

Palestine Chronology

1997

January

Jan. 1: Israeli soldier Noam Friedmann, a settler from Ma'ale Adumim, opens fire at passers by in the Hebron marketplace, injuring six. Asked for his reasons, he says he wanted to kill Arabs to prevent redeployment from Hebron.

- *An-Nahar* Arabic daily publishes its last edition before closing after ten years of publishing in Jerusalem.

Jan. 2: Seven mobile homes are placed at Maoz Tzur settlement.

- Finance Minister Dan Meridor announces that IS100 million (\$33 million) is to be allocated for settlement expansion in the Golan Heights and Jordan Valley.

Jan. 3: The protocol of the Ministerial Committee on Settlement, chaired by Prime Minister Netanyahu, commits the government to "full development of the Jordan Valley as a wide strip of settlement comprising the eastern portion of the State of Israel. This commitment is expressed in the paving of Road #90 during 1997 and its completion in 1998, and the development of the settlement of Ma'ale Ephraim as the regional city of the Jordan Valley."

Jan. 5: The mobile homes are removed from Maoz Tzur as part of an understanding with Defense Minister Mordechai to enlarge the settlement of Beit El.

Jan. 10: Palestine Airlines has its inaugural flight leaving from Port Said to Saudi Arabia with 48 pilgrims aboard.

Jan. 12: King Hussein visits Gaza for the first time since 1967.

Jan. 15: The PLO and Israel conclude a protocol on Israeli redeployment from Hebron. The agreement is accompanied by letters of assurances from the US and the EU concerning negotiations on other outstanding interim issues and a timetable for three "further redeployments" from unspecified portions of the West Bank, beginning in March 1997 and ending in mid-1998.

Jan. 16: The Netanyahu government approves by a vote of 11 to 7 the IDF redeployment in Hebron. An announcement after the vote notes that the government will "work to protect the conditions and necessary requirements for the existence, security, and livelihood of the Jewish community in Hebron." The government decision notes that "details of the next stages of redeployment in Judea and Samaria will be determined by the government of Israel."

Jan. 17: Israel redeploys its troops from the city of Hebron, transferring control of 80% of the city to the PNA ('H1'). The Israel army will continue to devote significant resources to protect the city's some 450 settlers. Palestinian police enter the liberated part of Hebron.

Jan. 20: The 'Settlement Forum', under the direction of an assistant to Minister of Defense Yitzhak Mordechai, approves construction of 60 units in Ma'ale Ephraim.

- For the first time in 30 years, Chairman Yassir Arafat visits Hebron.

Jan. 22: The National Agreement Regarding the Negotiations on the Permanent Settlement with the Palestinians is published, outlining principles to guide Israeli policy in final status negotiations and signed by Labor and Likud politicians.

Jan. 26: Eight hundred trees planted by Palestinians near Jenin are uprooted by Israeli officials, who claim that the planting took place on state land and is illegal.

Jan. 28: Israel prohibits new Palestinian construction in the Hebron market, which remains under exclusive Israeli control.

Jan. 29: Israel announces that 84 settlements are to be classified as priority 'A' development areas, entitling them to an increase in a range of state benefits (39 settlements are already designated as 'A').

Jan. 30: NGO delegations and individuals from Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Egypt sign the 'Copenhagen Declaration' in Denmark, supporting Palestinian independence and a freeze on settlement expansion.

- Minister of National Infrastructure Ariel Sharon announces his intention to construct a rail link between the settlement of Ariel and Tel Aviv, and a Tel Aviv-Jerusalem route that passes through the West Bank.

Jan. 1997: Human rights organizations announce that at least 1,600 Palestinians are held in PNA custody, 700 of them without charge.

February

Feb. 1: Yousef Ismail Baba dies in Rafidiya Hospital, Nablus, after being tortured during interrogation by PNA security forces, marking the 11th to die in PNA detention.

- Fifty-one out of a total number of 180 international observers arrive in Hebron.

Feb. 3: Israel partly reopens Shuhada Road in Hebron to limited Palestinian traffic for the first time since the 1994 Hebron massacre of Palestinian worshippers by Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein.

Feb. 9: Arafat and Netanyahu meet at Eretz to prepare for further redeployment and negotiations on outstanding issues.

- Israeli Finance Minister Meridor requests Knesset approval of government loan guarantees for 85% of investments in settlement industries and state guarantees in the amount of \$8 million.

