



Demonstrators block a road near Athens' Polytechnic on Dec 10. Greek union chiefs hailed a "massive turnout" of public and private sector workers for a long-planned general strike on Wednesday, as the country reeled from days of rioting over the killing of an Athens schoolboy. PHOTO: AFP

India unveils massive security overhaul

AP, New Delhi

India announced a massive overhaul of its security and intelligence agencies yesterday in the wake of the Mumbai terror attacks that left 171 dead and provoked a public outcry over the government's response.

Among the new measures, the government will seek to create an FBI-style national investigative agency, beef up coastal security, better train local police, strengthen anti-terror laws and increase intelligence sharing, said Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram, the country's top law enforcement official.

"Given the nature of the threat, we can't go back to business as usual," Chidambaram said in a speech to India's Parliament, adding he would "take certain hard decisions to prepare the country and people to face the challenge of terrorism."

The revamp represents the government's first detailed response to widespread public anger over security and

intelligence failures in the attacks. Chidambaram has previously apologised for government "lapses" in the assault.

Meanwhile, police in Mumbai backed off of plans to produce the only surviving attacker, Mohammed Ajmal Kasab, in court Thursday for a routine hearing, citing security concerns.

Instead, a magistrate came to police headquarters and granted authorities permission to hold Kasab for a further two weeks, public prosecutor Eknath Dhamal said, without providing details of the decision. Under Indian law, police can extend detentions for months on end before formal criminal charges are filed.

A security cordon was thrown around the downtown Mumbai building where Kasab was being held, and journalists were kept 200 yards (180 meters) away, their view blocked by a police van.

Kasab, who was wounded and captured by police in the first hours of the Nov. 26 attack, has been repeatedly interrogated by authorities and reportedly offered key details about the planning of

the assault and those responsible for it. Many lawyers across the city, horrified by the attacks, have said they would not represent Kasab.

On Thursday, Dinesh Mota, a lawyer asked by the court to defend Kasab, said he would refuse.

"I will not represent him, it is against all human values," he said.

On Wednesday, police identified two more people involved in the training of the 10 attackers.

One of the trainers, identified only as Khafa and described as a senior operative in the banned Pakistani terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba, was their main handler after the men were selected for the attack, Rakesh Maria, Mumbai's chief police investigator.

The other man, another senior Lashkar militant identified as Abu Hamza, was responsible for much of the training they received while sequestered in a house in Azizabad, Pakistan, for three months to prepare for the attack, Maria said.

Riots and looting across Athens amid protests

AFP, Athens

Riots and looting erupted across Athens yesterday as the Greek government confronted a sixth day of violent protests over the police killing of a schoolboy.

Demonstrators clashed with security forces outside the country's biggest prison and a university in central Athens while police said groups of youths were reported to be looting stores in various districts. Others blocked main roads.

Formal voluntary homicide charges against the police officer accused of shooting 15-year-old Andreas Grigoriopoulos failed to stem the public anger. Underfire prime minister Costas Karamanlis still left for a European Union summit in Brussels, while

Greek embassies in other countries have also become a target for protests.

A clash at Koyrdallos prison in a western Athens suburb blew up after protesters started throwing rocks and other missiles at police who fired tear gas to force the protesters back, a prison guard said.

The demonstrators were staging a sitdown protest in front of the prison.

Police said there was a second riot at the agriculture university in Athens, which has been occupied by students, and that rampaging youths were looting stores in the Nea Smyrni and Galatsi districts of the capital.

School students also blocked several main roads in Athens.

Iraq restaurant bomb kills 45

AFP, Kirkuk

At least 45 people were killed and 93 wounded in a suicide bomb attack on a restaurant near the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk yesterday, the city's deputy police chief Torhane Yussef said.

Women and children were among the victims of the attack on the "Abdullah" restaurant, an interior ministry official in Baghdad said.

The blast happened in early afternoon on the final day of the Eid-ul-Azha (Feast of the Sacrifice) holiday at a roadside restaurant 15 kilometres (nine miles) north of Kirkuk and 255 kilometres (160 miles) from Baghdad, police officer Salam Zengana told AFP.

