# EU trio agree on military planning wing

Britain, France and Germany have agreed plans to give the European Union its own facility for military planning independent of NATO, officials

"We have defined the basis for a proposal with our British and German friends and we will submit it to the conference tonight," French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin told a news conference as the EU held talks on its first constitution.

"This is a key issue. We can't have a Europe without defence," de Villepin separately told France-Info radio from

A British Foreign Office spokesman said: "I can confirm we have a set of

"We will be discussing it with our key allies and partners," he said on condition of anonymity, indicating further discussions with the rest of the EU and

"Any EU operations planning capability has to be compatible with NATO," the official added.

Agreement by the EU's "big three" would significantly ease the path to finalising the constitution's text on the bloc's nascent common defence policy.

Senior officials from the trio met in Berlin on Wednesday to discuss the military planning office ahead of the two-day Naples meeting, including how it would cooperate with NATO, the Financial Times said.

The constitution proposes three new areas for the EU to build its military policy -- through "structured cooperation", "mutual defence" and "autonomy" for planning operations separate

But Britain has sought to ease US concerns about the plans by saying an EU planning arm will never rival NATO, sting the alliance forms the bedrock



An unidentified relative of 35-year-old Palestinian Said Abu Safra mourns during his funeral in Beit Lahia Friday. Abu Safra was shot dead by Israeli soldiers in the northern Gaza Strip on Thursday as he tried to prevent a mentally-deranged person from approaching a Jewish settlement,

# Arafat urges Western leaders to relaunch peace process

#### Israel fails to comply with UNGA demand to halt fencing: Annan

INTERNATIONAL

Palestinian president Yasser Arafat has launched a series of appeals to Western leaders to relaunch the stalled Middle East peace process, one of his aides said.

In the written messages, sent to British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac among others, Arafat appeals for Western leaders "to act to relaunch the peace process" that has been stalled for three vears, his adviser Nabil Abu Rudeina told AFP late on Friday

Arafat also sent messages to German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, as well as the leaders of Spain, Canada, Ireland, Malaysia, and South Africa.

In the messages Arafat also told the leaders about "developments in the Palestinian territories, continuing Israeli aggression and the refusal of the Israeli government to implement the

roadmap" for peace backed by the

The appeals follow continued pressure by the United States to shun Arafat to encourage the rise of a nev Palestinian leader.

They come ahead of the planned signing Monday in Geneva of an alternative Middle East peace plan drafted by opposition Israeli politicians and prominent Palestinians.

The "Geneva Initiative", which includes detailed proposals to resolve some of the thorniest issues, has been met with outright opposition from the Israeli government and lukewarm support from the Palestinian leader-

Reuters adds: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan reported on Friday that Israel has failed to comply with a General Assembly demand that it halt construction of a barrier cutting deep into Palestinian West Banklands.

The official finding lays the groundwork for the Palestinians to return to the 191-nation assembly next week to seek further action against Israel.

 $\hbox{$^{\tt "I}$ have concluded that Israel is not in}\\$ compliance with the assembly's demand that it 'stop and reverse the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,"' said the report, requested by the assembly in an Oct. 21

Annan acknowledged Israel's "right and duty to protect its people against

But doing so by building what Israel calls a "security fence" that veers as much as 13 miles from its 1967 border with the West Bank would violate international law and increase Palestinian suffering, he said.

It also "could damage the longer term prospects for peace by making the creation of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian state more

The General Assembly voted 144-4 with 12 abstentions last month to adopt a resolution demanding that Israel halt construction of the barrier. Only the United States, Israel, the Marshall Islands and Micronesia voted "no."

Palestinian envoy Nasser al-Kidwa said he would seek an emergency General Assembly meeting next week to take up a second resolution asking the International Court of Justice to issue an advisory opinion on whether the barrier

The court, a branch of the United Nations based in the Netherlands. judges disputes between countries.

Annan's report "vindicated everything we have said on this matter," al-

Kidwa told Reuters. But Israeli Deputy Ambassador Arve Mekel said his government "strongly disputes the report's find-

#### Iran pledges cooperation with IAEA

Iran will provide the UN's atomic watchdog with all the required information by February and soon sign an additional protocol to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the country's top nuclear official said yester-

However, the Islamic republic still refuses to indefinitely suspend its uranium enrichment activities, said Iran's Supreme National Security Council handles the country's nuclear

"The government must give its authorization to its representative (to the IAEA) to sign (the protocol). It won't be very long," Rowhani told a

"The director general (of the IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei) must present his new report in February ... we will put every means at the agency's disposal so it can verify the information which we have provided," he said.

#### 'India shifting its policy on Myanmar junta'

THE NATION/ ANN, Bangkok

Support for Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in India, where she studied in 1960s and has wide connections, is declining as New Delhi shifts its policy to engage the ruling military junta and gain strategic advantages against China, an expert said.

