



Hundreds of protesters rally on Wednesday on the National Mall in Washington, DC, to press Congress for immigration reform...

Violence kills 19 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

At least 19 people were killed in violence across Iraq yesterday as last-minute political dealings continued on key security portfolios ahead of this weekend's expected unveiling of a new cabinet.

In the deadliest attacks, a car bomb in a busy commercial street in the capital's central Waziriyah neighborhood killed at least seven people and set security vehicles ablaze.

And seven people from the same family all died in a drive-by shooting of a minibus, part of a wave of violence that has underscored the need for a permanent government and strong leadership in the defence and interior ministries.

Although prime minister designate Nuri al-Maliki said Wednesday he would submit his cabinet line-up for approval by parliament on Saturday, political groups have shown continuing discord.

Palestinian civil war feared as factions flex muscles

AFP, Gaza City

The rival Hamas and Fatah factions staged mass shows of strength yesterday amid warnings that the Islamists' decision to deploy its gunmen on the streets of Gaza could trigger a Palestinian civil war.

The day after the Hamas government dispatched its followers on a mission to restore law and order to the territory, thousands of members of the official security services rallied to denounce the rival militia and pledge support for beleaguered Palestinian Authority president Mahmud Abbas.

Signs that tensions between the two factions could be spreading beyond Gaza were seen in the northern West Bank when the Hamas deputy premier cut short a tour when confronted by Fatah loyalists.

Nasserine al-Shaer had to be spirited away by his own bodyguards while visiting Tulkarem after Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades gunmen, a radical offshoot of Abbas's Fatah faction, fired into the air and initially blocked his vehicle.

Al-Aqsa supporters have said they will have no truck with the new force which began its operations in Gaza on Wednesday, despite Hamas interior minister Said Siam's insistence that its ranks were open to all-comers.

The security services are meant to be within Abbas's remit, in his capacity as Palestinian Authority president, and the main branches are dominated by Fatah supporters despite Hamas's victory in January's parliamentary election.

Abbas's office made clear the president's anger at the deployment of the Hamas forces while he was on a visit to Europe -- ironically to lobby for an end to the international community's isolation of the Hamas-led

government. "President Abbas is not and cannot be seen as folding in the face of the unconstitutional decisions taken by the interior minister," his office said.

"Any situation in which two different forces, seemingly taking orders from separate authorities, are attempting to take charge of maintaining law and order in Gaza, is untenable."

A senior official in Abbas's office went further by warning that the deployment of the new force "could lead to a civil war".

"This force should withdraw from the streets in order to allow the men from the security services to carry out their mission: protect and apply the rule of law," he told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Around 3,000 members of the security services -- drawn from the ranks of the national and preventive security forces as well as Abbas's

own elite Force 17 unit -- rallied in downtown Gaza to denounce the new force.

"Abu Mazen (Abbas) is our leader" and "Other forces are illegal" were among the chants of the demonstrators gathered outside the headquarters of the preventive security service.

Meanwhile, several hundred Hamas supporters rallied outside the nearby parliament building.

Yussef al-Zahar, brother of foreign minister Mahmud al-Zahar and one of the commanders of the new force, defended the deployments.

"We will be under the control of a democratically elected government," he told AFP. "We will play our role in protecting the rights of the people."

A spokesman for the interior ministry sought to downplay the rift with Abbas.

Senate okays fencing of Mexico-US border

Lawmakers back citizenship of illegal immigrants

AP, Washington

The Senate agreed to give millions of illegal immigrants a shot at US citizenship and backed construction of 370 miles of triple-layered fencing along the Mexican border Wednesday. Prospects for legislation clearing Congress were clouded by a withering attack against President Bush by a prominent House Republican.

"Regardless of what the president says, what he is proposing is amnesty," said Rep. James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., the lawmaker who would lead House negotiators in any attempt to draft a compromise immigration bill later this year.

Bush stood his ground. "The Republican Party needs to lead on the issue of immigration," he told an audience of GOP donors, "...America can be a lawful society and a welcoming society and we don't have to choose between the two."

The blast by Sensenbrenner,

chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, came on the day the White House dispatched top presidential aide Karl Rove to ease the concerns of rebellious House Republicans and GOP senators clashed on the Senate floor.

