

21/4 Judgment in Fiji 10

A single judge of the Fiji high court has issued a landmark ruling that the abrogation of the 1997 constitution in the aftermath of George Speight's May 19 coup was an illegal act. Justice Anthony Gates has consequently directed that Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara be restored to office as president; that parliament be reconvened; and that the new "Constitution Review Commission" that he has held to be illegal be disbanded immediately. The present interim administration of "Prime Minister" Laisenia Qarase that had been put in place by the army on July 14 has decided to appeal against the judgment, and the case will now go before a five-judge panel of the supreme appellate court in early December. Justice Gates' ruling which is remarkable not only for its contents but also for how it came about, deserves wide notice. "An indigent farmer" as the judge puts it, who had become "a refugee staying at Girit Centre" during the riots following the coup, had moved the court for relief on July 4. The petitioner had appeared in person and, in view of the circumstances and the high constitutional questions involved, the judge decided to overlook defects in the pleadings and appointed counsel to assist the petitioner, very much in the manner of public interest writ petitions in our Supreme Court. Later he allowed Dr George Williams and Anu Patel from England also to appear for the petitioner as "the case demanded the assistance of able counsel". Setting aside various procedural objections by the counsel for the interim government he declared he would "jettison formalism" as the issue involved complex constitutional questions and proceeded to go right to the heart of the matter.

Striking a fine balance he allowed the declaration of a state of emergency and dismissal of the Mahendra Chowdhry government by President Kamisese Mara to stand on grounds of "the doctrine of necessity" as these were well within the powers of the president under the constitution. But he held that the same justification of "necessity" was not applicable to the subsequent decisions, taken under coercion, to dissolve parliament and abrogate the constitution. The test he applied was that of legitimacy derived from popular sanction or approval. The judge has now left it to the president to appoint a new prime minister, but has suggested that he may install a Government of National Unity spanning all parties, for which a provision exists in the constitution. The judgment is also significant for its scathing indictment of the three sitting judges who have been advising the present rulers and have helped them draft "decrees of notoriety" setting aside the constitution and assuming extraordinary powers. One must hope that Justice Gates' judgment is upheld and democratic order is restored in Fiji for the sake of its people who have suffered grievously from the riots and chaos, and the international sanctions which followed the events of May — the armed invasion of parliament, the hostage crisis, the takeover by the army and the abrogation of the constitution. Such a denouement would be yet another affirmation that one small voice can count for a great deal in today's world of increasing democratic consciousness.

THE TIMES OF INDIA.

21 NOV 2000

11-13 Anarchy in Fiji 30/5

FIJI'S DESCENT into lawlessness was predictable the moment the country's President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, bowed to the blackmailing tactics of the coup leader George Speight, agreeing to replace the democratically elected Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry with the insolent leader of a ragtag platoon of hoodlums. Once the legitimate authorities decide to humour those who have broken the law, the retreat cannot but become a rout. This is exactly what has happened in Fiji, for the bankrupt businessman Speight has now sensed that the tide is running in his favour. Whether the martial law will stop him in his tracks is unclear.

The backtracking before the upstart coup leader began when the so-called Great Council of Chiefs, led by none other than the leader of the 1987 coup, Sitiveni Rabuka, partially agreed to Speight's demands, favouring Chaudhry's dismissal and altering the Constitution to reserve the top positions for the indigenous Fijians only. Rabuka has refused to learn from his own coup when he had to abrogate his own racist Constitution under the pressure of international isolation and economic sanctions. If he has prescribed the same dangerously flawed formula for Speight as well, it is apparently because there is deep resentment among the indigenous Fijians about the prominence gained by the Indian immigrants, first in the island's economy and now in its politics. The same feelings must have also persuaded the President virtually to approve of the coup while acknowledging that the result will be "very bad" for Fiji. It is also true that Speight is drawing some support for his patently racist policies from a section of the indigenous Fijians.

But while Speight's vision may be limited, it was for the President and the chiefs' council to recognise the folly of again subverting the Constitution and courting international censure. Such criticism will also grow if anarchic conditions prevail and the ethnic Indians and their businesses come under attack. After the last coup, there was a 6 per cent drop in the Indian population in the island. It will be a matter of deep regret if there is yet another exodus. New Delhi will have to watch the scene with great care. While there is bound to be deep concern in India about the fate of Indians, many of whom, including the deposed Prime Minister, have close relatives in this country, the government cannot intervene diplomatically except on the grounds of preserving democracy and the rule of law. But the Fijians must be told to respect their own Constitution, for any other step, based on ethnic hatred, will be disastrous for the country.

THE HINDUSTAN

10 10 100

Laden warns against U.S. attack on Afghanistan

By Kathy Gannon

ISLAMABAD: Suspected terrorist Osama Bin Laden has warned the U.S. against attacking his home in Afghanistan, where fears have grown of a retaliatory strike to the Yemen attack that killed 17 Americans.

In his first statement since December 1998, Bin Laden said an attack would not kill him and vowed to continue his battle against the "enemies of Islam" — an apparent reference to the U.S., Israel and the Saudi royal family. He made no direct reference to the Yemen attack. Suspicion for the suicide bombing last week that damaged a U.S. navy vessel off the coast of Yemen immediately fell on Bin Laden and his organisation, Al Qaida. No credible claims for the attack on the 'USS Cole' have emerged.

Officials in Afghanistan have warned of a possible U.S. retaliatory attack against their country, where Bin Laden lives, and newspapers in neighbouring Pakistan have carried daily stories about such a strike. "The dream to kill me will never be completed," Bin Laden said in his statement, published in Pakistan's largest circulation Urdu-language newspaper, *The Jung*, meaning war. "I am not afraid of the American threats against me," he said. "As long as I am alive there will be no rest for the enemies of Islam. I will continue my mission against them." Although there are no apparent signs, Washington is planning a strike against Afghanistan, people there remember August 1998, when the U.S. fired dozens of Tomahawk cruise missiles on eastern Afghanistan in an attempt to kill Bin Laden. That assault was in retaliation to the bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa that killed 224 people. Since then, the U.S. has been trying to capture Bin Laden. (AP)



Bin Laden

INTERNATIONAL

After Serbia, Kostunica turns to Montenegro

By Katarina Kratovac

BELGRADE: After striking a deal on power-sharing in the republic of Serbia, Yugoslavia's new President is turning his attention on smaller Montenegro, seeking the support he needs to form a federal government.

President Vojislav Kostunica was to travel Tuesday to Podgorica, the Montenegrin capital, to meet with the pro-Western leadership there, his advisers said on Monday. The September 24 elections gave Kostunica and his supporters victory on the federal level, but that triumph did not affect the composition of governments in the two Yugoslav republics of Serbia and Montenegro.

Yugoslavia has government on two levels — the federal administration headed by Kostunica, with a Prime Minister and a Cabinet and two similar, separate administrations in the republics. After days of negotiations with Milosevic's Socialists, the pro-democracy forces said Monday they would accept a deal to share control of Serbia's government pending new elections on December 23.

Taking up the Montenegro issue, Kostunica and his associates convened in Belgrade with representatives of the Socialist People's Party late Monday.

Though officially still in a coalition with Milosevic's Socialists on a federal level, the party, from Montenegro, appears ready to change alliances in return for the post of Yugoslav Prime Minister and seats in a federal government. The talks adjourned, however, after the Montenegrins demanded that Milosevic's Socialists be given at least one federal Cabinet post. (AP)

Deposed Fiji prime minister returns home

SUVA: Fiji's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry returned home on Tuesday amidst tight security amid fears for his safety but said he was not scared by threats made against him.

"It's good to be back home," the deposed premier told reporters in his Nadi Hotel room, minutes after alighting from a plane that brought him from Sydney. Mr Chaudhry said he was not scared of threats to his life. "But taking my life will not solve Fiji's problems. It may even compound it."

He was deposed in a civilian coup in May and held hostage for 56 days along with other members of his government.

He left Fiji a week after his release on July 13 to muster international support for Fiji's return to democracy. In the past three months he has had talks with top government officials in India, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and the United States and has had audiences with United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and the European Union to discuss Fiji's political crisis and the Indo-Fijian problem here.

"No country has a future without democracy, not even Fiji," he said. Mr Chaudhry's return adds to the growing uncertainty about Fiji's political future. He declined to give any indications of his plans, saying that he had to discuss them with the party first.

The deposed coalition government has been campaigning for an immediate recall of the elected parliament, which was prorogued by President Ratu Sir Kamiseva Mara within days of the hostage crisis and the setting up of a government of national unity. (AFP)



M. Chaudhry

Military takes over in Fiji, Mara resigns

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, MAY 29. The Chief of Fiji's Military Force, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, proclaimed martial law tonight and assumed executive powers in a new twist to the South Pacific nation's raging constitutional crisis. A country-wide blanket curfew was imposed — although it is doubtful whether the duration is 24 hours or 48 hours — and the Army began guarding strategic installations.

But the fate of the democratically-elected Prime Minister of minority Indian descent, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry who was toppled in a "civil coup" 11 days ago by Mr. George Speight, remained unclear. The whereabouts of the civilian President, Ratu Kamisese Mara, were not immediately known, though it was understood that he had handed over the reins of administration to Cmdr. Bainimarama. It was euphemistically said that Mr. Mara had resigned, paving the way for martial rule.

The military's formal intervention, which was not officially described as a coup upon a coup, followed the President's orders during the day for a deployment of the Army across the country to quell a spiralling reign of terror unleashed last night by armed



Ratu Kamisese Mara... whereabouts not known.

Commodore Bainimarama... declares martial law.

supporters of Mr. Speight, according to foreign diplomats and observers in the Fijian capital, Suva.

A political version in Suva was that a group of military officers, led by Cmdr. Bainimarama, called on Mr. Mara at twilight today and first presented him "a whale's tooth," considered to be a symbolic gesture in the native customs, before asking the President to step down from his executive position. Mr. Mara was widely believed to have agreed to do so.

Australia and New Zealand as also the U.S. and the Commonwealth monitored the situation in Suva closely, to determine the nature and scope of trade and military sanctions that could be applied. The possibility of Australia and New Zealand resorting to a

trade embargo on Fiji as also stoppage of sporting links and a suspension of military cooperation with it looms large. Calls were made for a suspension of civilian flights to Suva besides a cessation of cargo traffic to Fiji.

There was no immediate indication of any significant exodus of Fijian-Indians in search of asylum or as refugees elsewhere.

As the Fijian military took charge tonight, it became increasingly clear that the battle lines were now completely redrawn

The initial tussle between Mr. Speight and Mr. Chaudhry, who appeared to have been backed by Mr. Mara at that time, hotted up by last night as a virtual war between the armed squads of the "civil coup" leader and Mr. Mara with the Army behind him. Mr. Speight's men roamed the streets of Suva tonight too and there was no immediate indication how the military would seek to rescue from the Parliament complex Mr. Chaudhry and the other captives, including Mr. Mara's daughter.

DPA reports from Sydney:

Mr. Speight warned Ratu Kamisese Mara that his daughter would be the first to die in any attack on Parliament to free the Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry.

THE HINDU

30 MAY 2000

Verdict for democracy

IN WHAT must have come as a bolt from the blue for Fiji's interim Government put in place by the military following George Speight's thwarted coup six months ago, Justice Antony Gates of the Pacific nation's High Court has upheld the validity of the country's non-discriminatory, multiracial Constitution of 1997. He has ruled that it was unlawfully abrogated after the ouster of the elected Government of Mahendra Chaudhry. The Gates ruling also directs that Parliament be convened to elect a Government. The judgment goes a long way in upholding the principles of non-racialism and constitutional democracy in a multi-ethnic society. *MG-10*

But it is unlikely to be the last word on the subject. Nor is it likely to be honoured right away, as the army-backed Government has declared its plan to go in appeal. In the light of the controversial attempts to subvert Fiji's justice administration on racial lines, it will be instructive to see if the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court would uphold the Gates order. All the same, there can be little doubt that the High Court verdict has caused a serious setback to Fiji's interim Government of unelected rulers that has taken away the political rights of ethnic Indians. After the forcible ouster of the multi-racial Chaudhry Government, Suva had attracted international opprobrium as calls were made to return to democratic ways. The Gates judgment is likely to reinforce this international spirit.

It will now be that much harder for the conservative elements amongst the ethnic Fijians, particularly for the Great Council of Chiefs, to pursue their divisive agenda of effecting structural changes aimed at excluding ethnic Indians from power. The Gates ruling will also boost the morale of democracy-minded ethnic Fijians who are dismayed by the recent happenings in their country. It is too early to say if Mr Chaudhry can return as Prime Minister, although many will favour the restoration of his genuinely democratic dispensation. *Inter alia*, this may depend on how well his parliamentary bloc, comprising both ethnic groups, is able to hold in this hour of trial. *A*

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 NOV 2000

Military springs second Fiji coup

AFP and REUTERS

SUVA, May 29. — The army seized power in Fiji and declared martial law today, ten days after George Speight's "civilian coup" in the name of indigenous islanders.

The President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, is reported to have resigned and moved out of his official residence to a "safe place". Mr Mara had on Saturday fired the ethnic Indian Prime Minister, Mr Mahendra Chaudhry, and assumed executive power.

Within hours of the army taking control of Suva and issuing "shoot to kill" orders, military chief Commodore Frank Bainimarama announced the takeover at the Queen Elizabeth barracks:

"All the nation has been saddened by the extent to which the country has fallen during the last week.

"I have therefore, with much reluctance, assumed executive authority of the country and henceforth declared martial law. The country, in the meantime, will be run by a military government. The primary objective of this government is to take the country towards peace and stability and the well being of Fiji."

The army's intervention followed an overnight rampage by the supporters of Speight who roamed Suva's streets firing shots and forced state TV to go off air. Speight and his gunmen have been holding Mr Chaudhry and a large number of his Cabinet colleagues in Parliament since 19 May.

Commodore Bainimarama gave no details of how he would rule. But diplomatic sources told AFP he might appoint himself Prime Minister.

The army chief today said all

movement into Parliament would be restricted to essential services and appealed to the people to respect the curfew, which he said would run for 24 hours.

Shortly before the curfew came into force at 11.30 a.m. India time, an AFP reporter saw soldiers taking up strategic positions around Suva, setting up barricades across main roads and at key installations, including fuel depots and radio and TV stations.

The move was preceded by an appeal on national radio for all reserve troops under the age of 55 to come to the Queen Elizabeth barracks, the army's main headquarters. Troops on leave were recalled.

Earlier today, a policeman died from his injuries after he was shot in the back during the night's rioting — the first death in the crisis. A security guard also died after a heart attack overnight.

Australia today cranked up pressure on Fiji with a warning of tough sanctions if it abandoned its democratic constitution. It threatened to suspend trade and downgrade aid worth US \$12.5 million, and push for Fiji's suspension from the Commonwealth.

Sporting links could also be hit. A ban on matches against Fiji's national rugby union team is under consideration. Plans for the Olympic torch to pass through the islands this week were scrapped today.

Canberra has urged its 2,000 nationals based in Suva and an estimated 3,000 tourists to leave as soon as possible. The US embassy issued similar advice.

Britain offer: Britain could act as a go-between in Fiji's coup, foreign office minister, Mr John Battle, said in London today.

THE STATESMAN

3 MAY 2000

Prime Minister, military say they will appeal against high court ruling terming interim govt illegal

Govt rejects order reinstating Chaudhry

REUTERS
SUVA, NOV 15

Fiji's High Court on Wednesday ordered the pre-coup administration of Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry reinstated, but the military and its interim government promptly rejected the ruling.

"The interim government will continue as the national government and legislative authority in Fiji," interim Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase said in a statement.

Both Qarase and the military said they would appeal against the court decision that the interim government was illegal. Analysts said that without military backing the ruling was only a moral victory for Chaudhry, Fiji's first ethnic Indian leader who was toppled in a May coup and held hostage.

"In real political terms there is no evidence that the legal solution will matter very

much," Suva-based University of South Pacific associate professor Scott MacWilliam said.

"Fiji now has a government that is dependent entirely on military support. It cannot rule in any other means."

High Court Judge Anthony Gates said in his ruling that the post-coup government was unconstitutional and called on deposed President Sir Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to recall parliament and reinstate Chaudhry.

Failed businessman George Speight and gunmen stormed Fiji's parliament in May and toppled the Chaudhry government in the name of indigenous rights. Chaudhry was released after 56 days and the military appointed an interim indigenous Fijian government.

Speight is in jail awaiting trial on treason charges. A failed military mutiny on November 2 by the special forces unit which backed Speight's coup left eight soldiers dead and 22



Chaudhry... still far away from justice

civilians wounded and further rocked Fiji. "The George Speight coup was unsuccessful in its attempt to overthrow the democratically elected government of Mahendra

Chaudhry," Gates said. Chaudhry welcomed the ruling and urged post-coup authorities to recall parliament and return Fiji to democracy. "The (Chaudhry government) coalition urges the authorities to abide by the high court ruling and to recall parliament so that Fiji is back to democratic rule," he said in a statement.

Qarase said he would continue to rule Fiji with the aim of securing the safety of citizens, rehabilitating the battered economy and working towards an eventual return to democracy.

He said he drew authority from the military-backed President Ratu Josefa Iloilo and Fiji's traditional power base, the Great Council of Chiefs.

He said his government was committed to a new constitution to "secure the future of indigenous Fijians" after the Great Council of Chiefs withdrew its endorsement of the 1997 multi-racial constitution. But Gates said the abrogation of the 1997

multi-racial constitution, which had enabled Chaudhry to become Fiji's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister, was wrong and that the make-up of Fiji's multi-racial pre-coup parliament was still intact.

The high court ruling stems from a case by an Indian-Fijian who was displaced by the coup and forced to live in a refugee camp. There are a series of individual cases pending which challenge Fiji's the post-coup administration.

The Qarase administration has said it plans to rule Fiji for the next 18 months after which it would hold fresh elections.

New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark said the ruling was a signal to Fiji to speed up a return to democracy.

"The sooner the government, unconstitutional as it is in Fiji, comes up with a clear timetable to return to constitutional democracy, the better," Clark told at a news conference on the sidelines of a summit of Asia-Pacific leaders in Brunei.

INDIAN EXPRESS

16 NOV 2000

MARA'S SON-IN-LAW MADE PM?

Multi-racial statute scrapped in Fiji

By P.S. Suryanarayana

40-1
81/5

SINGAPORE, MAY 30. Fiji's new military ruler, Commodore J.V. (Frank) Bainimarama, today promulgated a decree scrapping the 1997 Constitution Amendment. As a document of multi-racial political pluralism, the scrapped statute had proved conducive to the democratic election of the now-deposed Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, an ethnic Indian, in a country dominated by a narrow majority of natives.

The fate of Mr. Chaudhry and his associates remained unpredictable as they were still being held captive by the "civil coup" leader, Mr. George Speight, despite the new military Government's overtures to him. Mr. Speight took a dim view of Cmdr. Bainimarama's credentials to steer Fiji out of its constitutional crisis, even as the military Government opened a dialogue with the representatives of Mr. Speight, who had overthrown and taken Mr. Chaudhry hostage at the Parliament building in Suva on May 19.

Cmdr. Bainimarama, proclaiming himself 'the Commander and Head of the Interim Military Government of Fiji,' issued two other decrees today. While one of these protected all the laws in force prior to Monday's military takeover, subject to a proviso that new decrees could alter them henceforth, the other measure outlined the contours of a new Council of Advisers for Cmdr. Bainimarama's notional or real "interim" administration, according to sources in Suva.

Two significant aspects of the new "administration" came into sharp focus today, albeit behind the scenes, even as Mr. Speight remained unrelenting in his defiance of Cmdr. Bainimarama. The President,

Ratu Kamisese Mara, who has been sidelined, was officially stated to be under "military protection" and safe, although out of public sight.

The other significant development was the diplomatic indication that a new Acting Prime Minister had either been nominated or might soon be appointed by the military ruler. Speculation in this regard zeroed in on a former Army Chief, Ratu Epelii Naitikau. While there was no authoritative confirmation of this by nightfall today, Mr. Epelii, the husband of Mr. Mara's daughter who is being held hostage along with Mr. Chaudhry and others, is known to have held diplomatic positions.

Cmdr. Bainimarama maintained that Mr. Mara was still the country's President. This prompted Mr. Speight to argue that the new military ruler's judgment was "clouded" by his proximity to Mr. Mara.

While Mr. Speight made it clear that there would be no love lost between him and Cmdr. Bainimarama, the military ruler authorised negotiations, under his auspices, with the nominees of the "civil coup" leader to try and secure the release of Mr. Chaudhry and others.

The negotiators said that "goodwill" and a desire to resolve the issue dominated their exchanges today. This development was at odds with Cmdr. Bainimarama's assertion in a television interview that he could not be seen to be negotiating with Mr. Speight, who had committed a "criminal" act, which Mr. Mara had decided to forgive through an amnesty.

The Commonwealth announced that the question of Fiji's suspension would be discussed by an empowered panel next week.

THE HINDU

MAY 31

MAY 31

Fiji HC declares ousted govt legal

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SUVA, Nov. 15. — Fiji's High Court ruled today that the government ousted in a coup led by George Speight on 19 May is still legally in power. Justice Tony Gates found that Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara remains Fiji's lawful President and that Parliament is legally still intact.

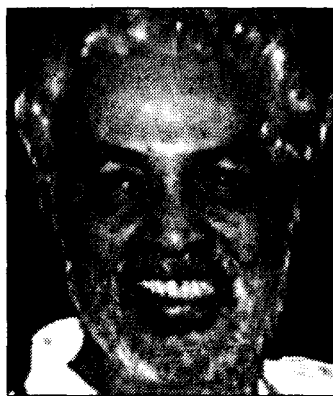
The judge upheld the validity of the 1997 Constitution and ruled that it was unlawfully abrogated after Mr Mahendra Chaudhry's government was deposed. Ratu Mara should as soon as possible appoint as Prime Minister a member of the House of Representatives who, in his opinion, could form a government with the confidence of the House, the court said.

(A Reuters report, however, said the court has ordered Mr Chaudhry's reinstatement.

"The (former ruling) coalition urges the authorities to abide by the High Court ruling

and to recall Parliament so that Fiji is back to democratic rule," Mr Chaudhry said.)

The ruling places the interim government of Mr Laisenia



Mr Mahendra Chaudhry

Qarase under pressure to resign as it has also been held illegal by Justice Gates.

It is, however, not expected to do so.

Mr Qarase said his administration would continue to rule with the aim of securing the

519 16/12
citizens' safety, rescuing the economy and working towards a return to democracy. "The interim government will continue as the national government and legislative authority in Fiji."

Fiji radio reported the military has rejected the ruling and will appeal against it. Against this backdrop, the verdict seems only to be a moral victory for Mr Chaudhry as without military backing it is impossible for anyone to rule the country.

"In real political terms there is no evidence that the legal solution will matter very much," said Prof Scott Macwilliam of Suva-based South Pacific University.

"Fiji now has a government that is dependent entirely on military support. It cannot rule in any other means."

The judgement — on a petition filed by a citizen, Chandrika Prasad — was handed down amid tight security in the Lautoka courtroom in west Fiji.

THE STATESMAN

16 NOV 2000

Army scraps Fiji Constitution

AFP & REUTERS

SUVA, May 30. — The Fijian general who took over power yesterday has revoked the country's multi-racial Constitution and reverted to the 1990 statute that allows only an indigenous islander to be Premier — one of George Speight's consistent demands.

He has also announced that Speight and his gunmen will be allowed to walk free after the crisis is over.

Local FM 96 radio reported today the general and Speight are close to an agreement, and that the sacked Prime Minister, Mr Mahendra Chaudhry, and the 30-odd other hostages may be released soon. Mr Chaudhry may be freed as early as midday (5.30 a.m. India time), the radio said.

Despite describing the takeover of parliament on 19 May as a "criminal act", Commodore Frank Bainimarama announced that the amnesty offer made to Speight by Fiji's former President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, would be honoured.

"That was a promise made by His Excellency the President and we intend to carry that forward," the Commodore told BBC TV.

He insisted he had the welfare of Fiji at heart. "We have put in place an amnesty but I must make it clear we are not doing this for them (Speight and his gang), we are doing this for Fiji. We did what we did to ensure there is no civil war."

Speight had earlier declared the military was as much with him as against him.

"We have a severe split in the military," he

said. "We have one hundred per cent support from our people and when they have one hundred per cent support of the army we will agree ... I truly believe a vast majority of army officers will know what to do."

Commodore Bainimarama today appointed Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, son-in-law of Mr Mara, as interim Prime Minister. Mr Nailatikau had been Fiji's army commander till he was overthrown in a coup in 1987.

Indian move: A senior Indian external affairs officer, Mr ST Davare, will travel to Fiji via Canberra, Mr Jaswant Singh told reporters in New Delhi today, adds SNS. India is keen to cooperate with key players in the region to play a role in the crisis.

BJP demand: The BJP today urged the Centre to step up efforts to restore democracy in Fiji.

THE STATESMAN

31 MAY 2000

Not much to cheer about

THE GLOOMY outlook for the economy has now been endorsed by the Reserve Bank of India's mid-term review of monetary and credit policy. The RBI's decision in this context not to interfere with the interest rate and the cash reserve ratio, two important instruments in its hands, seems to be part of a waiting game. Its apprehensions are evident in its GDP growth rate forecast which has been revised downwards to the 6 to 6.5 per cent range from the earlier 6.5 to 7 per cent. Besides, the RBI has allowed more flexibility for banks in their investments and also pushed for a better delivery system in the banking sector which will help bring it closer to international standards.

