INTERNÂTIONAL

Israel, Palestinians narrowing security differences: Powell

Hamas rejects Sharon's 'threats'

Israel and the Palestinians are narrowing their differences over an Israeli army pullout from some occupied areas but have yet to reach an accord, US Secretary of State Colin Powell said here Friday.

Powell made his remarks after talks with Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom at the start of a round of meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials in efforts to boost the flagging peace process.

Security officials from both sides met Thursday night without reaching an accord on a pullout of Israeli troops from parts of the Gaza Strip and the transfer of policing authority to the Palestinians

But Powell said: "Although we do not yet have a final answer as to how we will manage the Gaza turnover of security, the conversations have been serious.

"The issues, I think, are being reduced in number and the differences are being narrowed," he told reporters before heading off for a

meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul

Powell arrived in Jerusalem amid so-far unsuccessful efforts to bring Islamic militants on board a ceasefire deal. But he and Shalom agreed a truce was not enough and that groups such as Hamas must be stripped of their armed capacity.

"A ceasefire is a ticking bomb. Ceasefire for (the) long-term is not acceptable," said Shalom, adding that a dismantling of the militants' armed wing was "a fundamental condition for any future progress".

Powell, seeking to advance mplementation of a US-backed "roadmap" for peace approved by both sides at a June 4 summit in Aqaba, Jordan, said they had to seize the "window that has been provided ... to keep moving for-

They must also "blast through those who would try to stop it (the roadmap process), those who would keep us from our goal of peace through acts of violence and

Citing Israeli moves to free Palestinian prisoners and to start dismantling some Jewish settlement outposts in the occupied territories, Powell praised the Israelis for "their energy and their efforts to meet those commitments" they made at Aqaba.

Powell said that when he meets later in the day with Palestinian prime minister Mahmud Abbas, he would stress the need to go beyond a truce with the militants and focus on ways to "end their potential for violence"

Meanwhile, the radical movement Hamas rejected calls from Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and US Secretary of State Colin Powell on Friday for the disarming of Palestinian militants

"The threats from Sharon and Secretary of State Colin Powell show that Israel and the United States want to limit the Palestinian aovernment's role to ensuring the Zionist entity's security," Hamas official Ismail Haniye told AFP.

The official stressed "the legiti-

mate right of the Palestinians to resist" Israeli occupation.

"That's what the Palestinian factions have explained to the Palestinian prime minister" Mahmud Abbas in talks held in Gaza City on Wednesday and Thursday, he said.

Sharon, at a joint press conference with Powell after talks in Jerusalem, said he expected the Palestinian government to make "genuine" efforts to disarm and dismantle Islamic militant groups if the peace process is to move for-

"So long as there is terror, there

will be no political process," he said. The prime minister called on his Palestinian counterpart to wage a "genuine" struggle against the radical groups to disarm, punish them and dismantle their infrastruc-

For his part, Powell called on Abbas to implement "very quickly" reforms of the Palestinian security

but Israel says Palestinian groups

would only use any temporary truce

The EU document urged Israel to

'take action to restore trust and

abstain from any punitive mea-

sures, including extra-judicial

killings, and to act in accordance

Israeli forces recently carried out a

series of attacks that killed some

Hamas officials. Seven helicopter

strikes in the Gaza Strip since June 10

have left 27 dead, including six women

two children, and other civilians

to regroup and rearm.

with international law."



A local train makes its way along flooded rail tracks as it enters the Mumbai central railway station on Friday. The city has seen monsoon rains for the last four days, which disrupted movements of public transports.

'More time needed to judge Iraqi WMD'

REUTERS, Washington

US intelligence analysts who testified at a closed Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on Thursday stood by their basic prewar assessment that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, two attendees said.

A controversy has erupted over whether the Bush administration exaggerated the threat from Iraq's alleged biological, chemical and nuclear weapons programs in making a case for war against Baghdad. No such weapons have been found

Sen. Evan Bayh, an Indiana Democrat, said there was "nothing that changes the bottom line" o prewar assessments that Iraq had

weapons of mass destruction and the capacity to create "voluminous quantities" of such weapons.

He and other Democrats who attended the hearing said either they could not make judgments about whether the Republican administration hyped the intelligence or they did not believe outright deceit had occurred.

Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Pat Roberts, a Kansas Republican, said no intelligence analysts have told the panel the administration pressured them to make a stronger case on the weapons assessment than was warranted.