"This is not amnesty, so let's get the terms right," Sen. Chuck Hagel of Nebraska lectured fellow Republicans who condemned the bill. "Come on. Let's stop the nonsense."

"It sort of reminds me of the famous line, 'Methinks thou dost protest too much,'" responded Sen. David Vitter, R-La..

Rhetoric aside, the votes on the Senate floor gave fresh momentum to legislation that closely follows Bush's call for a broad bill. The measure includes steps to secure the borders, the citizenship-related provisions for illegal immigrants and a new guest worker programme for as many as 200,000 people a year. Senate passage appears likely next week.

No security guarantees for Iran, says US

AFP, Washington

The United States will not give Iran security guarantees in exchange for forfeiting its nuclear programme, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Wednesday.

"That's not something from the United States that's on the table," McCormack told reporters when asked about European willingness to present Iran with incentives tied to security.

On Monday, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said in Brussels that the European Union was preparing a "bold package, that will contain issues relating to nuclear, economic matters, and maybe, if necessary, security matters".

But McCormack said the US was not considering offering assurances over security.

"I'll let others speak for themselves," McCormack said. "But from the United States, that's not on the table."

He recalled President George W. Bush's oft-repeated position that no option is off the table, including the military option.

Earlier Wednesday Iran's headline

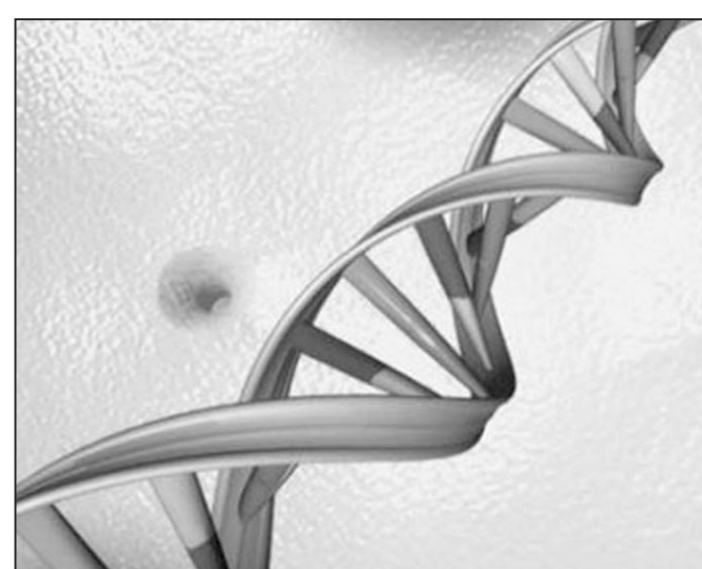
President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad ridiculed the EU plan during a rally in Arak, Iran, saying, "They say they want to give us incentives. They think they can take away our gold and give us some nuts and chocolate in exchange."

When asked about the comment, McCormack said: "I think that once this is presented to the Iranian regime, we will have at least a better idea of what their intent is."

McCormack also said that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany would meet on Tuesday to work out a common approach on Iran.

The discussions on Iran were initially scheduled for Friday but the State Department spokesman said the six countries needed time to prepare contingency plans depending on how Iran responds to the package of incentives and penalties.

He said diplomats from the major powers were trying to "talk through" the question of "how would the international community react to either Iran agreeing to this package of incentives or rejecting this package of incentives?"



Picture shows an illustration of DNA Double Helix of the human genome. Scientists of the National Human Genome Research Institute have reached a landmark point in one of the world's most important scientific projects by sequencing the last chromosome in the Human Genome, the so-called 'book of life'.

Last chromosome in human genome sequenced

REUTERS, London

Scientists have reached a landmark point in one of the world's most important scientific projects by sequencing the last chromosome in the Human Genome, the so-called "book of life."

Chromosome 1 contains nearly twice as many genes as the average chromosome and makes up eight percent of the human genetic code.

It is packed with 3,141 genes and linked to 350 illnesses including cancer, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

"This achievement effectively

closes the book on an important volume of the Human Genome Project," said Dr Simon Gregory who headed the sequencing project at the Sanger Institute in England.

The project was started in 1990 to identify the genes and DNA sequences that provide a blueprint for human beings.

Chromosome 1 is the biggest and contains, per chromosome, the greatest number of genes.

"Therefore it is the region of the genome to which the greatest number of diseases have been localised," added Gregory, from Duke University in the United States.