

Division for Palestinian Rights
**Chronological Review of Events Relating to the
 Question of Palestine**
 Monthly media monitoring review
April 2008

Monthly highlights

- Israel to build 2000 apartments in West Bank settlements in 2008. ([2 April](#))
- IDF dismantles 10 West Bank roadblocks. ([3 April](#))
- PA President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert resume negotiations. ([7 April](#))
- US to convene follow-up summit to the Annapolis conference in May at Sharm el-Sheikh. ([8 April](#))
- Militants kill two contractors at Israeli fuel terminal; Israel cuts off fuel supplies to Gaza, 13 Gazans die in Israeli attacks. ([9](#), [10](#) and [11 April](#))
- Israeli cabinet approves 5,000 additional work permits for West Bank Palestinians. ([13 April](#))
- Eight UN agencies express concern about critical Gaza fuel situation. ([15 April](#))
- Three Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza, at least 17 Gazans, including a *Reuters* cameraman, killed in clashes and Israeli air strikes. ([16 April](#))
- Israel approves the reopening of 20 PA police stations in the West Bank. ([18 April](#))
- After meeting former US President Carter, Hamas leadership says it agrees to a Palestinian State within 1967 borders, but no to recognition of Israel. ([21 April](#))
- Hamas proposes six-month ceasefire, which is dismissed by Israel. ([24 April](#))
- President Bush meets with PA President Abbas in Washington. ([24 April](#))
- Fuel shortage halts UNRWA food aid distribution in Gaza. ([24 April](#))
- UN International Conference on Palestine Refugees opens in Paris. ([29 April](#))

1

Settlers in Hebron sealed off with glue the entrances to six stores belonging to Palestinians. They also sealed off the entrance to the offices of the Islamic Waqf at the Tomb of the Patriarchs. The action was a response to a Palestinian attack on an Israeli woman at the Tomb the previous day. (*The Jerusalem Post*)

A new report by the World Health Organization described in detail five cases of patients who died while awaiting an Israeli permit to exit the Gaza Strip or after having been denied one. Another 27 cases of patients unable to receive specialized care outside Gaza were also documented in the report. (*IRIN*)

A team from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that it had observed one Israeli military checkpoint being removed from a road near Jericho. OCHA classified it as a partial checkpoint, manned only some of the time. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

2

The IDF entered the northern Gaza Strip, east of Beit Hanoun, arresting three Palestinian civilians, said witnesses and security sources. (*Xinhua*)

Israeli forces raided the home of an officer in the Palestinian Authority (PA) Preventive Security Service in Tulkarm. Israeli troops also seized a Palestinian in a village near Bethlehem, and also raided the city centre, Palestinian security sources said. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

An Israeli wrecking crew demolished a Palestinian home in East Jerusalem. The home had been built without a permit. It had been demolished once before, and rebuilt last summer by peace activists. Former Jerusalem city council member Meir Margalit said that the municipality issued only about 130 building permits in Arab neighbourhoods each year, well below what was needed. Israeli police arrested Jeff Halper of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions for attempting to prevent the demolition. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Egyptian President Mubarak held talks with visiting PA President Abbas on the latest developments in the Middle East, particularly the future of the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks. "I can't speak of progress [in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks] as long as we have not started to edit a draft. When we start drafting, we will feel we have started to make progress," Mr. Abbas told reporters after the meeting. So far, he said, the two sides have only had "exchanges of ideas, a dialogue... in depth." (*AFP*)

"We support the Russian Federation's role in the peace process by organizing the Moscow conference which was agreed upon" at the Annapolis Conference, said Nabil Sha'ath, the PA representative for preparation of the conference. Mr. Sha'ath said that the Annapolis conference had not achieved anything so far and the negotiations had made no progress and Israel had not fulfilled any of its obligations. The tentative date for the meeting would be the middle of June, according to Mr. Sha'ath, who said that PA President Abbas would visit Moscow from 17 to 19 April to hold talks with President Vladimir Putin. (*Xinhua*)

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal told the Palestinian daily *Al-Aya* that Hamas supported the united Palestinian position calling for the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, including East Jerusalem, and the right of return for refugees. He explained in the interview that Hamas was interested in a complete ceasefire in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but that Israel was willing to agree to such a deal only in the Gaza Strip. He said that secret contacts were under way with the Europeans, but that the US was applying pressure in an effort to keep those contacts from broadening. Regarding the prisoner exchange deal for captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, Mr. Mashaal said that it was not linked to the ceasefire but that negotiations were not progressing at this point. He said Israel continued to refuse to release prisoners who had been sentenced to life terms, even though it had changed its criteria for releasing prisoners. (*Haaretz*)

Israel planned to build nearly 2,000 new apartments in settlements in the West Bank in 2008, the largest number in a decade, *Yediot Ahronot* reported. The homes were all being built in the large settlement blocks, including "Givat Ze'ev", "Ma'aleh Adumim", "Beitar Illit", "Ariel", and "Kiryat Arba". The figure did not include additional construction which was going on within the city's municipal boundaries. (*DPA*)

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said that 2008 was the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel and was also an opportunity to acknowledge once again that true security for the people of Israel could only be realized when Palestinians' own aspirations for statehood were met in their turn. Israel's future depended on it having normal relations with its neighbours, and above all on the creation of a new and viable Palestinian State, alongside a secure Israel, and the UK would continue to support that development. (*Haaretz*, www.fco.gov.uk)

3

The IDF killed three Palestinians during a military operation in Khan Yunis, in the Gaza Strip. Palestinian sources reported that they belonged to Islamic Jihad. Six Palestinian fighters had been injured, one seriously, in ongoing clashes, and three had been seized. Beit Hanoun residents said that all telecommunications, including cell phones, had been shut down by the Israeli military during the operation. (*Haaretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Ma'an News Agency*)

The IDF dismantled 10 roadblocks in the West Bank, as part of a pledge to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to remove 50 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The roadblocks had been removed from areas near Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqilya and Tulkarm in the north of the West Bank. The measure affected a fraction of more than 500 roadblocks and checkpoints the army was operating across the West Bank, according to Palestinian security services. (*AFP*)

Israel said that they had removed 50 dirt mounds used as roadblocks in the West Bank. Citing security concerns, Israel balked at Palestinian calls to dismantle major West Bank checkpoints. (*Reuters*)

A Middle East peace conference to be hosted by the Russian Federation could take place in June, said Nabil Sha'ath, adviser to PA President Abbas. "Moscow plans to organize this event in June. [US Secretary of State] Condoleezza Rice has voiced agreement with this approximate date. We would also like the meeting to take place in June in order to implement the decisions taken there," Mr. Sha'ath told journalists after talks with Russian officials. (*AFP*)

Yasser Abed Rabbo, member of the Palestinian negotiating team, called for a halt in negotiations with Israel in response to a recent Israeli decision to intensify settlement activity in Palestinian areas. "We cannot continue negotiations and have a political process under an Israeli deception and a US administration unwilling to do anything about it. If the US is unable to stop settlements, it will not be able to bring peace," he said. He also said that the PA "should generate a major crisis equal to the crisis Israel has generated and we should start by saying enough, we cannot continue with political negotiations ... This [Israeli settlement] conspiracy is the peak of all conspiracies and it is called negotiations, dialogue and political efforts, yet we do not see any of this on the ground ... What we see is changing facts on the ground and taking advantage of the regional and international situation to implement the scheme." (*AP*, *Haaretz*, *Xinhua*)

Hamas called on Israel to respond to efforts aimed at achieving calm with armed Palestinian groups. A Hamas legislator, Mushier al-Massri said, "I call on the Israelis to take advantage of the international and regional efforts for calmness". He added that at present Israel did not want a mutual, comprehensive and balanced truce, saying "... they want calmness on the ground without any price in return." (*Xinhua*)

PA President Abbas announced in Cairo that he would meet with US President George W. Bush on 23 April in Washington D.C. (*AP*)

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said that he would dock the pay of union members who participated in strikes. The union had held repeated warning strikes in recent months, calling for wage increases. Mr. Fayyad had been trying to keep down Government spending at a time when donor countries demanded cost-cutting and efficiency in exchange for a massive injection of foreign funds pledged in December. Mr. Fayyad said civil servants would not be paid when on strike and he would not consider salary increases because of widespread unemployment and poverty. "There is a need to expand the social safety net and development projects that the Government started last year," he said. (*AP*)

On the occasion of the International Water Day, several Palestinian officials reviewed the acute shortage in drinking water and proper sewage systems in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. PA Water Authority Director Fadl Ka'ush urged "world countries and all concerned organizations to find immediate solutions to the water, environmental and public health problems that the Gaza Strip is suffering from to avoid a full destruction of the aquifers and to check the rising level of salinity and pollution." Mr. Ka'ush pointed out "the urgent need to expedite the establishment of a waste water treatment plant for Khan Yunis and its surroundings." He also pointed out the need to complete the renovation and development of the waste water treatment plant for Rafah. He further noted the need "to start supplying the Gaza Strip with additional quantities of water from outside the Gaza Strip in coordination with Israel, and to start the work on the establishment of a pipeline system which included a two-phased construction of a desalination station with a production capacity of 50 million cubic metres." Mr. Ka'ush noted that only nine per cent of the population centers in the West Bank were linked to sewage systems, while the rest, including large neighbourhoods in major towns, still used soak pits. He went on to say that over 300 localities diverted "an estimated 25 million cubic metres of polluted water annually through open canals into fields, while over 22 million cubic metres of wastewater from settlements also flow in the Palestinian canals." He also highlighted the fact that many Israeli settlements have industrial plants "which produce chemical and hazardous waste." (*BBC*)

4

Israel's Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter came under fire from the Gaza Strip as he and his delegation toured Israel's border area with a group of Canadian tourists. Mr. Dichter escaped unharmed, but his Bureau Chief, Matti Gil, was said to be moderately injured when hit in the groin. An Israeli army spokesperson in Tel Aviv confirmed that Palestinian militants had opened fire from the Gaza Strip, aiming either at the group of officials and civilians, or possibly at nearby army outposts or patrols. Several Palestinian groups claimed responsibility for the shooting, including the armed wing of Hamas. (*AP*, *DPA*, *Haaretz*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Ynetnews*)

