

International

BRIEFLY



Chief of the Karak branch of the Islamic Action Front Ahmad Kafawin talks to worshipper after the Friday's *Jummah* prayers in Karak. Some 150 people took to the street chanting "we are hungry" and demanding the release of detainees who were arrested in violent protests last week against a steep rise in bread prices. The march was peacefully dispersed by police. — AFP/UNB photo

Kurdish factions agree to end fighting

WASHINGTON, Aug 24: Leaders of Iraq's two main Kurdish factions agreed on Friday to end six days of fighting and to attend US-mediated peace talks next month, the State Department said, reports Reuter.

Spokesman Glyn Davies said in a statement that the agreement followed direct US contacts with Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Davies said the two leaders "have agreed to cease the fighting and return their forces to the positions held before the current fighting began" on August 17. He did not give a specific time for the ceasefire but said the United States, looked forward to "immediate implementation."

The two party leaders had also agreed to meet US Assistant Secretary for near eastern affairs Robert Pelletreau in September "to solidify the ceasefire and to pursue reconciliation," Davis said.

Indian court orders arrest of ex-minister

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: An Indian court has ordered the arrest of a controversial former minister who was dropped from the cabinet for alleged criminal links, newspapers reported today, says AFP.

The Patna High Court in the Eastern state of Bihar on Friday asked the authorities to arrest Mohammed Shahabuddin within 10 days on charges of having fired at a police officer during the parliamentary polls in May, the Times of India reported.

Shahabuddin allegedly shot at the then superintendent of police of Siwan district in Bihar. The officer escaped unharmed.

Shahabuddin was named minister of state for home affairs by Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda in June but resigned after the opposition accused him of criminal links. Shahabuddin, an MP, is a provincial leader of Deve Gowda's Janata Dal (People Party) in Bihar.

Afghan factional clashes leave 10 Pakistanis dead across border

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, Aug 24: Residents in a small village that borders Afghanistan have been suffering the fallout of a bloody factional battle across the border. As many as 10 villagers have been killed in the past two days and several more wounded, the News reported Saturday, reports AP.

Missiles and mortar shells have rained down on the Pakistan border town of Parachinar as Taliban guerrillas fight rivals belonging to Hezb-e-Islami, just across the border in Afghanistan's Paktia province, the English language daily newspaper, the news reported.

Afghan government jets also bombed Taliban positions, although there were no immediate reports of casualties.

Taliban soldiers, many of whom are former Islamic seminarians turned guerrilla fighters, are trying to overthrow Afghanistan's government of which Hezb-e-Islami is part.

Over 200 rebels surrender to Sudanese troops

KHARTOUM, Aug 24: Sudan said today more than 200 rebels from the war-torn south had surrendered to government troops there, reports Reuter.

Sudanese government radio said 225 rebels in eastern Equatoria State, on the border with Kenya and Uganda, gave themselves up in the town of Kapopta where the commander of government troops offered them assistance.

The radio quoted an official source as saying the rebels were from the Tobosa warrior tribe, the largest ethnic group in eastern Equatoria, and had fought alongside John Garang, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

The rebels had joined the peace process after numerous contacts had been made with them and said they had endorsed the peace charter, the radio reported.

The Sudanese government and a number of rebel groups, including dissident factions of the mainstream SPLA, earlier this year signed a peace charter which the government hopes will end more than 10 years of war between Khartoum and the mostly Christian and animist south.

Yeltsin backs Lebed's peace efforts Russia begins withdrawing troops from Grozny

MOSCOW, Aug 24: Russia began withdrawing troops from the capital of breakaway Chechnya today in line with an agreement reached in talks between Russian military leaders and rebel commanders, Interfax news agency said, reports Reuter.

The agency said the Interior Ministry troops would be redeployed in Grozny's suburbs. It did not say how many soldiers were being pulled out.

Chechen rebels captured much of Grozny on August 6, trapping Russian soldiers in their checkpoints and inside the central complex of government buildings.

Most fighting stopped on Friday after Russian peace-maker Alexander Lebed and top Chechen commanders agreed a ceasefire and promised to work towards a political solution.

The truce took effect at noon (0800 GMT) on Friday and both sides say it has been broadly respected. Interfax said seven Russian servicemen had been

wounded in Grozny in the past 24 hours. Hundreds of people died in the fighting earlier this month.

