

## International

# Army revokes constitution

Speight can walk free: Fiji military chief

SUVA, May 30 : Army commander Frank Bainimarama revoked Fiji's multi-racial constitution today a day after declaring martial law, but coup leaders refused to recognise his authority, citing splits in the military, reports AFP.

Bainimarama said the 1997 constitution allowing all races equal access to power under which captive Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, an ethnic Indian, won a landslide victory a year ago had been "wholly removed."

The Fiji Military Force (FMF) chief assumed executive authority Monday in a bid to restore order after coup leader George Speight seized parliament on May 19 in the name of indigenous Fijians and took Chaudhry and most of his government hostage.

In a series of decrees, Bainimarama ordered the South Pacific nation's existing laws stay in place, and that parts of the constitution relating to the operation of government be reinstated.

On Monday he clamped down on the coup plotters holding Chaudhry and others at gunpoint in parliament, saying that under martial law, movement in and out of the building would be restricted to essential supplies.

But the reality outside the complex Tuesday was markedly different -- there were no soldiers or police within two kilometres and Speight's supporters were coming and going more freely than ever.

Bus loads of supporters also

entered unchallenged.

Road blocks were set up around the capital, but mostly in non-sensitive areas, suggesting soldiers were attempting to avoid clashes with the rebel gunmen.

Suva's inner city was sealed off during the afternoon after the military said a group of men left parliament and began rampaging through a nearby residential area.

"They are beating up people. Go," a soldier manning a checkpoint told AFP reporters.

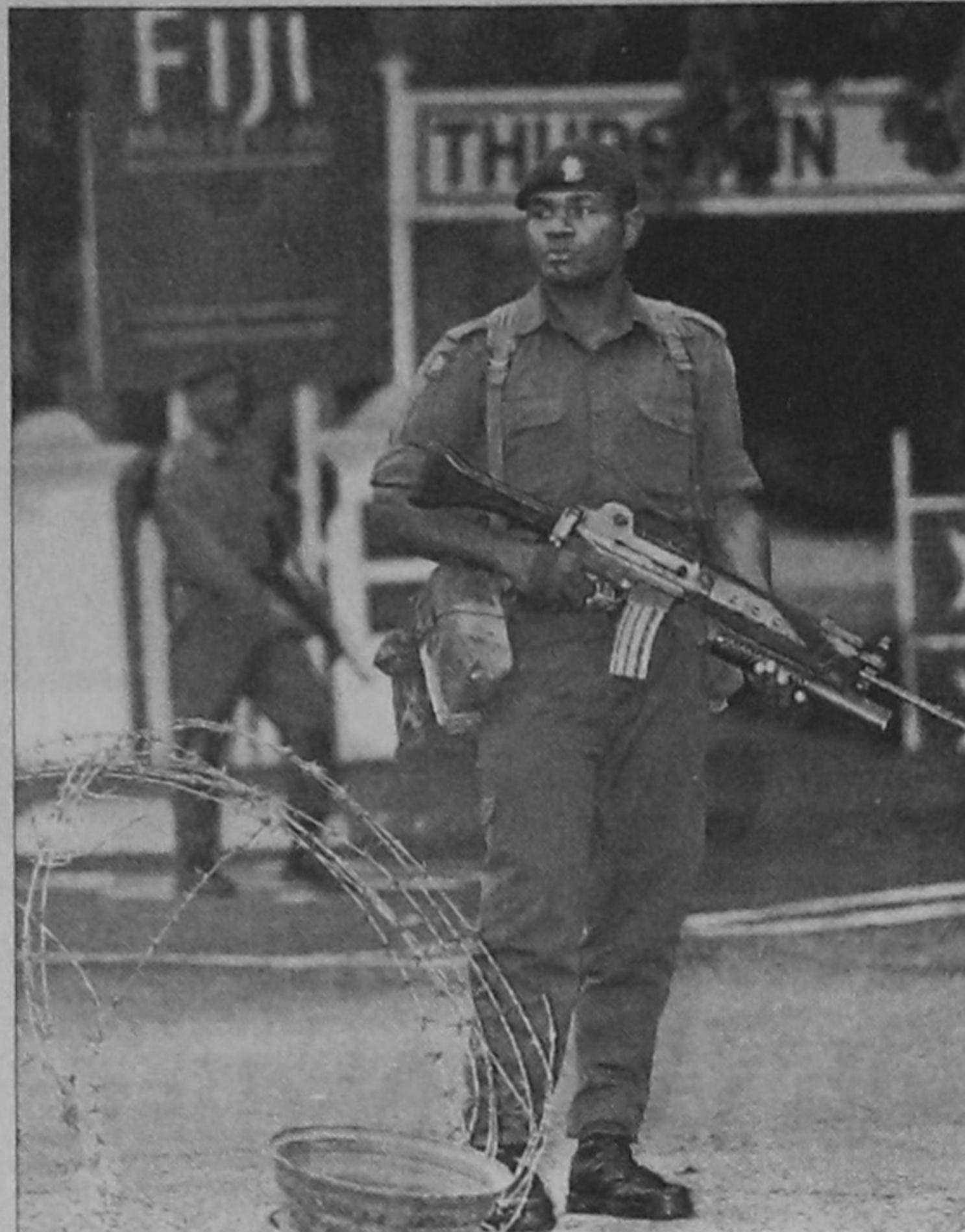
Speight, who has wide support for his anti-Indian stance from indigenous Fijians who resent ethnic Indian business success, Tuesday firmly rejected the new military government and refused to release his hostages.