Israeli press sources said that soldiers had arrested two Palestinians at a military checkpoint near Qalqilya in the northern West Bank. The Palestinians were allegedly carrying knives, which were confiscated. In Nablus, soldiers arrested four Palestinians at dawn after storming their homes. (*Ma'an News Agency*)
Palestinians opened fire on farmers working in the fields of Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha, near the Gaza Strip, according to *Israel Army Radio*. No one was hurt. (*AP*, *Haaretz*)

A settler was questioned by the Hebron police after firing into the air and hurling dung and urine at Palestinian farmers and human rights activists who had been working in the area the previous day. The incident took place when Palestinian farmers, accompanied by volunteers from the Rabbis for Human Rights organization, began to plow their fields south of the settlement of "Susiya." Police said additional arrests might take place. (*Ynetnews*)

5

A Palestinian farmer was killed in the Gaza Strip near the border with Israel, medical workers said. According to local residents, the man was killed when a mortar fired by Palestinian militants at Israel fell short in northern Gaza. An Israeli army spokesperson said soldiers had been fired upon by militants in Gaza near the fence but they did not return fire. (*Reuters*)

Two rockets launched from the Gaza Strip landed in open areas on the outskirts of Israel's southern city of Ashkelon, causing no injuries or damage. (*Ynetnews*)

The Ir Amim Organization for an Equitable and Stable Jerusalem published a report indicating that an additional 9,617 new housing units had been built in East Jerusalem following the Annapolis Conference in November 2007. Accelerated planning and construction were currently taking place on 471 housing units in settlements at the very heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods, according to the report. The homes of 14 Palestinian families in East Jerusalem had been razed, and dozens of political, religious and social events held by Palestinians living in East Jerusalem had been cancelled by police directive, the organizations said. The report also indicated that excavations underneath the Bab al-Maghariba (Mughrabi) Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem had resumed, and unauthorized archaeological digs had been taking place underneath the Muslim Quarter of East Jerusalem as well as in the Arab area of Silwan. (*Ynetnews*)

6

A five-year-old Palestinian boy, Abdullah Buhar, was killed when an IDF shell exploded near his home in the Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, Palestinian officials said. An IDF spokesperson confirmed that troops had exchanged fire in the area with armed Palestinians but said she was unaware of casualties. (*Haaretz*)

Israeli forces arrested four Palestinians in Hebron and Bethlehem. (*Wafa*)

Deputy head of Hamas' Political Bureau Moussa Abu Marzouk said that Israel had responded negatively via Egyptian mediators to an offer for a truce with the group both in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. (*Haaretz*)

The Israeli Defense Ministry said that the IDF had dismantled 10 dirt roadblocks in the West Bank over the weekend, bringing to 60 the total number of barriers removed in the past week. (*Haaretz*)

7

Eight Israeli military vehicles penetrated 600 metres into Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. Bulldozers that accompanied the Israeli forces dug up agricultural lands in the area. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces seized 10 "wanted" Palestinians from Qalqilya, Bethlehem and Hebron. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

An Israeli settler bus ran over and killed a 15-year-old Palestinian shepherd on a bypass road near Nablus. Witnesses said that the bus "deliberately" struck the

boy while he was attempting to cross the road with his flock of sheep. (Ma'an News Agency)

Palestinian military groups in the Gaza Strip agreed among themselves to suspend the firing of home-made projectiles at Israeli towns fearing a major Israeli incursion, Hamas sources told the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbar*. "The agreement does not mean a unilateral ceasefire, rather it is meant to annul any Israeli pretext to undertake more aggressive actions against the Gaza Strip," a Hamas official said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israel had rejected the Palestinian Authority's bid to deploy its national security forces' special battalion in Hebron but had agreed to their deployment in Jenin instead. The Israeli security establishment opposed the Hebron option, mainly because of tensions between Israelis and Palestinians there. (Haaretz)

PA President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert resumed face-to-face negotiations. Israeli Government spokesman Mark Regev said that the two had agreed to meet every two weeks. "Both leaders reiterated their commitment to the Annapolis process and to reaching a historic agreement by the end of the year," Mr. Regev said. (AP)

UN officials said that the Executive Director of the office of the United Nations Register of Damage caused by the Construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Vladimir Goryayev, had begun his first fact-finding mission. An official said that Mr. Goryayev would visit areas affected by the project in and around the West Bank and would meet with "potential claimants." "This is a technical visit to establish direct contacts with the relevant parties in the region, and see the situation on the ground," the official said. However, an official at the Israeli Mission to the UN, however, said that Israel would not cooperate with Mr. Goryayev. "This is yet another body which is the result of the automatic majority in the General Assembly," the official said. (Reuters, The Jerusalem Post)

8

Palestinian medical officials said that a man had been killed during clashes between Israeli forces and militants in the northern Gaza Strip. They said that he appeared to be a militant, and that two others were moderately wounded. Hamas said that its fighters had fired nine mortars at Israeli forces in the area. The IDF said its troops had fired back, hitting some of the gunmen. (AP)

A Hamas member was killed and another injured during fighting with undercover Israeli forces in Khan Yunis, witnesses said. (Ma'an News Agency)

In recent weeks, the IDF has been collecting hundreds of military-issued weapons from settlers in the vicinity of Ramallah. *Voice of Israel* radio reported that the army was allowing only security guards in the settlements in the area to carry weapons. (Ma'an News Agency, The Jerusalem Post)

Israeli forces seized 17 Palestinians during raids in Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Hebron. (Ma'an News Agency)

"The situation [in the Gaza Strip] is no longer bearable," senior Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya told a news conference. "All options are open to breach this border.

Not only the Egyptian border, but others as well," he said." (Xinhua)

The US is planning to convene a follow-up summit to the Annapolis peace conference in May at Sharm el-Sheikh, Meretz Knesset member Yossi Beilin told the media. According to Mr. Beilin, US President Bush, Prime Minister Olmert, PA President Abbas, Egyptian President Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah II were expected to attend. (Haaretz)

Imprisoned Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti wrote a letter to be read out at a rally in Tel Aviv to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Peace Now movement.

In the letter, he said: "The majority of the Palestinian people are ready for a historic agreement based on international decisions that will allow a Palestinian and Israeli State to coexist, side by side, in peace and stability." (Haaretz)

Comments made by Israel's Vice Premier Haim Ramon to a Knesset committee two months ago confirmed that the "Ofra" settlement had been built on privately-owned Palestinian land in violation of a 1979 Supreme Court order. This information could have legal implications for Palestinians seeking compensation.

(Haaretz)

9

Palestinian militants breached the border near the Nahal Oz terminal in Israel and killed two Israeli civilians in their 30s. Two Palestinians were killed by troops who returned fire, but others fled into Gaza. Islamic Jihad and the Popular Resistance Committees claimed responsibility. Israel rushed forces and tanks across the border after the raid, and an Israeli aircraft struck a car carrying militants near Gaza City. Four Palestinians were killed in Israeli reprisals, including three children.

Israeli Government spokesman Mark Regev said that Hamas was responsible and would be held accountable. In an unrelated incident, an IDF soldier was killed and two others were lightly wounded in clashes with Hamas members in the southern Gaza Strip. The IDF killed two militants during the exchange of fire. (AP, AFP, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Ynetnews)

Israeli troops arrested 39 Palestinians during overnight and early morning raids across the West Bank. (AFP, Xinhua)

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry warned that "any attempt to violate the sanctity of the Egyptian border by force or to illegally encroach on the border line will be met with the appropriate seriousness and firmness to protect the border and its sanctity ... Efforts to create upheavals on the Egyptian border coinciding with fabricated problems inside Egypt are a matter that raises suspicion over the true motives behind the statements of the leaders of Palestinian Islamic groups," according to a Foreign Ministry statement. Egyptian security forces had been deployed heavily along the Rafah crossing. (AP, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters)

Nemmer Hammad, an aide to PA President Abbas, told the London-based *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* that the President would meet with US President George W. Bush in Washington on 24 April and would tell him that the peace talks had achieved nothing. "All the previous sessions of talks and the meetings were just a mental exercise and heartbeat testing," Mr. Hammad said. He added that the Israeli negotiators "are not willing to write anything on paper except the thoughts they have, which we, of course, reject. Even if some of them get interested in some issues, they reject forming a deal." (Xinhua)

The US was keen on holding a summit at Sharm el-Sheikh to coincide with US President Bush's visit to Israel in May for the country's sixtieth anniversary celebrations. According to Israeli sources, the American initiative was still in the early planning stages. (Haaretz)

Ahmed Yousef, a member of Hamas, denied that Hamas was seeking to create a crisis with Egypt. "If the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip continues, we will be obliged to open a hole on the wall and breach the borders because our people are dying," (Xinhua)

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said that it would not allow Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, to enter the country after he stood by comments comparing Israelis to Nazis. (Haaretz)

10

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert said that Hamas would be held accountable for every infiltration, shooting and rocket attack in southern Israel, no matter which terrorist organization claimed responsibility. "I promise you that the response to Hamas will be such that Hamas will no longer be able to continue to take action against the citizens of Israel," he said. (The Jerusalem Post)

Israel cut off fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip, citing security reasons, a day after an armed Palestinian infiltrated the Israeli fuel depot at Nahal Oz and killed two workers. In the afternoon, hundreds of demonstrators flocked to main intersections of Gaza City to protest Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. Matan Vilnai, Israel's Deputy Defense Minister, warned that more reprisals were planned. He told *Army Radio*: "We will choose the time and the place to respond. The blame lies on Hamas as the responsible authority there". Israeli security sources said that Israel had not decided to stop fuel shipments completely and would probably resume the supply in a few days. Abu Ahmed, of Islamic Jihad, said that the attack had deliberately targeted the fuel depot. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said that the attack on Nahal Oz was one of the many options Hamas had, adding, "This was the first option and the beginning of the eruption" against the blockade. (AP, Haaretz)

Egypt sent more security forces to the Rafah crossing, witnesses and security sources said. Spokesman for Egypt's Presidency Suleiman Awad said that Egypt would not allow further breaches of the Gaza Strip-Egypt border. Egypt also barred large trucks from taking goods into Rafah to remove any economic incentive for Palestinians to cross the border with Egypt, security sources said. However, a spokesman of Hamas who appeared on the *Al-Jazeera* news channel denied reports about Hamas' threats to breach the border, stressing that all the information on such threats is imprecise and incorrect. (DPA, Haaretz)

A gag order was lifted by the Israeli authorities, revealing that two Palestinians from Nablus had been arrested in March for allegedly planning to poison diners at a restaurant in the Israeli city of Ramat Gan. The Shin Bet said the men had been recruited by a cell of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. (Haaretz)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said that he would submit a request to the Government next week to issue 5,000 new permits for Palestinians in the West Bank to work in Israel. The permits were part of a package pledged during the recent visit by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Israel said that the package was meant to ease restrictions on Palestinians in the West Bank. Palestinians said that the changes would have little impact on daily life. (Reuters)

Mahmoud Al-Khizindar, deputy director of the federation of gas stations in the Gaza Strip, said that a humanitarian disaster was looming in the Gaza Strip as fuel supplies had been stopped. He said that the Gaza Strip could be left without electricity as diesel fuel needed to run the electricity generating station was about to run out. (Ma'an News Agency)

The spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued the following statement:

The Secretary-General condemns the terrorist attack today by Palestinian militants against the Nahal Oz depot in southern Israel, in which two Israeli civilian

contractors working to supply fuel to the Gaza Strip were killed and others injured.