Lebed, who won the rather belated backing of President Boris Yeltsin late on Friday, is to travel to Chechnya again at the weekend.

Another earlier report says: Peace seemed closer in battered Chechnya as Russian and separatist commanders implemented a truce and President Boris Yeltsin finally gave his public blessing to talks aimed at a political solution.

The two sides said they plan to start pulling back forces in the heavily damaged capital Grozny on Saturday and form joint military patrols to enforce the new ceasefire.

The truce came into effect at noon (0800 GMT) on Friday, rekindling hopes for an end to the 20-month-old separatist conflict only days after some of the heaviest fighting.

Russian security chief Alexander Lebed pressed on

with his peace plan armed at last with Yeltsin's public approval.

ITAR-Tass news agency reported that Lebed briefed Yeltsin by telephone on Friday in Moscow and the president gave the former paratroop general the go-ahead to seek a political solution in talks with leaders of the Chechen separatist guerrillas.

Lebed, who got sweeping powers as Yeltsin's special adviser in the breakaway republic, had signed the military agreement with rebel Chief-of-Staff Aslan Maskhadov.

Now he is drafting the broader political agreement and was expected to return to the region this weekend.

Military leaders on Friday held a relaxed meeting in southern Chechnya and declared they were in total agreement.

Maskhadov said Russia's clear decision to stop the war had made all the difference.



Gypsy children play in the camp of 7000 caravans assembled on Thursday on an unused NATO base for an annual four-day evangelical pilgrimage by some 35,000 Roms from France and other European countries. The Evangelical Mission of Life and Light, founded in 1946, numbers some 100,000 faithful out of a 300,000-strong gypsy community. — AFP/UNB photo

Sihanouk to stage mass amnesty in two months

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, Aug 24: King Norodom Sihanouk announced Saturday that he will stage a mass amnesty in two months, raising expectations of a pardon for a long-time chieftain of the Khmer Rouge now negotiating peace at the head of a break-away faction, reports AP.

The announcement came a day after Cambodia's two prime ministers met one of Sihanouk's conditions for a royal amnesty: issuing a joint declaration that they favoured pardoning Ieng Sary, brother-in-law of the notorious Pol Pot, in the interest of peace.