However, the RBI will be keeping a watch on the Government's borrowing programme. So far the borrowing has been forecast to be less than last year's as revenue collections have been satisfactory. But if the oil prices do not stabilise at around \$ 30 per barrel, the oil pool deficit will have to be financed by the Government through fresh borrowings. Another problem for the RBI could come from the external sector because in the event of a slower inflow of foreign investments, the current account deficit could widen due to a higher foreign exchange outgo for oil as well as for non-oil imports. The rupee could then come under pressure. Interest rates will have to be raised in that case by the RBI to stabilise the rupee.

At a time when the GDP growth has been projected to be lower by both the Central Statistical Organisation and the RBI, the international rating agency, Standard and Poor, has also downgraded India's rating slightly in its long-term foreign currency issues. This has been done following its assessment of the Government's fiscal situation and in view of the fact that many state Governments are bankrupt because of the slow progress on the disinvestment front. The Government's inability to reduce the fiscal deficit from a projected total combined deficit of 10 per cent is also a cause for worry. The downgrading will cause problems for the State Bank of India's proposed launch of the India Millennium Deposit Bonds and will also put off foreign investor who may prefer the markets of the South East Asian and Latin American countries which are recovering.

11/10 Apartheid in Fiji 12/10

THE POLITICAL situation has been dismal for the Indo-Fijians for a long time; it now borders on the despairing. The new Government of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase has made it quite clear that people of Indian origin will have to accept the status of second class citizens in the island nation. With Mr Qarase ruling out the possibility of Indians ever ruling Fiji, the latter cannot but feel a sense of hopelessness. October 10 marked the 30th independence of Fiji, but the occasion was only a reminder of how a new decolonised country can make a mess of its political system. Three Constitutions and as many coups later, the country is all set to enact yet another blatantly unfair Constitution inspired by the hated principle of apartheid.

With the adoption of every new Constitution, more and more rights have been taken away from the Indo-Fijians. Although these developments have aroused moral outrage all over the world, there is nothing to indicate that the indigenous Fijians have understood how they are gradually imprisoning themselves in a closed world. If racial discrimination is sought to be legitimised by the successive coup leaders and their hand-picked successors, the island cannot but fall off the map. It was Sitiveni Rabuka who first sought to disenfranchise the Indo-Fijians by scrapping the 1970 multi-racial Constitution. Later, he rectified the error by amending the Constitution and holding elections.

However, Col. Rabuka's move was not inspired by altruistic reasons. He was forced to shift his stand to overcome Fiji's international isolation and economic crisis. The new Fijian Government has apparently not learnt any lesson at all from the colonel's disastrous experiment. According to one view, the man behind the present exercise is none other than Col. Rabuka. That George Speight is still being kept in detention is probably only a facade. Mr Speight is paying the price for growing too big for his shoes. Otherwise, there is no difference between what he had said and what the present rulers are saying. The Fiji Government's move is a big blow to ethnic Indians but some day those holding the reins of power will reap a bitter harvest for pursuing such myopic policies.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 2 OCT 2000

MARA MUST QUIT: SPEIGHT

TV station attacked in Fiji capital

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, MAY 28. A new wave of political unrest swept across the Fijian capital of Suva tonight, hours after the "coup" leader, Mr. George Speight, had maintained that he could not be blamed for (the previous) law and order problems in the city as "the Army is deployed all around us" (the "coup" leadership).

The sounds of gunfire were heard late in the night in the vicinity of the residence of the President, Ratu Kamisese Mara, and a television network was disabled, according to foreign diplomats and observers in Suva. There was no conclusive information about who was responsible and what might have been the immediate provocation for the firing near the President's mansion, but the incident occurred in the overall context of what was seen as a new campaign of intimidation by the Speight brigade.

Groups of Mr. Speight's supporters had earlier in the night moved out of the parliament complex, where he was holding in captivity the democratically elected Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, for the tenth consecutive day, and invaded the local television station. Sources said a blackout which occurred at the television facility seemed to have been the handiwork of Mr. Speight's supporters. The television complex itself was said to have been badly damaged. The free movement of the armed supporters of Mr. Speight was made possible by the "withdrawal" of the Army from the vicinity of their "base" — the parliament building — following the President's announcement yesterday stripping Mr. Chaudhry of the post of Prime Minister. Although Parliament itself was not dissolved in conjunction with the dismissal of the elected Prime Minister, it remained suspended.

Today's violence cast a deep shadow over the efforts of the President to solve the crisis on the basis of the continuing parleys between a sub-committee of the Great Council of Chiefs and Mr. Speight's designated interlocutors. The talks were largely aimed at finding a solution based on the norm that top executive positions and real political power should be vested in the majority indigenous population even if that be at the expense of the rights of the substantive minority of ethnic Indians. This formula was said to be a native-Fijian backlash to the

suspected efforts of Mr. Chaudhry at perpetuating and expanding the dominance of the ethnic Indians at the cost of the interests of the indigenous population.

However, even in the midst of the dialogue between the representatives of the indigenous chiefs and Mr. Speight's team, the "coup" leader remained unrelenting in his demand that Mr. Mara first quit as President. Mr. Mara's action of dissolving the duly elected government headed by Mr. Chaudhry, widely condemned by the international community as a capitulation to those seeking to "usurp" power, did not go far enough in pleasing Mr. Speight. The charge of "usurpation" of power was countered by Mr. Speight on the ground that at least the now-deposed Prime Minister and others of his line of thinking were seeking to subject Fiji to an "Indian colonisation".

Mr. Speight dismissed Mr. Mara's move against Mr. Chaudhry as "an act of a desperate man" and asserted that he was "not too concerned" about either the threatened sporting boycott of Fiji by other countries or the "\$22 millions worth of aid (to Suva) from Australia" which might be in jeopardy now. Australia, while criticising Mr. Mara's attempted appeasement of Mr. Speight, ruled out either a East Timor-style military intervention or a show of "gunboat diplomacy" in regard to Fiji.

AP reports:

Mr. Speight, who received a delegation from the Great Council of Chiefs, said he expected a new offer within two days that could lead to the freeing of the hostages. Any deal would have to be ratified by the full Council, he said.

Several countries have threatened to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions on Fiji. The Fiji Hoteliers' Associated president, Mr. Hafiz Khan, said cancellations had skyrocketed since the crisis began.

IPU chief warns Fiji

In the Egyptian capital of Cairo, the president of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Ms. Najma Heptullah, threatened to expel Fiji from the Union if the democratic process was not restored in the country by October.

"If by October, when the IPU meets in Jakarta, the situation does not change in Fiji, then the IPU could kick out the country from the grouping," she said.

THE HINDU

29 MAY 2000

Ethnic Indians boycott Fijian constitutional review panel

SUVA: Fiji's ethnic Indian political parties and social groups boycotted a constitutional review commission named on Friday by the troubled nation's military-installed regime.

The Indian-dominated Fiji Labour and National Federation parties, which have the support of at least 90 per cent of Fiji's Indians, refused to nominate representatives to fill four places reserved for Indians on the 12-member constitutional commis-

sion. The parties believe the body will curtail their political rights.

The commission — which is dominated by indigenous Fijians — is redrafting the constitution to ensure indigenous Fijians hold all key political posts.

The redrawing of the constitution was one of the key demands of George Speight, a failed businessman who led a May 19 coup to topple Fiji's first ethnic-Indian-led gov-

ernment. He was later arrested.

Speight claimed he was acting to protect indigenous rights, saying Indo-Fijians, who make up 44 per cent of the 840,000 population, held too much political and economic power. Indigenous Fijians make up 51 per cent of the population.

Interim Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase said the commission should make recommendations for reforms by June, 2001, so

that a constitution can be drafted by December 2001 and elections for a democratic government held between March and June 2002.

Mr Qarase named four Indians to the commission: Joe Singh, president of the Association of Pacific Islands Chambers of Commerce, Joseph Maharaj, a lawyer, Benjamin Baghwan, a social worker, and Fred Achari, a retired civil servant. (AP)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

7 OCT 2000

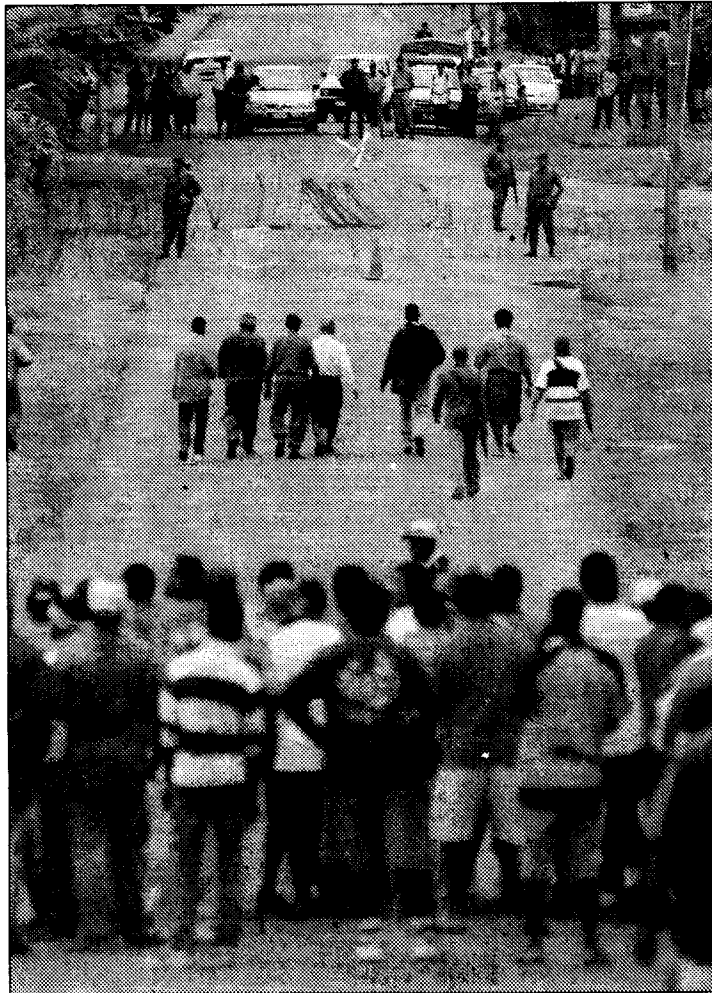
Fracas in Fiji

HW-21

IS DEMOCRACY a system of government of the majority, by the majority and for the majority population within sovereign states? This question has again been brought into sharp international focus by the events in the South Pacific island-republic of Fiji. The same poser, whether or not stated in such a stark fashion, has at one time or other stared a few other countries in the face. Some such States, Sri Lanka included, have grappled with the problem in the context of their respective citizens of Indian ethnic origin. And, in a sense, there has yet been no clear, universally applicable, answer to this basic question, with the latest crisis in Fiji compounding the poser itself.

At the time of Fiji's independence from British colonial rule in 1970, the country's indigenous population was actually in a "minority" in relation to the combined demographic mix of ethnic Indians as also small numbers of European settlers and Chinese migrants. At the macro-level, the ethnic Indians, totalling at present about 44 per cent of Fiji's population compared to the 51 per cent of the natives, had made the South Pacific country their home due to the historical accident of a British colonial practice. The British Crown had treated its different territorial possessions as a collective domain with complementary natural and human resources. In Fiji, the Indian population gradually diminished through emigrations from there since 1970 in the context of a continual confrontation between them and the indigenous people over economic resources and resourcefulness.

So, there was a certain inexorable political logic when Mr. George Speight, self-proclaimed leader of a presumptive "civil coup," and a small band of his armed lieutenants stormed the Parliament complex in the capital, Suva, on May 19 and took into "custody" the democratically-elected Prime Minister of Indian origin, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, and his Cabinet colleagues as also several parliamentarians. A coup orchestrated by the natives-dominated Fijian Army had in May 1987 toppled the then newly-elected Indian-controlled Government, the first such administration in Suva. A political chain-reaction within



The rebel leader in Fiji, Mr. George Speight (in white shirt at centre), strolls near the Parliament building where he is holding the Indian-origin Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, hostage... a nation divided.

There was a certain inexorable political logic to Mr. George Speight and his armed lieutenants' storming of Fiji's Parliament to overthrow the Prime Minister of Indian origin, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry.

P. S. SURYANARAYANA reports.

the indigenous spectrum, not matched by any major counter-reaction from the ethnic Indians, led to the approval in 1990 of a new Constitution that affirmed the political supremacy of the native Fijians at the expense of the rights of others.

Under the 1990 Constitution, the 1987 coup leader, Gen. Sitiveni Rabuka, who chose to leave the Army, formed an elected Government with a majoritarian political stamp. But, he did so by taking on board some non-indigenous people. With Fiji continuing to attract adverse international attention in those

circumstances and with the emigration of non-natives increasing, yet another Constitution was adopted in 1997. This document, with some non-racial features and explicit democratic provisions such as a Government for the whole population including minorities, served as the guide for a general election in 1999, which brought Mr. Chaudhry, a fiery trade unionist and leader of the Fiji Labour Party, to power at the head of a coalition. In collateral events preceding the first genuine democratic election, Fiji rejoined the Commonwealth in 1997 after having left it in the

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context of the 1987 coup.

It was against this background and in recognition of the traditional leadership role in politics by the Fijian Great Council of Chiefs, a paramount conscience-keeper of the indigenous people, that the United Nations and the Commonwealth stepped in briefly to try and undo the "coup" staged by Mr. Speight, whose credentials as a pristine native have been questioned in some quarters, given his presumptive part-European links. However, there is no doubting the quintessential agenda of the natives that Mr. Speight vowed to uphold even as he formally anointed himself, in a traditional ceremony, as the new Fijian Prime Minister a few days ago.

With Mr. Speight responding to the intervention of the U.N. and the Commonwealth by declaring himself the new Premier, the diplomatic mission by these two international organisations has come to naught, at least for the present. But, Mr. Speight is in no mood to heed the advice of the Great Council of Chiefs, either. The Council, presided over by Gen. Rabuka in his capacity as a leader of the natives and not an erstwhile coup leader, is willing to set in motion a process that would culminate in the formulation of yet another Constitution which could explicitly reserve the top executive positions for the native Fijians.

With Mr. Speight having sought political legitimacy for his "civil coup" by organising shows of public support among the natives for his action against a duly-elected Prime Minister, Mr. Chaudhry's continuation in office has been disfavoured by the Council, too.

The formation of an alternative Government on a "principle of necessity" and "clemency" for Mr. Speight over his hostage-taking have been mooted by the Council, but the chiefs are up against his defiance in the manner of equating himself with the state itself on the basis of a modern-day variant of the old dictum relating to one's parity with a sovereign entity. In Mr. Speight's view, he has epitomised the "will of the people". The Fiji puzzle can be considered a suitable topic for settlement at an international conference, but the question is whether the major powers will have a sufficient geostrategic stake in Fiji for that purpose.

110-12

POLITICAL TERRORISM IN FIJI

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THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY has few known and reliable weapons, apart from slow-action economic sanctions, to counter the type of thuggery that one has been witnessing for the past week in Suva, capital of the tiny South Pacific island nation of Fiji. The collective voice of institutions such as the United Nations and the Commonwealth counts for almost little in situations, rather rare no doubt, where gangsters hold a Government and a country to ransom. The new military ruler, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, after imposing martial law and sidelining the veteran political operator and President, Ratu Kamisese Mara, has belied the initial impression of fairness and surrendered to the so-called rebels by scrapping the 1997 Constitution that had restored the multiracial character of the island. Fijians of Indian origin, who saw their political rights being taken away after the 1987 coup under a Constitution that barred them from top Government positions, were given back their political dignity through an amended statute in 1997. This is now sought to be scrapped. If Fijians of Indian origin are not again to be reduced to the status of second class citizens, the international community must immediately warn the rebels and their benefactors that it will not countenance the creation of a system which does not respect and protect the rights of all Fijians irrespective of their ethnic origins. The restoration of the democratically-elected Government under Mr. Mahendra Choudhry must be the logical first step.

Despite the fact that this is a repetition of what happened in 1987, India has apparently been caught off guard, not learning the right lessons from the criticism last time when Delhi did *not even have enough diplomatic representation* in Suva and could not therefore respond adequately. But by moving the Commonwealth and Fiji's big neighbours, it has been initiating the right actions. The Commonwealth's watchdog

body is reactivating itself and Fiji's neighbours, New Zealand and Australia, on whose trade connections the country thrives have reacted strongly. Trade and economic sanctions imposed after the first coup in 1987, that saw the rise to power of Col. Sitiveni Rabuka, ultimately produced the desired results by forcing the native Fijian leadership to drop the racially-biased provisions. Elections under the multiracial constitution brought an ethnic Indian to the Prime Ministership. Sanctions will most certainly be imposed again and Fiji expelled from the Commonwealth. But, more immediately, the U.N. must deliver the clear warning to the thugs in Suva that unlike the last time the world body can activate more potent mechanisms to end victimisation of civilian populations.

Through their unacceptable actions on the streets and their hostage-takings and killings, sections of native Fijians are seeking to reverse the progress to democratic plurality that was ensured three years ago. Any political system that attempts to guarantee power to the native Melanesian population will be welcomed by the international community. But what is being sought to be achieved through coercion and violence is the elimination of an entire ethnic population from the political life of the country. This is most repugnant. At the root of the Fijian crisis is the attempt, since derailed, by the democratically-elected Government of Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, to work out a fair deal for the tenant farmers, who are mostly people of Indian origin and whose sugar plantation leases are running out. These leasehold farmers control the vital sugar industry. The first coup led by Col. Rabuka, who still wields considerable influence, saw the flight of thousands of Fijians of Indian origin to other countries, mostly Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Fiji was the loser. Native leaders must realise that another exodus can reduce their tiny land to even greater poverty.

110-12

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Fiji rebels dismantle army block outside parliament

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
SUVA, MAY 27

FIJIAN rebels on Friday tore down military barricades outside the besieged Parliament, forcing government soldiers who had taken over security outside the building to back off.

About 40 heavily armed men, led by coup leader George Speight, marched out of Parliament where Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry is being held hostage, and challenged the soldiers.

In wild scenes, they pulled down the coils of razor wire and dismantled the barricades. The soldiers and the rebels pointed guns at each other and screamed threats but no shots were fired.

The soldiers regrouped and negotiations began between Speight and their colonel. The coup leader eventually secured their agreement and the two sides began shaking hands.

However, one of the soldiers at the barricade told AFP they were not defecting.

"We are here to make sure the civilians do not get hurt," he said.

Meanwhile, Fiji faced an international backlash today over its traditional chiefs' decision to back the overthrow of a democratically elected government, with the United States, Britain and Australia leading the condemnation.

The Pacific nation was threatened with sanctions and expulsion from Commonwealth if democracy was not restored.

Fiji's traditional chiefs plan to sacrifice ethnic Indian premier Mahendra Chaudhry and replace him with an indigenous Fijian to appease coup leader George Speight, who stormed Parliament a week ago.

They have also recommended a new Constitution ensuring the country can only be

ruled by indigenous Fijians, and a pardon for the rebels.

Washington called the move "inconsistent" with Fiji's Constitution and warned of sanctions.

"The US position remains that any actions to resolve this matter should be in accordance with Fiji's Constitution," said State Department spokesman Philip Reeker.

The consequences would be "very substantial and very detrimental to Fiji's standing in the international community," he added.

"We continue to recognise the democratically-elected government of Fiji."

Australian Prime Minister John Howard also threatened sanctions and branded Speight a terrorist.

"Unless the course of action on which Fiji is now embarked changes very dramatically there will be consequences, and we will consider that in the appropriate

way," he said when asked if Australia would apply sanctions.

"If a country allows somebody to take hostage a democratically-elected Prime Minister, to hold him hostage, make demands and behave the way he's behaved, if you give that person a pardon you are suspending the rule of law."

He described the situation in Fiji as like "Pacific apartheid."

"You can't have a situation where twice in the space of 15 years, because somebody of Indian heritage has become prime minister, you have a coup," he said.

Fiji was suspended from the Commonwealth after two 1987 coups deposed an Indian-dominated government and was only re-admitted after its 1997 Constitution restored political rights to the ethnic Indian population.

Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said he would recommend Fiji be ex-

cluded again if democracy was not restored.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon has convened a meeting of the Commonwealth ministerial action group in London early next month to decide what action to take.

"Aiming a loaded gun at the Constitution to marginalise sectors of Fiji's society is totally unacceptable," he said in a statement today.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General was in the Fijian capital earlier this week with UN envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello seeking the unconditional release of all hostages and "strict adherence to democratic and constitutional principles."

In London, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said "the use of armed force to achieve political ends cannot be tolerated" while Japan called the coup an attempt "extremely regrettable".

INDIAN EXPRESS

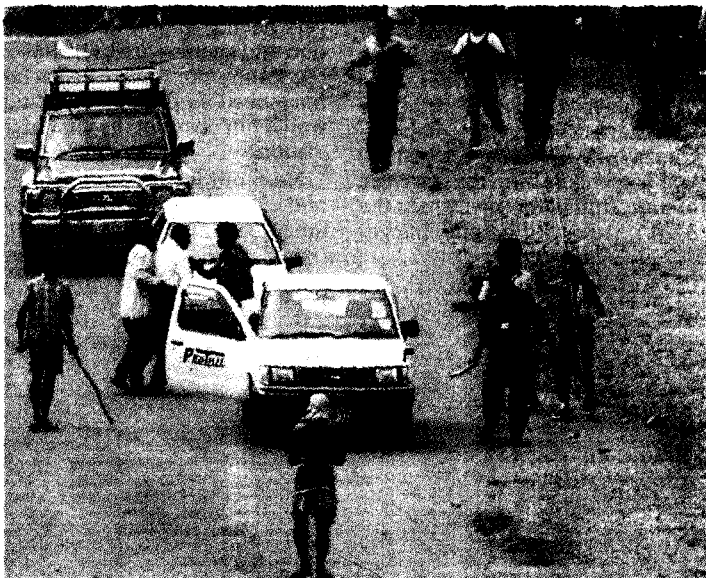
28 MAY 2000

Three-year deadline set for new Fiji Constitution

By P. S. Suryanarayana ^{HD-1} 1/6

SINGAPORE, MAY 31. Fiji's military ruler, Commodore J. V. (Frank) Bainimarama, today set a time-frame of up to three years for formulating a new Constitution, generally expected to be in favour of the majority indigenous population, and holding elections to form a new Parliament. The proposed statute will replace the 1997 Constitution which, with its core of a multi-racial equity, led to a leader of ethnic Indian descent becoming Prime Minister just over a year ago.

Cmdr. Bainimarama today revised his priorities on the delineation of an interim administration until the next election, even as he found himself on a collision course with the



Rebels with clubs and spears pull a driver from his vehicle on Wednesday outside the gates of Parliament House in Suva, where the Fijian Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, and 30 others are being held hostage. — AP

Mara flees

SUVA, MAY 31. Fiji's former President, Ratu Kamisese Mara, has fled to his remote Pacific island home in fear of his life, police sources said today. The deposed Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry's wife, Ms. Virmati, has also reportedly been offered sanctuary by the Mara family on Lakeba, in the Lau group of islands, 200 km east of Suva.

The 80-year-old former President was flown by helicopter to Lakeba, the southernmost Fijian island, of which he is high chief, the sources said. — AFP

"civil coup" leader, Mr. George Speight, on the safe release of the deposed Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, and his colleagues being held hostage at the Parliament building in the Fijian capital, Suva. The military ruler, who had on Tuesday indicated the possibility of a general clemency for Mr. Speight and the other hostage-takers as part of a new

political process, today said "an amnesty will only be given when the hostages are freed and the guns (being brandished by the "civil coup" coterie) are returned" to the new administration.

Referring to Mr. Speight and his supporters, Cmdr. Bainimarama said: "We want to tell them that there is no need to hold those (political) people as hostages. They are no longer in the government. We (the military authorities) are the Government." In line with these comments, he gave up, during the course of a day, an attempt to broaden the base of his government and include at least one key person from outside the Army.

With the initial nomination of the former Fijian Army Chief and diplomat, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, as the new interim Prime Minister coming under fire from Mr. Speight, the military ruler put on hold by nightfall today the formation of an interim set-up as an adjunct to the "military government" of serving defence

personnel. The proposed candidate for transitional prime ministership — the son-in-law of the now-relegated President, Ratu Kamisese Mara — was also seen to have become a stumbling block to the military regime's efforts to secure the release of the hostages from Mr. Speight's control. These include Ratu Epeli's wife.

Cmdr. Bainimarama expressed frustration that Mr. Speight's negotiators "keep avoiding the issues of hostages" in their talks with the military government's interlocutors. A resolution of the hostage crisis would, in Cmdr. Bainimarama's reckoning, help him "bring life back to the people of Fiji" by mollifying the international community over the latest turn of events in Suva.

However, Mr. Speight signalled a sustained bid at securing for himself a role in the new administration, perhaps as interim Prime Minister, while his supporters were reported to have waylaid minority citizens today.

Editorial: Page 12

THE HINDU

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F 1 JUN 21m

Mara sacks Chaudhry govt

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SUVA, May 27. — The Fiji President today dismissed the civilian government being held hostage by coup plotters, leaving himself as sole authority of the nation.

Mr Ratu Sir Kamises Mara said he had appointed a caretaker administration. The leader of the caretaker government immediately resigned, leaving the President as the sole authority.

Parliament will be suspended for the next six months, Mr Mara said, adding that his actions were allowed under Fiji's constitution. He said it was "very likely" that Speight and the six other coup leaders would be granted immunity.

Speight's group quickly rejected Mr Mara's plan, with special adviser, Mr Jo Nata, telling Fiji TV that the rebels' demands remained the same. "It does not address our requests (which include Mr Mara's resignation)," he said.

The dramatic turn of events unfolded after Mr

Mara attempted to contact Mr Chaudhry but failed. Private secretary Mr Joe Brown had attempted to see Mr Chaudhry, but was not granted access.