"Aung San Suu Kyi's network in India is marginal," said Renaud Egreteau, a French researcher at the Centre de Sciences Humaines of New

"There remains sympathy among friends who have known her since she was there in the 1960s, but not among the decision makers who run the current government."

India dropped its idealistic stance of promoting democracy in Burma since the implementation of its "Look East" policy in early 1990s, Egreteau told a conference at Alliance Francaise in Bangkok on Wednesday.

## Anti-terror raids target Islamists in Europe

**REUTERS,** Milan/Berlin

Police hunting Islamic militants across Europe capped a dramatic series of antiterror raids in three countries with the arrest of a suspected Algerian extremist in the German port of Hamburg on

Abderrazak Mahdjoub, 29, was held at the request of Italian authorities investigating an alleged network involved in recruiting Islamists to carry out suicide attacks in Iraq. A copy of an arrest warrant, obtained

by Reuters, showed that one of the recruits was suspected of complicity in an October rocket attack on a Baghdad hotel where US Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz was staying.

Separately, British police were questioning a suspected would-be suicide bomber arrested in southwest England on Thursday. The government

may have links with al-Oaeda.

The European police operations coincided with the charging of three Kenyans in connection with a previously undisclosed plot to blow up the US embassy in Nairobi -- the same mission that was destroyed by suspected al-Qaeda bombers in 1998.

While described as breakthroughs, the developments highlighted the fact that Islamic radicals and al-Qaeda sympathisers, suspected of carrying out deadly suicide attacks in Saudi Arabia and Turkey this month, apparently remain active across a wide variety of

In the latest alert, the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo said on Friday it had stepped up security in response to a "specific threat" against international organisations in the UN-

Two years into the US-led war or terror, some European security officials are expressing concern that Islamic militants may be drawing new strength from Muslim anger over the US-led war

German foreign intelligence chief August Hanning last week described Iraq as a potential "crystallizing point" for the radical Islamist cause and said small numbers of activists had been heading there from several European countries with the aim of fighting the  $\ensuremath{\mathsf{US}}$ 

Germany has been especially vigilant for signs of extremism in its 3.2 million-strong Muslim population since the September 11 attacks on the United States. Three of the 19 suicide hijackers had lived and studied for years in

#### Paparazzis acquitted of Diana car crash case

Three photographers who took pictures of Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed on the day they died were acquitted on Friday of invading their privacy.

The three men, whose photographs were confiscated and not published, were among a swarm of photographers who either pursued the car carrying Diana and her boyfriend across Paris on 31 August 1997 or took photos after it crashed into the pillar of a traffic

Jacques Langevin, with Sygma/Corbis at the time, Christian Martinez of the Angeli agency, and free-lancer Fabrice Chassery had risked a maximum of one year in prison and \$53,000 fines. The prosecutor had asked for suspended prison sentences.

But the Paris court ruled that a crashed vehicle on a public highway is not a private area. The court also said Diana and Dodi Fayed knew they would be photographed when leaving Paris' Ritz Hotel by car.

#### Japan may send ground troops to Iraq in Feb

More than 500 Japanese non-combat ground troops could be sent to southern Iraq in February and March according to a draft plan for their dispatch, Kyodo news agency said vesterday.

Japan, one of the closest United States allies in Asia, has yet to decide when to send troops to Iraq, with voters growing increasingly nervous about the dangers involved.

Tokyo inched closer to such a dispatch on Friday, though, when Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba said a recent fact-finding mission had reported that the southern part of the country was relatively stable.

According to a draft plan quoted by Kyodo, an advance unit of 10 members of Japan's air Self-Defence Forces would be sent to Kuwait and Iraq by the end of December, followed by C-130 cargo planes in mid-January. The number of air personnel would eventually total 150, the plan said.



# transition plan

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's US-installed interim leadership held key talks vesterday demands from the powerful Shiite religious hierarchy for immediate elections that have undermined the democratic credentials of the US-led coalition and left its plans for an accelerated transfer of power in

The Governing Council has been deeply divided by top Shiite Muslim cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani's rejection of the arcane system of indirect selection by caucus it announced two weeks ago to put a caretaker government in place by June next year. "We're going to discuss Ayatollah Sistani's proposal and council president Jalal Talabani will inform him of the results of our discussions," council member Rajaa Khuzai, a Shiite secularist, told AFP ahead of the Saturday morning meeting.

The US-led coalition too has been caught on the hop by opposition from among Iraq's majority community and admitted it considers the complaint significant enough for a major overhaul of the November 15 agreement signed with Talabani to be under consider-

On the record, US officials said they were discussing the demands of the Shiite religious leadership with the interim leadership as part of what they described as a "healthy" debate. But off the record, a senior official told

the Washington Post that the prior polls, which the coalition has so far resisted. were now a "possibility" and appeared to give Sistani a veto over their newly unveiled plans.