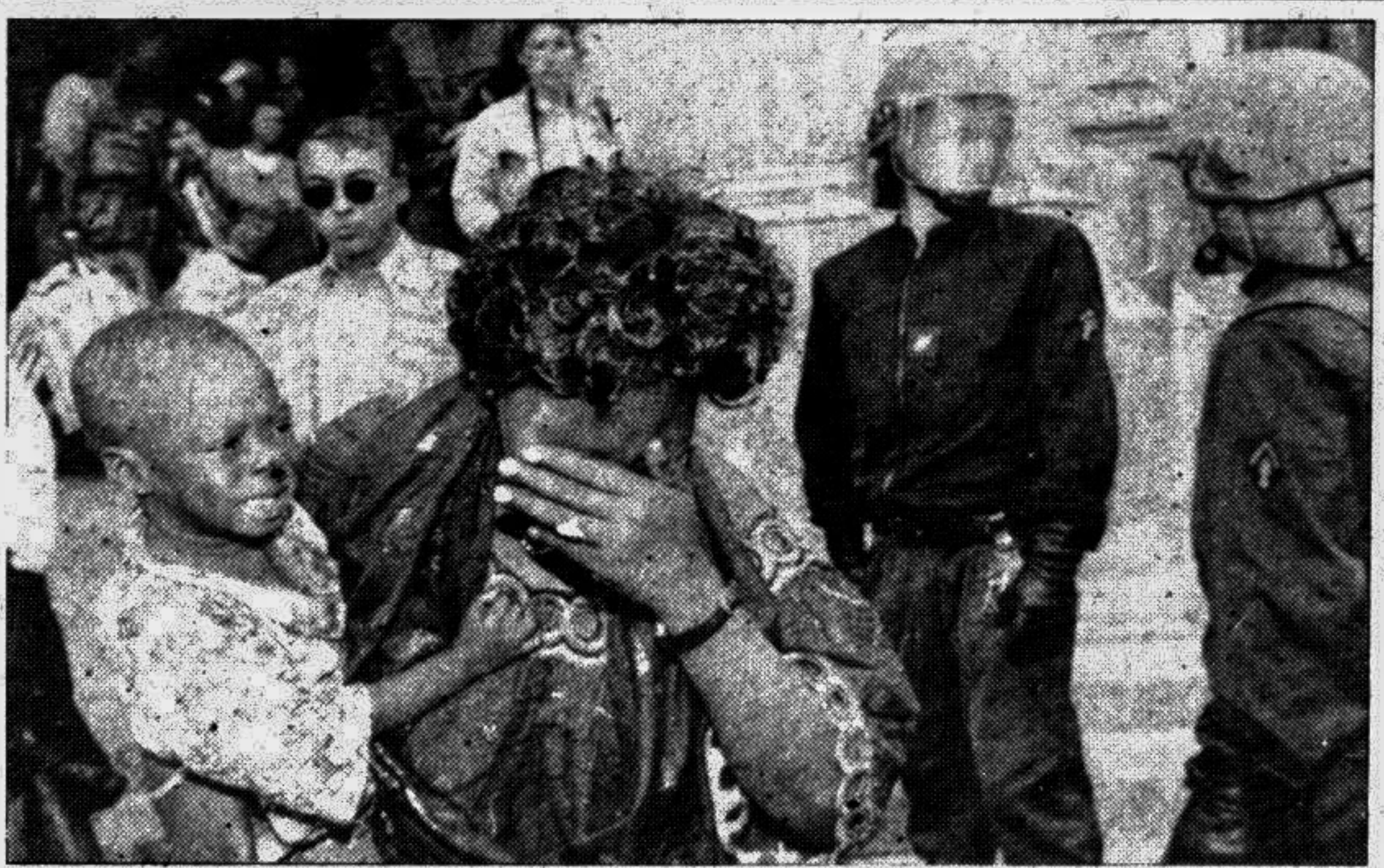
Sihanouk has also said that amnesty for Sary, widely accused of crimes against humanity during the Khmer Rouge's bloody rule from 1975 to 1979, should be approved by a two-thirds majority of the 120-seat National Assembly.

ently also wish to retain control over the areas rich in gems and timber they occupy along the border with Thailand.

According to the palace statement, Tep Vong chief of Cambodia's Buddhist monks, wrote to the king suggesting an amnesty ceremony and asked for his cooperation. Sihanouk said in the statement that he agreed with the idea "100 per cent."

Sihanouk has powers to grant amnesty or reduce sentences under the constitution that accompanied UN-sponsored elections in 1993, which were aimed at ending decades of civil war and suffering.

The king, a prisoner of the Khmer Rouge during their murderous reign, has said that he personally would like to see Sary tried for crimes against humanity.



A weeping African woman and her child leave the church of St. Bernard in Paris on Friday after riot police stormed the church which 300 African illegal immigrants were occupying. The ten hunger strikers have been taken to hospital and the immigrants to a detention centre in Vincennes. — AFP/UNB photo

'No talks with govt' Taliban capture crucial base in Paktiya

ISLAMABAD, Aug 24: The Islamic Taliban militia said today it had captured a crucial pro-government base on the Pakistani border after five hours of fighting, reports Reuter.

A Taliban spokesman in the Pakistani city of Peshawar said the Spina Shega base in Paktiya province had been seized from Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami forces overnight and its defenders driven across the border.

The spokesman, quoted by the Peshawar-based Afghan Islamic press agency, said five fighters had been killed and 13 wounded in the battle for Spina Shega, Hezb-e-Islami's last and most important military position in Paktiya province.

AFP adds, Afghanistan's powerful Taliban militia force has vowed it would not enter into any negotiations with Kabul and would pursue its goal to set up a truly Islamic government in the country.

"We will defeat all internal

and external conspiracies to weaken us and thwart our march toward supremacy of Islamic values in Afghanistan," an important Taliban Leader, Amir Khan Muttaqi, said.

Muttaqi, speaking to AFP in the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta on Friday, dismissed recent Kabul overtures for negotiations as propaganda aimed at creating division in the militia.

He said the reported accord between Kabul rulers and northern warlord Abdul Rashid Dostam to reopen the Salang Highway and other such moves would not bring peace to the war-torn country.