Mr Mara said there were no plans to storm the Fijian parliamentary complex by force.

The latest twist came after two soldiers and a British journalist were wounded in a gunfight between coup supporters and troops in the Parliament complex. One soldier was shot in the arm and the other in the leg, *live.com* said. The journalist, a TV cameraman for the Associated Press, was wounded in the ribs, but his condition was not serious, police said.

Asked how he thought the world would react to his decision, Mr Mara said: "Very badly. I have been warned so often by Mckinnon (Commonwealth secretary-general) and others."

However he asked for understanding. "We live in a place (that is) not only purgatory, but hell," he said.

THE STATESMAN

28 MAY 2000

Fiji military rules out Chaudhry's return

Suva, May 31

Fiji's NEW military ruler today said there was no chance of ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry's Government, which is being held hostage in parliament, would resume its leadership of the Pacific island nation.

"Mahendra Chaudhry will no longer come back as Prime Minister," said Commodore Voreqe (Frank) Bainimarama, who declared martial law on Monday and appointed a new civilian Prime Minister in the early hours of the day. FIJI'S MILITARY rulers said today that they had withdrawn the nomination of an interim Prime Minister, following objections from gunmen holding around 30 politicians hostage in the country's Parliament.

Fiji's military rulers said they had withdrawn the nomination of an interim Prime Minister, following objections from gunmen holding around 30 politicians hostage in the country's Parliament.

A statement issued by the Military Council said its leader, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, "wanted the Military Council to ensure that their objectives are

fully achieved before putting in place the interim Government".

Earlier in the day, coup leader George Speight, who has been holding former Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and much of his Government hostage since May 19, had rejected Bainimarama's nomination of Ratu Epeli Nailatikau as interim Prime Minister.

The Military Council said in its statement that its main objective was to win the release of hostages and the return of all firearms and military stores to the Army's headquarters.

Bainimarama said negotiations with Speight's group had ended for the day and would continue tomorrow.

Earlier, the military rulers had defied coup leader George Speight and named the new interim Prime Minister, sparking skirmishes around the country's Parliament complex, where Speight is holding hostages.

Radio stations broadcast urgent warnings for people to stay away from Parliament area after supporters of Speight began throwing stones and hijacking taxis driven by ethnic Indians. Speight claimed power in the name of indigenous Fijians on May 19, taking hostage

Fiji's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and members of his Government.

Military ruler Frank Bainimarama told a news conference that he intended to go ahead with the appointment of former soldier and diplomat Ratu Epeli Nailatikau as interim Prime Minister, despite resistance from Speight. It was the first time Bainimarama had acted in open opposition to Speight since declaring military rule on Monday.

On Tuesday he bowed to one of Speight's main demands by reimposing a Constitution that reserves the post of Prime Minister for ethnic Fijians.

"If they (Speight's group) have an alternative to Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, I'd like to know," Bainimarama said on Wednesday. "If they are talking about members of their so-called Government, I don't know if any of them have the courage to go up and stand and talk on behalf of Fijians after holding guns to hostages. I don't see any of them as being the Prime Minister of the interim Government".

Hostages still held Speight's gunmen are holding about 30 people in the Parliamentary complex and one of the military Government's main goals is to get

the hostages released.

Bainimarama said negotiations were still under way and that Speight and others would be granted a partial amnesty - but only after they freed the hostages.

"The amnesty will be given when the hostages are released and the guns are returned. And they have my personal guarantee," he said. He added the amnesty would not cover last Sunday's killing of a policeman in riots in Suva, which would be subject to a normal criminal investigation. Interim Prime Minister Nailatikau is the son-in-law of sidelined President Ratu Sir Kamiseva Mara, whose daughter is among Speight's hostages. Mara was Fiji's Army Commander until he was overthrown in a military coup in 1987 and later became Fiji's High Commissioner to Britain.

The military declared martial law on Monday, sidelining Mara. The President was believed to be safe on a boat off the coast after "stepping aside", Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said.

Most of Speight's demands met the annulment of the 1997 multi-racial Constitution, the offer of amnesty for Speight and Mara's departure mean that most of Speight's demands have been met. (Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 JUN 2000

THE ASIAN AGE

27 MAY 2000

Racism in Fiji

Fiji is clearly embarked on a collision course with the international community. Its traditional chiefs have now risked international condemnation to almost support coup leader George Speight in his effort to capture power. After initial resistance the chiefs have now asked President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to head the government, and in effect replace democratically elected Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry who is being held hostage. Mr Sitivenia Rabuka, chairman of Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs, gave in a set of proposals which even include a return to the earlier racist Constitution under which the posts of President and Prime Minister were to be reserved for the indigenous Fijian community. These proposals have not been accepted in their entirety, with even colleagues of coup leader Speight not fully supportive. Rabuka has a clear vested interest in the developments having led two coups in 1987 himself. He is a person with ambition reflected in his revealed desire to be a player in the present game. Speight, a failed businessman, has acted with some deliberation. Obviously there was a method, which is now disclosing itself, in his apparent madness when he rushed into Parliament with seven gunmen and took the Prime Minister and his Cabinet hostage. He has been emphasising the differences between the indigenous Fijians and the Indian settlers, playing to base sentiments to gather popular support. After a stunned silence Fijians began gathering outside Parliament to garland and greet him as a saviour. Speight broke down under the attention, which probably further endeared him to those who see deliverance in racist hatred. And is holding out, in the hope that he will be able to rally around the indigenous people to get rid of an Indian Prime Minister. The tensions must be palpable with the Indians, who have settled in Fiji over the years, feeling tremendously insecure. Reports suggest that many are even thinking of leaving their home, scared for their lives and property. For suddenly a mixed Cabinet that was seen as a shining example of unity and integration, has been reduced to a symbol of divisiveness and hatred. India, as usual, has been rather laid back in its responses to the crisis. It has expressed its outrage along with UK, New Zealand and Australia although a strong statement from the Indian Foreign Office has still to emerge. Given the fact that the community under attack is of Indian origin, New Delhi should make it very clear that racism will not be accepted as the reason for overthrowing a constitutional government. And use its good offices in the region to mount strong pressure to ensure that Chaudhry is re-installed. Reports from Fiji seem to suggest a certain resignation to the inevitable which appears to be the exit of Mahendra Chaudhry and the Indians elected along with him. He is holding out, and it is important that the struggle for justice and equality is given a new impetus by the international community with India in the lead. At present it seems that India is quite content to follow an international consensus but it will be more in the fitness of things if it takes the lead in mobilising even those nations that have, for the moment, kept out of the controversy. The drama in this little South Pacific nation will not end easily now that it has been set into motion by Speight and his gunmen. The dynamics of the situation will ensure that it is played out, and India along with other concerned nations should ensure that they determine a just end.

THE ASIAN AGE

27 MAY 2000

Speight strikes terror despite martial law

Suva, May 31

SHORTLY AFTER noon today, a rumour spread that supporters of Fiji coup leader George Speight would march through the streets of the Capital.

Within minutes, the streets in downtown Suva were choked by traffic as people got into their cars to flee. Food was left half-eaten in cafes and coffee left forgotten.

The town emptied quickly. Not a single shop remained open.

That is the kind of terror Speight's militia strikes in the hearts of the people of Suva, to whom the 1987 coups carried out by Army strongman Sitiveni Rabuka now seem like a picnic.

Today's rumour turned out to be a false alarm but no one is taking any chances. Speight's mob is armed with guns and has shown a relish for using them.

The policeman who was killed by one of his supporters earlier this week was shot three times in the chest. Two soldiers were wounded in an earlier skirmish.

'Information Minister' in Speight's self-styled Government, Simone Kaitani, said he was worried of losing control over armed civilians.

A civilian supporter punched the son of a staff member of Parliament catering for the rebels after mistaking him for an Indian.

This was to be expected. People camped inside Parliament are receiving heavy doses of inflammatory anti-Indian rhetoric almost daily. During a prayer session there on Sunday, one pastor told the group: "Idol worshipers can

never rule this country".

He threatened to burn the office of the newspaper that reported his comments and to shoot its reporters.

Despite the military commander, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, declaring martial law and assuming executive powers and despite the presence of armed soldiers in the city, fear still rules.

Even the former President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who stepped aside to let the military take full control, and his immediate family were moved from the Government House in Suva to Tubou in the Lau group of islands, his traditional home.

This followed continued threats to President Mara's life from suspected supporters of Speight, who led the "civilian coup" against the Government of ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Pal

Chaudhry on May 19.

Waves of fleeing Indian families are seeking flights out of Fiji from Nadi airport, their TV sets, microwaves and other household items in tow.

The Australian Government says persecuted Fiji Indians could be taken in temporarily as refugees under a form of safe haven programme such as that granted to East Timorese and Kosovars. However, for that to happen the situation would have to escalate significantly, the Australian Government says.

For now, the people are trapped. All foreign embassies and High Commissions have closed their visa application offices until the crisis clears up. (LANS)

Waves of fleeing
Indian families are
seeking flights out of
Fiji from Nadi airport

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

JUN 2 1987

Fiji chiefs may offer pardon to Speight

REUTERS

CANBERRA, May 25 — Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs today ended a crucial meeting and sent a delegation to Parliament to talk to coup leader George Speight, website *fijilive.com* reported.

The independent website said the chiefs were expected to offer a pardon to Speight for taking Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry hostage, and to give President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara the go-ahead to form an interim government.

"Mara is expected to appoint an interim PM tomorrow, following the release of the hostages at Parliament and the resignation of Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry," the website said.

It was unclear whether Speight would accept the decision and much depended on who was proposed as the new Prime Minister, it added.

The chiefs called for Prime Minister Chaudhry to step down in favour of an indigenous Fijian, former Prime Minister, Mr Sitiveni Rabuka, reports AFP from Suva. The chiefs had also called for the immediate release of all the hostages and demanded a pardon for all those who had taken part in the coup, he said.

Mr Rabuka, a chief himself and the leader of two coups in 1987, said the outcome was "the least damaging of all the bad solutions". He told a

Sydney Radio programme that the chiefs' proposal for a resolution to the crisis would probably be unacceptable to the rest of the world. "We should brace ourselves for international...curses which people can bring upon a nation. They include trade bans and aid bans and so on," he said.

The coup leaders, however, refused to release Prime Minister Chaudhry and other hostages. Peceli Rinayama, spokesman for George Speight, said the chiefs' offer of a pardon left open the possibility that they could still go to prison. "We want an amnesty," he said. "Under the current proposal we (may) have to go to prison for two to three years. "George speight and the boys do not deserve that."

The Indian External Affairs Minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, who held extensive talks with the British Foreign Secretary, Mr Robin Cook, in London yesterday discussed a wide-range of issues including the crisis in Fiji, reports PTI

Diplomatic sources said the British and Indian positions on Fiji converged and reinforced each other that the holding of a chief executive at gun-point is a criminal act.

According to the sources, Fiji may be expelled from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr Don Mckinnon, urged the coup leaders yesterday to free Prime Minister Chaudhry.

THE STATESMAN

26 MAY 2000

The Fiji crisis

By Rajeev Dhavan

Fiji's Constitution of 1998 embodied a great constitutional experiment — no less significant than that of India or South Africa. The coup is a blow to multi-ethnic living.

IS MIGHT right? Or, are contemporary Constitutions unable to meet the challenge of multi-racial, multi-ethnic, or socially differentiated societies? Pakistan's Constitution fell to a usurper in 1999. The fund of 'pro-usurper' jurisprudence blessed this usurpation by giving Gen. Pervez Musharraf three years to clear the mess. Sierra Leone burns with upstarts and upsurges. Civil war has caught up with Sri Lanka in ways that question whether a single consensual Constitution can be devised to pledge this multi-ethnic island into peace. Close on the heels of these crises comes the rebellion of Mr. George Speight in Fiji. The Prime Minister and his Cabinet are marooned. Their authority is undermined. The President, Ratu Kamiseva Mara, has succumbed to the coup d'état while pretending not to do so. The innocent Mahendra Chaudhry Government has been thrown out. The Army has now taken over. Mr. Speight is to get an amnesty. The Indian community, which has worked hard and honestly to support Fijian interests, has suddenly become the scapegoat for things it has not done. The Indian Government has shuffled its feet but little else. The Indian people are relatively unconcerned. They do not know how to look after their own diaspora.

Since the Ian Smith rebellion in the then Southern Rhodesia in 1965, usurper jurisprudence has become fashionable. The white judges of Rhodesia and, at least one member of the Privy Council in England, used this usurper jurisprudence to defend Mr. Smith's illegal regime in 1969. Ghana's courts in 1966 and Nigerian judges in 1969 justified coup d'état. From Dosso's case (1958) — through the entanglement of many refinements — Pakistan judges have, willy nilly, acceded to military takeover whilst pretending that they have also retained and imposed Constitutional limitations when blessing military takeover and dictatorial rule. In the first coup in Fiji by Mr. Sitiveni Rabuka, the judiciary of Fiji, in part, buckled under. At least, one Fijian judge told me that they did so because they would have been replaced by bad judges with no respect for the rule of law. So, good judges had to

become bad, because bad judges can never be good! At the root of 'usurper' jurisprudence lies the positivist theory of law which recognises that politics in an institutionalised form lies at the root, and forms the basis, of all Constitutions. If an alternative politics (like the armed gunmanship of Mr. Speight) sets aside the basis of a Constitution (variously described in juristic literature as a *grundnorm* or 'rule of recognition') the Constitution itself breaks down. Amidst self-gratifying, but relatively meaningless, moral reservations by judges, the intuitions that inspire the positivist theory of law surrender the dharma of the law to provide support for and sustain usurpers.

While the courage of Indian courts was found wanting during the Emergency

(1975-77), the craft of its judges suggests that the 'basic structure' of India's Constitution cannot be altered even by legal means. However, Indian judges failed to check or control usurpation when it mattered most. Neither courts nor jurists have been able to find an answer to the general helpless drift into usurper jurisprudence. Once the political rot starts the 'law' cannot stop it. We are not dealing with 'independence' movements or anti-racist takeovers, but simple audacious subversions of reasonable democratic Constitutions. Might is right. Judges and jurists throughout the world have not been able to stand firm against such audacity which insults both law and democratic governance.

Fiji is an important case. If we do not wish to endlessly re-draw the map of the world, we have to create Constitutions for multi-social societies. The imperial solution was to encourage and politicise differences and create a 'divide and rule' governance. The Indian Constitution of 1950 started a new experiment to deal

with the demands of group life. With a creative use of federalism, human rights for groups, affirmative action and special representation, India succeeded in pulling a subcontinent together under adverse circumstances. The third generation Constitution in this lineal progression is the Constitution of South Africa of the 1990s which dealt with complex social issues through innovative frameworks. The Fiji Constitution of 1997-98 was an amalgam of all three approaches, in addition to being an insightful expression of Fiji's genius. It is difficult for a Constitution to capture the genius of any society. Fiji's attempts to do so under its July 27, 1998, Constitution remain impressive. In an effort to find not just one but several right answers, Fiji's Constitution of 1998 found interesting balances. English, Fijian and Hindustani have equal status in the State (Art. 4(1)). Ownership of Fijian land according to Fijian custom, the rights of Fijian and Rotuman people to their right to governance through their separate administrative systems and the protection and upholding of the interest of Fijian communities are specific articles of faith in the Constitution (Art. 6 (c), (d), (j)).

There are special provisions for affirmative action which 'must' be implemented in virtually every sphere of life (Art. 44) which are far more extensive and elaborate than those of casteist India or racialised South Africa. Citizenship by birth is recognised but only if one parent is a Fijian citizen (Art. 10) — an interesting and fair solution. The House of Representatives has proportionate electoral representation for Fijians, Indians and Rotumans (Art. 51) and the Senate has people appointed by the Great Council of Chiefs (Bose Levu Vakaturaga), the Council of Rotuma, the Prime Minister and the

Leader of the Opposition (Art. 64). The Great Council of Chiefs has constitutional status (Art. 116). The civil service reflects ethnic composition (Art. 140 (d)). What we have is an amalgam of ideas which brings diverse people together in an interestingly just manner. It is a unique experiment in a complex situation.

Fiji's President was wrong to dismiss the Prime Minister and his Cabinet; and make rash promises of replacement regimes. Under Fiji's Constitution, a Prime Minister must resign or be defeated (Art. 109). The Emergency Powers can only be mobilised under a law — and, in any case eventually not without reference to Parliament (Art. 187). It is pointless to argue that the crisis in Fiji represents a breakdown of the rule of law and constitutional governance. That is self-evident. More significantly, Fiji's Constitution of 1998 embodied a great constitutional experiment — no less significant than that of India in 1950 or South Africa from 1990. It was an example to the world. Strife-torn countries with ethnic divisions had much to learn from the Fiji solution — especially those with Indian and other migrants. There is something in the solution which has answers for Sri Lanka. Even if Fiji were now to create a new Constitution, it cannot do better — if it wants to be fair to Fijians, Indians and Rotumans alike. The coup is a blow to multi-ethnic living in the world.

Neither India nor the Indian people can remain aloof. India has a duty to support all and any just constitutional experiments which confront and deal with plural diversity — especially those concerning the Indian diaspora. Indians abroad are not just 'NRIs', but social ambassadors who are wrongly maligned for their hard work. Both morally and politically India buckled under during the Keryan (1968), Ugandan (1972) and other crisis (including human rights violation by Americans) to convey the impression that Indians can be badly treated anywhere by anyone in the world with impunity and without remorse. India should support the 1997-98 Constitution which Fiji should not abandon. If the Fiji experiment fails, the world is the loser — not just Fiji or the Indian diaspora.

Speight resists UN, C'wealth plea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA 5-11

LONDON, May 24. — Fijian coup leader George Speight today "resisted" UN and Commonwealth appeals for immediate release of Mr Mahendra Chaudhry and other hostages but assured that they "would be well cared for and no harm would come to any of them".

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr Don McKinnon and the UN secretary general's personal envoy, Mr Sergio Vieira de Mello, who met President Ratu Sir Kamisese and the hostages, said Speight was present "when we visited the hostages."

"We took the opportunity to express our total disapproval of the methods he had adopted in seeking to redress perceived injustices. We told him there was no tolerance in today's world for the violent overthrow of democratically elected governments," they said in a press note.

"We succeeded in seeing Prime Minister Chaudhry and other hostages briefly. We found

them in what, under the circumstances, could be described as good spirits, although he complained that he and his son were twice manhandled. Some of the hostages were clearly in anguish," they said.

Looting and arson of ethnic-Indian Fijian property were reported today, as Speight turned down a plea from the tribal chief council to release the hostages, AP adds from Suva.

The council met for a second day to find a peaceful solution to the hostage crisis. The council chairman was optimistic that the matter would be resolved today. But Speight appeared intransigent, repeating his call for Mr Mara's resignation "before the situation escalates and becomes uncontrollable by any authority in Fiji".

While the chiefs met at a heavily guarded army barracks outside Suva, the situation in the capital was tense. A chicken processing factory was burned down overnight, and there were reports of outlying villages inhabited by ethnic Indians being pillaged and burn-

ed by masked men.

Late yesterday, Australian foreign minister, Mr Alexander Downer, said he feared the coup may not end peacefully. "We're deeply concerned about the risk of bloodshed. It's an extremely ugly and unacceptable situation," he said.

About 300 coup supporters were in the complex today where an impromptu church service was held. Yesterday, hundreds of supporters stood in line to congratulate Speight.

Speight claims to be acting on behalf of majority ethnic Fijians who believe they are being marginalised by Mr Chaudhry's government.

Speight and his gunmen were left in a weaker position yesterday when the chiefs, who hold moral authority over Fiji's indigenous population, backed the President's condemnation of the coup and demanded the hostages' release.

Accusing council chairman Mr Sitiveni Rabuka of misleading tribal chiefs, Speight said "I don't recognise Rabuka's right to broker a deal anymore."

THE STATESMAN

25 MAY 2000

MILITARY GOVT., SPEIGHT HOLD TALKS

Hope seen for Fiji hostages

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JUNE 1. New hopes of an early negotiated release of Fiji's political hostages, including the deposed Prime Minister belonging to the minority ethnic Indian community, were raised today by the military rulers in Suva, capital of the small South Pacific state.

A Fijian military spokesman told *The Hindu* here that the ball was now being put back into the court of the Great Council of Chiefs, moral conscience-keeper of the majority indigenous population, for a political-constitutional settlement of the issues at stake.

The turmoil began with a 'civil coup' on May 19 when a frustrated businessman, Mr. George Speight, took the then Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, and his Cabinet colleagues hostage at gunpoint in the parliament building in Suva.

The military spokesman, Col. Filipino Tarakinikini, speaking over the telephone said the hopes of a possible release of the political hostages, now deemed ordinary citizens, were based on the "understanding" that featured in the talks held today between the military Government and Mr. Speight in "good faith."

In the spokesman's reckoning, the hostages might be set free ahead of the deliberations by the Great Council of Chiefs by early next week on the basic constitutional questions sparked by the military's coup upon a 'civil'



The Fijian coup leader, Mr. George Speight, on his way to attend a meeting with the military at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Suva on Thursday. — Reuters

coup. Today's new mood of optimism in the ruling camp was a sequel to a meeting between the Head of the Interim Military Government, Commodore J. V.

(Frank) Bainimarama, and Mr. Speight.

The meeting itself took place in the context of Mr. Speight's disapproval of "a coup within a

coup" as also his demand that the new military rulers, who imposed martial law a few days ago, should climb off a "high horse" and desist from imposing their will on the people.

Without going into the "specific details of each option" that might now be put on the table of the Great Council of Chiefs, the military spokesman said "there can even be a military council on top of a civilian (set-up)" under a new solution.

While one of the proposals would provide for a continuing military administration until the enactment of a new constitution and fresh elections, the other option now in focus was made up of two strands, the spokesman said. These related to the possibilities of either a new interim civil administration under the military's overall auspices or the co-existence of a civilian president and the armed forces in a governing capacity.

The spokesman said a role for Mr. Speight in any new interim order "cannot be ruled out". Earlier in the day, Mr. Speight had said he would be willing to play a role if offered by the Great Council of Chiefs.

THE HINDU

1987

Arson, in Fiji

behalf of majority ethnic Fijians who believe they are being marginalised by Chaudhry's government.

Sitiveni Rabuka, a former Prime Minister and leader of the influential tribal Great Council of Chiefs, said he was optimistic the crisis would be resolved today.

But Speight appeared intransigent, repeating his call for the resignation of Mara and accusing Rabuka of misleading the tribal chiefs.

Mara imposed a state of emergency in Fiji and took control of the government from outside Parliament after coup.

"I don't recognise Sitiveni Rabuka's right to broker a deal anymore," Speight told Mel-bourne radio station 3AW.

Speight's representatives presented a statement from his self-styled "Taukei Civilian Government" to the chiefs, which accused Mara of trying to shore up power for himself and of misleading the council and Fijians.

Speight and his gunmen were left in a weaker position yesterday when the chiefs, who hold moral authority over Fiji's indigenous population, backed Mara's condemnation of the coup and demanded that the hostages be released.

However, the police and eth-

C'wealth chief in Fiji as looting, arson erupts

tion and the Milbrook action programme of the Commonwealth.

The MEA said the disruption of inter-racial harmony could be rapidly brought to an end with the restoration of the legitimately elected government.

Speaking to reporters in Tehran, Singh, who is going to London to attend a heads of mission conference — ahead of the crucial EU-India summit in Lisbon next month — said he would be meeting Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon as well as British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook there to tell them about India's concerns on Fiji.

"I will re-emphasise that there should not be any differentiated

responses to similar events," Singh said, pointing to the Commonwealth action against the coup in Pakistan during the Durban summit last November, when Islamabad was expelled from the Councils of the Commonwealth.

Singh also said he was "somewhat disappointed with Australia's shift in emphasis" on the situation in Fiji.

It seems as if Canberra, seeing that the coup may be succeeding, is beginning to change its mind against the coup leaders.

Meanwhile, the Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon and United Nations envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello met President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara today before travelling to Parliament for a one-hour meet-

ing with Speight and a brief inspection of the hostages.

McKinnon did not comment on the talks, but said the hostages, "all appear to be in reasonably good spirits considering the obvious pressure they've been under."

The Commonwealth is made up of former British colonies, such as Fiji and Australia, and McKinnon, who is based in London, is its top administrator. About 300 coup supporters were in the complex today and an impromptu church service was held on a lawn with a choir of indigenous women singing Fijian songs. Yesterday, hundreds of supporters stood in line to congratulate Speight for his act.

Speight claims to be acting on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INDIAN EXPRESS

25 MAY 2000

Speight goes back on offer

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JUNE 3. The clock was put backwards in Fiji today in regard to the much-promised release of the political hostages including the duly elected Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry. Instead of taking steps to set them free, the chief hostage-taker and the "civil coup" leader, Mr. George Speight, called on the new military rulers to quit the centre stage first. The martial law authorities, too, confirmed that an earlier agreement between them and Mr. Speight had now run into rough weather.

Late in the night, Mr. Speight set a key new condition for the release of the hostages, even as some indigenous people and ethnic Indians joined hands in the western part of the country to campaign against the 'civil coup' leader and as tension continued to run high following violence the previous night. A nine-point ultimatum Mr. Speight outlined included the demand that Ratu Jope Seniloli, a close friend, be appointed President. The other demands were said to include a general amnesty for the hostage-takers and a reinstatement of the soldier-deserters who defected to his side.

The promise of hostage-release was held out by Mr. Speight in the context of an accord he had reached earlier in the week with the head of the 'Interim Military Government,' Commodore J. V. (Frank) Bainimarama. The agreement, in essence, was that the Great Council of Chiefs, custodian of the rights of the majority indigenous population, would next Monday adjudicate the dispute between Mr. Speight and Cmdr. Bainimarama about how the country should be governed until the elections sometime in the future.

