

Division for Palestinian Rights

Chronological Review of Events Relating to the Question of Palestine

Monthly media monitoring review

February 2007

Monthly highlights

- Quartet issues statement after meeting in Washington, D.C. ([2 February](#))
- PA President Abbas and Hamas Political Bureau Chief Mashaal sign agreement on formation of a national unity government. ([8 February](#))

1

Three Qassam rockets were launched into southern Israel. No injuries were reported. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. (*Ma'an News Agency, Ha'aretz*)

Four Palestinians were killed by IDF troops in separate incidents: Omar Kalboni, 21, and Wael Awwad, 21, of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade in an incursion in Nablus; an unidentified Palestinian at Qalandia checkpoint; and a Palestinian teenager when he tried to cut the fence in the West Bank. The IDF also wounded a 35-year-old farmer who was trying to cut the fence separating Gaza from Israel. Several Palestinians were arrested in Hebron, Nablus, Tulkarm and Bethlehem. During the incursion in Nablus, Israeli soldiers uncovered a lab reportedly operated by Fatah. A 5-kg explosive device was found. (*AP, Ynetnews, Wafa, Xinhua*)

IDF forces entered the village of Beitunia, near Ramallah, killing two members of the PA Preventive Security Force. The IDF said troops had entered a building to stage an ambush, but had mistakenly fired at the security officers instead who, according to the IDF, were not wearing uniforms. A senior PA security official said that the two had been in fact wearing fatigues. (*AFP, AP, Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

Palestinian Authority (PA) Presidential Guards stormed the Islamic University in Gaza City with mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, setting it on fire. Weapons and explosives were confiscated. Hamas officials accused Fatah forces of trying to burn down the university. "Breaking into a university is an unacceptable act and unjustified," said Hamas spokesperson Ayman Taha. The Presidential Guards surrounded the PA Interior Ministry and exchange fire with Hamas gunmen guarding it. Hamas members had attacked the offices of the General Union of Palestinian Workers in Gaza City before setting fire to the offices of the union's radio station in Gaza, Palestinians working at the station said. The charge was denied by Hamas. It was reported that Hamas had also attacked a Preventive Security office in Beit Lahiya. Ambulances were caught in the crossfire and gunmen exchanged heavy fire. *BBC* and *AP* reported that at least 10 people had been killed including three Hamas members, two members of the PA intelligence services, a woman and two children, and nearly 100 people had been wounded. (*AFP, AP, BBC, Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

Speaking to *Ma'an News Agency*, the President of the Islamic University, Kamlen Sha'ath, said that he had received a call from university guards, confirming that Presidential Guards had withdrawn from the university. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Hamas members ambushed a convoy in southern Gaza, killing Ramadan Mashallah, 24, and a Palestinian boy in the crossfire in central Gaza Strip. Several people were wounded. Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwan said the trucks were carrying weapons. Fatah spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khoussa said the convoy was carrying generators, tents and medical equipment. Violence broke out in the Central Gaza town of Bureij after the incident. Soon after, separate gun battles broke out in Gaza City and in northern Gaza. Gunmen in a car shot at Islam Shahwan, a spokesman for Hamas, and wounding another Hamas member. (*AFP, AP, DPA, Reuters, Wafa*)

A member of the PLO, Tayseer Khaled, in a statement to the press, called on Israel to end its settlement activities in the West Bank ahead of any meeting between PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Mr. Khaled said that if a summit were held amid continuing expansion of settlements, the meeting would be considered a political cover for the Israeli policy. He also condemned the alleged move by Prime Minister Olmert's approval to move a stretch of the wall deeper into the West Bank to include two settlements. "This is a dangerous development of Israel's unilateral measures ... The Israeli Government races with time to prevent the creation of a Palestinian viable statehood." (*Xinhua*)

PA President Abbas received the Representative of the Russian Federation to the PA, Alexei Pogodin. They discussed the latest Israeli practices aiming at creating facts on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the efforts aimed at forming a new Palestinian government. (*Wafa*)

2

The Middle East Quartet issued the following statement:

"The Quartet Principals - Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, High Representative for European Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner - met today in Washington to discuss the situation in the Middle East.

"The Quartet welcomed United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the representative of the European Union Presidency, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

"Recognizing the critical need to end the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, which would contribute to security and stability in the region, the Quartet pledged to

support efforts to put in place a process with the goal of ending the occupation that began in 1967 and creating an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel, and reaffirmed its commitment to a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

"The Quartet expressed the hope that the result-oriented dialogue initiated between Israeli and Palestinian leaders will continue in the framework of a renewed political process with the aim of launching meaningful negotiations.

"The Quartet undertook to give active follow-up to these meetings and to remain closely engaged at this moment of increased activity and dialogue. The Quartet reaffirmed its commitment to meet regularly at both the principals and envoys level according to an agreed calendar, including with the parties and other regional partners, to monitor developments and actions taken by the parties and to discuss the way ahead.

"The Quartet noted its support for renewed dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian leaders and welcomed the 23 December meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Abbas, and the subsequent implementation of some steps discussed at that meeting. The Quartet urged the parties to implement fully steps discussed at the 23 December meeting, to refrain from taking any measures that could predetermine the number of issues that will be resolved in negotiations, to meet their respective obligations under phase one of the Road Map and under the Agreement on Movement and Access, and to seek to fulfil their obligations under the Sharm el-Sheikh Understandings of 2005.

"The Quartet discussed United States efforts to facilitate discussions between the parties. The Quartet welcomed the upcoming meeting between Prime Minister Olmert, President Abbas, and Secretary of State Rice, that could begin to define more clearly the political horizon for the Palestinian people, and help engender a sense of partnership. The Quartet affirmed the primacy of the Road Map, and welcomed United States efforts to accelerate progress on the Road Map.

"The Quartet noted the continuing importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, particularly its reflection of a shared commitment to a two-State solution.

"The Quartet reiterated its call for an immediate and unconditional end to all acts of violence and terror. It condemned the suicide bombing in Eilat on 29 January and called once again for an immediate end to all rocket attacks against Israel.

"The Quartet expressed its deep concern at the violence among Palestinians and called for respect for law and order.

"The Quartet called for continued international assistance to the Palestinian people, and encouraged donors to focus on preserving and building the capacity of institutions of Palestinian governance, as well as the development of the Palestinian economy. The Quartet welcomed international efforts to reform the Palestinian security sector and thus to help improve law and order for the Palestinian people. It called for the Temporary International Mechanism to be further developed to support the political process, to identify suitable projects for international support in the areas of governance, institution-building and economic development, and urged other members of the international community to consider practical support to the parties.

"The Quartet called for Palestinian unity in support of a Government committed to nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map. The Quartet reaffirmed that these principles endure. The Quartet reiterated its call for the Palestinian Authority Government to commit to these principles."

(UN press release SG/2122, www.state.gov)

At a press conference following the Quartet meeting in Washington D.C., Russian Federation Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the policy of isolating Hamas would not achieve the desired results and supported holding talks with the organization. Mr. Lavrov characterized his country's dialogue with Hamas as a "political force" aimed at helping the organization to understand its responsibility. *(Ha'aretz)*

PA President Abbas, appealing for calm, said, "I call on all parties in Gaza to stop these actions that harm the Palestinian people", he said. *(AP, Ma'an News Agency)*

The head of the Egyptian security delegation, Gen. Burhan Jamal Hamad, currently in the Gaza Strip, said that "the side that attacked the trucks [Hamas] is the one responsible for the bloodshed", and condemned the targeting of public institutions. He also said that no one would be victorious in this internal conflict, that all parties would lose and harm the Palestinian cause. The Egyptian official confirmed that he would facilitate a high-level meeting between Fatah and Hamas in the coming days. *(Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency)*

The Islamic Jihad, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine issued a joint statement calling on Hamas and Fatah to cease their fighting and return to the negotiating table. The statement stated that the internal fighting was contrary to the interests of the Palestinian people and served only Israeli interests. *(Ma'an News Agency)*

Hamas and Fatah officials said that they had agreed in principle to a new ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, but needed more meetings to work out the details of a pullback of forces. *(Ha'aretz, Reuters)*

PA President Abbas announced that he would meet with Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal in Saudi Arabia next week in another effort to negotiate a national unity government. *(DPA, Ha'aretz)*

The World Bank signed an agreement to give US\$ 25 million to poor Palestinians affected by the aid suspension. "The focus of our technical and financial assistance is to facilitate the delivery of basic services to vulnerable families", said World Bank Managing Director Juan Jose Daboub after signing the agreement at PA President Abbas' office in Ramallah. *(Reuters)*

The head of the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory reminded "all those engaged in the ongoing acts of armed violence that they must abide by ... principles of humanity that also include duty to protect and enable the work of personnel, vehicles and facilities that provided emergency medical services. *(Ma'an News Agency)*

3

In a [statement](#), six United Nations agencies working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process) expressed extreme alarm by the deteriorating security situation in Gaza, which took the lives of innocent civilians and was also putting their workers on the ground at serious risk. They appealed to the parties to refrain from any action which endangered civilian life and which prevented them from fulfilling their humanitarian responsibilities. *(www.reliefweb.int)*

4

Israeli soldiers assaulted a Palestinian youth, beating him aggressively when he tried to pass the Huwara checkpoint, south of Nablus. The Israeli soldiers had been focusing their patrol in the main street of the village of Huwara, which was used by settlers to reach the nearby "Itamar" settlement. *(Ma'an News Agency)*

Two members of the Presidential Guard died of wounds they suffered in factional fighting during the weekend. Also, Hamas members had abducted Ashraf Dahlan, 20, nephew of Mohammed Dahlan, Fatah leader in the Gaza Strip. He was arrested at a roadblock manned by the Hamas Executive Force on the road between Khan Yunis and the Gaza Strip. PA President Abbas' offices in the Gaza Strip had also been fired at. *(Ha'aretz)*

Aides to PA President Abbas expressed disappointment about the Quartet's statement of 2 February. Nabil Abu Rudeineh said the Palestinians had expected the Quartet to end the boycott of the PA "in order to create the appropriate atmosphere in which to renew the peace process." PA Foreign Minister Mahmoud Al-Zahhar sent a letter to the Quartet in which he called on its members "to respect the vote of the Palestinians in the elections and to engage in a serious dialogue with the Hamas Government in order to end tensions in the region." *(Ha'aretz)*

Representatives of Hamas and Fatah met and agreed on a new mechanism for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Burhan Hammad led an Egyptian delegation which attended the meeting. *(Ma'an News Agency)*

5

Fatah gunmen abducted a Hamas official as he left his office in Ramallah, saying they would exchange him for the kidnapped nephew of senior Fatah official Mohammed Dahlan. (*Ha'aretz*)

A ceasefire between rival Palestinian factions appeared to be taking hold in the Gaza Strip after at least 28 persons died and some 240 were injured during days of infighting. The groups agreed to get the gunmen off the streets, remove roadblocks and stop incitement against each other. The two groups began exchanging hostages each had taken during the fighting. However, there had still been some sporadic exchanges of gunfire. (*BBC, Ha'aretz*)

The Israeli domestic intelligence force, Shin Bet, announced that they had apprehended members of two Palestinian units in Bethlehem which were affiliated with Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. According to reports, the groups operated in the refugee camp of Aida, north of Bethlehem, where they manufactured homemade explosive devices. Meanwhile, Yuval Diskin, Shin Bet Director, said it would be detrimental for Israel to get involved in the ongoing Palestinian factional fighting. "Let's say we occupy all of the Gaza Strip, and we carry out an operation like Defensive Shield, the question is, what happens next?"