Feb. 10: The Israeli army presents a final status map to the cabinet. With this map as a guide, cabinet members estimate that Israel will retain 51.8% of the West Bank in any permanent arrangement, while the Palestinians will retain 48.2%.

Feb. 11: After Israel's Supreme Court clears the way for the release of female Palestinian prisoners, the 31 women are released from Tel Mond prison, 1½ years after their release was scheduled in the Oslo II Accords. Twenty-two of them were serving life sentences.

- Seven Palestinians are injured during a protest against the confiscation of land near Tulkarem for the creation of five stone quarries.

Feb. 12: 120 dunums of village land in the Tulkarem district are declared a closed military zone in order to facilitate construction of a new bypass road to the settlement of Burka.

Feb. 13: Israel reopens part of the Arab market in Hebron that had been closed since the 1994 Hebron massacre.

Feb. 16: Palestinian-Israeli talks resume for the first time after the signing of the Hebron Agreement to discuss the outstanding elements of the Oslo Accords.

Feb. 18: The Palestinian Security Exchange (stock market) opens for trading in Nablus.

Feb. 20: Arab-American University in Jenin inaugurated.

Feb. 24: Arafat, EU President Jacques Santer and PM Willem Kok on behalf of the Dutch Chair of the EU sign the PLO-EU Partnership Association, marking the fourth such signing in the Middle East after Tunisia, Morocco and Israel. The agreement provides for certain free trade arrangements and dialogue/assistance on economic issues.

- The PNA seeks to block extradition to Israel from the US of the Gaza-born Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzouk, detained in New York since July 1995, saying Hamas may wage attacks on Israeli targets if the extradition goes ahead.

Feb. 27: Palestinian National Dialogue Commission meets in Nablus under the auspices of Chairman Arafat. Over 100 participants from the PNA and all political factions except Islamic Jihad attend and issue a statement calling for national unity.

Feb. 1997: President Arafat approves the PLC's Local Government Election Law, marking the first law officially ratified by both the legislative and executive authorities.

March

March 3: The Palestinian Territories observe a general strike, called by the PLC in protest of Israeli settlement policies in general and the Mt. Abu Ghneim case in particular.

March 6: PM Netanyahu's cabinet approves the first of three 'further redeployments' agreed to in the Oslo II Accord. The government intends to transfer 2% of the West Bank (108 square km) from Area C to Area B and A status, and 7.1% of the West Bank from Area B to Area A status, and bring 50 additional villages and 200,000 more West Bank Palestinians under the control of the PNA. After the redeployment has taken place, the PNA will exercise full control (Area A) over less than 10% of the West Bank.

March 7: The Israeli Cabinet approves by a vote of ten to seven in principle the plan for further redeployment from West Bank locations, basically in about 9% of the territory (2% of Area C and about 7% of Area B).

March 9: Minister of Trade and Industry Natan Sharansky approves a \$30 million program to encourage investment, including in the settlements of Kiryat Arba, Betar, Emmanuel, and Ma'ale Ephraim in the West Bank, Neve Dekalim in Gaza, and Katzrin on the Golan Heights.

March 10: President Clinton meets Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as new tensions flare up in the Middle East over Israeli withdrawal plans from the West Bank.

March 12: At a meeting with leaders of the Yesha Settler Council, Israeli Defense Minister Mordechai accepts 40 of 46 Yesha recommendations regarding changes to the 'further redeployment' plan approved on March 6.

March 13: The PLC holds an emergency session in Bethlehem, calling for the suspension of talks with Israel.

- A Jordanian soldier opens fire on a group of Israeli schoolgirls on a field trip to a border site south of the Sea of Galilee, killing seven and provoking international condemnation.

March 15: Mini-summit called for by Arafat to push the implementation of the Oslo Accords convenes in Gaza, attended by representatives from the US, EU, Japan, Egypt and Jordan.

March 17: The final status negotiations fail to begin as planned when the PLO refuses to attend in protest of Israel's unilateral action (planned settlement construction at Mt. Abu Ghneim) to pre-empt the talks.

March 18: Israel begins construction on the new 'Har Homa' settlement on Jabel Abu Ghneim. The PNA responds by halting the peace negotiations.

