



Pakistani policemen patrol in front of burning vehicles during clashes, which erupted between the supporters of government and opposition parties in Karachi yesterday. Rival political workers fought intense gunbattles ahead of huge rallies by Pakistan's suspended top judge Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and President Pervez Musharraf, leaving 18 people dead and scores more injured.

US is true nuclear proliferator: Iran

AP, Vienna

Iran on Friday accused the United States of being the true violator of the Nonproliferation Treaty as a global conference ended without managing to bridge conflicting priorities on how to tighten the pact meant to prevent the spread of nuclear arms.

The United States and the European Union, in turn criticized Tehran for hamstringing the 106-nation meeting for a week by blocking consensus adoption of its agenda because of a phrase calling for the "need for full compliance" with the treaty. Diplomats accredited to the conference said Iran felt that wording would allow it to be

targeted for its defiance of the UN Security Council.

Differences were reflected to the last minutes of the meeting by the failure of delegates Friday to adopt the Japanese "chairman's factual summary" Yukiya Amano's review of the debates initiated and documents submitted at the 130-nation meeting since its opening April 30.

The document was to have been annexed to the meeting's concluding report. But opposition from nonaligned nations, which felt it did not reflect their priorities and from Tehran, which opposed mention of "serious concern ... expressed over Iran's nuclear programme," led it to be listed only

Brown declines to set Iraq pullout dates

APP, London

Britain's likely next prime minister Gordon Brown said yesterday he intended to visit Iraq soon, but declined to set a timetable for withdrawing British forces from the country.

Brown, the finance minister who is on track to succeed Prime Minister Tony Blair at the end of June, also told BBC radio he would put special stress on economic development in Iraq to give Iraqis a stake in their own future.

"I've visited them (British troops) in Basra, I will continue to

keep in touch with them and I will be visiting again fairly soon," Brown said.

"I want to make my own assessment of the situation, to listen to what they have to say, to listen to what the troops have to say themselves and then to listen to what the authorities in Iraq have to say," Brown said.

"Our troops are moving towards an advisory position, towards an overwatch position and allowing what would be half a million Iraqi security forces to take control themselves," he said.

Brown said more stress now had to be placed on economic development in Iraq.

Israel ready for 'serious' talks with Arabs: Peres

AFP, Jerusalem

Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres said yesterday that Israel is ready for serious discussions with Arab nations over a revived peace proposal, as shuttle diplomacy in the region continued apace.

"If the Arab side puts forth serious proposals, Israel will in turn offer its own proposals with a view to holding serious negotiations and to finding common ground," Peres was quoted by army radio as saying.

"We should be careful not to miss out on this opportunity," Peres stressed.

Peres was speaking amid efforts to advance the peace plan, first presented by Saudi Arabia in 2002 and revived at an Arab League summit in March.

The plan would offer a normalization of relations in return for full withdrawal from Arab lands seized in 1967, the creation of a Palestinian state and the return of

Palestinian refugees.

The league tasked Egypt and Jordan, the only two Arab countries that have made peace with Israel, to work to convince the Jewish state to accept the plan.

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met her Egyptian and Jordanian counterparts in Cairo on Thursday, and stressed the important role the Arab world could play in helping to achieve peace.

On Saturday, Palestinian foreign minister Ziad Abu Amr met his Jordanian counterpart Abdel Ilah Khatib and other officials in Amman to discuss the initiative.

The two "reviewed bilateral relations as well as ways to advance the peace process to where the Palestinian people's ambitions of an independent state are achieved," Jordan's state news agency Petra reported.

Abu Amr, an independent and the first Palestinian foreign minister to visit Jordan since the Islamist

group Hamas formed a government in March 2006, thanked King Abdullah II for his efforts on behalf of the Palestinians.

He is to travel to Brussels on Sunday for talks with EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana.

Khatib stressed the need for Arabs and the wider world to "make every effort... to relaunch the peace process through negotiations between the two sides and to achieve a just and comprehensive peace."

On Sunday, King Abdullah will visit the West Bank town of Ramallah for talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

A palace official said the king "will discuss Arab and international efforts aimed at bringing Israel and the Palestinians back to negotiations on the Arab peace plan and a two-state solution."

70 Taliban killed in offensive

AFP, Kabul

cleared" from the area, the statement said. It did not say when the district was overrun by the rebels.

Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters in Kabul was not immediately able to confirm the statement.

Helmand is one of the biggest hotspots for the ultra-Islamic Taliban movement, which was ousted from government by US-led forces in late 2001 after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington.

The rebels have seized several districts where policing is thin over the past year but have in most cases been driven out within days or weeks, often with heavy militant casualties.



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (R) hugs 2006 Nobel Peace laureate from Bangladesh Dr Muhammad Yunus (L) during a meeting at Miraflores Presidential Palace in Caracas on Friday.

Tiger attack costs Shell \$700,000

APP, Colombo

The Sri Lankan unit of Royal Dutch Shell suffered damages of at least 700,000 dollars in an air attack by Tamil Tiger rebels last month, the company said yesterday.

Two bombs exploded at the Anglo-Dutch company's storage facility on the outskirts of Colombo, damaging one of its four storage terminals and disabling its fire-fighting operations, the company said.

"There was big damage to our fire-fighting facility and we estimate it will cost us in excess of 75 million rupees (700,000 dollars) to put things back," Shell's Sri Lankan country director, Hassan Madani, told reporters here.

Indo-US nuke deal faces legal hurdle

APP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court is to hear a petition, which says the country's landmark civilian nuclear deal with the United States could threaten national security, a report said yesterday.

The suit, lodged on Friday in the Supreme Court, says there is an "immediate need to examine" the national security and sovereignty implications of the deal, the Press Trust of India reported.

The petition, known as a "public interest litigation" or a suit filed for the protection of the public interest, was lodged by MN Ramamurthy, a metallurgist and a member of the

Mumbai-based Forum for Integrated National Security.

The pact, which would give India access to US civilian nuclear energy technology without requiring the Asian country to halt its atomic arms programme, is the centrepiece of the energy-hungry country's new relationship with Washington after decades of Cold War tensions.

The petition demands the public release of the full texts of the proposed agreement and that the government refrain "from hurriedly executing any agreement" with United States until it can be examined by a committee appointed by the Supreme Court.