He is gravely concerned at the prospect of an escalation in violence, and, while recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self defence, deplores the reported civilian casualties among Palestinians during Israeli military operations this afternoon. The United Nations calls for the protection of all civilians in the conflict.

(UN press release SG/SM/11505)

Senior Israeli diplomatic officials said that they were "outraged" at former US President Jimmy Carter's plan to meet with Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal in Damascus. Prime Minister Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni have declined to meet with Mr. Carter when he visits Israel, citing "scheduling conflicts." Sources close to Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu said he would refuse to see Mr. Carter. On the other hand, President Shimon Peres, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Shas Chairman Eli Yishai and Israel Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman have all agreed to meet with Mr. Carter. (The Jerusalem Post)

11

Seven Palestinians, including a 12-year-old boy, were killed by air strikes and a ground raid by Israeli forces on the Gaza Strip. Medical officials said that the boy sustained bullet wounds in the head and chest during the exchange of fire near the refugee camp of Bureij. Three of the dead were civilians. The deaths drove the death toll to 13 in Israel strikes retaliating for a militant attack that killed two Israeli civilians at a vital Gaza Strip fuel depot on 9 April. Meanwhile, a tractor working in the agricultural fields of kibbutz Nir Oz, near the Gaza border, was fired upon. No one was injured, but the tractor sustained some damage. (AP, Haaretz)

Israeli forces seized a Palestinian from the town of Silwad, northeast of Jerusalem. Local sources said that several military vehicles entered the town at 1:30 a.m. and arrested Amr Ahmed Hamid, 23, after raiding his house and destroying its contents. Several houses were searched in the area. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert had called on IDF commanders in the West Bank to understand that the roadblocks were causing suffering to the Palestinians, whose needs should be appreciated to avoid a worsening of relations between the two peoples. Mr. Olmert also told officers that "sooner or later" Israel would have to operate in the Gaza Strip but "this will not be done without connection with the international scene. We need our friends throughout the world, and our reliance on them is of existential significance to the State of Israel." (Haaretz)

The US State Department said that it had advised former US President Carter against meeting any representative of Hamas. "US Government policy is that Hamas is a terrorist organization and we don't believe it is in the interest of our policy or in the interest of peace to have such a meeting," spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters. He said that the message had been directly conveyed to Mr. Carter in a phone call by Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch.

(The Jerusalem Post)

12

Witnesses said that IDF tanks and a bulldozer rolled about 500 meters into Gaza Strip territory, east of Jabaliya, in the northern Gaza Strip, amid intensive gunfire. No injuries were reported. The Israeli incursion came shortly after Palestinian militants had launched two Qassam rockets from the area at southern Israeli towns. No damage or injuries among the Israelis were reported. The armed wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility for the rocket attacks. (Xinhua)

PA security sources said that the IDF had arrested five Palestinians in Ramallah, Hebron and Bethlehem. (Xinhua)

The Gaza Strip's main power plant will have to halt electricity supplies if Israel does not allow the resumption of fuel shipments in the next few days, the plant's director said. "This means we will stop feeding electricity to over half a million people living in Gaza." (Reuters)

The Palestinian National Committee for the Anniversary of the Nakba will stage several events in the coming weeks. This year "will be completely different from previous years," the head of the committee Omar al-Asaaf told reporters in Ramallah. "We are trying to get all Palestinians to wear black in the middle of next month, to send a loud message to the world that we have the right to return to the homes we were expelled from," he said. He said that the events will also include conferences and cultural and sporting activities. (AFP)

13

Palestinian medical officials said that three people had died and seven were wounded in an explosion in a house in the Gaza Strip. Local residents said that the house belonged to a member of Hamas and the blast likely resulted from the accidental detonation of explosives. The Israeli military denied involvement. (AP)

Seven Palestinians were wounded in an Israeli air raid on Gaza City, Palestinian and medical security sources said. They said that the raid targeted the home of Mohammed Hajazi, head of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. An Israeli military spokesman in Tel Aviv confirmed the raid. (AFP, Ma'an News Agency)

A Jordanian military court jailed three nationals for smuggling weapons to the West Bank in 2006. (AFP)

Ayman Taha, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, said: "The comprehensive Zionist blockade on the Gaza Strip will be defeated by a strong popular uprising... The uprising won't be decided by Hamas this time. It will be against the occupation and will be spontaneous and popular. The explosion won't only be in Gaza; it will be in the West Bank and Arab countries," he continued. However, he denied that anyone was planning to breach the Gaza Strip-Egypt border, saying that no one had been threatening Egypt and no one was permitted to do so. (Xinhua)

Prime Minister Olmert and PA President Abbas met in Jerusalem. An Israeli official said Mr. Abbas and Mr. Olmert had coordinated peace moves before Mr. Abbas' trip to Washington. He would not elaborate and spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting's agenda was confidential. Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, said that Mr. Abbas had asked Mr. Olmert to agree to an Egyptian initiative to arrange an unofficial ceasefire in Gaza, but Mr. Olmert gave no commitment. (AP)

Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO Saeb Erakat told reporters after meetings in Cairo with Egypt's Foreign Minister, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Intelligence Chief Omar Suleiman, and Arab League Secretary-General Amre Moussa that he had asked Egypt to continue its efforts to achieve calm in the Gaza Strip, something "we want to consolidate to protect the Palestinian people." At the same time, he called on all Palestinian factions in Gaza to cooperate with Egypt, expressing fears of a catastrophe in Gaza if Israeli forces launched a major offensive on it. He also said that it would be absolutely unacceptable for anyone to threaten the national security of Egypt. (AFP)

Israel had offered Hamas and Islamic Jihad, through Egypt, to agree on a truce in the Gaza Strip, the London-based daily Al-Hayat reported. It quoted well-informed Palestinian sources as saying that the truce would be for six months to one year, and would include only the Gaza Strip, during which militants would refrain from launching rockets at Israel. According to the sources, if Israel's offer was accepted, Israel would ease restrictions and agree to open Gaza border crossings, particularly the Rafah terminal. Palestinian sources were quoted as saying that Hamas accepted in principle the Israeli offer, but Islamic Jihad and other Gaza Strip factions did not and insisted that the West Bank be included. (Xinhua)

Israel urged former US President Carter not to meet with Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal. "Such a meeting would be all the more shameful as Jimmy Carter symbolizes peace," senior Israeli Defense Ministry official Amos Gilad told Army Radio. Mr. Carter told ABC News, "I think there's no doubt in anyone's mind that if Israel is ever going to find peace with justice concerning the relationship with their next-door neighbours, the Palestinians, that Hamas will have to be included in the process". He told Haaretz that he intended to check Mr. Mashaal's willingness to accept the Arab Peace Initiative. He also said no one from the US State Department had tried to dissuade him from holding the meeting. Senior Hamas official Mohammed Nazzal has said Hamas "welcomed the request" from Mr. Carter to meet with Mr. Mashaal. He said the meeting would take place on 18 April. (AFP, AP, Haaretz)

The Israeli Cabinet gave its approval for the issuance of a further 5,000 work permits to West Bank Palestinians. The new permits would bring the number of West Bank Palestinians working legally in Israel to 25,000, compared to more than 80,000 in the 1990s. (AFP)

"The [Nahal Oz terminal supplying fuel to Gaza] will remain closed for a few days to give us time to check and decide on measures to ensure security," Tzahi Hanegbi, the head of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, told Israel Army Radio. He added that "no strategic decision has been taken" to close the crossing indefinitely. (AFP)

Seventy-one per cent of Israelis opposed a peace agreement that would entail handing over Jerusalem's Old City and Al-Haram Al-Sharif (the Temple Mount) to the Palestinians, a new poll released by Israel's Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies said. The results also showed that 59 per cent of those polled believed Prime Minister Olmert was negotiating a division of the city, despite the Government's denials. Other results found that 62 per cent of respondents were against Jerusalem's status being discussed in the framework of negotiations for peace with the Palestinians. Thirty-three per cent were in favour or "possibly in favour" of discussing Jerusalem's status during such negotiations. Notwithstanding, 71 per cent of the poll's respondents felt that Israel should not agree to give up the city's Arab neighbourhoods to the Palestinians, including the Old City and the Al-Haram Al-Sharif, in return for a final status agreement. (The Jerusalem Post)

The Israeli human rights group Public Committee Against Torture said in a report that Israel had stepped up its psychological torture of Palestinian suspects, in part by threatening to hurt their families if they did not cooperate. (www.stoptorture.org.il)

The IDF arrested three Palestinians in Tulkarm, security sources said. (Wafa)