"If he says no to the caucuses, then we have to figure out a way to get elections done," the official was quoted as saying by the Post. "We're scrambling to find a solution.

The Shiite cleric's demand hit at the heart of the coalition's plans for a rapid transfer of sovereignty by highlighting the gap between its promises of post-Saddam democracy and its new plans to hand power to a government designated by a transitional assembly chosen by caucuses of selected notables

US President George W. Bush met with four members of the Governing Council during his lightning stopover in Baghdad Thursday evening and briefly discussed the handover.

Challenged about the demands of Shiite religious leaders for immediate elections, Bush acknowledged that their grievances constituted an "overarching flaw" in the new transition blueprint which he had discussed with his Iraqi

But he added that he still thought the game plan they've got now in place is a good plan" and was one that he himself had supported.

"To get where they need to be is going to require debate and discussion and that's healthy," he told journalists on Air Force One. "We've got to be realistic and patient about how they proceed.

Bush's comments were echoed by National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice, who accompanied him on his

## **Campaigning for** state polls ends in India

AFP, New Delhi

Strident campaigning by thousands of  $candidates\,contesting\,India's\,provincial$ elections ended Saturday, setting the stage for the crucial voting on Monday in four key states, officials said.

Political parties and candidates pulled back from electioneering in the states of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi city at 5:00 pm (1130 GMT), in line with orders of India's autonomous Election

Commission. India's electoral code allows campaigning up to 48 hours before voting, and bans politicians or their parties from participating in radio or television

chat shows after the deadline "From now on they can meet voters only in a one-to-one contact," mmission official said as India's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) recalled its top leaders

resolve the vexed problem

from the campaign trail. Indian main opposition Congress party also wound up its street rallies in line with the deadline

Congress was among the liveliest in India's electoral history with the two bitter foes pulling out all stops to discredit each other ahead of Monday's

The polls are seen as a litmus test for the popularity of the BJP ahead of neral elections in 2004.

Some 94 million voters are eligible to choose from 5,348 candidates in the fray across the four states

#### Japan fails to launch spy satellites

President of the European Commission Romano Prodi (R) and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (L) arrive

for an official meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi yesterday. The European Union welcomed the recent

ceasefire between India and Pakistan in disputed Kashmir and expressed hope the move would lead to dialogue to

AFP, Tokyo

Japan aborted the launch of a second pair of spy satellites to monitor North Korea shortly after take-off yesterday in a bitter blow to its efforts to enhance snace and security programmes.

"Shortly after the launch, we sent a destroy order to the rocket as we concluded that the mission cannot fulfil the purpose," said Shoko Yamamoto, a spokesman for the satellite launch project.

Television footage showed a apanese H-2A rocket with the two spy satellites lifting off smoothly from a launch site on the southern island of Tanegashima some 1,000 km southwest of Tokyo at 1:33 pm (0433 GMT). But the governmental Japan

Aerospace Exploration Agency's Tanegashima Space Center decided to destroy the rocket and the satellites about 10 minutes later due to "some troubles in the rocket," public broadcasting network NHK said.

## Irish peace plan put on hold as hardliners gain in election

**REUTERS,** Belfast

British and Irish ministers begin the arduous search for a way to save the Northern Ireland peace process yesterday, after election triumphs for hard $liners\, shattered\, hopes\, of\, a\, speedy\, return$ to power-sharing.

Britain's chief minister in the province, Paul Murphy, was to launch a series of meetings with local politicians following a poll which sharpened divisions between unionists from the Protestant majority, who favor continued British rule, and Catholics who want to join the south in a united Ireland.

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) led by Protestant cleric Ian Paisley, a diehard opponent of the province's five-year-old peace accord, emerged as the largest in the mothballed legislature when vote-count was completed on Friday. The Irish Republican Army's (IRA's)

political ally Sinn Fein -- whose leaders Paisley brands "murderers and reprobates" and refuses to speak to -- was the bigwinner among Catholic voters.

Northern Ireland's power-sharing assembly, the centerpiece of the 1998 Good Friday peace agreement, has been suspended since October last year when a shaky Protestant/Catholic coalition broke down over allegations of IRA

London and Dublin had hoped Wednesday's twice-delayed election would provide impetus for rival politicians to reach a deal on restoring the assembly and so safeguard the 1998 deal, which aimed to end three decades



Opposition activists of the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez gather to sign to call a referendum to revoke Chavez term in Caracas on Friday. To call the referendum is needed the signatures of a 20 percent of the voters of a register of about 20 million, it means that the opposition has to pick up approximately 2.5 million signatures.