the Knesset. (*Ha'aretz*)

The European Commission [announced](#) it was contributing €14 million to a newly-established European-Palestinian Credit Guarantee Fund to support Palestinian small- and medium-sized enterprises. Other contributors are the European Investment Bank (€10 million) and the German Development Bank (€5 million). (www.eu.int)

In a joint Palestinian-Israeli private sector [declaration](#), presented at a donor conference hosted by the United Kingdom Treasury and the World Bank, participants said that Israel and the PA had a critical role to play to create an economically and politically viable independent Palestinian State, aided by the private sector. (*Reuters, www.worldbank.org*) The Austrian Parliament agreed for Austria to contribute up to six people to the EU mission at Rafah: two border guards, two police officers and two soldiers. Two others, an expert in criminal law and a police officer, would help train PA police, the Parliament said in a statement. (*AP*)

The United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine opened in Caracas on 13 December. "I ... reiterate the Quartet's recent call for renewed action in parallel by both parties to meet their obligations under the Road Map. I also call on Israel to abide by its legal obligations as set forth in the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and in General Assembly resolution ES-10/15," Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in a [statement](#) delivered by David McLachlan-Karr, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Venezuela. (*UN*)

14

Four Palestinians were killed and four others wounded when their car was ripped apart in an Israeli air strike in the Gaza Strip, near the Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing with Israel. The Israeli army said it had targeted militants from the Popular Resistance Committees on their way to carry out an attack against Israel. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

Hours after Israel's assassination of four Palestinians in Gaza City in an air strike, Palestinians fired two Qassam rockets into Israel, which landed in an open field in the southern town of Sderot. There were no injuries or damage, police said. (Ynet)

At the Hawara checkpoint, south of Nablus, the Israeli army arrested a Palestinian carrying a fully loaded ammunition clip. (www.idf.il)

At the Qalandiya checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah, border guards arrested a 17-year-old Palestinian carrying two Molotov cocktails. (Ynet)

In a raid on a Hamas explosives laboratory in Nablus, IDF paratroopers discovered a Qassam rocket, as well as about 60 kg of explosive materials, an electronic ignition system for explosives, an explosive device and a large quantity of bomb-making materials. (Ynet, www.idf.il)

Israeli forces arrested 15 Palestinians in Qabatiya, south of Jenin, two in Tulkarm, two in Bethlehem, one in Azzun, east of Qalqilya, and three in Hebron. (Wafa)

Gunmen from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades stormed the Fatah headquarters in Gaza City, demanding that the results of the Fatah primaries be respected. Security personnel of Fatah's secretary-general in the Gaza Strip rushed to the building and exchanged fire with the gunmen. (AFP, AP)

Islamic Jihad spokesman Khader Habib was lightly wounded when an Israeli missile was fired on his car in Gaza City. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

The IDF discovered a number of explosive devices, weighing several dozen of kilograms, in Qabatiya, south of Jenin. Four "wanted" Islamic Jihad members were arrested in the operation. A border police officer was injured slightly when Palestinians hurled firebombs. (www.idf.il)

The Palestinian Central Elections Commission resumed work, a day after halting operations to protest a spate of attacks against its staff. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

In a speech at the annual Ad Hoc Liaison Committee conference held in London under the co-chairmanship of the United Kingdom and Norway bringing together Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the donor community, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch said that bus convoy traffic between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would begin on 15 December as planned. "We fully expect Israel and the Palestinians to implement all aspects of the movement agreement on schedule and we will help them to do so," an aide quoted Mr. Welch as saying.

(AP, Ha'aretz, www.hm-treasury.gov.uk)

Israeli security officials said on condition of anonymity that Israel had notified United States officials that the trial convoys would begin next week, and that five buses, carrying 250 Palestinians, would travel from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank in the first convoy. (AP)

Kadima MK Haim Ramon said that Israel should no longer control Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem under a permanent peace agreement. "I don't know any sane person who wants, for example, A-Ram to be an inseparable part of Jerusalem, because this is a mistake. It means that Jerusalem would be the non-Jewish and non-Zionist capital of Israel", Mr. Ramon told *Army Radio*. (Ha'aretz)

The Israeli Defence Ministry said Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz had approved construction of hundreds of new homes in West Bank settlements in the past week. The new housing includes 200 homes in "Ma'aleh Adumim" and 40 trailers in "Ariel". Mr. Mofaz also agreed to advance construction plans in "Givat Zeev" and "Beitar Ilit", two large settlements near Jerusalem, according to the Ministry. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

The PA Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs said in a report that at least 9,200 Palestinians, including 301 children, were currently in Israeli jails. (Wafa)

Hamas submitted its list of candidates for the PLC elections in January 2006, under the name "Change and Reform". Among the top candidates were Ismail Haniyeh, Mahmoud Al-Zahar, Abdel Fattah Dukham and Saied Abu Masamh. Also, a party named Al-Hur'ia (Freedom) and headed by PA Finance Minister Salam Fayyad was registered. (IPC)

Young Palestinian activists announced that they were splitting from Fatah and forming their own party. Kadoura Fares, a PLC member and a leader of young activists, told reporters that they had presented their own list of candidates for the PLC elections, minutes after the wife of jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti, Fadah Barghouti, formally presented the list of candidates for the new party to the Central Elections Commission.

Saeb Nimr, Mr. Barghouti's campaign manager, told reporters, "We have registered an independent party under the name 'The Future,' headed by Marwan Barghouti." PA Civil Affairs Minister Mohammed Dahlan and PA security adviser Jibril Rajoub joined Mr. Barghouti in his new party. Among others on the list were PA Minister for Prisoners' Affairs Sufiyan Abu Zayid and a top Fatah official, Samir Masharawi. (AFP, AP)

PA Foreign Minister Nasser Al-Kidwa registered Fatah's party slate. Mr. Al-Kidwa told reporters that Marwan Barghouti was at the top of the list and PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia was fourth. (AFP)

Physicians for Human Rights - Israel said in a new report that the separation wall was preventing large numbers of Palestinians from gaining access to health care in East Jerusalem. (AFP, www.phr.org.il)