The row itself was an offshoot of the coup the military staged to negate the "civil coup" launched by Mr. Speight to snuff out the alleged misrule by the

Prime Minister belonging to the minority ethnic Indian community and restore the monopoly political rights of the natives.

Responding to questions, the spokesman of the Fijian military government, Col. Filipo Tarakinikini, told this correspondent today that "some differences of opinion" had arisen in regard to the earlier agreement between Cmdr. Bainimarama and Mr. Speight. Although the two sides were still engaged in discussions, the military spokesman indicated that the planned crisis-busting meeting of the Great Council of Chiefs was in doubt. Col. Tarakinikini asserted that "the military is still the government of the country" but he maintained that he "cannot say, for the time being," how long the Army would hold the reins of power.

Mr. Speight exuded confidence in Suva today that a scenario of the Army trying to overcome his resistance by force "will never happen" as the primary objective of his May 19 "civil coup," namely the political supremacy of the natives, was shared by the military which, however, did not need state power to maintain law and order. Mr. Speight said he did not hate the ethnic Indians and cited as proof the restraint he showed by not seeking to liquidate the Prime Minister and other Indian members of the Fijian Parliament.

On a political note, Mr. Speight said: "It is not a mandatory requirement that I be the Prime Minister or (that) I take any role. I am quite happy not to have a part of it (the proposed new set-up sought to be determined by the traditional chiefs)."

Meanwhile, India's fact-finding team of senior diplomats today left Suva after assessing the ground realities.

Indians safe: Page 11

THE HINDU

- 4 JUN 1987

WFS 3/5 Apartheid in Fiji

THE RECENT observations of the Fijian President and of the chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs in the island cannot but be seen as an unfortunate attempt to put the clock back. Instead of calling upon the upstart coup leader, George Speight, to surrender unconditionally along with his gunmen, both Ratu Sir Kamasese Mara and Sitiveni Rabuka have virtually conceded his main demand for Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry's removal. The President and the chairman of the GCC may not have approved of the coup, but by saying that "there is a lot of sympathy" for what Speight has done, Rabuka has shown where his own sympathies lie. The President has also backtracked from his earlier description of the men in Speight's group as terrorists and is now saying that he cannot ensure Chaudhry's continuance in office.

Yet, there can be no other solution. If the men in authority join hands with the rebels to force Chaudhry to step down, it would amount to legitimising the coup and undermining the concept of law and order. What is more, it will mean the official endorsement of the racist ideal which is behind the coup. According to it, the people of Indian origin, despite their long stay in Fiji and immense contribution to the island's development, must still be regarded as outsiders and treated as second class citizens. The first expression of this belief was when Rabuka toppled the Timoci Bavadra government which had a sizeable Indian presence. He later recanted not because he changed his view, but because Fiji became a virtual pariah where the international community was concerned, just as South Africa was in the days of apartheid.

If Chaudhry is dethroned simply because of his origin, it will mean that Fiji will once again court international isolation. The US, for instance, has already threatened it with sanctions unless the democratically elected government is reinstalled. However, more than Chaudhry's reinstatement, what is evidently needed in Fiji is to build a consensus on its multi-racial character. It is for the leaders in high positions to make it abundantly clear that the ethnic divisions cannot be allowed to mar the island's development as a united country. Apart from the principle of equality, even from the practical point of view, a community making up as much as 44 per cent of the total population cannot be denied political power without plunging the nation into chaos.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 MAY 2000

SQUARE ONE

Fiji under martial law

IN a way, the army takeover in Fiji was inevitable. Firstly, the effort to arrive at a deal with George Speight and his gunmen got nowhere because it was more or less apparent that the Melanesian camp was divided among partisans of the 1997 multiracial Constitution and those who favoured a return to some kind of Melanesian supremacy and also because Speight, in the meanwhile, encouraged by the street response, began having other ideas in which he, himself, figured prominently. Secondly, the situation in the street had clearly gone out of control. Speight's supporters rammed through barricades, attacked the local television station, fired shots behind the presidential mansion, holding out the threat that more was to follow by way of demonstration of strength until the President and the Great Council of Chiefs succumbed and granted Speight what he wanted: abrogation of the 1997 constitution and a government headed by Speight himself. Thirdly, Speight's hoodlum tactics worked because of the sympathy that he apparently enjoys within sections of the police and the army. On the day Mara sacked Mahendra Chaudhry, Speight was joined inside the Parliament building by a group of army reservists. His men and supporters have been able to move around the capital Suva, with impunity. The spectre of an internecine conflict involving army units must have begun looming large in the minds of the top brass.

So, the army has stepped in, in order to stop the violence and end the political stalemate. The Constitution has been suspended, martial law imposed and Ratu Mara's son-in-law — the daughter is being held hostage by Speight — has been appointed Prime Minister. How the army proposes to deal with Speight now is, for the moment, uncertain. They are talking and, apparently, agreeing with each other, but on what? The military takeover is bad enough, from the international point of view, but handing the country over to Speight and his thugs will be worse. The process of isolating Fiji has already begun: sanctions have been imposed by Australia, travel advisories will put paid to tourism and expulsion from the Commonwealth is certain. Speight has 30 hostages in ready-to-shoot condition and can claim to be author of this particular episode of Melanesian emancipation. The situation is volatile and one will have to wait and see whether the new military ruler, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, is really in charge.

THE STATESMAN

- 3 JUN 2000

C'wealth, U.N. pressure on Speight

By P. S. Suryanarayana

JAKARTA, MAY 24. The United Nations and the Commonwealth today exerted moral pressure on Mr. George Speight, the "civil coup" leader in Fiji, to set free the democratically elected Prime Minister of Indian origin, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, as a prelude to a constitutional settlement of the continuing crisis in the South Pacific island-republic.

With the U.N. envoy, Mr. Sergio de Mello, and the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Don McKinnon, flying to the Fijian capital, Suva, and holding talks with the President, Ratu Kamisese Mara, the focus today shifted to the options before the global community.

The U.N.-Commonwealth diplomacy of moral persuasion punctuated Mr. Speight's continued resistance to the "internationalisation" of the crisis, which he sparked last Friday by taking

the Prime Minister and others hostage. The U.N.-Commonwealth trouble-shooters met the captive Prime Minister and the "coup" leader. Talks will be held with Fiji's paramount tribal chiefs in Suva tomorrow.

The Fijian Great Council of Chiefs met near Suva for a second consecutive day but no formula to defuse the crisis was agreed.

Although Mr. McKinnon said he and the U.N. envoy were not mandated to mediate an end to the crisis, they not only transmitted a message to Mr. Chaudhry but also tendered a piece of advice to Mr. Speight, according to some foreign diplomats whom the visiting dignitaries met in Suva today.

The release of Mr. Chaudhry and other hostages was demanded by the U.N.-Commonwealth diplomats as the first priority. They also indicated preference for

a solution in consonance with the present Constitution.

U.S. backs Chaudhry Govt.

PTI reports:

In Washington, a U.S. State Department official said the United States continued to recognise the democratically elected Government of Fiji led by Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry. "Washington continues to recognise Fiji's legitimate government and any change in government should be done only through constitutional means," the official, Mr. Philip Reeker, said.

India against violence

In New Delhi, the Indian Government categorically opposed any change in the Mahendra Chaudhry Government through violence. The issue of Mr. Chaudhry being taken hostage figured during the talks between the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Lalit Mansingh, and the visiting U.S. Under-Secretary of State, Mr. Thomas Pickering.

THE HINDU

25 MAY 2000

Hostages to be freed by Monday, says Speight

Suva, June 2

REBEL LEADER George Speight said to be expected Fiji's political hostages to be freed by Monday.

"I am confident that this whole crisis or crusade will come to an end in the next two or three days, certainly by Monday next week, when the great council of chiefs meets...Everything will be finalised once and for all," the ethnic Fijian nationalist told reporters.

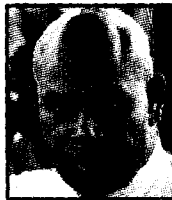
The great council of chiefs — which brings together more than 50 indigenous tribal leaders — will rule on rival proposals from Speight's self-styled Taukei civilian government and the military forces on who should run Fiji.

Former insurance salesman Speight has held about 30 politicians hostage at Suva's Parliament since May 19. "We have a unified resolve, the Army and ourselves to pursue solutions which we believe in the best interest of our Fijian people," Speight said.

Speight said he felt remorse for holding the hostages, including Fiji's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry.

"I do feel remorse from a

humane perspective, certainly. We do care for the non-Fijian groups in Fiji. We believe they have a role to play," said George Speight. "No one can come here this morning or sit here and accuse me of being racist."



George Speight

Mob in stand-off with Army: A mob of around 100 men was involved in a stand-off with troops and police today outside the gate of Fiji's Parliament, where around 30 politicians have been held hostage. The mob — many armed with clubs and sticks — tried to move down the road towards Suva township, but were turned back by around 12 armed troops and unarmed police.

The incident is the latest in a series of skirmishes since a roving mob killed a policeman and ransacked state-owned Fiji TV on Sunday night. It came just hours after Fiji's military rulers announced a breakthrough deal with the leader of the hostage takers, George Speight. (Reuters)

9/11/57
110-1

Fiji chiefs back Mara

By P. S. Suryanarayana

JAKARTA, MAY 23. Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs today supported the President in his standoff with the self-styled leader of the "civil coup". But the elders of the majority indigenous people, acting as the final arbiters of the country's political future, stopped well short of propping up the besieged Prime Minister belonging to the minority ethnic Indian group.

Although no final decision was announced by the Great Council of Chiefs, which met near the capital, Suva, today, it became clear that the Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, was being marginalised. As a result, a battle of wits began between the tribal elders and the "coup" leader, Mr. George Speight, who did not also free Mr. Chaudhry for yet another day.

The continued captivity of Mr. Chaudhry was frowned upon by

the elders and his release insisted upon. Mr. Speight today freed two hostages on grounds of their deteriorating health in captivity. (An AP report from Suva said four captives had been released).

The Council, it was said, would resume its deliberations tomorrow to try and solve the crisis.

Speaking on behalf of the Council, Gen. Sitiveni Rabuka, an erstwhile Prime Minister, indicated that today's deliberations spanned the political-moral question of how to set right a suspected wrong.

Gen. Rabuka said the tribal chiefs "do not approve of what Mr. Speight has done". The elders could not bring themselves to support Mr. Speight, despite the signs of an emerging new groundswell of support among the majority population for his political agenda. In the event, the caucus of elders threw their lot with the President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Ma-

ra, and endorsed his attempt to engage the rebels led by Mr. Speight to fashion a settlement.

While the elders were still grappling with ways to engage Mr. Speight, who called once again for a political order that "enshrines indigenous supremacy" in Fiji, the businessman-turned-rebel said he would be willing to "depart" from the scene, if the tribal chiefs were to ask him to do so and if such a demand were acceptable to the people.

Mckinnon for Suva

AFP reports from London:

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Don Mckinnon, today headed for Fiji to press for a speedy return to constitutional rule following last week's coup, it was announced here. Mr. Mckinnon is to break off from a meeting with Commonwealth Youth Ministers in the Solomon Islands to travel to Fiji.

THE HINDU

23 MAY 1957

Speight terms for freeing hostages

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JUNE 2. Fiji's 'civil coup' leader, Mr. George Speight, today made a conditional offer to free the Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, and others being held captive in the Parliament building in Suva since May 19.

While the offer was in tune with the hopes raised by the military Government on Thursday, Mr. Speight indicated that release of the hostages might hinge on his becoming the Prime Minister under a settlement to be fashioned by the country's Great Council of Chiefs next Monday.

Though Mr. Speight said in Suva today that he would "let the chiefs decide" whether or not he should be made the Prime Minister, he was categorical about his personal ambitions for the post of chief executive. In his calculus, there should be 'no' role for the military, which seized power from the President a few days ago and proclaimed martial law, in any formula to be worked out by the chiefs. Mr. Speight and the military ruler, Commodore J.V. (Frank) Bainimarama, had agreed

on Thursday to ask the country's traditional chiefs to settle the dispute about who should rule the country following the "coup within a coup."

Mr. Speight said Cmdr. Bainimarama and he would "address the situation of those who are detained" — an indirect offer to set the hostages free.

Jaswant on Fiji

The visiting External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, said in Singapore today that "the Commonwealth is seized of the matter" and that New Delhi was "in consultation with other Commonwealth countries, including Australia and New Zealand."

He cited the Commonwealth's "principle" that "a forceful unseating of a democratically-elected Government is not to be encouraged." He said he had sent officials to Fiji to "see the state in which our (Indian) mission is there".

Indian diplomats, Mr. S.T. Devare and Mr. C.P. Ravindranathan began assessing the situation in Suva in consultation with India's

resident High Commissioner, Prof. Ishwar Singh Chauhan. Mr. Devare described his mission as "a fact-finding" exercise.

Asserting that there was no move now to close the Embassy, Mr. Devare said the "morale" of the diplomats and staff there "is very high."

U.S. considering sanctions

Even as the overall security situation in Fiji remained tense today, with reports of stone-pelting at the Parliament building and the ransacking of the house of Mr. Chaudhry's son, a U.S. official said it was "uncertain when democracy will return to Fiji." He said the U.S. was "considering a range of steps (sanctions) in consultation with other nations that could have serious impact on Fiji's international contact and on outside assistance."

Gunshots heard

AFP reports: Gunshots were heard inside Parliament and a man, said to be a Speight supporter, was rushed away from the building in an ambulance, soldiers said.

- 3 JUN 200

Ethnic Fiji chiefs want PM's release

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE and REUTERS

SUVA, May 23. — The Fiji crisis took a dramatic twist today when powerful Great Council of Chiefs representing indigenous Fijians urged coup leaders to release Prime Minister Mr Mahendra Chaudhry and his Cabinet, as international pressure against the rebels mounted.

A brief burst of automatic gunfire in the Parliament building rang out earlier today, signalling a new heightening of tension on the fifth day of the siege.

Coup leaders have admitted that Mr Chaudhry has been roughed up during the ordeal and the acting leader of his coalition government, Mr Ratu Tevita Momoedonu, said he had suffered serious internal injuries. Former Prime Minister Mr Sitiveni Rabuka, who himself led two coups in 1987, said he doubted ringleader George Speight would bow to the chiefs' demands.

"The chiefs don't approve of what Speight has done though there is a lot of support for the (ethnic Fijians') cause," Mr Rabuka said. He said he had heard nothing to suggest that Mr Chaudhry had been beaten up by the gunmen.

The council had adjourned for the night after deciding to support the President, Mr Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, rather than Mr Speight, a failed businessman. The council will discuss tomorrow whether Mr Chaudhry should be reinstated or whether an interim government should be installed to consider concessions to ethnic Fijians, especially on land rights.

Rebels today released three of their captives. Those released were a junior MP, Mr Michael Columbus, suffering from diabetes and two doctors who went to Parliament on Sunday to check Mr Chaudhry's health.

Fiji's neighbours turned the heat on coup leaders today. Australia warned it would not accept any compromise that undermined Mr Chaudhry's elected government.

The USA has said the constitutional government in Fiji should be allowed to continue and called for release of the hostages. "Any unconstitutional seizure of power would be detrimental to Fiji's standing in the international community," the state department spokesman, Mr Richard Boucher, said yesterday, adds PTI.

In Sydney, a UN spokesman said its East Timor envoy, Mr Sergio Vieira de Mello, was heading for Fiji, meeting up en route in the Solomon Islands with the Commonwealth secretary-general.

THE STRAITS TIMES

24 MAY 2000

Speight re-opens talks with army, stalemate continues

SUVA: Talks between Fiji's coup leader George Speight and the country's military over how the Pacific nation should be ruled resumed on Sunday a day after discussions broke up without resolution.

Speight left the country's Parliament compound, where he has been holding Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and most of his government hostage since May 19, and headed for the army headquarters across town in Suva.

A short while later, Speight could be seen talking in the barracks to army leaders, who declared martial law and assumed executive power six days ago.

After an hour, military chief Commodore Frank Bainimarama left the meeting, but Speight could be seen still inside the building. A statement from the army was expected later.

Negotiations between Speight and the military collapsed on Saturday when his group issued a new set of demands, including a transfer of all executive power to the Great Council of Chiefs, the forum for the Pacific nation's indigenous tribal leaders.

Speight and his small group of armed men, who seized Parliament in the name of indigenous Fijians seeking an end to ethnic Indian Chaudhry's rule, have demanded an amnesty in return for the release of the hostages.

The council is expected to decide on Monday whether the current military regime would continue, or whether a civilian government with Speight's nominees aboard would be sworn in.

A Sydney report quoted Speight as saying the Fijian military would never attack the group who were holding Fiji's Prime Minister hostage.

"The army will never attack Fijians, never," he told Nine Network TV from Suva in an interview broadcast on Sunday.

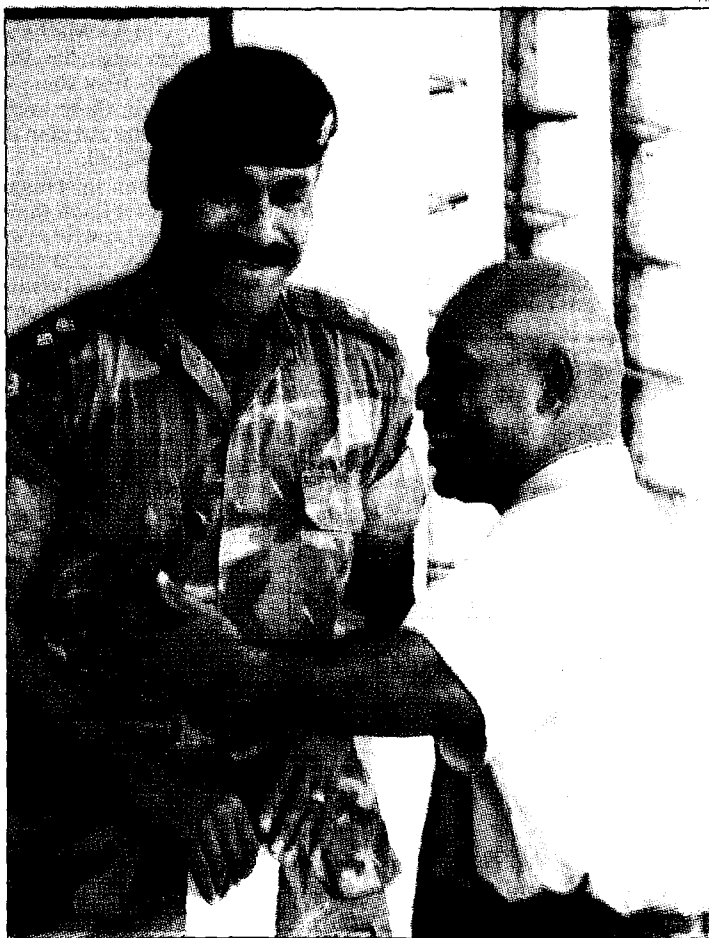
But he questioned the army's motives for imposing martial law and assuming executive power.

"It really looks like the army's come in at the twelfth hour to take the cream, you know, off the top of the cake, you know for their own personal motives," Speight said.

"One has to ask them, who are they working for?"

Speight revealed that four women hostages refused an offer to leave.

"We asked the ladies, there's four, we asked the ladies today if they wished to go home today, or



Coup leader George Speight (right) embraces military negotiator Lt. Col. Filippo Tarakinikini during a break in talks with the Fiji military at the Queen Elizabeth barracks in Suva on Sunday.

sometime this weekend," Speight said.

"And they chose not to. They want to stay."

Speight said the hostages were housed in good conditions and they understood their positions.

"They are in a coup situation, they understand that," he said.

"They are anxious to leave, as one would expect. But they will remain here for as long as necessary until these issues are resolved on behalf of the Fijian people.

"Now, all I am saying is that I am going to finish the job."

Speight expected the same international acceptance as General Sitiveni Rabuka received after his two 1987 coups.

"Two years later, everybody was patting him on the back; three years later, he was the Prime Minister and he held power for five, six, seven years until he lost the elections in 1999," Speight said.

"I'm confident in five years from now, whether I'm on power or

not... Australian Prime Minister John Howard will come and shake my hand; he will, mark my words.

"Australia will understand and New Zealand will understand... the hard line they've taken in these last few days is expected, it's normal, what else can they say?"

Speight conceded that international sanctions and loss of investor confidence caused by his attempted coup could bankrupt his Pacific island nation.

"It could be bankrupt but why have money in the bank and no control over your destiny?" he said.

"I think once we're unified, then we cement those interests in our country, Fiji will be very, very quickly rebuilt much like after 1987.

"I don't claim to have 100 per cent unanimous support of all Fijians in Fiji but I do claim that I do have the overwhelming majority which is why I'm still here two weeks later." (AFP)

40-1
23/5

Fiji PM threatened at gun-point

9/5/80

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, MAY 22. The political future of the Fijian Prime Minister of Indian origin, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, today hung in the balance in the capital, Suva, ahead of tomorrow's planned crisis breaking summit of the Great Council of Chiefs, the supreme moral-political conscience-keeper of the majority community of indigenous people.

By nightfall today, the signs were ominous for the Prime Minister's continuance in office, as both the leader of the Great Council of Chiefs, Gen. Sitiveni Rabuka, and the country's President, Mr. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, made it clear that Mr. Chaudhry's tenure might be abruptly terminated if such a political denouement could help resolve the constitution-



Self-appointed Prime Minister of Fiji, Mr. George Speight, conducts a radio interview via satellite phone on the premises of Parliament House in Suva on Monday. — Reuters

al crisis caused by a group of armed men who were holding him and several others hostage in the Parliament complex in Suva for the fourth consecutive day. Mr. George Speight, leader of the armed group and a self-styled architect of a presumptive 'civil coup', raised the political stakes to a new high by organising a show of support for his action within the Parliament premises and by asserting that the die was firmly cast against Mr. Chaudhry's claims to stay on in office.

Diplomats and observers in the Fijian capital and elsewhere in the South Pacific region confirmed that there were "eyewitness accounts" on how Mr. Chaudhry was today dragged out of the Parliament House by the rebels holding him there and "threatened" at gunpoint.

While the speculation related to either an internal military-police action or even some external intervention to save Mr. Chaudhry, he himself did not suffer any physical harm as a result of his being dragged out of Parliament today. There were "reports" that some relatives of Mr. Chaudhry had pleaded for military action by India.

The most outspoken comment was made by Gen. Rabuka in his status as a leading decision-maker in the current context of efforts to defuse the hostage-crisis. Gen. Rabuka said: "I think it is that his (Mr. Chaudhry's) position right now is untenable. And, if he feels for the country (and if) he sees (the) demonstrations (against him) and the damage that happened in Suva — the destruction (in the post — 'coup' rioting) on Friday afternoon, he might feel that he wants to step down." If Mr. Chaudhry were to resign "willingly", that could still have a salutary effect on the efforts to end the crisis, even if such a step were to be seen as a response to what he had so far endured in captivity, Gen. Rabuka hinted.

More significantly, the President, who had declared a state of emergency and put the troops and police on alert to checkmate Mr. Speight, said in Suva today that he "cannot give (anyone) the assurance" that Mr. Chaudhry would not be asked to quit the centre stage. Mr. Mara said his intention, on the eve of tomorrow's conference of the Fijian chiefs, was to ask Mr. Chaudhry for "a possible solution" in the light of "what has happened" since Mr. Speight's action began.

Foreign countries warned

AFP reports from Melbourne:

Mr. Speight today warned foreign countries to stay out of the country's political turmoil. He could guarantee the safety of those detained if outsiders stayed away, Mr. Speight told Melbourne Radio.

THE HINDU

23 MAY 2000

AD-1

Focus shifts to 'draft accord' in Fiji

5/10
By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JUNE 4. As the stalemate in the negotiations for the release of Fiji's elected Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, and other captives dragged on today in the tiny state's capital of Suva, the focus shifted to the talks on a "draft accord" between the military rulers and the hostage-taker, Mr. George Speight, concerning an interim set-up "acceptable politically and culturally" to the majority indigenous population.

On a different but related plane, reports of increasing violence against the ethnic Indians punctuated the calls by the natives themselves for a secession of the western part of the main island. The new discontent in the more prosperous western part was a reflection of opposition there to Mr. Speight's political agenda and methods in taking Mr. Chaudhry, first ethnic-Indian Prime Minister, and his Cabinet colleagues hostage.

The military government's spokesman identified the overall problem confronting the "authorities" at present as "politically motivated" and "politically connected". Concern was expressed over the latest calls for secession emanating from the western half of the main

island. The importance of national unity was stressed in the context of this threat.

Independent of this sour mood, sparked by suspicions that the military was allowing Mr. Speight to dictate Fiji's political future, a new protest by some unions gathered momentum. The Fiji Cane Growers' Association and the National Farmers' Union joined hands to demand that the multi-racial Constitution of 1997, now abrogated by the military government, be upheld. Native Fijian reports indicated that these two unions threw their weight behind Mr. Chaudhry and endorsed his credentials as a duly elected Prime Minister.

Mr. Speight, sustaining his political brinkmanship for yet another day, insisted that the military government, which in his view was not acceptable to the native Fijians, should go. The chief hostage-taker and "civil coup" leader wanted his own nominee made the new interim President. His other demands included a categorical paramountcy of the majority natives in politics, amnesty for himself as also his associate coup-plotters, besides the reinstatement of the security personnel who had defected to his ranks.

The representatives of some political parties

and trade unions had told senior Indian diplomats, during their visit to Suva yesterday, about the disquiet over a transparent move to exclude the Indo-Fijians from the power apparatus, according to a political version in the Fiji today.