"Peace and order will return to Afghanistan only under an Islamic Taliban government," said Muttaqi, in-charge of the information wing of the militia at their base in Kandahar near the Pakistan border.

Muttaqi alleged that some foreign countries were apprehensive and did not want Taliban control in Afghanistan.

Rifkind to try to finesse India into signing CTBT

LONDON, Aug 24: British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind will try to finesse India into signing a nuclear test ban treaty and seek word on British hostages in Kashmir when he flies to Asia on a five-nation tour next week, reports AFP.

He will meet with top political and business leaders in Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka.

He will try to strengthen worldwide cooperation with Japan and Mediate the touchy issue of compensation for World War II British prisoners of war in Japanese camps. And he will become the first British foreign secretary ever to set official foot in Mongolia.

British officials briefing the press on the trip played down the nuclear treaty aspect of Rifkind's visit to India, which on Tuesday formally vetoed the treaty, derailing two and half years of negotiations.

They declined to say if he had a firm treaty agenda, but said the "treaty will undoubtedly be part of the discussion in New Delhi because it is something that we feel very strongly

about."

Rifkind will, they said, have a Kashmir brief, both concerning the two hostages held for over a year by Kashmiri rebels, and the larger question of a political settlement between India and Pakistan, which jointly administer Kashmir and have fought two wars over it since 1947.

Keith Mangan, 34, and Paul Wells, 25, were seized by the Al-Faran group last July with two Americans managed to escape but the beheaded corpse of the Norwegian was found on a road from Pahalgam to Srinagar in August with "Al-Faran" carved on his body.

Despite reported sightings, there has been no hard evidence that the two British men are still alive, and last week Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto appealed for their release.

"Our main objective will be to find out the fate of these unfortunate people," said a British official. "I wish there was something more we could do."

Off the Record
Drugs for blood pressure may increase risk of cancer

LONDON: Calcium-channel blockers drugs commonly used to treat high blood pressure and heart disease, may increase the risk of cancer, US and Italian doctors reported on Friday, says Reuter.

The research published in the Lancet-Medical Journal, adds to growing evidence that the popular drugs may be dangerous to some people.

Dr Marco Pahor of the University of Tennessee in Memphis and colleagues looked at the health records of more than 5,000 men and women over the age of 70 in the United States. Of them, 415 had been using calcium-channel blockers (CCBS).

Those who used CCBS were 70 per cent more likely to develop cancer. The more of the drugs they took, the higher their risk.

"No association with cancer was found for other cardiovascular medications," Pahor's group wrote in the Lancet.

Those cancers that stood out most were cancer of the uterus and of the lymph and blood systems. But Pahor said people should not stop taking the drugs.

"The evidence provided by this single study is not sufficient to recommend withdrawal of treatment from current users," they wrote. "Whether calcium-channel blockers truly promote cancer needs to be confirmed in long-term clinical trials."

CCB help lower blood pressure and ease the heart's workload by stopping calcium from accumulating in the muscle cells of the heart and blood vessels, calcium is important in cell function.

French police, supporters of African aliens clash

PARIS, Aug 24: French riot police and supporters of African illegal immigrants evicted from a Paris church, clashed for a almost two hours on Friday night after a demonstration held to protest the crackdown, reports AFP.

Police guarding the detention centre, used tear-gas after being pelted with stones and other missiles by the demonstrators who had earlier taken part in a peaceful march led by various leftwing personalities.

Police headquarters said the demonstrators dispersed shortly after midnight and that there were no injuries.

The clashes erupted when demonstrators converged on a detention centre on the wooded eastern outskirts of the city where many of the evicted Africans are being held while French authorities decide whether to deport them.

Meanwhile, the authorities said Friday night that all

women "with children" who were seized in the raid on the Saint Bernard Church in northern Paris early Friday, had been released later in the day.

However the authorities declined to give a precise figure for those released.

A total of 53 women and 68 children were evicted from the church, along with 89 men. They were among some 300 African illegal aliens who had occupied the church since the end of June in an attempt to obtain residence permits to stay in France.

Ten of the Africans had been on a hunger-strike for 50 days.

Informed source said earlier that more than 100 Africans, most of them Malians would be deported early on Saturday.