A defence ministry source and waiter Abbas Fadhel said a suicide bomber activated a booby-trapped belt in the

middle of the restaurant, where families were dining.

However, the interior ministry official said the attack was by an explosives-laden car outside the restaurant.

The wounded were taken to Kirkuk's main hospital.

"More and more victims are arriving," Doctor Mohammed Abdallah told AFP.

At the restaurant, victims were lying on the ground with blood on their faces, an AFP journalist said.

Bomb attacks have continued regularly in Kirkuk and surrounding areas, although the number of violent incidents in Iraq as a whole has dropped sharply this year.

The province is ethnically mixed, with large Arab, Kurdish, and Turkmen communities, but the Kurds have demanded that it be added to

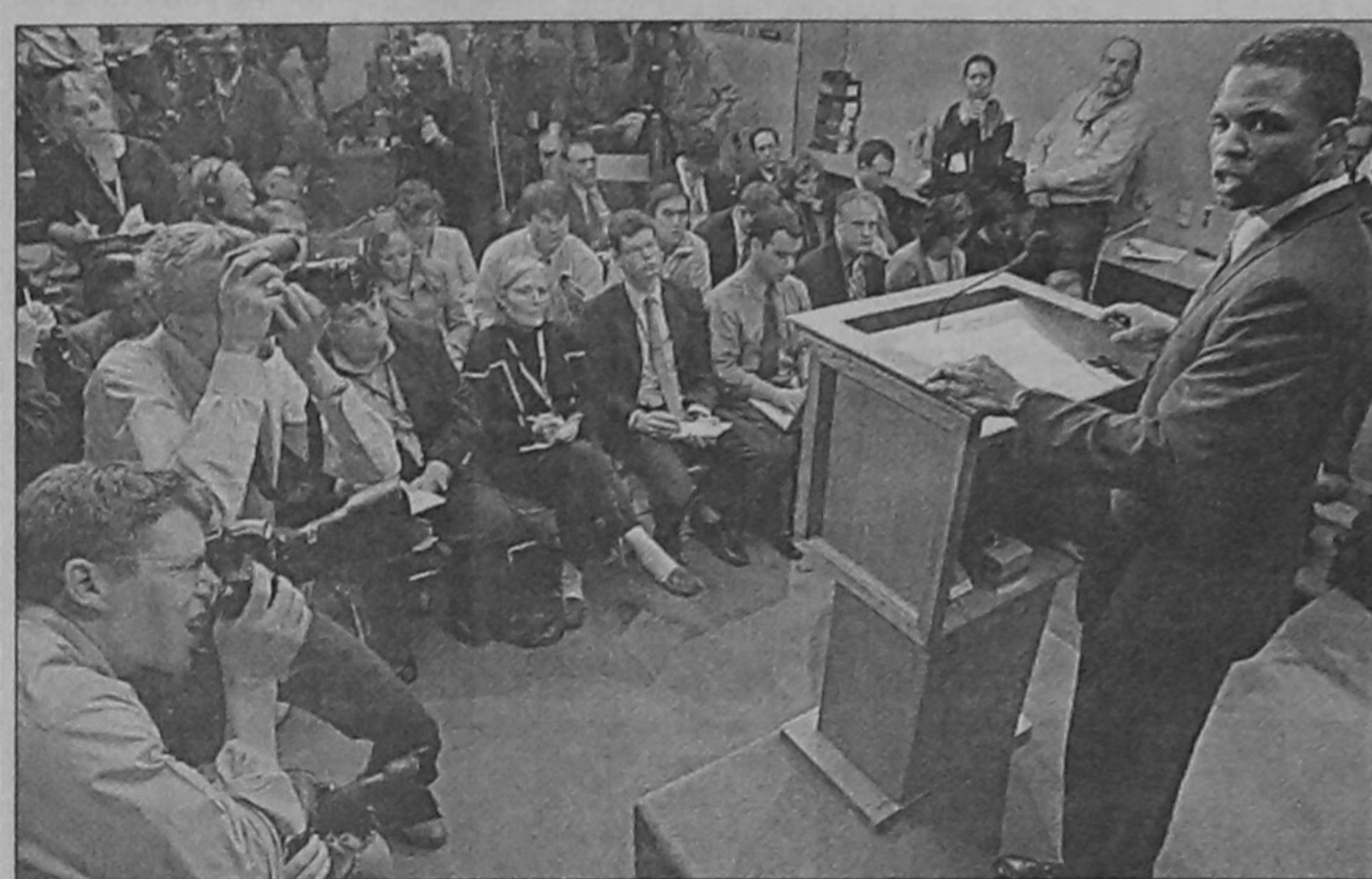
their autonomous region in the country's north.