The following is an excerpt from the [Chair's summary](#) from the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee donors' conference held in London: "Establishment of security and implementation of reform will be needed alongside planning and fund-raising to ensure the necessary environment for increased investment, trade, tourism and development. In addition to the major improvements in border management envisaged in the [Agreement](#) [on Movement and Access], Israel is urged to maintain Palestinian labour permits at existing levels as a minimum, and to implement its previous commitment to issue 35,000 permits. ... After consultations with the donor community and the parties, a pledging conference could then be held before the end of May 2006." (www.fco.gov.uk)

The United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in Caracas, was concluded with the adoption of [final declaration](#). (UN press release PAL/2037)

Military sources said Israeli aircraft had fired rockets at open areas in the northern Gaza Strip used by Palestinians to launch rockets into Israel. Palestinian sources said two people had been wounded in the attack. (*Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

An Israeli aircraft fired a missile on the home of a militant from the Popular Resistance Committees in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, causing massive damage to the building. The militant was not at home. One person was slightly injured, according to medical sources. Shortly afterwards, another Israeli missile slammed into a three-storey building in Rafah housing the offices of a charity run by Islamic Jihad, heavily damaging the building but causing no casualties. The IDF confirmed both strikes, saying the first had targeted a structure in Jabaliya "used by the Popular Resistance Committees for storing weapons" and the second air raid had "targeted an office in Rafah used by Islamic Jihad for terrorist activity." (*AFP, Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

Palestinians fired four rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel, including one that landed on the southern outskirts of the town of Ashkelon. Three of the rockets landed in open areas, causing no casualties. Israeli artillery units responded by pounding targets in the northern Gaza Strip. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

Palestinian security officials discovered a small car filled with gas canisters and flammable liquids at a main entrance to Bethlehem, in Beit Jala. After being alerted by them, the Israeli army carried out a controlled detonation of the car. (*AFP, AP, www.idf.il*)

The IDF arrested 16 "wanted" Palestinians overnight: an Islamic Jihad member in Yatta, south of Hebron, two Islamic Jihad members and a Hamas member in Tulkarm, 11 Hamas members, west of Ramallah, an Islamic Jihad member in Asira Shamliyya, north of Nablus, and a Fatah member in Al Khadr, west of Bethlehem. (*www.idf.il*)

Israeli soldiers arrested three Palestinians in Tubas, north-east of Nablus, Beit Rima and Bani Zeed near Ramallah. (*Wafa*)

A 24-year-old member of the armed wing of Islamic Jihad, Khalil Ikmeil, was shot dead during an exchange of fire with Israeli soldiers in Qabatiya, south of Jenin, according to Palestinian medics and witnesses. Israeli military sources denied any involvement in the incident, saying, "Our forces were not active in that region at the time." (*DPA, Xinhua*)

PA President Abbas said PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia had submitted his resignation to participate in the PLC elections. (*DPA, Reuters*)

Fatah officials held negotiations with Marwan Barghouti and his associates in an effort to keep them in the party. PA President Abbas hinted in a closed-door meeting with some of the rebels that he might resign and call early presidential elections if the split within the party was not reversed, according to meeting participants. PA Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said the Fatah list would be reworked to put young activists, not just Mr. Barghouti, in higher spots. Kadoura Fares, a leader of the young activists, said, "It's too late. ... We approved primary elections to choose our candidates, but the President did not abide by that. They went with the old system of masters and slaves, and now we are more determined to go ahead with our list." (*AP*)

The Palestinian Central Elections Commission announced on its web site the factions registered for the PLC elections and the number of candidates by region. (*www.elections.ps*)

The fourth and final round of the municipal elections was held in 42 West Bank cities and towns, including Nablus, Jenin and Ramallah. (*AFP, AP*)

Israel Radio reported that Israeli officials had decided to further delay beyond next week the launch of Palestinian bus convoys between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, due to have started on 15 December under the [Agreement on Movement and Access](#). (*AP, Reuters*)

The General Assembly [adopted](#) a resolution on "Assistance to the Palestinian people". (*UN press release GA/10434*)

16

Israeli aircraft shelled 13 targets in the Gaza Strip used either as launching sites for Qassam rockets or as paths leading to launching sites. The aircraft also produced sonic booms over the Strip. Two Palestinians were wounded during the shelling, according to residents. (*AP, Ha'aretz*)

A Qassam rocket landed near the southern Israeli town of Sderot. There were no reports of casualties or damage. (*Ha'aretz, Ynet*)

The Israeli army imposed a closure on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in response to the recent barrage of Qassam rockets from the Gaza Strip.

The Al-Muntar (Karni) crossing was not affected by the closure, according to *Israel Radio*. (*Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, Ynet*)

Palestinian gunmen shot at an Israeli vehicle near Hebron, killing a settler from "Beit Hagai," south of Hebron, and slightly wounding two women inside the vehicle. (*AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

Five Israelis were arrested and several Palestinians wounded during a protest against the separation wall in Bil'in, west of Ramallah. The Palestinians said they had been beaten up by soldiers and police officers. (*Ynet*)

Israeli forces arrested six "wanted" Palestinians in the West Bank: three Islamic Jihad members in Illar, north-east of Tulkarm, one Islamic Jihad member in Tzeida, north of Tulkarm, and two Hamas members in Beit Liqya, south-west of Ramallah. (*www.idf.il*)

According to preliminary results of the municipal elections conducted in the West Bank on 15 December, Hamas won 73 per cent of the vote in Hebron, gaining 13 seats of the town's 15-member council and a coalition of Fatah and independent candidates won the two remaining seats. In Jenin, Hamas won eight seats, while a coalition between Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) garnered seven. In El-Bireh, a large suburb of Ramallah, Hamas won 72 per cent of the vote, gaining nine seats of the 15-member council. Fatah won four seats, and PFLP and independents took the remaining two seats on El-Bireh's council. In Ramallah, Fatah gained six seats in a coalition with other factions, while PFLP won another six, and Hamas won three. Official results would be announced on 18 December. (*AP*)

The Swedish Foreign Ministry said that Sweden had decided to send 10 election observers as part of an EU team that would monitor the January 2006 PLC elections. (*www.sweden.gov.se*)

According to a poll published in *Yediot Ahronot*, 49 per cent of Israelis support giving up Palestinian neighbourhoods in Jerusalem under a peace deal with the Palestinians, and another 49 per cent object to such an arrangement. (*Ynet*)

A British inquest ruled that UNRWA's British staff member Iain Hook, shot dead in a crossfire between Palestinian gunmen and Israeli troops, had been unlawfully killed. (*The Mirror*)

