

International

Tribal rebels warn Delhi to respond to peace overtures or face insurgency

OKING, India, June 19: A separatist tribal guerrilla group in northeast India urged the central government today to respond to peace overtures or face a resumption of a 50-year-old insurgency in the region, reports AFP.

The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), fighting for an independent tribal homeland in Nagaland state, threatened to return to arms unless New Delhi formalised a ceasefire agreement and lifted a ban outlawing the organisation.

"The lifting of the ban on the NSCN apart, we want the proposed ceasefire agreement to be extended to all tribal Naga in-

habited areas of the northeast, so that our people can move freely without being harassed by Indian soldiers," NSCN leader Kitovi Zimomi told AFP.

"Otherwise, we shall be forced to review our decision for a ceasefire," Zimomi said in an interview at the group's mobile headquarters, known as Oking, in eastern Nagaland.

The NSCN announced a unilateral ceasefire in April, but has yet to sign an agreement with the government formalising a temporary halt to the insurgency that has claimed an estimated 50,000 lives since independence in 1947.

"We want New Delhi to adopt

a sincere approach in solving the Naga political problem," Zimomi said.

"This is the first chance for the Indian government this new millennium to hammer out a peaceful settlement to the 52-year-old insurgency movement in Nagaland."

"If the government fails to avail itself of the peace offer, people will not hesitate to take their own decisions and things might take a turn for the worse."

Zimomi said the NSCN had launched a consultation process with the Naga people to seek a consensus on how peace talks should be handled.

"The opinion poll will be

conducted by the tribal councils and we shall abide by the verdict," Zimomi said.

"In 1951, there was a plebiscite and more than 99 per cent of the Nagas opted for sovereignty. So the question of compromising on the issue of sovereignty does not arise," he added.

If the government adopts a "sincere approach" to peace talks, Zimomi said other separatist groups in the northeast region might follow the NSCN lead in declaring a ceasefire.

"So this is a very important phase for the government to hold talks sincerely with us and pave the way for other groups to see reason."

ROK students clash with police at US bombing range

MAEYANGRI, South Korea, June 19: About 100 South Korean students clashed with riot police here today as US military planes resumed firing exercises at a disputed bombing range, reports AFP.

The US military has suspended practice bombing operations at the Koon-Ni range, about 80 km south of Seoul, as a goodwill gesture for last week's landmark Korean summit.

Disturbances erupted as soon as the first strafing exercise was seen to start.

Students kicked police as they tried to break in through the main entrance to the range. About 1,000 riot police held them at bay, witnesses said.

Blasts kill 2 in Delhi

NEW DELHI, June 19: The double bomb explosion in one of the capital's busiest market places near the ancient Red Fort was the fourth attack this year in the heart of New Delhi, raising questions about the level of security and the identities of the bombers, reports AP.

An 8-year-old girl and a man were killed and 11 people were injured Sunday night when the explosions went off within five minutes of each other, ripping through the bus terminal and bazaar opposite the 17th century tourist landmark, the Red Fort.

No one claimed responsibility for the blasts. In the past, police have blamed explosions in the capital on Islamic militants fighting a separatist war in Kashmir since 1989.

However, the Press Trust of India news agency quoted a se-

nior New Delhi police official as saying Monday the types of explosive used were similar to a Jan. 3 bomb in a train at the nearby old Delhi railway station that injured 20 people. At that time, police said they suspected a group based in western Uttar Pradesh state, and the unidentified official told PTI the same group was suspected in Sunday's attack.

"We are surprised at this sudden appearance of serial blasts," New Delhi's north district police chief, Mukund Upadhye, was quoted as telling the Times of India on Monday.

But it may have been an effort to send out some kind of warning signal with Independence Day coming up.

In most years, bomb explosions increase as August 15, Independence Day, approaches. Buses and trains are com-

mon targets for bombs, which are common in the capital. In addition to separatist groups in many states, criminal gangs and private militias use bombs.

The Sunday blasts were the fourth attack this year — and the 12th in three years — specifically in the old "Walled City" area of the capital, inhabited mostly by Muslims. The walls were built by Mughal emperors, who ruled from Delhi from the 14th-19th centuries.

A quick getaway is also possible from the area, as it is within 2 km of two railway stations, and the Kashmir Gate interstate bus terminal is nearby.

