

ME truce declaration put off: Fatah

Israel to pull out troops from Gaza today

REUTERS, AP, AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian militants have put off declaring a cease-fire with Israel because of factional disputes, officials in the main Fatah faction said Sunday.

"The hudna (truce) won't be declared today (as expected) due to differences on the wording of the agreement," Ahmed Ghneim, a senior Fatah official involved in talks between militant factions that went on all night, told Reuters.

Ghneim said the cease-fire, critical to a separate military disengagement deal under which Israel would pull back forces from the occupied Gaza Strip, could still be declared Monday or Tuesday.

Fatah sources said the main problems were the refusal of a

radical leftist faction to stop fighting and a demand by Islamist radicals that references to a US-backed peace plan be deleted because they oppose peacemaking in principle.

AP adds: A joint truce declaration by Palestinian militias, initially expected Sunday, has been delayed, a Palestinian Cabinet minister said.

In the statement, armed groups would declare a three-month suspension of attacks on Israelis.

The minister, Yasser Abed Rabbo, said he expected the announcement to be made Monday, with statements issued simultaneously from Cairo, the West Bank town of Ramallah and from Gaza City.

However, members of Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction expressed

last-minute objections to the declaration, and it was possible there would be further delays. The wrangling is over the wording of the introduction to the actual truce announcement.

AFP adds: Israeli troops will withdraw from reoccupied areas in the northern Gaza Strip on Monday, a senior Palestinian security official said Sunday after a meeting with Israeli officials.

"The Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, namely from Beit Hanun, Beit Lahia and from the buffer zones (with Israel), will start tomorrow morning," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Top Palestinian and Israeli security officials went into what was expected to be a final round of talks Sunday before the announcement

of a deal for a phased handover of policing duties in designated areas, Palestinian security sources said.

The meeting is expected to yield an agreement on an army withdrawal from reoccupied areas in the northern Gaza Strip and from the southern West Bank city of Bethlehem.

In exchange, the Palestinian security services will have to prevent attacks by militant groups against Israel from these areas.

The Palestinian delegation was led by Gaza police chief Abdelrazeq al-Majeida but Israeli sources did not specify who was heading the Israeli delegation in the talks at the Erez crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip.



PHOTO: AFP

US national security adviser Condoleezza Rice (C) shakes hands with Palestinian Cabinet Affairs Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo as Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath (R) and Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas (2nd L) look on prior to their talks in the West Bank town of Jericho on Saturday. Rice launched a crucial visit aimed at pushing along an internationally-backed Middle East peace initiative. Man on left is unidentified.



PHOTO: AFP

Unidentified Indian woman and child leave their home as floodwaters rise in Samarajan some 460km north of Guwahati on Saturday. Approximately 50,000 people were displaced overnight in a second wave of floods triggered by heavy rains in the northeastern Indian state of Assam.

N Korea may test nukes by Dec: US analyst

AFP, Tokyo

North Korea has enough plutonium to make six to 10 nuclear weapons and could test such a weapon by the end of the year, a former US negotiator with the Stalinist state said in an interview published Sunday.

"To the best of my knowledge, based on very well-informed Washington sources, North Korea's nuclear program is moving ahead very quickly," Kenneth Quinones was quoted as saying by the Daily Yomiuri.

"Basically, this means North Korea's reprocessing (of plutonium from spent nuclear fuel) is almost finished, or has finished. This means North Korea now has enough plutonium to make six to 10 nuclear weapons," he said.

"If North Korea wants to use their nuclear weapon as negotiating leverage, they must test it," said Quinones, who is now the Korean affairs director at the Washington-based private think-tank, International Center.

"The more I talked to my friends, the more I realized that it is possible

for North Korea to have a nuclear weapon by December. It is possible they'll have a test by December. There is nothing to stop North Korea from doing this."

He said it took about six months to reprocess plutonium from spent nuclear fuel and then about six months to make a nuclear bomb, according to the daily.

As a US state department official, Quinones was involved in US talks with North Korea that led to a 1994 agreement that froze its nuclear program in exchange for light-water reactors for power generation and heavy fuel aid.

Pyeongyang has however declared the agreement void amid a dispute with Washington about its nuclear ambitions.

The dispute arose last October when the United States said North Korea had admitted to running a nuclear weapons program based on highly enriched uranium. Washington then cut off fuel aid to the energy-starved regime.

