



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian youths light tyres and wave their national flag during clashes with Israeli soldiers at the border fence near Gaza City yesterday to protest against Israel's renovation of a synagogue in Jerusalem's Old City and plans to build new settlements.

New Intifada unlikely despite Jerusalem tensions

AFP, Ramallah

Tensions over Jerusalem sparked the worst riots in years but are unlikely to ignite a new Intifada, or uprising, as the Palestinian Authority appears determined to preserve calm.

The Islamist Hamas movement has repeatedly declared a new Intifada from its Gaza enclave and its exiled base in Damascus, but analysts and Palestinian officials in the West Bank expect their calls to go unheeded.

"An Intifada is not going to happen just because some leaders called for it from (hundreds of) kilometres (miles) away," a senior Palestinian official in the West Bank political capital of Ramallah said on condition of anonymity.

"They think an Intifada is a plate of hummus they can order whenever they want it, with spices on top."

The calls for a new uprising came amid the most widespread riots in years in annexed Arab east Jerusalem following Israeli announcements of new settlement

plans, as well as the reopening of a 17th century synagogue in the Old City several hundred meters (yards) from the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound.

As thousands took to the streets in demonstrations in Gaza, Hamas's exiled deputy politburo chief Mussa Abu Marzuk called for a new "Intifada" along the lines of massive popular uprisings in 1987 and 2000.

But the occupied West Bank remained largely quiet, with few turning out even for the peaceful demonstrations called for by various political factions.

The muted response was largely due to efforts by the Western-backed Palestinian Authority to prevent things from getting out of hand.

Hamas has had little visible presence in the West Bank since the Authority cracked down on its activities in the wake of the Islamist group's bloody takeover of Gaza in June 2007.

"Hamas and Israel want to return the region to a state of violence and chaos," said Adnan al-Damiri, a spokesman for

West Bank security forces loyal to president Mahmud Abbas, who ban all non-licensed demonstrations.

"Right-wing Israeli governments since 1996 have tried to provoke the Palestinians and drive them to violence, because this is the court where Israel prefers to play," he said in a statement distributed to police.

The lack of interest in a new Intifada is also linked to the bitter factional infighting between Abbas's secular Fatah movement and its rivals in Hamas, which has bred widespread apathy among Palestinians.

"Any Intifada requires popular leadership," a Hamas official in the West Bank said on condition of anonymity. "At the moment there is no unified Palestinian leadership to lead any Intifada, even in Jerusalem."

The Palestinians have repeatedly expressed outrage at Israel's expansion of settlements and perceived threats to holy sites in east Jerusalem, which Israel annexed in 1967 in a move not recognised by the international community.

Earth and Venus might be involved in a long-distance relationship

ANI, Washington

New calculations by scientists have suggested that Venus and Earth might literally be involved in a long-distance relationship, with our planet speculated to be tugging on the core of Venus and exerting control over its spin.

Whenever Venus and Earth arrive at the closest point in their orbits, Venus always presents the same face to us.

This could mean that Earth's gravity is tugging subtly on Venus, affecting its rotation rate.

That idea, raised decades ago, was disregarded when it turned out that Venus is spinning too fast to be in such a gravitational "resonance".

Beach jogger killed by plane likely never heard it

AP, Hilton Head Island

The kit-built single-engine plane had turned into a glider, almost silently trying to make an emergency landing along a stretch of beach.

Pharmaceutical salesman Robert Gary Jones, ear buds in, listening to his iPod while jogging neither saw nor heard it and was struck from behind Monday evening and killed instantly.

Iran ready for nuke fuel exchange inside country

No sign of China budging on sanctions

AFP, AP, Tehran/ Beijing

Iran has said it is ready for a one-shot nuclear fuel exchange on its own soil, edging closer to the conditions of a plan drawn up by the UN atomic watchdog last year as major powers mulled a new round of sanctions.

