



PHOTO: AFP

Students march in Los Angeles, California with a call for amnesty to illegal immigrants on Saturday. Some 3,000 people marched through downtown Los Angeles to City Hall opposing the House bill HR 4437 introduced by Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner, R-Wisconsin. The bill would increase penalties for immigrant smuggling, beef up penalties for undocumented immigrants who re-enter the United States and require employers to report Social Security numbers to the Department of Homeland Security.

## Taliban storm police posts: 14 killed

AFP, Kandahar

Taliban fighters attacked three police posts in Afghanistan overnight, leaving 14 rebels dead or wounded, while soldiers killed four more in separate battles, officials said yesterday.

Police said meanwhile they had arrested 15 suspected Taliban in a sweep Saturday of an area south of Kandahar city where 41 militants and six police were killed in a major day-long battle Friday.

The police posts – a couple of kilometres apart from each other on the country's main highway between Kandahar and the capital – were attacked in a near-simultaneous strike late Saturday, police said.

"For 30 minutes the Taliban were fighting with police last night. Fourteen Taliban wounded and killed," Zabul provincial police chief Mohammad Nabi Molakhel told AFP.

The posts, which are usually

manned by about 10 policemen, were all near the Zabul capital Qalat.

A Taliban spokesman, Yousuf Ahmadi, confirmed the attack but said only two Taliban were killed along with nine policemen. Police said they had no casualties.

Afghan and coalition soldiers killed another three Taliban Saturday after being ambushed while on a joint patrol in central Uruzgan province, a US military statement said.

"The engagement occurred when five insurgents attacked Afghan National Army and coalition forces with small-arms fire and rocket-propelled grenades. The Afghan and coalition forces manoeuvred and returned fire," it said.

The area southwest of Kandahar city – the scene of a major battle on Friday in which coalition helicopters fired rockets in support of Afghan forces – was quiet after a sweep on Saturday.

## Hu calls for talks with Taiwan

AFP, Beijing

Chinese President Hu Jintao, in a speech given days before he travels to Washington, called Sunday for dialogue with Taiwan but under preconditions that Taipei is unlikely to accept.

In televised talks with Lien Chan, former head of the opposition party Kuomintang (KMT), Hu urged the KMT to work with China's ruling Communist Party.

"We always maintain that both sides of the Taiwan Straits should take a far-sighted and constructive attitude in dialogue and negotiations to resolve their disputes and problems," Hu said.

However, he said a precondition to discussions would be Taiwan's acceptance of the so-called "one China principle," which holds that both the mainland and Taiwan are part of one China.

"Peace and development should become the main issue on the development of cross-strait ties and should be the goal that compatriots on both sides of the strait should struggle for," Hu said.

PERES SAYS

## Ahmadinejad to end up like Saddam

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli veteran statesman Shimon Peres, responding to the latest verbal attack on the Jewish state by Iran's president, said on Saturday that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would end up like Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

In a speech to a conference on the Palestinian issue on Friday, Ahmadinejad said: "The Zionist regime is a decaying and crumbling tree that will fall with a storm."

Peres, in a statement quoted by Israel Radio, called Ahmadinejad's comments a direct threat to Israel's existence.

"His statements are reminiscent of those voiced by Saddam Hussein. Ahmadinejad will end up like Saddam Hussein," he said, referring to the Iraqi leader ousted by a US invasion in 2003 and on trial for the killings of 148 Shias two decades ago.

EX-OFFICIALS WARN

# War with Iran will do US more damage

REUTERS, New York

A US conflict with Iran could be even more damaging to America's interests than the war with Iraq, former White House counterterrorism chief Richard Clarke wrote in Sunday's New York Times.

In an op-ed article co-authored with Steven Simon, a former State Department official who also worked for the National Security Council, Clarke wrote reports that the Bush administration is contemplating bombing nuclear sites in Iran raised concerns that "would simply begin a multi-move, escalatory process."

Iran's likely response would be to "use its terrorist network to strike American targets around the world, including inside the United States," Clarke and Simon warned.

"Iran has forces as its command far superior to anything Al Qaeda

was ever able to field," they said, citing Iran's links with the militant group Hezbollah.

Iran could also make things much worse in Iraq, they wrote, adding "there is every reason to believe that Iran has such a retaliatory shock wave planned and ready."

President George W. Bush might then sanction more bombing, Clarke and Simon said, hoping Iranians would overthrow the Tehran government. But "more likely, the American war against Iran would guarantee the regime decades more of control."

The authors concluded by warning that "the parallels to the run-up to the war with Iraq are all too striking: remember that in May 2002 President Bush declared that there was 'No war plan on my desk' despite having actually spent months working on detailed plans

for the Iraq invasion."

Congress "must not permit the administration to launch another war whose outcome cannot be known, or worse, known all too well," they said.

Earlier the Sunday Times newspaper said Iran has formed battalions of suicide bombers to hit American and British targets if its nuclear installations are attacked.

According to Iranian officials, 40,000 trained suicide bombers were ready to strike, the British weekly broadsheet said.

Iran is in a stand-off with the West over its nuclear programme, which the Islamic republic insists is for entirely peaceful purposes.