AFP reports from Sydney:

In an interview to an Australian TV channel telecast today, Mr. Speight said the Fijian military would never attack the group holding Mr. Chaudhry and about 30 others hostage in the Parliament House in Suva. "The army will never attack Fijians, never," he said.

But he questioned the army's motives for imposing martial law and assuming executive power six days ago. "It really looks like the army has come in at the twelfth hour to take the cream, you know, off the top of the cake, you know for their own personal motives," Mr. Speight said. "One has to ask them, who are they working for?"

The 'civil coup' leader revealed that four women hostages refused an offer to leave. "We asked the ladies, there are four, today if they wished to go home today, or sometime this weekend," he said. "And they chose not to. They want to stay."

THE HINDU

5 JUN 2 1997

Speight unrelenting, tussle on

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, MAY 21. Political tension mounted in the Fijian capital of Suva tonight as at least two shots were reported to have been heard inside the parliament complex, where Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, the democratically-elected Prime Minister of Indian origin, and some of his Cabinet colleagues were being held captive for the third successive day by a group of armed men led by Mr. George Speight.

There were no immediate indications of casualties. According to the police version, the shots had been fired in the air to end the day's curiosity show regarding the consequences of the 'coup'.

Some Fijian officials and doctors, who visited Mr. Chaudhry today following the news that he had collapsed due to exhaustion and perhaps also a physical assault, said he was alright. The focus has now shifted to the tussle between the President, Mr. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, and Mr. Speight, even as the President insisted that there was no room for an illegal power-grab.

In a monitored address to Fijians, Mr. Mara said: "There is no legal backing to what they (Mr. Speight and his men) have done. I have the constitutional right. I declared a state of emergency. And, parts of Government, parts that make up the Government, disciplined (military and police) forces, the civil service, the judiciary are behind me."

Mr. Mara's statement indicates that he was hinting at the possibility of some units of the military throwing their weight behind Mr. Speight, who claims to represent all the native Fijians despite his part-European origin.

It was in this context that Mr. Speight denied that he had threatened to kill the elected Prime Minister and others if they were to insist on retaining power without transferring it to the 'coup' leaders. However, the perception of a threat to the lives of Mr. Chaudhry and his fellow-hostages was based on a public comment by Mr. Speight himself. Reacting to the idea of a military raid to free the hostages, Mr. Speight said: "If they (the military forces) do so, you know, they have actually taken a decision causing us to jeopardise their lives (those of the hostages)."

(Reuters quoted Mr. Mara as saying he had rejected a request to meet Mr. Speight. The President said Mr. Speight had sent him an indirect message "that if I didn't follow what he says... he will start executing hostages one by one... I asked what he really wants, I was told that he wants me to step down and allow his group to run the country.")

On the perceived "torture" of the hostages, Mr. Speight maintained that all the captive members of parliament, "have been treated with the respect they deserve." He asserted he was "very careful" in this regard. The other issue arising out of the demand by the captives — that the President, not just Mr. Chaudhry as the elected Prime Minister, should relinquish office — also caused confusion. There were conflicting versions whether or not a few native Fijian associations had pledged support for Mr. Speight's actions. Unofficial estimates by nightfall today were that some 10 hostages, mostly parliamentary staff, were freed by Mr. Speight. At least another 30 are still suspected to be trapped in the parliament complex.

Freed hostage's version: Page 13

THE HINDU

MAY 21

Australia flays coup in Solomon Islands

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JUNE 5. Australia today condemned the coup in the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific region. The capture of the Prime Minister, Mr. Bartholomew Ulu-fa'alua, by a group of armed men, suspected members of a rebel Eagle Force militia, earlier in the day attracted much international attention in the light of the continuing coup-related crisis in Fiji in the same region.

The rebels, who took Mr. Ulu-fa'alua hostage and demanded his resignation, were suspected to have been emboldened by the manner in which Mr. George Speight, a 'civil coup' leader of Fiji, had gone about in the last two weeks in his country.

Commenting on the Solomon Islands' situation, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. John Howard, said in Canberra today, "we utterly condemn the kidnapping of the Prime Minister and the Governor General (in Solomon Islands) by armed militants with assistance from elements of the police." He said Canberra's concern over this development would be comparable to that over the continuing Fijian crisis.

The Foreign Minister, Mr. Alexander Downer, said any "real judgment" on the new crisis in the Solomon Islands would need time to make. The Solomon Islands' Prime Minister had indeed

offered to resign last week itself, Mr. Downer said while noting the latest developments with an apparent connotation of inter-ethnic rivalries.

'India ready to play its part in Fiji'

NEW DELHI, JUNE 5. India today said it was ready to play its part in building international pressure for restoring constitutionally-elected democratic government in Fiji.

Such international pressure should be sustained, a foreign office spokesman told reporters in response to questions and added, "India is ready to play its part in this".

New Delhi has called for immediate release of the hostages and restoration of the democratically-elected government and the constitutional process.

It has also rushed a senior official of the External Affairs Ministry to Australia and New Zealand for consultations on the evolving situation in Fiji.

Mr. S.T. Devare, Secretary (Economic Relations), also visited Suva for a first-hand assessment of the situation. He will report to the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, on his return to the Capital tomorrow from New Zealand. — PTI

THE HINDU

6 - JUN 2000

Crisis again in Fiji

EVER SINCE Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka staged a coup against the democratically elected Timoci Bavadra government in 1987, Fiji has been lurching from one crisis to another, witnessing a dogged competition between tragedy and farce. The latest development is tragic not only because "Fiji is not yet ready for an Indian Prime Minister", to quote senior opposition leader Jai Ram Reddy, but also because the putschists have made a mockery of democracy in the island-nation. The latest violator, George Speight, is the son of a close associate of the wily Rabuka. A year ago, when the Indian-born Mahendra Chaudhry took over as Prime Minister, following his victory in the multi-party elections, one hoped that Fiji had left its unsavoury past dominated by racial animus behind. That hope has been belied.

When Rabuka sought to change the farcical 1990 Constitution which had reduced ethnic Indians to the status of second class citizens, it was presumed that he had learnt his lesson and was rectifying the past error. However, it is apparent now that the exercise was not motivated by a desire to restore racial harmony but was a delayed response to Fiji's growing international isolation and its grave economic difficulties. Now an attempt is again being made to turn back the clock. The 1987 coup created a racial divide. Even the present Constitution did not restore racial balance in Parliament which was the hallmark of the 1970 Constitution. In a country where racial wounds are yet to heal, the assault on a democratic government and the subsequent anti-Indian riots are bound to widen the divide.

Fiji is not the only country where the presence of various ethnic groups has created problems. Even in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, it has taken decades before ethnic Indians could manage to have an important voice in political affairs. The credit, however, goes to the success of parliamentary democracy in the Caribbean, unlike in Fiji, where the economic achievements of the ethnic Indians are resented by the Melanesians. Rabuka described the Indians as arrogant and lacking in commitment to their adopted country — a charge which had more venom in it than truth, reflecting the customary paranoia of all xenophobes. Chaudhry's victory was largely the result of his efforts to broaden the support base of his party. It is time for the international community to intervene to restore democracy. Only the reinstatement of the Mahendra Chaudhry government will enable Fiji to recover from the double blow of racial politics and loss of democracy.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MAY 2000

Speight threatens to shoot hostages

Suva, June 5

FIJI COUP leader George Speight today warned that he will shoot his 31 hostages, including Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, if the military attempts to force their way into the Parliamentary complex where they are being held.

Rebels, rejecting a demand by the military to lay down their arms and release 30 politicians held since May 19, said they would wait as long as it takes to achieve their goals. George Speight said he and his supporters were "prepared to pay whatever price in order to cement our position... I can wait here as long as I have to".

Businessman Speight, with a group of dissident soldiers and other supporters, stormed Fiji's Parliament on May 19, taking the country's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and

most of his Government hostage. Speight claims to be acting on behalf of ethnic Fijians.

Talks to free the hostages broke down today and the country's military rulers said they would no longer listen to conditions imposed by Speight.

Taking his toughest stance yet in Fiji's hostage crisis, the nation's military ruler, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, said today that he will entertain no more demands from George Speight and won't let him play a role in the next Government.

9/10/80
said he was in firm control of Fiji and urged Speight and his rebel gunmen to take the "easy way out"

by freeing the captives in exchange for amnesty.

But the Government ruled out storming the Parliamentary complex, where Speight has surrounded the hostages with army defectors and civilian supporters.

Speight has allowed the Red Cross to visit the hostages and has vowed to keep them safe unless the compound is stormed. One of the hostages is the daughter of sidelined President

Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who stepped aside to allow the military to take power on May 29. "We are not here to battle anyone, we have not even considered the military option as a means of freeing the hostages," Bainimarama said.

"There has been a deadlock in the talks between the Republic of Fiji military forces and George Speight and his team," Bainimarama said in a statement read over local radio stations.

"We will not entertain any more demands by George Speight and his men... We would like them to leave, to have the hostages released, return their arms so we can bring back some normalcy to our daily lives".

Speight wants to handpick Fiji's next Government as part of his plan to establish a new Constitution. (AFP)



Coup leader George Speight: Thug in disguise. Photo: AFP

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 6 JUN 200

Gunmen may kill Fiji PM unless President quits

But radio report says captive PM has submitted resignation to his captors

By Paul Tait

SUVA: Fiji's President said on Sunday that gunmen holding the country's Prime Minister and other politicians captive were prepared to start killing their hostages unless he quit as head of state.

However, Fiji Radio said that Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry had signed a letter of resignation and would soon be released. Three local reporters were allowed inside the Parliament complex late on Saturday and said the Prime Minister had a bruised right eye after being beaten by his armed captors.

President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara said he had rejected a request to meet would-be coup leader George Speight, who has been holding Mr Chaudhry and some of his colleagues hostage in Parliament since Friday.

But Speight had sent him an indirect message "that if I didn't follow what he says... he will start executing hostages one by one," Mr Mara told the nation in a televised address. "When I asked what does he really want, I was told that he wants me to step down and allow his group to run the country," Mr Mara added. "To that extent I will not be able to comply."

Speight has claimed to have overthrown Mr Chaudhry on behalf of indigenous Fijians. A coalition of nationalist parties backed Speight on Sunday, calling Mr Chaudhry an "insensitive and power hungry immigrant Indian Prime Minister."

But the President, the police and the military have all supported the elected government and Fiji's trade unions have called a national strike on Monday in support of Mr Chaudhry.

Speight led some ten civilian gunmen into Parliament on Friday and seized 45 hostages, but has since freed about 30 of them, including some MPs who signed resignation letters in return for their release.

Police pushed journalists a few hundred metres back from the Parliament gates soon after Mr Mara's announcement, sparking speculation that intervention

might be imminent.

The website fiji-live.com, run by local journalists, said that around the same time gunshots had been fired in Parliament "as warnings to police who have tried to enforce Mr Mara's instructions."

But Mr Mara, whose daughter is among the remaining hostages, indicated that he still hoped the crisis could be resolved peacefully. "The action we want is for these people to lay down their arms and talk," he said.

His daughter, Adi Koila Mara, is Mr Chaudhry's tourism minister.

Earlier local media announced the Great Council of Chiefs, an influential body in the Pacific island nation, would meet to discuss the impasse on Tuesday, and suggested this meant neither side was likely to make a major move before then.

Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who led a 1987 coup which toppled an Indian-dominated government, has been acting as mediator between Speight and Mr Mara and is expected to chair the council meeting. The coalition of five indigenous Fijian political parties and groups who support Speight delivered a petition to Mr Mara earlier on Sunday, demanding he dissolve Parliament and establish an interim government of Fijian National Unity.

"What we are saying is we really want to change the government," Jone Banube, a spokesman for the small but vocal Nationalist Taukei Movement, said at a roadblock outside Parliament House.

Fiji's population of about 8 lakh is made up of about 51 per cent indigenous Fijians, 44 per cent Indian-Fijians and five per cent other races. Indians are economically more powerful than indigenous Fijians and dominate key industries such as sugar.

Racial tension in the South Pacific island state has increased since Mr Chaudhry won power last May. Part of the nationalist petition demanded the revocation of Fiji's 1997 multi-racial constitution, so that only indigenous Fijians could be Prime Minister or President. (Reuters)

► See Edit: Time to Recoup, Page 10

THE TIMES OF INDIA

22 MAY 2000

MILITARY RULES OUT SAY FOR COUP LEADER

Speight threatens to shoot hostages

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JUNE 5. Fiji's military ruler, Commodore J. V. (Frank) Bainimarama, today sought to call the bluff of the "civil coup" leader, Mr. George Speight, over the captivity of the deposed Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, and 30 others. Mr. Speight responded by saying the hostages' lives could be endangered if the military tried to rescue them by force. *9/2/68*

Asked whether he would shoot the hostages if the Army tried to free them, Mr. Speight said: "That could happen if they (the military) force entry into this place" (where the hostages are being held).

With the discussions between the "interim military government" and Mr. Speight in his self-proclaimed role as a 'native-supremacist' grinding to a virtual halt today, Cmdr. Bainimarama did some plain-speaking at a press conference in Suva, Fiji's capital.

He said the military's "mandate" was to restore normality in Fiji. Without going into how the mandate had been secured, he said, "we (the military rulers) will not entertain any more demands by (Mr.) George Speight and his men." According to the military commander, it was now "impossible" to allow Mr. Speight to participate in any new government that could, if at all, be formed to replace the present outfit and empowered to manage the country until an election was held some-

time in the future, perhaps in three years.

Cmdr. Bainimarama's blunt ultimatum to Mr. Speight ended several rounds of talks between them even as there was no crisis-busting meeting by the Great Council of Chiefs — paramount body of the natives with a moral-political authority over the entire country. The military demanded that Mr. Speight's group set free the hostages and lay down arms for the solitary quid pro quo of a complete amnesty for each of the hostage-takers.

Explaining why Mr. Speight could not be included in any new government ahead of a future poll, Cmdr. Bainimarama said the European Union had already "written" to him saying it "will not buy any sugar from Fiji" if either 'civil coup' leader or any of his associates were to find a berth in any transitional set-up in the present circumstances. "Credibility" would be the watch-word as and when a new government is constituted under the overall auspices of the present military Government, he said.

Meanwhile, even as Mr. Speight ignored Cmdr. Bainimarama on these issues and maintained that the hostage-taking was a "crusade" for the native-Fijians, calls for secession gained momentum in the country's western region.

The separatist tendencies were traced to a disapproval of the methods of Mr. Speight, who said he was not about to turn over Fiji to the ethnic Indians. They could be granted some rights in a con-

sultation he would outline in the place of the now-abrogated multi-racial statute. A Fijian account in Suva today was that some secession-seeking chiefs in the western division wanted to count on what they saw as a possible tacit support by the U.S.

Coup in Solomon Islands

SYDNEY, JUNE 5. Rebel gunmen demanded the resignation of the Solomon Islands Prime Minister,



Mr. Bartholomew Ulufa'Alu, today after taking him hostage in the capital Honiara in a coup. Mr. Mr. Andrew Nori Ulufa'Alu and the Governor-General, Father John Lapli, were kidnapped by six gunmen led by a Honiara lawyer, Mr. Andrew Nori, while other rebel units combined with elements of the police in seizing key installations. Mr. Ulufa'Alu, who is said to have been seized at a police station, and Father Lapli were unharmed but held in what Mr. Nori, leader of a group known as the Malaita Eagle Force said, was "protective care".

The coup followed months of ethnic tension and racial clashes in which at least 55 people were known to have died or disappeared while 20,000 others were forced to flee their homes. — AFP

Australia flays coup: Page 13

RECEIVED

JUN 5 1988

THE attempted coup in Fiji on Friday by George Speight of the Soqosoqo Vakavulewa Taukei which lost power in last year's election is an indication that indigenous Fijians aren't yet ready to accept an ethnic Indian as their Prime Minister, however successful he might be in improving their lot. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry of Haryana origin was sworn in Prime Minister on 19 May 1999, after his Labour Party won a landslide victory in the Fiji parliamentary election.

Speight, a rising corporate star until the defeat of the SVT government of Sitiveni Rabuka in which his father, Sam Speight, was a minister, led a group of seven civilians armed with AK-47s to Parliament House in Suva, locked up Chaudhry and his cabinet colleagues and declared that indigenous Fijians had taken over the government. Speight named Ratu Timoci Silatolu of the Fijian Association Party, a constituent of the ruling coalition, as the acting Prime Minister.

Although it was a bloodless coup, Fijian youths went on the rampage through the streets of Suva, looting and setting fire to property owned by ethnic Indians who con-

stitute 44 per cent of the population. The army, exclusively comprising indigenous Fijians, and the police remained mute witnesses as arson and looting continued unabated.

President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, whose daughter Adi Kuini Speed is Deputy Prime Minister and is among Chaudhry's cabinet colleagues held hostage, declared a state of emergency throughout the Fiji Islands and called on the army to free the hostages and restore the duly elected government.

In spite of his best efforts to provide a multi-ethnic, multi-racial government, Chaudhry faced rebellion from day one of his prime ministership. A founder-leader of the Fiji Labour Party, he formed a coalition of half a dozen parties to contest the election last year. The Labour Party won an absolute majority on its own, but Chaudhry honoured the coalition arrangement.

The Fiji Association Party, a member of the coalition, warned

Fiji not ready for an Indian PM

In spite of his best efforts, Mahendra Pal Chaudhry faced rebellion from day one of his prime ministership, writes SAM RAJAPPA. Indeed, he made the mistake of accepting charge of a coalition without ascertaining the wishes of its partners

also felt the time wasn't ripe for Chaudhry to assume power.

Chaudhry made the mistake of accepting the leadership of a coalition government without ascertaining the wishes of its partners. But he made up for this lapse by making Adi Kuini Speed of the FAP and Tupeni Baba of the Party of National Unity, another ethnic Fijian party, Deputy Prime Ministers.

While bending over backwards in safeguarding the interests of ethnic Fijians, Chaudhry made one unwise move by appointing his son, Rajendra, as his private secretary. The Labour Party-led People's Coalition rode to power on the promise of providing a clean and transparent administration, free of nepotism which was the bane of the outgoing Rabuka government. Even the Fiji Indians felt let down by this one appointment of the Prime Minister.

Nevertheless, the 57-year-old Chaudhry has been assured of a place in Fiji's history books as the



Too much too soon: Mahendra Pal Chaudhry

him that his appointment as Prime Minister would threaten the unity and stability of Fiji and advised him to step aside in favour of an ethnic Fijian. Jai Ram

first Indian Prime Minister elected under the revised 1997 constitution. It was also the first time any political party in Fiji won an outright majority, 37 in its 71-member Parliament.

A founder-member of the Fiji Labour Party, Chaudhry was minister for finance and economic planning in the 1987 Bavadra government which was overthrown by Colonel Rabuka. Along with other ministers, he was held prisoner for six days by the military rulers.

The intimidation did not deter Chaudhry, who went on to lead the Labour Party to Parliament in 1992 and during this term he was a member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Review. Son of the late Ram Gopal Chaudhry who ran a bus and farm in Ba in the Fiji Islands, the Chaudhry family still retains links with their ancestral village of Bahu Jamalpur in Rohtak district. His grandfather, Ram Nath Chaudhry, was among thousands of Indian indentured labourers taken to Fiji to work in the sugarcane fields at the turn of the last century.

(The author, a veteran journalist, who retired from The Statesman, is based in Chennai)

11-10 2016 - Fiji Stalemate

The confrontation in Fiji between the army authorities and coup leader George Speight continues even as the commonwealth ministerial action group has sent out a clear signal that abrogation of democracy will have political and economic costs for Fiji. The commonwealth's immediate goal seems to be to make further efforts to bring Fiji to the democratic path rather than to impose economic sanctions which would result in a breakdown of communications and cause hardship to the common man. Fiji's economy is heavily dependent on sugar exports and if the commonwealth imposes sanctions and the European Union were to follow suit, it would have very serious economic consequences for Fijians. Within Fiji, the sugar industry is largely controlled by the Indian Fijians, both at the plantation and processing levels. It might be instructive for the current coup leaders to recall the aftermath of Col Rabuka's coup of 1987 which had resulted in the flight of capital and skills from Fiji. Following this, Rabuka was forced to revise his earlier constitution to permit Indians to share power. In the ensuing elections, Mahendra Chaudhry was elected prime minister. Both President Ratu Mara and the army are fully conscious of the economic consequences of Fijian chauvinists defying the international community. The commonwealth conference has decided to send a four-member team, including the Australian foreign minister and others drawn from Botswana and Malaysia. The despatch of the team should hopefully strengthen the resolve of the Fijian army authorities to stand up to the bullying tactics of the coup leader, George Speight. The army has taken a firm stand that Speight will have no share of power in the interim government which is to function till the constitution is revised, and further that he must unconditionally release the 31 hostages including Prime Minister Chaudhry and other members of his cabinet.

George Speight does not appear to have majority support among the chiefs who are deeply split. A meeting of the great council of the chiefs has had to be postponed. The chiefs of the western part and the outlying islands do not approve of George Speight and his conduct. Three members of the armed forces who were with him in the hostage holding operations in parliament have returned to the barracks. Speight may have significant support among the native Fijians for his attempt to impose a constitution which would deny power sharing to the Indian Fijians. It is doubtful though if the majority of the population would go along with that. It was this division among the native Fijians which enabled Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry's Labour Party to have a coalition with sections of the native Fijians. His deputy prime minister belonged to the Fijian Association Party. That verdict suggests that any revision of the constitution to exclude the Indian Fijians from power sharing would prima facie be undemocratic and unacceptable to the majority of the population of Fiji. In the circumstances, the only democratic solution to the crisis would appear to be for the army to hold fresh elections to enable the people of Fiji to express their views. Otherwise, a vocal minority of significant strength, and ready to resort to terrorist tactics would get away with imposing its views on the entire nation.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 8 JUN 2000

Fiji PM resigns after torture

AFP, DPA & REUTERS

SUVA, May 20. — The Fijian Prime Minister, Mr Mahendra Chaudhry, has resigned and will soon be released, Fiji radio said late tonight.

"Chaudhry has signed his resignation letter, which will allow him home to his family," the radio said.

Earlier, Mr Chaudhry had collapsed today with a bruised right eye after his captors beat up and threatened to kill him. Fijian TV showed pictures of coup leader George Speight holding a gun to Mr Chaudhry's head.

There were reports that two doctors had been allowed in to examine Mr Chaudhry after the beatings. But the Prime Minister was apparently sleeping. One of a group of MPs the gunmen released today said Mr Chaudhry had been beaten up pretty badly, but he was not seriously injured.

Hours ago, Speight had himself sworn in Prime Minister by a man he appointed interim President — one Ratu Jope

Seniloli. He also announced a new cabinet list made up of indigenous Fijians.

Outside, however, the Fijian army and police had closed ranks behind Mr Chaudhry, and the islands' head of state, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, sworn to defend the Constitution and foil the coup attempt.

"I want to state unequivocally that Fiji police are the custodians of the law in Fiji and respect the 1997 constitution," police commander, Mr Isikia Savua, said.

On TV, the President told the nation he had assumed executive authority, and would not bow to the threats of a "terrorist" group. "We wish to see the impasse broken and the captives set free but ... the perpetrators should not underestimate my unshakeable determination to maintain the integrity and stability of the state ..."

Chief of the Labour Party, Ms Jokapeci Koroi, told reporters at the gates of parliament that the Prime Minister had collapsed after beatings inside. Civilian ambulances had arrived, but the gunmen had turned them away, demanding a mili-

tary ambulance instead.

Ms Koroi is among those taken hostage. Her captors allowed her to speak with reporters today.

Mr Chaudhry was apparently beaten up for refusing to call Mr Mara and tell him to have the military removed from outside the parliament building. Speight appeared on TV holding a gun to Mr Chaudhry's head, threatening to shoot if he did not call Mr Mara.

But Mr Chaudhry refused, telling Speight to go ahead and shoot if he liked.

Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Tupeni Baba, then came on Fiji radio, supporting the coup. Sounding confused and upset — probably under duress — he called for talks with the new regime and an end to violence.

As Mr Baba spoke, Mr Chaudhry was heard screaming in the background: "We are not legitimising anything." It was then that Speight reportedly had the Prime Minister hauled off and bashed.

In Washington, the US state department condemned Speight's takeover.

THE STATESMAN

21 MAY 2000

Speight 'defies' Commonwealth

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JUNE 7. Even as the sound of gunfire reverberated outside the parliament complex in Suva several hours after the Commonwealth decided to place Fiji under suspension, the self-styled "civil coup" leader, Mr. George Speight, today asked the organisation not to interfere in the country's internal affairs.

The brief exchange of fire between the army and Mr. Speight's supporters did not result in casualties, but the incident accentuated a volatile situation. With Mr. Speight refusing to respond positively to calls by the military ruler, Commodore J. V. (Frank) Bainimarama, for the release of the Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, and others being held in the Parliament House, the 'civil coup' leader's defiance of the Commonwealth complicated an already complex situation.

While the planned visit to Suva by a Commonwealth team later this week was being seen by the military government as an opportunity to portray itself as a factor of stability at this stage, Mr. Speight trained his guns on it. The "civil coup" leader was not amused by the Commonwealth's move of subjecting him to a diplomatic squeeze over the hostage crisis while actually recognising that Cmdr. Bainimarama himself was not the initiator of a coup and that he had opposed Mr. Speight's action.

Outside the parliament complex, Mr. Speight's supporters gave vent to their frustrations by trying to "loot" (as the authorities claimed) a house opposite the parliament building to get some food for the hostage-takers and their supporters in the complex. It was then that the troops fired warning shots and Mr. Speight's squads responded, but the standoff lasted only a few minutes. Foreign diplomats and

observers in Suva, while confirming the incident, said tension had mounted following the Commonwealth's decision — a partial suspension not amounting any economic embargo.

