

International

Fiji army to name civilian govt this week

Speight won't be included

SUVA, Fiji, June 13: Fiji's military ruler said today he would name a civilian government within days, and it would not include coup leader George Speight or his supporters, reports AP.

Commodore Frank Bainimarama would announce the makeup of Fiji's new administration by the end of the week, said military spokesman Capt Eroni Volavola, confirming local radio reports.

Hours after the announcement, a bomb threat was made by a telephone call to the Telecom Fiji head office in the capital Suva. Dozens of workers were evacuated from the building and bomb squad experts sent in.

Military and firemen cordoned off the immediate area around the six-story concrete building.

It was not immediately clear who issued the threat, said a military officer overseeing the

evacuation. He declined to give his name.

The bomb scare came as traders, most of them ethnic Indians, began reopening shops in the city. Many stores were looted and burned by a rampaging mob shortly after Speight staged a coup May 19.

Negotiations between Bainimarama and Speight — who is holding 31 hostages including deposed prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry — have been deadlocked for more than a week over the makeup of Fiji's next administration.

Although Bainimarama's martial law regime has taken steps that meet a number of Speight's demands — including throwing out Fiji's constitution and offering an amnesty to key supporters — Speight has said he will hold onto his hostages until the military agrees to a plan including him as a candidate to lead the new government.

Those leases are due to be renewed, and Chaudhry's refusal to accept demands for higher rental rates enraged many Fijians. Sugar exports make up around 40 per cent of Fiji's gross domestic product of

around 3 billion Fiji dollars (US \$1.44 billion) annually.

Volavola said Bainimarama was picking a Cabinet made up of people "totally outside both the military and the people inside parliament," where the hostages are being held.

"That's just something George will have to live with," Volavola told The Associated Press.

Bainimarama told state-run Fiji Radio that the people of Fiji wanted the military government to negotiate the release of the hostages and then to "set in place a civilian government to steer the country toward democracy."

"We all know that this will not be an easy task and one that may not satisfy the international community," he said.

Bainimarama has said he wants the civilian government to oversee changes to the constitution and, eventually, new elections.

Floods in India: 20 killed

GUWAHATI, India, June 13: Floods triggered by heavy monsoon rains have killed at least 20 people and marooned more than 10,000 villagers in India's remote northeast, government officials said today, reports AP.

The deaths occurred as several houses collapsed in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh states over the past three days, the officials said.

The floodwaters also threatened to submerge the 430-square-kilometre Kaziranga National Park, which boasts the world's largest population of the one-horned rhino.

The reserve is in a remote part of Assam state, which records some of the heaviest rainfall on earth.

Authorities sounded an alert in the two states as the overflowing Brahmaputra river submerged large tracts of land, killing more than 4,000 cattle. The Statesman newspaper reported Tuesday.

At least 5,000 people were marooned in sprawling Majuli island in eastern Assam state. Another 5,000 people awaited evacuation from their flooded villages in Arunachal Pradesh state, the officials said.

3 killed in Pak train collision

KARACHI, June 13: At least three people were killed and several injured today when two passenger trains collided in southern Pakistan's Sindh province, police and ambulance sources said, reports AFP.

They said the Peshawar-bound Awam Express ploughed into the Shah Lalif Express near Jhangipur, 130 kilometres north of Karachi.

Initial reports said the deceased included the driver and a guard of the Awam Express.

Railway officials, police and volunteers from the private Edhi Welfare Trust have rushed to the area and rescue work was underway, officials said.

Solomon Islands PM to resign in two days

HONIARA, June 13: Facing threats from rebels who have captured the capital, the embattled prime minister of the Solomon Islands said today that he will resign in two days, a move he warned could cause more fighting and the break up of the South Pacific nation, reports AP.

Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview that he had no safe choice but to stand down Thursday, regardless of the outcome of a parliamentary vote of no confidence on his leadership set for that day.

The vote was the result of a clash with rebels who seized Ulufa'alu at gun-point on Monday and demanded that he resign. A few days later, they released him and allowed him to stay in office until the parliament decided his future.

Ulufa'alu said it was just an attempt to give the change of leadership the appearance of legitimacy.

Ulufa'alu called the entire process "a sheer mockery of democracy" because he was still resigning under duress, fearing that the rebels would harm his family and Cabinet ministers if he stayed in office.

Corruption case Suharto's son questioned

JAKARTA, June 13: State prosecutors extended a corruption investigation against ex-President Suharto by questioning his youngest son Monday, reports AP.

Accompanied by his father's legal team, Hutoimo "Tommy" Mandala Putra, declined to comment when he arrived at the Attorney General's office.

"Please ask the prosecutors later," he told reporters.

Tommy is the third Suharto's six superrich children to be questioned over his father's case.

Eldest daughter Siti Hardiyati Rukmana and middle son Bambang Trihatmodjo have been quizzed by prosecutors in the past.

Investigators submit report on Love Bug virus

MANILA, June 13: Philippine investigators submitted a report today on the "LOVEYOU" computer virus to their lawyers, who will determine what laws were violated and who should be charged, officials said, reports AP.

"They are now evaluating it... their recommendations may be made later this week," said Elifren Meneses, head of the National Bureau of Investigation's anti-fraud and computer crimes division.

NBI agents seized computer

diskettes, telephones and other computer accessories in a raid of the apartment, but found no computer or modem.

Officials at the Philippines' AMA Computer College, where de Guzman studied, said they rejected his thesis proposal, which involved a software programme that steals passwords of Internet users, a feature of the Love Bug virus.

AMA Assistant Vice President Johnny Ramos said de Guzman did not enroll for the current term.

Classified data missing from US nuclear lab

The Los Alamos lab officially informed the Energy Department about the incident on June 1, according to the statement.