(*Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

Qadura Fares, a leading Fatah member, said that during the meeting in Mecca scheduled for 6 February PA President Abbas and Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal, were expected to agree on setting up a national unity government, "barring any surprises tomorrow." Mr. Mashaal said, "We must not fail on Tuesday [6 February] in Saudi Arabia. The dialogue with Fatah must succeed." According to details of the agreement reached, Ismail Haniyeh would be head of the unity government; Salem Fayyad would be Deputy Prime Minister. The Interior Minister was to be resolved by Mr. Abbas choosing from a list of independent candidates put forth by Hamas. Hamas would allow President Abbas to hold negotiations with Israel with no strings attached. (*Ha'aretz*)

The two-day [UN Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People](#), convened under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, opened in Doha with a statement from the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, a message from the UN Secretary-General read by Angela Kane, Assistant-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, as well as statements from the Chairman of the Committee and from Nabil Sha'ath, member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and representative of Palestine. (*Ha'aretz, UN News Centre*)

Israeli Defence Minister Peretz said, "Yesterday, I informed Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that our efforts to reach agreement on the voluntary evacuation of the illegal outposts in the West Bank have been exhausted." Mr. Peretz said he planned to move forward with the evacuation plan, adding that Mr. Olmert had no intention of reneging on Israel's commitment to carry out the decision. The Yesha Council, the umbrella organization of the various settlements in the West Bank, denied that negotiations had reached a deadlock. Yesha hoped for the establishment of a new settlement for each outpost that would be vacated willingly. (*ynetnews*)

Shin Bet Director Yuval Diskin said that he was of the opinion that Israel should not take action [in the Gaza Strip] at a time when Palestinian infighting was ongoing.

He added that if it became clear that the confrontation between Fatah and Hamas was losing steam, and that Hamas continued to grow stronger and improve its "terrorist infrastructure" in the Gaza Strip, then Israel would have to weigh seriously a ground offensive there. (*Ha'aretz*)

A Palestinian public servants syndicate confirmed that payment of 1,500 Israeli shekels for employees had started. Almost 80,000 employees in the public sector would be paid from a grant from the EU. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

6

PA President Abbas and Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal were headed for Mecca for their two-day summit. Hamas delegation consisted of PA Foreign Minister Mahmoud Al-Zahhar and a number of senior Hamas members. The Fatah delegation included Mohammed Dahlan, Fatah leader in the Gaza Strip.

The meeting was expected to take place at a guest palace of Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz that overlooked the Kaaba, the black-draped cubic shrine. Both sides expressed optimism that an agreement on a national unity government would be reached. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said that there were more major issues to be addressed in Mecca and he hoped that they would return with an agreement which would end the conflict and enhance partnership. (*DPA, Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

The Fatah and Hamas movements have released the majority of abducted members from both sides. Hamas representative Ayman Taha said that the issue was now over. "They were handed to the Fatah committee, including the nephew of [senior Fatah member Mohammed] Dahlan, and Fatah handed over 19 Hamas members," he said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt had to be closed after the European observer mission working there was forced to withdraw owing to the chaos at the crossing. Delegates heading for the Mecca meeting had passed through earlier, along with hundreds of other Palestinians. However, crowds of people tried to cross, and chaos ensued. Security sources said that they were working to restore calm and impose order so that the European observers could resume their work. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli authorities issued demolition orders for a number of farm buildings in the village of Jinsafut, east of Qalqilya and adjacent to the settlement of "Immanuel".

The route of the separation wall passed through the village and lands of Jinsafut. Owner Yousef Sukkar said the farm was the only source of income for them and their families, adding that it sustained eight other families, consisting of more than 50 members. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli authorities closed the gates to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Old City of Jerusalem and deployed troops in the streets as an excavation project commenced, angering Muslim worshippers. Israeli authorities said that work was needed to restore a walkway leading to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem. Palestinian leaders said it threatened Islamic archaeological remains. Israel police were deployed throughout the East Jerusalem area and were blocking access to the compound to non-Muslims and Palestinians under 45. Adnan Hussein, Director of the Islamic Waqf, said he was concerned that the new walkway could damage the original earthen ramp, which was Waqf property and contained ruins of archaeological significance. The new construction constituted a violation of the site, he said. (*AP, BBC, Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency, Wafa*)

King Abdullah II of Jordan said Israeli excavation work near the Al-Aqsa Mosque led to a dangerous rise in Middle East tensions that could derail the revival of the Arab-Israeli peace talks. "What Israel is doing in its practices and attacks against our sacred Muslim sites in Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa is a blatant violation that is not acceptable under any pretext ... This is a dangerous escalation we have seen in the last few hours ... these works and excavations pose a threat to the foundations of Al-Aqsa," he said. (*Petra News Agency, Reuters*)

Thousands of Palestinians took part in a rally in Tulkarm protesting the Israeli excavations taking place under the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem and the destruction of the Bab Al-Magharba (Dung Gate) neighbourhood. The Al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of the Islamic Jihad, launched two homemade projectiles at the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon. The group said the operation was a response to "Israeli aggression on the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque." Later in the day, two more rockets were fired at the western Negev. One of the rockets landed on land belonging to a kibbutz, causing damage to the local health clinic and adjoining houses. (*Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency*)

British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett said after meeting Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni that she believed that there was an opportunity for moving the peace process forward. There was a clear message coming through from the Israelis, Palestinians and Arab States that there had to be a negotiated settlement and that the continued intra-Palestinian violence served no purpose. She welcomed the efforts of those in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to bring the violence to an end. (www.fco.gov.uk)

The British Embassy in Israel was helping to fund research on the enclaves created by the separation wall around Palestinian villages in the West Bank. The study was being carried out by Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights. Israel's Foreign Ministry said that the action was "interference by Britain in an internal Israeli matter." The British Embassy issued the following response: "We recognize Israel's need and right to defend itself, but we believe the route of the separation fence should follow the Green Line. Our funding of the research was intended to examine the implications of the current route of the fence on the Palestinian population." (*Ha'aretz*)

Israel Radio reported that, at a meeting of senior security officials with the Israeli Prime Minister's Office Director General Ra'anana Dinur, it was decided that the construction of the wall would continue as planned despite State budget cuts. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

7

The Al-Aqsa Brigades launched six projectiles at the city of Sderot, the western Negev and Ashkelon, in southern Israel. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Tensions continued in Gaza. Rival Palestinian factions threatened revenge attacks and fortified positions on rooftops and in the streets, despite the Saudi-hosted talks between Fatah and Hamas in Mecca. Hamas members warned of new violence unless the Fatah officers they accused of being behind the attack a week earlier on the Islamic University were handed over by the end of the day. One Hamas member was killed and three others wounded in an exchange of fire with Fatah security forces in the Gaza Strip. The PA Ministry of Refugee Affairs said that its Minister, Atif Udwan, survived an assassination attempt. In a separate incident, gunmen abducted the General Director of all hospitals in the West Bank, Dr. Bilal Abboushi, from his office in Al-Bireh-Ramallah area. (*AP, Ma'an News*)

Agency, Ynetnews)

The IDF arrested three Palestinian students in East Jerusalem protesting against the excavation near the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Also arrested were three brothers in Qalqilya; a 19-year-old man in Hebron; and another young man in Bethlehem. Israeli soldiers stormed Nablus, broke into houses and arrested two Palestinians from the refugee camp of Balata. (Wafa)

Leaders of Fatah and Hamas began talks in Mecca. At the opening session, PA President Abbas said, "I tell our people to expect good news, and I hope this (meeting) will not be mere words in the air." Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal told the inaugural ceremony, "We came here to agree and have no other option but to agree.... We want to give a message to the nation, and the world, to create a positive atmosphere for these talks... I ensure the Palestinian people that we will not leave the holy city of Mecca until we reach an agreement." Saudi Arabia King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz first met with President Abbas, and then with Mr. Mashaal and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad said, "King Abdullah told our delegation that inter-Palestinian fighting harmed the Palestinian cause." (AP, DPA, Ha'aretz, Ma'an News Agency, Saudi Press Agency, Ynetnews, Wafa)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that the world would not accept any Palestinian government that did not renounce violence, recognized Israel's right to exist and accepted existing peace agreements. "The only way for the future Palestinian government to gain legitimacy by the world is an acceptance and compliance of the requirement of the international community, including renouncing violence and terrorism, accepting the right of Israel to exist and accepting the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians," she said in speech before a conference of Jewish leaders. (AP)

British Foreign Secretary [Margaret Beckett](#) said that if any future PA unity government refused to recognize Israel, the international community would boycott it. "We have said from the beginning that any (PA) government has to abide by the Quartet demands to recognize Israel... If Hamas won't change its position, we will not be able to change ours regarding them", she told *Israel Radio*. Following talks with Palestinian officials in Ramallah, Mrs. Beckett also announced a further contribution from the British Government of £2.2m into the Temporary International Mechanism to assist the Palestinian people. (AP, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, [www.fco.gov.uk](#))

Tensions caused by the Israeli excavation near the Al-Aqsa Mosque continued. Sheik Ra'ad Salah from the Islamic Movement was held for questioning for trying to reach the site of the excavation beneath the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Six people accompanying him were also detained. The Director of the Islamic Waqf, Adnan Husseini, told *Israel Radio* that no one liaised with him regarding the start of the construction and demanded that Israel ceased all excavations immediately.

"This is a dangerous project that will damage things of great historical value in this very sensitive place," he said. Some leading Israeli archaeologists have also criticized the plan to rebuild the bridge, saying that the bridge's pylons would damage one of the most significant archaeological parks in Israel and in the world. (AP, BBC, Ha'aretz, The Jerusalem Post, Xinhua)

In Jeddah, PA President Abbas met with the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu. The President briefed Mr. Ihsanoglu on the Israeli excavation near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. For his part, Mr. Ihsanoglu condemned Israel's acts as flagrant violations of international law. (Wafa)

Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said in a statement: "There are irresponsible elements, who know full well that no harm is being caused here to any holy site, who are exploiting Israeli democracy to fan religious feelings for political gain. This is true of both political groups within Israel and extremist elements outside Israel." ([www.mfa.gov.il](#))

A Syrian Foreign Ministry official said, "Syria strongly condemns these violations [Al-Aqsa excavation] and consider them a blatant affront to the Muslim waqfs and feelings on Muslims worldwide". (Ynetnews)

The Al-Aqsa Brigades, in a statement, threatened to target Israeli synagogues if the Israeli authorities continued the excavation work near the Al-Aqsa Mosque. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics released the results of its labour force survey, conducted from October to December 2006. According to the report, the fourth quarter of 2006 experienced essential changes in the labour market owing to the strike in the public sector and the closure of schools. The olive season produced jobs, which helped reduce unemployment. (Ma'an News Agency, Wafa)

Oxfam called on the British Government to persuade Europe to end "aid fiasco" to the Palestinians. A [press release](#) said over a million Euros a month of European aid was wasted on bank charges paid to the HSBC Bank for transferring allowances to over 140,000 Palestinian workers and people of low incomes. It called for the Temporary International Mechanism to be scrapped and for European States to resume funding for essential services delivered by local and national Palestinian authorities. (The Financial Times, [www.oxfam.org.uk](#))

Israel's Vice-Prime Minister Shimon Peres told *Kyodo*: "The real problem is not to have a [PA] unity government, but a government with a unified policy that will answer the expectations of the world." (Kyodo)

Foreign Minister of Malaysia Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said regarding the informal war crimes tribunal organized by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to look into abuses in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory: "I will not say the Government supports or objects to it... It is an independent tribunal." (AP)

8

At least 10 Palestinians were shot and wounded by the IDF in Hebron, medical sources said. (Wafa)

A Palestinian rocket attack on the Gaza Strip-Israeli border prevented EU monitors from opening the Rafah terminal, witnesses said. The Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the rocket attacks, which it said, were a response to the Israeli excavation near Al-Haram Al-Sharif. (Xinhua)

