

**BRIEFLY**



Palestinians celebrate after Israeli troops withdrew from the West Bank town of Qalqiliya, some 15 km from Tel Aviv, on Saturday ending 28 years of occupation and bringing Palestinian self-rule. — AFP/UNB photo

**2 Algerian rebel leaders killed:** Two leaders of Algeria's Muslim rebellion have been murdered by their own guerillas, the Algerian official news agency APS said yesterday. Reuter reports from Paris.

Quoting from a report on Algerian state-run television, the agency gave the names of the two leaders as Mohamed Said and Abderrezek Redjam.

**Colombian justice minister quits:** Colombia's justice minister resigned Saturday, becoming the third member of president Ernesto Samper's Cabinet to step down in recent days, AP reports from Bogota.

The resignations were expected as part of a Cabinet shake-up just days after a congressional commission exonerated Samper of allegations he took millions of dollars from the Cali drug cartel to finance his 1994 election campaign.

**Gunmen kill 10 in South Africa:** Gunmen killed 10 people, including a six-month-old infant, in what appeared to be the latest round of political violence in strife-torn KwaZulu-Natal province, AP reports from Port Shepstone.

Police said that the adult victims were members of the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party, which has struggled for control of the province against President Nelson Mandela's African National Congress in a decade of fighting that has killed thousands.

**US newsman wounded in Chechnya:** An American journalist and his translator were wounded in a grenade explosion at a checkpoint outside a rebel-held town in breakaway Chechnya Saturday, AP reports from Grozny.

Steve Levine, a stringer for the New York Times, had extensive shrapnel wounds and two fractures in his left leg. His translator Nana Kiknadze had less serious shrapnel wounds in her legs.

**Bus mishap kills 22 in Brazil:** At least 22 people were killed and nine injured when a bus and a tanker truck collided, causing the fuel lead to explode in an inferno, a newspaper reported on Saturday. Reuter reports from Sao Paulo.

Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper said the accident happened when the fuel transporter tried to pass a truckload of chickens on a road 120 miles (200 km) northwest of Sao Paulo.

**Militancy to be uprooted, Mubarak tells House**

CAIRO, Dec 17: Addressing a new parliament elected in balloting marred by violence and allegations of fraud, President Hosni Mubarak vowed on Saturday to uproot Muslim militants, reports AP.

"The recent conspiracies have undoubtedly proved that we are facing hired gangs, specialists in crime who are trying to destroy our society," he said.

"We should all be a mighty barricade to confront these groups and prevent their crimes."

More than 30 people were killed, scores wounded and hundreds arrested during the November 30 election and the December 6 run-off, in which supporters of the governing party and the opposition clashed in frequent scuffles.

All but 14 of the 444 seats

**Pak, US, ASEAN reactions to New York Times report Peace would be endangered if India conducts any N-test**

ISLAMABAD, Dec 17: Pakistan said on Saturday that any nuclear test conducted by arch-rival India would endanger peace and damage non-proliferation efforts in the region, reports Reuter.

An Indian nuclear test would "constitute a serious setback to non-proliferation efforts in South Asia," said a foreign office spokesman quoted by the official news agency APP.

"It would jeopardise peace and stability in the region," he said in Pakistan's first official reaction to a US newspaper report that Delhi might be preparing a test.

India dismissed the New York Times report as "highly speculative," but did not deny it outright.

The Pakistani spokesman said such a test could harm prospects of achieving a Comprehensive Test Ban

Treaty (CTBT) next year.

The test would have grave implications for ongoing efforts on the conference on disarmament to conclude a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty," he said.

India exploded a nuclear device in 1974, but, like Pakistan, denies possessing nuclear weapons. US officials say both countries could swiftly assemble nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, the United States, reacting to reports that India could be preparing a nuclear test, said on Friday it would be a "dramatic departure" from Indian policy and a setback to international disarmament efforts.

But the State Department, citing US policy regarding intelligence matters, declined comment on a New York Times report that New Delhi could be preparing a test.

State Department spokesman Glyn Davies said: "We are concerned that if there were to be an explosive test by India it would be a dramatic departure from India's own long-standing position against testing. Any such tests would be a setback to disarmament efforts internationally, disarmament efforts which India itself has championed."

