

BRIEFLY

8 killed in African violence : A new round of black factional fighting has claimed eight lives, including a teenager killed when a tire was put around his neck and set on fire, police said Thursday, reports AP.

The new violence came after the African National Congress and government leaders met to discuss how to halt soaring violence that has claimed hundreds of lives in recent months. ANC leaders called for a ban on weapons such as spears and clubs, which are carried by many black men.

Police in Johannesburg said Thursday new violence erupted in Natal Province, where at least five people were killed during the past 24 hours. A 16-year-old boy was killed when a car tire doused with gasoline was put around his neck and set on fire, police said.

Sikhs' bid to blow up train fails : Sikh militants tried but failed to blow up a train carrying hundreds of people to the Sikh holy city of Amritsar, the Press Trust of India in New Delhi said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

The news agency quoted passengers as saying the Bombay-Amritsar express swayed violently but stayed on the tracks after explosions underneath it on Wednesday night about 25 km (15 miles) from Amritsar.

They said the train filled with smoke, but no one was hurt. Police said two bombs went off as the train passed over them, the agency reported.

Gunmen kidnap 3 Japanese : Gunmen abducted three Japanese tourists on a rafting trip in southern Sindh province and demanded 40 million rupees (2 million dollars), police sources in Karachi said Thursday, reports AP.

The trio are believed to be the first foreigners abducted in the turbulent southern province, where kidnappings-for-ransom have become commonplace in recent years.

The victims were identified as Yoshita Tachikawa, 20, Takayasu Hattori, 20, Takuya Sato, 19, all students at Waseda University in Tokyo. A fourth companion had decided not to take the rafting trip after hearing about Sindh's crime rate, sources said.

The Japanese embassy in the federal capital of Islamabad refused comment.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ordered the provincial government to take extraordinary steps to secure their release.

European rocket blast off : The 43rd European Ariane Space Rocket blasted off from the jungle space centre of Kourou, French Guiana at 2333 GMT Thursday, carrying a Canadian telecommunications and broadcast satellite, reports AFP from Kourou.

The satellite, Anik-E2 was due to be put into orbit 19 minutes and 43 seconds after Ariane's lift-off.

The launch was nearly delayed by industrial trouble at the launch site. But workers on strike for two weeks following the accidental death of one of their colleagues agreed late Thursday to end the industrial action.

Plan to curb Brazilian violence : President Fernando Collor de Mello on Thursday approved a plan to stop growing violence and the "extermination" of street kids in Brazil, reports AP from Brasilia.

"The fact that millions of children and youngsters wander abandoned and hungry in the streets is a violence in itself, and a violation of the most basic of human rights", Collor said in a speech at the Justice Ministry.

Brazil has an estimated 7 million street kids in a population of 150 million.

Collor's speech came a day after the National Movement of Street Children revealed that an average of three street kids are murdered per day. In the first three months, at least 280 Brazilians under 17 were killed in eight states.

Mario Volpi, national coordinator of the movement, said the killings were committed by death squads, police and security guards.

Dutch-Iran ties restored : The Dutch government announced Thursday it will restore diplomatic relations with Iran to the ambassadorial level for the first time in about two years, reports AP.

It was the latest sign of improved Western relations with Tehran, which has been praised by US and European leaders for its neutrality in the Gulf war.

The Dutch ambassador to Iran was recalled in early 1989 after Tehran issued a death call against British writer Salman Rushdie, who the late Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini accused of blaspheming Islam in the novel "The Satanic Verses."

However, the Dutch maintained diplomatic ties with a temporary charge d'affaires in the Iranian capital, according to a Dutch Foreign Ministry spokesman in the Hague.

3 Iraqi agents nabbed in Cairo : Police have arrested three alleged Iraqi agents who confessed they were planning to blow up the American, Israeli, Saudi and Syrian embassies in Cairo, a newspaper said.

A fourth agent died in a car accident shortly after he arrived in the southern Sinai from the Jordanian port of Aqaba, al-Akhabr newspaper reported in its early Friday edition, reports AP from Cairo.

This brings to 81 the number arrested in Egypt and accused of being sent by Iraq to carry out terrorist attacks.

Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria stood at the forefront of Arab states which condemned Iraq's Aug 2 invasion of Kuwait.

Al-Akhabr said that the four alleged agents, all Egyptians, arrived in Egypt together and then split up into two groups. The first two men were involved in a car accident in which one was killed.

After the other three were arrested on Wednesday, they told police investigators that they had been paid to blow up the American, Israeli, Saudi and Syrian embassies in Cairo as well as attack other targets.

43 Kurdish refugees die: one million more to cross into Iran

TEHERAN, Apr 5: A million Iraqi Kurdish refugees have massed along the border waiting to cross into Iran, and 20,000 others have already entered the country, the official IRNA news agency reported Thursday, reports AFP.

IRNA citing an informed source said Iran would allow all the refugees into the country. The build-up at the border had been going on for the past two days.

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurdish refugees have been fleeing the advancing Iraqi army as it crushed the revolt against President Saddam Hussein.

Another report says: Forty three of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurdish refugees massing on freezing mountains at the border with Turkey have died since Sunday, according to a provisional unofficial toll established from reports here.

Five women died Wednesday night when they went into labour, Sakir Hussein, a Kurd from Zakho told journalists here. Mr Hussein was married to one of the women.

Of the 43 dead 24 were children who died of infectious diseases and of cold after night in temperatures well below freezing, according to the reports. The father of a family who tried to cross the border on Thursday in the Isikvere region was killed by a mine explosion which seriously wounded four others.

Local hospital staff said they did not have the medicines or equipment to treat the injuries.

A Turkish Kurdish religious official organizing funeral ceremonies cited nine other deaths, four people trying to cross the border in the Isikvere region have been shot

dead since Sunday, according to local residents.

A doctor from Sirnak who asked not to be named, told Agency France-Presse that he had seen "traces of chemical weapons" on the bodies of patients, but did not give details.

Refugees from Zakho and Duhok in Iraqi Kurdistan said they had been attacked with bombs and napalm.

AP from Washington adds: The Iraqi military is carrying out the systematic destruction of homes in towns where it met strong resistance from rebels, the Defense Department said Thursday.