Israeli bulldozers continued excavations at the Moroccan Gate in East Jerusalem. Thousands of Israeli police and border guards deployed in the Old City and assaulted and arrested tens of Palestinians. (Wafa)

Israel's Defence Minister Amir Peretz had sent a letter to Prime Minister Olmert urging a halt to construction work on a new walkway to Al-Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount), a senior official in the Prime Minister's office said. In the letter, Mr. Peretz attached an opinion by a senior Defence Ministry official warning that the construction was causing considerable damage and would create foment in the Arab world. The official in Mr. Olmert's office told *DPA* that the construction would continue, the letter notwithstanding. (DPA)

Hundreds of Arabs from across Israel arrived at the Moroccan Gate in East Jerusalem. A spokesman for the Islamic Movement, Zahi Nujidat, said: "We came to protest the excavations. The path to the gate is 800 years old and it's only Muslim, not Jewish... We suspect that the goal of the current works is to declare Al-Aqsa to be a synagogue," he added. Religious leader Supreme Judge Sheikh Taysir Al-Tamimi called for a "day of outrage" across the Muslim world for the following day to protest the excavations, which, he said, jeopardized the Al-Aqsa Mosque. "This aggressive policy will open doors of hell on the Zionist entity," a statement issued by Hamas said. (Ma'an News Agency, Wafa, Xinhua, Ynetnews)

Egypt summoned the Israeli Ambassador to the Foreign Ministry to protest against the excavations in East Jerusalem. (Reuters)

The Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [expressed](#) his deep concern over the work initiated by the Israeli authorities on the site of the Old City of Jerusalem, which is protected by the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. ([www.unesco.org](#))

Following two days of talks in Mecca, PA President Abbas and Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal signed an [agreement](#) on a national unity government in a ceremony hosted by Saudi King Abdullah. President Abbas asked PA Prime Minister Haniyeh to form a national unity government and called on him to respect all past agreements. The agreement reaffirmed the importance of national unity as a basis for the achievement of the legitimate goals of the Palestinian people, and endorsed dialogue as the only language to solve political differences in the Palestinian arena. It announced the formation of a Palestinian national unity government according to a detailed formula approved by the two parties and an urgent start of constitutional measures to implement it. It envisaged further measures to develop and reform the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and affirmed the principle of political partnership on the basis of laws adopted by the PA

and agreements between the parties. It reaffirmed the commitment to achieve the Palestinian national goals: an end to the occupation, the restoration of [Palestinian people's] rights, and stressed the basic issues, particularly Al-Quds, refugees, Al-Aqsa Mosque, prisoners and detainees, the wall and the settlements. Prime Minister Haniyeh will reportedly retain his post. Officials said the two sides had agreed on a distribution of Cabinet posts with a Fatah Deputy Prime Minister and the posts of Finance, Foreign Affairs and Interior ministers going to independents. They named former PA Culture Minister Ziyad Abu Amr as Foreign Minister and Salam Fayyad as Finance Minister, a post he had held before. (www.aljazeera.net, AP, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters, Saudi Press Agency, Xinhua) The following statement was issued by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

"The Secretary-General welcomes the announcement, in Mecca, of an agreement on a Palestinian national unity government, and commends the initiative of His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to help bring about this very important step forward. He hopes that this agreement will curb the violence, creating a better future for the Palestinian people.

"The Secretary-General looks forward to discussing the way ahead with the parties and regional and Quartet partners."

(UN press release SG/SM/10874-PAL/2069)

According to media reports, the future PA Minister of the Interior was nominated by Hamas. He was identified as Hammouda Jarwan, an independent. Hamas will be in charge of nine ministries: Education, Waqf (Religious Affairs), Local Government, Telecommunications, Labour, Justice, Sport, Economy, and a Minister without portfolio. Hamas will also name an independent figure for the Ministry of Planning. Fatah will be in charge of six ministries: Health, Social Affairs, Labour, Prisoners' Affairs, Transportation, Agriculture, and will name an independent minister. The Vice Prime Minister and a Minister without portfolio will also be nominated by Fatah. The ministries of Information, Women's Affairs, Culture, and Tourism will be distributed among the other factions. (IMEMC) Secretary of the PLO Executive Committee Yasser Abed Rabbo and Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat met with David Welch, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs in New York. The meeting was in preparation for the Abbas-Rice-Olmert meeting on 19 February. They reiterated that any future negotiations should be based on the Arab Peace Initiative and leave out a Palestinian State with provisional borders. (Wafa)

Speaking in Madrid, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that the Quartet's requirements were not negotiable and applied to any future Palestinian governments. "We expect the international community to stick to its own requirements that were stated after the elections which Hamas won," she said. Tom Casey, Deputy State Department Spokesman said: "In terms of what the outcome of those discussions look like and whether they meet the Quartet principles, I think we'll just have to see... So we'll see what any final agreement actually looks like and we'll have to make an evaluation from there. (Ha'aretz, www.state.gov)

9

About 200 police officers entered the area around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and threw stun grenades to disperse Muslim protestors there as hundreds of demonstrators threw stones at security forces. (Ha'aretz)

Following telephone consultations between its principals, the Quartet released a [statement](#) welcoming "the role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in reaching the agreement to form a Palestinian national unity government" and setting 21 February as the date of its next meeting, in Berlin, "to continue their consideration of these developments, and to review formation and implementation of the agreement on the government". "While awaiting formation of the new Palestinian Government, the Quartet reaffirmed its statement of 2 February regarding its support for a Palestinian Government committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map," the statement said. (UN News Centre, UN press release SG/2123-PAL/2070)

French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy said: "The inclusion in this Government's programme of respecting international resolutions and agreements signed by the PLO constitutes a step in the right direction towards full adherence to the international community's demands. Creation of the new Government on the basis of this programme should be encouraged and supported," he added. "We are going to look at all the details with the best will in a positive but cautious manner" during the EU Foreign Ministers' meeting on 12 February, said Cristina Gallach, a spokesperson for EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana. "The agreement and the guidelines for a government are first steps in the right direction," German Government Spokesman Ulrich Wilhelm said.

"The Palestinian Government remains obliged to acknowledge Israel's right to exist, to avoid violence, and stick to (past) agreements." UK Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett called the agreement "an interesting and important development." Arab League Secretary-General Anre Moussa called on the Quartet to take the Mecca agreement into consideration "and to consequently lift the embargo." Egypt's Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit called it "a big step in the right direction" and "expressed his hope that this deal will be a step towards lifting the embargo imposed on the Palestinian people to alleviate its suffering." Bahrain's Foreign Ministry said in a statement: "We call upon the international community to support and cooperate with this agreement and this National Unity Government and to help the Palestinian people to overcome this crisis and to lift the imposed blockade." Secretary-General of the OIC Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, welcomed the accord and expressed confidence that the deal would reinforce Palestinian national unity, and help lift the unfair siege imposed on Palestinians. (AFP, AP, Bahrain News Agency, Reuters)

"The position of Hamas is well-known: non-recognition of the Zionist entity [Israel]," said Hamas spokesman Ismail Radwan. (AFP)

Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erakat and senior PLO member Yasser Abed Rabbo told reporters they had had "fruitful" talks with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the UN discussing the Mecca agreement and the next Quartet meeting to be held in Berlin on 21 February. (AFP)

The United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society completed the first phase of a \$13 million project to build 600 housing units and associated facilities in Khan Yunis in cooperation with UNRWA. (Xinhua)

Saudi Arabia had promised \$1 billion in aid to the Palestinians, according to Ahmed Yussef, a political adviser to PA Prime Minister Haniyeh. (AP)

10

Sporadic protests against ongoing Israeli construction near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem continued. Palestinian teenagers threw rocks at Israeli police and set garbage bins on fire. Angry Palestinians also pelted a bus carrying vacationing Canadians on a tour of the Mount of Olives. The police, some on horseback and others in riot gear, responded by firing tear gas to disperse the protesters and arrested 15. Protests were also reported in the West Bank. (AFP, AP, DPA)

Abu Mujahed, a spokesman for the Popular Resistance Committees, announced, "The Egyptian brothers have presented a new offer for the factions that hold the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit," but declined to give details about the proposal, saying they were waiting for the Israeli reaction. (Xinhua)

Iran welcomed the Mecca agreement between Fatah and Hamas, with IRNA quoting Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad-Ali Hosseini as calling it a "constructive move" for consolidation of unity among Palestinians. DPA also quoted an unnamed official at the Syrian Foreign Ministry as telling it that Syria "welcomes the agreement reached in Mecca and calls on the Palestinian brothers to take executive measures to put it on the ground." (DPA)

Afghan President Hamid Karzai welcomed the agreement between Hamas and Fatah on a national unity government, saying in an official statement, "This agreement will open the way for Palestinians to form a national unity government in Palestine, strengthen peace and stability in the region and ensure unity among Muslims around the world." He also "praised the key role of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in settling the differences between our Palestinian brothers," the statement said.

(Xinhua)

Nabil Amr, an aide to PA President Abbas said that he would travel to Brussels the next day to brief EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana on the Mecca agreement. "I am also going to meet with the Foreign Ministers of Norway and of Germany, the current President of the European Union (EU)," Mr. Amr said, adding that "emissaries will be dispatched (to numerous countries) to explain the accord." (AFP)

Ahmed Yousef, political adviser to PA Prime Minister Haniyeh, told DPA that "the political agenda of the unity government" gave no sign of "recognizing Israel because it is based on the national reconciliation document." Xinhua quoted a Palestinian source who took part in Mecca talks as saying that Hamas had agreed that the new coalition government would recognize Israel, but as a political party it still refused to recognize it. The source also said that Hamas had accepted all resolutions of previous Arab summits but asked to avoid directly mentioning the 2002 Beirut summit. (DPA, Reuters, Xinhua)

Nezzar Rayan, a senior leader of Hamas, called on Palestinian factions to end the ceasefire with Israel in response to the excavation works near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. (Xinhua)

The League of Arab States held an emergency meeting at the level of permanent delegates on excavations by Israel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque, saying it would move at the Arab, Islamic and international levels to "halt the Israeli assault on the mosque." The League issued a statement condemning the excavation and calling on the UN Security Council to hold a meeting to stop the Israeli activity and on the members of the Quartet "to take up their responsibilities and pressure Israel, the

occupying power, to make it stop this aggression immediately.” The League’s Secretary-General, Amr Moussa, in a statement distributed to the Arab representatives before the meeting, accused Israel of attempting to alter the features of Jerusalem. Mr. Moussa said that he also sent letters to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UNESCO, warning of repercussions the Israeli work could have on peace in the region. (AP, Reuters, Xinhua)

In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Israel’s Strategic Affairs Minister Avigdor Lieberman said: “What worries me is that the Palestinian government of national unity may give Hamas the international legitimacy which it has lacked up to now, without it recognizing Israel or putting an end to its terrorist tactics against us.” (AFP)

11

The Israeli Cabinet ordered construction work to proceed on a ramp leading to Al-Haram al-Sharif/The Temple Mount, despite objections from the Muslim world and two days of Palestinian protests. Speaking ahead of the vote, Prime Minister Olmert accused “people with ulterior motives in the international Arab world” of using the Israeli work as a pretext “to fan the flames of hostility and hatred.” The existing ramp, Mr. Olmert said, “is a dangerous structure that must be renovated,” and the work is being done “in an area that is totally and completely under Israeli responsibility and day-to-day administration, and under our full sovereignty.” Workmen returned under heavy guard to the site after Sabbath. Israeli Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld reported no fresh incidents in the morning and said the work was scheduled to proceed throughout the day. (AP)

Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Amr Moussa instructed Arab ambassadors at the UN to discuss the possibility of calling for an urgent meeting of the Security Council to discuss Israeli construction at Al-Haram Al-Sharif (Temple Mount). (AP)

