



PHOTO: AFP

The two women presidents, Gloria Arroyo of the Philippines (centre-L) and Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia (centre-R) are surrounded by their male counterparts during a group photo session on the opening day of the 13th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Kuala Lumpur on Monday.

NAM nations line up against war on Iraq

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

Kings and presidents from more than 100 countries massed in Malaysia Monday to show that the developing world, two-thirds of the UN's membership, wants no war in Iraq and to tell Baghdad to disarm.

He underscored NAM's desire that the United Nations -- and not the United States -- should be the top world arbiter of international crises such as Iraq. "Peace and stability in our countries and the rest of the world demands that all of us, including those who are incomparably more powerful than we are, should respect the findings of the weapons inspectors and the decisions of the Security Council fully and without reservation."



Norah reigns supreme at Grammy

AFP, New York

Norah Jones, the daughter of Indian sitar maestro Ravi Shankar, cemented her reputation as the hottest newcomer on the US music scene by winning a fistful of trophies at the 45th Grammy Awards on Sunday.

Sharon inks coalition deal with centrist party

9 Palestinians, Israeli killed in ME violence

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon brought the centrist Shinui Party into his coalition on Monday, ensuring a slim majority in parliament that will allow him to form a government, a spokesman for Sharon said.

community.

The lineup of the proposed new government would freeze out ultra-Orthodox parties that have traditionally served as the kingmakers of Israeli politics.

families.

Gissin said Sharon would continue talks with smaller parties to try to expand his coalition. Sharon, who won a sweeping electoral victory in January has until at least the end of February to form a government whose main tasks will be to tackle the Palestinian uprising and an economic crisis.

UN says no to Iraq's missile compromise

France keeps veto option wide open

AP, Baghdad

Iraq said it is "serious about solving" a UN order to start destroying its Al Samoud 2 missile program by the end of the week, but asked the United Nations to reconsider. A UN official in Baghdad said that wasn't an option.

official said on condition of anonymity.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said he expected Baghdad would go ahead with the destruction in the end.

was a ploy by the United States and President Bush.

"The little Bush continues to despise the United Nations and the Security Council," the government daily Al-Jumhuriya said.

The deal was closed a day after the centre-left Labour Party abandoned coalition talks, leaving Sharon without the more moderate face he sought ahead of anticipated US pressure for concessions to the Palestinians after any war in Iraq.

Sharon had initially sought a wide "national unity" coalition that would have included the centre-left Labour Party. But the two parties could not reach an agreement on how to deal with the Palestinian uprising.

Labour's dovish chairman Amram Mitzna declared an end to talks on the alliance after the coalition deal with NRP was signed. "The NRP's position suits him (Sharon) better," Mitzna said in a speech to Labour members, predicting the Israeli leader would make no breakthrough toward peace with Palestinians.



PHOTO: AFP

South Korea's outgoing President Kim Dae-jung (C in car) waves to presidential staff while leaving the presidential Blue House on Monday on Kim's last day in office. Kim said reconciliation with North Korea must go on, defending his hallmark 'sunshine' policy of engagement with Pyongyang, as he will end his five-year-term on Tuesday to leave the presidency to his successor Roh Moo-hyun, who has pledged to pursue reconciliation with the Stalinist state.

Iraq's chief liaison to UN weapons inspectors insisted Sunday night that Baghdad is "clean" of weapons of mass destruction and suggested the United Nations and Iraq could come up with a compromise over an order to destroy the missiles, whose range has been tested at above the 93-mile limit imposed by the at the end of the 1991 Gulf War.

Blix offered a harsher view, telling Time magazine in an interview to be published Monday that "of course they have no credibility" and "diplomacy may need to be backed up by force."

Reuters adds: Turkey's foreign minister said he expects his country's parliament will vote Tuesday on whether to allow the US to base troops in Turkey for a war on Iraq.

Sharon assured his rightist Likud party of a slim 61-seat majority in the nearly 120-member parliament following a day of violence in which Israeli forces killed nine Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and an Israeli soldier was shot dead.

Curbing such violence, which has raged since the start of the nearly 29-month Palestinian uprising for independence, will be one of the central tasks of the incoming government, which will also have to deal with a spiralling economic crisis.

On the political front, Israel's centre-left Labour Party said it was pulling out of talks on forming a coalition after Prime Minister Sharon signed a coalition deal with the pro-settlement National Religious Party (NRP).