Mr. Speight said he would "not accept" any Commonwealth team as a "mediator" because its members "can never understand the reasons" behind his hostage-taking, such as the (alleged) political dominance by the ethnic Indian minority. While he would be "happy" to talk to a Commonwealth team, he said the crisis was "a local issue that only Fijians can resolve among themselves."

The Commonwealth, on the other hand, said it chose to impose a partial suspension only to encourage Fiji to restore democracy. Some of the steps taken by Cmdr. Bainimarama, too, had impelled the Commonwealth to lessen the intended blow on Fiji, and these related to his refusal to hand over power or share it with Mr. Speight.

At another level, the Australian Foreign Minister, Mr. Alexander Downer, defended the partial suspension on these lines: "To impose significant economic sanctions on Fiji would successfully destroy Fiji economy... The people who would suffer (as a result of an economic embargo) would not be the organisers of the 'civil coup'... but the ordinary people of Fiji, Fiji-Indians, indigenous Fijians who have nothing to do whatsoever with the political processes."

Pacific leaders to discuss coup

TOKYO, JUNE 7. Violent coup attempts in Fiji and the Solomon Islands will be top of the agenda at a key meeting in Tokyo of Pacific leaders, government officials said today.— PTI

22-11-11

6 JUN 11

Turmoil in Fiji

Fiji is again in trouble. The armed coup against the elected government headed by Indian-origin Mahendra Chaudhry, stunned the world which was just about getting used to dealing with a constitutional government in Fiji. Businessman George Speight along with seven armed men stormed Parliament and took hostage the first ethnic Prime Minister and his Cabinet. Speight chose to give the entire action a divisive hue, by claiming that he was acting on behalf of the indigenous Fijians who constitute a little more than half of the 800,000 population. Obviously Speight is not acting on his own initiative, and has the backing of others. Who these others are will be known only with time, but it is unfortunate that Fiji which is struggling to revive democracy has been again brought into the grip of those who do not believe in unity. Speight also has a personal score to settle with Chaudhry who had sacked him as the head of the state-owned Fiji Hardwood Corporation. Speight had been declared bankrupt. He has now claimed to be in touch with former Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka who took power in Fiji through an armed coup in 1987. He was replaced 10 years later by Chaudhry who got an overwhelming majority in the 71-seat Parliament. Significantly, Speight has separated the Indian and the indigenous Fijian MPs being held hostage, giving a totally racial twist to the armed coup. President Ratu Sir Kamisee Mara has declared a state of emergency, and the army has moved into position. The police and the army still appear to be wedded to the 1997 Constitution of the elected government and the police chief has said that he will take orders only from the President. Mara, so far, has been taking a constitutional position but developments will really determine his position. Violence has definitely received an impetus with large scale looting of shops and property marking the coup. Speight also held a gun at Chaudhry's head directing him to ask the President to move the army away from the Parliament building. When Chaudhry refused he was reportedly beaten up badly by Speight who comes through as a man being driven by a variety of negative motivations. India has joined Australia, New Zealand, the United States and others in condemning the incident which, according to newspaper reports, has also been greeted with dismay by the people of Fiji. Chaudhry was leading a racially mixed government, with the Indians and the indigenous community quite happy with the three-year spell of constitutional rule. Speight is clearly trying to appeal to the baser sentiments of people, and it now remains to be seen how the situation develops in Fiji. The President's role will be crucial, given the police and army are willing to follow his lead. India has done well in its initial reaction expressing dismay and regret at the coup, and demanding the immediate restoration of the elected government. It will have to step up its efforts to create an international pressure block to ensure that the President and others in Fiji do not entertain any second thoughts, and act in unison to free the hostages and restore Chaudhry in the Prime Ministers office.

THE ASIAN AGE

21 MAY 2000

FIJI-INSPIRED GANGSTERISM

THERE IS A sickening similarity between the happenings in Fiji and the nearby Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. If a rash of such eruptions are not to afflict the other islands, which remain untouched yet by the trappings of modernity, the international community needs to immediately ensure that political thuggery is defeated by whatever means. The failure of the key sponsors of an earlier, equally disastrous coup in 1987 to act effectively to curb such misadventures in Fiji has apparently emboldened similar gangsterism nearby. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group's decision to impose some punishment on Fiji will be welcomed for the warning it sends out to Mr. George Speight and his henchmen. The group is to despatch a representative team of officials to Fiji's capital, Suva, to try and help the country back to normality and attempt to fix a timetable for a return to democratic rule. Its more urgent task will be to save the lives of the ethnic Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Choudhry, and the others being held hostage by Mr. Speight's gun-toting rebel gang inside the Parliament building since their crude attempt at a coup on May 19. The fortuitous developments in the past week beginning with the takeover by the armed forces have undermined Mr. Speight's position and reduced his bargaining power. Having driven himself into a corner, his options have narrowed considerably.

Growing international pressure and threats of trade sanctions have begun to yield results. The European Union has warned that it will stop buying Fijian sugar, the main export, and New Zealand and Australia have initiated similar action. The new military ruler, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, has toughened his stand against the rebels and now appears to have the upperhand, helped by the fact that the coup attempt has served to expose the divisions in the Great Council of Chiefs, itself a colonial leg-

acy which was propped up by the U.S. during the 1987 coup. Ranged on opposite sides are those under Ratu Kamisese Mara who want accommodation with the ethnic Indians and those who oppose the grant of equal rights to them. From the coup's initial weeks when the rebels had it all their way, with Mr. Mara, the then President, surrendering to their dictates by abrogating the multiethnic constitution, to the present is a steep fall for Mr. Speight. The military ruler now insists that Mr. Speight and his group will have no role in an interim government that will lead the country to elections and apparently a new constitution. Better counsel will then hopefully prevail and the indigenous people will realise the continuing contribution of the ethnic Indians, who are the apparent target of Mr. Speight and his gang. Another exodus by this ethnic group can cripple the economy of the island.

The current convulsions in Fiji and the Solomon Islands are a reminder that at the root of such ethnic wrangles are issues of economic empowerment — much unlike Fiji, the rebellion in the Solomon Islands is said to be led by immigrants who have a dominant position in commerce and the civil service. But what must worry the international community is the impunity with which democratically-elected governments are toppled and their leaders taken hostage at gunpoint by small groups of political bandits. If it is a measure of the lethargy that is afflicting international organisations, it also highlights the absence of a mechanism by which the global community can voice its opinion. The past decade has witnessed the enormous cost of this impotence in Africa, large parts of which fell into the grip of terrible clan warfare. This is the test for the international community in Fiji: whatever else it does, it must ensure that men possessed like Mr. Speight do not succeed.

THE HINDU

5 8 JUN 2000

SPEIGHT ANOINTS HIMSELF PM, FORMS CABINET

Chaudhry beaten up, collapses

HD-1
2/15
SUVA, MAY 20. Fiji's ousted Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, was beaten and threatened with death today by the self-styled leader of Friday's 'coup', Mr. George Speight, who declared himself Prime Minister. Later, Mr. Chaudhry collapsed, according to the Labour Party president, Ms. Jokapeci Koroi.

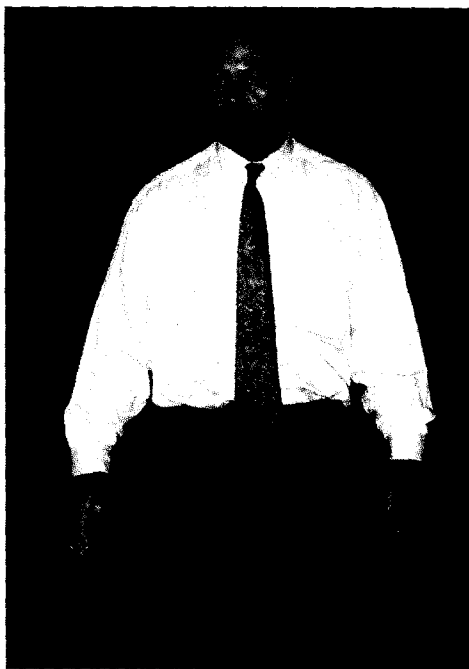
Ms. Koroi, who along with other Cabinet Ministers is being held hostage in the Parliament house, was allowed by gunmen to brief journalists at the gates of Parliament. She said civilian ambulances were turned away after the gunmen demanded that a military ambulance be sent instead.

Earlier, 20 parliamentary staffers were released, but no politicians, according to the Government-owned Fiji Television.

Radio Fiji said Mr. Chaudhry was hauled off and bashed after he interjected in a radio broadcast from parliament in Suva where he has been held since Mr. Speight — a failed businessman — and a gang of 10 armed men stormed the building Friday morning. Mr. Speight was reported to have held a gun to Mr. Chaudhry's head and threatened to kill him unless he called the President, Mr. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, to order the military away from Parliament.

Fiji Television reported that Mr. Chaudhry — the nation's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister elected exactly a year ago — told Mr. Speight to go ahead and shoot. Mr. Mara issued a warning to Mr. Speight that he would not bow to threats.

"We wish to see the impasse broken and the captives set free but we will not bow down to threats and coercion," Mr. Mara said in a broadcast to the nation. The President did not



George Speight

refer directly to the possibility of military action to free Mr. Chaudhry, but said he had held further talks with the armed forces and police.

Mr. Chaudhry has not spoken publicly since the coup but was pushed back inside Parliament by Mr. Speight as he shouted "we are not legitimising anything" to local reporters.

The coup leaders were sworn in heads of an

interim Government with Mr. Speight, son of a Fiji Opposition MP, declaring himself Prime Minister in a nine-member 'cabinet' during a low-key ceremony broadcast on television from the parliament building. Fiji Television said the leaders of the legal Government handed over authority shortly before the swearing in, but only after a gun was held to Mr. Chaudhry's head. It remains unclear how much support Mr. Speight has within Fiji.

The self-anointed Prime Minister told reporters he had been negotiating during the night with former Fiji Prime Minister, Mr. Sitiveni Rabuka, who staged an armed coup and took power in 1987. Mr. Chaudhry defeated Mr. Rabuka with an overwhelming majority in the 71-seat Parliament last May.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Tupeni Baba, earlier urged the military not to launch an action against Parliament to free the 45 hostages, including parliamentary staff, being held. "We believe that the Army must not be allowed to intervene offensively," Mr. Baba said in a statement read with Mr. Speight and Mr. Chaudhry at his side outside the parliament building.

At a news conference earlier today, the military and police pledged their backing for Mr. Mara, who declared Emergency on Friday.

Unfortunate: Vajpayee

In New Delhi, the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, described the attempted *coup de etat* as "unfortunate" and hoped democracy would return to the nation as early as possible. — Reuters, AFP, PTI

THE HINDU

21 MAY 2000

Solomon rivals fail to agree on 14-day truce

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WELLINGTON, June 9. — Warring rebels in the Solomon Islands today failed to agree on a 14-day truce, a New Zealand official said. The Prime Minister was earlier freed from house arrest.

The factions signed a two-day ceasefire to allow the weekend visit by the foreign ministers of New Zealand and Australia and other dignitaries.

Indigenous militants from the main island of Guadalcanal, known as the Isatabu Freedom Movement, were willing to sign a 14-day ceasefire, but a rival group from Malaita island refused, said the New Zealand High Commissioner Mr Nick Hurley in the Solomon Islands. A Malaita band of guerrillas, calling itself Malaita Eagle Force, has gained an upper hand this week through the seizure of machine guns from the Solomon Islands armory. Isatabu rebels use mostly single-shot rifles and home-made guns.

Isatabu rebels are trying to push the Malaitans back to their home island, but the Malaitans are fighting to stay in Guadalcanal. They have been attacking one another for 18 months, and at least 50 people have been killed or gone missing recently, with 20,000 forced out of their homes.

No fresh fighting was reported today between the two sides, who have established a frontline east of the airport outside Honiara.

The Australian navy, meanwhile, has wrapped up an operation to evacuate hundreds of frightened foreigners from Honiara.

THE STATESMAN

10 JUN 2 1976

Fiji PM Chaudhry taken captive

AFP
Suva, May 19

FIJI'S PRESIDENT today declared a state of emergency after gunmen seized the Pacific nation's ethnic Indian Prime Minister and his Cabinet and claimed power in the name of indigenous Fijians.

The coup sparked off looting and arson attacks in the capital and prompted President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to impose a curfew along with the state of emergency. "We have executed a civil coup on behalf of the indigenous people of Fiji," coup leader George Speight said after seven masked gunmen stormed Parliament and seized Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and his cabinet.

"That civil coup has resulted in the overthrow of the Labour-led coalition government in Fiji," said Mr Speight, a local businessman and the US-educated son of an opposition MP, Sam Speight. The dramatic events unfolded on the first anniversary of Mr



A building burns in Suva on Friday after ethnic tension heightened following the overthrow of the Chaudhry Government. Photo: AP



PM Mahendra Chaudhry



'Coup' leader George Speight

Witnesses said the looters targeted Indian businesses in Suva, where ethnic tensions between the indigenous Fijian and Indian communities have been simmering for months.

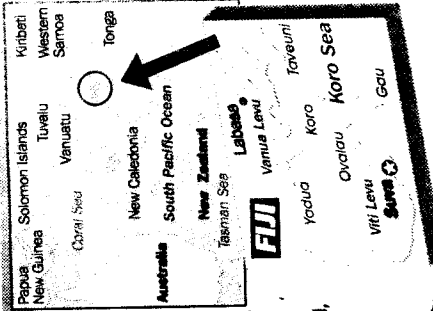
Of Fiji's around 8 lakh people, 51 percent are ethnic Fijian and 44 percent are ethnic Indians, the descendants of labourers brought here in the late 19th century to work in sugar plantations.

Fiji TV said protesters against Mr Chaudhry's government had also marched to Parliament where they began throwing stones and attacking people.

The situation was calm by early

Fiji FACTSHEET

- Population 8,00,000 (1981 figures), of whom 51% are indigenous Fijians, 44% Indian-Fijians and 5% other races.
- In 1874, Britain ceded sovereignty.
- India became an important source of labour after 1880. In the next 40 years, about 63,000 Indians travelled to Fiji.
- Siveni Rabuka led two military coups in 1987.
- A new Constitution was introduced in 1998 and a 71-seat Parliament created, made up of 23 Fijian seats, 19 Indian, one Rotuman island, three other races and 25 open-race seats.
- Mahendra Chaudhry's Fijian Labour Party won power in May 1999. It was supported by the "People's Coalition" consisting of the Fijian Association Party and the Party of National Unity.



Graphic by VINEY

evening as police moved in to enforce the curfew, witnesses said, and soldiers had fanned out across Suva to protect property. Phone lines were also cut and although shots were heard from the Parliament building during the storming no bloodshed was reported. "I would like to announce that Fiji is currently under civilian rule,

headed by myself," Mr Speight said in a radio address. The coup leader said Fijian Association Party MP Ratu Timoci Silivola, a political novice, had be-

en named interim prime minister. Mr Speight said he had revoked the constitution at the request of the indigenous people of Fiji and executive control was now in his hands.

He said the purpose of the coup was to lay "the foundation for change once and for all in the affairs of the country of Fiji as desired by the indigenous people of Fiji."

Local reporters told AFP that seven men armed with AK-47 assault rifles burst into the Parliament building early on Friday and seized both government and opposition members of parliament.

Mr Chaudhry was heard to tell his MPs to "hold your seats" while Speaker Apenisa Kurisakiia told the men what they were doing was "illegal," local media reports said.

www.hindustantimes.com
The unabridged report can be accessed at your favourite website

Rescue operation ruled out in Fiji

By P. S. Suryanarayana

HD-13
716
SINGAPORE, JUNE 6. As the crisis in Fiji over the continued captivity of the Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, and 30 others remained unresolved, the military ruler, Commodore J. V. (Frank) Bainimarama, today discounted the option of using force to rescue the hostages in the context of the intransigence by their captor and self-styled "civil coup" leader, Mr. George Speight.

Following Mr. Speight's threat to shoot the hostages in the event of a rescue effort by the military, the disinclination of Cmdr. Bainimarama to free them may have somewhat eased the threat to the lives of captives at this moment.

Cmdr. Bainimarama cited the hostages' safety as the prime reason for his reluctance to mount an armed operation against Mr. Speight. In a statement in Suva today, he said the "concerns" of the hostage-takers would be

"addressed and reflected" in a "new Constitution" planned to be drafted. These "concerns" pertain to the stated objective of according political primacy to the majority natives as distinct from the minority ethnic Indians.

Noting that the "concerns" of "all the Fijians" as also those of "the community at large" would be addressed as part of an exercise to frame a new Constitution, Cmdr. Bainimarama urged the hostage-takers to release their captives and lay down arms in exchange for a total "amnesty".

If there was a political message in seeking to address the "concerns" of "the community at large," Cmdr. Bainimarama did not make that explicit. He cited the possibility of "international repercussions" as the reason for wanting to keep Mr. Speight out of any interim government that might be formed in the future. Cmdr. Bainimarama indicated that the military could not give up power in these uncertain circumstances.

At a press conference in Suva, Cmdr. Bainimarama was quoted as saying that the military would try to bring peace and stability during the next three months and then appoint an interim Prime Minister as also a transitional government mandated to frame a new Constitution and call a general election. This new timeframe would not, however, negate the military's earlier plan of being at the helm for about three years to oversee the transition.

On the issue of securing the hostages' release, the military ruler said he would seek to use the influence of the people, especially the native chiefs, to force the pace.

At least three military deserters, who had earlier defected to the ranks of Mr. Speight, were reported to have rejoined the Army today in response to Cmdr. Bainimarama's call to do so. There were also accounts of how the anti-Speight groups had begun to mobilise themselves in the more prosperous western part of the main island.

THE HINDU

27 JUN 2000

Ethnic Indian PM ousted in Fiji coup

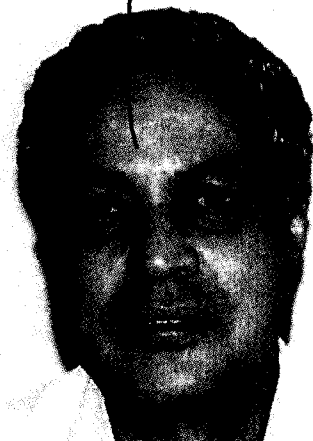
By P. S. Suryanarayana

BANGKOK, MAY 19. In an apparent 'civil coup', the first ethnic Indian Prime Minister of the South Pacific island-republic of Fiji, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, was today ousted from power. A state of Emergency was proclaimed by the President, Mr. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, to control the rioting that broke out after the announcement of a political 'change'. A night curfew was also reported to have been clamped in the capital town of Suva. However, it remained unclear as to who really was exercising power.

Mr. Chaudhry, leader of the Labour Party, was elected Prime Minister in the country's first poll held last year under a democratic and non-racial constitution that was promulgated in 1997. Ethnic Indians constitute nearly 44 per cent of the population and control vital economic interests, while the native Fijians have often wanted a greater share.

Mr. Chaudhry's election was seen as the first step towards the stabilisation of an orderly arrangement for power-sharing by the two communities in a reversal of years of political and other animosities between them.

The crisis in the island-nation remained far from clear, as attempts to reach Suva were unsuccessful. What was not in doubt, though, was that Mr. George



Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry
(File photo)

Speight, the presumptive leader of an armed group that claimed to have seized power, went on record to say that Mr. Sivatolu had been nominated to "carry out the duties of interim Prime Minister."

According to Mr. Speight, "civilian rule is still in place" and the new "interim Prime Minister" would soon constitute a transitional Cabinet.

While these remarks signified that a 'civilian coup' had taken place in Suva, the Army, dominated by the country's majority indigenous population, was reported to have taken up positions after the constitutional Head of State promulgated an Emergency. It was not known

whether the rioting had resulted in casualties.

There was no authentic indication of any resistance by the 'deposed' Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues or of injuries to them as they were taken hostage by the group led by Mr. Speight at the Parliament complex in Suva.

Shortly after the 'takeover', the former Prime Minister and an erstwhile coup leader, Gen. Sitiveni Rabuka, was reported to have gone to the parliament, but his equation with Mr. Speight, son of a politician opposed to the Chaudhry Government, remained a mystery.

Shops looted

AP reports from New Zealand:

Diplomats in New Zealand, monitoring the situation, continued to characterise the sequence of events as a 'hostage situation' rather than a coup, saying the Army had not actively supported the takeover of power.

"The Army remains in its barracks and the police and military are still believed to be supporting the rule of law," the Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman said.

However, local media reported that youth went on the rampage in main streets of Suva and looted shops. About 5,000 people gathered in front of the Parliament cheering in supporters of the coup.

20 MAY 2000

Solomon Islands' PM agrees to resign to end conflict

SYDNEY: Solomon Islands Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu has agreed to resign to head off the threat of civil war in the tiny Pacific island nation, his government announced on Tuesday.

After a day of talks with cabinet colleagues and leaders of the rebel group behind an attempted coup on Monday, Mr Ulufa'alu "indicated his willingness to resign if his resignation is the price of peace," minister for state Alfred Sasaako said. Parliament will be reconvened around June 16 to accept his resignation and consider who will succeed him.

Mr Ulufa'alu's decision came as a gunbattle erupted between rival armies on the outskirts of the Solomons capital Honiara.

At least four fighters were wounded in the three-hour battle between the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) and the Isatabu Freedom

Movement (IFM) for control of Honiara's Henderson Field international airport, local radio reported.

MEF rebels led by Honiara lawyer Andrew Nori kidnapped Mr Ulufa'alu on Monday and seized key installations, including a government communications centre and the entire police armoury.

Mr Sasako said Nori, who attended talks with the cabinet, had agreed to withdraw a ultimatum demanding Mr Ulufa'alu's resignation within 48 hours with the threat of undisclosed consequences if he failed to resign.

Meanwhile, fighting between rival ethnic militia groups broke out around the airport outside Honiara on Tuesday, New Zealand officials said.

"We have had reports of fighting around the airport between Malaita Eagles and the Guadalcanal-based resistance movement," foreign affairs spokesman Brad Tattersfield said in Wellington.

A spokesman for New Zealand foreign minister Phil Goff said he had heard there had been a lot of shooting.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 7 JUN 2 1998

Sierra Leone rebels take key town

REUTERS & DPA

9.87 51-9 115
LONDON/NAIROBI, May 10. — Sierra Leone today urged Britain to commit combat troops to enforce peace in the West African country, saying London was not doing enough to end the violence in its former colony.

From the strife-torn country came reports of thousand of civilians fleeing towards the capital Freetown to avoid advancing rebels, BBC said. The flight followed the capture by Revolutionary United Front rebels of the strategic town of Masiaka, 55 km from Freetown, the report, monitored in Nairobi, said.

"If the British government and British military provide significant support with men and materials to the UN force, the whole situation will change very quickly," Sierra Leonean information minister, Mr Julius Spencer, told BBC.

Mr Spencer said Britain should take the lead in ending "major discrimination" against African

countries when it comes to peacekeeping. Britain has sent troops to evacuate Britons and other nationals from Sierra Leone but has stressed that its troops are there only to secure the safety of evacuees.

"The Sierra Leone public expect much more than what the British seem to be giving," Mr Spencer said.

"It is disturbing for us because it seems like there is indeed some major discrimination in the way world peace is being kept when it comes to African countries.

"The British government has been very helpful to Sierra Leone, but we are in a crisis situation now and we believe that the British can play a very leading role and ... redeem the image of the UN," Mr Spencer said.

As the rebels took Masiaka, government troops and pro-government militia were reported to be patrolling Freetown in readiness for an offensive on the capital.

THE STATESMAN

11 MAY 2000

Solomon Islands PM freed, will lose post

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

SYDNEY, June 7. — Mr Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, Solomon Islands Prime Minister, was released today even as rival guerrilla armies fought a five-hour pitched battle for control of the international airport.

The island nation faces the threat of a civil war despite Mr Ulufa'Alu's offer to resign. He was released on condition that the Parliament will remove him from office by next Thursday, reporters said.

Several thousand men took part in the battle for control of the airfield as it became the focal point of the conflict between indigenous militants of Guadalcanal Island and Malaitan settlers.

Malaita Eagle Force leader, Andrew Nori, said around 50-100 members of the rival Isatabu Freedom Movement were killed in the fighting.

The toll, however, could not be independently confirmed.

MEF rebels and their paramilitary police allies detained Mr Ulufa'alu at gunpoint when they seized Honiara on Monday.

"Everybody here, I think, including MEF members, is hungry for peace ... (and) restoration of normalcy," Nori said.

THE STATESMAN

- 8 JUN 7 m

U.N. hostages issue draws global ire

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, MAY 5. The United Nations Security Council has condemned the violence and hostage-taking involving its peacekeepers in Sierra Leone.

The Clinton administration has also warned the rebel leader, Mr. Foday Sankoh, that his amnesty may have run out as he has violated the peace deal signed in Togo last year.

After expressing concern and unease in the last few days over what was taking place in Sierra Leone, the United Nations has sharpened its tone on the goings-on in Sierra Leone, bluntly telling the rebel leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) that he should stop harming the United Nations peacekeepers.

The U.N. now says that the estimated dead Kenyan soldiers in the mission is four and not seven as originally feared, and that 92 peacekeepers — including 23 from India — have now been surrounded and taken hostage.

On Thursday, the Security Council formally condemned the violence and the Secretary-General, back from a trip to Africa, said that the leaders there have told Mr. Sankoh to stop his fighters from harming the United Nations troops.

"They (the African leaders) have tried to impress on him (Mr. Sankoh) the seriousness of the situation," Mr. Kofi Annan said. The U.N. chief further noted that he had spoken to the leaders of Nigeria, Mali, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Togo, and Libya.