"We exert efforts with the Egyptians to reach a ceasefire with Israel," PA President Abbas told *PA Television* after he chaired a weekly cabinet meeting. "I appeal to the residents of the Gaza Strip to bear in mind their highest interests and halt carrying out any [attacks] in order to reach a ceasefire agreement and start a new stage of life," urged Mr. Abbas. (Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua)

PA President Abbas would hold talks with Jordanian officials and then go to the Russian Federation before going to Washington to meet President Bush, Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, told reporters. "The aim of Abbas' tour and talks is to rally supports for a truce between Israel and the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and end the Israeli blockade imposed on the enclave," he said. (Wafa)

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni held talks with her Omani counterpart in Qatar. Ms. Livni also met the Emir and Prime Minister of Qatar, an aide said. The Prime Minister of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, had told *AFP* that talks with Ms. Livni would focus on ways of calming the situation in the Gaza Strip. "But I don't want to put this in the context of a mediation," he added. The Omani Minister for Foreign Affairs Yousef Bin Al-Alawi Bin Abdulla told *AFP* he did not agree with the Israeli views on the peace process and there was no question of reopening the Israeli trade office until agreement was reached on a Palestinian State. Ms. Livni gave him "an update on the negotiations with the Palestinians" during the meeting, another aide said. (AFP)

At the eighth Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade, Qatar Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani urged Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni to end Israel's "crippling blockade of Gaza, due to the difficult humanitarian situation." The Israeli Foreign Minister, in her speech said, "The situation in the Gaza Strip is not just Israel's problem—Gaza is becoming an obstacle to the establishment of a Palestinian State ... although Israel fully withdrew all its forces from the Gaza Strip, dismantled all settlements and allowed for Palestinian self-rule in this territory, instead of coexistence, we have received terror in return."

In a question and answer session following the speech, she said: "We have no desire to run [Palestinians'] lives, and we are committed to the establishment of a Palestinian State that will be the national State of the Palestinian people and a good neighbour of Israel's. We have no interest in waiting or creating facts on the ground that will prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State." (Haaretz)

Former US President Carter deplored Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel as a "despicable crime" as he toured Sderot. "My hope is there will be a ceasefire soon," he told reporters. (Haaretz)

Spokesman of the Popular Resistance Committees in the Gaza Strip Abu Mujahid told reporters: "Any ceasefire agreement with the occupation should be mutual and comprehensive. The enemy should stop its aggression all over the Palestinian territories." (Xinhua)

The Palestinian Investment Fund said that it planned to build 30,000 affordable apartments in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to ease a housing shortage. An official in the Fund said that the project would cost more than \$2 billion, and that private investors would be involved. (AP)

Egypt allowed 20 Palestinians to cross into the Sinai Peninsula from the Gaza Strip for medical treatment, a security official told *AFP*. "All those coming for treatment were hurt in the latest Israeli raids on the Gaza Strip," the official said. (AFP)

Israeli settlers moved three mobile homes from an outpost into the settlement of "Mevo Horon", north-west of Jerusalem. Israeli defense officials confirmed that the settlers would instead receive permits to build permanent housing in "Mevo Horon" and other areas. Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, called the Israeli Defense Ministry's deal with the settlers "a blatant violation of the Road Map ... That's what they do best, negotiating between themselves and making peace among themselves, and the result is a diktat on us." (AP)

15

Ibrahim Abu Ilba, a leader of the military wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, was killed in an Israeli airstrike on Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip. Two bystanders were injured. Israeli forces also entered the southern Gaza Strip and carried out searches, accompanied by exchanges of fire and explosions, Palestinian security sources said. (AFP, DPA, Ma'an News Agency)

Sami Abu Zuhri, a Hamas spokesman, denied media reports that Hamas was planning to blow up the concrete wall on the Gaza Strip-Egypt border. (Xinhua)

PA President Abbas held talks with King Abdullah II of Jordan on the latest developments related to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and efforts to advance these negotiations. (Petra)

Former US President Carter laid a wreath at the grave of the late PA President Yasser Arafat. He told reporters that he had been refused Israeli permission to enter the Gaza Strip, and he confirmed that he would meet Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal in Damascus. (AP, DPA, Haaretz)

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak ordered the Israeli Army to renew shipments of industrial diesel fuel and liquefied gas to the Gaza Strip starting the following day. In a statement, he said that he would only allow the transfer of the type of industrial diesel fuel that was used for Gaza's only power plant, but not ordinary diesel fuel used for backup generators and cars. Chairman of the Palestinian Energy Authority Omar Kittaneh confirmed in an interview with *Ma'an News Agency* that at the present reduced level of output, there was enough fuel to operate the power plant until the following day. Two major universities in the Gaza Strip suspended classes, saying the fuel crisis was making it difficult for students to travel to school. (AP, Ma'an News Agency, Reuters)

An Egyptian-brokered prisoner exchange between Hamas and Israel was imminent, Deputy Minister of the PA Ministry for Prisoners' Affairs Ziad Abu Ein said. He said that the agreement would involve the release of all Hamas-affiliated Palestinian Legislative Council members, the mayors of Palestinian cities, and other Palestinian prisoners, in exchange for the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. (Ma'an News Agency)

Quartet Representative Tony Blair urged investors to invest money in the Palestinian economy, which he said offered opportunities despite Israeli restrictions on movement. The PA and the private sector said that they would host a three-day conference in Bethlehem to start 21 May, offering more than \$1 billion worth of projects to foreign investors. The title of the conference would be: "You can do business in Palestine." Palestine Investment Conference CEO Hassan Abu Libdeh said that 25 per cent of the projects that would be offered would be in the Gaza Strip. (Haaretz)

UN humanitarian and development agencies working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory issued a joint [statement](#) expressing their concern about the limited fuel supplies in the Gaza Strip which were having a severe impact upon the daily life of the population. They called for a cessation of all acts of violence, including attacks such as the one on Nahal Oz, and for the immediate resumption of the flow and distribution of fuel supplies sufficient to allow for Palestinians to go about their normal daily lives. ([www.relief web.int](#))

16

At least 17 Palestinians were killed in clashes and Israeli air strikes in the Gaza Strip. Nine Palestinians were killed in an Israeli air strike in Gaza City. The dead included at least two children. Sources also reported a large number of injured. Israel confirmed it had launched an air strike on the Bureij refugee camp. Hamas and medical officials said that most of those killed were civilians. (BBC)

Israeli troops entered the northern Gaza Strip in what the IDF described as a "routine operation" to target militants launching rockets. Hamas said that four of its members had been killed and three wounded. A 42-year-old farmer was also killed in an Israeli air strike. The Israeli army said that armed militants were near the farmer's vehicle at that time. Israeli armoured vehicles hit and damaged a mosque, destroying two houses and partially demolishing another, local residents said.

The army said that the mosque was full of explosives that ignited during an exchange of fire. (AP)

Three Israeli soldiers and four Hamas militants were killed in heavy clashes in the Gaza Strip. The clashes took place near the Nahal Oz border terminal, east of Gaza City, when troops backed by helicopters entered the Gaza Strip. The soldiers were killed after troops spotted and pursued two Hamas members planting a bomb near the Israeli border. The soldiers fell into an ambush by another Hamas group, Israeli defense officials said. (AP, BBC, Haaretz)

A Palestinian militant was killed and five others wounded in two separate Israeli air strikes on the northern Gaza Strip. Witnesses said that an Israeli aircraft first targeted a car, killing one Palestinian and wounding two bystanders in the town of Beit Lahia. An unmanned Israeli drone fired a second rocket at a group in the northern Gaza Strip, wounding three, two in serious condition. (Haaretz)

Palestinian officials said that an Israeli military strike in the Gaza Strip killed a Palestinian cameraman who worked for *Reuters*. Fadal Shanaa, 24, was killed while filming Israeli tanks in Central Gaza. (AP)

Palestinian medics said that two Palestinian civilians were injured when their house in the Gaza Strip was hit by a tank shell. The Israeli army did not immediately comment. (BBC)

Two Qassam rockets hit the Shaar Hanegev Regional Council area in Israel. No one was injured. Eight other Qassam rockets hit the western Negev. Hamas claimed responsibility for the rocket attacks. (Haaretz)

Israeli Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz said that Hamas leaders must understand that they would not be immune from attack as long as rockets fired from the Gaza Strip continued. He said that Israel should act as it did in 2004 when it killed Hamas leaders Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi. (The Jerusalem Post)

In Cairo, former US President Carter was set to meet two top Hamas officials, Mahmoud Al-Zahhar, former PA Foreign Minister, and Said Siyam, another senior Hamas leader. The previous day, he had met with a Hamas leader in the West Bank. He was scheduled to meet on 18 April with Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal in Damascus. Mr. Carter said, "I am not a mediator ... I'm just exploring possibilities for peace." (AP, *Ma'an News Agency*, *The Financial Times*)

The Egyptian parliamentary delegation participating in the meeting of the General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Cape Town called for accelerating the implementation of the Road Map in preparation for granting Palestinians their legitimate rights. (Wafa)

The following statement was issued by the spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

The Secretary-General is gravely concerned at the escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel today. He condemns the reported civilian casualties among Palestinians, including children, during Israeli military operations, and calls on Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. The Secretary-General also reiterates his condemnation of rocket fire against Israeli civilian targets. He urges all parties to exercise restraint.

(UN News Centre, UN press release SG/SM/11517)

During a one-on-one meeting with US President Bush at the White House, Pope Benedict XVI and the President discussed the Middle East, in particular the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict in line with the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, according to a joint statement released by the White House. (www.whitehouse.gov)

Israeli said that it had frozen plans to renew the fuel supply to the Gaza Strip because of an attack in which three soldiers were killed. However, a European Union official reported that EU-funded fuel supplies had started to go through. (AP, *Haaretz*)

A group of young Israeli Meretz Party activists sent a letter to Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal calling on him to release IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, to recognize the State of Israel and to launch negotiations on a ceasefire to promote the establishment of a Palestinian State. The letter was relayed to Mr. Mashaal in Damascus through the help of former US First Lady Rosalynn Carter. The letter said, "We are encouraged by your recent statement according to which Hamas' political goal was to establish an independent Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders." (Ynetnews)

17

Two senior leaders of Islamic Jihad's Saraya Al-Quds Brigades were killed by Israeli forces in a house under construction in the West Bank town of Qabatiya, south of Jenin. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Ossama Abu 'Anza, a Hamas militant, was killed and two others were wounded in clashes with Israeli troops near the Kerem Shalom crossing in the southern Gaza Strip, according to Palestinian medical sources. Mu'awiya Hassanain, Director of Ambulance and Emergency Services, said that his office had to liaise with Israeli authorities to let ambulances take the dead man and the wounded to a hospital in Rafah. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli forces seized 11 Palestinians in Nablus, 8 in Tulkarm and 1 in Salfit. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Gaza militants fired 17 rockets at Israel, none of which caused casualties. (*Haaretz*)

Seven members of the German Parliament's law committee said that they were threatened by Israeli settlers while touring Hebron, and had to discontinue the visit.