The decision dashed Sharon's hopes of forming a unity government to try to provide much-needed economic stability to Israel, which has been shaken by a 29-month-old Palestinian uprising for statehood.

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Blix, too, expressed skepticism over Iraq's claims to have destroyed the stocks of anthrax and VX nerve agent. Blix told Time he found it "a bit odd" that Baghdad, with "one of the best-organised regimes in the Arab world," had no records of the substances' destruction.

Sharon signed a deal with Shinui, a stridently secular party, after bringing into his coalition the National Religious Party (NRP), a champion of Jewish settlements on occupied land and an opponent of a Palestinian state, Sharon spokesman Raanan Gissin said.

Shinui's parliamentary strength surged in the January election on a platform opposed to the exemption of ultra-Orthodox men from military service and religious control over civil issues such as marriage.

According to the Likud statement, Shinui and NRP have agreed to revisit several laws that deal with the military draft of ultra-Orthodox, and government subsidies for large

Amin said Iraq had sent a letter to chief weapons inspector Hans Blix last week proposing he reconsider. "We are still waiting for a response," he said.

But a UN official in Baghdad said Sunday night that the response had already come - in the form of Blix's order Friday to begin destroying the missiles by the end of this week.

Editorials in Iraq's official press on Monday said the new resolution



PHOTO: AFP

Australian actress Nicole Kidman poses after winning the BAFTA best actress award for her role in "The Hours" at the British Film Academy Awards ceremony at London's Leicester Square Odeon Cinema on Sunday.

Generals see red as India mulls cut in military spending

AFP, New Delhi

India is likely to slash its defence budget this week as part of all-round austerity measures, but commanders warn that scaled-down military spending could set back modernisation projects and endanger national security.

Powell presses China for support on Iraq, N Korea

AFP, Beijing

US Secretary of State Colin Powell opened meetings here Monday to lobby a reluctant China for support on a new UN resolution to compel Iraq to disarm and backing for the US approach on North Korea.

leader-in-waiting Hu Jintao ahead of talks with President Jiang Zemin.

Hu and Powell both said the Tang meeting has been "very good" but offered no details.

Government officials say they expect a 10 percent cut in defence budgetary allocations for the financial year beginning April 1 as part of Finance Minister Jaswant Singh's bid to stop India's fiscal deficit from rocketing past the current 5.9 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

New Delhi spent millions of dollars during a tense stand-off when the two nuclear-armed rivals between them posted a million troops along their border after India blamed an attack on the parliament here in December 2001 on Pakistan-based guerrillas.

Powell, on the second leg of a three-nation tour of Asia that will take him later Monday to South Korea, will face resistance from the Chinese who have adopted a cautious line on Iraq and have failed to exert their influence with North Korea in the crisis over its nuclear programs.

The United States is looking for China -- a veto-wielding permanent member of the council -- to vote for the resolution or, at the very least, remain neutral by abstaining. In Tokyo on Sunday Powell had stern words for Baghdad and the United Nations, which he said must act to force Iraq to comply with Security Council resolution 1441 that gave it a last chance to disarm.

StanChart's donation for restoring sight

Standard Chartered Bank launched a programme to restore the sight of 28,000 people across the world -- one for each of the bank's 28,000 employees. Standard Chartered's Group Chief Executive, Mervyn Davies, handed a cheque for US\$120,000 recently to Richard Porter, Executive Director of Sight Savers in London, says a press release.



Standard Chartered Bank's Group Chief Executive, Mervyn Davies, (R) is handing over a cheque for US \$ 120,000 to Executive Director of Sight Savers, Richard Porter, (L) in London in a recently taken picture.

VHP vows to keep up move for temple construction

AFP, New Delhi

Angry Hindu hardliners, thwarted by police in their attempts to march on India's parliament Monday, vowed mass action campaigns until they realise their goal of building a temple on a disputed holy site in northern India.

warned Sunday that 10,000 of its members would march on parliament but early Monday police set up three tightly-guarded barricades on the proposed route, prompting the group instead to stage a sit-down protest.

A group of about 5,000 mendicants blocked by riot police when they assembled for the march in the Indian capital, vowed not to rest until they held the disputed land in the northern pilgrimage town of Ayodhya.

"This is just a knock on the door of parliament, we will march another time if we want," one organiser told AFP.

Senior VHP leader Praveen Togadia, addressing the saffron-clad monks, warned of gathering "storm clouds" and urged the government to bypass parliament if the legislature refused to give permission for the building of the temple.