Earlier Southeast Asian countries, which this week signed a nuclear-free zone treaty, are opposed to nuclear testing by any power, including India, senior official of the regional grouping ASEAN said on Saturday.

Ajit Singh, secretary general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) made the comments in response to a New York Times report New Delhi could be preparing a test.

**Islamabad hands over 10 militants to Egypt Pakistan continues hunt for clues of Nov 19 embassy blast**

CAIRO, Dec 17: Pakistan said on Saturday it has never been intimidated by Muslim militant threats as it continued its hunt for clues in the bombing of the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad last month, reports Reuter.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Ahmed Ali, in Cairo for talks with Egyptian officials, said Pakistan had handed over 10 militants to Egypt and reported cooperation in investigations to reveal the identity of those behind the November 19 bombing.

"We have one suspect (in the bombing) and one dead body which is lying in the morgue in Islamabad hospital. Unfortunately we were not able to place a name of this dead body," Ali told reporters at a joint news conference with his Egyptian counterpart, Amr Moussa.

The Pakistani minister

said the two countries were cooperating to identify the dead body who is believed to have taken part in the suicide car bomb attack.

Ali, who headed his country's delegation to a one day meeting of the joint Egyptian-Pakistani committee, said that Pakistan had handed over to Egypt 10 suspected "terrorists" according to an extradition agreement signed between the two countries last year.

"Ever formal extradition requests were put by Egypt. Out of those 11 requests, we have already extradited 10. One person we have not been able to locate, he is missing," Ali said.

The Jihad Group, one of three militant groups who claimed responsibility for the embassy bombing that killed 16 people, warned Pakistan in a statement on Thursday to stop extraditing suspected

militants to Cairo or it would carry out attacks against Pakistani interests.

"We should threats seriously from such organisations. But Pakistan is a country that has never been intimidated by threats. Ali said: "We are for peace, tolerance, Islam, but we will not tolerate terrorism."

The Pakistani minister said his country was open to any proposals by Egypt to contain terrorism, adding that Cairo made no further extradition demands since the embassy blast.

Egypt and other Arab countries have been complaining that their nationals who took part in the fighting to oust the former Soviet Union from Afghanistan and were taking Pakistan as a base, have now turned their guns against their governments.

**PLO police enter Qalqiliya**

QALQILIYA, West Bank, Dec 17: Dance, song and cheers welcomed Palestinian police into Qalqiliya Saturday as Israeli troops withdrew, ending 28 years of occupation of a West Bank town in the heart of Israel, reports AP.

"The Jews are leaving, the army has come," cried Hisham Qassem.

Qassem was among the several hundred Palestinians who chased the departing convoy of Israeli jeeps.

The handover of Qalqiliya, the fifth West Bank town to go to PLO rule since the peace process began, is one

of the most critical turning points for Israelis because of the town's strategic location.