"The Israeli police and army showed no willingness to step in and said they couldn't guarantee the safety of the delegation," they said in a statement. (AP)

In Cairo, former US President Jimmy Carter met with a Hamas delegation from the Gaza Strip after he had been barred by Israel from visiting the territory. The Hamas delegation included former PA Foreign Minister Mahmoud Al-Zahhar and Hamas leader Said Siyam. Upon arriving in Cairo, Mr. Al-Zahhar said, "President Carter can break all the Israeli restraints that they want to place between

him and Hamas and so we and our brothers in Damascus are determined to meet with him". The former President also spoke at the American University in Cairo, and said, "It's an atrocity what is being perpetrated as punishment on the people in Gaza. It's a crime. ... I think it is an abomination that this continues to go on."

(AP, *Haaretz*)

In a recorded speech delivered during Palestinian Prisoners' Day, PA President Abbas said that the release of all Palestinian prisoners must be part of any peace deal with Israel. Rallies and marches had been planned throughout the West Bank. Mr. Abbas, who was currently in Moscow, told students at Moscow University that a Middle East peace conference would be held in Moscow in June, and that he hoped that it would give a new impetus to the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, adding, "We want the Moscow conference to be held as soon as possible." Mr. Abbas was expected to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the end of his three-day visit. (*Haaretz*, Wafa)

Representatives of the Middle East Quartet met in Amman to discuss whether to hold a follow-up meeting to the Annapolis Conference in Moscow. The Russian ITAR-TASS agency said that the proposal had been approved but there was no immediate confirmation of the report from any member of the Quartet. (AP)

The EU Presidency issued a statement expressing its deep concern over the latest escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel which had resulted once again in many civilian victims, among them Palestinian children. The Presidency also condemned the terrorist attack at the Nahal Oz fuel terminal which had claimed two civilian lives. It called on both sides to show restraint and end all violence. (www.eu2008.si)

The Russian Foreign Ministry expressed concern over the renewed escalation of tensions in Palestinian-Israeli relations and urged both sides to show restraint.

Ministry spokesperson Mikhail Kamynin said, "We are calling upon both sides to show restraint, and to prevent a large-scale confrontation around Gaza. It's necessary to make all efforts toward securing calm and a complete ceasefire." At the same time, Pascale Andreani, French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said that France was "very concerned" by the escalating violence in the Gaza Strip and southern Israel, and called for the end of "the prolonged isolation of Gaza," according to reports. (*Xinhua*)

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied Since 1967, John Dugard, issued the following statement:

The bloodletting in Gaza, and to a lesser extent, the West Bank, continues. On Wednesday 16 April, around 20 Palestinians were killed in Israeli military operations. The majority of those killed were civilians and five were children. On the same day three Israeli soldiers were killed.

How long is this madness to continue without serious international intervention? It has become clear to many responsible persons with experience of the conflict, both in Israel and elsewhere, that only direct negotiations or talks between the real parties involved – Israel and Hamas – can stop the killings.

Israel's unwillingness to talk to Hamas is understandable, given Hamas' hostility to the State of Israel. But there is no reason why the United Nations, acting through the Security Council or the Secretary-General, should not intervene and assert its role as mediator. This is a role that the United Nations has traditionally played, even where one of the parties has been labelled as "terrorist". It is the responsibility of the United Nations, as the ultimate guardian of human rights and international peace, to open lines of communication between Israel, Hamas, and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, and to bring them to the negotiating table. Such a step would also contribute to the advancement of Palestinian national unity – another area which the United Nations has to date failed to address.

The right to life is the most precious and important human right. The United Nations, acting through the Security Council or the Secretary-General, must do its utmost to protect the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis. Surely it is not too much to ask of the Security Council, and if it cannot act, the Secretary-General, to protect human life, even if it means talking to a group of which it may disapprove politically.

(UNHCHR press release 17 April 2008)

18

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades said that Hani Al-Kabi, a leader of the group in the Balata refugee camp, had been killed by Israeli troops in a raid in Nablus. He was among about a dozen militants who had fled a PA prison three months before. (AP)

Seven Qassam rockets landed in Sderot and the western Negev in southern Israel. No injuries were reported. (Ynetnews)

Israeli forces raided the West Bank village of Beita, south of Nablus, and seized 10 Palestinian youths. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

The Israeli Defense Ministry said that Israel had approved the reopening of 20 defunct PA police stations, to support the West Bank security drive by PA President Abbas. The stations, in areas outside major West Bank cities, had been abandoned after 2000. Israeli official Peter Lerner said that they would be staffed by 500 new police personnel under a new agreement. (*Reuters*)

Israel closed off the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for the Passover holiday. The closure was to last until the end of the holiday on 26 April, according to a

statement by the military. Palestinians had been banned from entering Israel, except for doctors, lawyers, and humanitarian cases. (AP)

Roei Lachmanovich, a spokesman for Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry, Trade and Labour Eli Yishai, said that Mr. Yishai had offered to meet the leadership of Hamas to ask for the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, adding that he had passed the proposal to former US President Jimmy Carter. The spokesman quoted Mr. Yishai as telling Mr. Carter that he "would be happy to meet anyone relevant, including Mashaal." (Reuters)

The Israeli Government announced plans to build 100 new homes in two settlements in the West Bank. The Housing Ministry published an advertisement inviting construction firms to bid for the rights to build 48 homes in "Ariel," and another 52 homes in "Elkana." "The current Government never undertook not to build within settlement blocks. ... Moreover, the current construction is intended to address internal needs of natural growth," Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction Ze'ev Boim said in a statement regarding the tenders. (Reuters)

19

Two Palestinians were reportedly killed by Israeli forces in separate incidents in the Gaza Strip. Also over the weekend, two Palestinian teenagers, wounded in an air attack on 16 April, succumbed to their wounds. At least five Qassam rockets hit the western Negev. (BBC, Haaretz)

An armoured personnel carrier, supplied to the PA in the 1990s, rammed through the fence between Israel and the southern Gaza Strip near the Kerem Shalom crossing. Two explosive-laden vehicles exploded at the scene, wounding 13 IDF soldiers. Israel then carried a number of air strikes in the Gaza Strip, killing seven Palestinians. Defense officials said that Kerem Shalom would remain closed for at least two days, and until all of the breaches in the fence were sealed. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

20

Egyptian authorities said that efforts towards a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas were making progress. An aide to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said that a truce between Hamas and Israel was "very near." (The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews)

UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process Roberterry and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal met in Riyadh. They conferred on the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian talks as well as on the situation on the ground, including the grave humanitarian conditions faced by the Gaza Strip. In addition, they discussed efforts to ensure implementation of phase I Road Map obligations. (UN News Centre)

21

Two Palestinians were killed in two separate air strikes across the Gaza Strip. One was killed in a strike that targeted a vehicle in Rafah, while the second was killed in a strike on Beit Hanoun. Eight other Palestinians were wounded. IDF ground forces shot two gunmen and detained more than 30 Palestinians for interrogation before withdrawing from the Gaza Strip, a military spokesperson said. (Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post)

Palestinian militants in the northern Gaza Strip launched a Qassam rocket attack, lightly wounding a boy in Kibbutz Gevim, close to Sderot. At least four other Qassam rockets fired from the Gaza Strip hit open areas of the Sderot, Ashkelon and Shaar Hanegev regions. There were no injuries or damage reported in any of the incidents. (Haaretz)

Hamas leader Sami Abu Zuhri said that the group would carry out more attacks on crossings to break Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. "These operations are the beginning of the explosions that Hamas has warned of. If the parties don't intervene quickly to save Gaza and break the siege, what is coming will be greater," he said. (BBC)

Israel was planning to tighten controls even further over goods allowed in the Gaza Strip, after a series of Hamas attacks on border crossings. (Haaretz)

In Jerusalem, former US President Carter said that Hamas was prepared to accept the right of Israel to "live as a neighbour next door in peace." He said that the group would be willing to accept a peace agreement initiated by PA President Abbas if it were favoured in a national referendum. Hamas, however, said that although they were open to a referendum, they would not necessarily accept the results. Hamas also wanted all Palestinians, including refugees and those in the diaspora, to be included in the vote, or some 9.3 million Palestinians. Mr. Carter said that Hamas was prepared to transfer Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to Egyptian authorities as part of a deal that would include the release of Palestinian prisoners. Mr. Carter also said that Hamas was prepared to release another letter from Mr. Shalit to his family. (AP, BBC, Haaretz)

"We agree to a [Palestinian] State on pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, with genuine sovereignty, without settlements but without recognizing Israel," Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said. "We have offered a truce... of 10 years as a proof of recognition," he said. He rejected direct negotiations with Israel, while confirming "indirect negotiations concerning the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and an exchange of prisoners." He said Hamas was ready to hold talks with Washington, praising Mr. Carter's "audacious and courageous" decision to meet Hamas officials. He also said that he had refused Mr. Carter's proposal for a unilateral ceasefire. US State Department spokesman Tom Casey said: "Nothing has changed in terms of Hamas' basic views about Israel and about peace in the region... The bottom line is Hamas still believes in the destruction of the State of Israel, they don't believe Israel has a right to exist," he said. (AP, DPA, www.state.gov)