In a resolution passed on a 397-17 vote, the United States House of Representatives said that any Hamas participation in the Government of the PA would "potentially undermine the ability of the United States to have a constructive relationship with or provide further assistance to the Palestinian

Authority.” The House also urged PA President Abbas to declare before the vote that he intended to dismantle terrorist organizations. (AP, www.house.gov/)

17

The PA Ministry of Interior said that a Palestinian, who died late during the day while driving east of Rafah, had been killed by an explosion from inside his car and not due to an Israeli airstrike. The Ministry said in a statement that Khaled Abu Setta, 27, was driving his car, which was loaded with rockets and explosives, when a huge explosion wrecked the car and wounded three bystanders. Earlier reports had said that Mr. Abu Setta was killed in an Israeli airstrike carried out by a drone, which was denied by an IDF spokesman. (DPA)

A Palestinian militant was killed and others wounded during armed clashes between militants and an IDF force near the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel. Palestinian security sources said that the IDF informed the PA that the area was a closed military zone until the next morning. The body of the Palestinian was recovered the following day in the northern Gaza Strip. Palestinian security sources said Lokman Abu Zikree, 21, a member of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, was shot by soldiers in the Beit Lahya area. An IDF spokeswoman said soldiers had opened fire in the direction of a Palestinian who “was crawling towards the security fence (between Gaza and Israel) in order to plant an explosive device”, while AP reported that a Palestinian was killed on the edge of the Gaza Strip. The man was identified by Palestinian medical officials as Mohammed Abu Dikri, 34. An IDF statement said the man had crossed an outer barrier and was getting close to the main fence when troops shot him. It was not immediately clear whether these two border shootings were separate incidents. (AFP, AP)

Sayid Siyam, a Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, said that Hamas was ready to hold talks with the United States to explain the movement’s attitudes if it was elected into the parliament in the upcoming elections. “We are ready to meet with the whole world except the occupation (Israel)”, he told reporters, adding that he had met with several United States and European officials. Mr. Siyam accused Israel of misleading the United States and always trying to show that the Palestinian people and Hamas are terrorists. (Xinhua)

18

Israeli aircraft struck the Gaza Strip repeatedly. Four Palestinians were wounded in at least nine raids, including three policemen and a baby who was hit in the face with shrapnel, medics said. Key bridges in the northern Gaza Strip were also targeted, cutting off roads for thousands of people.

“These routes were used by terrorists to reach the areas from which they launched rockets at Israeli targets,” the IDF said. A rocket fired by militants in the northern Gaza Strip crashed in an industrial zone on the outskirts of Ashkelon, some 10 km north of Gaza, security sources said.

Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement posted on its website. (AP, Reuters)

The Israeli army arrested three members of the Islamic Jihad in a predawn raid in Jenin. (Xinhua)

Nablus’ largest hospital was briefly evacuated after a car packed with explosives was discovered parked outside. Palestinian security forces neutralized the explosives, and staff and patients were able to return to the hospital. There were no reports of injuries. (AP)

The operation of Palestinian convoys between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank had been postponed due to security concerns, Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said. Mr. Mofaz was quoted by public radio as saying at the weekly Cabinet meeting that “the security conditions were not ready for these convoys at the moment”. (AFP, Xinhua)

Ron Prosor, Director-General of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told *Israel Radio*, “We hope that the countries of the European Union will follow the example set by the House of Representatives with regards to Hamas, and have made contacts to this effect”. The United States House of Representatives had passed a resolution on 16 December that Hamas should not be permitted to participate in Palestinian polls until it recognized Israel’s right to exist. (AFP)

EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana said that European taxpayers would have a hard time supporting the PA if it included a party that supports violence and advocates Israel’s destruction. “It would be very difficult for the help and the money that goes to the Palestinian Authority to continue to flow,” he told reporters in Tel Aviv during a tour of the region. (AP)

Fatah leaders agreed to present two separate lists of candidates for the January elections to try to end a split in the movement. (Reuters)

Sayid Siyam, a Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, said that the group believed that entering the Government would allow it to push its agenda of promoting reform and ending corruption. In particular, he said, Hamas had its eyes on some of the Palestinian security branches, which he called “one of the areas of corruption” and “an object of our interest to reform”. (AP)

19

Israeli aircraft fired 11 rockets (13 according to AFP) at the northern Gaza Strip overnight, wounding a Palestinian doctor and a paramedic, Palestinian security sources and medics said. Two of the Israeli rockets had struck near a hospital and shrapnel had wounded the two medical workers, medics at Balsam hospital said. Security sources said most of the rockets had been targeting access routes and a main road that linked northern Gaza to Gaza City. The PA Interior Ministry had reported early Monday that two rockets had landed near the Palestinian national security headquarters in the northern Gaza Strip, causing damage to the building. The Ministry website also said that several rockets had been fired near the Sheikh Zayed neighbourhood, in the northern Gaza Strip, damaging several houses and a school. *Israel Army Radio* quoted an IDF spokesman as saying that the army had been targeting four roads in the area used by militants for transporting Qassam rockets to be fired at Israel. (AFP, Xinhua)

Israeli security forces pursued two Palestinians near Jerusalem who reportedly intended to carry out an attack, according to *Israel Army Radio*.

The two youths, who threw firebombs at security forces during the chase, were eventually arrested as they crossed the wall near Har Homa. The two, aged 16 and 17, carried two pipe bombs, fire bombs and knives and had a Hamas flag. *Israel Radio* also reported that security forces had captured a Palestinian near Kibbutz Nir Am, located adjacent to Sderot near the Gaza Strip border. (Ha’aretz)

The political leader of Hamas, Khaled Mashaal, rejected the EU’s warning to halt aid to the PA if Hamas won next month’s parliamentary elections without renouncing violence. He dismissed the move as “a flagrant interference” in the Palestinians’ internal affairs and urged the PA not to bow to EU pressure. (AP)

Israeli settlers cut down dozens of olive trees belonging to residents of Burin, a small village near Nablus. The settlers from “Har Bracha” used chain saws in the middle of the night to cut down olive trees on the edge of the village, the villagers said. Israeli police were investigating, said West Bank police spokesman Shlomi Sagi. He said about 30 trees had been damaged but not uprooted. “The settlers uprooted 128 olive trees on Friday and we were shocked this morning to discover the loss of an additional 40 trees,” Raed Nahas, head of the Burin regional council, told AFP. (AFP, AP)