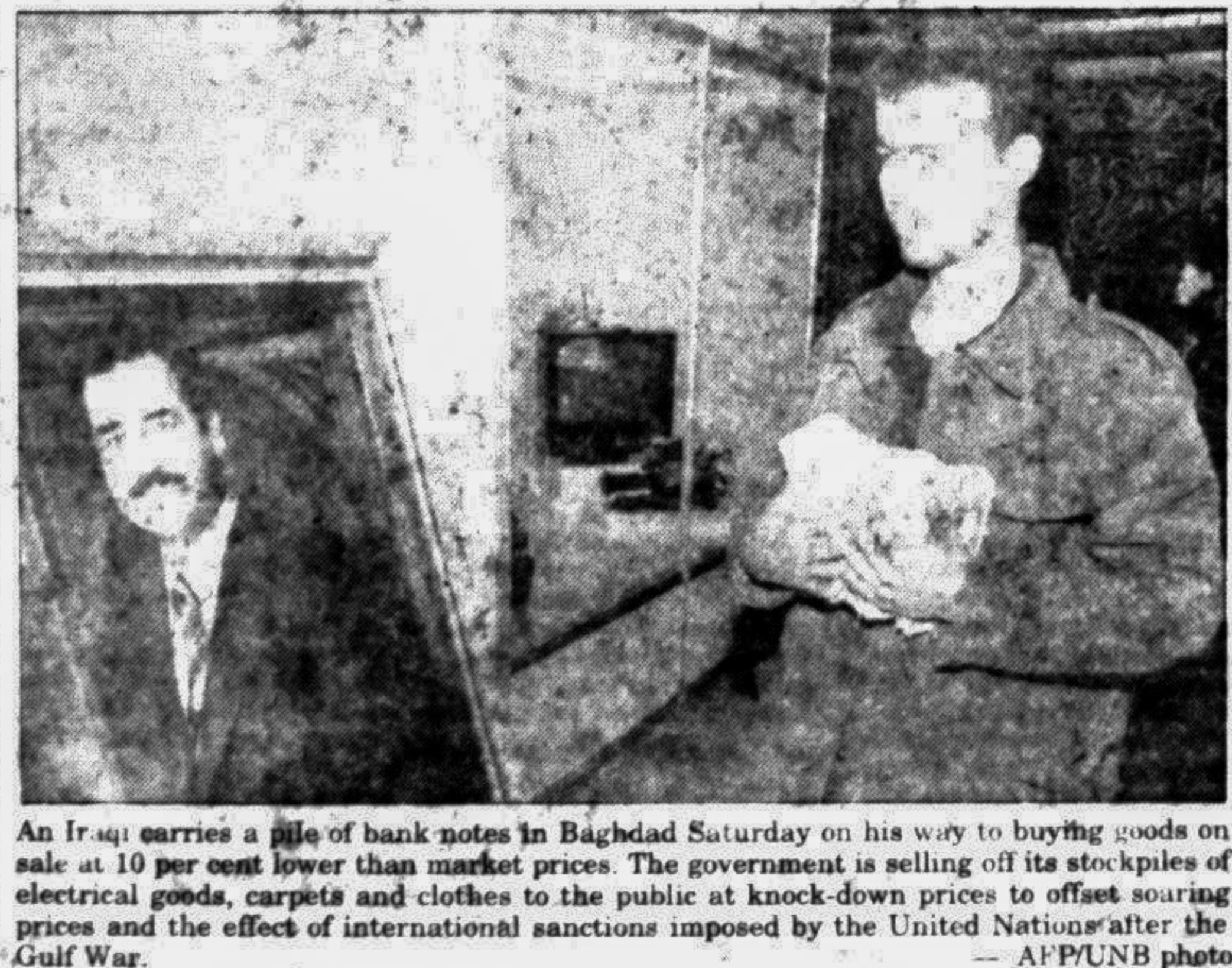
In contrast to distant Palestinian population centres like Gaza and Nablus, Qalqiliya overlooks the lush coastal plain of Israel. The towers of Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean Sea are visible only 30 kilometers (20 miles) away.

The takeover by the Palestine Liberation Organisation in Qalqiliya, home to some 75,000 Palestinians, brings the total number of West Bankers living under complete autonomy to more

than a quarter million. Hundreds of thousands in rural areas remain under joint Israel-PLO control.

In coming weeks, Israel is to withdraw from Ramallah and Bethlehem, just to the north and south of Jerusalem. Most of the last town, Hebron, is to be handed to the PLO by March.

The transfer of power in the West Bank is in line with the Israel-PLO autonomy accord signed in September. Under that agreement, Palestinians will also hold elections on January 20.



An Iraqi carries a pile of bank notes in Baghdad Saturday on his way to buying goods on sale at 10 per cent lower than market prices. The government is selling off its stockpiles of electrical goods, carpets and clothes to the public at knock-down prices to offset soaring prices and the effect of international sanctions imposed by the United Nations after the Gulf War. — AFP/UNB photo

**US House okays \$275b defence bill**

WASHINGTON, Dec 17: The House of Representatives approved a 275 billion dollar defence bill on Friday that the White House said President Bill Clinton would veto primarily because it would require a costly US anti-missile defence by 2003, reports Reuter.

The House approved the bill 267-149 and sent it to the Senate for final approval, possibly on Tuesday. It approved the bill without change despite a White House paper warning that "in its current form the president would veto it."