Several of these leaders have already sent their special envoys to Freetown.

The crisis in Sierra Leone started after the United Nations refused to hand over to the RUF some of their former colleagues who had gone to a disarmament centre to turn in their

weapons. The rebels were keen on knowing the whereabouts of their former comrades but this information was not shared.

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, known as UNAMSIL, will reach its full strength of 11,000 peacekeepers by this July, when it is set to become the largest operating in the world. Even before the present crisis broke out, an additional contingent of some 2,000 troops were expected from India, Bangladesh and Jordan.

The mandate to the peacekeepers is to ensure that the peace deal signed is observed, and to oversee the demobilisation and disarmament of an estimated 45,000 rebel fighters. The rebels are said to be resisting because the areas they operate are rich in diamonds, the clandestine operation that funds their activities.

No request for troops

In Washington, the Clinton administration is making it known that it is indeed watching the developing situation very carefully, but made it known that at this time there was no request for ground troops from the United States.

"We don't anticipate one, we're not considering one, nor would we think one is necessary. In this case we're prepared to consider ways to support the U.N. and make sure the U.N. out there can do its job," said Mr. Richard Boucher, the State Department spokesperson. But nothing has really been ruled out by the United States, including the participation in a rapid deployment force in coordination with other countries.

In praising the United Nations for the manner in which this crisis was being worked out, the administration is saying that Washington will be discussing with the world body on how

to make the international effort "as effective as possible."

The United States has said that Mr. Sankoh's amnesty may have run out. By killing four United Nations peacekeepers and taking several hostages, the administration is maintaining that he has violated a peace accord signed in Togo last July where the rebel leader agreed to halt the civil war which saw brutalities beyond belief.

"The key point ... is that there was an amnesty attached to the Lome Agreement and he was given a second chance, and any actions that take place after that could invalidate or risk losing that chance," the State Department spokesperson argued.

Meanwhile, the United Nations is saying that the rebels holding hostages would be prosecuted.

NEW YORK: Sri Chinmoy's New Record: On Thursday the 69-year old Sri Chinmoy set a new world record in New York City by lifting 1050 pounds in the seated calf raise machine over one inch high. The unprecedented feat of strength which completely isolates the calf muscles on a standard exercise machine astounded the world's top fitness experts. The most weight which anyone of any age has been said to have lifted in the standing calf raise, a much less difficult lift, is 600 pounds. Five-time Mr. Universe and the World's Best Built Man of the Century, Bill Pearl, said "Sri Chinmoy is an astounding individual. He is constantly playing at the absolute end of the line!" Explaining how he can accomplish his amazing feats of physical strength at nearly 70 years old, Sri Chinmoy states, "If we remain in a childlike heart, then age can never be a barrier and there is no end to our progress."

MAY 6 1998

Commonwealth team to reach Fiji today

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JUNE 8. Political dissent in parts of Fiji over the continuing crisis there came into a sharp focus today even as the "civil coup" leader, Mr. George Speight, asked the Commonwealth, especially Australia as its prime mover in the South Pacific region, to mind its own business. A Commonwealth delegation is expected to arrive in the Fijian capital of Suva tomorrow for urging a quick end to the current crisis.

At least one police official was said to have been thrashed today by the supporters of Mr. Speight on the premises of the parliament building in Suva, where the deposed Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, and his associates completed three weeks of captivity.

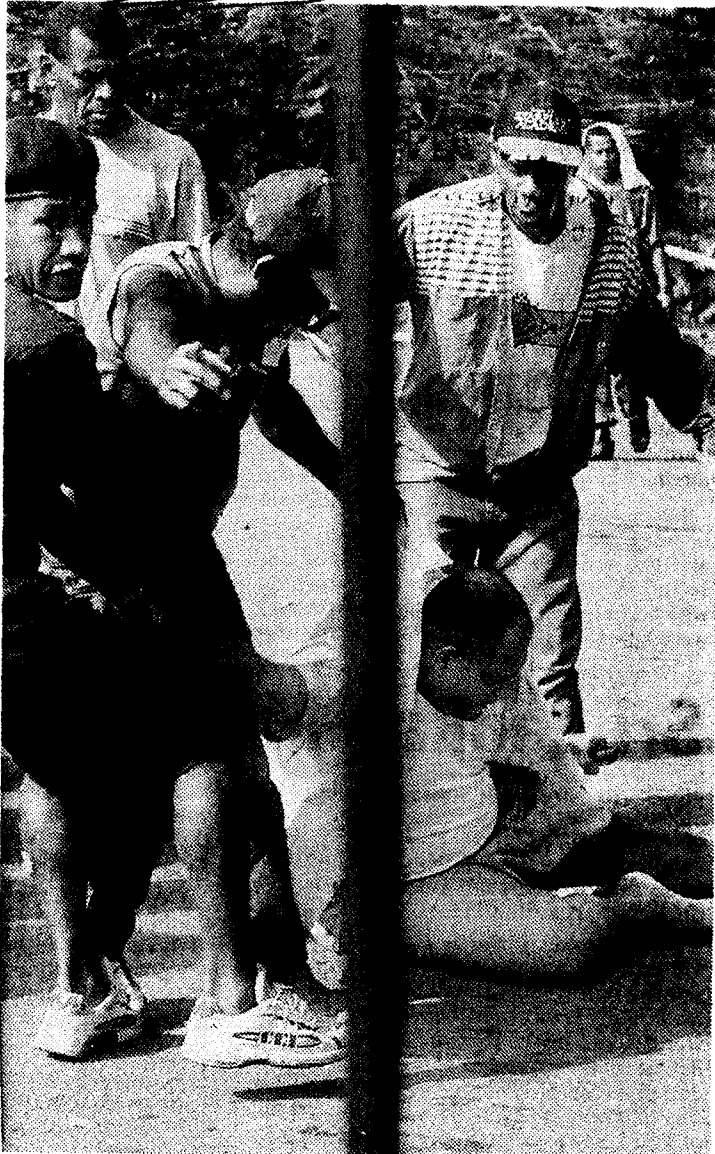
The traditional chiefs of some areas in the western part of the main island today opted for the constitution of a separate "confederacy," consisting of their domains, within the overall framework of Fiji as of now, according to a late night political version in Suva. These chiefs, it was said, would like the Great Council of Chiefs to recognise the proposed new confederacy. In the event of such a proposal for a new entity within Fiji being turned down by the Great Council of Chiefs, the western-region chiefs, now known to be opposed to Mr. Speight, might seek a secession from the country itself.

While the general refrain by some of these dissenting chiefs was that Mr. Speight should be stopped in his tracks and multi-racial politics restored (with or without a dose of democracy), those opposed to this initiative felt that the dissonance among the traditional leaders of the Fijian natives was being sparked by persons close to Mr. Chaudhry.

In other developments, the reported bashing of a policeman was viewed in Suva as a somewhat localised incident, though it served as a reminder of the continuing confrontation between Mr. Speight and his lieutenants on one side and the military government on the other.

Mr. Speight said "the voice of the people of Fiji" would help resolve the crisis. He also sought to question or even undermine the credentials of Australia, in particular, for trying to broker a political solution to the crisis sparked by his own action of taking Mr. Chaudhry and others hostage on May 19.

Criticising Canberra for having got the "reputation" of being the "big bully in the Pacific," the civil



A suspected policeman being kicked and dragged into the Parliament complex by supporters of the Fijian coup leader, Mr. George Speight, in Suva on Thursday. The policeman is still being held. — Reuters

coup' leader suggested that Mr. Downer as also the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. John Howard, should first "ask the aboriginal leaders" about their views on the current crisis in Fiji and about the emergence of Mr. Speight as a champion of the cause of the native Fijians in their own country.

Solomon Islands PM calls for peace

BRISBANE, JUNE 8. The Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Mr. Bartholomew Ulufa'Alu, held at gunpoint since Monday, feared for his life and has called on the warring ethnic militias to lay down their arms, the Solomons radio reported today.

"Personally, just like any other human being...I suppose we all

feared for our lives," Mr. Ulufa'Alu said.

Mr. Ulufa'Alu was seized by the Malaita Eagles Force militia on Monday. The Malaitans, who have been battling the rival Isatabu Freedom Movement for the past 18 months, took over key installations in the capital Honiara and demanded that Mr. Ulufa'Alu resign. In the broadcast, the Prime Minister said he had not resigned.

Fierce jungle fighting between the two groups broke out yesterday, with unconfirmed reports of up to 100 deaths.

"If they can all go back to their pre-coup positions it will enhance our position... so the process of peace talks, the process of negotiating... can move forward and be realised," Mr. Ulufa'Alu said in the interview. — Reuters

THE HINDU

9 JUN 2001

3 JUN 2001

Help for S Leone commission sought

ARTICLE 19, the Global Campaign for Free Expression, and the Sierra Leone Working Group on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) today urged the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' office to show greater urgency in TRC's launch and consult Sierra Leonean stakeholders more than it has done in recent months.

According to UN plans, the three-month preparatory stage which precedes the TRC's launch is to appoint, train and equip commissioners and staff and to build public awareness and support for it in Sierra Leone.

Mr John Caulker, chair of Sierra Leone Working Group, a coalition of over 40 local NGOs lobbying for a credible and effective TRC in Sierra Leone, said in London today: "We welcomed the passage of the Truth and Reconciliation Act by the Sierra Leone parliament in February. But there has been a loss of momentum since then. The last two months should have been spent building public awareness and a sense of ownership of the TRC on the part of the Sierra Leoneans. Instead, little has happened on the ground"

Mr Andrew Puddephatt, Article 19 executive director, said: "The office of Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, is leading on international assistance to the TRC. It has a responsibility not to allow the planning process for the preparatory stage to drag on too long and to ensure that Sierra Leonean stakeholders are fully involved in the process. Governments have pledged large sums for the TRC process and entrusted them to the OHCHR"

The groups also urged the Sierra Leone government and UNAMSIL to investigate human rights abuses since the signing of the Lome Peace Accord in July 1999 and bring perpetrators to justice.

— SNS

THE STATESMAN

6 MAY 2000

Military tries to starve Fiji rebels

Wellington, June 8

FJI'S MILITARY rulers are trying to starve rebel George Speight and his armed gang who have been holding more than 30 members of the government hostage for nearly three weeks, reports said today.

Speight confirmed that food supplies were not reaching the Parliamentary complex where about 100 supporters are camped as he continues to detain Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and his government who he seized at gunpoint on May 19.

The military which declared martial law 11 days ago have surrounded the area and erected road blocks to control movement in and out. "They have been trying to stop our food supplies," Speight said, according to Wellington's dominion newspaper.

"What possible agenda or justification could they have for stopping food from coming into this place" maybe to starve us, demoralise us. What are they going to prove by doing that we are fellow Fijians down here."

The dominion said a military spokesman refused to confirm or



A Fijian cop in plainclothes spits blood as he is beaten and taken into custody by supporters of Fijians coup leader George Speight, at Parliament in Suva, on Thursday. Photo: AP

deny the ploy, saying tactics were confidential.

While Speight said he and his men had enough to eat, some of his supporters asked reporters for food, the newspaper said.

A Fiji newspaper has reported that food delivered to the 31

hostages by their families had been stolen and eaten by Speight's supporters.

The rebel leader moved to tighten discipline among his supporters after an exchange of shots near Parliament on Wednesday morning when the army warned off a

group of them trying to break into a nearby house.

Meanwhile, reports from Suva said a Fijian policeman was severely beaten today outside the rear gate of Parliament complex where a group of coup-makers has held 31 hostages, including the elected ethnic Indian Prime Minister, since May 19, witnesses said.

The man, who appeared to have been badly hurt, was taken inside the compound and shortly afterwards the followers of coup leader George Speight were seen hosing blood off the road.

The incident occurred as Speight, an Australian national and failed businessman, was to have held a press conference.

The policeman, who was in civilian clothing, had arrived at the rear entrance to recover a stolen taxi.

He was dragged out of his car and attacked by up to 30 people.

One of Speight's security guards said: "The cops must have thought we were fools, trying to come here and locate stolen cars. It's all bullshit."

The policeman was still inside the rear gate guardhouse but receiving no treatment. (Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN

9 JUN 7 1977

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SPEIGHT ON TOP

Literally and figuratively

THERE is now some clarity in Fiji. Speight, no matter what the international community thinks of him and his gunmen, enjoys support from the army and the Great Council of Chiefs and cannot be ignored in any new dispensation. Speight is being consulted over the new Constitution and some of his nominees, if not he himself, may find their way into the Cabinet. Speight is eschewing personal ambitions but a significant portion of the army sees him as a Fijian saviour. An army spokesman made no bones about these feelings when he recalled, for the international media, the general strike organised by the Indians during the last war, while ethnic Fijians were away fighting. There is a cultural alienation in Fijian politics that no Constitution has been able to bridge.

The only thing that may be holding back Fijian ultra-nationalists is the fear of international sanctions that would put the country and the rich western district, homeland of the chiefs, out of business. Which is probably why the military felt constrained to reassure the visiting Commonwealth team that it would abide by the Harare declaration calling for a "just and honest government", one that respects the rights of all citizens. The military committed itself to multiracialism to the CMAG, "for the sake of our God", but they seem less and less sure about keeping it, especially since Speight seems to be tapping support and keeping the coup humming with sporadic outbursts of violence. The military, internally divided, has been unable either to isolate or break him and latest reports confirm that Speight is having his way. The Commonwealth team sees the intractability of the problem and is not pressing Bainimarama and company to restore the *status quo ante*, but they would expect any new government to maintain a reasonable balance of power between Melanesians and Indo-Fijians. This may not be possible any longer because the game is being played entirely between various groups of Fijian nationalists and the Indians have almost lost their political voice.

THE STATESMAN

29 JUN 2000

New Zealand, Australia fight shy of slapping sanctions on Fiji

HT Correspondent

New Delhi, June 9

AUSTRALIA AND New Zealand, two of Fiji's largest trading partners who control between them more than 80 per cent of the island nation's foreign trade, are showing a marked reluctance to hit out at the coup leaders of Suva with economic sanctions. They are arguing that sanctions would hit the common Fijians and may prove counter-productive.

This renders the Commonwealth's pressure tactics to tighten the noose around the coup leaders quite toothless. Though the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) at its June 6 meeting in London expelled Fiji from the councils of the body and sent a group of observers to Suva, it is unclear what purpose the mission would serve. Commodore Bainimarama, the military chief of Fiji, has informed the delegation that he will not be able to meet them before June 16.

The only hope now is the European Union, which has threatened to stop buying Fijian sugar. But even here there are doubts as to what effect it would have if Australia and New Zealand step into the breach.

It is clear that commercial considerations have compelled the two Pacific giants to get off the high horse of democracy. The Australians, in particular, have made too many investments in Fiji over the past decade to put these at risk.

Even the highly publicised boycott of Fijian post, shipping and other crucial services announced by Australian trade unions has come to nought. Threats issued have simply not been carried out.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 JUN 2000

Junta threatens action against Fiji rebels

DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR

WELLINGTON, June 26. — Fiji's military rulers started to talk tough today for the first time on taking action against armed rebels who have been holding the country's government hostage for more than five weeks.

"We are trying to resolve the crisis as much as we can in a peaceful way," the spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Filipo Tarakinikini, told New Zealand's TV3 channel.

"But if we are forced to take harder options because the country is brought to its knees, then we will not hesitate to do so," Lt Col Filipo Tarakinikini, said.

Lt Col Tarakinikini said there would be no more negotiations until Speight, who claims he launched his coup in the interests of the indigenous Fijian population, signed the accord and released the hostages.

"There seems to be a false assumption on the part of Speight and his group that they have overwhelming support in the military and also outside amongst the indigenous Fijians," Lt Col Tarakinikini said. "This is simply not true."

He warned it was a mistake to think the army, predominantly Fijian, would not use force against a coup led by indigenous Fijians. "It is always an option," he said.

"In any country, especially a democracy, the armed forces are put in place by the people in the final analysis to be able to protect the state either from without or within.

"We will not allow the country to be brought down and the fate of the country handed over to a group which does not represent the majority of views, especially amongst indigenous Fijians."

Speight released the four women among the hostages early yesterday but Mr Chaudhry and the other 26 men remained held at gunpoint.

The crisis has crippled the economy, with thousands of workers laid off and the usual flood of foreign tourists at this time of year reduced to a trickle following "stay away" alerts by the governments of the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Britain and Japan.

Schools reopened today for the first time since the coup but Radio New Zealand reported that attendances were low because many parents still feared for their children's safety.

THE STATESMAN

27 JUN 2000

Militiaman shot dead as Solomons unrest spreads

politicians. (Reuters)

AP (AP)

Honiara (Solomon Islands), June 11: A young member of one of the warring militias in the Solomon Islands was shot and killed on Sunday as ethnic unrest appeared to spread to remote Western islands in the strife-torn South Pacific nation.

The killing came as visiting foreign ministers from Australia and New Zealand said they hoped a delicate truce would hold between rival militias from Guadalcanal and Malaita islands.

Australian radio reported that a new group, possibly with links to a secessionist movement from Bougainville Island in neighbouring Papua New Guinea, had taken control of a police station and communications in Gizo in the Western Solomons.

"I understand that there has been one young Malaitan boy killed this morning in Gizo," a Solomons government source told Reuters.

Long-simmering ethnic unrest in the Solomons boiled over after the Malaita Eagles Force militia seized Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu and took over key installations in the capital Honiara on the main island of Guadalcanal last Monday.

The take-over has sparked fierce fighting with the rival ethnic Isatabu Freedom Movement of Guadalcanal.

Australian Broadcasting Corp radio said the heavily armed group in Gizo, 380 km northwest of Honiara in the New Georgia Islands, had taken over the local police station to protect the West from the Malaita Eagles Force.

ABC radio also said it believed another police station on nearby Choiseul Island was taken by the same group on Sunday. An Australian aid worker said it appeared the junior Malaita Eagles member in Gizo was accidentally shot when he grabbed the

barrel of a gun pointed at him. New Zealand foreign minister Phil Goff said after returning from the Solomons on Sunday there had been tension between Malaitan and Bougainvillian migrants in Gizo over the past week.

He said he hoped the Gizo shooting would not trigger a significant escalation in the crisis. "We hope that doesn't happen," Mr Goff told reporters. "The last

TURMOIL IN SOUTH PACIFIC

thing the Solomon Islands needs is for this conflict to spread."

Australian foreign minister Alexander Downer, who led a Commonwealth ministerial delegation to the Solomons at the weekend, said he hoped a truce between the warring sides would hold but warned the situation was still very dangerous.

"The situation is volatile the situation

could change very quickly within a matter of minutes or hours and they really do need to be extremely cautious," Mr Downer told reporters after arriving in Townsville in Australia's North from Honiara.

The delegation of Commonwealth ministers had met with the militias and Prime Minister Ulufa'alu. They called for the militias to lay down their arms, extend a 14-day truce declared on Friday and re-start failed talks.

The Commonwealth delegation is due to visit the scene of another South Pacific coup in Fiji next week. Guadalcanal islanders are resentful of migration by Malaitans who have taken top jobs in Honiara. About 20,000 Malaitans have been forced from their homes on Guadalcanal, while fighting over the past 18 months has left some 60 people dead.

The current unrest is the worst in the

Solomons, since independence from Britain 22 years ago. Mr Goff said after arriving at a military base in Auckland that the safety of Mr Ulufa'alu — a Malaitan — could not be guaranteed. "It's fair to say the Prime Minister himself still fears for his life," Mr Goff told reporters.

New Zealand and Australia on Sunday continued to evacuate foreign nationals, mostly their own, a day after residents fled in panic from chaotic Honiara.

A New Zealand C-130 Hercules transport plane landed in Brisbane from Honiara later on Sunday carrying 60 people, mainly from Australian and New Zealand.

Those on board included nine workers evacuated from the Gold Ridge gold mine outside Honiara. Also on board were nationals from Britain, Fiji, the United States, Russia, China, Malaysia, Indonesia and Ethiopia. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

THE ASIAN AGE

12 JUN 2007

Fiji rebels free 4 women

ASSOCIATED PRESS & REUTERS

SUVA, June 25. — Rebels holding members of Fiji's deposed government hostage released four women today. They, however, said no more hostages would be freed until the military met their demands for ending the island nation's five-week-old political crisis.

The four women, including three ministers, left the parliamentary complex where they had been held for the past 37 days. They were first taken to meet their families, under heavy police escort. Later they saw a team of trauma specialists for medical check-up and counselling, officials said.

Mr John Scott, head of Fiji Red Cross, said he had spoken to two of the women and they sounded "pretty cheerful ... physically they are okay."

"I'm thankful to the Lord for making this day possible," said Ms Lavenia Wainiqolo Padarath, one of the freed hostages. On how it feels to see her fami-



Mr Akanisi Koroitamana, a member of the Fijian parliament, receives a hug from an unidentified man and woman after his release in Suva on Sunday. — AP/PTI

ly again, the deposed minister for women, culture and social welfare minister, said: "Wond-

erful...it's all I live for."

Jo Nata said the four were released as a goodwill gesture.

Fiji's schools are about to open after being closed during the first weeks of crisis. The rebels wanted the women — some of them mothers — to be back with their children, Nata said.

George Speight, however, played down the suggestion, saying "as for the goodwill side of it, let people interpret what they want to."

On when negotiations might resume, he said "that's the \$64,000 dollar question."

Military spokesman, Lt Col Filipo Tarakinikini, described the women's release as a "positive step for the humanitarian side".

Among the released hostages is Ms Adi Koila Mara, a cabinet minister Mr Mahendra Chaudhry's government and daughter of former President, Mr Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.

Australia would consider taking in Mr Mahendra Chaudhry if he sought to leave Fiji after being released by rebels, Prime Minister, Mr John Howard, said today.

THE STATESMAN

1987 JUN 26 1000

Solomons govt tells rebels to return arms

5-4
13/6

REUTERS & AFP

Solomon

HONIARA, June 12. — The Solomon Islands government today threatened to call off a parliamentary no-confidence vote later this week if rebels controlling the capital do not return stolen police weapons.

The government brokered the release of the Prime Minister, Mr Bartholomew Ulufa'alu on Friday on condition that parliament would be recalled on Thursday for a vote of confidence on his government.

But a senior minister said the parliament may not meet if the Malaita Eagles force do not return weapons stolen from the police armoury last week.

"There have been discussions about a parliament meeting on Thursday and in the present situation there is some question about whether it will happen," Mr Alfred Sasako.

"It depends on whether the arms are still with the militants, and if there is an atmosphere of safety and if members can vote without fear of being under duress," Mr Sasako said.

Eagles force leader, Andrew Nori, had told a Commonwealth ministerial delegation on Saturday that the stolen weapons would be

returned before the parliamentary sitting.

Meanwhile, the warring rebels have been offered a multi-million dollar land deal to buy peace, New Zealand officials said as a ceasefire held for the third day today, a report from Sydney says.

A compensation package, financed mainly by Australia and New Zealand, emerged as the key point of a treaty proposed by the Commonwealth delegation.

But the mission warned the militia leaders they would get nothing if they refuse to return to negotiations and the violence continues.

On the Bougainville connection, the New Zealand foreign minister, Mr Phil Goff, said: "It's not beyond the realms of possibility that the Bougainville militia could come in on the side of the Guadalcanal people and that would mean a spread of violence."

The Commonwealth team — which included Mr Goff and Australian foreign minister, Mr Alexander Downer, also called for the groups to lay down their arms, to extend the temporary truce and to restart failed peace talks.

New Zealand and Australia continued to evacuate foreign nationals from the strife-torn Pacific nation.

THE STATESMAN

17 JUN 2002

4 hostages freed in Fiji

By P. S. Suryanarayana (1)

SYDNEY, JUNE 25. The sudden release of four women hostages by Mr. George Speight, the Fijian 'civil coup' leader, in Suva today gave a new twist to the political atmospherics of the now-stalled negotiations between him and the 'Interim Military Government' over the freedom of all captives, including the recently dismissed Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry. But the indications from the Fijian capital, by nightfall today, were that the impasse in the parleys was yet to be addressed following the latest breakdown in talks.

One of the released hostages, Ms. Lavinia Padarath, took the stand that she could forgive those who held her captive since May 19, but the military authorities indicated their growing frustration at Mr. Speight's tactics of shifting his stance continually.

With both the military regime and Mr. Speight reluctant to disclose the full details, the available official indication was that a key snag pertained to the manner in which a new President could be selected and the likely candidate for that post. Those released by

Mr. Speight today included the daughter of the former President, Ratu Kamisese Mara, who relinquished his post after Commo-



The Fijian Minister Ms. Lavinia Padarath, who was released on Sunday. — AP

dore V. Frank Bainimarama proclaimed martial law on May 29.

One of the aspects of discussions pertains to Cmdr. Bainimarama's proposal that the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), a high-power body of traditional native Fijian leaders, be convened within three months from the date of release of all the political hostages.

THE HINDU

26 JUN 2000

Military tried to kill Speight: Fiji coup leaders

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
SUVA, JUNE 12

Fiji coup plotters accused the military of trying to assassinate their leader George Speight on Monday when warning shots were fired at a convoy of vehicles carrying Speight which refused to stop at an Army checkpoint. The coup leader was uninjured in the shooting, which an Army spokesman described as a "grave misjudgment on the part of the soldiers" manning the checkpoint. Speight's car was hit by at least two rounds of M-16 fire while another car took multiple hits, witnesses said.

"This was a grave misjudgment and overexcessive use of force," said Army spokesman Colonel Filipo Tarakinikini. He said the country's martial law authorities had apologized to Speight, who took the government of Fiji's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, hostage in parliament on May 19. "I have assured them (Speight's supporters) that we are in control of the situation on our side now."