Israel will ease access to Bethlehem during the upcoming Christmas celebrations, starting 24 December until Armenian Christmas on 18 January. Lt. Col. Aviv Feigel said pilgrims would not need permission from the IDF to enter the town. The military would try to speed the process by not checking every tourist bus, but would conduct spot checks of buses instead, he said. Arab Israelis and Christian Palestinians would be allowed to drive into Bethlehem, and Palestinian Christians would be allowed into Israel to visit family, the officer said. “We are taking a calculated risk by easing steps and that is because we are well aware of the importance of Bethlehem,” Lt. Col. Feigel told reporters. He added that the quiet in Bethlehem was misleading, and security threats continued. Half of the Israeli fatalities in 2004 came from attackers who entered Jerusalem from Bethlehem, he stressed. There had also been persistent rumours that Al-Qaeda may attack the city’s holy sites. (AP, *The Express on Sunday*) Fatah’s official list of candidates for the forthcoming parliamentary elections did not include jailed Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti, according to the Central Elections Commission. Fatah sources said that it was Mr. Barghouti’s decision not to run as he would rather remain at the head of a

“future” party to be made up of younger members of Fatah. (AFP)

The Gulf Cooperation Summit summit in Abu Dhabi extended support to the Palestinians in their pursuit of an independent State alongside Israel. (Xinhua)

Romania’s President Traian Basescu conferred with Jordan’s King Abdullah on the latest developments in the Middle East peace process, among other issues, an official statement said. The two leaders stressed the international community’s role in helping the Palestinians and Israelis progress with the peace process and build on Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. (DPA)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel will also meet with Palestinian leaders when she visits Israel on her first trip to the Middle East in late January. Deputy Spokesman for the Federal Government Thomas Steg said Ms. Merkel wanted to make clear that Germany believed that Palestinians had the right to have their own State. (AFP)

20

The IDF arrested six Palestinians and wounded five during an incursion into the village of Yamun, west of Jenin. Around 40 armoured vehicles entered the village, where soldiers surrounded a group of activists from Hamas and Fatah. Five Palestinians were wounded in exchanges of gunfire with the Israeli soldiers. Witnesses said an Israeli policeman had been moderately wounded. In Ramallah, soldiers entered Qibya, west of the city, and conducted a house to house search. Soldiers arrested some 13 Palestinians in Ramallah and Jenin. (Ha’aretz, Wafa)

Some 20 members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades entered the Bethlehem City Hall, near Manger Square, and forced workers out, interrupting preparations for the Christmas season. Mediators despatched to the building managed to persuade those inside to end their occupation peacefully.

Members of the Brigades said they were protesting the PA’s failure to provide financial assistance to some 300 activists. (AFP, Ha’aretz)

A group called the Loyalists of the Land of Israel said that they intended to build 15 new outposts across the West Bank during the Hanukka festival.

The same group had attempted to build four new outposts last October. (Ha’aretz)

Palestinians fired five Qassam rockets at targets in Israel. Three rockets landed near the western Negev town of Sderot, one landed south of Ashkelon, and the fifth landed in an Israeli army base north of the Gaza Strip, according to *Israel Radio*. There were no injuries or damage reported. The IDF responded by firing artillery rounds at open fields in the Gaza Strip used by Palestinians to launch rockets. (Ha’aretz, Ynet)

Palestinians opened fire at an Israeli force in Nablus. There were no injuries, but a vehicle was damaged. An Israeli was slightly wounded when Palestinians hurled rocks at his vehicle near Bethlehem. The IDF arrested a “wanted” Palestinian in Hebron. (www.idf.il)

Israeli forces arrested three teenage Palestinian students in Bethlehem. In a separate incident in Bethlehem, Israeli forces opened fire at Palestinians, seriously wounding one in his head. In Nablus, Israeli forces shot and wounded two Palestinians. (IPC)

Fatah’s “old guard” and “young guard” agreed to cooperate as closely as possible during election campaigns despite their differences. They also said they would try to get permission from electoral authorities to merge two rival candidate lists that had already been presented. “The two [sides] have agreed to coordinate their efforts to support Fatah candidates in the districts and we’re committed to this,” said Mohammed Dahlan, who is part of the “young guard”. A senior aide to PA President Abbas, Samih Abdel-Fattah, said, “Both have ... agreed to find mechanisms for cooperation and to avoid competing.” (Reuters)

Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz held his first meeting with the new American security coordinator, Gen. Keith Dayton, and said that Israel was preparing to cooperate with the Palestinian Authority on the PLC elections. A senior security source said that the cooperation would be limited to the most basic level, such as enabling ballot boxes to be moved. Freedom of movement for candidates would be considered on a case-by-case basis but would not be extended to Hamas candidates. (Ha’aretz)

The Canadian Representative Office in Ramallah said in a statement that Canada was preparing to deploy a 58-member observer mission for the PLC elections. (Wafa)

Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari [briefed](#) the Security Council on “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.” (UN News Centre, UN press release SC/8596)

21

Hamas leader in Jenin Zaid Khalil Moussa, 28, was killed during a shoot-out with Israeli troops who were trying to arrest him. The shoot-out began when the troops surrounded buildings where Mr. Moussa and other Hamas militants were hiding, according to witnesses. An Israeli border policeman suffered slight injuries in the shooting. (AFP, AP, DPA)

Palestinian gunmen abducted a Dutch school principal and his Australian deputy as they drove to work at a private American school north of Gaza City. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said it was behind the kidnapping and demanded the release of some of its leaders held in a jail in Jericho under international supervision. The two teachers were released hours later. (AFP, AP, Reuters)

Israeli forces arrested five “wanted” Palestinians: two Hamas members in Qibya, west of Ramallah, a Fatah member in Beitunya, south-west of Ramallah, and a Hamas member and another Palestinian in Yatta, south of Hebron. Palestinians opened fire at Israeli forces operating in Nablus, causing no injuries or damage. An Israeli was slightly wounded when Palestinians threw rocks at his vehicle south of Jerusalem. (www.idf.il)

Israeli forces stormed Azzun village, east of Qaqilya, and arrested four Palestinians. (Wafa)

The chief Palestinian Islamic justice, Sheikh Tayssir Al-Tamimi, was arrested by Israeli police for his unauthorized entry into East Jerusalem. (AFP, Reuters)

