

## International

# Fiji coup leader signs deal with military to end crisis

SUVA, July 9: Fiji's coup leader George Speight today signed a deal with military authorities aimed at ending the country's political crisis which began eight weeks ago with the storming of parliament, reports AFP.

Witnesses said the deal was struck between Speight -- a failed businessman whose hostages include elected prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry -- and martial law commander Voreqe Bainimarama.

Shortly before leaving for the signing of the accord, Speight told reporters: "We're excited, we're ecstatic, it's a great day for Fiji."

The final date for the release of 27 hostages was still to be fixed, but Speight has said they could be freed by Thursday when the highly influential Great Council of Chiefs was to meet to select Fiji's new president and vice president.

Witnesses said Bainimarama was accompanied by his deputy Filippo Tarakinakina. Details of the accord were not released.

"Bainimarama looked humiliated and beaten while Speight along with dozens of supporters were smiling broadly," one witness told AFP.

Earlier, speaking before entering talks with the army, George Speight told reporters: "We hope to sign an accord today."

He added the deal to end the 52-day-old crisis would include the dismissal of the interim government set up last week by the military.

On May 19, Speight and spe-

cial forces soldier Ilisoni Ligairi seized parliament in the name of ethnic Fijians demanding political power be reserved for indigenous Pacific islanders.

Chaudhry, Fiji's first ethnic Indian leader, has been deposed and the 1997 constitution allowing non-ethnic Fijians into government was ripped up.



An armed sympathiser of coup leader George Speight stands guard near Korovou police station, about 35km north of the capital Suva, yesterday. Armed men are holding 16 policemen, six soldiers and three government officials hostage in an attempt to force the military government to accede to the rebels' demands. — AFP photo

## Palestinian woman shot dead by Israeli troops

GAZA, July 9: A Palestinian woman was shot dead when Israeli troops opened fire in the Gaza strip overnight Saturday, while her husband and their children were among those injured, a Palestinian hospital source said, reports AFP.

Attala Moamar, 35, died after being shot in the head when Israeli soldiers fired on the car she was travelling in on the road between the towns of Gaza and Rafah, the source said.

Her husband Sarif and their two children, aged six months and six years, were said to have been shot and injured as was the driver of another car.

One of the injured children was said to be in serious condition while the other driver was shot in the leg.

An Israeli military source confirmed that there had been an exchange of shots, with Israeli troops opening fire after being shot at themselves.

The soldiers patrolling near the Kfar Darom settlement were fired on from a vehicle. They returned fire, apparently hitting another vehicle travelling in the opposite direction, the spokesman said.

He expressed regret for the innocent victims but said it was difficult to avoid civilian casualties in such circumstances.

The Israeli army will open an enquiry into the incident, he added.

## Car bomb explodes in N Ireland

STEWARTSTOWN, Northern Ireland, July 9: A car bomb exploded outside a police station in Northern Ireland early today, causing no injuries, according to local police, reports AFP.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) said that the bomb went off in Stewartstown, County Tyrone, some 30 km north of Portadown, where an annual Protestant march was due to take place later today.

One person was treated for shock at the scene of the blast and police were determining the extent of the damage to the police station which was closed at the time, an RUC spokesman said.

Police were alerted to an abandoned vehicle outside the station by a member of the public late Saturday and began evacuating nearby homes, rousing residents from their beds.

At 00.55 am, (0555 BST) the car bomb exploded.

Police said there had been no warning of the bombing and no paramilitary group had claimed responsibility.

# Pak military sees biggest threat from Kulsoom

KARACHI, July 9: The Pakistani military regime last week launched its first major crackdown on opposition since the October coup, and in the process turned a former housewife into a political juggernaut, analysts say, reports AFP.

Hundreds of former ruling party politicians and activists were arrested in a pre-dawn sweep Friday all because Kulsoom Nawaz, the wife of ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif, had planned to lead a motorcade to raise funds for drought victims.