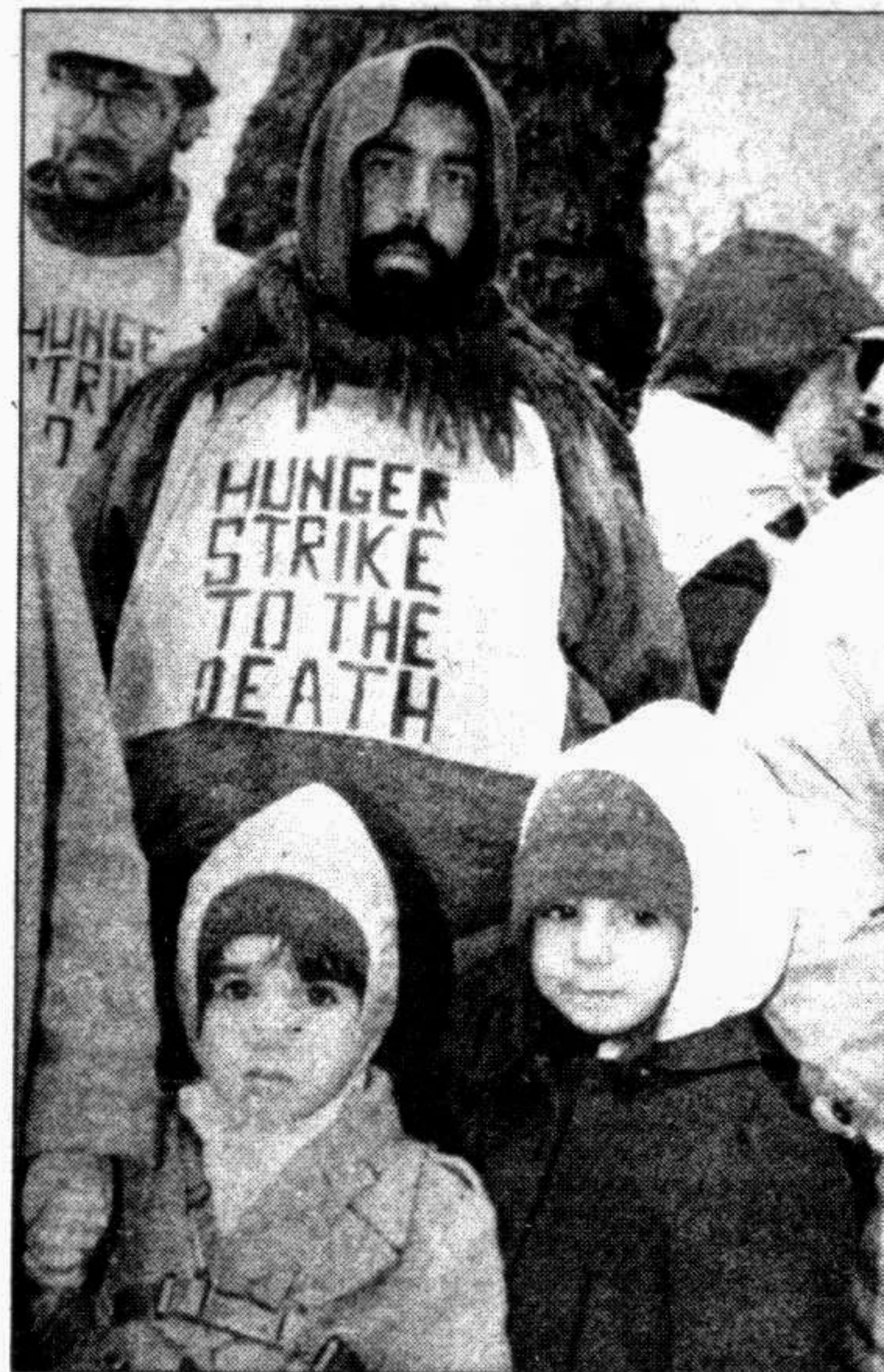
A systematic destruction of dwellings has taken place in population centers where insurgent activity was high," spokesman Bob Hall said at a news conference.

"We're unable to estimate the number of casualties but there's no question that the government retribution against the insurgents has been violent and is causing widespread displacement of people."

Hall agreed with official Iraqi reports that Shi'ite and Kurdish uprisings against President Saddam Hussein's government had been crushed. The State Department also said the rebellions had been crushed.

"Some sporadic fighting may continue in the future, but government troops essentially have unchallenged control of all the population centers and all the rural areas where they have asserted themselves," Hall said.

The Defense Department spokesman said that in Southern Iraq, where Shi'ite Muslims rose up against the government, "there is virtually no activity beyond patrolling by Iraqi forces," while in the north, "Kurdish forces have



LONDON: One of 20 Iraqi Kurds with two young Kurdish children on hunger strike outside the US Embassy on Thursday. The Kurds are protesting the US administration's non-intervention on the Iraqi civil war.

withdrawn into the mountains and there are large numbers of refugees making their way to the borders of Turkey and Iran.

Hall said 17,000 refugees have crossed into Turkey. As many as three million Kurds are believed to have fled their homelands for Turkey and

5,000 Kuwaitis still missing

KUWAIT CITY, Apr 5: As many as 5,000 Kuwaitis are still missing following the liberation of the Emirate in late February, a senior United Nations official envoy said here today citing reports from Kuwaiti informants, reports AFP.

Former UN Under Secretary General Abdulrahman Abi Farah, speaking at the close of a three-week fact-finding mission, said his team had also investigated reports of rape, torture, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, collective punishment and confiscation of property during the seven month Iraqi occupation.

Indo-Pak accord to reduce war risk soon

NEW DELHI, Apr 5: Indian and Pakistani military commanders completed work Thursday on two agreements to reduce the risk of accidental war, the government said, reports AP.

The accords were prepared for signing by the foreign secretaries of the two countries, who began three days of talks on Friday aimed at building confidence between the two suspicious neighbors.

The agreements provide for advance notification of military exercises and for preventing air space violations, the Foreign Ministry said.