March 19: Israeli PM Netanyahu proposes a new deal to the Palestinians: an all-out striving to settle the final status issues in 1997. Palestinians reject the plan, saying Netanyahu cannot be trusted and insisting that Israel stick to the pending implementation of the original interim agreements.

March 21: The US vetoes a second UN Security Council resolution critical of Israeli construction at Har Homa.

- A bomb placed by a Palestinian in a Tel Aviv cafe kills three Israelis.

- Arafat's plane uses the Gaza airport for the first time.

March 28: US Middle East envoy heads for home without scoring a breakthrough during an emergency Middle East mission to salvage crumbling Israeli-PLO peace talks.

March 30: The Knesset Finance Committee approves a special allocation of \$16 million for reinforcement of settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as promised in the agreement establishing the governing coalition.

March 31: The Council of the Arab League Foreign Ministers meets in Cairo to discuss Israeli violations of the Oslo Accords, mainly Israeli settlement plans in Arab Jerusalem. At the end of the two-day meeting, a resolution is issued calling for a halt in the normalization of relations with Israel, the resumption of the old economic boycott, and withdrawal from multilateral talks. The resolution is binding with the exception of Jordan and Egypt as they have already signed peace treaties

March 1997: Over 400 Palestinians are injured in clashes with the Israeli army that broke out in protest against the Israeli settlement construction on Jabel Abu Ghneim.

- The UN special investigator on torture accuses the Jewish state of institutionalizing the use of torture in interrogating Palestinian detainees and puts Israel on a list of 29 countries where torture is a fairly extensive problem.

April

April 1: Two suicide bomb attacks fail in Gaza, one near Kfar Darom settlement, the other near Netzarim settlement.

April 2: After a bomb is thrown at an Israeli bus in the West Bank, causing it to overturn and wounding 11 soldiers, Israeli PM Netanyahu says Israel will not resume peace talks as long as Palestinian bomb attacks - touched off by continuing Israeli settlement construction in the Palestinian Territories- continue.

- The Israeli government confirms its approval of further expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

- Israeli Channel 2 reports that Defense Minister Mordechai has approved "dozens of plans for construction in various settlements throughout the territories."

April 3: A new policy of benefits to settlers, approved in principle late last year, is finalized, allowing purchasers of apartments in 110 settlements in the Palestinian Territories to receive additional mortgages and grant payments of between \$3,000 and \$4,500.

April 4: Israeli PM Netanyahu proposes a Camp David-style summit with President Clinton and Chairman Arafat to forge a final peace deal.

April 5: Teachers across the Palestinian Territories resume their strike following the suspension by the PNA Ministry of Education of 19 teachers.

April 6: Foreign Minister David Levy rejects a EU demand to freeze settlements as part of an EU-sponsored 'code of behavior' to stop Palestinian protests.

April 7: Washington summit between President Bill Clinton and Israeli PM Netanyahu makes no apparent headway in easing tensions or resolving an impasse in the peace process.

April 8: Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers kill three Palestinians and wound 103 others in fierce West Bank clashes after failed US attempt to revive Middle East peacemaking.

- The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) calls on its 113 member states to freeze ties with Israel to force it to end a Middle East peace impasse stemming from its settlement policies. The NAM also demands the elimination of the UN Security Council's veto power, describing it as discriminatory, mentioning the two recent occasions when the US blocked resolutions calling on Israel to stop settlement building in East Jerusalem.

- During the meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in New Delhi, Egypt says it is willing to mediate to break a deadlock in the Middle East peace process if Israel puts on hold further Jewish settlements in Palestinian territory.

April 9: A Jewish settler shoots dead a Palestinian in Hebron. Following the incident rioting breaks out and Israeli forces kill two more Palestinians and injure over 100.

April 13: A Palestinian woman crossing into the Israeli-occupied West Bank from Jordan opens fire at Israeli guards, wounding two.

April 20: In Surif village Israeli forces destroy three houses of the Ghneimat family to which the alleged Tel Aviv Cafe suicide bomber belonged. The village has been under curfew since the March 21 bombing.

- Israeli prosecutors decide against indicting PM Netanyahu in an influence-peddling scandal but bring charges against Shas party leader Aryeh Deri.

April 22: Palestinian security forces arrest 25 teachers for “abusing power and authority and for incitement.”

April 24: A single Israeli settler extends the settlement of Kfar Yam near Khan Yunis by 6,000 square meters by constructing sand ridges on the beach.