The IDF confiscated 85 dunums of agricultural land in Al-Khadr near Bethlehem to set up a crossing point. (IPC)

Senior Israeli officials told the head of the European election observers, Veronique de Keyser, that Israel would not allow voting for the PLC elections to take place in East Jerusalem because of Hamas’ participation. PA Deputy Prime Minister Nabil Sha’ath responded by saying, “If the Israelis insist on not allowing us to conduct the elections in Jerusalem, then there will be no elections at all.” (AP, DPA, Ha’aretz)

Egypt’s intelligence chief Omar Suleiman separately met with Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz and PA President Abbas to discuss the upcoming PLC elections. (Ha’aretz)

The Japanese Foreign Ministry said Japan had decided to contribute \$4,826,000 to UNRWA as part of \$100 million in economic aid to the Palestinians that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi had pledged during a meeting with PA President Abbas in Tokyo in May. The day earlier, the Ministry had announced emergency aid totalling approximately \$720,000 to “support the fair and smooth implementation of the Palestinian Legislative Council elections.” (AP, www.mofa.go.jp)

A poll conducted jointly by Hebrew University’s Truman Institute and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research showed that 50 per cent of Israelis supported negotiations with Hamas, if such talks were needed, in order to reach a compromise deal with the Palestinians, while 47 per cent objected to such talks. The poll also showed that 38 per cent of Israelis supported a division of Jerusalem with the Palestinians, with 60 per cent

opposed. (*The Jerusalem Post, Reuters, Ynet*)

Secretary-General Kofi Annan held his annual [press conference](#) with UN correspondents at Headquarters. When asked what he saw as the big, global issues that were going to be confronting the world next year, he said: "... I also see the situation in the Middle East. Here, I am talking about the broader Middle East. ... And I am looking at the Palestinian-Israeli situation. So, the Middle East will be a major issue for us." Responding to the question on his position regarding the suggestion that Egypt and Saudi Arabia be added to the Quartet, he said: "... Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Jordan have played an important role in the situation in the Middle East. In fact, on the reform of the Palestinian security, Egypt has been extremely helpful, working with the Europeans and the Americans to reform the Palestinian security authority. The Quartet, in the past, has broadened its meeting. We had a meeting once where we brought in the three countries Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. And at our last meeting, in September, this issue came up: that we should in the near future allow room for a larger discussion, bringing in the partners in the region. I don't think there's an intention to expand the Quartet as such. But the Quartet can meet in an expanded format with the three countries that you mentioned, and I think that is not excluded, that it will take place in the course of this year." (*UN News Centre, UN press release SG/SM/10280*) Israel and the United Nations signed an agreement for removal of the rubble from 21 settlements dismantled during Israel's withdrawal of the Gaza Strip in September. Yossi Tzernach, spokesman for the Israeli liaison mission with the Gaza Strip, said Israel would transfer \$25 million to the United Nations Development Programme, which would bring in Palestinian contractors to remove the rubble. He said that UN inspectors had carried out an environmental check and found that there was no dangerous material in the rubble. He did not know when the work would begin. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

22

Three Palestinians, including a leader of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Bashar Khanani, were shot and killed by Israeli troops in Nablus. The two other men, Anas Al-Sheikh and Ahmed Jiyousi, were members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The men were shot as they tried to flee a building that had been sealed off by Israeli troops. (*AP, BBC, DPA, Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

Palestinians in the Gaza Strip launched two Qassam rockets into an Israeli military base south of Ashkelon, lightly wounding five soldiers, the IDF said. Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds Brigades took credit for the shelling. A Palestinian, Ibrahim Naana, 21, was killed when the IDF responded by firing shells. Palestinian medical officials said Mr. Naana was killed by shrapnel after a shell landed east of the Jabaliya refugee camp [in the northern Gaza Strip]. He was passing through the road in the area hit in the shelling, witnesses said. Another Palestinian man was wounded. (*AP, BBC, DPA, Ha'aretz, www.idf.il*)

Israeli troops arrested 14 Palestinians in overnight operations, the military said. (*AP, BBC*)

Israeli officials said they would step up military measures to counter the rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. Vice Premier Ehud Olmert said, "Certainly if the rocket fire on Ashkelon does not stop, there will be a very fierce response, and no option can be ruled out, including a ground operation, but of course, we must reach the conclusion that this is the right method at the time we make the decision." David Baker, an official in [Prime Minister Sharon's] office, said, "The rocket launching was from territory that Israel evacuated. Israel is compelled to respond, including steps that we haven't taken until now." (*Ha'aretz*)

Israel would overhaul the wall along the West Bank and Jerusalem to cut the crossing time for people and goods from hours to minutes. The construction of 27 terminals would cut costs close to \$500 million, Israeli officials said, and would sharply reduce tension caused by the presence of armed and ill-trained soldiers at the checkpoints, replacing them with civilian contractors hired by the Defence Ministry. Palestinian columnist Daoud Kuttab said it was a "disgusting move to sugar coat an unacceptable occupation. Instead of freeing Palestinians, they're going to make life easier within the big prison." (*The New York Times*)

Hamas and 10 other factions told PA President Abbas that they wanted the PLC elections held even if Israel banned voting by Palestinians in East Jerusalem. The PLO Executive Committee pledged "its total commitment to holding the elections on the scheduled date". (*AFP, Reuters, Wafa*)

The Fatah Central Committee decided at a meeting chaired by PA President Abbas to merge its two rival candidate lists – one drawn up by the party leadership and the other by those campaigning for change – into one, headed by Marwan Barghouti, followed by former PA Prime Minister Qureia. Uniting the two lists would be dependent on a special court decision granting extra time to register candidates, a process that had expired on 14 December. Earlier in the day, Mr. Barghouti called for Fatah reunification. (*AFP, AP*)

PA Tourism Minister Ziad Al-Bandak said that the PA was working with its Israeli counterparts to ensure that as many foreign visitors as possible would be able to reach Bethlehem for the Christmas holiday. Israel had promised to ease travel restrictions and its roadblocks on Christmas Day to guarantee a "smooth passage" for worshippers, Mr. Bandak said. (*AFP*)

