



Mabel Ng Chin Mei (2nd-R) smiles after being crowned the new Miss Malaysia/World in Kuala Lumpur on Friday. She is flanked by 1st runner-up Audrey Chong (2nd-R), 2nd runner-up Michelle Hon (L) and 3rd runner-up Dennapa Ung. Mabel wins 20,000 ringgit (5,263 dollars) cash, various endorsements and gifts and she will represent Malaysia to the Miss World pageant in Abuja, Nigeria in November.

US probe sees airstrike on Afghans justified

AP, Washington

US military investigators concluded that an American airstrike that killed dozens of Afghan civilians at a wedding party was justified because the plane had come under fire. A summary of the investigation report, released late Friday by US Central Command, said those who were firing at US aircraft were to blame, not the Americans who fired back. "While the coalition regrets the loss of innocent lives, the responsibility for that loss rests with those that knowingly directed hostile fire at coalition forces," the report said. "The operators of those weapons elected to place them in civilian communities and elected to fire them at coalition forces at a time when they knew there were a significant number of civilians present."

'Big-5' in constructive talks on Iraq

EU opposes attack without UN backing: Solana

AFP, London

Leaders of the permanent member states on the UN Security Council - Russia, China, France, Britain and the US - are pursuing "very constructive" talks on Iraq, Russia's ambassador to Britain told BBC radio on Saturday. Grigory Karasin confirmed that Russian President Vladimir Putin had voiced serious doubts about the legality of military strikes on Iraq in a conversation with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on Friday. "But we also have the good news," Karasin said, "and that is that all the leaders of the five countries... are in very constructive discussions, so let us rely on the wisdom and experience of our leaders." Karasin said 12 months of anti-terrorist action since the September 11 attacks had already shown that any new initiative must be "based on logic and law" and that "just cause has to be confirmed by the only existing universal organisation, which is the UN." Russia, like other permanent Security Council members, can exercise an individual veto on any decision by the body. But Karasin was also careful not to rule out eventual support for military action, stressing that "all options are open now". Blair and Putin had agreed to meet next month, he added. The British premier is to fly to Washington on Saturday for talks with

George W. Bush at the Camp David presidential retreat, to coordinate the next stage in their campaign to drum up international support for firm action against the regime of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Meanwhile, Javier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy chief, warned Washington that the EU is opposed to military action against Iraq without a UN mandate, in an interview to be published Sunday. "We're against a pre-emptive attack," Solana told German weekly newspaper Bild am Sonntag, adding that a US-led strike bypassing the UN "could not be reconciled" with international law. Solana said EU foreign ministers meeting last weekend had agreed on wholehearted support for the UN and its resolutions as well as Iraq's obligation to obey them - notably by allowing the return of weapons inspectors. This was "the clear message of the EU - also to the United States", the EU high representative added. German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has already provoked American wrath for his publicly-stated opposition to military intervention in Iraq, ruling out German participation in a war described by Defence Minister Peter Struck as "against international law". However, Struck appeared to soften Berlin's tone on Friday evening when he said that if evidence of Iraq's involvement in terrorism was produced, it would "create a new situation".

Germany detains 2 over new Sept 11 attack plot

REUTERS, Berlin

German officials said on Friday they had arrested an apparent follower of Osama bin Laden and his American fiancée on suspicion of planning attacks on US sites to mark the anniversary of the September 11 attack. Separately, the German prosecutor's office said US authorities had arrested an Afghan-born German from the city of Hamburg, where three September 11 hijackers once lived, also on suspicion of planning attacks. In Germany, police on Thursday arrested a 25-year-old German-born Turk suspected of building five bombs near the tourist city of Heidelberg. They also detained his 23-year-old American fiancée who works as a civilian at the commissary of the city's US Army Europe headquarters, a closed military base. "We have evidence that an attack was planned for September 11," said Thomas Schaeuble, interior minister for the southwest German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg. "He seems to be a follower of Osama bin Laden who is deeply religious and harbours a hatred for Americans and Jews." "According to our information she hated Jews as well." The scenic Heidelberg area is home to 16,000 Americans who are soldiers, family members and support staff for the US Army Europe headquarters, base spokesman Sandy Goss said. The city is a popular destination for American tourists and students studying in Germany, and is where U.S. General George Patton died in a military hospital in 1945.

Schaeuble said the attacks would have been aimed against US military installations and sites in the city centre. Security has been tightened across Europe ahead of the first anniversary of the attacks on the United States in which more than 3,000 people died. Washington has blamed Saudi-born dissident bin Laden and his al-Qaida network for the attacks with hijacked airliners, which destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and hit U.S. military headquarters at the Pentagon on Washington's outskirts. Schaeuble said police had found shells for five bombs and 287 pounds of chemicals and electrical material. The suspect worked as a warehouse employee in a chemical factory. "About 130 kilos (286 pounds) of chemicals intended to be used as explosives were found," he said. Police also found a picture of bin Laden in the apartment of the man, who had a criminal record involving theft and drugs. He lived with his fiancée in the city of Walldorf near Heidelberg. Military spokesman Goss said the American woman would have had a special identification card to gain access to the base, but would not necessarily have been a government employee. Schaeuble said Germany had received help from US military officials in uncovering the case. Schaeuble said it was unclear if the pair were part of an international group. "One must also consider the possibility of fanatical individuals," Schaeuble said.