But Speight's spokesman Joe Nata said the shooting was no accident. "We believe it was an assassination attempt by the military because those shots could not have been fired without orders from above," he said. As the shots rang out, witnesses inside parliament said dozens of armed men, not seen before now, suddenly emerged from hiding. Fiji TV said some people inside parliament fired down a road, but did not cause injury. Nata said Speight was a "bit shaken" but "we will not be retaliating, although there was a knee-jerk reaction from our people here."

Fiji's military has been seeking a peaceful resolution to the political crisis sparked by the takeover, and Speight has been allowed to leave the parliament complex on numerous previous occasions for talks. He left on Monday to visit former vice-President Ratu Josefa Iloilo and his own nominee for President, Ratu Jope Seniloli. Martial law commander Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama was also there at one point. A military statement said Speight then left to go to hospital.

Nata said the coup leader left to see



Supporters of coup leader George Speight look at the car in which Speight was travelling on his way back to the parliamentary compound in Suva. Fijian soldiers fired on Speight's convoy when it failed to stop at a roadblock on Monday - AFP

the head of the Methodist Church. When the convoy drove through a checkpoint "warning shots were fired into the air", Tarakinikini said, and when the vehicles still refused to stop shots were fired at the tyres of the front car, which was not carrying Speight.

The military spokesman said about 20 rounds were fired from M-16 Automatic rifles by "more than one soldier".

In a statement, the military said "soldiers had signalled for the vehicles to stop but they forced their way through". "Speight's backup vehicle was hit by a bullet and was forced to stop, resulting in the arrest of the occupants."

But Speight is back at the parliament compound and the occupants of the

second vehicle were later released. Nata, who was not at the scene, denied the convoy was ordered to stop, and said the soldiers fired deliberately as they recognised Speight.

"They were yelling saying 'he's here, he's here' and they fired shots," Nata said. "They claim it was an act of ill-discipline, a case of misjudgement. We fear it was more than that."

Nata said they wanted an explanation from the military by sunset. "We hope that good sense will prevail and they will not have trigger happy pricks out there on checkpoints because it is very very dangerous."

A policeman who witnessed the incident said half-a-dozen soldiers opened fire with M-16s. Letting off around 60 rounds. "Bullets were flying everywhere," the policeman said. Two rounds hit the wall of the vice-President's residency.

The military has declared martial law in the Pacific nation following the coup attempt by Speight, who is seeking power for ethnic Fijians who make up 51 per cent of the 800,000-strong population.

Deal struck in Fiji

SUVA, JUNE 23. The gunmen holding 31 political hostages in Fiji and the country's military rulers struck a deal today that could end the captives' 36-day ordeal soon, negotiators said.

At the end of six straight days of talks, Mr. Jo Brown, a Government negotiator, announced today, "We have now reached an agreement." The military commander, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, and the rebel leader, Mr. George Speight, planned to sign the accord tomorrow.

Mr. Metuisela Mua, one of Mr. Speight's advisors, said the hostages could be released any time after the signing of the accord. The final wording of the accord was still being hammered out and details of it were not released.

The deal would end the standoff at parliament. But it could also leave Fiji open to widespread criticism and even economic sanctions, by other countries, because the accord is expected to scrap some of Fiji's democratic traditions, reduce the rights of its ethnic Indian minority, grant an amnesty to the gunmen, who captured the hostages and immobilised the Government, and disable the already struggling economy. The announcement of a resolution came after days of talks between Mr. Speight, the Military Commander, Commodore Frank

Bainimarama and their lawyers. "I'm feeling optimistic, as always," the rebel leader told reporters as he left for a new day of talks today. Mr. Speight had not emerged from the talks when the announcement was made.

He had initially demanded that Indians in Fiji be denied political power, but the former Insurance salesman later conceded he would accept Indians in a future Government.

Asked if the accord was definitive, military spokesman, Col. Filipo Tarakinikini said "yes." Mrs. Vinay Singh, the wife of Fiji's Attorney General who is one of the hostages, said she expected the hostages to be released tomorrow.

The local media today reported that Mr. Chaudhry looked "haggard and dejected" as he took a brief walk in the besieged Parliament.

India refuses comment

A New Delhi report said the Indian Government refused to comment on the agreement, stating that it would first examine the "contours of the settlement." A spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs said "our priority is the release of the hostages and restoration of democratic Government in Fiji." — Reuters/AFP/UNI

Picture on Page 14

THE HINDU

2 JUN 2000

Fiji's military pledges to restore Constitution

SUVA, JUNE 15. Fiji's military has pledged today to restore the country's multi-racial Constitution in a setback to the coup leader Mr. George Speight's attempt to ensure that top political posts are reserved for indigenous Fijians. The announcement by the military, which revoked the Constitution after declaring martial law last month, came just hours before a top-level Commonwealth delegation arrived to press for a timetable for the restoration of democracy.

Colonel ^{HD-}Filipo Tarakinikini, military spokesman, said the country was determined to meet its international obligations under the Commonwealth's Harare Declaration on Governance which requires just and honest Government.

Col. Tarakinikini said they aimed to convince the delegation that the martial law Government was aiming to achieve a just and fair Government under the Harare Declaration. "We are committed to it and we will ensure we will get to it. We also want to put to the Commonwealth Action Group that Fiji as a country is genuinely trying to fulfil its international obligations and not just paying lip-service to it."

'No talks with Speight'

Meanwhile, the delegation of Commonwealth Ministers upon arrival here today urged the resto-



Fijian Home Minister, Mr. Jioji Uluinakauvadra, a hostage of coup leader Mr. George Speight, coming out of a clinic in Suva on Thursday.

— Photo: Reuters

ration of democracy in Fiji. The Ministers from Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Botswana will not hold talks with Mr. Speight. They plan to meet the

military, the church, tribal and community leaders on Friday.

"Our job is not to come here to Fiji and try to negotiate the release of the hostages," the Australian Foreign Minister, Mr. Alexander Downer, told a news conference.

Home Minister released

Fiji's Home Affairs Minister, Mr. Jioji Uluinakauvadra, was released by the country's coup plotters today after he fell seriously ill, medical sources said. State-run Fiji Broadcasting Commission also reported that one of the 31 politicians being held by Mr. Speight and his gunmen was released, but provided no further details.

Agreement in Solomon Islands

HONIARA, JUNE 15. Easing tensions in the strife-torn Solomon Islands, rebels who seized the Capital last week, agreed today to let police take back control of law and order.

The agreement came after the Prime Minister Mr. Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, held last week at gunpoint by the rebels, resigned yesterday and unveiled a plan to negotiate a permanent ceasefire between warring islanders.

It is hoped a deal will be reached within the next 14 days, paving way for Parliament to select a new Prime Minister. — AP

16 JUN 2000

Speight, Army reach deal on hostages

FROM MARIE MCINERNEY

Suva, June 23 (Reuters): Fiji rebels and military leaders reached an agreement today to end the South Pacific nation's five-week political crisis, paving the way for the release of Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and 30 other political hostages.

"We have now reached an agreement," Joe Brown, private secretary to former President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, told reporters in the capital Suva.

"The journey that started on the 19th of May will be completed tomorrow," said Brown, adding that the agreement would be signed at 11 am local time tomorrow.

Details of the agreement remained unknown and Brown made no comment on the fate of the hostages. Rebel leader George Speight and his gunmen have held Chaudhry, Fiji's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister, and the 30 others for 36 days inside Suva's parliamentary complex after storming the building to overthrow the government in the name of indigenous Fijians.

Speight has said all along that he would release the hostages once an accord, which includes an amnesty for himself and his sup-

porters, was signed. "We would like to see the hostages released as soon as possible," rebel spokesman Joe Nata told Reuters today.

"But there are process and a programme that needs to be put in place. The hostages will all need reconditioning and so will the other people in here — we have all been locked up," he said.

A military spokesman said he expected the hostages to be freed tomorrow after the accord signing. "Yes, but you know that they will have to go through medical boards and things like that for physicians to have a look, to do the examinations," said Colonel Metusela Mue. He said the medical examinations would be held inside the parliamentary complex.

Chaudhry haggard

Local media reported today that Chaudhry looked "haggard and dejected" as he took a brief walk in the besieged parliament.

"Chaudhry... shuffled along with his head bowed and shoulders stooped," The *Fiji Times* newspaper reported. "He was not the same man who only two months ago strode purposefully along the same corridors on government business."

Speight has repeatedly

banned foreign media from access to the hostages, granting only rare opportunities for local media.

The accord announcement came after days of talks between Speight, military commander Commodore Frank Bainimarama and their lawyers.

"I'm feeling optimistic, as always," Speight told reporters as he left for a new day of talks today. He had not emerged from the talks when the announcement was made.

Speight had initially demanded that Indians in Fiji be denied political power, but the former insurance salesman later conceded he would accept Indians in a future government.

Indians make up 44 per cent of the 800,000 population and dominate the economy of this South Pacific nation.

The predominantly indigenous Fijian military, which took control of the country on May 29 to quell growing violence by Speight supporters, wants to hold on to power for another three months to maintain law and order.

It has said it would then create an interim government to prepare for fresh elections within two years. Speight has said he wanted a civilian government appointed as soon as possible.

THE TELEGRAPH

24 JUN 2000

Fiji military to give assurance on return to democracy

Wellington, June 16

FJI'S MILITARY rulers are expected to assure a visiting British Commonwealth delegation during talks today that they are committed to returning the country to Parliamentary democracy, news reports said.

The talks come as Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and 30 members of his Government remain locked up a month after armed rebels stormed Parliament and took them hostage.

The leader of the Commonwealth delegation, Malaysia's Tan Sri Muta Hitam, said on arrival in Suva on Thursday that they wanted to persuade the military, who were governing under martial law, to restore democracy as soon as possible.

The delegation, which includes Roy Blackbeard of Botswana and the Foreign Ministers of Australia and New Zealand, was meeting armed forces Chief Commodore Frank Bainimarama, tribal chiefs, church and community leaders to outline the position of the Commonwealth, which had begun the process of suspending

"We want to prove that Fiji as a country is genuinely trying to fulfil its international obligations and not just paying lip service," he said.

Tarakinikini said the military was prepared to restore the 1997 multi-racial Constitution it abrogated on the demand of rebel leader George Speight, but he qualified this by adding "with some review, of course".

Speight, who raided Parliament with six gunmen on May 19, says he acted to protect the rights of indigenous Fijians who, he claims, were being eroded by the Government led by Chaudhry, an ethnic Indian.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Phil Goff said the delegation would not meet Speight, who dubbed as a terrorist, a thug and a crook. (DPA)

Talks with C'wealth team

Fiji's membership in protest against the takeover of the elected Government.

Military spokesman Lt. Col. Filipo Tarakinikini told newsmen in Suva that the armed forces were committed to restoring the "just and honest" Government required by Commonwealth rules, radio New Zealand reported on Friday.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 JUN 2000

Fiji hostage crisis lingers

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SUVA, June 22. — Negotiations to end a stand off between Fiji's military rulers and gunmen holding the deposed government hostage in parliament building, crawled through a fifth day today without a deal to end the crisis. Both sides, however, said a deal is close.

Military chiefs, who have been running the country after declaring martial law on 29 May, were optimistic of wrapping up an agreement with coup leader George Speight on an interim civilian government, adds AFP.

But spokesman Col Filippo Tarakinikini said differences over the composition of the new administration had prevented a deal. "We have come to an agreement on some (members of the interim government) but until we get the total agreement, these preliminary agreements are not certain," he said.

There are also differences over how long a term the interim government should serve, he said.

The dillydallying has left the families of the 31 hostages, including former Prime Minister Mr Mahendra Chaudhry, waiting nervously.

"I just want to take my mother home," said Mr Ben Padarath, whose mother Lavenia, a minister, is among the hostages. "Every night we go to bed thinking maybe tomorrow," he told ABC radio.

Speight's men stormed parliament on 19 May. They claim to have acted of behalf of indigenous Fijians whose rights they say were trampled upon by an arrogant administration. Speight demands that Fijians of Indian descent be stripped of political power.

The army has already given in to most of his demands. Chaudhry has been removed and the constitution suspended. Speight and a core group of supporters have been offered amnesty.

Fiji's economy is in a tailspin. Military roadblocks, burnt-out buildings and a refugee camp full of badgered Indians signal growing problems. USA, Australia and New Zealand have said they will impose sanctions on Fiji if it doesn't return to democracy.

Millions of dollars are being lost in tourism and the garment industry is cut off from its principle market by the refusal by Australian unions to handle cargo to and from Fiji.

THE STATESMAN

23 JUN 2000

Waiting for a road map

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9/11/08

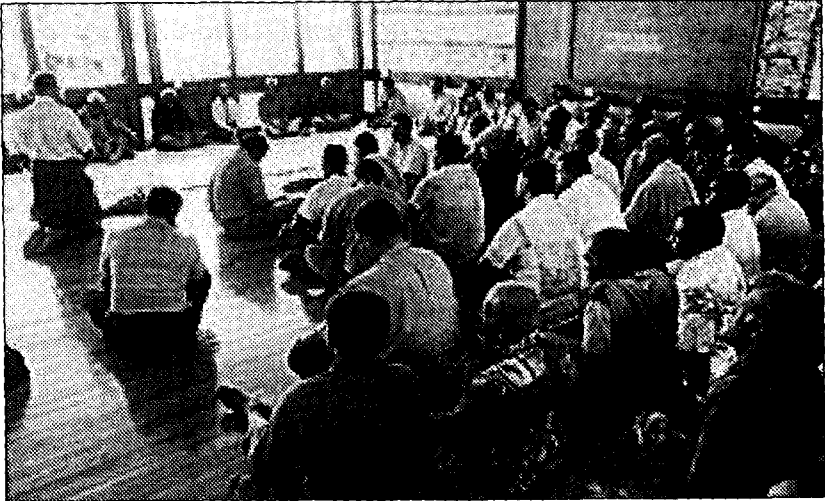
THE WHIRLWIND visit to Fiji by a high power Commonwealth delegation on June 16 has led to the sketching of a "rough road map" towards restoration of democracy in the tiny South Pacific state. Reflecting these sentiments, the Australian Foreign Minister, Mr. Alexander Downer, indicated in Suva, capital of the country, that the Commonwealth would like to "wait" until the road map was delineated properly by the Fijian authorities before the multilateral organisation or its key members with a vital stake in Fiji, such as Canberra, fashioned new ways of addressing the political puzzle.

Asked whether the road map as now proposed by the military ruler, Commodore Bainimarama, in his conversations with the Commonwealth delegation would mark a return to multiracial politics with a fair deal for the ethnic Indian and other minorities, Mr. Downer said the present ruler appeared "committed to the general principles" of a multicultural polity. The "proof of the pudding is in the eating," Mr. Downer emphasised, though.

The leader of the Commonwealth delegation, Mr. Musa Hitam of Malaysia, and the other key members including the New Zealand Foreign Minister, Mr. Phil Goff, too expressed a general satisfaction with the indications dropped by Cmdr. Bainimarama. These included the setting in motion of sequential steps with an intensified effort by the Fijian authorities to secure the release of the political hostages — the now-deposed but duly-elected Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, and 30 of his associates of indigenous population. The ordeal of the captives, being held by Mr. George Speight — a self-styled 'civil coup' leader and chief hostage-taker — began on May 19.

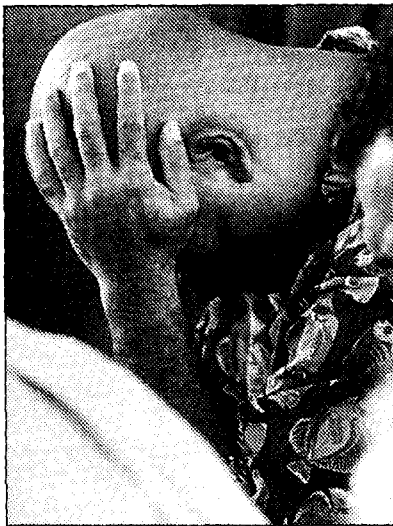
Now, Mr. Speight has consistently sought to portray his "putsch" as a Fijian version of the old Cromwellian action against British parliamentarians of a bygone era. But neither Cmdr. Bainimarama, who staged a counter-coup on May 29 to try and subdue Mr. Speight, nor indeed the international community has seen his action as anything other than a terrorist outrage. Yet, there is a key difference between the views of Cmdr. Bainimarama and those of the world community, as represented by the Commonwealth in particular. As Fiji's chief power-that-be, Cmdr. Bainimarama is willing to play a game of patience with Mr. Speight, despite the citing of the hostage-release as a prime and immediate objective of the imposition of martial law on May 29. The Commonwealth leaders made it clear, on the other hand, that the international community could not wait indefinitely for the conclusion of the war of attrition between Mr. Speight and Cmdr. Bainimarama.

It is against this background that the



The Fijian coup leader, Mr. George Speight, with members of the Great Council of Chiefs in Suva...

The Commonwealth will like to wait until a road map — towards restoration of democracy — is properly delineated by Fijian authorities, says
P. S. SURYANARAYANA.



...His misadventure has caused him a big headache.

Commonwealth team has now tried to accommodate Cmdr. Bainimarama to a considerable extent. The pace of securing the release of the hostages has been left entirely to him Cmdr. Bainimarama, at least for the time being. The reason cited is the complexity of the crisis itself. Fiji is seen by the outside world as a multiracial society where the majority natives and the minority ethnic Indians are not evenly poised in their access to the instruments of power except in a demographic sense. In recognition, the Commonwealth team has clarified that there is no question of external inter-

vention, even of the diplomatic kind, to force Mr. Speight to let his hostages go free and accept the clemency and immunity from prosecution that Cmdr. Bainimarama repeatedly offered in recent weeks.

Not surprisingly, the Commonwealth team took enormous care on June 16 to avoid even the semblance of engaging in a dialogue with Mr. Speight for any purpose.

Two significant pointers came into focus as a result of the Commonwealth's latest mission to Suva. The earlier visit by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Mr. Don McKinnon, and a U.N. Special Representative, Mr. Sergio de Melo, cannot be compared with the latest one, as they sought to defuse a situation that had not been complicated, as seen from an international perspective, by the military's subsequent intervention. Given this, the first pointer, from the Commonwealth team but not explicitly spelt out at the end of its visit to Suva, is that there is no great urgency to press for a complete suspension of Fiji from this multilateral forum at the present moment. The option is, of course, kept open by the caveat that there is room still for considering substantive sanctions, as distinct from the current suspension of Fiji from the Commonwealth's decision-making councils decided upon recently. The reckoner will be the pace at which Mr. Bainimarama delineates the "road map" to democracy.

The second and no less significant pointer is that the Commonwealth leaders, Mr. Downer in particular, have conveyed to the military rulers that the timeframe of two years, as spelt out by Cmdr. Bainimarama in his latest conversations with them, is being deemed too long a wait. The point made by the Commonwealth is that the patience of those who voted Mr. Chaudhry to power at the head of a coalition in a democratic poll last year cannot be taken for granted.

SPEIGHT HARDENS STAND AGAIN

51-9
22/6
High price tag likely
for Fiji peace
9/18/68

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SUVA, June 21. — Although a peaceful end to the standoff in Fiji appears likely, the island nation could still pay a high price for letting an armed gang topple the democratically-elected government.

Military rulers and the gunmen holding members of the former government hostage entered their fourth day of negotiations today on forming an interim regime that would guide the country to elections within two years. Both sides insist that talks are going well and that the 31 hostages — including former Prime Minister Mr Mahendra Chaudhry — will probably be released within days.

But the decision to sack Mr Chaudhry and Fiji's 1997 constitution is seen as a triumph of racism and violence.

"The power of the gun must not be allowed to dictate policy," said an editorial yesterday in *The Fiji Times* newspaper. Yet, reinstating Mr Chaudhry is not even under discussion. Instead, powerbrokers are haggling over how to implement the demands of George Speight — who led the 19 May armed takeover of parliament amid widespread looting and street violence.

Speight's demand that political power be wrested from Fiji's Indian minority was watered down yesterday, when he said he'd be willing to allow a few Indians in the interim government.

But today, Speight appeared to back away from that statement. "Our very strong view is that no non-Fijian should be included in lawmaking or the promulgation of a new constitution," he said.

The military took control of Fiji and imposed martial law 10 days after Speight's raid. Military commander, Commodore Frank Bainimarama, has announced a plan to restore civilian rule by appointing an interim government to oversee a recasting of the constitution and hold elections within two years.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

22 JUN 2000

New statute to cover 'all Fijians'

1876 By P. S. Suryanarayana HD-1

SUVA, JUNE 17. Fiji's interim military Government today pledged to uphold its moral obligation of taking into consideration the interests of all the people in this country while continuing to sympathise with the cause of the indigenous Fijians so as to "make sure that their aspirations (and) fears are covered in a (proposed) new Constitution".

Offering this explicit undertaking in the wake of the interim Government's "very positive" interaction with a team of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group here, Col. Tarakinikini, chief spokesman of the military regime, said, "We cannot surrender the fate of the country to Mr. Speight (the civil coup leader) and his group." Mr. Speight described the Commonwealth team's visit as a waste of time and gave no indication about his plans regarding the Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Pal Chaudhry, and his associates, held captive at the Parliament House since May 19.

As a sop to Mr. Speight and his group, the military government's spokesman said: "They have made their case. They have stood up for the indigenous

Fijians' aspirations. We sympathise with that." At the same time, Col. Tarakinikini made it clear that the military regime's first priority still was the "immediate release of all hostages and the recovery of all weapons" deployed by Mr. Speight's squad.

Acknowledging that "we do not have a properly mandated government under democratic process" at this juncture and noting that "we took the government by force out of necessity," Col. Tarakinikini said, "We must now look for the next best moral authority, that is, the Great Council of Chiefs" — the moral-political conscience-keeper of the majority native population. The idea was to "hand back the executive authority of government to the GCC and to a (new) president" to be selected. To accomplish this task, the military regime would institute a new civil administration and convene the GCC.

Concurrent with this planned process, which might take at least three months from the date the hostages are released, "a constitution review team" would be formed. The proposed review panel might encompass all shades of political opinion in the country, including those of the ethnic Indians and those being articulated by Mr. Speight, it was said.

JUN 17 1987

Speight backs off from demand for PM's post

Wellington, June 19

HD-12
FIJI REBEL leader George Speight, who has been holding the government hostage at gunpoint for over a month, said today that he was ready to make concessions, prompting hopes of an early end to the crisis, news reports said.

In negotiations on a settlement of the hostage crisis with the military, now ruling under martial law, Speight backed off earlier demands that he be appointed Prime Minister in an interim civilian government.

"I can't be the leader of the coup and then impose myself on any position in government or the running of the country ... It's wrong to do that," he said in comments reported by radio New Zealand.

It was the biggest concession coup leader Speight has made since storming Parliament with six gunmen on May 19 and taking

Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry and 30 members of his Government hostage.

Speight says he acted on behalf of indigenous Fijians, claiming their rights were being eroded by the year-old multi-racial government led by Chaudhry, the country's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister.

Despite his concession, he appeared to be keeping his options open, saying the country's new President or tribal chiefs, who have huge influence in the Pacific country, could ask him to participate in the new government.

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," he said on radio New Zealand. "I am not in government and I certainly don't propose that I take part in any way.

"I will consider my work done when the interim Fijian government composed of skilled Fijian men and women dedicated to the cause and to the advancement and

improvement of Fijian issues in our country take up their places and run the country."

Following talks with armed forces head Commodore Frank Bainimarama, Speight said they had agreed on tribal chief Ratu Josefa Iloilo taking over as President to oversee the establishment of an interim civilian government to restore normalcy to the country.

Iloilo was Vice-President when Speight, supported by dissident soldiers with weapons stolen from the military armoury, launched his coup on May 19.

"We have agreement that he is the best person to take up the position of President and from then let's agree on an interim Fijian civilian government and then if decrees can be signed, the accords promulgated, the hostages can be released, the arms can be returned and I can go back to my village, I suppose," he said. (DPA)

20 JUN 2000

Fiji's military hopes to end crisis soon

SUVA: Fiji's military government on Sunday raised hopes for an imminent end to the country's four-week hostage crisis, saying the only obstacle remaining was the demand by nationalist rebels to be part of a new civilian administration.

Military spokesman Lieutenant-Colonel Filipo Tarakinikini said the armed forces hoped to be able to achieve a resolution "within the next few days" to the crisis which has toppled Fiji's elected government and crippled its economy.

"We are much more optimistic now that we are coming towards a resolution," Col Tarakinikini told

local television after another day of talks in the capital Suva. "The point of contention continues to remain the amount of participation that coup leader George Speight and his group want in the interim administration," he said.

The military has said Speight's team would be represented on a new body to change the country's multi-racial constitution, which led to the election of Chaudhry's government last year.

However, it has insisted that the rebel leader is not welcome in the interim administration, due to take over in about three months,

although some of his nominees will be considered.

Meanwhile, trade bans imposed by unions in Australia and New Zealand in protest against the rebel coup have begun to hit Fiji, and tourists are steering clear of the country's resorts. The ministry of labour says more than 4,000 jobs have been lost in the past four weeks. Speight has accused the international media of unfair reporting, according to a news report on Sunday. He said members of the international media were not reporting his side of the story accurately and that he would

no longer defend his actions to them, Radio New Zealand reported. He said he would continue to talk only to Fijian journalists who understand his position, Radio New Zealand said.

Earlier on Sunday, New Zealand foreign affairs minister Phil Goff said it may be virtually impossible to find a peaceful solution to the political crisis in Fiji because of the high level of racism in the country.

The delegation, which included representatives from Malaysia, Botswana, Australia and New Zealand, talked to a cross section of Fiji society. (Reuters)

19 JUN 2 1976