The Swedish Government and the PA signed an agreement to fund a programme for developing the PA police services. In a ceremony in Ramallah, PA Minister of Planning Ghassan Al-Khatib said the Swedish Government had donated €2 million to enhance the Palestinian police in its work in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Sweden's General Consul in Jerusalem, Nils Eliasson, confirmed his country's support to the PA in order to improve security in the Territory, thus helping promote economic development. (*Wafa*)

In a press release issued in Montreal, the Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine announced a campaign of boycotts against Israeli goods in order to force Israel to respect international law, end occupation and dismantle the wall. The organization said that this was a response to the international call for boycotts, divestment and sanctions issued by Palestinian civil society in July 2005. The targets of this campaign were Israeli products and products of companies contributing to the Israeli occupation. It would start by questioning the Canada-Israel free trade agreement. (*Wafa*)

Federal judge Amy St. Eve ordered United States prosecutors to request documents from Israeli security forces relating to the interrogation of a United States citizen. Mohammad Salah had been charged in 2004, along with two other Palestinian immigrants, with a racketeering conspiracy to send millions of dollars to Hamas. The documents could refute or support his claim that his statements were obtained through torture. Statements obtained through torture are inadmissible in United States courts. (*AFP, Reuters*)

UNDP announced that it was asked by the Government of Israel, the PA and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Quartet, James Wolfensohn, to undertake rehabilitation of sites of demolished Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip. With more than 1.2 million tons of debris and rubble to be cleared and recycled, the project would cost \$24.7 million, to be provided by the Government of Israel. It would take an estimated 18 months to complete, and will employ several hundred Palestinian workers. "We are very pleased with the trust that all parties have placed in UNDP/Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (PAPP) to carry out this task," said Minna Tyrkk, the acting head of PAPP. The \$25 million grant is believed to be the first donation from the Government of Israel to a UN agency for an economic development project in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. (*IMRA, www.undp.org*)

Israel threatened to stop Palestinian militants firing rockets from the Gaza Strip by using airstrikes and shelling to enforce a buffer zone inside the territory. The Defence Ministry said the IDF had already been ordered to restrict movement within the belt along the border and security sources

said that meant intensified air strikes. But the Prime Minister's Office said the "no-go" zone was not yet being enforced. Palestinian forces said they had refused an Israeli request to evacuate the border zone and were continuing their own efforts to prevent rocket firing from amid the rubble of former Israeli settlements at the border. "We will not move one inch," said Assayed Shaban, commander of forces in northern Gaza. Israel's Deputy Defence Minister Ze'ev Boim told *Israel Army Radio* that Israel might shell populated areas of the Gaza Strip as opposed to open fields.

MK Yuval Steinitz (Likud), chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, said that he would not rule out cutting off electricity to the Gaza Strip for an hour following each rocket attack, or a full day, following an attack that causes casualties. (*Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

Israel decided to step up targeted killings of senior leaders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in response to rocket attacks on Israeli targets. (*Ha'aretz, Xinhua*)

Thousands of Hamas supporters marched under pouring rain in the Gaza Strip to celebrate the movement's eighteenth anniversary. The demonstrators also protested United States and EU criticism ahead of Palestinian elections and urged PA President Abbas not to delay the vote. (*AFP, AP, Reuters*)

Senior Palestinian officials said former PA Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia had decided to abandon his bid for a seat in the PLC. He had reportedly sent a letter to PA President Abbas to say that he wanted the elections postponed and that he opposed a plan to merge two rival lists of candidates from the ruling Fatah movement. (*Reuters*)

MK Ahmed Tibi (Hadash) said that Israel's decision not to allow Palestinian parliamentary elections in East Jerusalem hurt the standing of PA President Abbas. "Lately, the Government of Israel isn't just not helping Abu Mazen," Mr. Tibi told *Israel Radio*. "It's also damaging Abu Mazen." (*Ha'aretz*)

23

During a weekly demonstration against the separation wall in Bil'in, west of Ramallah, Israeli forces fired gas canisters and rubber-coated bullets at protestors, wounding three Palestinian, Israeli and international activists. The forces also arrested three other activists, including two Israelis. (*IPC*)

Israeli forces arrested an 18-year-old Palestinian in Bethlehem after breaking into several houses. (*IPC*)

24

Palestinians fired a Qassam rocket from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, but the rocket landed within the territory. (*Ha'aretz*)

A Hamas gunman opened fire at a Palestinian policeman, moderately wounding him in the shoulder, when the policeman stopped a group of armed Hamas members at a routine checkpoint in Gaza City. (*AP*)

Israeli forces arrested one Palestinian in Nablus, two teenagers in Ramallah, and another two teenagers in Hebron. (*Wafa*)

Ahmed Qureia said he would not run in the PLC elections, resuming his job as PA Prime Minister. Fatah sources said veterans who might be sidelined if the two rival lists were merged were considering a plan to launch their own breakaway faction as the Martyr Yasser Arafat list. (*AP, Reuters*)

During the annual Christmas eve mass at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, which was attended by PA President Abbas, Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah said, "Leaving all violence, all vengeance, freeing political prisoners and putting the past behind can create a new land in which we can assure security for Israelis ... and give Palestinians liberty and an end to occupation." (*AFP, DPA, Ha'aretz*)

25

Israeli forces opened fire at a group of Palestinians in Anabta, east of Tulkarm, wounding an 18-year-old Palestinian, Ala Zubedi, in the thigh. (*Wafa*)

Prime Minister Sharon ordered senior defence officials to immediately implement the plan to prevent Palestinians from entering areas in the northern Gaza Strip used to launch Qassam rockets against Israel. Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz said he had directed Israeli forces to pursue a policy of intensive operations and targeted killings of Palestinian militants. (*AFP, AP, DPA, Ha'aretz, Ynet*)

An Israeli Government source said Israel was to extend a general closure of the Palestinian territory until 3 January 2006 because of Hannukah. (*AFP*)

Some 120 olive trees, between 20 and 30 years old, were cut down in Burin, south of Nablus. The perpetrators were unknown, but signs pointed to settlers from "Yitzhar", known to harass Palestinians. (*Ha'aretz*)

26

Palestinians fired two rockets into Israel. One landed next to a kindergarten in a farming community, near the Gaza Strip, and the other landed near a village south of the coastal city of Ashkelon. In response, the Israeli army fired artillery rounds into fields in the Gaza Strip. There were no injuries on either side. (*Reuters*)

Palestinians threw an explosive device at an Israeli force in Nablus, causing no injuries or damage. The IDF arrested a "wanted" Fatah member in the Al-Aida refugee camp near Bethlehem and two "wanted" Palestinians in Hebron. (www.idf.il)

An Israeli Defence Ministry source said, "The Defence Minister has ordered the army to apply from Monday evening a decision taken last Thursday setting up a limitation on Palestinians circulating in the northern Gaza Strip, following rocket fire launched from this area toward southern Israel."