The bill is 7 billion dollar. More than Clinton asked and authorises ships, warplanes and other weapons he did not request. It also repeals Congress's 1993 mandate that only 20 B-2 Stealth bombers could ever be built for a maximum total of 44 billion dollar although it does not immediately authorise more.

The bill also authorises a third Cold-War-era Seawolf submarine that Clinton did request.

**Bal Thackeray backs Tamil Tigers**

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: Bombay's top right-wing politician threatened Saturday to enforce a shutdown of the western metropolis if the Sri Lankan government continues what he described as "massacre of Tamil Tiger rebels," reports AP.

The support from the Indian leader, Bal Thackeray, who is widely regarded as the de facto ruler of the western state of Maharashtra, of which Bombay is the capital, comes as Sri Lankan forces have captured the rebel stronghold of Jaffna.

In a 50-day offensive since October 17, the Sri Lankan military claims to have killed 2,063 rebels.

Thackeray, whose Shiv Sena Party is in power in Maharashtra state, told a news conference that Indians should be proud of the spirit of the Tigers. He suggested that the fierce guerrilla group be used to fight India's enemy, Pakistan.

**Israel, Syria to resume peace talks Dec 27**

JERUSALEM, Dec 17: Israel and Syria will resume their stalled land-for-peace negotiations near Washington on December 27, Secretary of State Warren Christopher said on Saturday, reports AP.

The first round of talks will last three days, recess for a week and then resume the first week in January for another three days, Christopher said. Then, Christopher said he would return to the Middle East to discuss the results with Prime Minister, Shimon Peres and Syrian President Hafez Assad.

"Clearly, we are entering a new phase of negotiations," he said. "Conducting the negotiations in a site near Washington will intensify the discussions."

**115 states adopt legal means to deal with AIDS**

NEW DELHI, Dec 17: As many as 115 countries, including India, have adopted legal means to deal with the killer disease, AIDS and HIV infection and related matters, between 1983 and 1995, reports PTI.

Of them, 25 countries have adopted HIV-related laws in 1987. They included India, China and Sri Lanka.

This information was provided in a paper presented at the recently concluded international conference on "AIDS — law and humanity," organised under age is of the Indian Law Institute (ILI).

Of the countries which adopted the legal measures, 70 were developing ones, it said.

**Off the Record**



Laure Belleville, Miss pays de Savoie, waves after being elected Miss France '96 in Lille on Saturday. Laure Belleville, 19, is a languages student in Annecy. — AFP/UNB photo

**Telephone chargecard for her flighty feline**

LONDON: The owner of a wandering cat has bought a telephone chargecard for her flighty feline so people can phone home and say where the black Burmese has strayed to, reports Reuter.

Beryl Venters said six-year-old Cagney was always going missing from her home in the southern English city of Wuchester. So Cagney now has a chargecard on her collar.

"Cagney is always sticking her nose into things and running off chasing anything that moves. The chargecard means anyone who without having to pay," she told reporters.

**Bombarding Di with love letters**

LONDON: Syria's defence minister is bombarding Princess Diana with love letters, a newspaper reported Sunday, but has only a scorched heart to answer for his campaign, reports AP.

LT Gen Mustafa Tlass sends the princess his entreaties to Britain's embassy in Damascus. The Sunday Telegraph reported, citing diplomatic sources. She has never replied.

The Syrian embassy in London would not confirm the obsession, the newspaper said. "I suppose he might send the princess letters," it quoted an unidentified Syrian diplomat as saying. "She's a nice lady."

The general, who helped Syrian President Hafez Assad gain power in a 1970 coup, adorns his library with photos of the princess, the newspaper reported, and is believed to possess the world's largest collection of books about her.

Tlass admiration was known as far back as 1984, the newspaper said, when a diplomat reported he went "soft as a kitten" at the mention of her name, the newspaper said.

He is also said to admire the actress Sophia Loren and the singer Whitney Houston.

**ROK air force on alert as DPRK deploys war planes**

SEOUL, Dec 17: The South Korean air force is on a higher state of alert after the communist North deployed more war planes near the demilitarised zone separating the two Koreas, the domestic Yonhap news agency said today, reports Reuter.