He said the regime had no authority to govern because it did not have the united backing of the armed forces.

Meanwhile, Fiji coup leader George Speight will be granted an amnesty after the country's political crisis is over, military chief Commodore Frank Bainimarama, who declared martial law on Monday, said Tuesday.

Speight and a gang of armed men have been holding former prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry and some 30 other legislators hostage in parliament since May 19.

Bainimarama described Speight's actions as a "criminal act," but he said that he would nevertheless honour an offer of amnesty made to Speight by the country's president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.



Troops loyal to Fijian military commander Frank Bainimarama enforce a checkpoint on the approach to Parliament House in Suva yesterday where coup leader George Speight continues to hold former prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry and 30 others hostage. -- AFP photo

## Japan's leader plunges in poll, faces censure

TOKYO, May 30 : Japan's struggling Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori crashed in the popularity polls and faced a resignation demand today, just weeks before a general election, reports AFP.

Approval for Mori's gaffe-prone, two-month-old administration slumped to 19 percent in May from 42 percent in April, according to the poll by the respected Asahi Shimbun newspaper.

It was the lowest support rate for any government in more than a decade, said the newspaper.

Meanwhile the opposition urged a censure in the upper house of parliament, demanding the prime minister quit for having described Japan as a divided nation centred on the emperor.

Although the motion was expected to be defeated at a vote Wednesday in the upper House

of Councillors, it amounted to a symbolic slap in the face for the 62-year-old Mori.

"Without waiting for a dissolution and general election, Mori's cabinet must immediately resign," said a copy of the parliamentary motion received by AFP.

Mori has agreed with his ruling alliance partners to call a general election for June 25.

But he has weathered a storm of criticism for declaring at a pro-Shinto meeting on May 15 that "Japan is God's country, centred on the emperor," a statement reminiscent of Japan's wartime past.

Shinto became the national religion in the 19th century and elevated the emperor to the status of a living god in whose name Japan pursued military aggression across Asia.

His popularity had already been battered by a series of scandals since he took power

## Elian likely to return home, resume life quietly

HAVANA, May 30 : If the most famous child in Cuba returns to his homeland, he is likely to slip in quietly without the crowds, the cheers and the media frenzy of his time in the United States, reports AP.

Very few people are expected to get a glimpse of Elian Gonzalez, the first-grader lionized here as the "boy hero," the "symbolic child," the beloved "elfin prince." A national campaign that plastered the 6-year-old's face across billboards, placards and T-shirts will probably fade overnight.

After his time in Maryland and Washington, DC with his father, stepmother, half brother, Cuban teachers and classmates, Elian probably now would go directly to his former life in his hometown of Cardenas, 100-km east of Havana.

Family friends say Elian is catching up in his studies after five months of interrupted classes while staying with relatives in Miami. He recently learned to ride a bike and went swimming without fear, despite the boating accident that killed his mother and 100 others and left him adrift on an inner tube.

Plans had called for Elian to live discreetly during his first

three months back in a specially prepared boarding school in Havana. Elian's Cuban family and first-grade classmates were to live there, too. But government sources now say privately that the boarding school plan, designed to help Elian readapt to life in Cuba, is being readopted.

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Months ago, President Fidel Castro promised there would be no street celebrations, no parades. Foreign correspondents have been warned they will be lucky to see Elian's plane if his father wins permission from US courts to bring his son home.

Plans had called for Elian to live discreetly during his first

reinforcements of troops and marines to secure the villages.

The attackers mostly came from the island of Ternate and we're investigating all the facts and the possibility of the alleged involvement of the Lakas Jihadih," Tamaela was quoted as saying.

He was referring to some 2,000 radical Muslim militant "jihad" warriors who have sailed from Java to the Maluku Islands in the past month to reinforce Muslim militants in a year of sectarian violence there.

Biso said the attackers used the same pattern as they did on May 25, when they swooped down on the sleeping villagers from the sea.

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The camp covers the mainly Muslim towns of Buntig, Lumutan and Binidayan in the southern island of Mindanao.

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