April 25: An emergency special session of the UN General Assembly approves a resolution with 134 in favor and three against (US, Israel and Micronesia) for a halt in construction at Har Homa and an end to all settlement activities in the occupied territories.

April 28: A national unity meeting in Nablus, called for by the Palestinian Dialogue Permanent Secretariat, discusses political developments.

April 1997: In Surif village near Hebron, Israeli forces destroy the houses of five Palestinian families whose sons allegedly were involved in suicide attacks in Israel, leaving 33 people homeless.

May

May 5: *The New York Times* reports about a new PNA law imposing the death penalty on anyone who sells land to Israelis, introduced by Minister of Justice Freih Abu Meddein.

May 6: Musa Abu Marzouk, political leader of Hamas, pledges to continue to work for the organization after his release from nearly two years of detention in a New York jail.

- Israeli forces destroy seven homes in the West Bank over the past two days.

May 12: Harbi Misleh Abu Sarah from Yarboud village, known for collaboration and land sale deals with Israelis, is found killed.

May 18: Israeli Defense Ministry officials state that 500 more Palestinian homes have been targeted for demolition in the West Bank, all located in Area A and near settlements, by-pass roads, or Israeli army bases.

May 19: Hamas leadership in Beirut issues a statement accusing the PNA security forces of planning a plot against the movement in order to convince Israel to go ahead with the implementation of the Oslo Accords.

May 20: The PNA arrests journalist Daoud Kuttab allegedly in relation to his broadcasting of PLV sessions, including critical discussions. The arrest occurs after Kuttab openly blames the PNA for jamming off the air his broadcasts.

May 21: Khaled Ali Abu Dayya, 37, dies in Share Zedek Hospital after being detained and interrogated in the Mosqobiya Prison in Jerusalem for one week.

May 24: The report of the PNA Monitoring Institution reveals that public funds in the amount of US\$326 million have been misused by the PNA.

May 26: President Arafat meets with Egyptian President Mubarak to coordinate their views one day ahead of the Mubarak-Netanyahu summit in Sharm Al-Sheikh.

May 28: The summit conference between Egypt and Israel aimed at restarting stalled Middle East talks ends with no results.

May 29: A new crisis erupts in the deadlocked Middle East peace process over reports that Israeli PM Netanyahu plans to hand back to the Palestinians less than 40% of the occupied West Bank, while Israel will keep the remaining 60%.

- Meretz party reports that Israel has confiscated 30,000 dunums of Palestinian land in the West Bank since January 1997, including 20,000 dunums located in the Jerusalem area.

May 1997: A US report discloses a vacancy rate in settlements of 26% for the West Bank and 56% for Gaza.

June

June 4: Israel's Labor Party chooses Ehud Barak, former army chief of staff, to succeed Shimon Peres as its leader with 51% of the vote. Other candidates were Yossi Beilin, Shlomo Ben-Ami, and Ephraim Sneh.

June 7: Chairman Arafat fires Attorney-General Khalid Qidreh, allegedly on grounds related to the corruption scandal.

June 8: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators meet for the first time in more than two months in an attempt to restart the peace process. The meeting is attended by Egyptian mediator Osama Al-Baz.

June 13: The first Palestinian national soccer match takes place in Jericho against the Jordanian national team; ends with a draw.

June 16: Israeli soldiers shoot and wound at least 38 Palestinians in the third day of clashes in Hebron. In Gaza, Jewish settlers shoot and wound one Palestinian youth and fire at journalists during a clash over land that has recently been fenced off and annexed to the Gush Qatif settlement bloc.

- The UN cancels a planned mission to Israel to discuss the building of settlements in East Jerusalem because of what it calls unacceptable conditions imposed by Israel.

- Hakam Subhi Qamhawi dies in Jericho Prison while in PNA custody.

June 20: The Israeli army requests \$100 million to fortify settlements throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip and to make improvements for Israeli troops serving in the area.

- Israeli soldiers firing rubber bullets wound about 20 Palestinians during the seventh day of street battles with Arab demonstrators in the divided West Bank town of Hebron, say witnesses.

June 24: Nasser Abed Radwan dies in Gaza Prison, marking the 13th death of a prisoner in PNA custody.

June 26: Pope John Paul urges Israeli PM Netanyahu and President Arafat to restart the stalled Mideast peace process, telling them he is very worried by the deadlock in dialogue.