MENA quoted PA President Abbas as saying that his meeting with US Secretary of State Rice and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert scheduled for 19 February would pave the way for final status negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel. Speaking to reporters after meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Mr. Abbas said, “We should strive for a final settlement and start talks on some final issues, such as borders, Palestinian refugees and settlements.” On the new PA Prime Minister, he said, “According to the constitution [Mr.] Haniyeh will resign and I will immediately and formally appoint him on 15 February.” (AFP, Xinhua)

Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that he had discussed with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice preparations to hold a three-way summit between Israel, the US and the PA. He made the remarks while speaking to the *Voice of Palestine* following his visit to the US where he briefed the US Administration on the Mecca accord. (Xinhua)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said that Israel had not yet made a decision on how to respond to the national unity government agreement between Fatah and Hamas, but insisted that it must abide by international demands to recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept past agreements. (AP)

12

Several rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip into Israel. In a statement faxed to reporters, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and Abu al-Reesh fighters said that they had fired six rockets into southern Israel and an IDF checkpoint in the eastern Gaza Strip in separate incidents, in response to the construction work by Israel near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Israeli sources said that three rockets landed near Sderot in the morning and that there were no casualties or damage. (AP)

Israeli forces shot and wounded a Palestinian in the foot and arrested 10 others in Nablus. Israeli forces also arrested six Palestinians in the Tulkarm area. In Bethlehem, an Israeli special unit abducted a six-year-old boy, and soldiers beat up and wounded a 17-year-old boy on his way to school. (Ma’an News Agency, Wafa)

The Israeli authorities have suspended construction work near the Al-Aqsa Mosque, but continued archaeological excavations. Jerusalem’s Mayor, Uri Lupolianski, who had direct responsibility for the work, ordered a review of construction work near the mosque. He decided that the plan should be sent for a longer review process that involved accepting public objections, hoping that this would help calm Muslim concerns, City Hall spokesman Gidi Schmerling said, adding that the mayor had made the decision after meeting Muslim leaders, “so that the process will be transparent, and so that it will be entirely clear that there is no attempt to harm any Muslim holy sites.” (AFP, AP)

Khaled al-Qidra, a Fatah member and former PA chief prosecutor, was kidnapped by armed gunmen who stopped his car near Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. (AFP)

PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said his Government planned to step down quickly as part of the coalition agreement with Fatah. “We are convinced of the necessity of speeding up the resignation to within days, possibly Wednesday, Thursday or Friday,” he told reporters before crossing into Gaza from Egypt. (AP)

Senior Palestinian officials said they would start forming a national unity government in coming days, but acknowledged that some issues still had not been resolved. The two sides have agreed to a division of Cabinet posts, but have not yet reached agreement on the names of most of the government ministers.

Another unresolved issue was who would be Interior Minister. (AP)

Jordan’s King Abdullah II opened talks with PA President Abbas on ways to revive the Middle East peace process. Chief Jordanian Government spokesman Nasser Judeh said it was important to maintain the “highest level” of coordination between Jordan and the Palestinians. “We’re exploring every opportunity. The meeting today is very, very important,” Mr. Judeh told reporters in Amman. (AP)

Egyptian police found boxes with around 18,000 bullets hidden in a tunnel in the deserted zone of the Tel Zaareb region near the Egyptian border with the Gaza Strip, security officials said. The tunnel linked Egypt to the Gaza Strip, where the ammunition appeared to be destined. “It seemed the smugglers felt the police were close so they abandoned the ammunition and fled,” said an unnamed official, adding that the tunnel would be destroyed. (AFP, Reuters)

Israel was considering suspending contacts with PA President Abbas if his new unity government with Hamas did not meet international demands, Israeli officials said. An Israeli defence official said ties with Mohammed Dahlan were also in doubt. Israeli officials said any suspension might only be temporary. Advisers to Prime Minister Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and other ministers were to meet later in the day to consider the options. Mr. Olmert’s spokeswoman, Miri Eisin, declined to comment on what she called “hypotheticals”. (Reuters)

Speaking at the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said Israel would reconsider its position on the Hamas-Fatah coalition Government if captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit were freed, *Yediot Ahronot* reported. (Xinhua)

The EU was not yet ready to resume aid to the PA Government despite the unity accord signed the previous week in Mecca, EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said, ahead of a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Brussels. She said, “When it becomes possible to re-engage with a national unity government, and we are not there yet, we could gradually resume support to Palestinian Authority ministries and agencies. I intend to look at this agreement with an open mind, I hope others too. We need to study carefully the details of the agreement.” (AFP, AP, Reuters)

A Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Muhammad Sheehab, said that the groups holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit had received an Egyptian offer for his release. According to Mr. Sheehab, a total of 1,429 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons would be released in return for Mr. Shalit, and the Egyptian offer followed discussions with Israel, Mr. Sheehab said. (Ha’aretz)

The following is an excerpt from the [conclusions](#) on the Middle East peace process adopted by the Council of the European Union: “The Council welcomed the fact that an agreement has been reached in Mecca on 8 February on the formation of a Palestinian national unity government. It paid tribute to the sustained efforts of President Abbas to form a government of national unity and expressed its appreciation for the role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Arab leaders in bringing about Palestinian reconciliation. The EU stands ready to work with a legitimate Palestinian government that adopts a platform reflecting the Quartet principles and welcomed the Quartet statement of 9 February.” (www.consilium.europa.eu)

Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon Michele Montas told reporters that Mr. Ban had telephoned King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas over the weekend, reiterating international terms for solving the Middle East conflict including recognition of Israel, and urging support for the Palestinian unity accord. In his talks, Mr. Ban reiterated the terms of the Quartet statement released on 9 February, and also expressed his concern over construction work initiated by Israel in the Old City of Jerusalem. (UN News Centre)

13

A 20-year-old member of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Mohammed Saidi, was killed and two others were wounded by Israeli fire as they tried to plant explosives near the security fence between Gaza and Israel. The Israeli army said that its soldiers had fired warning shots before opening fire on “two terrorists” approaching the security fence, during which an explosive device detonated and one of the Palestinians was killed. (AFP)

Israeli forces arrested 13 Palestinians in Hebron, 3 in Nablus, 1 in Bethlehem 1 in Ramallah, and 6 in East Jerusalem. (Ma’an News Agency)

Settlers from “Qame Shomron” and “Ma’ale Shomron” near the Palestinian village of Kafir Laqif, east of Qalqilya, prevented farmers from working on their land, pointing weapons at them. According to sources in the village, an Israeli force came to the area and confiscated the identity cards of the workers and landowners, then stopped them from continuing their work and warned them not to enter their land again. (Ma’an News Agency)

The Jewish Quarter Development Company, which owns the land where the Western Wall Plaza stands, informed the Jerusalem municipality of its decision to

completely abandon the construction work at the Mugrabi Ascent in the Old City, near the Temple Mount [Al-Haram Al-Sharif]. The company, however, rescinded the decision later in the day under pressure from the Ministry of Housing and Construction, the Prime Minister's Office, the Jerusalem municipality and the Western Wall Heritage Foundation. The Ministry said that the construction work would continue as planned, in accordance with law and government approval.

(Ha'aretz)

The Israeli Government denied a report that archaeological excavations and building work near Al-Haram Al-Sharif had been abandoned. (AFP)

Israeli forces erected three 10-metre-high control towers near the Za'atara check point, south of Nablus. The towers enable the Israeli authorities to survey and control the main road links between the Za'atara and the Jordan Valley. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Hamas-led Government's spokesman, Ghazi Hamad, said that the Government's resignation was expected "within the next two days," most likely before PA President Abbas' arrival in Gaza on 15 February for a meeting with Prime Minister Haniyeh. (AP)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert's spokeswoman, Miri Eisin, said that with so many questions unanswered, the time was not ripe for full-fledged peace talks at the upcoming meeting with Palestinian leaders and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on 19 February. "We are not talking about the substantial issues; we are just talking about the political horizon. ... We are waiting to see when the new Palestinian Government is put together, because it has not been finalized, what the new Government policies are," Ms. Eisin said. Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that the Palestinians were eager to resume talks on a final peace agreement with Israel, but acknowledged that the agenda for the meeting remained undetermined. (AP)

Russia's President Vladimir Putin told reporters after meeting Jordan's King Abdullah II: "We think that Russia's initiative to hold a broad-based international conference on the Middle East remains a timely and useful proposal. We made this proposal two years ago and we know that support for it is growing. Of course, we would need to prepare very thoroughly for a forum of this kind that seeks to provide collective solutions for a Middle East peace settlement, and the agenda of such a conference would need to encompass all areas of the settlement process – the Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese tracks." (www.kremlin.ru)

Russia's President Putin met with PA President Abbas in Amman. In remarks to reporters after the meeting, he expressed the hope for the "formation of an efficient Palestinian Government so that an appropriate climate could be established for the lifting of the siege against the Palestinians and for the opening of final status negotiations with the Israelis." "The release of the Israeli soldier will be an important step," he added. (AP, DPA)

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Alvaro de Soto briefed the Security Council on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question." (UN News Centre, UN press release SC/8953)

The United States Agency for International Development said that it had funded the delivery of 3,500 blood bags to be distributed to seven hospitals in the Gaza Strip. (Wafa)

14

The IDF had arrested 11 Palestinians in Hebron, Tulkarm and Bethlehem, PA security sources said. (Wafa)

IDF bulldozers demolished Bedouin tents and pens near Jenin which had been erected without authorization, the IDF said. (Wafa, Ynetnews)

A 21-year-old Palestinian was shot and injured in the arm by Israeli soldiers in the village of Qarawat Bani Hassan, south-east of Qalqilya. According to witnesses, Palestinian youths threw stones and empty bottles at an Israeli patrol, and the soldiers fired back with live ammunition and tear gas. (Ma'an News Agency)

A faction of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for firing two homemade projectiles at the southern Israeli town of Sderot. (Ma'an News Agency)

PA President Abbas postponed an address he was due to give the next day about a new unity government, and an official said the delay was the result of a dispute with Hamas. "Hamas has made several unacceptable conditions which cannot be implemented. The Mecca agreement cannot be reinterpreted and must be implemented immediately without any conditions," a Palestinian official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "They have certain conditions on the interior minister and the foreign minister and on the executive force," he added. (Reuters)

South Africa's Defence Minister Mosiuoa Lekota said the Government welcomed the power-sharing deal reached in Mecca between Fatah and Hamas. It would "be very wise if the sanctions of the EU, the US were lifted to encourage the strengthening of this coalition," Mr. Lekota said during a parliamentary briefing. "We think this would create a better atmosphere for the solution of the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict," he said. (AP)

Chile's Government welcomed the Mecca agreement and voiced hope that the international community would support it and ease the situation the Palestinian people lived in. (Wafa)

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry announced a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, along with the Secretary-General of the OIC, to be held in Islamabad on 25 February. The meeting would prepare the groundwork for a summit of Muslim leaders at an unspecified date in Mecca, the Ministry statement said. The goal of the summit is "a new initiative to address the grave situation in the Middle East, in particular the Palestinian issue and for harmony in the Islamic world," the statement said. (AP)

Prime Minister Olmert was quoted by *Yedioth Ahronot* as telling a meeting of his Security Cabinet: "The agreement on the establishment of a unity government in the PA places the region at a juncture of a strategic decision of enormous significance, no less dramatic than what happened after Hamas' victory in the PA elections a year ago." "The hope is that they [Abbas-Olmert-Rice] will be able to discuss the political horizon of possible future negotiations within the parameters of the Road Map and the possibilities that they could lead to the vision of two States," an Israeli Government official told AFP on condition of anonymity. (AFP)