Iran's atomic chief Ali Akbar Salehi revealed the new offer in an interview published by hard-line daily Javan on Wednesday, signalling a major change in Tehran's longstanding position on the nuclear fuel plan first drafted last October.

Salehi said Iran is ready to deliver 1,200 kilogrammes (2,640 pounds) of low-enriched uranium (LEU) in one go in return for fuel for a Tehran medical research reactor, but the

exchange must be inside the country.

Salehi, who is also a vice president, said Iran had earlier proposed to deliver its LEU only gradually in batches of 400 kilogrammes (880 pounds).

"But this has no technical justification because those who want to produce the (20 percent enriched) fuel say that this amount has no economic justification," Salehi said.

"What we are saying now is that we are ready to deliver the total amount of fuel in one go, on condition that the exchange take place inside Iran and simultaneously."

"We are ready to deliver 1,200 kilos and to receive 120 kilos (264 pounds) of 20 percent enriched uranium."

Attackers kill 12 in latest Nigeria fighting

AP, Lagos

Attackers killed 12 people in a small Christian village in central Nigeria on Wednesday, and witnesses said some of the victims' tongues had been cut out in a region where religious fighting already has killed hundreds this year.

Raiders entered the village of Bye around 2 am, setting fire to homes and driving frightened residents into waiting attackers' machete blades, said Mark Lipdo, leader of a regional Christian nonprofit group. Ten adults and two children were slain, he said.

Tough fight in Iraq polls

Maliki and rival Allawi projected to tie on seat count

AFP, Baghdad

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and his main rival Iyad Allawi were projected yesterday to win the same number of seats in Iraq's parliament in a dramatic tightening of the country's election race.

Maliki's State of Law Alliance and Allawi's Iraqiya bloc were both on pace to garner 87 seats in Iraq's Council of Representatives, with less than 9,000 votes separating the two nationwide, according to an AFP projection based on 79 percent of ballots cast.

But votes cast outside Iraq and during special voting for the security forces, the sick and prisoners have not yet been tabulated by Iraq's

election commission, and could yet dramatically affect the outcome.

The election, the second since Saddam Hussein was ousted in the US-led invasion of 2003, comes less than six months before the United States is set to withdraw all of its combat troops from Iraq.

State of Law leads in Baghdad, Iraq's largest province and accounting for more than twice as many parliamentary seats as any other, as well as in the oil-rich southern province of Basra, the third biggest in the country.

It is also ahead in five other mostly Shia southern provinces, but failed to finish in the top three in all but one of Iraq's Sunni-majority provinces.



PHOTO: AFP

An Olive Ridley turtle digs in the sand to lay its eggs on Rushikulya beach, about 140km south west of Bhubaneswar yesterday. Thousands of Olive Ridley sea turtles started to come ashore over the last two days from the Bay of Bengal to lay their eggs on the beach at Rushikulya, one of the three mass nesting sites in the Indian coastal state of Orissa.

Laden will never face US trial, be caught alive

Says Attorney General

AFP, Washington

al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden will never face trial in the United States because he will not be captured alive, Attorney General Eric Holder told lawmakers on Tuesday.

During a heated exchange with Republican congressmen, Holder predicted that "we will be reading Miranda rights to the corpse of Osama bin Laden" rather than to the US public enemy number one in captivity.

"Let's deal with reality," the attorney general added. Bin

Laden "will never appear in an American courtroom."

Holder reacted angrily to Republican critics who say the attorney general's proposal to try terror suspects in US federal civilian courts would put Americans at risk.

"They have the same rights that a Charles Manson would have, any other kind of mass murderer," he told a House Appropriations subcommittee hearing.

"The notion that a defendant in an Article III (civilian) court is somehow being treated in an inappropriate,



PHOTO: AFP

Two Americans paddle in a row boat on a street filled with floodwaters from the Passaic River on Tuesday in Little Falls, New Jersey. Many residents who had to evacuate their homes due to the floodwaters, fear that they will not be able to return until the weekend.




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