

# Israel begins to withdraw troops from West Bank

JENIN, West Bank, Nov 20: Israel today began to withdraw its troops from areas in the West Bank, military officials said, reports AP.

Hundreds of Palestinians had taken to the streets of Jenin Thursday to celebrate the Israeli government decision to withdraw from areas surrounding this Palestinian-ruled town in the northern West Bank.

An AFP reports from Jerusalem adds: Israel will release a first group of 250 Palestinian prisoners today in tandem with its military pullback in the West Bank, the prisons authority and the military said Thursday.

Two hundred prisoners will be freed by the penal authorities and other 50 by the military, they said.

The Palestinians have protested that only 100 of the detainees that Israel plans to release are political prisoners while the rest are common criminals.

We didn't go to Wye River and American President Bill Clinton didn't intervene so that a bunch of car thieves could be released, senior Arafat aide Ahmed Tibi told AFP Thursday.

The Palestinian side lodged a complaint with the US administration and asked them to

intervene to sort this out and force Israel to stick to its commitments completely, he said.

The Wye River memorandum signed by Israel and the Palestinian Authority October 23 in Washington provides for the release in three stages of 750 of the 3,500 Palestinians detained by Israel.

Hisham Abdel Raziq, Palestinian Minister of State for Prisoner Affairs charged that the presence of common criminals on the list of those to be released is a violation of the accord, which does not bode well for relations between the two sides.

AP adds from Washington: Four Arab countries — Egypt, Jordan, Oman and Bahrain — are among about a dozen nations that have accepted invitations to meet here Nov 30 to consider new assistance to the Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza.

Israel, which has joined the United States in appealing for financial help, funneled through Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, also plans to attend the one-day conference, as does Arafat.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will be the host. She has urged wealthy European, Asian and Arab countries to

help the Palestinians and has appealed to the Arabs to establish or improve relations with Israel, now that it is giving up another chunk of the West Bank.

The State Department spokesman, James P Rubin, said Thursday a positive response was expected now that the Israeli pullback is about to start.

Past appeals produced \$3.9 billion in pledges, about two-thirds at a similar conference in 1993.

AFP from Jenin, West Bank says: The Palestinian Authority today refused to take control of territories in the West Bank evacuated by Israel earlier in the day on the grounds that the area was smaller than expected, a Palestinian police official said.

General Haj Ismail Jaber, the head of Palestinian police forces in the West Bank, quit the military liaison office in this northern West Bank town where he had been due to take part in a formal handover ceremony with his Israeli counterpart, the Palestinian official said.

Jaber left by helicopter for consultations with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Hebron in the southern West Bank.



Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat smiles while greeted by officials upon his arrival to Hebron Thursday. The Israeli cabinet approved Thursday the first stage of the new Middle East peace agreement, which includes the handing over of West Bank territory to Palestinian hands. — AP/UNB photo

# Serbia's PM blames ethnic Albanians for blocking peace efforts

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia, Nov 20: Serbia's prime minister accused Kosovo's ethnic Albanians of blocking peace efforts Thursday, a day after they failed for the 17th time — to attend Serb-proposed talks without international mediation, reports AP.

Serbian Premier Mirko Marjanovic visited Kosovo's capital, Pristina, on Thursday, the day after the Serbian president attempted to meet directly with leaders of Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority.

The successive trips to Kosovo were an attempt to assert Serbia's authority over the southern province, despite continued Western attempts to hammer out a peaceful solution. Hundreds have been killed and about a quarter of a million people in Kosovo left homeless since Serbs cracked down on separatist ethnic Albanian rebels in February.

Ethnic Albanian politicians refused to attend the talks called by Serb President Milan Milutinovic, saying a basic agreement on the future of the province must come first — with international mediation.

In Belgrade on Thursday, Serbia's ultranationalist vice premier Vojislav Seselj accused the United States of backing the ethnic Albanian boycott. He

said US mediator Christopher Hill can only be a guest at any negotiations.

