

## EU mulls resumption of aid to Palestinians

People await new govt

AFP, Brussels/ Ramallah

European Foreign Ministers meeting here Friday will hail the planned Palestinian government of national unity and take steps toward lifting the aid boycott imposed when the Islamist Hamas movement came to power, diplomatic sources said.

The 25 ministers attending the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) are hoping they will soon be able to reconsider their boycott of aid to the Palestinian Authority.

"The hope is that the political programme of the government will reflect the principles identified by the EU and the international quartet on the Middle East and therefore allow for a re-engagement," a European diplomat said.

"Such a re-engagement could include the resumption of political contact with the Palestinian government ... and the resumption of direct aid from the EU."

The West froze direct aid to the Palestinian government after Hamas took office in March, demanding that the radical Islamist movement renounce violence, recognize Israel and agree to abide by past peace agreements.

Palestinians awaited yesterday the official dissolution of the Hamas-controlled government and the formation of a national unity

cabinet after six months of unprecedented political and financial crisis.

Talks were progressing slowly over the makeup of the new government, which will include for the first time representatives from both the Islamist movement and president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah party.

"For the moment, we haven't reached an agreement on the portfolios," Salah Bardawil, a spokesman for Hamas's faction in parliament, told AFP.

Abbas and outgoing Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, who is to retain his post in the new coalition cabinet, clinched a deal on Monday after weeks of tortuous talks on the political programme for the new government.

Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas said Wednesday that he hoped to soon officially task Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya with forming a new unity government.

Speaking at a press conference in Ramallah, Abbas confirmed that Haniya would remain at the helm of the new coalition cabinet.

Another European diplomat stressed that the unfreezing of a full aid programme "depends crucially on the political platform of the government of national unity".

## Dubai governor, Arab sheiks sued for using children as camel jockeys

AFP, Miami

A lawsuit was filed Wednesday in US district court alleging that the governor of Dubai and his son enslaved some 30,000 children over the past three decades for use as camel jockeys, the US attorneys announced here.

The 56-page suit, which bases its case on international laws banning slavery and the use of child labor, names Dubai governor and United Arab Emirates vice president Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum and his son, Sheikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, as well as others.

They are charged with "the alleged abduction and human trafficking of thousands of young boys" from places like Bangladesh, Sudan and southern Asia, according to a release by the South Carolina-based law firm Motley Rice LLC.

"Once abducted, the children were allegedly sold into slavery to serve as camel jockeys for the entertainment of the Arabian elite," the statement read.

According to the complaint "boys as young as two years old have been stolen from their families, trafficked across international borders, and kept in brutal camel-racing camps throughout the United Arab Emirates, forced to train camels and perform as jockeys."

## Bush seeks Republican support for terror bills

AP, Washington

President Bush faced a tough crowd yesterday as he stepped behind closed doors to ask a divided House Republican caucus to back more power to spy on, imprison and interrogate terrorism suspects.

Walking through the Capitol to a basement conference room, Bush was flanked by Vice President Dick Cheney, House Speaker Dennis Hastert and White House adviser Karl Rove. They did not speak to reporters.

For Bush, the election season visit to Capitol Hill on Thursday caps a week of high-profile administration pressure to rescue bills mired in turf battles and privacy concerns. It also gives GOP leaders a chance to press for loyalty among Republicans confronted on the campaign trail by war-weary voters.