June 1997: Israeli military authorities issue 17 new house demolition orders, 15 of them for houses in a village near Hebron. All of the houses are close to settler bypass roads.

July

July 2: PNA Preventative Security arrest Dr. Fathi Ahmed Subuh, Professor of Education at Al-Azhar University, Gaza, for asking questions critical of the PNA in a final exam.

July 10: Israeli forces destroy 19 Palestinian homes - four stone houses and 15 wooden ones - in Bir Nabala, without allowing the families to remove their belongings.

July 16: The UN General Assembly recommends that UN members actively discourage activities that contribute to Israeli settlement building and demands that Israel provide information about goods produced in settlements.

July 18: On his first visit to the PA areas, Jordanian PM Abedul Salam Majali meets President Arafat in Ramallah to discuss joint ways to save the peace process.

July 20: EU envoy to the Middle East, Miguel Moratinos, meets with Nabil Shaath and Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in an effort to revive the peace process.

July 22: The EU arranges a meeting between Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and President Arafat in Brussels in an attempt to get the two sides back to the negotiation table.

July 23: The Knesset Finance Committee approves \$12 million in grants and subsidies for 400 dwelling units to be built in rural West Bank settlements.

July 29: The PLC Commission of Inquiry on Government Performance issues its report recommending the dismissal of the entire PNA cabinet on suspicion of corruption and the formation of a new government consisting of technocrats and qualified professionals.

July 30: The PLC Commission of Inquiry on Government Performance presents its findings to the PLC: misuse of power and funds in every every ministry.

- Two suicide bombers blow themselves up in the middle of Mahane Yehuda market in the city center of Jerusalem, killing 13 and injuring some 170. Israel reacts with a total sealing of the Palestinian territories and an arrest campaign, and the Netanyahu government authorizes the army to operate "if necessary" inside Palestinian-controlled territory.

July 31: The PLC passes a resolution that the current cabinet be entirely replaced by a vote of 56:1.

July 1997: Ongoing clashes between Palestinian protestors and the Israeli army in Hebron, sparked by a settler-initiated anti-Islam campaign, displaying posters showing Prophet Mohammed as a pig, leave dozens of Palestinian injured.

August

Aug. 1: Sixteen of the 20 PNA cabinet members offer their resignation to President Arafat following the PLC corruption report's recommendation.

Aug. 8: Minister of Defense Mordechai approves the construction of ten apartment units in the Jewish area of Hebron. Fifty Jewish families currently live in Hebron.

Aug. 9: US envoy Dennis Ross begins a new shuttle mission between Arafat and Netanyahu.

Aug. 12: The PLO office in Washington receives a notice saying it can no longer operate legally as the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act, which allows the PLO to operate and US agencies to fund the PNA, will expire and the US Congress does not intend to renew or extend it.

Aug. 13: US envoy Dennis Ross ends a mission to revive Israel-PLO security cooperation.

Aug. 14: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright says she will make her first visit to the region at month's end if progress is made on the security front.

Aug. 17: Security forces from the PNA and Israel hold a joint meeting with CIA officials in Ramallah.

Aug. 18: PNA imposes a boycott on Israeli products in response to Israeli policies crippling the Palestinian economy.

Aug. 20: President Arafat presides over the national unity conference in Gaza, attended by most Palestinian factions, which tries to find common ground to face the serious challenges posed by Israel.

- President Arafat inaugurates the headquarters of the Palestinian Civil Aviation Authority and Palestine Airlines in Gaza.

Aug. 21: *Ha'aretz* reports that according to a survey conducted by the Panorama Market Research Institute, 56.4% of Israel's Jewish citizens said that Israeli Arabs should not be allowed to vote in elections for the prime minister. 39.8% regarded Arab citizens as a danger to the Israeli state, and 51.6% would like to transfer them to a Palestinian state if one is established. 56.7% accepted that Arabs did not have the same rights as Jews, and 6.6% said they regarded the Israeli Arabs as the 'enemy'.

Aug. 24: An Israeli court finds Noam Friedman, the Israeli soldier who opened fire at Palestinians in Hebron on January 1 to stop the government's redeployment plans, not guilty due to mental instability.

Aug. 25: Israeli forces destroy five Palestinian homes in the West Bank.