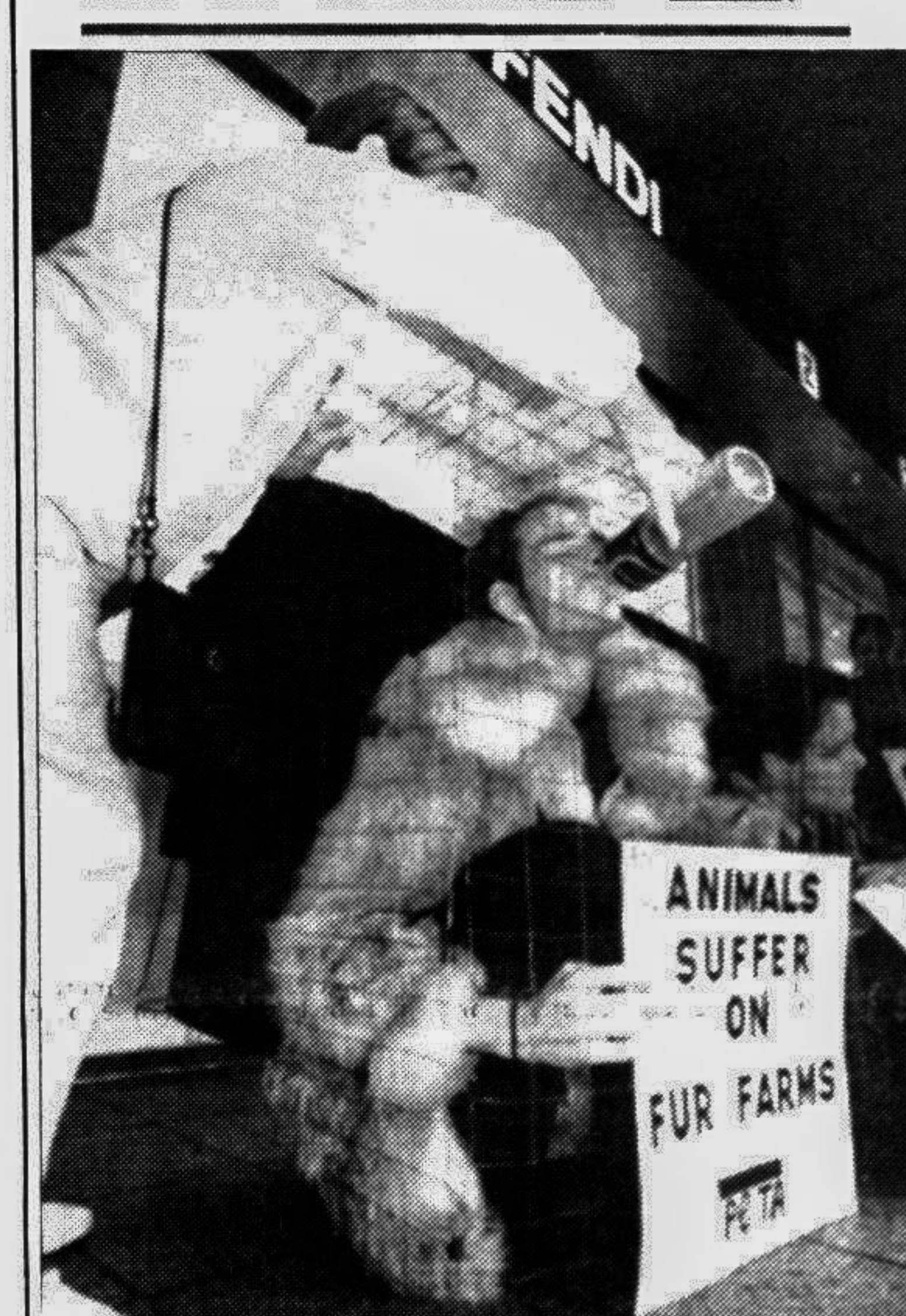
The Serb leadership has rejected a draft version of a plan proposed by Hill, envisaging almost no Serbian control in the province, while leaving it under the partial jurisdiction of Yugoslavia, now made up of Serbia and Montenegro. Milutinovic instead offered Kosovo self-rule, with its own authorities and police, but under Serb rule.

Addressing a ceremony held in Pristina Thursday honoring soldiers and police officers who participated in the crackdown, Marjanovic blamed the Albanians for stalling the peace.

He accused the ethnic Albanians of "causing great damage to everybody, including a big majority of Albanians who want to live and work in Kosovo with the others" by boycotting the talks and said Serbia's top priority was to "preserve peace and freedom, territorial integrity and sovereignty."

Meanwhile the ethnic Albanian Kosovo Information Centre said a 49-year-old doctor was killed and his daughter wounded when three masked assailants broke into their home in Pec, some 50 kilometers (30 miles) west of Pristina.

# BRIEFLY



A member of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals wearing fur cramped inside small wire cages drinks water outside a Hong Kong fur store Thursday, as they protest animals on fur farms around the world suffer from extremes of weather and overcrowding. — AP/UNB photo

**Director Alan Pakula dead:** Movie director Alan Pakula, who made such hits as "All the President's Men" and "Sophie's Choice," was killed in an automobile accident in New York on Thursday, police said, Reuters says from New York.