EU calls on Hamas to declare ceasefire

AFP, Porto Carras

The European Union called Friday on the militant Palestinian group Hamas to declare a ceasefire and urged Middle East countries to condemn terrorism, in draft conclusions from the EU summit.

"The Union calls on Hamas and other groups to declare immediately a ceasefire and to halt all terrorist activity," said the text, which is to be presented to EU leaders at their meeting in a Greek beach resort later Friday. "It is essential that all concerned

in particular the countries of the region, condemn terrorism and assist in efforts to eradicate it," it

The militant Islamic group

pleads guilty to al-Qaeda support Hamas, behind scores of anti-Israeli attacks, said Thursday it was mulling over proposals for a ceasefire,

REUTERS, Washington

An Ohio truck driver, who met Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and plotted to destroy the Brooklyn Bridge, has pleaded guilty to providing support to the al-Qaeda network, US officials said on Thursday.

US truck driver

lyman Faris, a truck driver based in Columbus who entered the United States in 1994 and became a US citizen five years later, admitted as part of the plea deal that he gave al-Qaeda information about possible US targets for attack, they said.

N Korea vows retaliation if censured by UN

North Korea vowed on Friday to take "strong emergency measures" to retaliate if the United States succeeds in taking Pyongyang's nuclear programs to the United Nations Security Council.

The North Korean threat came as South Korea reiterated its reluctance to put the issue before the Council at this time despite US moves on Thursday for a statement condemning Pyongyang for reviving its nuclear weapons program.

A draft statement circulated by Washington would call on Pyongyang "to immediately and

weapons program in a verifiable and rreversible manner" and fully comply with international nuclear safeguard requirements, according to a copy of the text obtained by Reuters.

"In the event the United States takes the nuclear issue to the United Nations, we will respond with powerful emergency measures." said the communist state's ruling party news-

The Rodong Sinmun did not specify how it would respond if the nuclear crisis is taken up by the Council -- a US goal it described as "an attempt to legitimize an international pressure campaign against us

and provoke a second Korean War." South Korean Foreign Minister Yoon Young-kwan told reporters in the Cambodian capital on Friday, that Seoul wanted more time to allow a North Korean response to proposals for multilateral talks on the eight

"With a proposal made for follow-up talks to the Beijing meeting, our government's stance is that it is important to properly choose the timing" for a UN Security Council debate, Yoon was quoted as telling South Korean domes-

month-old nuclear crisis.

Afghan women make their way back home after collecting grass for their cows on the outskirts of Islamabad on Friday during the World Refugee Day. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) commemorated World Refugee Day with the theme "Refugee Youth: Building the Future", in order to highlight the plight of one of the most vulnerable segments of refugee populations world-wide. Pakistan has sheltered some 3.5 million Afghans and about 1.5 million of these returned to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime

Russia won't stop nuke cooperation with Iran

AFP, Moscow

Russia has brushed off increasingly loud US demands to halt its nuclear cooperation with Iran, remaining the Islamic regime develop what many fear is a nuclear weapons program.

US and European demands that Iran come entirely clean on its nuclear program have fallen on deaf ears, prompting the West to turn its criticism on Russia's construction of Iran's first nuclear power plant at Bushehr. Yet they have made little head-

way there too. Russia insists it will complete the

Bushehr plant, supporting Iran's claim that it is part of a plan to develop nuclear energy for peaceful

Yet many in the West wonder why oil-rich Iran -- which produces around 3.6 million barrels of crude per day needs to turn to nuclear energy.

Faced with increased criticism, Moscow has stepped up its calls that Tehran sign an additional Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) protocol allowing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect all suspect sites, not just those

IAEA asks Iran to accept stricter nuke inspections

The UN's nuclear watchdog called Thursday for Iran to unconditionally allow stricter inspections of its nuclear facilities, a day after US President George W. Bush urged the world to warn Tehran against developing nuclear weapons. But senior Iranian officials imme-

diately rejected the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) call for wider inspections, prompted by a report to the IAEA's 35-nation Board of Governors which said Iran had failed to respect international inspection agreements. IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei

said the agency had reached a "broad sense" at the board meeting that opened Monday in Vienna "that made it clear that Iran should accept (a new protocol for inspections) without any conditions". A statement from the Kuwaiti

chairman of the board urged Iran to do this so the IAEA "could provide credible assurances regarding the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities, particularly the absence of undeclared material and activi-

Iran has moved sharply into the spotlight since the end of the Iraq war in March, with Bush, still flush from his victory in toppling Iragi pressure on the Islamic Republic.

