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- WORLD

On summit's eve, tense Genoa braces for its High Noon

By **Alessandra Stanley in Genoa**

Scrubbed, freshly painted and sealed off with metal fences, the harbour where a summit meeting of the world's leading industrial nations will begin today is quite calm - the shuttered down silence that enveloped the Western frontier town before the shoot-out in the film *High Noon*.

"It's a little scary, and I am coming home," a young woman whispered in Italian into her mobile phone as she turned her two-year-old's stroller away from where the Group of Eight summit meeting will be held.

"It really does seem like we are under siege in some kind of war," said Geraldine Brown as police officers roamed the area.

Ms Brown works at a hair salon that will stay closed today when President George Bush and seven other leaders arrive. So too will almost any of the other shops and restaurants inside the so-called red zone, a secure nine-kilometre area where leaders will meet from today until Sunday and which some anti-globalisation groups have vowed to penetrate.

More than 100,000 demonstrators are expected in Genoa to protest against what they view as US-led global capitalism that exploits and further impoverishes the Third World.

The surrounding counter-summit in many ways mirrors the summit. There are tidy white canvas banquet tents, information booths, brochures, maps, housing - mostly tents - discussion groups and news conferences. The protesters, however, want the two parallel universes to collide.

Fear that groups of radical protesters and riot police will

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near that groups of radical protesters and riot police will clash violently is one reason so many residents have fled the city.

Those few who remain watched uneasily as police erected the last gratings and concrete-lined metal fences bolstered with steel poles to seal off small alleys and other access routes to the harbour.

"Inside the red zone, we are really protected, but we are so protected our clients can't get to us," said Marisa Salvi, 55, as she stood guard over the veal in her empty butcher shop.

Genoa, a small medieval city whose port - an odd blend of restored warehouses and modern jetties - is surrounded by hills dotted with high-rise buildings, was not an obvious choice for a G8 summit meeting.

The Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, has spent nearly \$A200 million on restorations, infrastructure and security for the gathering. He has taken three inspection trips to Genoa since taking office and has pointed out flaws and ordered last-minute changes, minor and major.

Among other things, he called for a newly painted building across the street from the Ducal Palace, where meetings will take place, to be repainted a different colour, and ordered a row of potted lemon trees realigned.

When Mr Berlusconi asked that Genoese remove wet laundry from their windows while his important guests were in town, however, he went too far for some residents. On Wednesday, at least, damp sheets and underwear fluttered proudly near Italian national flags.

Security efforts include helicopters hovering above rooftops and the more than 16,000 police officers and soldiers, many of them already carrying riot helmets and batons.

More than 300 riot police yesterday raided a stadium that had been turned into a tent city to serve as the headquarters of the more radical protest groups. Their slogan is "civil disobedience", and they promise to break through the red zone.

"We have nothing to hide," said Luca Casarini, a leader of Tutte Bianche, or White Overalls, an anti-globalisation group.

"If we did, we wouldn't have spent the last month talking about how to carry out civil disobedience at the G8."

The New York Times

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