The first explosion Sunday went off at a bus information counter covered with empty mango crates dumped by the shopkeepers and handcart fruit sellers who crowd the area

2nd hostage crisis hits Fiji as soldiers seize police station

Speight softens anti-Indian stance

SUVA, June 19: Three soldiers seized a Suva police station today, fuelling reports of a split in the Fiji military as talks resumed to end the country's month-old coup crisis, reports AFP.

At least six shots were fired and one policeman was wounded when the soldiers raided the Nabua police station where an ethnic Indian soldier, Private Henry Ali, was being held on murder charges, witnesses said.

Coup plotter George Speight took Fiji's first ethnic Indian prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry, his cabinet and MPs hostage in parliament on May 19 in the name of indigenous Fijians.

The brief police station raid had no apparent direct connection to events at parliament, five kilometres away, but highlighted divisions within the military which has imposed martial law on Fiji.

The military, in a statement, said three armed men stormed the police station and took several people hostage.

The statement gave no reasons for the assault, but security sources told AFP it was related to the March 22 death of Private Anare Waqavonovono, 20, who was shot in the back while serving with United Nations peacekeepers in South Lebanon.

Private Henry Ali, a Fiji-Indian with a Samoan mother, who has been accused of the

murder is being held in the police station cells.

The military statement said one of the three men who stormed the police station was Lieutenant Papu Waqavonovono, father of the dead private.

Lieutenant Colonel Meli Saubulinayau, chief staff officer on duty, negotiated with the gunmen and the matter was subsequently resolved," the statement said.

Alli, who was not hurt because the attackers could not find his cell, was later taken with the three gunmen to the Fiji military headquarters at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks.

Waqavonovono is of Lau descent, the same group of islands as President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara who was forced to step down for martial law after the coup.

Security sources have told AFP that the Waqavonovono killing, and other incidents involving soldiers serving overseas, have caused severe strain within the military.

Martial law commander Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama has attempted to resolve the situation but failed to do so, according to the sources, leaving many soldiers unhappy about his leadership.

Martial law spokesman Colonel Filipo Tarakinikini has denied a split in the military, saying it was representative of all indigenous villages and districts in Fiji.

Meanwhile, the leader of Fiji's attempted coup declared for the first time Monday he would accept ethnic Indians in the Pacific nation's new government.

After talks to end the month-old crisis resumed between George Speight and the military, Speight appeared to soften his insistence that political power be reserved for indigenous islanders.

He also suggested the drama was nearing its end.

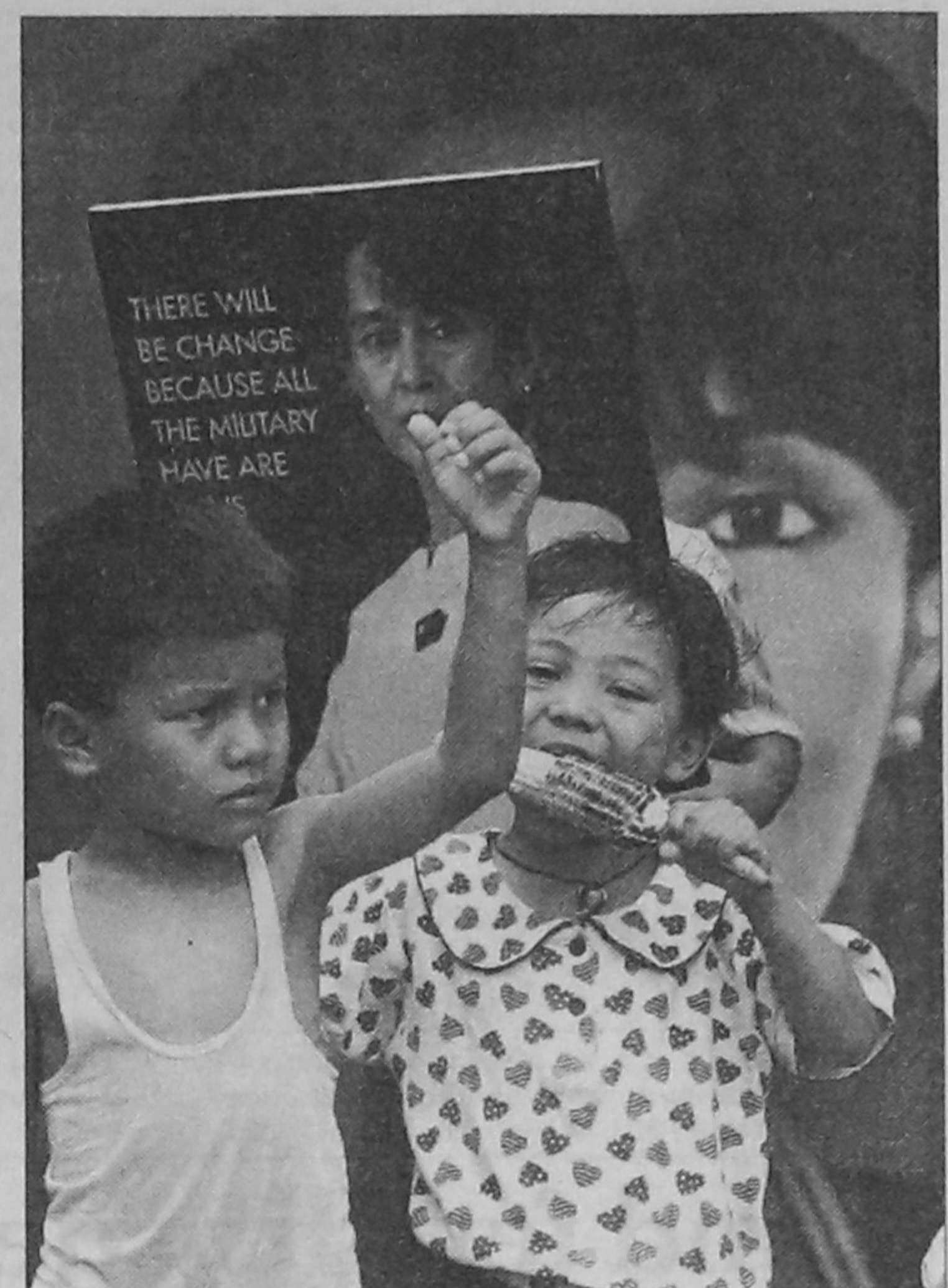
After repeated unrealised predictions and changes of denials in the last month, Speight's announcements have come to be treated with some scepticism.