The Islamic Jihad said that it rejected any referendum related to "inalienable Palestinian rights," as proposed by former US President Carter, Islamic Jihad leader Sheikh Khalid Al-Batsh said. (Ma'an News Agency)

Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and visiting PA President Abbas discussed the Palestinian delegation's upcoming visit to Washington, official radio reported. "President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali made a firm promise to exert all efforts, either with the Americans or with the Europeans, to back up the Palestinian stance", it quoted Mr. Abbas as saying. The two leaders also discussed the prospective Moscow conference, according to the report. (Xinhua)

Speaking at a news conference, PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki said that "the Government is for reaching a ceasefire, ending the blockade and opening Gaza border crossings... We welcome anybody, either Mr. Carter or Egypt, that will be able to do something towards pushing the wheels of the ceasefire ahead and lifting the blockade imposed on Gaza," he said. (Xinhua)

No new fuel was delivered to the Gaza power plant, according to Mojahed Salama, head of the Ramallah-based Palestinian Gas and Petroleum Authority. He noted that the Gaza power plant had just enough fuel to operate for two more days. (Ma'an News Agency)

The Physicians for Human Rights organization said that since early April Israel's Shin Bet had been rejecting a significantly larger number of permits for Gazans seeking treatment in Israeli medical facilities. Figures presented by the organization pointed to 12 cancer patients in serious condition who had been waiting to undergo lifesaving procedures in Israel, but who had so far been barred from crossing the border. (Ynetnews)

22

Israeli troops killed three Palestinian militants in overnight clashes in the northern Gaza Strip after fighters attacked a military position near the border, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad said. An IDF spokeswoman confirmed the incident, saying, "They probably tried to attack something and infiltrate Israel but they did not succeed." (AFP)

Israeli forces arrested 20 Palestinians in Salfit, Hebron and Nablus, PA security sources and Israeli media said. Palestinian sources said that a 28-year-old PA policeman from Nablus was among the detainees. (Wafa, Xinhua)

Egypt had reached a preliminary agreement with Hamas on a ceasefire with Israel, Egypt's Al-Ahram reported. "The report is inaccurate; Hamas still waits for an answer [from Israel] to a truce offer presented earlier [by Egypt] to the movement," Ismail Radwan, Hamas' spokesman in Gaza, told reporters. Hamas had softened its position and was willing to accept a ceasefire in just the Gaza Strip, dropping a demand that the truce immediately include the West Bank, the group's senior representatives said. Sami Abu Zuhri, a senior Hamas official in the Gaza Strip, said that the group would present its final response to Egypt on 24 April. (AP, Reuters)

"The United States is not going to deal with Hamas and we certainly told President Carter that we did not think that meeting with Hamas was going to help the Palestinians," US Secretary of State Rice said. (Reuters)

An IDF spokesman said that the Sufa cargo crossing had been reopened. Sufa crossing manager Shlomo Tzaban said that trucks with flour, oil and fruit were entering the Gaza Strip. (AP)

In an urgent message addressed to international and human rights organizations, PA Minister of Health Fathi Abu Mahdi warned that the Israeli restrictions on the fuel supply to the Gaza Strip would cause, inevitably, a halt in ambulance services, and a shutdown of generators, laundries and equipment sterilization in hospitals. (Wafa)

The World Bank Board of Directors approved \$55 million in replenishment of the Trust Fund for Gaza and West Bank. World Bank Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa Region Daniela Gressani said that the World Bank Group's assistance was aligned with the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. "We

work closely with donors and Palestinians to strengthen institutions, to support development, job creation and basic services," she added. (www.worldbank.org) More than 300 investors, including a Saudi representative, a Government minister from the United Arab Emirates, officials from the World Bank and European Governments, were expected to attend the Palestine Investment Conference, to be held from 21 to 23 May 2008 in Bethlehem, PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki told reporters. He said that the Palestinians were seeking \$1.5 billion in private investment to help fund about 105 projects, in addition to a \$200 million plan to develop Ramallah. (AP)

23

A Palestinian was injured when Israeli soldiers shot him near the separation wall in the village of Qatanna, near Ramallah. Palestinian security sources said that Israeli forces had also invaded Al-Bireh, but no arrests were reported. (Ma'an News Agency)

One Palestinian was killed and three wounded, including one seriously, in an Israeli raid near Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, according to the head of the ambulance service, Mohamia Hassaneh. A second attack near Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip targeted armed militants, causing no injuries, witnesses said. (AFP)

Israeli forces arrested 10 Palestinians in the West Bank. (Ma'an News Agency)

Jordan's King Abdullah II met with US President Bush in Washington, urging him to set "clear grounds and fixed time-frames" for the Middle East peace talks.

"King Abdullah said it is important that Israel refrain from measures that would jeopardize negotiations with the Palestinians and called for an end to all Israeli settlement activities, a lifting of the blockade and restrictions on the movement of Palestinians," the Jordanian Embassy said in a statement. King Abdullah II later discussed his White House visit with PA President Abbas. (AFP)

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said that a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas must include the West Bank as well as the Gaza Strip. According to Mr. Haniyeh, when a delegation of senior Hamas officials visits Cairo on 24 April, "the ball will be in Israel's court." Israeli officials were refraining at this stage from making public statements on the Egyptian mediation effort to secure a ceasefire. PA Foreign Minister Riad Malki said that a Gaza Strip truce was very close and would lead to an end to the embargo placed on the Gaza Strip by Israel. (Haaretz)

Israel agreed to pump one million litres of diesel fuel to the Gaza Strip, enough to power the Gaza power plant for at least three days. The IDF said that the fuel shipment had already begun. Kanaan Obeid, a Gaza energy official, had warned that the plant was in imminent danger of shutting down if fuel was not delivered.

John Ging, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Operations in the Gaza Strip, said that if Israel did not supply gasoline to Gaza immediately, UN agencies would not be able to distribute desperately needed aid packages to Gaza Strip residents. (Haaretz)

PA President Abbas said that talks between Israel and the PA were ongoing and would be expanded to include the subject of Palestine refugees living in Lebanon.

"When we sign an agreement [with Israel], not a single Palestinian refugee should remain in Lebanon," Mr Abbas told reporters on board a flight to Washington. (Haaretz)

In a joint statement with UNRWA, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Roberterry said, "The collective punishment of the population of Gaza, which has been instituted for months now, has failed. ... The immediate and common goal must be an end to violence and a reopening of crossings."

(Ynetnews)

Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Angela Kane briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

(UN press release SC/9305)

The UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People held its 308th meeting, discussing, among other things, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. (UN press release GA/PAL/1082)

24

Islamic Jihad said that three of its fighters had been hit in an Israeli air strike east of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip and that about 10 Israeli tanks were headed towards the area. The Israeli army confirmed it had struck against a group of militants approaching Israeli troops on the Israel-Gaza border. (AP)

Israeli forces arrested 24 Palestinians in Beit Hanoun and Abasan in the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, Israeli forces arrested 16 Palestinians in Ramallah, Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Nablus and Bethlehem. (Wafa)

A group of two dozen Palestinian, Israeli and international peace activists took over an Israeli checkpoint that separates Ramallah and the village of Ein Kinia in the West Bank, reopening a road that had been closed since the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000. The protesters claimed that settlers had taken over the site and were setting up an illegal outpost there. The Israeli army evacuated the checkpoint and moved to a nearby hill, before the activists moved in, replacing the

Israeli flags with Palestinian flags. Troops tried to carry away the protesters and pushed several to the ground. (Ma'an News Agency, Haaretz)

Israeli forces seized Aqaba Musleh Abu Zaid, an activist affiliated with Islamic Jihad, during an incursion in the town of Qabatiya, south of Jenin, local sources said.

In addition, the Israeli army also entered Jenin amid heavy gunfire. There were no reports of arrests. (Ma'an News Agency)

The IDF seized three Palestinians from the village of Kafr Jamal, south of Tulkarm, when they passed through Za'tara checkpoint north of Nablus. A Palestinian security source in Tulkarm named the three men as Ibrahim Ahmed Naser, Inad Abdul-Aziz Abdul-Jabbar Mustafa and Mohamed Abdel Rahim Khalil Yared.

(Ma'an News Agency)

Hamas proposed a six-month ceasefire with Israel in the Gaza Strip, with an option to extend it afterward to the West Bank after an agreed and specified period of time.

Hamas faction head in the PLC, Mahmoud Al-Zahhar, stated after talks in Cairo with Omar Suleiman, Egypt's intelligence chief, that the ceasefire must be mutual and simultaneous and must include an end to the blockade by Israel of the Gaza Strip and the opening of crossing points. Hamas would stop the firing of rockets at Israeli territory. The following day, Israel dismissed the Hamas call for a conditional six-month ceasefire as an attempt to allow it to recover from the recent fighting in order to rearm and regroup. "We can't have a period of quiet that will just be the quiet before the storm," said Mark Regev, spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Olmert. (AP, Reuters, BBC, Haaretz)

US President Bush held talks in Washington with PA President Abbas. President Bush said, "I assured the President that a Palestinian State is a high priority for me and my administration, a viable State, a State that doesn't look like Swiss cheese." President Bush said that he remained confident that both sides in the Middle East peace process could agree on the definition of a Palestinian State by the end of his term in office in January 2009. President Abbas said that he wanted a framework deal that would outline the way sensitive final status issues can be resolved to establish a Palestinian State. (AP, Haaretz, Reuters)

PA President Abbas had asked US President Bush to tighten oversight over expansion by Israel of settlements in the West Bank. He said that the continued construction of settlements would make it difficult for him to convince the Palestinian people that his peace talks with Israel may reach a breakthrough. (Haaretz)

The lawyer for the residents of Bil'in village in the West Bank, Michael Sfard, threatened legal action against the Minister of Defense of Israel and the IDF Commander in the West Bank for failing to act on the ruling of the High Court of Justice of Israel issued in September 2007 stipulating that the 1,700 meter segment of the separation fence near Bil'in be dismantled. Shlomo Dror, a spokesman for the Ministry of Defense, said that the omission stemmed from budget constraints and that he hoped that the planning for the alternative route would be included in the work plan for 2009. The Court had ruled that the current route was topographically inferior, which endangered the security forces that patrolled the area. (Haaretz)