Israeli public television said that any Palestinian entering it would do so "at risk to their life," adding that helicopters would take a key role in enforcing the "sterile" zone. (*AFP*)

Spokesmen of the Popular Resistance Committees, Islamic Jihad's armed wing Saraya Al-Quds, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades told a news conference in the Gaza Strip that their groups would carry out joint armed attacks against Israel within the coming days in response to a security buffer zone being set up by Israel in the northern Gaza Strip. (*DPA*)

In response to a Fatah request, a special Palestinian court for electoral affairs decided to reopen the registration of candidates for the PLC elections for six hours. The registration was expected to be held on 28 December. Fatah would be allowed to submit a single list unifying the two rival lists. (*AFP, AP, DPA, Ha'aretz*)

An Israeli official said Israel might allow Palestinians in East Jerusalem to participate in the upcoming PLC elections. Israel had recently threatened to prevent voting in East Jerusalem because of Hamas' participation. A government official said Israel would probably allow the Palestinians to vote in city post offices as it had done in the past. (*AP*)

Israel's Housing Ministry published tenders inviting contractor bids to develop 150 plots for single family homes in the "Beitar Ilit" settlement and a further 78 plots in "Givat Zayit", part of the "Efrat" settlement. The two settlements, just outside Jerusalem, are part of the "Gush Etzion" settlement block, which Prime Minister Sharon had vowed to retain under any deal with the Palestinians. Mr. Sharon's advisor, Raanan Gissin, said the bureaucratic process for building those homes had begun five years before under the previous Government, and that the homes would be built within the boundaries of existing settlements that were part of the major blocks that Israel had intended to retain. Peace Now, an Israeli settlement watchdog group, said the Ministry had published tenders for 1,131 new housing units since January 2005. (*AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters*)

In a draft election platform published in *Ma'ariv*, Prime Minister Sharon's new party, Kadima ("Forward"), declared Palestinian statehood a central goal and called for conceding more land to the Palestinians as part of peace talks based on the Road Map. "The basic tenet of the peace process is

two national States,” says the platform. It also says, “When discussing the permanent borders, Israel will keep vital security zones in its own territory, united Jerusalem, which is the eternal capital of the Jewish people, places of national and historic importance and the large settlement blocks.” Party spokesman Lior Chorev said the draft was to be approved by next week. (AP, DPA)

27

Israeli helicopters fired missiles at two offices connected to Fatah in Gaza City and Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, heavily damaging the buildings. The army said the offices had been used by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades to meet, plan and recruit, but Palestinians said the offices, empty during the strike, had been used for social and educational purposes. Missiles also hit roads and a bridge in the northern Gaza Strip, which the army said had been used by militants to access rocket launching sites. (AFP, AP, Reuters, Ynet)

Israeli soldiers opened fire towards the Balata refugee camp near Nablus and wounded two Palestinians. Also, Israeli soldiers arrested three other Palestinians near Nablus. (Wafa)

Palestinians opened fire at an Israeli vehicle travelling near Huwara, south of Nablus, causing no injuries or damage. (www.idf.il)

Gunmen from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades stormed the governor's office, the PA Education Ministry and a religious court near Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, demanding jobs. The gunmen left five hours later after Palestinian officials promised that their demands would be addressed.

Later in the day, dozens of gunmen from the Brigades, firing bullets in the air, took over an election office in A-Ram, just outside Jerusalem, demanding that Fatah include more Jerusalem residents in its candidate list for the PLC elections. (AP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

Hundreds of young Israeli settlers, some of them among those evicted from Gaza settlements, erected 13 makeshift outposts next to existing settlements in the West Bank. Datya Yitzhaki, a former Gaza settler and spokesperson for the settler group, said a total of 25 new outposts would be erected by the end of Hanukkah. (AFP, Ha'aretz, Reuters)

Israeli bulldozers demolished a house in Beit Hanina, north of Jerusalem, which did not have a building license from the Israeli authorities. (Wafa)

PA President Abbas met in Gaza City with leaders of Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, to urge them to halt rocket fire and renew the ceasefire with Israel. Islamic Jihad leader Khaled al-Batsh said, “When the time is up there will be a general position, but calm will most likely not be extended.” (AP, DPA, Reuters)

The PA Ministry of Prisoners Affairs said that nearly 9,200 Palestinian prisoners and detainees were currently in 28 Israeli prisons and detention camps. The Ministry also said that more than 650,000 Palestinians had been imprisoned by Israel since 1967. (IPC)

28

Israeli aircraft fired missiles into the northern Gaza Strip overnight. There were no casualties. The army said it had targeted three routes used by militants firing rockets. (Reuters)

A Qassam rocket landed in an open field near the southern Israeli town of Sderot, causing no injuries or damage. (Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post)

Palestinians detonated a pipe bomb targeting an Israeli force in Nablus. Also, Palestinians opened fire at an Israeli force patrolling along the border fence with the northern Gaza Strip. There were no injuries or damage in either incident. (www.idf.il)

Israeli forces arrested four Palestinians in Hebron, including two children. Also, Israeli soldiers thrust into Rummana village, west of Jenin, and arrested one Palestinian. (Wafa)

More than 60 gunmen from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades stormed the main election office in Gaza City, exchanging fire with some 500 security forces who rushed to the scene. The gunmen demanded that members of the Brigades be included in Fatah's candidate list for the PLC elections.