The former businessman and a small group of gunmen stormed parliament on May 19 and took Fiji's first ethnic Indian prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry and 29 government members hostage in the name of ethnic Fijians.

Chaudhry was elected on a landslide a year ago to run the country for a five-year term. Ethnic Indians make up 41 per cent of the country's population.

Speight's coup attempt has found some support in Fiji's indigenous community, where there is widespread resentment at comparative ethnic Indian business success.

On Monday Speight told a press conference he would accept ethnic Indians in a new government named by a new president.



A young Burmese activist shouts slogans as another snacks on corn in front of a portrait of Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration to mark her 55th birthday yesterday. Scores of Burmese women exiles and their children, who celebrate her birthday as "Women of Burma Day", took part in the protest, calling on the Myanmar military junta to reconvene parliament. — AFP photo

Huge built-in advantage for ruling party in polls

Zimbabwe polls begin Saturday with tension running high

HARARE, June 19: Zimbabwe is ruled by President Robert Mugabe, who has virtually sole power as executive president under a constitution agreed with the British before independence in 1980 and amended multiple times since then, reports AFP.

In the 150-seat parliament, to be elected this weekend, Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has a huge built-in advantage because the president appoints 30 of the MPs.

This means that ZANU-PF need win only 46 of the 120 contested seats to retain its majority in the unicameral house, while the opposition must win 76 to gain power.

ZANU-PF had 147 seats in the last parliament, with three small parties holding one each.

The speaker must be a current or former MP -- in the last parliament the speaker was brought in from outside the house.

Mugabe rules with two vice presidents, both drawn from parliament, but who retain voting rights in the House.

There is no prime minister. In the outgoing government, three of 21 ministers are women.

ZANU-PF is fielding about 16 women candidates at the weekend, and the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), seven.

If the combined opposition win 51 seats in the elections,

they could block further amendments to the constitution, which must be passed by a two-thirds majority.

The more than five million voters among Zimbabwe's 12.5 million people must be at least 18. Election is a first-past-the-post system -- there are no second rounds, and no form of proportional representation.

Meanwhile, more than five million Zimbabweans go to the polls at the weekend to elect a new parliament after months of political violence which has left at least 30 people dead and hundreds injured.

Most of the victims have been supporters of the opposition, led by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

The MDC, set up in September last year, is headed by Morgan Tsvangirai, the secretary general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU).

The party's supporters include urban intellectuals, impoverished black Zimbabweans tired of years of economic hardship, and prosperous white farmers who have seen around 1,500 of their farms invaded by squatters since February.