Kulsoom was herself detained for several hours Saturday after she sped through police roadblocks around her house and led police on a bizarre car chase through the streets of Lahore.

She had earlier lashed out at the military authorities and called on Pakistanis to rise up for democracy.

"It is a reign of terror unleashed on the people of Punjab. I appeal to all patriotic people to come forward and play their role for restoration of democracy," Kulsoom said.

The authorities have defended the move as necessary to uphold an eight-month-old law banning political rallies. They say Kulsoom was planning to turn the procession into yet another attack on the regime.

But observers say the move

has backfired and propelled Kulsoom into the forefront of Pakistani politics. They say the woman who once said "my job is to look after the kitchen" is now the only opponent the military really fears.

Human rights activist B.M. Kutty said Kulsoom was now the most prominent figure in Sharif's former ruling party, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML).

"Her other party leaders have now gone into the background. She has gained what she could not have achieved in the rally," he said.

Pakistani journalist Mo-

## News Analysis

hammad Riaz said Kulsoom deserved credit for taking her fight to the authorities despite strong pressure from within the PML to avoid confrontation at all costs.

"Some of her statements have been more aggressive than her husband. Kulsoom must be thankful to the police for making her programme successful," he said.

Kulsoom has taken up the challenge of politics since Sharif was toppled in October and subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment for hijacking and terrorism.

But she has no official position with the PML and her role

had been limited to protesting her husband's innocence and denouncing the government of General Pervez Musharraf.

That is until Friday, when she was suddenly at the centre of Pakistan's latest political storm.

"In the post-October scenario she has emerged as the only leader who is challenging the military ruler," said Tauseef Ahmed, a professor at a college in the southern city of Karachi.

"Her party leaders will now come under more pressure from the workers to do something to launch the movement for the restoration of democracy."

Among her more memorable attacks on the regime, she has demanded Musharraf be tried for treason, called for an investigation of last year's bloody border conflict with India in Kashmir, and denounced her husband's trial as a farce.

But in a recent interview with AFP, she said she did not want a career in politics and would be happy to go back to domestic duties if her husband is released.

"I was never involved in politics. My job is to look after the kitchen. But since all our male members are in jail, I have to enter into this arena," she said.

I am here while my husband is in jail. Once he is released I will resume my duties as a housewife.

## Philippine troops capture MILF headquarters

MANILA, July 9: Philippine troops captured Sunday the headquarters of the country's largest Muslim rebel group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, President Joseph Estrada announced, reports AP.

The seizure of major structures at the sprawling headquarters, Camp Abubakar, in southern Maguindanao province is a major blow for the MILF, which has been fighting for an independent Islamic nation in the southern Philippines.

Critics, however, have said that military attacks on the MILF will not solve the basic problems, such as poverty and prejudice, that triggered the Muslim rebellion in the predominantly Christian nation.

At least 210 government soldiers have been killed in skirmishes and major battles since January. The number of deaths acknowledged by the MILF is considerably smaller.

# China again opposes US missile shield for Taiwan

BEIJING, July 9: China has again voiced strong opposition to the United States over including Taiwan under a proposed missile defence shield, state media quoted Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi today as saying, reports Reuters.

China has again voiced its firm opposition to arms sales to Taiwan by any country, including providing Taiwan with TMD-related assistance and a "TMD shield," Sun said, referring to the US-proposed Theatre Missile Defence scheme for Asia.

Beijing considers Taiwan part of its sovereign territory and has threatened to use military force if the island seeks independence.

The remarks followed the end of the first arms control talks in more than a year between the United States and China and the failed US test of a proposed National Missile De-

fence (NMD) system that has united China and Russia in opposition.

In comments carried by major newspapers, Sun said China expressed "serious concerns" to the United States about the missile defence schemes during the talks, which ended on Saturday in Beijing.

A senior US arms negotiator said on Saturday that the United States has not ruled out Taiwan's protection under an Asian missile defence umbrella.

"We don't rule out the possibility that some time in the future Taiwan may have TMD capabilities," senior US arms control adviser John Holm told reporters.