Pakula, 70, was driving on a suburban New York highway when a metal bar crashed through the windshield, striking him in the head, and his car slammed into a fence, said Suffolk county, NY police. He was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital.

**21 bodies found from Mexico crash:** Rescue teams have recovered the bodies of 21 people who were aboard two helicopters that crashed while flying between offshore rigs in the southern Gulf of Mexico, government oil monopoly Petroleos Mexicanos said Thursday, AP says from Mexico City.

One more person is missing and presumed dead. In a press release, Pemex said that 20 of the victims have been identified and that the search by Pemex and Mexican navy teams for the last victim was continuing.

**Quakes rattle SW China:** Two strong earthquakes hit a rural area in southwestern China and injured 303 people, the Central Seismology Bureau reported yesterday, AP reports from Beijing.

A quake measuring 5.0 struck the Ningland Yi Autonomous County in southwest China's Yunnan province and neighboring Yanyuan County in Sichuan province at 7:31 pm (11:31 GMT) Thursday, followed by a stronger 6.2 quake seven minutes later.

**US blasts China's expulsion of newsmen:** The US State Department said Thursday China's expulsion of Japanese and German journalists within the past month raises serious questions about China's willingness to respect freedom of expression and the press, AP says from Washington.

In the more recent expulsion, Juergen Kremb of the German magazine Der Spiegel, was accused of illegally obtaining state secrets. He was barred from returning to China for five years.

**Chinese hijacker gaoled for 20 yrs:** A Chinese hijacker who was sent back to the mainland from Taiwan was convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison on Friday, the state-run Xinhua News Agency reported, AP says from Beijing.

The Intermediate People's Court in Shenzhen in Guangdong province in south China, tried and sentenced Huang Shugang on Friday morning. He also was convicted of embezzling public funds, the report said.

**Lao PM to visit Myanmar:** Lao Prime Minister Sisavath Keobounphan will pay an official visit to Myanmar on Monday aimed at strengthening the relations between the two countries while promoting cooperation in the southeast Asian region, Xinhua says from Yangon.

According to an official announcement yesterday, the visit will be made at the invitation of senior general Than Shwe, chairman of the Myanmar State Peace and Development Council and also the prime minister.

**US-Europe to launch weather sat:** The United States and Europe signed an agreement Thursday on joint operation of a set of polar-orbiting weather satellites, Xinhua says from Washington.

Under the agreement, they will jointly operate the polar satellites that carry a common set of instrument so that the two sides can share the data.

# Japan's defence minister resigns

TOKYO, Nov 20: Japan's defence minister stepped down Friday, one day after releasing an internal agency report that exposed a cover-up at the highest levels in a growing corruption scandal, reports AP.

Fukushima Nukaga handed his resignation to Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi after a Cabinet meeting Friday morning, an agency spokesman said.

Nukaga, who served in the post since July, will be replaced by fellow ruling party lawmaker Hosen Norota, new reports said.

Defence Agency officials are being investigated for allowing Japanese electronics giant NEC Corp. to inflate defence contract bills in exchange for cushy jobs for retiring bureaucrats.

# Int'l campaign launched to ban death penalty

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 20: The Roman Catholic nun who wrote "Dead Man Walking" came to the United Nations on Thursday to launch an international campaign for a moratorium on the death penalty, reports AP.

Sister Helen Prejean was joined by Tim Robbins, who directed the 1995 Oscar-winning film based on her book, in delivering petitions backing the appeal to Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The petitions — signed the Dalai Lama, six other Nobel Peace Prize winners and close to a hundred other prominent people worldwide — calls for the UN General Assembly to establish a universal moratorium on executions next year, with a view to a total abolition.

"There are some human rights that are so deep they are nonnegotiable," Sister Prejean told reporters.

The petition was organised by Hands Off Chain, an Italian anti-capital punishment group.

# Ocalan to remain in Rome jail

ROME, Nov 20: Italy's Justice Minister Oliviero Diliberto on Wednesday asked a Rome judge to give Abdullahi Ocalan house arrest, but a Rome prosecutor said the Kurdish guerrilla leader should stay in jail or he might flee, reports Reuters.

The diverging recommendations made to Rome's court of appeals, which must decide whether to uphold Ocalan's detention, highlights the prickly judicial issue Italy faces over Ocalan's fate which has swelled into a diplomatic crisis with Turkey.

Diliberto asked the head of the court of appeals "to substitute Ocalan's custody in jail with a different and less serious measure" while awaiting a ruling on whether he would be granted asylum or be extradited to Turkey, a justice ministry statement said.