Those occupations began after President Robert Mugabe, who has held power since independence 20 years ago, suffered a humiliating defeat in a referendum which would have allowed him to seize white-owned land without having to compensate the owners.



Coco Lee walks away with her trophy for the Best Newcomer at Singapore's first Radio Music Awards Sunday night. She beat other artists including Latin star Jennifer Lopez and also took Class 95's (a local radio station) Love Song of the Year Award. Lee said the award was a recognition for aspiring Asian stars. — AFP photo

Ethiopia pulls out forces from western Eritrean town

ADDIS ABABA, June 19: Ethiopia said its forces had withdrawn from the western Eritrean town of Tesseney this morning. It was a political decision, a government spokeswoman Salome Tadesse said, reports AFP.

Tesseney lies about 110 km north of the two countries' common border and close to the Sudanese frontier.

Salome said the Ethiopian forces had pulled back to "positions where they can defend themselves and liberated Ethiopian territories on the western front."

She did not specify the new location of the forces that had twice occupied Tesseney since the conflict resumed on May 12.

No talk of ransom for 21 hostages in Philippines

MANILA, June 19: There has been no talk of paying ransom for the release of 21 mostly-foreign hostages held by the Muslim extremist Abu Sayyaf group in the southern Philippines, a government official said today, reports AFP.

"We are not moving toward any payment of ransom. We're not talking about ransom. The official policy of the government remains: no ransom will be paid," Press Secretary Ricardo Puno told reporters.

Asked about reports the kidnappers were seeking a million dollars for each hostage, Puno said "there have been no specific demands made by any party purporting to speak for the Abu Sayyaf and there is certainly no demand on the table."

"We continue to negotiate but we do not talk about ransom," he said.

Vultures circle over Mori

TOKYO, June 19: The vultures are already circling over Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori as he heads into June 25 elections with a crumbling support rate, analysts say, reports AFP.

Top members of his faction-ridden Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the monolith that has held power with just one 10-month break since 1955, are ready to attack in the event of a debacle.

Reformists and traditionalists are pitted against each other in the fight, experts say.

'Tebhaga' movement hero Hemanta Ghosal dead

CALCUTTA, June 19: Freedom fighter and leading Communist leader Hemanta Ghosal died in a government hospital here yesterday after protracted illness. He was 84, reports PTI.

Ghosal is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter, CPI-M party sources said.

West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, Left Front Chairman Saliha Das Gupta and CPI-M state secretary Anil Biswas have condoled Ghosal's death.

A two-time member of the West Bengal Assembly in 1950s, Ghosal played a leading role in the 1946 'Tebhaga' movement, an armed peasant struggle.



Syrian heir apparent Bashar al-Assad (R) raises his fist after being proclaimed "leader of the party and of the people" by the ruling Baath Party at a plenary session of the party congress as delegates applaud in Damascus Sunday. Assad takes over the title from his father Hafez al-Assad who died on June 10. — AFP photo

Annan urges Barak to respect Lebanon-Israel border line

'UN must eliminate Israeli encroachments'

CAIRO, June 19: UN chief Kofi Annan said he had spoken today to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak about the need to respect the international border now that Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon has been certified, reports AFP.

"This morning I spoke to the Israeli Prime Minister about the need for everybody to respect the line" marking the withdrawal traced by the United Nations, Annan said after meeting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

"We do not want to see any violation of the line," Annan told reporters before leaving for Beirut.

"If they do cross the line, it's a violation and the peacekeepers will have to report to the Security Council and to myself and we will try to get the Israelis to pull back," the UN secretary-general said.

Annan announced on Friday that UN troops in Lebanon had confirmed the May 24 withdrawal of all Israeli forces "in full compliance with Security Council Resolution 425."

Lebanon rejected the announcement, saying that Lebanese experts who accom-

panied the UN peacekeepers to the border had observed "flagrant trespassing" by Israeli troops.

Meanwhile, Lebanon demanded today that UN troops "eliminate" immediately continuing Israeli encroachments on Lebanese territory, in a statement issued by Prime Minister Salim Hoss.

"The international force must immediately take in hand the task of eliminating the Israeli encroachments on the international border," Hoss said.

Former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao yesterday said there was no crisis in the Congress and the party would not die, reports PTI.

The Congress has a self-correcting mechanism of its own, Rao, who was here to participate in a number of functions, told reporters.

He said once the party was banned but it emerged again as a powerful party. "Congress is in the minds and hearts of people," the senior party leader said.