Holm spoke hours after a "hit-to-kill" weapon fired from Kwajalein Atoll in the central Pacific failed to destroy a target warhead in space in a \$100 million test of the NMD system.

Sun said the talks between Holm and Chinese Vice Minis-

ter of Foreign Affairs Wang Guangya were frank and comprehensive, but differences remained.

"Both sides agreed that the two countries have a number of common stances and interests in the areas of arms control and anti-proliferation, and at the same time some disagreement," he said, but gave no details.

China, which has found common cause with Russia in opposition to the NMD, has said it may have to add to its strategic missile arsenal if the US project goes ahead.

Holm said the two sides also failed to bridge gaps over alleged Chinese sales of missile technology to Pakistan.

The New York Times said last week China had stepped up shipment of special steels, guidance systems and technical expertise to Pakistan. China and Pakistan have publicly denied the accusations.

## US-N Korea missile talks begin today

KUALA LUMPUR, July 9: Amid decreasing tensions, the United States and North Korea were scheduled to resume talks Monday on Pyongyang's missile programme, one of the chief reasons for the Pentagon's missile defence project, reports AP.

A team led by Robert Einhorn, US assistant secretary of state for non-proliferation, will meet with North Korean officials for three days, US officials said.

Jang Chang Chon, head of US affairs at the North Korean foreign ministry, will lead his delegation. The meetings were to be held at the US Embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

State Department officials have refused to give details of the agenda for the talks or what a likely outcome could be. But in the last round held in Pyongyang in March 1999, North Korea rejected a US demand for a halt to its missile development and exports.

Pyongyang said it will never change its missile policy under pressure from the United States — a position maintained during

three previous rounds of talks in New York and Berlin.

It has also reportedly demanded 1 billion dollars annually for three years to compensate for foreign currency losses from curbing missile exports.

Washington has warned North Korean officials that further missile tests and exports would hamper their hope of improving ties with the United States.

But the Kuala Lumpur round, the fifth since 1996, comes as tensions between the two countries are considerably lower following the first ever inter-Korea summit. North Korea's leader Kim Jong Il met South Korean President Kim Dae-jung on June 13-15 and agreed to work toward reconciliation.

The two Koreas fought a three-year war in the early 1950s. The conflict ended in 1953 without a peace treaty. Their border is sealed and heavily armed. Several thousand US troops are stationed on the South Korean side.

## Fierce fighting erupts in Afghanistan

KABUL, July 9: Fierce fighting erupted north of Kabul this morning as the ruling Taliban militia deployed heavy tanks and jets to break entrenched opposition positions around Bagram airbase, reports AFP.

Besimallah Khan, an opposition front-line commander, said the Taliban launched a dawn attack from around the so-called New Road and Old Road targeting the same airbase where heavy fighting broke out nine days ago.

He said fighters loyal to anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud had so far rebuffed the new offensive, which was backed by artillery and aerial bombardment.

The opposition said there had been civilian casualties but details were sketchy.

"Fierce fighting is going on. The frontlines have not changed and our men have put up good resistance," Khan told AFP through a satellite telephone.

He said several Taliban tanks and other military vehicles had been destroyed in the initial hours of the offensive 50 km north of here.

Taliban spokesmen were not immediately available to comment.

Both sides accused each other of unleashing attacks in the Bagram area on July 1 despite repeated warnings from the United Nations not to renew hostilities for the sake of regional security and the Afghan people.

The front had been quiet since July 2, neither side having made headway in the first major clash of the summer fighting season.

But Yunus Ganuni, a senior aide to Massoud, said the Taliban fundamentalist militia had regrouped and were again launching consecutive waves of attacks against opposition bunkers.

"So far, their two attacks have been repulsed. They are bracing for the third one," he said.

Ganuni accused Taliban jets and artillery of indiscriminately hitting civilian targets in the nearby villages.

"There are civilian casualties. But since the fighting is intense we do not have the exact figure," he said by telephone from near the front.