On December 1, police found 12 bodies in a village south of Kirkuk. They had been riddled with bullets and incinerated, Jamal Taher Bakr, the provincial police chief, told AFP.

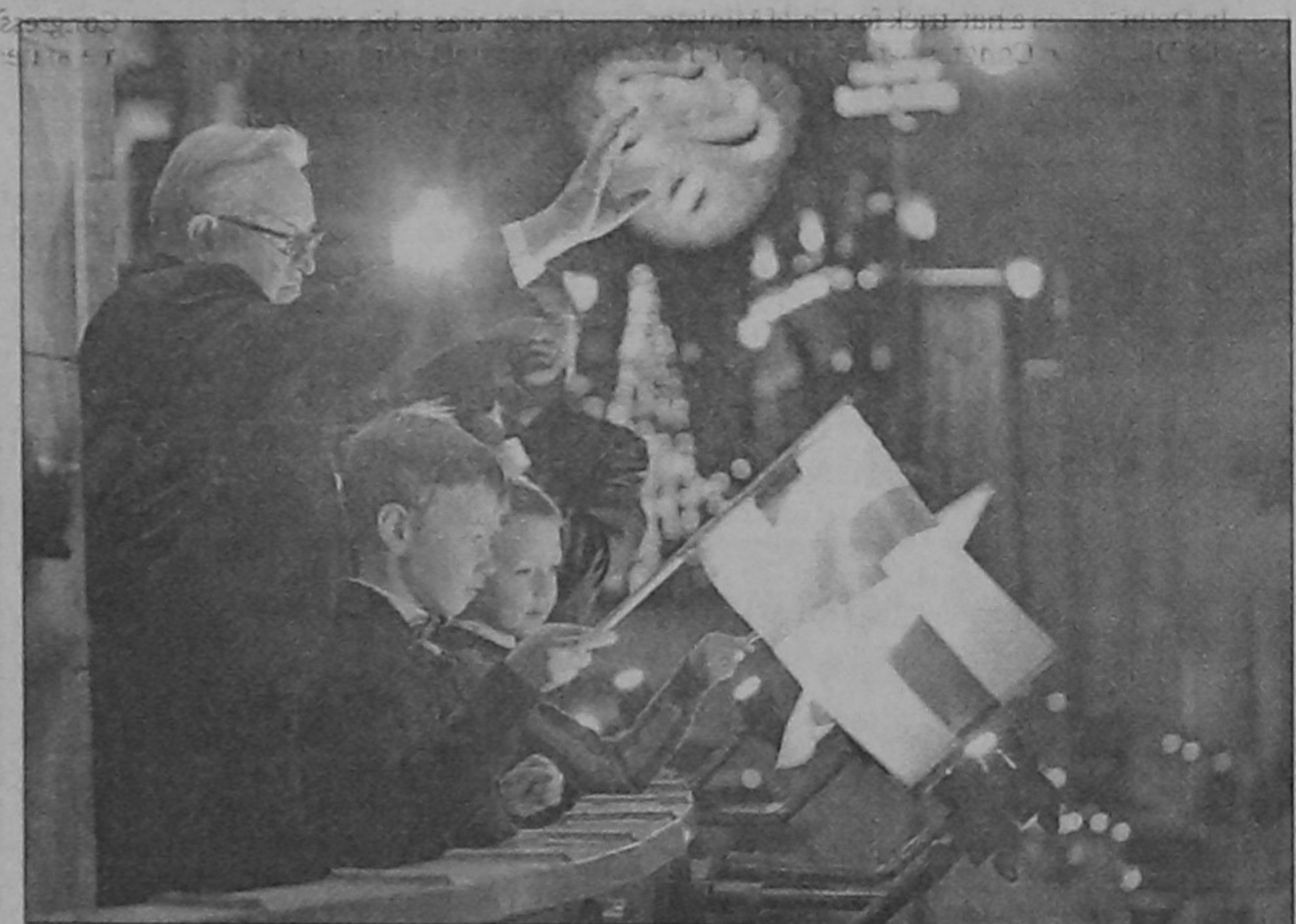
That incident was part of the bloodiest day in Iraq in more than three weeks, as a spate of attacks targeting security forces in the heart of Baghdad and the northern city of Mosul killed around 30 people.