The sources said they would be flown home aboard military aircraft from an aerodrome, south west of Paris — probably from Orleans or Evreux.

Microscopic trace of explosives found in TWA flight

NEW YORK, Aug 24: Investigators have discovered microscopic explosive traces on debris from downed TWA flight 800 but do not have evidence to prove that a bomb caused the plane to crash, the top FBI investigator in the case said on Friday, reports Reuter.

"Based upon evidence to date, investigators cannot conclude whether this tragedy was the result of a criminal act," James Kallstrom, Assistant FBI Director, said at a media briefing.

"The mere fact that there are chemical traces is just not enough."

Kallstrom said the explosive traces were of unknown origin and would not elaborate.

Gowda comes under fire for meeting Bal Thackeray

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Indian Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda came under fire Friday after meeting a controversial Hindu militant leader blamed for razing a mosque four years ago which sparked off major communal riots, reports AFP.

The country's two main communist parties hit out at Deve Gowda for his head-to-head with Bal Thackeray, whose fundamentalist Shiv Sena Party rules Bombay.

A section of the prime minister's own Janata Dal (People's Party) and a Muslim cleric also waded in, saying the two-hour dinner meeting late on Tuesday would undermine the ruling coalition's precarious support among the country's 100-million-strong Muslim minority.

"It is a slap for all the secular forces that the prime minister chose to meet a man in Bombay who openly advocates violence against Muslims," said Syed Ahmed Bukhari, Deputy Priest of the 17th-century Jama Masjid mosque here.

"It looks to us as if the prime minister is condoning everything for which Thackeray has been blamed," he said. "It is very sad."

Janata Dal spokesman S. Jaipal Reddy refused to comment on the meeting, which took place at the Bombay home of the well-known film actor, the prime minister's first visit to the city.

Thackeray publicly hailed

the demolition of the Babri Mosque by Hindu fanatics in the northern town of Ayodhya in December 1992, which sparked terrible Hindu-Muslim violence and left around 2,000 people dead.

Thackeray and Shiv Sena were also charged with later slaughtering hundreds of Muslim civilians in Bombay.

Deve Gowda, meanwhile, only met for 10 minutes with members of his own party in Bombay on Tuesday.

"It is a wrong political step Deve Gowda took," said Prakash Karat of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), one of four leftist parties which support the premier's

United Front government.

"What is the basis for this meeting? The Shiv Sena is known to be virulently anti-minorities and its people are involved in so many scandals. We are not happy."

The Communist Party of India and the regional Telugu Desam Party, which are members of the ruling coalition, also criticise Deve Gowda.

But the prime minister's aides hit back by claiming he met Thackeray to console him following the death of his wife, a reason immediately dismissed by the prime minister's critics.

"This is nonsense," said Bukhari. "If he was so concerned about the death in the

Thackeray family, what about the Muslims who died in Bombay? What about them?"

The meeting, however, sparked jitters in the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Indian People's Party, which sees Thackeray as a key ally and is a junior member of the Shiv Sena-led government in Bombay.

Thackeray added to the confusion by telling a newspaper he was not averse to ditching the BJP and forming an alliance with regional parties currently supporting Deve Gowda's government.

The Congress (I) Party of former premier P V Narasimha Rao, which lends crucial legislative support to the ruling

coalition, also claimed Deve Gowda may have wanted to drive a wedge between the BJP and Shiv Sena.

But Surendra Mohan, a Janata Dal ideologue, ruled out a marriage with the Shiv Sena.

"The Shiv Sena is a communal party," he said. "Unless it drops its communal ideology there is no point in talking about an alliance with the United Front, which is totally committed to secularism."

Deve Gowda became prime minister on June 1 at the head of a minority coalition after bringing down a short-lived BJP-Shiv Sena government, which took power following the April-May general elections.

Bob Dole vows to seek black votes actively

WASHINGTON, Aug 24: Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole on Friday promised to actively seek black votes and acknowledged that Republicans have missed chances to win the support of African Americans, reports AFP.

He also acknowledged missing a chance himself when he did not speak at the annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People.

"We've missed opportunities as a party from time to time. I missed one by not knowing about the NAACP convention, and I'm sorry about that," he said Friday.