- The National Dialogue Secretariat begins its meeting in Gaza (representatives from the PLC, the PNC, the PLO Executive Committee, cabinet ministers, and national and Islamic activists).

- In Bethlehem, several Palestinians are wounded in clashes with the Israeli army that erupted in protest of the ongoing siege of the city.

Aug. 28: Israeli forces destroy a Palestinian West Bank encampment, home to 54 Palestinians, near the self-rule enclave of Jericho claiming they are illegal structures

- Ten caravans are brought to the Binyamin community of Talmon, approved by Defense Minister Mordechai over two months ago.

Aug. 1997: Throughout the month, Israeli forces destroy over 50 homes in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

- Palestinian refugees launch several protest campaigns following UNRWA's announcement that it will be forced to make cuts in services.

September

Sept. 1: Tayeb Abdul Raheem, the President's Secretary-General, announces the PNA's rejection of Ehud Barak's offer of a confederation between Israel, Palestine, and Jordan.

- Clashes flare up between Israeli forces and Palestinian farmers in Tammon when Israel confiscates over 1,000 dunums of the village land for the construction of a new Jewish settlement with 3,000 new housing units.

Sept. 2: Clashes in Jiftlik between Palestinian farmers and Israeli soldiers over the ownership of a 400-dunum experimental farm, that had been taken over by Jewish settlers.

- Protest campaigns are carried out in Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza as well as in Jordan against UNRWA's decision to decrease its services provided to the refugees.

Sept. 3: Since Netanyahu took office (June 1996), 245 Palestinian homes have been destroyed, 21 in East Jerusalem, the rest in the West Bank.

- A Palestinian delegation (headed by Abu Mazen) and an Israeli delegation arrive in Washington for talks with officials prior to US Secretary of State Albright's visit to the Middle East.

Sept. 4: Triple suicide bombing on Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall kills four Israelis and injures over 150. In response, the Israeli cabinet decides to reestablish its intelligence network in the Palestinian Territories and to extend its military activities directly into Area A.

Sept. 7: Israeli forces have arrested over 170 suspected Palestinian militants since the triple suicide bombing in Jerusalem.

Sept. 11/12: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visits Israel/Palestine. On 11 Sept. Albright meets with President Yasser Arafat, stresses her demand that Arafat fights terrorism, but also voices understanding for what she calls "Palestinian suffering over actions taken by Israel's right-wing government" and reasserts US support for trading occupied land for peace.

Sept. 15: Alexandria Summit between Presidents Mubarak and Arafat to discuss the outcome of US Secretary of State Albright's recent trip and the latest developments of the peace process.

- Palestinian administrative detainee Marwan Hassan Ibrahim Maali found dead in his cell in Megiddo Prison.

Sept. 20: After meeting Arab Foreign Ministers in Cairo, President Arafat states that Palestinians will demand the full evacuation of Israeli settlers from Ras Al-Amud.

- Israel begins a one-week sweeping raid in Areas B and C of the Nablus district, mainly Asira Al-Shamaliya village, arresting over 500 Palestinians. The targets of the crack down are five missing Hamas members who the Israelis claim are the Manahe Yehuda and Ben Yehuda suicide bombers.

Sept. 23: Russian President Boris Yeltsin blames Israel for deadlock in Middle East peace talks because of 'its unconstructive position', and urges the US to play a more active role in trying to get the process back on track.

Sept. 24: President Arafat meets with Czech President Vaclav Havel in Bethlehem to discuss the latest political developments in the region as well as bilateral relations.

Sept. 25: Two Mossad agents fail in an assassination attempt on Hamas political bureau chief Khaled Mashaal in Amman, who was hit by a time delayed nerve gas when leaving his office. The two assailants are caught and turned over to the Jordanian police.

- Czech President Vaclav Havel urges Israel to think twice about Jewish settlement building that has sent Middle East peacemaking into a tailspin.

- PNA police close Afaq TV in the West Bank and seal 16 Islamic welfare institutions in Gaza (among them the Islamic Society and all its branches, Islamic Society Club, Muslim Girls Association, Holy Land Institute, Islamic Welfare Society and all its branches, Society of the Alms Givers, and all its branches), bowing to US and Israeli pressure to crack down on Hamas activists.

Sept. 26: Israel Radio reports that Israeli troops trained this week for a possible all-out West Bank war with Palestinians that might involve PLO fighters storming Jewish settlements.