North Korea later unsealed

8,000 spent nuclear fuel rods from an old graphite-moderate reactor, which produces weapons-grade plutonium as a by-product.

On June 9 communist North Korea declared publicly for the first time in an official media dispatch that it was seeking nuclear weapons.

Quinones, who visited North Korea 13 times from 1992 to 1997, said that while North Korea was believed to have the technology and material to produce nuclear weapons from plutonium, the country would possibly only be able to obtain enough highly enriched uranium to make a nuclear weapon in two to three years.

He added though that North Korea did not have "sophisticated" technology to produce nuclear warheads to be carried by its ballistic missiles.

Reports in Japan have said North Korea might have acquired technology to reduce the size of nuclear weapons so they can be mounted on ballistic missiles.

US seeks alliance to block arms exports by N Korea, Iran

AFP, Tokyo

The United States is seeking an international alliance to block exports of weapons of mass destruction and missiles by North Korea and Iran, it was reported here Sunday.

The report by Asahi Shimbun follows allegations that the United States may scuttle an international project to build light-water reactors in North Korea, a deal contingent on the Stalinist state's adherence to a pact freezing its nuclear arms programme.

North Korea publicly declared this month it was seeking nuclear weapons.

A senior US administration official said Washington would help establish a "voluntary alliance" of countries that would boost inspections of ships and aircraft against the hardware shipments, the Japanese daily said.

Leaders of the 11-country bloc are the United States, Japan and Australia, which met in Madrid on

June 12 to plot strategies to thwart the spread of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons and missile components, the influential daily quoted an unidentified official as saying.

Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain have confirmed they would make best use of existing laws to intercept such exports, the official said.

The countries were to meet July 9-10 in Australia to plan better cooperation in tracking the shipments.

China and Russia, both with close links to North Korea, were to be consulted by the United States in an effort to pursue "stronger action," based on a UN resolution, to halt weapons exports, the official said.

In December, the Spanish navy stopped and searched a suspected North Korean freighter in the Mediterranean found to be carrying 15 North Korean Scud missiles to Yemen, but US forces had no legal right to seize the cargo as the ship was intercepted in international waters.

Iraqi soldiers reach pay deal with British troops after standoff

AFP, Basra

Hundreds of Iraqi ex-soldiers mounted an angry protest at British headquarters in the southern city of Basra Sunday to demand back wages, later dispersing after striking a deal, military sources said.

The soldiers had placed barbed wire and large rocks in front of the main entrance to the British headquarters in Saddam Hussein's old Al-Barazhiya palace, to blockade the compound, an AFP correspondent saw.

"One of the representatives was brought into the palace and the issue was resolved," Lieutenant Commander Clive Woodman told AFP, adding that there had been "one or two instances of stone throwing and a small fire lit."

"There were around 200 people

outside the palace this morning, the same people as were down there yesterday, ex-Iraqi soldiers," he said, adding that there had been no injuries on either side and that the crowd had dispersed.

"The payment will take place Tuesday," he added.

The Iraqis had hurled stones, preventing two British ambulances from driving out of the former palace and prompting an armoured vehicle to take up position at the entrance, the correspondent said.

After threats of armed insurrection in Baghdad, the US-led coalition said last week that it would begin regular payments to members of the disbanded army in mid-July, backtracking on plans to give former soldiers a one-off payment.

'Niazi's arms safe with Indian army'

AFP, New Delhi

A gun that has come to symbolise the surrender of Pakistani forces to India in their 1971 war that apparently disappeared from the National Museum in New Delhi is safe at an Indian army training facility, reports said Sunday.

The Hindi news channel Aaj Tak, quoting unidentified army sources, said the weapon was at the Indian Military Academy, a premier institute at Dehra Dun in the northern state of Uttaranchal.

The pistol had been handed over in 1971 by Pakistani Lieutenant General A.K.A. Niazi to the then chief of the Indian army's eastern command, Lieutenant General J.S. Aurora.

Niazi surrendered the weapon along with 93,000 men at the end of the bloody war that resulted in Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan.

Outrage greeted news on Saturday that gun had gone missing from the National Museum.

No war if power balance maintained: Musharraf

IANs, Islamabad

There would be no war on the Indian sub-continent if the power balance in the region is maintained, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has said.

However, recent arms purchases by India could alter this balance, Musharraf told a gathering of Californian investors and lawmakers, Daily Times reported on Sunday from Los Angeles.

