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A volatile crowd gathers outside Birmingham Council House. Inset: Kamel Hawwash of the West Midlands Palestinian Association speaks at the meeting.

ISRAEL ignored mounting international calls today for a ceasefire, vowing not to stop its crippling 10-day assault until "peace and tranquillity" was achieved in towns in the line of Palestinian rocket fire. Israeli forces seized control of high-rise buildings and attacked smuggling tunnels and several mosques in a campaign against Hamas militants. Three young brothers were reported to have been killed during shelling and Palestinian wounded filled hospital corridors. Three Israeli soldiers were killed last night when an errant tank shell hit their position outside Gaza City, the Israeli military said, and 24 were wounded. The incident brought the death toll among Israeli soldiers since the invasion began on Saturday to four. Five civilians were killed when a shell fired by an

# A boycott for Israeli goods

By Tony Collins

**A HUGE crowd gathered outside Birmingham's Council House to voice their protests over the invasion of Gaza as they called on the local city council to boycott all Israeli goods.**

The call, which is to be backed up by a mass petition, was made during a public meeting attended by around a thousand people last night at the Council House in Victoria Square.

The crowd was so big that some climbed to vantage points on the building for a better view.

The emergency meeting, which followed a short march from Waterstones, in High Street, was organised by the Stop the War Coalition in response to Israel's escalation of the recent week-long bombing of Gaza which has killed more than 500 Palestinians.

A cross-party selection of speakers saw Coun Salma Yaqoob from Respect, Coun Ayoub Khan (Liberal Democrats), Coun Tahir Ali (Labour) and Coun Alan Rudge (Conservative), who is Cabinet member for equalities and human resources, share the same platform. Other speakers included Kamel Hawwash, of West Midlands Palestinian Community Association,



Councillor Salma Yaqoob makes a point.

and John Rose, a Jew, who is author of *The Myths of Zionism*.

Around 30 West Midlands Police officers accompanied the march and remained on duty at the Council House as hundreds of people crammed into the Council Chamber, public gallery and two committee rooms inside, with hundreds more having to be addressed outside.

Coun Yaqoob said: "This is a brilliant turnout and shows how important this issue is to the people of Birmingham. We are calling for an

embargo by the city council on all Israeli goods until Israel complies with UN resolutions not to occupy Gaza or the West Bank. We do not want just words of condemnation but action by the city council.

"Birmingham is the second largest city in the UK and the largest authority in Europe and I want to make sure all our councillors sign up to this very important, symbolic boycott. This is a cross-party, cross-faith issue. It is not about Muslims against Jews or Christians."

Coun Yaqoob said: "Our taxpayers' money is being used to buy parts of those F16 bombers that are making sorties every 20 minutes in Gaza.

"We have seen 500 Palestinians killed just this week but our brothers and sisters there are not abandoned."

The protest petition is to circulate this week before being presented to the full meeting of Birmingham City Council next Tuesday when a lobby of councillors is also planned.

Coun Rudge said Birmingham has been fortunate in that people in the city have always worked together. "We cannot tolerate this non-stop battling going on and I hope this meeting is a step towards getting that message across to everyone in government," he said.

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# Hundreds voice protests in city at Gaza invasion

## High-speed Heathrow train plans on the table



Police watch over a peaceful demonstration in Birmingham last night to protest against Israel's action in Gaza

### Call for boycott of Israeli goods in bid to end the conflict

TONY COLLINS

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**Inside: Shelling continues as Israeli troops move into Gaza** Page 17

Birmingham could get a 35-minute high speed rail link to Heathrow under plans being considered by the government.

Transport minister Lord Adonis wants to build the country's largest passenger interchange at Heathrow as part of a 200mph express line linking St Pancras to Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow.

And he expects businesses to help meet the estimated £20billion cost of the London to Manchester extension.

Lord Adonis said the "bullet train" line could mirror London's Crossrail project, which attracted £700million from private companies.

His support for the biggest railway project for more than 100 years was welcomed by Birmingham City Council chief executive Stephen Hughes, who rejected fears faster journey times to London might lure customers away from Birmingham International Airport.

It takes two hours to travel by train from Birmingham to Heathrow.

Passengers can go to Euston or Marylebone and take the London Underground to Heathrow, or change at Reading and use a coach. If Lord Adonis gets his way, it would be possible to travel between Birmingham and Heathrow in little over half an hour.

Mr Hughes insisted both airports could benefit. "This would enable passengers from Birmingham to get to Heathrow much more quickly. But obviously people will say what does this mean for BIA?"

Mr Hughes believes BIA and Heathrow must work together.

He added: "This is positive news. If you think about how Heathrow and Gatwick work, an awful lot of people travel by bus between the two. We must not look parochially at this, there will be benefits for Birmingham Airport."

The rail interchange could work to the advantage of BIA if the government decides against a third runway at Heathrow.

Mr Hughes said the 35-minute journey time between Heathrow and Birmingham would effectively make BIA "Heathrow's third runway".

Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Jerry Blackett insisted BIA had "nothing to fear" from Heathrow.

## 125 jobs could be at risk as Wyre Forest council ponders cutbacks

A Midland council which invested £9million in a failed Icelandic bank is set to make drastic cuts to its workforce with up to 125 jobs feared to be at risk.

Wyre Forest District Council, which employees more than 450 people in North Worcestershire, yesterday appealed for staff to apply for voluntary redundancy as deputy leader Marcus Hart admitted the authority was "in the grip of the global economic downturn".

The council has so far refused to re-

lease any figures on the number of jobs at risk or the amount of money they are looking to save although opposition leader, Coun Howard Martin, believes it could be up to a quarter of the workforce and more than £1million.

Coun Martin (Independent Health Concern) said: "The council needs to be much clearer otherwise more questions will be raised and people will become very worried.

"If you take into account the drop in

interest rates and the amount of money lost from investment in Iceland then the council could be looking to make up to £1.3million savings.

"If that all came from staff cuts then we would be in a very difficult position."

Wyre Forest District Council is currently trying to recover £9million from Icelandic banks including £3million in Landsbanki, £5million in Kaupthing, Singer & Friedlander and £1million in Heritable.

Workers at the council now have just one week before they must indicate whether they wish to leave or not.

The ruling Conservative Party blamed a slump in property prices, a drastic fall in interest rates and a small central government grant for the cuts.

But they would not be drawn on the amount they need to save, saying only that the number was "substantial", despite claims they did not know the exact figures.

Coun Hart said: "The credit crunch means that we have to redouble our efforts to become more efficient and the cabinet is working closely with corporate management team to see where further savings can be made. This includes a review of divisional management structures."

The budget proposals will be formally announced on January 22 at the cabinet meeting with the final decision being made at full council on February 25.