Israel was installing video cameras to provide a live Webcast of the archaeological excavations near Al-Haram Al-Sharif, Israel Antiquities Authority official Liat Eizenkot said. (AFP)

The US Congress voted to freeze \$86 million in funds that had been earmarked to enhance PA President Abbas' Presidential Guard. The House of Representatives had requested clarification of diplomatic policy pursued by the Palestinians following the signing of the Mecca agreement, days before the money was to be transferred. The decision was accepted by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. (The Jerusalem Post)

15

Israeli forces arrested 14 "wanted" Palestinians across the West Bank. (Ma'an News Agency)

PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh resigned, along with the rest of the PA Government, late during the day. Shortly after that, PA President Abbas asked him to form a new unity government and urged him to abide by peace accords signed with Israel. Mr. Haniyeh had five weeks for the task, which he accepted at a joint news conference in Gaza City. (AFP, AP, The Independent)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert agreed to a Turkish inspection of the construction work near the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The deal was struck during talks in Ankara with Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "Olmert showed me photographs of the construction ... but they have failed to convince me 100 per cent. ... I proposed to send a technical team to inspect on site the work that is being done and he has agreed," Mr. Erdogan told a joint press conference. (AFP)

In a published statement concerning the construction project near the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel Shlomo Amar said, "There is no need for unnecessary provocations," adding that he would try to reach an understanding and cooperation with Muslim clerics on the matter. "The Chief Rabbinate should discuss the issue before construction works on the bridge connecting the Western Wall and the Temple Mount begin. This matter should be examined from the perspective of Jewish law," Rabbi Amar said. (Ynetnews)

Israel began broadcasting live internet video footage of the archaeological excavations near Al-Haram Al-Sharif (Temple Mount) in a bid to appease Muslim anger over the project. "Everybody can see our work and see every minute of the excavation. We did it because the Prime Minister asked us and we thought it was a good idea. Now there is no question about what we are doing," Israel Antiquities Authority spokesman Osnat Gouez said. The live footage is to be broadcast live during the working hours of 6:30 a.m. (0430 GMT) to 2:30 p.m. (1230 GMT), Sunday to Thursday, but the three cameras will remain on in off hours as well. (AFP, www.antiquities.org.il)

A senior Palestinian official said on condition of anonymity: "The American administration informed President Abbas it was refusing to work with the new Palestinian Government because it does not fulfil clearly the conditions imposed by the Quartet." The official said the US position had been conveyed to Mr. Abbas by US Consul General to Jerusalem, Jacob Wallis, during a meeting in Ramallah. (AFP)

Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan wrote to the PA President and Prime Minister calling on them to make it a top priority of the new unity

government to create a security force that respected the human rights of all Palestinian people and operates within the rule of law. The two leaders must take action to break the pattern of impunity which has fostered spiraling inter-factional violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. "Any agreement between the two sides must address the human rights abuses their forces are committing and ensure an end to the pattern of impunity that, for far too long, has allowed the gunmen to walk free and repeat their crimes," said Ms. Khan. "The leaders of Fatah and Hamas must put their own houses in order and stop fostering the internecine violence that has shattered so many Palestinian lives." (PRNewswire, www.amnesty.org)

US\$ 86 million in aid for PA security forces, pledged by President Bush on 30 January, is stalled in the opposition Democratic-controlled Congress, Rep. Nita Lowey, a New York Democrat who chairs the House of Representatives appropriations committee that provides foreign aid, said. "Early last week, I placed a hold on the \$86 million. It is imperative that we have a fuller understanding of exactly what the funding is for and what the situation is on the ground," said Ms. Lowey. She indicated she was awaiting a State Department response to her request for more information about the funding transfer. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack promised the same day to keep Congress "briefed on what our efforts are and what we're hearing", adding, "We're going to work with Congress". (AFP)

16

Israeli forces arrested four Hamas members in Ramallah, one Hamas and one Fatah member in Bethlehem, and a Palestinian in Hebron. Also, Israeli forces arrested two members of the Palestinian national security forces in the Bethlehem area. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for firing four home-made projectiles at the southern Israeli town of Sderot. Also, the Abu Ar Rish Brigades, affiliated to Fatah, claimed responsibility for launching two home-made projectiles at Kibbutz Magen, east of the southern Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

PA Prime Minister designate Ismail Haniyeh began work on forming a new broad-based government, saying he would start formal coalition talks the next day. The Finance Ministry will reportedly go to Salam Fayyad from the Third Way party, and the Foreign Ministry to independent Member of Parliament Ziad Abu Amr, a moderate who was elected with Hamas backing. The Interior Ministry will also go to an independent, nominated by Hamas but approved by Mr. Abbas. (AFP)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in an interview with *Al Arabiya TV*, excerpts from which aired on the station's news broadcasts, denied that the US had decided to boycott all ministers of a PA unity government now being formed and said that Washington would reserve judgement until it was formed but hoped it would respect the Quartet conditions. Ms. Rice was due to arrive in Israel the following day ahead of a three-way summit with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas, *Israel Radio* reported. (DPA, Reuters)

The foreign ministers of seven Islamic countries – Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey – as well as the Secretary General of the OIC, will be meeting in Islamabad on 25 February to discuss ideas for resolving disputes including the question of Palestine, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri said. (Xinhua)

Thousands of Muslims attended prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem under heavy police guard. Worshippers dispersed peacefully, although 15 people were arrested in East Jerusalem, where isolated skirmishes had been reported between protestors and Israeli police, who used stun grenades and water cannons. The scattered clashes were quickly contained and no one was seriously hurt, police said. The protesters were arrested after they had tried to break through roadblocks and force their way into the area of the mosque, Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld told DPA. Adnan al-Husseini, director of the Waqf, said 2,500 worshippers attended the prayers, although police put the number at 6,000. Normally tens of thousands attend. Only Muslim men, aged over 50 and in possession of Israeli identity cards, were granted entrance to the main weekly service, compared to those over 45 last week, although there remained no restrictions on women's access. (AFP, AP, DPA)

17

The Abu Ar Rish Brigades, affiliated to Fatah, claimed responsibility for launching a home-made projectile at the southern Israeli town of Sderot. (Ma'an News Agency)

19

Israeli forces arrested 15 Palestinians in Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Hebron. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli settlers stormed and occupied the Al-Aqbat Mosque in Hebron's Old City. (International Press Center)

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for launching two home-made projectiles at the Kisufim crossing between the central Gaza Strip and Israel. Also, the Yasser Arafat Brigades and the Ahmad Abu Ar Rish Brigades, both affiliated to Fatah, claimed responsibility for launching four home-made projectiles at Sderot and the western Negev. (Ma'an News Agency)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hosted talks between Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas in Jerusalem. The following are her remarks after the meeting:

"All three of us affirmed our commitment to a two-State solution, agreed that a Palestinian State cannot be born of violence and terror, and reiterated our acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map.

"The President and the Prime Minister discussed how to move forward on mutual obligations in the Road Map in regard to the implementation of Phase I.

"We called for respecting the ceasefire declared in November.

"The President and the Prime Minister also discussed issues arising from the agreement for the formation of a Palestinian national unity government, and the position of the Quartet that any Palestinian Authority government must be committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including regarding the Road Map.

"The President and the Prime Minister discussed their views of the diplomatic and political horizon and how it might unfold toward the two-State vision of President Bush.

"The President and the Prime Minister agreed that they would meet together again soon. They reiterated their desire for American participation and leadership in facilitating efforts to overcome obstacles, rally regional and international support, and move forward toward peace.

"In that vein, I expect to return to the region soon."

(AFP, www.state.gov)

In an interview with *UN Radio*, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who was to travel to Berlin for a meeting of the Quartet on 21 February, said officials would analyse the recent agreement reached in Mecca on a new Palestinian Government. "I sincerely hope that with the establishment of [a] national unity government among the Palestinian Authority we will be able to see soon the vision realized where [the] Israeli and Palestinian people will be able to live in peace and prosperity side by side. ... This is [the] ultimate objective of the Quartet process," Mr. Ban said. Asked whether it was realistic that the economic measures might be lifted, he said, "With the national unity government we hope that the Palestinian Authority and Israel will further engage in a peace process between the two parties. In such case, I cannot see any reason we would not be able to lift the sanctions." (UN News Centre)

20

Israeli forces arrested 15 Palestinians in the West Bank, including seven Hamas members. (Ma'an News Agency, www.idf.il)

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for launching four home-made projectiles at the southern Israeli towns of Sderot and Ashkelon and the western Negev. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinians fired an anti-tank missile at an Israeli patrol near the fence between Israel and the Gaza Strip. There were no reports of injuries or damage. (www.idf.il)

An Israeli technician working on the separation barrier near the Qalandiya refugee camp, south of Ramallah, was moderately injured by gunfire. (www.idf.il)

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) said it would boycott the incoming Palestinian unity government, explaining it was upset that the Mecca deal would respect past peace agreements with Israel. "Our position is to boycott the incoming government. ... We voice our protest over the way in which Hamas and Fatah decided in Mecca," said Jamil Mezhar, a member of the PFLP's central committee. The PFLP holds three seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council and had been allocated one seat in the new Cabinet. (AP)

Miri Eisin, spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, ruled out any talks on a final peace deal with PA President Abbas if he went ahead with plans to form a new Cabinet including Hamas. Israeli talks with Mr. Abbas would be limited to matters such as improving living conditions for the Palestinians and ending Palestinian attacks against Israel. "We're not talking about negotiations on final status issues," Ms. Eisin said. (AP)

Following separate meetings with PA President Abbas and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Jordan's King Abdullah II issued a statement urging the United States to "continue to play a major role in the peace process by creating the necessary environment for a resumption of negotiations" that would ensure an independent Palestinian State. "The longer the time passes without a framework that would help Palestinians and Israelis move forward, the greater the risk of an escalation of tensions, which is not in the interest of anyone," King Abdullah said. (AP, Petra)

PA President Abbas' spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said that Mr. Abbas would be in London the following day, Berlin on 22 February and Paris on 23 February in a bid to end the aid boycott and explain the Mecca agreement. (AFP)

21

Israeli undercover forces ambushed a car in Jenin, killing Mahmoud Qassem Abu Obeid, 24, the leader of Islamic Jihad in the West Bank. According to the Israeli army, Mr. Abu Obeid was wanted for recruiting a Palestinian, who was caught by Israeli security in Tel Aviv a day before, trying to carry out a suicide bombing.