No crisis in Congress, says Narasimha Rao

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Mass prison breakout mounts tension in Solomon Islands

SYDNEY, June 18: Solomon Islands police were combing the capital Honiara for almost 100 escaped prisoners after a mass breakout from the central prison on Sunday, Australian officials said today, reports AFP.

The entire prison population of 90 to 100 inmates either escaped or were released by overworked prison staff, heightening tensions in the capital where an uneasy truce was still holding Monday after the coup two weeks ago.

The escapees include about 20 members of the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) who were on remand for charges related to the ethnic violence that led up to the coup by the rival

Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) militia, the officials said.

The MEF, and their paramilitary police allies, seized the capital including police headquarters and the prison, and took prime minister Bart Ulufalau hostage two weeks ago, demanding his resignation. He was released a few days later, but resigned last Wednesday.

Australian officials believe the IFM prisoners released a number of other inmates, and the prison guards, unable to control the situation, freed the remainder who included a number.

The breakout came after a spate of lawlessness including car thefts and robberies attributed to unruly elements.

More cops needed to prevent violence in Bihar

PATNA, India, June 19: The police chief of India's lawless Bihar state said today he would have to double the size of his 87,000-strong force to prevent the kind of caste-motivated massacre that claimed 34 lives at the weekend.

K.A. Jacob told AFP that his department was woefully understaffed.

"The national average of policemen per population is 135 for every 100,000 citizens. In Bihar the number is 85-86."

"I need to more than double the existing police strength which is currently about 87,000

to even think of putting up an effective resistance," he said.

Thirty-four lower caste Hindus were massacred Friday by a banned private army of feudal landlords in a remote village called Miapur.

According to locals, the attack was revenge for the June 10 murder of 12 rich landlords by around 150 armed men, believed to be landless farmers, in Bihar's Nawada district.

The eastern state has for three decades been engaged in a seemingly endless cycle of tit-for-tat caste murders.

William: A king-in-waiting

LONDON, June 19: Caught between two worlds, son of one of the most ill-matched royal couples for centuries and fated to be king, Prince William celebrates his 18th birthday Wednesday under an intense spotlight, reports AFP.

As he gains adulthood, he is arguably the world's most eligible bachelor, heir to the most glamorous job around and a billion-pound fortune.

His life is an open book: birth to first faltering footsteps to the school exams he is now taking and, most poignantly of all, the funeral of his mother three years ago.

Tall and blond, he has the looks of his cover-girl mother, Princess Diana, and the dutifulness of father Prince Charles.

In a rare written interview with Britain's Press Association for his 18th, William was like any other teenager.

He likes dancing, but does not go clubbing often. He prefers action films, team sports, a wide range of books but no particular author, and "being with my friends."

He is to study history of art at university, but plans to take a year out after leaving Eton, Britain's top public school, where he is doing his final exams.

He fended off questions about girlfriends and a possible future career in the services, and admitted feeling "uncomfortable" with public attention.

"We really know very little about him," noted the Daily Telegraph's royal correspondent Robert Hardman.

"But what we do know is that he is a remarkably self-assured young man who given all that he's been through, has really emerged better than anyone could have expected."

William Arthur Philip Louis Windsor was born on June 21, 1982 at St Mary's Hospital, west London. A year later he was on his first royal tour as Charles and Diana vowed Australia and New Zealand.

Brother Harry was born on September 15, 1984.

As they grew up however, in the background was their parents' increasingly strained marriage.

Pakistan wants cash, not wheat as refund for F-16s

ISLAMABAD, June 19: Debt-ridden Pakistan has told the United States it wants hard cash rather than wheat as a refund of some 80 million dollars for a cancelled fighter jet deal, reports AFP.

Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz said Washington had promised 30 million dollars worth of wheat this year and another 50 million next year as the outstanding refund for a 140-million-dollar deal to buy 28 F-16 fighters.

The country does not need to buy the 30-million (dollars) worth of commodity from the U.S., Aziz was quoted as saying

in the News.

"We do not want wheat but need money. Negotiations between the Pakistani and the US officials in this connection are underway."

Islamabad signed the deal in 1989 and paid for the jets but the delivery was cancelled as part of a 1990 US arms embargo over Pakistan's nuclear programme.

The United States agreed to refund the money in late 1998 when Pakistan's economy nosedived amid international sanctions over its nuclear tests following similar detonations by arch rival India in May that year.



United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (L) enters a meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Anwar Musa Sunday in Cairo. Annan is on a regional tour, which has already taken him to Tehran. — AFP photo