Sept. 29: Israelis and Palestinians agreed to resume formal talks in a step that US Secretary of State Albright says will "arrest the downward spiral" in the Middle East peace process. After a meeting in New York with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and senior Palestinian negotiator Mahmoud Abbas, Albright says joint Israeli-Palestinian negotiating committees will meet again in the Middle East during the week of Oct. 6.

Sept. 1997: As of September 1997, 290,000 Palestinian passports have been issued since the PNA assumed authority.

October

Oct. 1: Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin is released by Israel after eight years in prison and flown to Jordan for medical treatment. The move comes after an angry telephone call by King Hussein to Israeli PM Netanyahu, demanding concessions for the failed Mossad attack in the middle of Amman.

Oct. 4: PNA Finance Minister Nashashibi announces that the PNA budget deficit has hit US\$ 116 million, mainly because Israel continues to withhold PNA tax revenues.

Oct. 5: In Hebron, gangs of Israeli settlers try to set fire to several Palestinian houses in the Tel Rumeida area and throw stones and empty bottles at other houses.

- In the first official reaction to the foiled assassination attempt on Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al in Amman, Israel tacitly admits responsibility for the terrorist act.

Oct. 6: Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, 61-year-old spiritual leader of Hamas, arrives in Gaza from Jordan.

- Jordan sets free the two Mossad hitmen who had tried to kill Hamas official Khaled Mashaal in Amman, and returns them to Israel. In return, Israel frees 20 Palestinian and Jordanian detainees and pledges to free more soon.

- During a meeting in Jericho, Sae'b Erekat briefs EU envoy Moratinos on the Palestinian suggestion for the EU to take part in the final status negotiations.

- The Palestinian-Israeli Coordination Committee headed by Mahmoud Abbas and David Levy meets and decides that the eight sub-committees will resume their work.

Oct. 7: In Gaza, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin says he will forge a truce with Israel if it withdraws completely from the West Bank and Gaza Strip and removes all of its settlements.

- Israeli President Ezer Weizman meets with US President Clinton in Washington and proposes that Israeli and Palestinian leaders gather in the US for a Camp-David-style summit. The idea is vehemently rejected by the Palestinians who insist that Israel has first to implement its commitments to the interim agreements.

Oct. 8: Israeli PM Netanyahu and President Arafat meet face-to-face at Erez Crossing for the first time in eight months.

- US Secretary of State Albright announces that Hamas, Islamic Jihad, DFLP, PFLP, PLF, and the Popular Front-General Command are among 30 organizations officially considered terrorist organizations by the US government.

Oct. 9: Palestinian-Israeli Summit held at Erez checkpoint with the participation of the US peace envoy Dennis Ross marks the resumption of negotiations.

Oct. 14: Hamas mentor and spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin received Rabbi Menhame Froman of the settlement of Tekoa near Bethlehem who reportedly sought to hand him a letter from Chief Sephardi Rabbi Bakshi-Doron asking Yassin to denounce violence.

Oct. 19: President Yasser Arafat meets with the US envoy Dennis Ross in Ramallah yesterday to review the latest developments in the peace process. Ross met earlier Israeli PM Netanyahu, who declared prior to the meeting that Israel will not carry out the scheduled redeployments unless the Palestinian authority proves its determination to fight terrorism and the delay in issues like the airport, the seaport and the safe passage is due to security reasons.

Oct. 21: President Yasser Arafat meets with Israeli Defense Minister in a session organized by US envoy Dennis Ross to discuss security cooperation.

- At the closing the two-day inaugural session of the Peres Center for Peace, former Israeli PM Shimon Peres calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Oct. 22: President Yasser Arafat meets with Israeli Defense Minister, Yitzhak Mordachai at Beit-Hanoun crossing point, with the attendance of the American envoy, Dennis Ross, to discuss security matters and the revival of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process forward.

- The Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* reports that right-wing Israeli groups plan to launch armed assaults against Palestinians in the West Bank.

Oct. 23: President Yasser Arafat begins a visiting tour to France and Germany, aimed at enhancing the bilateral relations and discussing means to save the peace process.

Oct. 24: President Yasser Arafat meets with Chancellor Helmut Kohl in Germany. Both sides express their utmost concern over the deadlocked peace process in the Middle East.

Oct. 27: Israel frees 31 more Palestinian prisoners under a deal with Jordan.