One policeman was wounded in the leg by gunfire. Also, gunmen from the Brigades entered the election offices in Khan Yunis and Deir el-Balah, but in Rafah, police prevented gunmen from entering the building. All the standoffs ended within hours with the gunmen leaving the sites. (AFP, AP, Reuters, Ynet)

Unidentified Palestinian gunmen kidnapped a 25-year-old British human rights activist and her parents in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. (Reuters)

Israeli aircraft dropped leaflets in the Gaza Strip warning residents against entering a new “buffer zone” in the north of the territory after 6 p.m. (1600 GMT). “Anyone who will not heed to this warning is placing his/her life in immediate danger,” the leaflet said. (AFP, AP, DPA, Ha'aretz, Reuters, www.idf.il)

Coordination meetings were held between Israeli and Palestinian security officials on the new buffer zone in the northern Gaza Strip. The Israeli side communicated a formal warning to Palestinian officials and presented them a map detailing the zone. (Ha'aretz, IMRA)

PA President Abbas told a news conference in Gaza City on Israel's decision on the new buffer zone: “Israel left the Gaza Strip and has no right to return under any pretext such as the firing of missiles, which I also strongly condemn. ... I ask all parties to assume their responsibilities and not give pretexts to Israel.” (AFP)

Fatah submitted to the Central Elections Commission a unified list of candidates for the PLC elections headed by Marwan Barghouti. (AFP, AP, Reuters, Wafa)

The IDF began its “Operation Blue Skies”, aimed at preventing Palestinian rocket fire against Israel by establishing a “no-go” buffer zone in the northern Gaza Strip. Palestinian sources said a 14-year-old child in Beit Lahiya had been wounded by shrapnel during a shelling. (AFP, AP, DPA, Reuters, Wafa)

Prime Minister Sharon's Kadima (“Forward”) party launched its election campaign during a meeting in Tel Aviv. The party platform gave top priority to making major concessions to the Palestinians to seal a final peace settlement “in order to set the foundations for permanent borders to the State of Israel without jeopardizing national security”. “Conceding parts of the State of Israel is not an ideological concession but an ideological implementation that will guarantee the existence of the Jewish and democratic State in the Land of Israel,” the platform stated. Israel would only tolerate a peaceful and terror-free Palestinian sovereignty and preserve the right to annex Palestinian territory it found necessary for its security. The party also decided to take swift action against “illegal” settlement outposts and vowed to complete the [wall] by the end of 2006 while taking into consideration the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians. (Ynet)

The Israeli Labour Party was formulating a platform calling for long-term lease of large West Bank settlement blocks from the Palestinians, adopting the model of Hong Kong. Under the plan, the “Ma'aleh Adumim”, “Gush Etzion” and “Ariel” settlement blocks would remain under Israeli control in exchange for monetary or territorial compensation to a future Palestinian State. The platform would also declare Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital but would allow for re-examining the status of Palestinian neighbourhoods and villages surrounding the city by raising the issue of municipal boundaries. (Ha'aretz)

The following is an excerpt from a [statement](#) issued by the Quartet: “The Quartet welcomes the upcoming Palestinian Legislative Council elections

as a positive step toward consolidation of Palestinian democracy and the goal of a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. ... The Quartet recalled its September 20 statement, together with the Secretary-General's subsequent statement on behalf of the Quartet that ultimately those who want to be part of the political process should not engage in armed group or militia activities, for there is a fundamental contradiction between such activities and the building of a democratic state. In this regard, the Quartet calls on all participants to renounce violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and disarm. ... The Quartet expressed its view that a future Palestinian Authority Cabinet should include no member who has not committed to the principles of Israel's right to exist in peace and security and an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism. ... Both parties should work to put in place a mechanism to allow Palestinians resident in Jerusalem to exercise their legitimate democratic rights, in conformity with existing precedent." (UN News Centre, <http://ue.eu.int>, www.ln.mid.ru, www.state.gov)

Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs announced an emergency and recovery package for Africa and the Middle East, including €2.75 million for the Palestinian people. (www.foreignaffairs.gov.ie)

29

The IDF said that it had carried out overnight an aerial attack against six roads in the northern Gaza Strip used by militants to access rocket launching sites. It also renewed the firing of artillery at northern Gaza. Israel's Vice Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said the army's "Operation Blue Skies" was open-ended. (AP, www.idf.il)

A Palestinian suicide bomber blew himself up at a checkpoint set up by the Israeli army south of Tulkarm, killing an IDF officer and two Palestinians.

Three Israeli soldiers and six Palestinians were wounded in the blast. The army had set up a number of roadblocks in the area shortly after receiving warnings that a suicide bomber was headed towards Israel. Military sources said the bomber had intended to travel through the Qalandiya checkpoint to the Tel Aviv area, where he was to set off the 10 kg of explosives he was carrying. The Arabic satellite station *Al-Arabiya* reported that Islamic Jihad had claimed responsibility for the attack, but the claim could not be immediately confirmed. (AFP, AP, *Ha'aretz*, *Reuters*, www.idf.il)

Israeli forces swept into two villages near Bethlehem and arrested two Palestinians. (Wafa)

Israel's Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz ordered that a panel be established to probe the uprooting of olive trees owned by Palestinians in the West Bank. More than 1,000 olive trees had been cut down over the past month, mostly near settlements around Nablus. Mr. Mofaz said if the panel proved that Israelis were involved in the uprooting, the Palestinian victims would receive compensation from the Israeli Government. The deputy head of the Borin Council in the vicinity of Nablus, Ali Ayad, said, "I can't believe that after five years, the police and army have not succeeded in getting their hands on a single suspect. There are over 5,000 trees cut down and burned, and this, after over 100 sheep were burned, and dozens of homes plundered." (DPA, *Ha'aretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Ynet*)

30

About 100 Palestinian policemen stormed the Rafah Terminal firing in the air and forcing European monitors to flee, in protest against the death of their fellow officer killed in a clash with a local clan the day earlier. The policemen withdrew after several hours and the Terminal was reopened.

(AFP, AP, BBC, *Reuters*)

Israeli soldiers arrested overnight nine Islamic Jihad members in Attil and another in Illar, both north-east of Tulkarm. (DPA)

Islamic Jihad members in Attil village, north-east of Tulkarm, announced on loudspeakers that a 19-year-old member of the group from the village had carried out yesterday's suicide bombing south of Tulkarm. (AFP, AP, *Reuters*)

Israeli forces dismantled three makeshift outposts that had been erected next to the "Beit El" settlement, north-east of Ramallah, by a group of ultranationalist settler youths "The Land of Israel Faithful". (*Ha'aretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Reuters*)

31

Two Palestinian brothers were killed, and a third one seriously injured, as an Israeli tank fired three artillery shells at a group of Palestinians in the northern Gaza Strip, witnesses and security sources said, after militants had fired a homemade rocket at southern Israel. (*Xinhua*)