The "technical aspects" agreed on by the officers and defense ministry personnel "would be further considered and concluded during the forthcoming discussions" between Foreign Secretaries Muchkund Dubey and Pakistan's Shahrar Khan, the ministry said in a statement.

Khan arrived in New Delhi Thursday as the generals concluded five days of talks.

Iran. He said the Defense Department had no confirmation of reports that Iraqi helicopter gun ships have strafed caravans of fleeing Kurdish civilians.

A report from Riyadh says: More than 15,000 Iraqi civil war refugees being cared for by the US military will be returned to Baghdad's control when US forces leave occupied southern Iraq, a Red Cross official said Thursday.

The prospect has raised fears for the safety of the refugees, some of whom are insurgents and rebel sympathizers. There also are concerns they may be mistreated for having crossed into US-controlled territory.

The administration of US President George Bush has been sharply criticized for turning its back on the Iraqi refugees. When Saddam Hussein's troops crushed a Shi'ite Muslim rebellion in southern Iraq, killing scores of women and children, refugees poured into areas held by US forces.

The US military command in Riyadh says it is carefully monitoring reports of abuses by Iraqi troops and is attempting to verify them. Officials acknowledge, however, that refugees have been treated for gunshot and shrapnel wounds and severe burns.

Rebels have accused Saddam's forces of attacking them with napalm and incendiary bombs, and urged the US military to shoot down Iraqi helicopters. Bush refused, saying he did not want to draw Americans into Iraq's civil war.

The US military says it had treated about 600 wounded civilians a day since March 25, or at least 6,600 refugees over the past 11 days.

200,000 likely to die due to ozone loss in US

WASHINGTON, Apr 5: The earth's protective layer of ozone appears to be thinning about twice as rapidly as scientists previously believed, the Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday, reports AP.

Ator William K. Reilly said new estimates suggest there could be an additional 200,000 deaths from skin cancer in the United States over the next 50 years because of the unexpected ozone loss.

That would represent a near doubling from the current rate of 5,000 skin cancer deaths a year.

Reilly said the agency would work harder to eliminate

ozone-depleting chemicals such as chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, widely used in air conditioning and refrigeration, in making insulating foam and as a solvent.

An international agreement, the Montreal Protocol, calls for a phase-out by the year 2000 of CFCs and other chemicals that attack the ozone layer.

Reilly said preliminary data from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration suggest that the ozone layer has been depleted by 4 percent to 5 percent over the United States since 1978. Previous studies showed depletion of about half that amount, he said.

Iraqis facing death: Minister

BAGHDAD, Apr 5: A senior Iraqi official warned yesterday that people in this war-battered country were facing death as government-controlled food stocks were drying up, reports Xinhua.

Speaking at a press conference, Trade Minister Mohammed Mehdi Saleh attributed the food scarcity to the U. N. -imposed embargo to penalise Iraq for its August invasion of Kuwait and alleged looting by rebels in the wake of the Gulf war.

The official appealed to the international community and relief organisations for more humanitarian aid. Relief supplies received so far have been transferred to hospitals but are insufficient to meet the needs, he said.

"The Iraqi people will soon starve to death because government food stocks are drying up and there are no means to replenish them now," the official warned.

Saleh said that the U. S. -led allied bombing did not serve "their purpose of destroying the Iraqi food stock." But "traitors and criminals did the job," said referring to the anti-government revolt following the Gulf war.

The rebels "destroyed all government food stocks and warehouses in areas they captured," he said.

He said that food vauldised from government warehouses in southern and northern cities totaled 149,000 tons of wheat, 61,000 tons of rice, and 6,095 tons of cooking oil.

Anything else is demagogy. Somebody may try to knock me off the rails, but this is nothing new to me... no jeering or shouting on squares will knock me off the rails," he told the meeting, which took place on Wednesday.

"Does this mean I am clinging to power?" he asked. I feel responsibility for what began in 1985. If the Congress (supreme legislature) were to relieve me of my post, then that would be another matter."

He said there were elements in opposition groups who wanted to play the "miners card."

"They know how important coal is for the country, for the steel industry, for engineering, how without it the country could collapse.