Islamic Jihad had claimed responsibility for the attempted attack and vowed retaliation for the killing. (AP, AFP, The Jerusalem Post, Ma'an News Agency)

Two young Palestinians from Beit Jala were abducted by Israeli undercover forces. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Quartet convened a meeting in Berlin. In a [statement](#), read by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon following the meeting, the Quartet expressed hope that "the result-oriented dialogue initiated between Israeli and Palestinian leaders will continue in the framework of a renewed political process, with the aim of defining more clearly the political horizon and launching meaningful negotiations." The Quartet also reaffirmed its determination to promote this process, in cooperation with the parties and other regional partners, and urged the parties "to refrain from measures that prejudice issues to be resolved in negotiations." It also reiterated support for a Palestinian Government "committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map." Along with Mr. Ban, the meeting in Berlin involved Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who, in a press conference after the meeting, said that the US would await the formation of the new Palestinian unity government before taking further decisions, High Representative for European Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and European Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner. (AP, DPA, UN News Centre, UN press release SG/2124)

At the [press encounter](#) after the Quartet meeting, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, "... at this time, it would be crucially important for the international community to encourage this Mecca deal and this ongoing diplomatic initiative in the Middle East. We hope that, through our Quartet, meeting this afternoon, we will first be able to analyse the situation of the Mecca deal, as well as the trilateral meeting." (UN News Centre)

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, in an interview with *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, "I count on the Quartet speaking out in support of the agreement to form a new Palestinian Government ... I count on the Quartet in favour of removing financial and economic sanctions that were introduced by Israel." He added, "At least that will be the position of Russia, the EU and the UN Secretary-General." (AFP)

Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad said, "We hope the Quartet will take a positive approach towards the government and resort to lifting the pressure and boycott ... The unity government represents all sides and nothing justifies a negative position from the Quartet." (AFP)

British Prime Minister Tony Blair will host talks in London with PA President Abbas, a spokesman for the Prime Minister's office said. (AFP, Reuters, Wafa)

PA Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh was expected to end his first round of consultations regarding the formation of a unity government. The Prime Minister met with former Minister of Finance Salam Fayyad, followed by other meetings with the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front and the Palestinian Liberation Front. (Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal arrived in Cairo during which time he was scheduled to meet with senior Egyptian officials. According to Palestinian sources, Mr. Mashaal would discuss a prisoner exchange involving captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. (Ha'aretz)

A former Royal Marine was to lead a United Nations operation to train 250 Presidential Guards, known as the Kami Project, aimed at improving security at the Kami Crossing. The project is funded by the Netherlands, Canada and the United Kingdom. The project was conceived by Lt-Gen Keith Dayton, US regional coordinator. "The UN is meant to be totally impartial, above party politics and factional fighting, so to be seen to be helping just the Presidential Guard, which is connected to Fatah raises very real risks", according to one UN field officer not involved with the Kami Project. (www.telegraph.co.uk)

Peace Now published a report which stated that the Jewish population in the West Bank grew by 5 per cent in 2006, to 268,000 settlers, who lived among some 3.8 million Palestinians. Israel began building more than 3,000 new housing units in existing settlements last year. Most of the construction was taking place in settlements around Jerusalem and near the Green Line. They include "Ma'aleh Adumin", directly east of Jerusalem, the "Gush Etzion" bloc to the south, "Givat Ze'ev" to the north of the city, and also "Beitar Ilit", "Modi'in Ilit" and "Alfei Menashe" along the Green Line. Three of the other settlements - "Ariel" and nearby "Kidumim" and "Kamei Shomron" - are located in the heart of the northern West Bank. According to the report, Israel wanted to incorporate these behind the wall by creating a finger-shaped enclave eastwards, near the city of Qalqilya. Peace Now spokesman Yaviv Oppenheimer said, "The settlement blocks are becoming a huge problem, they are getting bigger and getting deeper into the West Bank ... In reality the growth of the settler population remains on steady rate, and three times higher than the rate amongst Israel proper ... The situation on the ground will make it very difficult to divide the territory and reach a two-State solution." (AFP, DPA, Wafa, Ynetnews)

The British charity organization Oxfam called the Quartet to lift the freeze on international aid to the Palestinian people. In a statement, Oxfam stated that the Quartet should realize that its decision have negatively affected Palestinian families, adding that considering international aid in the political agenda was immoral and unproductive. (Wafa)

The Palestinian National Information Center (PNIC) issued a report which showed that since the outbreak of the intifada in September 2000, until late January 2007, the Israeli army had killed 5,050 Palestinian men, women and children, wounded 49,760 and detained 10,400 others. The report stated that 150 patients have died at checkpoints and 66 have been killed owing to beating by Israeli settlers. In addition, 36 medical staff have been killed, 2 members of the press, and 220 sportsmen.

As for Palestinian farmland, until July 31 2006, the report stated that 13,572,896 trees have been uprooted and 785 stores demolished. Also, 15,549 bee hives, 1,360 water wells and 207 farmers' houses have been destroyed. Concerning unemployment, the report stated that 30.3 per cent of the Palestinian workforce had been unemployed, totalling some 288,300 persons. At the same time, PNIC said that the poverty line across the Occupied Palestinian Territory had reached 70 per cent, according to data gathered until the third quarter of 2006. The report also reported that the Israeli army had erected 5,001 checkpoints since 1 October 2001.

The report concluded that a total of 247,291 dunums of Palestinian-owned land had been confiscated for the construction of the wall in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. (Ma'an News Agency)

An official delegation headed by the President of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics Luay Shabaneh, travelled to the United States to represent Palestine in the thirty-eighth Session of the United Nations Statistics Commission and its sixtieth anniversary. The meeting will be held from 23 February to 3 March. (Ma'an News Agency)

The mayor of Qalqilya, Sheik Wajih Kawas, met with a delegation from the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ). GTZ was overseeing the implementation of development projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in collaboration with the Development Bank of Germany. (Ma'an News Agency)

22

Palestinian militants detonated an explosive device near an Israeli patrol along the Gaza Strip border fence, causing no casualties, the Israeli army said. (AP)

The Israeli army denied a Palestinian report that Israeli forces entered the southern Gaza Strip searching for smuggling tunnels. Palestinian security officials said that the Israeli forces operated close to the border, and that no clashes were reported. But the army said that no troops were inside Gaza. Israel had warned that militants were taking advantage of the truce to continue digging tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border and using them to smuggle weapons. (AP)

The Quartet put off a decision on how to respond to the inclusion of Hamas in the new Palestinian Government. Officials now say a decision would not be made until the policies of the power-sharing pact became clear. The four partners met in Berlin yesterday amid strong differences of opinion. (*Euro News*) In London, British Prime Minister Tony Blair met with PA President Abbas. After the meeting Mr. Blair expressed hope that negotiations with the more moderate elements of Hamas could lead to progress in the Middle East. After London, Mr. Abbas travelled on to Berlin for a meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

He would be in Paris on 24 February for talks with French President Jacques Chirac. (*Euro News*) Hamas said it was encouraged by what it called a "wait and see" approach by the Quartet towards a new Palestinian unity government. Hamas Cabinet spokesman Ghazi Hamad said that the Quartet had "decided to wait and see until the new government was formed and they have not rushed to reiterate the continuation of the siege and sanctions," adding, "They have left the door open for the possibility of opening a dialogue." PA President Abbas' political adviser, Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, said that the Quartet "will open the door" to restoring ties with the Palestinian government once it fully understood the unity government deal. (*Reuters*) Israel's High Court of Justice ruled that it was permissible for the IDF to build security barriers around West Bank settlements, even if they cut into agricultural land owned by Palestinians. This was in response to a petition submitted two years ago by 10 Palestinian residents of the West Bank villages of Beit Lid, Ramin, Shufa and al-Labad against the separation barrier path that planned to surround the nearby "Avnei Hefetz" and "Einav HaShomron" settlements. The Court rejected the petition after a section of the barrier was changed to an electronic fence, which monitored Palestinian movement without presenting a physical obstacle. (*Ha'aretz*)

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal will visit Moscow on 26 February, the Foreign Ministry of Russia announced. During the visit, Russia planned to continue its efforts "towards stabilizing the situation in the Palestinian territories and overcoming the inter-Palestinian discord that followed the Mecca agreement between Hamas and Fatah," a statement from the Ministry said. On the same day, speaking at a joint press conference after meeting with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Amre Moussa, Mr. Mashaal called on the international community to end the siege on the Palestinian people after the formation of the upcoming Palestinian unity government and to deal with the new government in a fair way. (*AP, www.mid.ru, Xinhua*)

The World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations said in a [report](#) to be released this month that the Palestinian economic crisis had left almost half the people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip food insecure. Reviewing and analysing 2006 statistics and assessing food security and socio-economic conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the report stated that poverty has risen since the international community cut off aid to the PA, leaving previously secure workers - fishermen, farmers, and small traders - increasingly desperate. Many Palestinians, who could not afford to buy food, have been forced to sell off valuable assets such as land or tools. The crisis had put the poorest families' long-term health at risk, said Arnold Vercken, WFP Country Director, adding, "Food assistance alone cannot prevent this decline - there also has to be economic growth which requires political dialogue and stability". (*World Food Programme*)

Abu Obaida, spokesman for Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, denied Israeli reports that it had obtained Soviet-made anti-tank missiles in Gaza. The denial came in response to a report by *Ha'aretz* that Hamas militants smuggled Sagger missiles into Gaza from Egypt. But Mr. Abu Obaida, insisted that the Palestinian resistance had the right to get such missiles and more advanced rockets. He said that the Brigades had been developing home-made weapons to fight against "the Zionist enemy which always announces intentions to launch wide aggression against the Gaza Strip." (*Xinhua*)

The Transformational Business Network (TBN), a UK-based charity, plans to set up call centres in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to boost the Palestinian economy. TBN said it wanted to establish the first centres by the end of this year, hoping to create 900 jobs over five years and offering IT support and other services across the Middle East. The charity wanted to devise a scheme that would not be affected by the frequent closures imposed on Palestinian areas by the Israeli military. Project manager Jerry Marshall said the next few months were "crucial" but he was optimistic about long-term success. "We have nearly everything in place, I see no reason why this shouldn't be successful," he said. There were plans to locate the West Bank operations in Jenin and Beit Jala, and all call centres would forge close links with Palestinian universities. Initially, computer support will be offered, but the project hopes to branch out into hotel bookings and other administrative services. (*BBC*)

23

Israeli border police used stun grenades and water cannons loaded with coloured water to disperse hundreds of protestors against the West Bank wall, including Palestinians, Israeli peace activists and foreigners, near the West Bank village of Bil'in on the day that marked the second anniversary of the start of demonstrations there. Some 20 activists, including an Israeli, were injured. One female Israeli protester was arrested, as were 15 Palestinian demonstrators. (*DPA, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters*)

Several dozen Palestinian youths protested in East Jerusalem after police blocked their entry to the Al-Haram Al-Sharif (Temple Mount) to avoid clashes over Israeli renovation works outside the compound. Police said no one was injured or arrested and the protest was dispersed without using anti-riot equipment. Israel restricted access to the compound to Muslim men aged 45 or older with Israeli identity cards. It placed no restrictions on Muslim women, but Jews and tourists were also prohibited entry. Some 6,000 worshippers attended this week's Friday prayers. (*DPA*)

Egyptian police, during its widening search for suspected Palestinian militants in Sinai, found one ton of explosives hidden underground near the border with the Gaza Strip. The cache was mostly TNT seemingly recovered from landmines. Police sources said on 21 February that they had arrested a Palestinian man wearing a suicide belt, who confessed to planning to attack Israeli tourists in Sinai. The man had entered Egypt from the Gaza Strip through a tunnel. Two of his accomplices were later seized in the Egyptian part of Rafah and security officials said a fourth suspect was still on the run. "Police fear that more [militants] could have entered Sinai through the same tunnel and have been sweeping suspected hideouts as a precautionary measure," one unnamed official told *Reuters*. Scores of Palestinians and Egyptians, including Sinai Bedouin, had also been detained for questioning, he said. (*AP, Reuters*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert ordered the operating hours at the Kami crossing into the Gaza Strip extended to accommodate commercial transport. The crossing will now be open an extra shift, until 11 p.m., set to begin in 45 days. The State will grant the Airports Authority, which operates the crossing, the funding for the extended hours of activity. Currently, the Kami crossing is open until 6 p.m. daily. The Defence Ministry believes that with the extra operating hours, traffic at the crossing will increase to 600 trucks in both directions, from an average of 400 trucks now. In addition, a new pedestrian passageway is planned to be opened at the Erez crossing, though it is unclear when that will occur. (*Ha'aretz*)

German Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed the Mecca agreement, saying after meeting with PA President Abbas in Berlin, "It is good that the bloodletting, especially in Gaza, has been stopped but there is a difficult stretch in front of us." "We welcome the formation of a national unity government, under the condition that certain measures are fulfilled. That would mean that Israel's right to exist would be recognized, that violence would end and that international negotiations, as they already exist, be accepted," Ms. Merkel said at a joint news conference, and added, "There is much to do ahead ... on the road to a two-state solution." Mr. Abbas said, "For eight or nine months our people have been suffering under this boycott." "We hope that by the time a new government is formed several things will happen that will improve the situation." Ms. Merkel further said, "It is important that soldier Shalit be released from captivity and thus a process of prisoner exchange be initiated," which "could set things moving." "I stress that Shalit must be released unconditionally," Mr. Abbas responded. (*AP, DPA*)

Asked whether the EU would boycott the upcoming PA Government, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana told a joint press conference after meeting PA President Abbas in Brussels: "We cannot boycott what doesn't exist. The government still has not been formed. ... We have two possibilities: the government of unity will be part of the solution or the government of unity will be part of the problem. I hope very much, from the bottom of my heart, that the unity government will be part of the solution. ... The EU is not boycotting the Palestinian people. We have said many times that we will never let down the Palestinian people, and we have done that," he said adding that the EU sent more money to the Palestinians in 2006 than in 2005. (*Xinhua*)

John Dugard, Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, released an advance editec version of his [report](#), prepared for the fourth session of the Council scheduled to begin on 12 March. The 24-page report says, "Although the two regimes are different, Israel's laws and practices in the OPT certainly resemble aspects of apartheid ... and probably fall within the scope of the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. "The report lists such Israeli practices as restrictions on Palestinian movement, house demolitions and preferential treatment given to Jewish settlers in the West Bank, and asks, "Can it seriously be denied that the purpose of such action is to establish and maintain domination by one racial group - Jews - over another racial group - Palestinians - and systematically oppress them?" The report further states that it is "grossly inaccurate" to say Israel's 2005 removal of settlers and soldiers from the Gaza Strip constituted an end to its occupation of that

territory, because "Israel retained control of Gaza's air space, sea space and external borders, and the border crossings. Gaza became a sealed off, imprisoned and occupied territory." (AP, www.ohchr.org)

"The Director-General of UNESCO, Koïchiro Matsuura, has decided to send a technical mission to the Old City of Jerusalem, inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List and on the World Heritage in Danger List, to carry out a technical assessment of the works on the access to the Al-Haram Al-Sharif", UNESCO said in a [statement](#). The mission will be led by the Director of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, Francesco Bandarin, and will include the Director-General of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), Mounir Bouchenaki; the President of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), Michael Petzel and Véronique Dauge of the World Heritage Centre. (AP, *Reuters, unesco.org*)

Indonesia will invite leaders of Hamas and Europe for a meeting in the country no later than March to help the settlement of the crisis in Occupied Palestinian Territory, spokesman of the Foreign Ministry Desra Percaya told a press briefing. The meeting was aimed at listening to the views of Hamas leaders about the way to settle the crisis and at helping release blocked-tax revenue to the PA, Mr. Percaya said, stressing that there was a necessity to engage the group, as there was little information about Hamas and its views. "The meeting will be held no later than at the end of March," he said. "We will invite (several leaders of) Hamas and some individuals from Europe." However, Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal would not attend the meeting and would send his representatives instead. (*Xinhua*)

Research done by BTselem indicates that, since the capture of Cpl. Gilad Shalit on 25 June 2006, Israel had forbidden boats, including fishing boats, to sail off the Gaza coast. The prohibition had struck a severe blow to the fishing sector, which provides livelihood for tens of thousands of residents of the Gaza Strip. Some fishermen, however, had risked their lives and violated the prohibition. (www.btselem.org)

24

Four Palestinians were killed in Khan Yunis in a feud between the Ghelban family, allied with Hamas, and the Karouah family, linked to Fatah, raising concerns about a new outbreak of factional fighting. Just before midnight, Mohammed Ghelban, 28, a local commander of Hamas' military wing, was driving in his car with his wife and children, when assailants dragged him from the car, shot and killed him. It was not immediately clear what prompted the attack. A member of the rival clan, Hazem Karouah, 22, was killed several hours later, as was 75-year-old Ismail Sabah, who was caught in the crossfire. Later in the day, Ghada Karouah, 27, died of gunshot wounds. Thirty-seven people were wounded, including four who were in critical condition. Talal Okal, a Palestinian commentator, said that the family feuds were "part of the rubble left over from the fighting." (AP, *Ha'aretz*)

The Jerusalem Post and two Israeli TV stations reported "significant" progress in negotiations for the release of Cpl. Gilad Shalit. A compromise was reportedly reached at a meeting some 10 days ago, which would have "few hundred" Palestinian prisoners released. However, a senior Israeli official denied there had been a breakthrough, saying that the two sides had not even begun discussing the most difficult issue – the identity of the prisoners to be freed. (AP, *The Jerusalem Post, Xinhua*)

PLC speaker Ahmed Baher of Hamas told a news conference that he expected Prime Minister Haniyeh to present a new PA Government for the Council's approval "by the first week of March." On the same day, Khaleda Jarar, a member of the PFLP Political Bureau, told reporters, "As we are not going to participate in the government, we will not grant it confidence when it is put for voting in the [PLC]." (AP, *Xinhua*)

Voice of Palestine quoted Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erakat as saying that there had been no contacts for another meeting between PA President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, but preparations to hold the new summit meeting were likely to begin in a few days. (*Xinhua*)

"I encouraged Mr. Abbas to persevere in his efforts to quickly form a national unity government," French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy told reporters as PA President Abbas wrapped up his European trip. "I told the Palestinian President that, if the government is formed on the basis of the platform of Mecca, France will be disposed to cooperate with him and that our country will also plead for this within the European Union and with other partners in the international community," Mr. Douste-Blazy said. (AP, *DPA*)

Jordan's King Abdullah II, in an interview with Israel's *Channel 2*, said that the new PA unity government must accept the three conditions of the Quartet, adding that there was widespread support among Arab States for his position. Yehia Moussa, PLC member from Hamas, criticized the King's comments the next day, saying, "I asked myself what did the King offer to lift the siege on the Palestinian people and was he a part of the Arabic system or a part of another one." (*DPA, Xinhua*)

Malaysia, as chair of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), proposed that Islamic countries having diplomatic relations with Israel sever the ties and recall their ambassadors in response to Israel's activities at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. According to *Bernama*, Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar, speaking in Malaysia's southern state of Johor at a charity event for flood victims there, said that the proposal had been made at an extraordinary meeting of OIC Foreign Ministers on the Al-Aqsa issue in Jeddah two days earlier. The meeting agreed to the proposal in principle and OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu was following up on the matter, he said, adding that Islamic countries should have an action plan for the international community to resolve the problem of Palestine, not mere empty words. (*Bernama, Xinhua*)

25

Dozens of Israeli jeeps and armoured vehicles raided Nablus overnight, placing large areas of the city under curfew and conducting house-to-house arrest raids in one of the largest West Bank military operations in months. Seven members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades were the apparent target of the raid. In a new tactic, troops broke into transmissions of local TV and radio stations and broadcast the names of the men, all residents of the old city. Soldiers warned civilians against hiding the fugitives and ordered them to remain indoors during the curfew which they said would remain in effect for several days. Two soldiers and several Palestinians were reported lightly wounded in clashes. An IDF spokesman said that the operation was aimed at countering "terrorist threats" in Nablus, a day after Israeli troops discovered an explosives laboratory in the city. "We condemn this military incursion," said Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erakat. "This will undermine the efforts that are being made to sustain the ceasefire with Israel." (AP)

Erez Levanon, a 42-year-old Israeli from the "Bat Ayin" settlement in "Gush Etzion", was found stabbed to death some 12 km north of Hebron. The body was reportedly discovered by Palestinians, who then informed Israeli security officials, in a vehicle near the Beit Ummar village. Police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld said the next day, "Police and forensic experts worked on the body overnight and I can now say this was a brutal terror attack," adding that police and the IDF were combing neighbouring villages, but no suspects had been arrested. (AP, *DPA, Reuters*)

The Islamic Jihad denied reports that its military wing was planning to carry out suicide attacks against Israeli tourists in Egypt. "Our movement's strategy has no intentions to carry out actions outside occupied Palestine, even if the targets were Zionists," a senior Islamic Jihad leader Khaled al-Batsh told reporters. On the same day, Mohammed al-Hindi, a senior Islamic Jihad official, said that his movement was ready to join the PLO when it is reshuffled. He told media that a reformed PLO would have a "true political partnership with everyone" and that the organization was the only way out of the political crisis. (*Xinhua*)

Israel's Supreme Planning Council for Judea and Samaria recently legalized the largest-ever settlement construction project, which was partially situated on Palestinian private land in the village of Bil'in in the West Bank, *Ha'aretz* reported. The plan includes the construction of 42 buildings containing about 1,500 apartments in the "Matiyahu East" neighbourhood of the "Modi'in Illit" settlement. Peace Now and Bil'in residents filed a petition against the construction a week earlier at the High Court of Justice. The petitioners' lawyer, Michael Sfard, said that planning authorities knew about the illegal circumstances and did nothing to stop the construction. Justice Salim Joubran ordered the State to respond to the petition by 6 March. (*Ha'aretz, Xinhua*)

The Palestinian economy shrank 21 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2006 compared with the previous year, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics said, noting decline in most sectors of the economy, including manufacturing, education, tourism and health care. Sufian al-Barghouti, the Bureau's Director for Economic Statistics, said the steep drop in economic activity was largely the result of international sanctions imposed after Hamas won elections and gained control of the Government. Foreign aid made up about half of the PA Government budget before then. (AP)

Jordan's King Abdullah II was in Cairo for a brief visit and talks with President Hosni Mubarak as part of a fresh round of diplomacy aimed at resuming the Israeli-Palestinians negotiations. "Egypt and Jordan are calling [on the international community] to lift the economic and political embargo on the Palestinian people," Egyptian presidential spokesman Suleiman Awwad told the press after the talks. "This will not be achieved through speeches, but through Palestinian policies that clearly and strongly acknowledge the Palestinian cause and the people, under the umbrella of legitimacy," he added. The King's visit to Cairo was to be followed by a trip to Riyadh, then to London and Washington, where, in his address to a joint session of the US Congress, the King was expected to concentrate on the Palestinian issue as the core crisis in the region. (AP, *DPA*)

The Foreign Ministers of seven Islamic countries (Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey) met in Islamabad on the basis of a new initiative led by Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz was to open the one-day meeting expected to formulate recommendations

on a number of issues including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for a summit of their leaders planned to be held in Saudi Arabia next month. (DPA, Kyodo)
Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev expressed satisfaction with the EU's initial reaction to the Mecca agreement, as had been shown during the just-completed European tour by PA President Abbas. "We understand the European message to the Palestinians is that a future Palestinian government must meet the international benchmarks in order to receive legitimacy," Mr. Regev said, as "a prerequisite for positive movement in the peace process." (AP)

26

Annan Al-Tibi, 42, was killed in Nablus' Old City, as Israeli raid of the city continued for a second day, in what the IDF said would be an open-ended sweep. A neighbour, Nashaat Hijawi, said Mr. Tibi was hit in the neck while he was in his home by shots fired from a passing IDF jeep. The man's son was wounded and evacuated to a hospital. The IDF said it fired at "suspicious characters" on the rooftop of a building, killing one man and injuring another. Israeli troops sealed off the centre of the old city with cement blocks and trash containers and enforced a curfew that confined some 30,000 Palestinians to their homes. Two explosives laboratories were reportedly uncovered. PA security officials said 30 people had been arrested since the raid began. (AP, DPA, Reuters, Xinhua)
IDF forces arrested two Palestinian youths in the murder of Erez Levanon, who was found stabbed the previous day. The suspects confessed under interrogation, saying that they had planned the murder in advance. They also said it was committed for nationalist reasons and that they were not connected with any Palestinian faction. (Ha'aretz)