Issa Qaraqe, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, issued a press statement in which he said that Palestinian civilians were being tortured by the IDF and border guards during official investigations. He alleged further that acts amounting to torture were being ignored by senior army officials and that they often took place in Israeli military jeeps. Mr. Qaraqe stated that 85 per cent of the detainees, especially children, were subjected to abuse, beatings and humiliation before and during questioning. (Ma'an News Agency)

Mahmoud al-Khuzundar, of the Association for Petrol Station Owners in the Gaza Strip, said that 50,000 litres (13,209 gallons) of diesel would be delivered to the UNRWA as an emergency shipment. The Agency said that the 50,000 litres should be enough to last about a week. (Reuters)

Adnan Abu Hasna, a spokesman for the UNRWA office in Gaza, stated "We have just stopped the distribution of all food aid to 650,000 Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip because of the lack of fuel in our storage in Gaza. We also stopped transporting students and officials in the Gaza Strip. Not a litre of fuel has come from Israel." (AP, AFP, BBC, Haaretz)

The EU Presidency issued a [statement](#) in which it expressed its grave concern at the reports that the humanitarian work by UNRWA had been suspended due to a lack of fuel supplies. The Presidency urged a regular and unrestricted delivery of fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip in order not to aggravate further the humanitarian crisis there. It reiterated the call on all parties to work urgently for the controlled re-opening of the crossings in and out of Gaza for both humanitarian and commercial flows. (www.eu2008.si)

Louis Michel, the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, [called](#) on Israel to ensure delivery of fuel supplies to Gaza. Mr. Michel said, "It is unacceptable that the UN should find itself having to consider suspending its humanitarian operations simply for a lack of fuel for its vehicles. It is also unacceptable that public services, such as garbage collection, sewage treatment, or hospitals, are on the brink of collapse for the same reason. It's essential that the fuel supply to Gaza be resumed, and in particular that fuel provision for the United Nations agencies as well as basic services be guaranteed immediately." (AFP, DPA, europa.eu)

AP reported that a new Israeli bill would compensate West Bank settlers who voluntarily left their homes, and Prime Minister Olmert was expected to decide within days whether to support it. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had raised the issue in meetings with Mr. Olmert, officials from his Kadima Party said. A key backer of the bill, Vice Premier Haim Ramon, would give Mr. Olmert a report in the coming days to persuade him to support it, Government officials said. The offer would apply to residents of the 74 settlements expected to remain outside the separation wall, said Avshalom Vilan of the Meretz Party, a co-author of the legislation. The bill's sponsors hoped the US Government would offer aid to compensate the settlers. According to Mr. Vilan's estimate, if half the settlers in question agreed to leave voluntarily, the total cost of compensation would be between \$2 billion and \$2.5 billion. Mr. Ramon's report showed that 25 per cent of the settlers living in those settlements would leave their homes if compensated. Sponsors of the proposal said the number was as high as 50 per cent. (AP)

25

During a helicopter-backed incursion into Beit Lahiya, Israeli special forces surrounded the house of Hamas leader Sanyah Ma'ruf and opened fire, killing a 14-year-old Palestinian girl and injuring her mother, along with six others. The armed wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for attacking Israeli special forces north of Beit Lahiya at dawn. (Ma'an News Agency)

The bodies of two Israeli security guards were discovered overnight in a factory at the Nitzanei Shalom industrial zone on the boundary between Israel and the West Bank near Tulkarm. The guards had been in charge of checking Palestinians arriving from the West Bank. The military wings of Islamic Jihad and Hamas claimed shared responsibility for the attack and said that the militant who carried it out had disguised himself as a woman. After the attack, IDF soldiers moved into the West Bank in force and set up a checkpoint. The PA Minister for Foreign Affairs, Riad Malki, condemned the attack, saying it was meant to undermine the efforts by the PA to undertake full security responsibilities in the West Bank. (AP, Haaretz, Ynetnews)

Three Qassam rockets were fired by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip, striking the Israeli city of Ashkelon and causing some damage to tombstones in a cemetery in the south of the city. A fourth Qassam rocket was fired towards the kibbutz Yad Mordechai in the western Negev area. (Haaretz)

The International Monetary Fund praised the Palestinian Government for "bold reforms" and said that it was making strides towards fiscal sustainability. The IMF praised PA President Abbas for freezing public sector hiring and wages and for reducing utility subsidies. The IMF also called on Israel to ease movement restrictions in order to help the Palestinian economy recover. (Haaretz)

26

Palestinian lawmakers held a rally in front of the ambulance and emergency centre in Gaza City demanding that the international community compel Israel to lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip. Most ambulances had been forced to stop running in Gaza due to a shortage of fuel resulting from the blockade. The acting speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ahmad Bahar, appealed to the leaders of Arab States and the United Nations "to shoulder their historical and moral responsibilities [to relieve] the ongoing disaster in the life of the people due to the embargo imposed on the Gaza Strip". (Ma'an News Agency)

In an interview with *Al-Jazeera*, Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mashaal said that Hamas would accept an Egyptian-mediated ceasefire with Israel. He said, "It is a tactic in conducting the struggle. It is normal for any resistance that operates in its people's interest... to sometimes escalate, other times retreat a bit," adding, "The battle is to be run this way and Hamas is known for that". (Haaretz)

In an interview published in *Alchourouk*, a Tunisian daily, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said that he intended to harness the French Presidency of the European Union to work on improving the lives of the Palestinian people. He explained that peace would recognize the right of Palestinians to have their independent, developed and viable State and live in peace and security alongside Israel. (Alchourouk.com, Wafa)

27

Egypt's President Mubarak and PA President Abbas met in Sharm El-Sheikh. After the meeting, Mr. Abbas said that he had reviewed with Mr. Mubarak the outcome of his visits to the Russian Federation and the United States and discussed the issue of calm and the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, stressing the importance of the Egyptian role in this field. (Wafa)

In Cairo, high official sources said that Egypt was to host an inter-Palestinian factions' dialogue with an Egyptian mediation to consider a ceasefire with Israel. They said that Islamic Jihad, Fatah, Hamas, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine would head to Cairo for the dialogue's resumption. (Wafa)

In a report prepared for a donor meeting to be held in London this week, the World Bank said that restrictions on travel and trade imposed by Israel in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were blocking Palestinian economic recovery, despite a renewal of donor funding and economic reforms by the Palestinian Authority. The bank estimated that per capita income in the Palestinian territories in 2008 would be "static, if not lower than the previous year", despite the \$7.7 billion in aid pledged by donors in December. "While the PA has moved ahead with its economic reforms, albeit slowly, there has been little progress on relaxing movement and access constraints," the report said, adding that "the contributing effects of the closures and movement restrictions cannot be overestimated." According to the report, there has been a "severe contraction" in the economy of the Gaza Strip, where Israel tightened a blockade after Hamas seized control last June, and only modest economic growth in the West Bank, where the administration of PA President Abbas governed Palestinian areas. (Chicago Tribune)

Hamas met with members of the striking Palestinian fuel association to ask them to resume deliveries in the Gaza Strip, a Hamas official said. The association said that it went on strike to protest against the limited supplies, preventing one million litres in fuel tanks on the Gaza side of a border crossing from being delivered. Peter Lerner, spokesman for Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, said the moment the tanks were emptied, more fuel would be pumped. He said that he was not aware of plans to increase supplies. (Haaretz)

Hamas announced new restrictions on public gatherings in the Gaza Strip. Gaza's police force said that anyone who wanted to hold an indoor cultural event or celebration would now need a special permit, explaining that the move was necessary to uphold law and order. The independent Palestinian Centre for Human Rights said that Hamas' decision was illegal. (Haaretz)

28

At least six Palestinians, including a mother and her four children, were killed when Israeli artillery blew apart a house in Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip, medical sources said. Palestinian witnesses said that they believed an Israeli tank shell or missile from a drone had flown into the victims' house. Three others were wounded in the attack. PA President Abbas condemned the attack, saying such attacks impeded the peace process and did not serve the exerted efforts to achieve calm. He stressed that it was necessary to reach calm to spare Palestinians the dangers of war and destruction. (Wafa)

Israeli troops killed a 22-year-old Palestinian, Mu'adh Al-Akhras, in the Al-Nada neighbourhood in the northern Gaza Strip. (Ma'an News Agency)

Israeli forces seized two Palestinians near Ramallah and another from Bethlehem during overnight raids. Israeli forces also arrested two 62-year-old Palestinians in Nabulus. (Ma'an News Agency, Wafa)

At least 19 rockets were fired at southern Israel from the Gaza Strip. (Ynetnews)

Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak blamed Hamas for the continuing deaths of Gaza residents, hours after a mother and her four children, along with two other Palestinians, were killed in an IDF shelling in Beit Hanoun. "We see Hamas as responsible for everything that happens there, for all deaths... The army is acting, and will continue to act, against Hamas, including inside the Gaza Strip. Hamas is also responsible, by way of its activity within the civilian population, for part of the casualties among uninvolved civilians," he said. (Haaretz)

After talks between Quartet Representative Tony Blair and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Israel said that it would take down one checkpoint between the city of Nabulus and dozens of smaller towns and villages in the northern West Bank. Mr. Blair had presented a list of travel and trade restrictions he wanted removed to bolster peace talks with the Palestinians. An IDF spokeswoman said that the decision was made after a security assessment, but added that the barrier could be replaced in the future if Israel determined that Palestinian militants were using the route. (Haaretz)

Haaretz reported that right wing Israeli settlers would take up residence in a group of buildings in the Ras al-Amud area in East Jerusalem in the next few days, based on an agreement signed with former police commissioner Moshe Karadi. The building had served as the headquarters of the Samaria and Judea District Police. Police officials said that work had begun on vacating the place and that they would finish moving the offices to a new facility built in the "E-1" area, which connects Jerusalem with the "Ma'aleh Adumin" settlement. A few days before, right wing settler groups had filed a request with the Jerusalem Planning and Construction Committee for approval of the construction of a new settlement comprising 110 housing units in the vacated area. The request stated that the new

settlement, "Ma'aleh David," was intended to link up with the "Ma'aleh Zeitim" settlement built in the heart of Ras al-Amud. (*Haaretz*)

White House spokesperson Dana Perino said that President George W. Bush would visit Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt from 13 to 18 May but had no plans for a joint peace summit with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. In Egypt, Mr. Bush would meet with President Hosni Mubarak, Jordan's King Abdullah II and PA President Abbas, and deliver remarks at the World Economic Forum on the Middle East, Ms. Perino said. (*AFP*)

The following statement was issued by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

The Secretary-General condemns the loss of civilian life earlier today in Gaza, including the tragic deaths of a mother and four of her children. The Secretary-General calls upon Israel to exercise maximum care and restraint, and reminds the Israel Defense Forces of its responsibilities to protect civilians under international humanitarian law during its military operations.