Inspectors get ready for return to Iraq

AP, United Nations

UN weapons inspectors are stepping up preparations for a possible return to Iraq, seeking new sources for satellite photos, scouting laboratories to test samples, and pressing friendly governments for more intelligence reports. In a quarterly report to the UN Security Council, chief weapons inspector Hans Blix said unnamed nations were quietly briefing the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission "on activities and infrastructural changes" at sites in Iraq. The commission, known as UNMOVIC, "will continue to seek presentations and products from supporting governments with access to satellite imagery," Blix said. On Friday, the head of a UN atomic weapons inspection team banned by Baghdad said that satellite photos of Iraq show unexplained construction at sites the team used to visit in its search for evidence that Saddam Hussein was trying to develop nuclear arms. The Bush administration contends Saddam is trying to obtain chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in defiance of his disarmament pledge after the Gulf War. Iraq says it wants to continue negotiations with the United Nations, but has not responded to Secretary-General Kofi Annan's request for permission for the inspectors to return. The Bush team is at work on a proposed resolution setting a deadline for Iraq to admit weapons inspectors or risk punitive action. The inspection commission has recruited a new manager to help collect information from public documents and looking at ways of better analysing such data, Blix said. The inspectors use California's Monterey Institute of International Studies to review publicly available documents and has signed a new contract with the French Research Institute for similar material, "with particular emphasis on European, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern sources," he said.

Cops detain leaders to thwart Pak rally

AFP, Lahore

Pakistani police on Saturday arrested leaders of five Islamic opposition parties for allegedly violating restrictions on campaigning before next month's elections. Party chiefs described the arrests as another blow to democracy before the October 10 parliamentary elections, which will be the first since army chief Pervez Musharraf seized power in October 1999. Some 14 central and provincial leaders of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) - an alliance of six religious parties - were detained at the railway station in the eastern city of Lahore, police said. "We have arrested some 14 leaders after they violated a ban on political gatherings at railway stations," city police chief Javed Noor told AFP. Police cordoned off the station and arrested the leaders as they arrived to board a train for an 800-kilometre (500-mile) campaign journey to Sukkur in southern Sindh province. Around 20 supporters shouted anti-government slogans before police swooped on them. Officials last month relaxed a ban on most public political activities but rallies and processions still need permission. Campaign journeys known as "train marches" are legal but rallies at stations are banned. Police detained leaders of five parties - Qazi Hussain Ahmed, Maulana Shah Ahmed Noorani, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, Allama Sajid Naqvi and Maulana Samiul Haq - nine provincial leaders and 16 workers. "They have been booked for violating Section 144, under which no gathering of more than five people is allowed around railway stations," Noor said. At Multan and Khanawal in Punjab province, police blocked roads to the stations to stop MMA supporters from hearing speeches by party leaders.

Police lift cordon around Kashmir leaders' houses

AFP, Srinagar

Police in Indian-administered Kashmir overnight lifted a cordon around the homes of three top separatists, including the head of the main separatist alliance, leaders said Saturday. "The cordon has been lifted and there seem to be no more restrictions," Abdul Gani Bhat, chairman of leading separatist alliance the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), told AFP. The other two leaders who were put under house arrest Friday were Hurriyat executive member Molvi Abbas Ansari and Shabir Shah, who heads the Democratic Freedom Party which is not part of the Hurriyat. Kashmir police chief Ashok Suri denied they had been placed under house arrest. "Then why did his men surround my house and tell me not to move out?" asked Bhat. "I had not invited

US Congress holds Sept 11 commemoration in NY

REUTERS, New York

The US Congress, in a show of strength and stirring sentiment, met in New York on Friday for the first time in more than two centuries to mark the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks and declare solidarity in the fight against terrorism. Some 300 members of the House and Senate and Vice President Dick Cheney marked the memory of the attacks in a rare, and wholly ceremonial, meeting at Federal Hall, built on the site where George Washington was inaugurated as the first U.S. president in 1789. The historic building is just blocks from where the World Trade Centre once stood. One year ago this great centre of history, enterprise and creativity suffered the gravest of cruelties and showed itself to be a place of valour and generosity," Cheney said. "Since the hour of those attacks we have been a nation at war, called once again to defend our liberty and our lives and save humanity from the worst of horrors," he said. "As a nation born in revolution, we know that our freedom came at a very high price. We have no intention now of letting it slip away." Congress was meeting at a time when President Bush is seeking its approval for taking action against Iraq, which the Bush administration accuses of posing a grave threat to the world. Cheney's stern words mixed with moving moments during the hour-long ceremony, especially when members of Congress, some in tears, joined hands across the aisle to sing "God Bless America." The patriotic anthem was led by students from Stuyvesant High School, just four blocks from the World Trade Centre. The rare meeting - the second time in history that Congress has convened outside the nation's capital - was capped off with a wreath-laying ceremony at the Trade Centre site, where nearly 3,000 people died in the attacks on the twin towers. Remembering those victims,

