

ITALY: FEATURE-Italian city braces for G8 summit invasion.

By Giada Zampano

GENOA , Italy, June 11 (Reuters) - July's Group of Eight summit in the northwest Italian port of Genoa could present new Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi with his first major headache after a declaration of war by anti-globalisation protesters.

When the leaders of the world's seven richest countries plus Russia meet on July 20-22, it will be a test of how and if Genoa , a fascinating but chaotic city, can meet the challenge.

Some 2,000 officials from G8 delegations plus 5,000 to 6,000 journalists and around 100,000 protesters promised by anti-globalisation groups will converge on the historic city which ruled the Mediterranean in the 12th century.

It will be one of Berlusconi's first international appointments since he won an overwhelming election victory on May 13 as Italy chairs the Group of Seven this year.

The city of 650,000 inhabitants, wedged between mountains and the sea, will be sealed off at major access routes while the its ancient centre, dubbed the "red zone", will be tightly controlled and open only to residents and workers.

"Our clients are bloody annoyed about the G8 being here," said Luigi Queirollo, who works in the Ghiglino 1893 clothing shop right in the heart of the top security zone.

"Business will slump right in the middle of the usually busy summer sales because it makes no sense to be open if clients can't come in, and we're worried about possible damage if there's trouble," he added.

Resident Antonino Vassallo said: "I think people living in the centre are starting to be frightened about the whole event. People could even have to endure a curfew and I've heard many say they're going away for the whole thing."

#### FROGMEN, SHARPSHOOTERS AND HELICOPTERS

The port, the largest in the Mediterranean, will come to a standstill, with ships banned during the three-day summit.

The only vessels allowed will be navy ships acting as barracks for the military and three or four luxury ferry boats booked to accommodate G8 delegates or the world's media.

Navy frogmen, army sharpshooters, air force helicopters and special anti-terrorist squads will all be on red alert.

With less than seven weeks before the official opening, work is still continuing on some 80 building sites, notably in the old town that will be the main theatre of events involving leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States.

"We'll be ready on time," Genoa Mayor Giuseppe Pericu recently told Reuters, saying he expected all building works to be completed two weeks before the summit starts.

Accommodation and security plans are not yet finalised, with the issue bouncing between Genoa and Rome.

"We are working closely with the government on the question of security, but we are not worried, and as far as I am concerned Genoa is a safe city," Pericu said. "We're hoping for a dialogue with the Seattle people." Since riots erupted at a World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle in 1999, protests by anti-globalisation groups have been a key feature of every world meeting.

An authentic mediaeval town, where a labyrinth of narrow alleys wind between towering building, Genoa could offer a perfect scene for street fighters - if they get into the city.

But Pericu played down the risk. "On one side there's the sea which is easily controllable, while on land there are indeed a lot of narrow streets. But they'll be sealed tight."

## PROTESTERS "ON THE WARPATH"

The anti-globalisation groups form part of the Genoa Social Forum (GSF), an international network of more than 300 grassroots organisations which has already met to draw up its own G8 plans.

"We've been trying to negotiate with the authorities and we mean to use legal means for our protest," said spokeswoman Chiara Malagoli, who aims to attract as many as 100,000 peaceful demonstrators to a march just outside the red zone on July 21.

But other protestors plan tougher measures.

"We will block the G8 ," said Luca Casarini, a spokesman for the radical "Tute Bianche" group, whose members are known for marching in the frontline of protests dressed in white overalls.

The group, although part of the Genoa Social Forum, told a news conference last month it was responding to a decision by Italian authorities to mobilise the army for G8 .

"We will seek to enter the areas sealed off for the G8 using only our bodies," he said. "We formally announce that we are on the warpath. Our army of dreamers...will not obey your rules."

"This is a declaration of war to the powerful. The world you want to impose on us, also through your Genoa meeting, is a one-way world, where the only ideology is that of money, profit and of the trade of goods and people," Casarini said.

## GENOA RENAISSANCE

Genoa , which has traditionally based its economy on the port and related transport and logistic services, has only been recently recovering from a decade of economic stagnation.

"The G8 is an important challenge for the city which will see a boost in investment and job opportunities, and we don't want to miss it," Mayor Pericu said.

The city has an unemployment rate of about 11 percent - about a full point above the Italian average and more than double the rate of other affluent northern regions.

" Genoa had some problems in its recent industrial past," said Anna Castellano, the city's councillor for Communication and Promotion. "But now it's experiencing a sort of renaissance and wants to become a new city, focusing both on traditional and new activities, such us the port, tourism and new economy.""

The "re-styling" project for Genoa G8 is as ambitious as these promises.

According to town hall data, work for the summit has created some 1,600 jobs and total investment of about 100 million euros (\$85 million).