Musharraf also maintained that Kashmir remained the core dispute between India and Pakistan and in its resolution lay the key to peace in South Asia.

"Pakistan is not for war, we desire peace and harmony and want a composite dialogue for resolution of all outstanding disputes including Kashmir."

Referring to the arms deals India had recently negotiated, he cautioned that the balance

Annan appeals for peace force in Liberia

AP, Monrovia

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Saturday called for urgent deployment of an international force for Liberia, warning of a "humanitarian tragedy" in a war-ruined capital where fighting this week killed hundreds of trapped civilians.

West Africa promised a peace force of at least 5,000 for Liberia if warring sides halt fighting, and France suggested Saturday it was open to contributing troops - stepping in where the United States, Liberia's colonial-era founder, so far has declined to tread.

After a four-day battle between government and rebel forces for the Liberian capital, Annan urged the Security Council on Saturday to authorize sending a multinational force to Liberia to enforce a cease-fire that fell apart soon after it was signed June 17.

"There are reports that several hundred innocent civilians have been killed in fighting in and around Monrovia and of wanton destruction of property and widespread looting," Annan said in a letter to the council.

of power in conventional weapons should not be disturbed. "India has increased its defence budget by 15 per cent. It has a multi-billion dollar weapons acquisition programme with several countries including the US, Russia, Britain, France and Israel. While Pakistan is under sanctions, please do not disturb the conventional balance and I mean every word of it," he asserted.

On Kashmir, Musharraf said Pakistan would deal with India on the basis of sovereign equality.

"India may be a big country, but we are not a small country. Like any other country we will defend our sovereignty," Musharraf maintained.

Welcoming the recent peace overtures by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, he said Pakistan would not be found wanting on the way forward.

Vajpayee undergoes eye surgery

IANs, New Delhi

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was on Sunday successfully operated upon for an eye ailment at the capital's prestigious Army Research and Referral Hospital.

The Prime Minister was recuperating in the special post-operation room of the hospital, army officials said.

Porch collapses during party in Chicago: 12 killed

AP, Chicago

A third-floor porch on an apartment building collapsed during a party early Sunday, killing at least 12 people and injuring as many as 35 others, authorities said.

The porch sent people and debris crashing down to the ground and sandwiched the second-floor deck underneath it, said Chicago Fire Department spokesman Larry Langford.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinians throw stones at an Israeli tank in the Balata refugee camp on the outskirts of the West Bank city of Nablus on Saturday. Palestinian militants will announce within days that anti-Israeli attacks would be stopped provided they receive required guarantees from Israel.

US now confident of capturing Saddam

Attacks on coalition forces go on rising

AFP, Baghdad

The United States remained confident Sunday of bringing former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to book, while on the ground the military dug in its heels as the US death toll in the Iraq conflict rose above 200.

Sunday saw two more instances of Iraqis' dissatisfaction with the coalition force engaged in a campaign to rebuild their country as US troops came under attack yet again in the flashpoint town of Fallujah and the British headquarters in Basra was blocked by protestors.

The chances of capturing Saddam, toppled in the US-led invasion of Iraq launched in March but unsighted since the beginning April, remain very good, Paul Bremer, the top US administrator in Iraq, said Sunday.

"I think the chances of catching Saddam are very high. We will catch him," Bremer told the BBC. "I think it is important that we do that, that we capture or kill him."

Bremer admitted that continued failure to account for Saddam's whereabouts was hampering the coalition's efforts to restore order in Iraq.

"There's no doubt that the fact that we had not been able to show his face allows the remnants of that Baathist regime to go around in the bazaars and in villages and in towns saying that Saddam will come back and we will come back, so don't cooperate with the coalition," he said.

As attacks on coalition forces become an almost daily occurrence, more than 200 US troops have now died in the war to oust the former Iraqi leader and the campaign to

rebuild Iraq.

US troops in Fallujah came under rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) attack again overnight, for the third time in four days, even though there were no reports of casualties.

The latest incident was further evidence of how strained relations are in Fallujah, a Sunni Muslim stronghold 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Baghdad, which has been tense since US troops shot dead at least 16 people at a demonstration in late April. In the main southern city of Basra, meanwhile, hundreds of former Iraqi soldiers angrily blocked the headquarters of British forces after the coalition failed to pay back wages.



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi watches US soldiers carry out a house-to-house search through the narrow alleys of old Baghdad on Saturday in which three men were arrested. Coalition forces have detained more than 900 people loyal to toppled Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's regime.