Another report adds: Soviet coal miners said on Thursday they would press ahead with a month-old strike after a pay deal proposed by President Mikhail Gorbachev failed to satisfy their demands.

Talks between representatives of the strike committees and the USSR President and Prime Minister have failed to end the strike and it will continue," said the Soviet news agency Tass.

Pavel Shushpanov, head of the Independent Miners' Union, said the government had no significant concessions on their economic and political demands

Uttar Pradesh Assembly dissolved

Indian parties trying to woo Muslim voters

NEW DELHI, Apr 5: Major political parties in India are making every effort to attract Muslim votes which often emerge as an important factor in determining the fate of a political party in general elections, reports Xinhua.

The Congress (I), the Janata Dal (People's Party), and the Janata Dal (Socialist) were reportedly to have sent feelers to top Muslim leaders to gain the Muslim support.

Unlike the 1989 general elections when a majority of the Muslim organisations had unanimously supported the Janata Dal headed by former Prime Minister VP Singh, an utter confusion prevails now among them as they fail to decide which party they should support this time.

In a meeting here on April 2, over 20 Muslim leaders from various parts of the country failed to choose any single party as the community's favourite in the forthcoming general elections.

According to local press reports, differences among the Muslim leaders surfaced as representatives from Madhya Pradesh (central state) and Rajasthan state spoke in favour of the Congress (I) while Uttar Pradesh (northern state) delegates spoke in favour of backing the Janata Dal or the Janata Dal (Socialist) headed by Prime Minister Chandra

Shekhar. Thus, the leaders decided to initiate a dialogue with the political parties on the minority community's problems.

Muslims from the largest religious minority in India, constituting nearly 12.5 per cent of the country's population now standing at 844 million.

In the country's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, the Muslim community has a sizeable say in 56 of the state's 85 Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) constituencies and can decisively affect political fortunes in 30 constituencies. There are a total of 545 Lok Sabha constituencies in the country.

In the history of India's general elections, the key factor determining the Muslim community's voting pattern is reportedly its inherent sense of insecurity.

Muslims voted for the Congress between 1952 and 1972. During the emergency declared by the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975, the Muslim community felt insecure, thus getting out of the Congress fold in the 1977 elections.

During the 1989 elections, the Muslims had decided to vote against the Congress (I) and supported the Janata Dal-led National Front. The Muslims made this decision because of Congress (I)'s role in

No hissing can force me to resign: Gorbachev Anything can happen now in USSR, says aide

PARIS, Apr 5: One of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's closest aides on Thursday said that "anything can happen now, in the Soviet Union, as radical Russian President Boris Yeltsin won parliamentary backing for emergency powers," reports AFP.

Alexander Yakovlev said "there was a feeling of disorder where anything can happen, anything can happen to all of us" in the Soviet Union, he was speaking in an interview with a private French television channel.

Yakovlev went to pains, however, to stress that "the people of nine republics out of 15 last month voted in a referendum to continue to live together in a Soviet Union of sovereign republics."

Asked whether the Soviet President would still be in power at the end of the year, he said "yes, I think so." Yeltsin is in Russia, he added. Yeltsin, leader of the largest Soviet republic and the main challenger to the Soviet head

of state, has persuaded the Russian Parliament to give him emergency powers in view of what he presents as pressing economic problems. But the Parliament had yet to debate specific aspects of its decision.

Many people in the Soviet Union are disappointed, by Gorbachev's Perestroika economic and social reform programme, Yakovlev said. He argued that this was "perfectly understandable" during a "transition period" from an "administrative command structure" to a different market system.

Distillationment with the "foot dragging pace" of economic change and the fact that "the consumer economy has completely collapsed" should not be confused with the desire for change in a democratic society, Yakovlev added.

Reuter from Moscow adds: President Mikhail Gorbachev told striking miners no amount of hissing and jeering by demonstrators would force him to resign.



AI-AHMADI, KUWAIT, an unidentified masked bulldozer operator works near burning wells in the Al-Ahmadi oil field 20 km (14 miles) south of Kuwait City on Thursday. Some 350 to 600 wells are estimated to be burning in the oil-rich nation.



Gorbachev