

Military option on table against Iran: Israel

AP, Jerusalem

sanctions. Mofaz told Israel Radio on Saturday that the US and Israel agree on how to deal with Iran.

"The strategy shared by the US and Israel has three elements," Mofaz told Israel Radio. "One is a united international front against the Iranian nuclear program. Secondly, at this time, sanctions are the best way to act against the aspirations of Iran." He said the third element is "a very, very clear signal and a clear statement that all options are on the table." Mofaz added: "I never said there is no military option, and the military option is included in all the options that are on the table, but at this time it's right to use the path of sanctions, and to intensify them."

Iran insists that its program is designed to produce civilian energy. It has resisted Western offers of diplomatic and economic benefits if it would suspend enrichment pro-

grams.

Meanwhile, Israel has put out secret feelers to Syria, but has not received a response, Israel's deputy prime minister confirmed Saturday.

The comments came a day after an Israeli newspaper reported that Israel has told Syrian leaders it is willing to give up the captured Golan Heights as part of a peace deal that would require Syria to distance itself from Iran's virulently anti-Israel regime.

Deputy Prime Minister Shaul Mofaz, speaking Saturday to Israel Radio, confirmed that a message was sent to Syria, but would not describe the content in detail.

"In light of the tensions in the current period, and considering the fact that in the past ... the Syrians sent messages that they want peace, I thought and I still think today that a secret channel is one of the channels for checking intentions

and expectations," Mofaz said. "And such an approach, in a secret channel, was done. And this was said clearly by the prime minister's office. At this stage, there is no Syrian response, or any comment on this issue."

Mofaz said he considered a back channel to be important, noting that Israeli peace agreements with other Arab countries started in such a way.

He said Syria seemed to be ambivalent about peace talks with Israel. "At the beginning, they (the Syrians) speak about their desire to renew talks and the process, and after messages are sent, there is no answer," he said. At this stage, he said, Israel is not sure what Syria's intentions are.



PHOTO: AFP
Sri Lankan Tamil women talk to reporters yesterday in Colombo hours after the government bussed them back to the capital after they were forcibly evicted at gun point on June 7.

al-Qaeda declares holy war on India

AP, Srinagar

A group claiming to represent the al-Qaeda terror network declared a holy war on India over its partial control of the divided Himalayan region of Kashmir, Indian officials said yesterday.

A statement and video was sent Friday to the Current News Service, in Srinagar, the main city of India's Jammu-Kashmir state, in which a masked man standing next to an automatic weapon read the declaration.

"We declare righteous holy war against India on behalf of God the great in which Jammu and Kashmir will be the launch pad for holy war in India," said the statement signed by Abu Abdul Rahman al-Ansari, purportedly the chief of al-Qaeda Fil Hind or al-Qaeda in India.

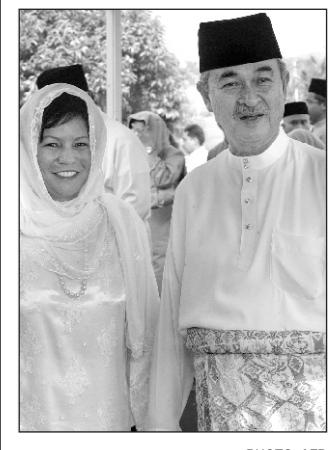


PHOTO: AFP

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (R) poses for photographs with his newly-wed wife Jeanne Abdullah, while visiting the grave of Abdullah's first wife, Endon Mahmood, in Putrajaya, near Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Malaysian PM ties the knot again

AFP, Putrajaya

Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi remarried behind closed doors yesterday before heading straight to the cemetery to pay respects to his late first wife.

Aides confirmed Abdullah, 67, had exchanged rings with 53-year-old Jeanne Abdullah, his petite former sister-in-law, in a private ceremony for close family at his residence here.

The family was then due to visit the nearby grave of Abdullah's first wife, Endon, who died of breast cancer in October 2005.

A small crowd of well-wishers braved scorching afternoon temperatures to wait outside Abdullah's Seri Perdana residence here, excitedly taking pictures and waiting for a first glimpse of the new couple.

Atlantis heads for ISS

AFP, Cape Canaveral

The US space shuttle Atlantis headed for the International Space Station early Saturday on this year's first mission, aimed at boosting the station's power-generating capacity.

The shuttle rocketed into a clear blue sky late Friday and reached orbit less than nine minutes after liftoff.

"It's a very good day for NASA and this nation's space programme," said Rex Geveden, NASA associate administrator for space operations, speaking at a press conference after the blastoff.

"What a great way to start the year and this mission," gushed shuttle launch director Mike Leinbach. "It's a great launch, it's the first step in a very challenging mission."

A team of NASA specialists studied the launch video, "and the preliminary word is that we lost no foam off, at least in the preliminary report," said shuttle programme manager Wayne Hale.