On November 2, two children were killed and two others wounded when a bomb exploded as they played on wasteland south of Kirkuk.

On October 18, a member of the Kurdistan regional security forces died and three Iraqi policemen were wounded in violence in Kirkuk province.



Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-IL) addresses a news conference at the US Capitol on Dec 10 in Washington, DC. Jackson had been mentioned as a potential replacement for the US Senate seat left vacant by President-elect Barack Obama. Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich (C), who has the power to fill the vacant Senate seat, was arrested from his Chicago home on Dec 9 and charged with corruption after prosecutors said he was trying to sell the seat to the highest bidder. PHOTO: AFP



Nobel Peace Prize winner Martti Ahtisaari watches a torchlight procession from the balcony of the Grand Hotel in Oslo on Dec 10. Veteran mediator Martti Ahtisaari insisted Wednesday that all conflicts could be resolved and urged Barack Obama to strive to bring peace to the Middle East as he received the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize. PHOTO: AFP

Nobel peace laureates speak out for Suu Kyi

AFP, Paris

Nobel peace laureates opened a summit in Paris Thursday to draw world attention to the plight of Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi, but former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was forced to miss the gathering.

Gorbachev, whose foundation is co-hosting the three-day gathering with the city of Paris, was suffering from ill health and unable to travel.

Meeting a day after former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari received this year's prestigious prize, the dozen Nobel laureates were also to present an award to Irish rocker-turned-activist Bono for his crusade against poverty.

Gorbachev, 77, was to join former leaders EW. de Klerk of South Africa, Lech Walesa of Poland and Northern Ireland

politician John Hume for the annual gathering, held in Paris.

"I regret to inform you that doctors have forbidden me to travel," Gorbachev said in a message read to delegates. "I hope that everything will be all right."

Italian opposition leader Walter Veltroni described his health problem as "minor".

Gorbachev won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990, a year after the Berlin Wall fell, marking a turning point in East-West relations that paved the way for the reunification of Germany.

The Paris summit focuses on the theme "human rights and a world without violence" amid celebrations marking 60 years since the UN declaration of human rights was adopted in Paris.

BID TO SELL PRESIDENT-ELECT'S SENATE SEAT Illinois governor ignores Obama's call to resign

AP, Chicago

His career in shreds, Illinois Gov Rod Blagojevich clung defiantly to power Wednesday, ignoring a call to step down from President-elect Barack Obama and a warning that Senate Democrats will not let him appoint a new senator from the state.

"Everyone is calling for his head," said Barbara Flynn Currie, a leader in the Illinois House and, like the governor, a Democrat.

One day after Blagojevich's arrest, fellow Illinois politicians sought to avoid the taint of scandal-by-association.

Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. said at a news conference in Washington that he was Senate Candidate 5 in the government's criminal complaint a man Blagojevich was secretly recorded as saying might be willing to pay money to gain appointment to Obama's vacant Senate seat. Jackson said he had been assured by prosecutors he was not a target of the investigation, and he emphatically said he had not engaged "whatsoever in any wrongdoing."

Other Democrats in Washington edged away from calls for a special election to fill Obama's place in the Senate, hoping that Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn would soon become governor and fill the vacancy on his own. That would assure the party of holding the seat, and on a far faster timetable than any balloting would allow.

Ensclosed in his downtown office, Blagojevich gave no sign he was contemplating resigning, and dispatched his spokeswoman, Kelley Quinn, to say it was "business as usual" in his 16th-floor suite, situated a few blocks from Obama's transition headquarters. "At the end of the day, the top priority for our office is to serve the people, and we have not lost sight of that, nor will we lose sight of that," Kelley Quinn said.