"If the inquiry reveals that individuals did not fulfill their responsibilities with respect to this matter, they will face certain and appropriate disciplinary actions," Browne said.

Authorities are searching computers, safes, and storage areas where highly classified information, such as on the development of nuclear weapons, is kept. Access to the areas is very limited, and everyone with access is being questioned, federal authorities said in a statement.

The lab is under particular scrutiny since it was where a Taiwanese-born American nuclear physicist, accused of spying for China, worked.

In December, a US federal grand jury indicted the scientist, Wen Ho Lee, 59, on charges stemming from his alleged copying of computer files on the research, design, construction and testing of US nuclear weapons.

The indictment stopped short of accusing Lee of actually handing secrets over to China or any other nation, and instead focused on security lapses. Lee has denied the accusations.

Federal authorities have made little comment on the disappearance and have not made a connection between this incident and the case against Lee.

The laboratory is operated by the University of California for the US Department of Energy. It is considered the birthplace of the atomic bomb.



Syrian workers carrying pictures of late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and his son and likely successor Bashar march towards Syrian Intelligence headquarters in Beirut yesterday, while in Damascus Assad's official state funeral took place. Assad, who ruled his country with an iron fist for 30 years, died on June 10 at the age of 69. — AFP photo

Political scenario in Syria

Son of Rifaat Al Assad supports Bashar's leadership

DUBAI, June 13: A son of Rifaat al-Assad, the exiled brother of late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad who challenged the nomination of Assad's son Bashar as next leader, said today he supported his cousin's position, reports Reuters.

Mudar al-Assad, one of Rifaat's 16 children, did not openly criticise his father's challenge to Bashar's new role, but told Qatar's al-Jazeera satellite television from Syria that Bashar had the support and confidence of the Syrian people.

"Bashar is our hope.... He is the new generation and we need a new path that will include all political, social and economic sectors."

"There will be freedom in Syria, there will be democracy in Syria and the citizen will take up his role in building the country and choosing his representatives," Rifaat added.

Somar al-Assad, another of Rifaat's sons, told Reuters that

his brother was expressing the view that family came first and noted that Mudar lived in Syria and supported the authorities.

"He nation is more important than the family. Rifaat al-Assad has 16 children and those of them who live in Syria cannot speak so freely," Somar said from his father's exile home in Marbella, Spain.

Rifaat, 62, has lived in exile since 1986, after his "defence brigades" mounted a failed challenge to his brother's authority. But some of his children chose to stay in Syria.

Rifaat was stripped of the title of vice-president two years ago, and a newspaper said on Monday the Syrian authorities had issued a warrant for his arrest.

President Assad died aged 69 after ruling Syria for 30 years. Bashar was swiftly nominated by the ruling Baath Party for the post of president.

'No alternative to US anti-missile plan'

MOSCOW, June 13: US Defense Secretary William Cohen said today that a Russian plan to develop a joint anti-missile shield could not offer Washington the protection it needs against nuclear-threshold "rogue states," reports AFP.

Despite being urged by Russian President Vladimir Putin during talks at the Kremlin to accept Moscow's proposal for a joint system, Cohen told him that the US did not see it as an alternative to its own planned missile umbrella.

Putin for his part urged two countries to "consider together the problems which are of concern to Russia and the United States," including a joint anti-missile defense system, cited by Russian news agencies.

Washington says only its national missile defense system (NMD) will protect the United States from the threat posed by Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, unfriendly states developing ballistic missile and nuclear warhead technology.

Russia opposes NMD, saying it will hurt Russia's deterrence and spark a new arms race Moscow can ill afford.

The missile shield will breach the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), the cornerstone of arms control agreements for almost 30 years, unless Russia agrees changes to allow a limited US system.

Putin has vowed to tear up all arms control accords with the United States if Washington unilaterally decides to deploy NMD.

Cohen, who also held meetings with his Russian counterpart Igor Sergeyev, described the half-an-hour talks with Putin as a "very candid exchange of views."

Japanese PM kicks off campaign for June 25 elections

TOKYO, June 13: Japan's unpopular prime minister launched his fight to stay in office on Tuesday with the start of the campaign for June 25 elections, battling new poll numbers showing public support for his government at historical lows, reports AP.

Mori started his campaign with a stop in central Tokyo.

The three coalition parties are firmly united and are working toward Japan's recovery in the 21st century," he bellowed through a microphone Tuesday morning.

The 12-day campaign comes as the prime minister's public support has nose-dived in the aftermath of a series of gaffes.

Candidates started making



Yuko Obuchi (C), second daughter of late Japanese prime minister Keizo Obuchi, greets her supporters upon arrival at a campaign rally for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Shibukawa, 120 km north of Tokyo yesterday. The official campaign for June 25 general elections began yesterday with the support rate for the Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's government slumping in the latest poll. — AFP photo

BRIEFLY

Clinton meets Wahid:

President Bill Clinton met with Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid during a short visit to discuss the country's troubles. AP reports from Washington.

White House spokesman Mike Hammer said Clinton went over Wahid's economic and military reform programmes, as well as Indonesia's political situation during a brief meeting Monday. "The president encouraged him to strengthen Indonesia's democracy," Hammer said, adding that they "no doubt" discussed the East Timor situation. Clinton's national security adviser, Sandy Berger, was also present at the half-hour meeting. Wahid is the United States primarily for medical treatment.

Quake rattles islands in Greece:

A strong earthquake rattled islands in southern Greece on Tuesday, but there were no reports of injuries or damage. AP reports from Athens.

The Athens Geodynamic Institute said the undersea quake had a preliminary magnitude of 5.7 and occurred at 4.43 am (0743 BST), about 450 kilometres southeast of Athens near the island of Karpathos.