A new report released by Peace Now said several Israeli settlements in the northern West Bank had annexed land from nature reserves for construction purposes. The report compares aerial photographs of settlements and outposts and maps of nature reserves, and states that the phenomenon is widespread and a central reason for the popularity of settlements in the area. (Ha'aretz)

Hamas political leader Khaled Mashaal met with Special Middle East Envoy of the President of the Russian Federation and Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov, and exchanged views on the formation of a new Palestinian government of national unity and the prospects for the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Upon arrival in Moscow, he was quoted by *Interfax* as saying, "We value Russia's position and we want to discuss the results of the agreement, recently reached in Mecca, with the Russian leadership. ... "Our goal is to begin the international community's interaction with the Palestinian Government in order to provide for a political atmosphere that would foster the creation of a Palestinian State," he also said. (AP, Xinhua, www.in.mil.ru)

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner began a four-day tour that was to include stops in Egypt, Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Jordan, to try to maintain momentum in the renewed peace efforts. In Egypt, President Mubarak and Ms. Ferrero-Waldner discussed, among other things, the possibility of convening the upcoming Quartet meeting in Cairo. After the meeting, she said the EU was preparing to launch a permanent mechanism on top of the EU's Temporary International Mechanism to channel assistance directly to the Palestinian people. Writing in the Palestinian daily *Al-Quds* on the same day, Ms. Ferrero-Waldner said she would discuss with PA President Abbas "proposals for a new mechanism of aid to the Palestinians," including long-term support for development projects. "We have to address the challenges in two time frames," she told *Reuters* in a phone interview before departure. "One, new actions that can be taken soon, even before the establishment of a national unity government with which we can re-engage ... And secondly, actions that could be taken once the political conditions allow us to re-engage with the Palestinian Authority." (AP, Reuters)

27

Israeli forces opened fire on fishermen and farmers in the Gaza Strip, Israeli security forces reported. Sources said soldiers opened fire from an Israeli military ship towards a Palestinian fishing boat off the coast of Tal Al-Sultan, in the west of Rafah, south of the Gaza Strip. The boat sailed further out to sea and no injuries were reported. Israeli forces also opened fire on farmers east of the destroyed Gaza airport, south of Rafah. No casualties were reported. (Ma'an News Agency)
The Al-Quds Brigades, military wing of the Islamic Jihad, claimed responsibility for launching six home-made projectiles towards the Israeli military base in Kisufim, east of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. A statement said this was done in retaliation for the incursion in Nablus. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (military wing of Fatah), the Al-Quds Brigades (military wing of the Islamic Jihad) and the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades (military wing of the PFLP), announced joint responsibility for hurling a number of explosive devices at Israeli military vehicles in the Al Yasmina area of Nablus during the previous night. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces have begun withdrawing from Nablus, according to Palestinian sources. Troops had left the city centre where they had imposed a curfew two days earlier. An estimated 50,000 Nablus residents were confined to their homes during the raid. Municipal workers cleared mounds of earth left by the soldiers to block access to this Old City, where the military had concentrated its operations. The IDF reported that they had arrested five terror suspects in the past two days and uncovered three explosive labs and video equipment used to film suicide bombers. During the operation, one Palestinian was killed and two houses were bombed, including the house of a senior Al-Aqsa commander. Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat said that the offensive would "undermine the efforts" by PA President Abbas to maintain a ceasefire with Israel. Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said the "criminal assault on Nablus" was designed to undermine Palestinian efforts to form a coalition government. Residents cautiously ventured back into the streets and shopkeepers returned to their stores, where they found their doors broken and contents of shops ruined. (AP, BBC, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz said Israel would not hesitate to act against a military buildup by Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip, particularly the actions of Hamas. He said, "The main issue is their [Hamas] taking advantage of the ceasefire to gain power and hoard weapons ... the fact that their power is growing and taking on a completely different nature will compel us to prepare ourselves accordingly. Several weeks ago, the Shin Bet warned of arms smuggling along the Gaza Strip border with Egypt. (Ynetnews)

Israeli Defence Minister Amir Peretz said that Hamas was taking advantage of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and the Palestinians to continue stockpiling arms. "We are definitely doing everything in order to preserve the ceasefire," he said, but added that Israel had "no reason to turn [Hamas'] strengthening into a real threat to Israel." (Ha'aretz)

In a press conference in Moscow, Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said, "Should the US administration insist on continuing the blockade of Palestine, this will engender even more hatred of the US in the region and not only in Palestine, but also in other Arab and Islamic countries." He added, "The Arab and Islamic world is in need of radical change in the Quartet's policy regarding the Middle East settlement. The Arab world needs a positive response to the agreement reached in Mecca." Mr. Mashaal also said, "Israel should stop the occupation of Palestinian territories and put an end to the suffering of the Palestinians. When Israel does this, Palestinians will clearly define their position." (www.interfax.ru)

At its [299th meeting](#), the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People opened its 2007 session. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon opened and [addressed](#) the meeting. The Committee elected its new Bureau and approved the programme of work for the year. The Bureau consists of the Chairman of the Committee (Ambassador Paul Badji of Senegal), two Vice-Chairmen (Ambassador Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz of Cuba and Ambassador Zahir Tanin of Afghanistan) and the Rapporteur (Ambassador Victor Camilleri of Malta). (UN News Centre)

UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd [said](#): "The [Mecca] agreement challenges the international community to match the courage and compromises shown by the parties with bold steps of its own, bearing in mind that the choices it makes will have profound consequences on the future of Palestinians and Palestine... Turning a blind eye to expanding settlements and the extension of the barrier, to economic blockades, to occupation generally, works against our goals and indeed vitiates our purpose for being here... The stark reality is that Palestinian space, both physical and political, is shrinking". (www.unrwa.org)

EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said that the international aid blockade would be lifted only after a long-term assessment of the new Palestinian Government's policies and actions. "We will judge the government by its actions," she said. (Ha'aretz)

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said: "The advice to Hamas ... is to continue in the direction of the principles of the international Quartet ... However, at the same time, we think that the progress that was achieved with the participation of Saudi Arabia should already now be rewarded," he said. "Following these agreements, Abu Mazen [PA President Abbas] instructed Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh to form the national unity government on the basis of a platform that meets the Quartet principles," Mr. Lavrov said. "We think Israel must refrain from the use of force in the Palestinian Territory and of course Hamas must use all the authority it has ... to stop the firing of Qassam missiles at Israel... We have received confirmation that such steps will be taken," he said. "We should

start discussing final goals and principles of the Palestinian-Israeli settlement and the structure of the future Palestinian State," he added. (AP, *Itar-Tass*)

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso announced that Japan has offered to host a Middle East conference in March. The representatives from Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority would be invited. In a [press conference](#), Deputy Press Secretary Tomohiko Taniguchi explained that the meeting was in relation to Japan's proposal called the Corridor of Peace and Prosperity, which aimed to develop the Jordan Gorge along the Jordan River as a place to grow agro-centric industries, and then connect the area with the Gulf States. There would be another meeting, such as a second-track meeting, according to Mr. Taniguchi, which aimed to build confidence among the parties concerned. (*The Jerusalem Post*, www.mofa.go.jp)

The Palestinian Islamic Women's Union and a cultural centre for refugees' rights made more than 500 food parcels to take to residents in Nablus, coordinating with other civil society organizations in the city. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

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Undercover Israeli troops shot and killed three members of the Islamic Jihad in Jenin. The IDF said that the militants had been involved in planning a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv. "This new crime will not pass without tough punishment," Abu Ahmad, an Islamic Jihad spokesman in the Gaza Strip, said in a text message to reporters. "Their blood will be the fuel of our holy battle." In a statement, the spokesman of PA President Abbas described the assassination and the incursion of Israeli occupation troops into Nablus as crimes and barbaric acts and a part of open war against the Palestinian people and its national institutions as well as a clear retreat from the state of calm. (AP, *Ha'aretz*, *Ynetnews*, *Wafa*)

In Nablus, Israeli troops reinstated a curfew, as bulldozers sealed off the Old City with rubble and concrete blocks and jeeps patrolled streets, witnesses said. A roadside bomb wounded one IDF soldier. (*Ynetnews*)

Five Qassam rockets hit the western Negev. There were no injuries in any of the strikes. (*Ynetnews*)

IDF forces operating in the West Bank apprehended 25 "wanted" Palestinians. Hamas PLC member Hathem Qafishe was arrested in Hebron. (*Ha'aretz*, *Ynetnews*)

The IDF arrested 15 international and Israeli peace activists protesting against the expansion of the separation wall near Bethlehem. (*Wafa*)

Israeli police banned a news conference in East Jerusalem because it was organized by Hamas, police spokesman Shmuel Ben-Ruby said. The Mufti of Jerusalem, the leader of Israel's Islamic Movement and a Roman Orthodox Archbishop were to speak against the excavations in the area of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. (*Ha'aretz*)

Ismail Radwan, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, told *Ha'aretz*: "We have not given up in any way our position regarding the territory of Palestine. We are willing to consider a possibility for a long-term hudna [cease-fire] if the Zionist enemy releases the Palestinian prisoners and the refugees return to their homes. No more. The Mecca agreement has to do with the Government, not Hamas," he added. (*Ha'aretz*)

European Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner and UNRWA Commissioner-General Karen Koning AbuZayd signed in Ramallah a joint declaration on EU support to UNRWA for 2007-2010 which is expected to be €264 million. (www.europa.eu)

In a press conference at UN Headquarters, High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour [commented](#) on extrajudicial killings by Israel in Gaza and the West Bank, and the thousands of Palestinians detained without trial. She said she had shared that concern directly with Israeli authorities in her recent visit to the Middle East. At that point, the Israeli Supreme Court had not yet rendered its decision on the legality of extrajudicial killings. The court was an excellent judicial body, but its decision had not gone the distance in totally prohibiting that practice. She said that the ruling had been disappointing. At the same time, one could not underplay the very profound security claims of ordinary Israelis, she added. People had the right to turn to their Government for protection. The measures employed to provide security, however, should not have the kind of impact they were having on ordinary Palestinians, by curtailing their ability to make a living and curbing their access to health care. (*UN News Centre*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met with visiting EU Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighbourhood Policy Ferrero-Waldner. During the meeting, Mr. Olmert reiterated the preconditions for proceeding further with diplomatic talks with the Palestinians, adding, "My talks with the Palestinian President will deal with issues relating to containing terrorism and the quality of life of the Palestinians". Mr. Olmert told Ms. Ferrero-Waldner of his decision the past week to extend the daily operating hours for the Karni crossing for goods in and out of the Gaza Strip, adding, "This way the crossing can handle more than 800 trucks per day". Ms. Ferrero-Waldner said that there was no discord within the Quartet on its demands of the Palestinian unity government, despite recent signs of divisions.

She also met with Palestinian officials, telling them that the new government needed to respond to the Quartet principles. Ms. Ferrero-Waldner made it clear to both sides that the EU was not likely to pull the plug on an emergency aid programme that provides relief for some 900,000 Palestinians. She described continued assistance to the Palestinians as a way to keep the situation somewhat under control. She said that the EU was keen to engage the Palestinians by launching good governance and other programmes. (*Ha'aretz*)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas will meet in two weeks, their third meeting since the resumption of top-level diplomatic contacts. They will concentrate on ways of "furthering the dialogue" in view of the difficulties in forging a Palestinian unity government, a senior political source in Jerusalem said.

Earlier this week, aides for the two leaders met for a frank discussion to prepare for the Olmert-Abbas meeting. (*Ha'aretz*)

The Israeli army evacuated two Israeli women after they entered Ramallah by mistake, *Israel Radio* reported. According to the report, Palestinian police had cooperated with the Israeli army to recover the two women. (*Xinhua*)