U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins read a poem written for the occasion, entitled "The Names." "Names blown over the earth and out to sea," the poem read in part. "So many names, there is barely room on the walls of the heart." Members of Congress said the event was intended to show solidarity with the city and with victims' and rescuers' families. "We are with you as one, as the family of America," said House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt, a Missouri Democrat. The lawmakers - more than 200 members of the House of Representatives and more than 60 members of the Senate - arrived by train at Pennsylvania Station and traveled downtown to Federal Hall, where scores of police officers, National Guard units and Secret Service agents lined the streets. "It's again showing the unity and the resolve of the American people," said House Majority Leader Dick Armey, a Texas Republican.



US Senators Charles Schumer (R), D-NY, and Hillary Rodham Clinton (C), D-NY, place flags during a ceremony at Ground Zero of the World Trade Centre site in New York on Friday. The US Congress met earlier at Federal Hall in New York as a show of solidarity with the city as it nears the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.



An exhibition of photos on September 11 and its aftermath called "Here is New York" is viewed by visitors at the Corcoran Gallery of Art on Friday, in Washington, DC. The collections of over 5,000 pictures, contributed by over 3,000 amateur and professional photographers, were put on display at the exhibition.

Countdown for Sept 11 begins

European states fear terror attacks around Sept 11

AFP, London

Prosecutors and police in Europe fear attacks by al-Qaida, the group blamed for the strikes on the US last September 11, in the run up to the anniversary of the hijackings, the BBC reported early on Saturday. Authorities in Germany, Italy and France told an investigation by the BBC World Service that while operations carried out since September 11 may have damaged al-Qaida's infrastructure in Europe, they feared that individuals could still launch suicide attacks. The report came only hours after German officials said they suspected that a Turkish man arrested with his American girlfriend in possession of bomb making materials could have been planning to attack US military facilities in southwestern Germany on or around next Wednesday, September 11. Manfred Murck, deputy head of a German intelligence agency in Hamburg, told the BBC: "The broad knowledge that we have shows us how many people are living in Hamburg who could be part of the international Islamic network. "They have many contacts we know about, but we are not able to evaluate them. That means that at the

moment we are worried. We are worried that something might happen again." A number of the September 11 hijackers, including suspected ringleader Mohammed Atta, who is believed to have died flying one of the planes that destroyed the World Trade Centre, lived in Hamburg at some stage. German officials said that police had arrested a 24-year-old Turkish man and his 23-year-old girlfriend in the southwestern town of Walldorf on Thursday. Thomas Schaeuble, the interior minister of the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, said it was suspected that the man could have been planning to attack either US military facilities in the nearby town of Heidelberg, or else the centre of the state town. The man "has the reputation of a very devout Muslim who hates Americans and Jews", Schaeuble added. In Italy, Stephano Dambrosco, the leading prosecutor of terrorism cases in Milan, told the BBC: "After September 11, all European countries that supported the USA's activities in Afghanistan are afraid that we are now targets for an al-Qaida attack. "We are really afraid of personal jihads, and we are trying to understand the way they are trying to organise themselves again."

Air patrols resume over NY, Washington

REUTERS, Washington

With the anniversary approaching of the Sept. 11 attacks on America, the US military has resumed 24-hour air patrols by fighter jets over Washington and New York, US officials said on Friday. The officials, who asked not to be identified, told Reuters that the patrols - designed to prevent hijack attacks like the ones that destroyed New York's World Trade Centre and heavily damaged the Pentagon - resumed on Thursday. "With members of Congress flying to New York, and the anniversary approaching, it was decided that the patrols should resume" indefinitely, one of the officials told Reuters. The US Congress met in New York on Friday for the first time in more than 200 years to mark next week's anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks that killed about 3,000 people. Pentagon officials refused to confirm or deny whether or not the patrol flights had been resumed. Spokesman Glenn Flood said, "All I can say is that we have adequate patrols." The officials refused to comment on a CBS News report that the patrols were resumed due to increased Internet "chatter" or communications among known operatives of al-Qaida, the militant network the United States blames for the attacks. US intelligence agencies have recently picked up a somewhat higher level of "chatter," or information about potential threats, but there was nothing specific and nothing to indicate that a terror attack was being planned for the Sept. 11 anniversary, a US official told Reuters.