Yonhap, quoting the joint chiefs of staff, said Pyongyang had recently deployed about 20 more planes in three forward bases, bringing the total to 115 in areas close to the demilitarised zone that has divided the Korean peninsula since the 1950-53 Korean war.

Government officials were not available for comment.

"The South Korean air force has decided to step up various air vigilance operations," Yonhap quoted a joint chiefs of staff officer as saying.

He said the decision was reached after a major commanders meeting on Saturday, Yonhap said.

Tension between the two Koreas, still technically at war, has reached a new peak in recent weeks with both sides stepping up surveillance.

South Korea's intelligence chief also warned on Friday of a threat from the North, saying the greatest danger was Pyongyang's "internal crisis and military adventurism."

A parliamentary official quoted Kwon Young-Hae as telling the parliamentary intelligence committee: "This winter and next spring will be a critical period in managing the crisis on the Korean peninsula."

**Hamas vows to kill more Israelis**

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip, Dec 17: Even as Hamas prepared to negotiate an end to violence, leaders of the Palestinian militant group promised thousands of exultant supporters that they would keep killing Israelis, reports AP.

"We assert Hamas will continue its Jihad (holy war) until all of Palestine is liberated," leading activist Mohammed Taha said at a rally Saturday for the eighth anniversary of Hamas.

His speech at Gaza Stadium was punctuated by taped sounds of gunfire and explosions that drove the crowd of 10,000 into a frenzy.

**US voters divided over giving Clinton another term**

WASHINGTON, Dec 17: At the dawn of the 1996 election year, the United States is evenly divided over whether President Clinton deserves a second term, and leaning toward Democrats for the next Congress, according to an Associated Press poll.

Among Republican White House hopefuls, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole tested strongest when voters were asked to match the attribute they consider most important in a president with a list of Republican candidates.

Dole's rivals barely registered in that test, providing additional evidence of the senator's big advantage seven weeks before the first voting

in the Republican nominating season.

Honesty and trustworthiness ranked highest when 1,004 randomly selected adult Americans were polled December 8-12 and asked what mattered most in picking a president.

Thirty-five per cent picked honesty, nearly twice as many as any other attribute. Among this group, Clinton fared poorly: only 25 per cent of those who listed honesty as most critical said Clinton was the candidate who best exemplified that quality.

Dole scored best among those who said experience or leadership mattered most. He also scored respectably among those who cited honesty and getting things done

as their top attributes.

The AP survey was replete with evidence that Clinton's improved standing at the close of a tumultuous political year in Washington stems largely from rising public anxiety with the Republican congressional agenda. And Clinton's fellow Democrats are also benefiting.

Overall the AP survey found that 43 per cent believed Clinton should be re-elected next November, while 42 per cent said he should not be given a second term.

By comparison, 38 per cent of respondents in a February 1992 AP poll said George Bush deserved re-

election, while 48 per cent said he did not. These numbers proved telling: Bush received 37 per cent in the November 1992 election.

In Clinton's case, the 43 per cent who said he should be re-elected matched his showing in the 1992 election. That would suggest Clinton has maintained his core support, but would have difficulties if the 1996 race is a two-way contest.

If that were the case the data suggest Clinton would have a hard time attracting 1992 Ross Perot voters: 50 per cent of them said Clinton should not be re-elected, while 28 per cent favoured a

second Clinton term.

When asked to think ahead to the 1996 election, women were more likely to side with Clinton: 46 per cent said he deserved re-election, while just 40 per cent of men did. Fifty-five per cent of those age 65 and older said Clinton should be re-elected.

Women and older voters are the constituencies that have become most anxious about Republican budget and other priorities. That is clear both in AP interviews with voters and in the poll, taken separately by ICR Survey Research Group of AUS Consultants.

Taliban rocket Kabul: 4 killed

KABUL, Dec 17: Four civilians were killed and nine injured when Taliban fighters besieging Kabul launched a rocket barrage on the city, witnesses and hospital staff said today, reports AP.

The four men died when two rockets from a salvo of about 17 landed near a packed mini-bus in Kabul's southern suburbs late Saturday, witnesses at the scene said. Two of the wounded were soldiers, they said.

All the injured were on or near the bus, which was travelling on the main road towards Kabul city centre, they added.