President Bush welcomed the UN agency's appeal Thursday, despite the fact that the IAEA motion was viewed as weak by Washington, which sought a clea condemnation of Iran's nuclear

"It's international reinforcement of the president's message yesterday that the world, broadly speaking, joins together in fighting proliferation and making certain that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said. On Wednesday Bush said the world must warn Tehran, which he has branded part of an "axis of evil" along with North Korea and Iraq, that it "will not tolerate" the Islamic regime developing atomic weapons.

The US president has also voiced strong support for protestors in Iran who have taken to the streets for nine nights running calling for a change of regime.

US ambassador to the IAEA Kenneth Brill said he was "verv satisfied" with what was "an important message from the board that it supports the US position of concern about Iran's nuclear program and a call for unqualified cooperation by Iran to help the IAEA get to the

"We expect to hear back from the IAEA soon in that regard," he said, referring to a report to be presented in September based on continuing

ElBaradei said however that "the jury is still out" on Iran.

A senior Western diplomat said the current report and Thursday's statement "sets things up for the next report," which could lead to tougher measures if Iran has failed to provide information or pushes ahead with a pilot program on uranium enrichment the IAEA warned against.

Russia welcomed the IAEA decision to refrain from slapping tough sanctions on Iran.

Deputy Foreign Minister Yury Fedotov was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency in Moscow that Russia was "satisfied" the IAEA had adopted a "balanced declaration" which noted that Iran was taking steps to redress the problems raised by the IAEA report.

Russia has brushed off demands so halt its nuclear cooperation with Iran and is helping the country build its first nuclear plant at Bushehr.

EU to boost crackdown on illegal immigrants

AFP, Porto Carras, Greece

EU leaders agreed Friday to boost cooperation to crack down on illegal immigration, although they failed to back a controversial British plan on asylum seekers, according to draft

conclusions from their summit here. British Prime Minister Tony Blair welcomed the broader accord, saying it would help weed out bogus asvlum claims.

The accord "give us a greater opportunity to take the action we need, not just in our own countries but also in the European Union, to try and make sure that we weed out those asylum claims that are not genuine claims," he said.

The agreement reached would also allow EU states to "return people to their countries of origin, should their claims fail, in an easier

system for handling refugee claim-The EU leaders gathered in the ants is too easily abused and too secluded Greek resort of Porto

Carras agreed notably to "reinforce existing cooperation" in the area of returning illegal immigrants to their countries of origin. They also reiterated their aim of

setting up a Europe-wide coordinated asylum system to process claims rapidly and efficiently, according to a draft final declaration. But they failed to give support to

a controversial British plan to set up protection zones" in conflict areas to stem the flow of asylum seekers into Europe The draft conclusions invited the

EU Commission to look at ways to help boost security in the world's hot It noted that some countries

would work with the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) to better protect refugees in their region of origin, but gave no support for that action. London argues that the current

It wants the protection zones to be set up to ensure a "firm and fair procedure" that encourages genuine asylum seekers to come for-

British officials had expressed confidence that their plan would be well received by leaders here, but after talks with other EU members they were forced to back down. Now it's a question for Britain to

do it bilaterally but it's not the case that they can do it with assistance, financing or support by the EU as such," said Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh.

Britain is keen to set up at least a pilot scheme for the plans, which have been criticized by human rights campaigners as "unlawful and unworkable.

Prince William turns 21

AFP, London

William, the elder son of Prince celebrates his 21st birthday on Saturday, seems to prefer an anonymous, ordinary life to the role of pretender to the throne that his family want to see him

Handsome and photogenic, bearing a striking resemblance to his mother, the prince appears to offer the best chance of survival to a monarchy lacking in glamour and rocked by scandals for 15 years. But he seems reluctant to take on a destiny made up of

privilege and duty. William is second in line to the throne after his father, and to celebrate his coming of age, a series of stamps bearing his picture went on sale this week

Nearly 300 guests will join him on Saturday for a costume ball with the theme "Out of Africa" at Windsor Castle, one of Queen Elizabeth II's residences west of



Prince William blows out the candles on a birthday cake held by an unidentified girl on Thursday during a visit to the Anglesey Food Fair in north Wales. The Prince turns 21 today. William and his father, Prince Charles, are in Wales for the day, and are later visiting Newport Action for Single Homeless in South