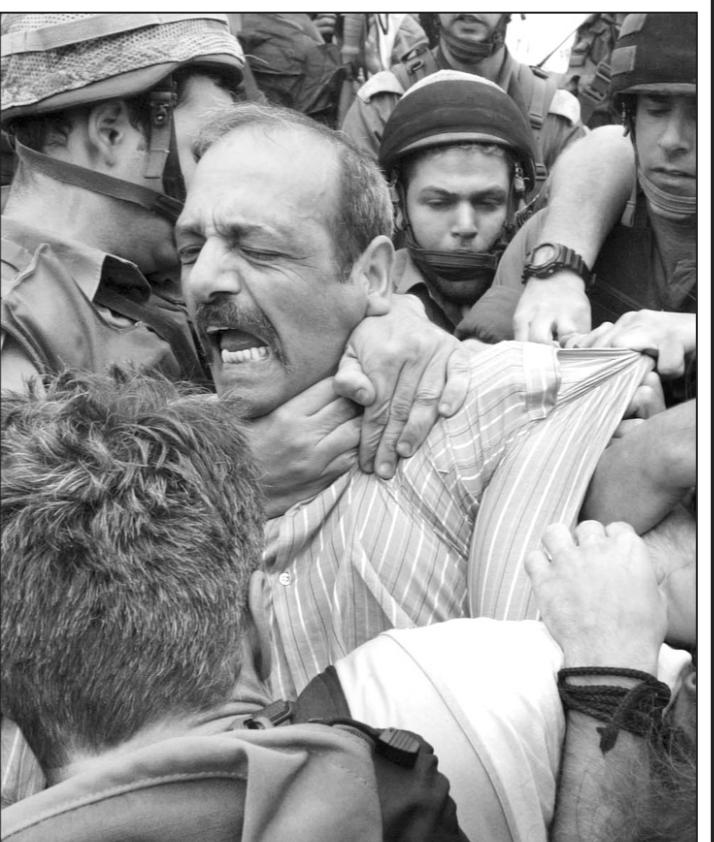


PHOTO: AFP
A Palestinian activist scuffles with Israeli soldiers during a demonstration against the Israeli separation wall in Umm Salamuna village south of the West Bank town of Bethlehem on Friday. The barrier is a combination of concrete walls and wire fences running more than 650 kilometres (400 miles) north to south that Israel says is necessary to protect itself from Palestinian militants.

India offers new proposal in US nuclear talks

AFP, New Delhi

India has proposed to set up a special unit to reprocess spent atomic fuel under international safeguards in a bid to close a major civilian nuclear deal with Washington, a report said Friday.

The proposal was put forth by Indian officials in a meeting with their American counterparts in Germany on the sidelines of the Group of Eight summit, the Press Trust of India news agency reported.

It could end the impasse in talks to conclude the India-US nuclear agreement that aims to give New Delhi access to previously forbidden atomic technology to generate power for its booming economy, the report said.

Separately, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held talks with US President George W. Bush also in Heiligendamm, Singh's spokesman Sanjaya Baru said.

"The conversation was positive," he said after the talks.

India and the United States have been discussing the fine print of the energy accord that intends to reverse three decades of US sanctions on nuclear trade with India, even though New Delhi has not signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and tested nuclear weapons in 1998.

G8 spurs hope for climate accord

AFP, Heiligendamm

A Group of Eight accord on cutting dangerous greenhouse gas emissions has breathed new life into the search for a follow-up accord on global warming spearheaded by the UN.

But emerging nations are insisting that any new pact against global warming allow them the "flexibility" they need to keep their economies growing.

The Chaldean Catholic church is an autonomous Eastern rite church with upwards of 700,000 followers that maintains full communion with the Vatican.

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announced a "high-level meeting" in September in New York to gain momentum for the road to Bali.

"What we are desperately in need of this time is political will at the leaders' level to make significant emissions reductions and to help countries adapt to climate change," he said.

"On both, we'll need leadership by the G8 countries. The outcome of this summit is an important first step."

Ban spoke to leaders of five emerging nations including China and India -- two countries Bush has insisted must join any binding emissions cuts -- who were invited to take part in the summit.

The countries issued their own declaration Friday saying they would play their part to limit climate change. But they said any global accord must allow them to continue their rapid economic expansion.



PHOTO: AFP
The US space shuttle Atlantis lifts off Friday at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. The shuttle is on an 11-day mission to the International Space Station.

Pope discusses 'worrying' Iraq situation with Bush

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Benedict XVI yesterday discussed the "worrying situation in Iraq" with visiting US President George W. Bush, the Vatican said.

"The worrying situation in Iraq and the critical situation of the Christian community there" were among issues discussed along with "the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian question and Lebanon," the Holy See said in a statement.

A Catholic Chaldean priest and three deacons were murdered last Sunday in northern Iraq, followed three days later by the kidnapping of another priest and five of his parishioners.

Benedict's right-hand man Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone lamented in a recent interview "the dramatic situation for Iraqi Christians, which continues to get worse."

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PHOTO: AFP

US President George W. Bush (R) speaks with Pope Benedict XVI (L) as they meet at the Vatican yesterday. US President George W. Bush and Pope Benedict XVI met privately for the first time for about half an hour.