One day earlier, federal prosecutors released a thick document that included excerpts of wiretapped conversations in which the governor allegedly schemed to enrich himself by offering to sell Obama's Senate seat for campaign cash or a lucrative job inside or outside government.

N Korea nuclear talks collapse with no deal

AFP, Beijing

North Korean nuclear disarmament talks collapsed here yesterday after failing to reach agreement on how to determine if the secretive nation had told the truth about its atomic programmes.

Chief US envoy Christopher Hill departed Beijing after four days of talks blaming the communist regime for refusing to agree on a protocol to verify a historic declaration it made in June this year about its nuclear activities.

"Ultimately, the DPRK (North Korea) was not ready, really, to reach a verification protocol with all the standards that are required," Hill told reporters as he prepared to leave Beijing.

With no date set for more talks, this week's failure all but dashed the hopes of US President George W. Bush's administration to make progress on North Korean disarmament before Barack Obama moves into the White House.

The Bush administration had made solving the North Korean nuclear impasse a key foreign policy priority.

Hill admitted that the goal this week of securing a verification deal had always been an extremely hard task.

"We had some very ambi-

tious plans for this round. Unfortunately we were not able to complete some of what we wanted to do," Hill, an assistant secretary of state, said at Beijing's airport.

"We worked very hard on verification but ultimately we were not able to get an agreed verification protocol."

One key sticking point has been North Korea's refusal to allow samples of atomic material to be taken away, envoys to the talks had said earlier in the week.

Under a landmark six-nation deal reached in February 2007, North Korea agreed to give up the nuclear programmes it had spent decades developing.

That pact also called for the other nations involved in the talks to deliver one million tonnes of fuel oil or energy aid of equivalent value to the North.

However the negotiations, which began in 2003, have been mired in countless setbacks, and did not prevent Pyongyang from testing its first atomic bomb in 2006.

And although the North made its declaration of its atomic activities in June, the next crucial step in the process was working out a way to determine if it had been telling the truth.

Indian bus fire kills 63

AP, Lucknow

Police say the death toll after a speeding bus caught fire in northern India has risen to 63.

Senior police official Navneet Kumar said Wednesday that the dead from Tuesday's accident include eight children.

Police say the 52-seat bus was crammed with more than 100 people when it caught fire, overturned and slid for several hundred yards (meters) down a highway.

Abuses persist as UN rights declaration turns 60

AFP, Paris

Six decades after the United Nations endorsed the fundamental principles of our shared human rights, campaigners Wednesday demanded action to defend these values against the worst abuses.

While for some the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was cause to celebrate great advances in dignity, angry voices were raised in countries such as China, Zimbabwe and Greece.

UK to pullout most troops from Iraq by June

AP, Baghdad

Britain announced Wednesday it will withdraw all but a handful of its 4,000 soldiers from Iraq next year, ending a mission that was unpopular at home and failed to curb the rise of Iranian-backed Shia militias in the south.

The decision comes as the United States is weighing a drawdown in its nearly 150,000-strong force. President-elect Barack Obama has called for withdrawing all

combat troops from Iraq by the spring of 2010, shifting responsibility to the Iraqis for the defence of the country against Sunni and Shia extremists.

The British announcement, which was expected, signals a conclusion to the role of the second biggest troop contributor to the multinational coalition after the United States. More than 45,000 British troops took part in the March 2003 invasion that overthrew Saddam Hussein.

Obama taps Nobel physicist as energy secy

AFP, Chicago

President-elect Barack Obama has chosen Nobel prize-winning physicist Steven Chu, a strong advocate of alternative and renewable energy research, to be his energy secretary, US media reported yesterday.

Obama has also decided to name three experienced policy makers and regulators to key environmental jobs, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times wrote.



Members of the Human Rights organisation Amnesty International light candles on Dec 10 in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. PHOTO: AFP

**আমার ভোট আমি দেবো
দেখে শুনে জেনে দেবো**

বঙ্গদেশের নির্বাচন পরিচালনা কমিশন

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