The Special Unit of Martyr Seekers in the Revolutionary Guards was first spotted in March when members marched in a military parade.

## 20 killed in Iraq attacks

AFP, Baghdad

At least 20 people were killed in a string of attacks in Iraq on Sunday, including bombings against a market and a minibus, as talks on the shape of the new government remained deadlocked over the post of prime minister.

A pre-dawn raid by the US military on a suspected Al-Qaeda hideout southwest of Baghdad also left five alleged insurgents and a woman dead.

The violence flared as Iraq's Sunni Arab and Kurdish leaders warned that the long-running dispute over the fate of Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari was unlikely to be resolved before parliament convenes on Monday.

Iraqi leaders have failed to agree on the Shia nomination of Jaafari to remain premier, four months after a landmark election to choose the country's first permanent post-Saddam Hussein government.

The country has been engulfed in sectarian violence that has left hundreds dead since the bombing of a major Shia shrine in Samarra in February.

## Olmert lays out plan to redraw Israeli borders

AFP, Jerusalem

Acting Israeli premier Ehud Olmert's Kadima party presented its draft government programme to the centre-left Labour Sunday as negotiations to form a new coalition inched closer to resolution.

Although the full programme was not made public, sources within both parties said Olmert fleshed out his plans to fix the final borders of the Jewish state within the lifetime of his government, which can run for up to four years.

The programme is largely based on Olmert's victory speech delivered on the March 28 election night when he declared his intention to redraw the map of the region with or without the agreement of the Palestinians.

Olmert made clear that, in the absence of progress in peace negotiations, he will seek to drum up international backing for his so-called convergence plan which would see around 70,000 settlers pulled out of the occupied West Bank. In return, Israel will keep hold of its main settlement blocs.

Labour has already voiced its support for the principles of the convergence plan and the disagreements with Kadima appear centred around economic issues and the division of portfolios – neither of which are seen as major obstacles to a coalition between the two parties.

David Libai, the head of the Labour's negotiating team, expressed broad satisfaction with the guidelines of the new government.

The Kadima document shows that Israel "wants to reach an end to the conflict (with the Palestinians) by negotiations in order to fix the borders, which signals that there will be another withdrawal," said Libai.

"The text says that if it proves impossible to have negotiations, Israel will take its fate into its own hands in the framework of a national agreement."

The programme stipulates that the convergence plan will have to obtain parliamentary approval but it will not be subject to a referendum, he added.



PHOTO: AFP

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz (L) walks with Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz (R) as they arrive for talks in Islamabad yesterday. The Saudi Prince Aziz, arrived on April 15 on a two-day visit for talks on bilateral relations and defence cooperation.

## White Britons deserting Blair for far right

AFP, London

White, working-class Britons feel so furious about immigration that they are deserting Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour Party for the far right, a key Blair ally told the Sunday Telegraph newspaper.

Employment Minister Margaret Hodge said that 80 percent of white people in her east London constituency of Barking were threatening to vote for the British National Party (BNP) in the May local elections.

Former voters for Blair's governing centre-left party were angry about a lack of affordable housing and blamed their worries on Labour neglect and immigration, she told the weekly broadsheet.

"They can't get a home for their children, they see black and ethnic minority communities moving in and they are angry," Hodge said.

"When I knock on doors I say to people, 'are you tempted to vote BNP?' and many, many, many – eight out of 10 of the white families – say 'yes'. That's something we have never seen before."

## Pentagon issues memo to counter critics

AFP, New York

The US Defence Department has issued a memorandum to former military commanders and civilian analysts that offers a direct challenge to the criticism made by retired generals about Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, The New York Times reported Sunday.

The newspaper said the one-page memorandum was sent by e-mail to the group, which includes several retired generals who appear regularly on television, and came as the Bush administration stepped up its own defence of Rumsfeld.

The memorandum begins by stating, "US senior military leaders are involved to an unprecedented degree in every decision-making process in the Department of Defence," the paper quotes the document as saying.

It says Rumsfeld has had 139 meetings with the Joint Chiefs of Staff since the start of 2005 and 208 meetings with the senior field commanders, the report said.

Seeking to put the criticism of the relatively small number of retired generals into context, the e-mail message also notes that there are more than 8,000 active-duty and retired general officers alive today, The Times pointed out.

## Tension between Chad & Sudan mounts

AFP, N'Djamena

Tensions between Chad and Sudan rose further on Saturday following a rebel attack that observers say could yet lead to the fall of Chadian President Idriss Deby Itno and plunge the country into chaos.

In the Chadian capital N'Djamena Deby accused his Sudanese counterpart Omar al-Beshir of "genocide" in the west Sudanese region of Darfur and branded him a "traitor", a day after severing diplomatic ties with Khartoum.

The United Nations voiced concern about threats by Chad to expel Sudanese refugees amid the escalating crisis between the two countries, warning that such action would violate international humanitarian law.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's special representative to Sudan Jan Pronk issued the warning after N'djamena threatened to expel some 200,000 Sudanese refugees currently in eastern Chad in retaliation for Khartoum's alleged support of a Chadian rebel offensive.