# Charles asks The Mirror to apologise to Harry

LONDON, Nov 20: Prince Charles publicly demanded an apology for a front-page tabloid article Thursday about a minor sports injury Prince Harry suffered at school, reports AP.

The privacy of Charles' two sons has long been a concern to the royal family, and most newspapers have agreed to its request that Harry, 14, and Prince William, 16, be left alone at school.

Charles' office had sent a letter to the newspaper Wednesday confirming Harry's injury occurred, but stating that coverage was not in the public interest and did not warrant publication without parental permission — which Charles withheld.

The Mirror ran a front-page editorial under the headline "Harry had an accident" that reproduced the palace letter, with the details of the injury blacked out.

# Taliban clear Bin Laden of terrorist charges

KABUL, Nov 20: The man the United States has declared its greatest enemy is "a man without sin," Afghanistan's hard-line Islamic Taliban militia declared on Friday, saying the case against Osama Bin Laden was closed, reports AP.

A three-week inquiry headed by Afghanistan's Chief Justice Noor Mohammed Saqib into allegations that Bin Laden is waging a war of terror against the United States ended Friday.

"It's over and America has not presented any evidence," Saqib told The Associated Press in an interview at the Supreme Court building in the Afghan capital.

"Without any evidence, Bin Laden is a man without sin... he is a free man," he said. Bin Laden has been living in Afghanistan for years with the permission of the Taliban, who control most of the country.

"Without commenting on the rigor of the Taliban judicial system, it is clear that Bin Laden is a proven threat to US national interests and will remain a focus of our diplomatic and legal efforts to take down his terrorist network and bring him and his associates to justice," said White House National Security Council spokesman David Leavy, speaking in Japan where he was travelling with US President Bill Clinton.

A US court has indicted Bin Laden in connection with the August 7 bombings of the two US embassies in East Africa that killed 224 people. Two weeks ago Washington offered a \$5 million reward for the capture of Bin Laden, something the Taliban said was tantamount to encouraging terrorist activity inside their war-shattered country.

Saqib said he waited in vain to a large ornately carved wooden desk and a bouquet of brightly coloured plastic flowers, for American officials to provide evidence of Bin Laden's involvement in terrorist activity.

"It is their shame that they have been silent," said Saqib. "America is wrong about Bin Laden... Anything that happens now anywhere in the world they blame Osama, but the reality is in the proof and they have not given us any."

The United States does not recognise the Taliban government and has no diplomatic representatives in Afghanistan.

Bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian who was thrown out of his homeland for advocating the ouster of the Saudi royal family, is believed by the United States to be using bases in Afghanistan to train and finance Islamic terrorist groups

worldwide who target US interests and US citizens.

In August the United States launched a cruise missile attack on eastern Afghanistan against suspected terrorist training camps. Twenty-six people were killed, but Bin Laden was unhurt.

The Taliban have refused to hand over Bin Laden to the United States saying they will withstand anything the US directs at them, including more Tomahawk cruise missiles.

Bin Laden's self-declared war against the United States was launched following the 1991 Gulf war to protest the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia, where two of Islam's holiest sites — Mecca and Medina — are located.

Taliban commanders who know Bin Laden say he is living in mountain camps outside the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar.

Bin Laden settled in Afghanistan when the Taliban's opponents, led by ousted President Burhanuddin Rabbani, ruled the capital of Kabul.

Taliban officials now ask why the United States didn't demand the extradition of Bin Laden when Rabbani ruled.

The Taliban religious army espouse a strict brand of Islamic law that has barred women from working.

# Indonesian army chief orders investigation into deaths

JAKARTA, Nov 20: Armed forces chief Gen. Wiranto has ordered an investigation into whether Indonesian soldiers fired live rounds at student demonstrators last week in street clashes that left as many as 16 people dead, a report said Friday, reports AP.

Meanwhile angry students punched and kicked a Cabinet minister after invading a provincial airport where government officials were holding a meeting, the newspaper Kompas reported.

It said bodyguards rescued Agriculture Minister Soleh Salahuddin from a mob of students in Padang, about 1,000 kilometres Northwest of Jakarta.

The minister later met with the students, who demanded the military be removed from government and that Wiranto resign.

A military team will determine how shooting deaths in Jakarta occurred despite live ammunition being banned, said Wayan Karya, a spokesman for the Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs.

The investigation aims to find out exactly what went wrong," Karya was reported in The Indonesian Observer newspaper as telling journalists.

"We want to find out why, despite the fact that live ammunition was expressly prohibited by military commanders," he said. "One postmortem (examination) did locate a bullet embedded in the body of a victim."