The Secretary-General also condemns the ongoing attacks and rockets fired today against Israeli targets by Hamas. He calls on Hamas and other militant groups to cease such acts of terrorism. He also reminds them that civilian areas within Gaza should not be used as a base from which to launch its actions.

The mounting loss of civilian life in and around Gaza is deeply worrying and the Secretary-General calls for an immediate calming of the situation.

(*UN press release SG/SM/11536*)

Chris Gunness, a spokesman for UNRWA said that the Agency would resume distributing food aid in Gaza the following day after a four-day interruption caused by fuel shortages. He said, "UNRWA has collected 55,000 litres [14,470 gallons] of diesel. Because of that we will be able to resume our food distribution tomorrow", adding, "But this falls well short of solving Gaza's fuel crisis". (*AFP*)

29

Israeli troops arrested 14 Palestinians in the West Bank. (*Wafa*)

Palestinians fired 10 Qassam rockets towards Israel. Four of the rockets exploded in Sderot, one of which directly hit a house. Three people sustained light wounds. (*Ynetnews*)

The *Ma'an News Agency* reported that Israel planned to allow hundreds of members of the Badr Forces, a Palestinian military unit based in Jordan, to deploy in Jenin after Israeli forces withdraw from the area next week. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israel had ordered the demolition of 35 homes in the West Bank village of Aqabe near Jenin for being built without permits, a lawyer for the villagers said. The court ruled the 300 residents of the village should have had an approved overall building plan for the village before they began construction. "The residents chose to build on land that is designated for agricultural use, and this is not acceptable," the three-judge panel wrote in its decision. A lawyer for the residents of the village, Eli Toussia-Cohen, said the buildings slated for demolition included a health clinic, a mosque and a nursery school. He said the branch of the Israeli military dealing with civilian affairs had not approved an overall construction plan for Aqabe, adding that such a plan was a prerequisite for the approval of individual houses. Mr. Toussia-Cohen said that according to the Hague Convention, Israel as the occupier of the West Bank must allow for construction, by developing an overall plan itself and issuing permits. (*AP*)

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told the American Jewish Committee at its annual meeting that young Palestinians were losing hope that an agreement with Israel could be reached. "Increasingly, the Palestinians who talk about a two-State solution are my age," according to Ms. Rice, who is 53. "We have a chance to reach the basic contours of a settlement by the end of the year," she added. (*AP*)

The UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People convened a two-day International Conference on Palestine Refugees at the Headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris. The Conference would assess the present situation of Palestine refugees and examine the role of the UN in alleviating their plight. At the opening session, a message from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was delivered by Angela Kane, Assistant-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. Statements were also made by Marcio Barbosa, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO; Paul Badji (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee; and Elias Sanbar, Permanent Observer of Palestine to UNESCO. (*UN press releases GA/PAL/1083, GA/PAL/1084 and GA/PAL/1085*)

30

Palestinian militants fired at least 10 Qassam rockets and three mortar shells at the western Negev from the northern Gaza Strip. Two of the Qassams sparked a fire in an open area near Sderot. Another struck an area next to a school and another hit the Shaar Hanegev regional council's industrial district. Meanwhile, Palestinians shot at IDF troops who had been patrolling near the Beit Hanoun (Erez) crossing. None of the soldiers was wounded. (*Haaretz*)

Awad al-Qiq, a militant from the military wing of Islamic Jihad, was killed in an Israeli Air Force attack on a metal workshop in the town of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. Four other persons were wounded. The IDF confirmed the air strike. IDF helicopters fired at Palestinian militants before the air strike. (*Haaretz, Ynetnews*)

An undercover Israeli force arrested Muhammad Da'amin, a Fatah activist, whom they had been pursuing for five years, in Ramallah. (*Ma'an News Agency*)

Israeli authorities imposed a three-year closure of a sewing workshop in Hebron, in the southern part of the West Bank, operated by the Islamic Charitable Society.

A group of international human rights workers belonging to the Christian Solidarity Movement stated that the Israeli soldiers looted the entire contents of the workshop. The IDF announced that it planned to close all of the charity's operations, including a school for 600 disadvantaged children, a day school and a bakery. (*AP, Ma'an News Agency*)

Rockets continued to be fired from the northern Gaza Strip at the western part of the Negev. A woman and child were treated for shock when a rocket struck the Ashkelon regional council. (*Haaretz*)

Twelve Palestinian factions, including Islamic Jihad, the Popular Resistance Committees and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, agreed to proposals for a truce with Israel, starting in the Gaza Strip. It was agreed that any agreement should be bilateral, apply to the Gaza Strip and should be later extended to the West Bank, and include an end to the siege of the Gaza Strip. Fatah and Hamas did not attend the talks in Cairo, but Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri called the agreement a "good step which confirms that the ball is in the Israelis' court." He said, "In light of this announcement, we are waiting for an official Israeli response to Cairo to determine our final position on this issue." Some factions expressed reservations regarding the ceasefire but said that they would not block a ceasefire agreement. Egyptian mediators would be presenting the agreed proposal to Israel. (*AFP, BBC, Haaretz, Ma'an News Agency, Xinhua*)

A military probe exonerated the Israeli army over the deaths on 28 April of a woman and her four children in the Gaza Strip, insisting that they had been killed by explosives carried by a Palestinian and not by an Israeli missile, *Israel Public Radio* reported. But Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem said: "The material (B'Tselem) has collected, including an analysis of the area, photographs of bodies, and eyewitness accounts, raise doubt about the IDF spokesperson's contention that a secondary explosion is what killed the family," the group said. B'Tselem urged the Military Advocate-General of the IDF to open an additional military police investigation into the deaths, saying the investigation should deal with the responsibility of the higher echelons of the IDF and the wider systemic implications of the killing. (*AFP, Haaretz, Wafa*)

The Israeli Army arrested 26 Palestinians in East Jerusalem and Nablus. (*Xinhua*)

Israeli troops had been unable to identify *Reuters* news cameraman Fadel Shana as a journalist before they fired at him from a tank, the IDF said, citing the preliminary results of an investigation. (*Reuters*)

A poll conducted by the Ramallah-based Near East Consulting company said that 94 per cent of Gazans held that the security conditions had worsened after Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Only one per cent said the security situation had improved and five per cent said it had not change. (*Xinhua*)

Chief Palestinian Negotiator Ahmed Qureia affirmed that the fate of the Occupied Palestinian Territory would be decided via negotiations, not according to Israel's proposals. "It is the negotiations which decide the fate of the land, not Defense Minister Ehud Barak. We know our borders and will struggle in any way to get them," he said. (*Xinhua*)

The father of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit said that the Government of Israel must make his son's release a top priority when considering a ceasefire with militants from the Gaza Strip. (*Haaretz*)

The International Committee of the Red Cross said the current fuel crisis was causing increasing hardships for the people of the Gaza Strip. It warned that the long-term consequences might be severe if sufficient supplies were not made available to ordinary people and for facilities like public transport, hospitals and water pumping stations. (www.icrc.org)

Israel should remove 10 major West Bank checkpoints to give a badly needed boost to the Palestinian economy and could do so without compromising security, according to a report drawn up by a team that included US experts, Palestinian officials, and two IDF reserve officers who served in the Israeli Civil Administration in

the West Bank. The 10 checkpoints caused major disruptions to Palestinian trade and movement, according to the report. Removal of checkpoints was in Israel's long-term interest because it would help defuse Palestinian resentment, according to one of the authors, Israeli Brig. Gen. Ilan Paz. (AP, Haaretz)

PA President Abbas met in Saudi Arabia with King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud to discuss developments in the peace process as well as Arab and international efforts to save it. President Abbas also briefed the King on his recent visits to the United States and the Russian Federation. (spa.gov.sa, Wafa)

Israeli Prime Minister Olmert met in Amman with King Abdullah II of Jordan to discuss the peace process and ways to make progress towards the objectives set at the Annapolis conference. King Abdullah urged Mr. Olmert to improve the living conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The King also told Mr. Olmert that his negotiations with the Palestinians must lead to an agreement between both sides before the end of the year. (Haaretz)

Egypt's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Hossam Zaki, stated that Egypt expected Israel to accept and implement the ceasefire proposal agreed to by Palestinian factions. Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman was expected to arrive in Israel shortly to receive Israel's official response to the Egyptian ceasefire proposal. (Haaretz)

Israel had decided to allow a shipment of humanitarian aid from international organizations into the Gaza Strip from Egypt. The shipment would first go to Israel through the Al-Uja crossing and then enter the Gaza Strip through the Sufa crossing. (Ma'an News Agency)

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that increased restrictions imposed by Israel on the checkpoints around East Jerusalem had caused more delays and more lost man-hours for United Nations staff in March 2008 than in all of 2007. (IRIN news)

Muhammad el-Harani, a father of six from Gaza, diagnosed with brain cancer in February 2008, died at the Shifa Hospital in Gaza after his entry permit to undergo brain surgery in Israel was denied for security reasons. (Ynetnews)

IDF troops demolished an illegal outpost near the settlement of "Kochav Ha'shachar" in the West Bank. (Haaretz)

The United Nations [announced](#) that the Secretary-General will chair a meeting of the Middle East Quartet in London later in the week. The gathering will review all aspects of the peace process launched in Annapolis last year and the situation on the ground. (UN News Service)

The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process warned that fuel supplies in the Gaza Strip were critically low. (UNSCO)