Human rights groups say as many as 16 people, including eight students and several soldiers, were killed in confrontations after demonstrators, seeking faster democratic change, tried to march on the national parliament. Police say 13 people died.

Hundreds of people were injured.

Opposition figures and students claim the military provoked much of the violence and have demanded that Wiranto resign.

The military has insisted that security personnel were issued only plastic bullets and blank ammunition. But Cab-

net Minister Adi Sasono said this week that autopsies on the bodies of some of the eight students who died showed some had been killed by live ammunition.

President B J Habibie has accused some opposition groups of orchestrating the protests as part of a plot to overthrow his 6-month-old government.

Police have charged 10 activists with sedition. More charges are expected to be filed soon. Despite the crackdown, big student protests have continued this week.

Reuters adds: A hospital forensic expert today said that metal bullet fragments have been found in some of the bodies of people killed in last week's bloody clashes in Jakarta which left at least 14 dead.

It is the first public evidence to support the widespread belief that live bullets were used during last week's student-led protests which were crushed by police and troops. The military says it only used blanks and plastic bullets.

# FM accuses Gore of inciting violence

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 20: The US ambassador to Malaysia said he was "shocked" by the government's charge that Vice-President Al Gore was inciting violence by praising a reform movement, in a report said today, reports AP.

Ambassador John Malott said democracy was not just about holding elections but also about allowing dissent to be voiced freely.

"Democracy is not simply having elections — Stalin held elections, even Hitler held elections. Democracy is a process of allowing all views to be heard, of allowing the competition of ideas," Malott said in an interview with The Star newspaper.

In a speech here Monday night, Gore praised "reformist" calls, made by ousted deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim following his sacking in September, and the "brave people of Malaysia" calling for greater democracy.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi slammed Gore's remarks as "unwarranted," "provocative"

and "abhorrent" and accused the United States of trying to incite "lawlessness" in Malaysia.

Asked about Abdullah's assertion that the United States would have to account for any rupture in Malaysia's multicultural harmony, Malott said: "I was shocked by that statement. It's the first time I've ever seen anyone say that when you call for democracy, you are inciting people to violence."

"I have to reject that kind of an idea," he said. "And I'm rather shocked by the notion that when you say that the right of people to express their views feebly is something good, this would be called an incitement to violence."

Among proposed Palestinian projects are an airport at Gaza, water treatment facilities and a luxury hotel in Bethlehem.

In 1993, the United States pledged \$500 million for five years, Rubin said. "We do hope to substantially increase that amount in the coming years."

# Americans not keen on impeachment hearings

NEW YORK, Nov 20: From cartoons to horror movies, stock quotes to talk shows, Americans turned the channel to watch nearly anything but the marathon impeachment hearings against President Bill Clinton, reports AP.

For some, it was the prospect of listening to Kenneth Starr's all-business monotone for two hours on Thursday that led them to turn off or turn away. Others said they were beyond fed up with the entire cast of characters.

"I'm sick of it. I don't ever want to see Monica Lewinsky's face anymore — or Bill Clinton's, for that matter," said Cindy Kilroy, who works at the Bowling Center in, of all places, Clinton, New York, northwest of Albany.

No one wanted to watch the hearings, so Kilroy flipped back and forth between cartoons and the 1991 horror movie, "Strays," starring Timothy Busfield.

Folks at Ferg's barber shop in downtown Des Moines, Iowa, opted to watch other scandals.

"We turned the TV on to Jerry Springer," said barber Bruce Fulton, referring to a controversial US talk show. "Ken

Starr is boring. They don't have enough votes to impeach so they're just going through the motions."

Some people gave the hearings a chance, but grew frustrated with the process and changed the channel.

"We watched for a while and finally someone said to put on the weather and the sports. I think it's gotten to the point where people want to drop it," said Cyril Clark, bartender at the 21st Amendment in Boston.

Chuck Cullen, a salesman at the Circuit City in Omaha, Nebraska, said employees changed the display televisions to the hearings after a customer asked.

"She watched it for a little while, then left. We changed the channel back," he said. The hearing "isn't really a good selling point, you know."

Jetsyn Tache switched the hearings on for the 150 morning exercisers at Golds Gym in Redondo Beach, California.

"The consensus is they look at it as a big joke," said Tache, a salesman at the gym. "They watch for 10 minutes and then walk away. It's like, been there, done that."



US President Bill Clinton, left, toasts with Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi during a banquet held by the latter at Akasaka State Guesthouse in Tokyo Thursday. Clinton arrived in Japan for a two-day visit. — AP/UNB photo