In Kabul, residents saw several military ambulances and jeeps rushing Taliban casualties to the bombed-out city's main military hospital.



## Israeli Interior Minister quits over summit

JERUSALEM, July 9: Israeli Interior Minister Nathan Sharansky today's resignation at today's weekly cabinet meeting, public radio reported, says AFP.

The leader of the Russian-speaking B'Aliya party had warned Wednesday he would quit in protest over the Israeli-Palestinian summit due to start Tuesday in Camp David, near Washington, under the auspices of US President Bill Clinton.

The radio reported that in his two-page resignation letter Sharansky said Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak "is not the prime minister of all the Israelis."

He also criticised him for "dividing the people" and of going to the summit without having fixed real "red lines" (non-negotiable positions) towards the Palestinians.

Sharansky also repeated his call for a government of national unity.

## Eight killed in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, July 9: Eight people, including five army jawans and two foreign mercenaries, were killed in separate encounters in Jammu and Kashmir since on Friday evening, and official spokesman said here yesterday, reports PTI.

While three army jawans were killed in an encounter between militants and security forces in Balakote in Poonch district, two other jawans lost their lives in another encounter at Bhatola village of Doda district.

Two foreign mercenaries, one of whom was identified as Mohammad Naveem of Gujranwala (Pakistan), were killed in a gunfight with security forces at Amr-e-Bekah in Devar-Lolab area of frontier district of Kupwara on Friday evening, the spokesman said, adding two AK 47 rifles and some incriminating documents were seized from them.

# Jordan won't accept new Palestinian refugees

AMMAN, July 9: Prime Minister Ali Abu Ragheb said today that Jordan will refuse to take in any more Palestinian refugees in the kingdom, which already hosts 1.4 million of them, reports AFP.

Jordan's position is firm and rejects any new wave of Palestinian immigrants under any circumstances. "Abu Ragheb said in a speech broadcast on state television before a confidence vote in his government, reiterating the kingdom's well-known position."

"We have communicated this position to all concerned parties," he said in a clear reference to Palestinian and Israeli leaders who will have to address the refugee issue as part of final status talks in the United States.

Any move to accept new refugees in Jordan "will contradict their right to return" to the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel, Abu Ragheb said.

Abu Ragheb, who formed his new government on June 19, also reiterated Jordan's intention to seek "compensation for

having welcomed on its soil" some 1.4 million Palestinian refugees in two waves since Israel's creation in 1948.

The prime minister insisted Palestinian refugees were considered full citizens in Jordan, where most of them hold Jordanian nationality, but also had the right "to compensation or to return to their homeland."

"Whatever their choice it will not affect their right as Jordanian citizens," Abu Ragheb said.

The issue of Palestinian refugees will be one of the thorniest issues when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat meet Tuesday in a summit with US President Bill Clinton to thrash out a final agreement.

Jordan's 80-member chamber of deputies is expected to begin debating Abu Ragheb's policy statement ahead of a vote of confidence Monday on the new government, which includes several ministers of Palestinian origins.

Jordan is facing a seven billion dollar debt and high unemployment which affects nearly one quarter of its five million people, according to independent estimates.

Abu Ragheb said the government will focus on develop-

ing the government to pass the confidence vote easily.

Meanwhile Abu Ragheb also reiterated Jordan's determination to work "towards ending the sufferings of the Iraqi people and to lift the unfair embargo" imposed on Baghdad after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

He also gave a broadline description of the new government's push to upgrade the country's economy through a series of measures including the "development of infrastructure and reform to attract Arab and foreign investments."

Jordan is facing a seven billion dollar debt and high unemployment which affects nearly one quarter of its five million people, according to independent estimates.

Abu Ragheb said the government will focus on developing information technology at all levels, starting with primary schools where English language and computer courses will be added to the curriculum.

# Five million Americans at high risk of catching AIDS

DURBAN, South Africa, July 9: Roughly 5 million Americans have sex and drug habits that put them at a high risk of catching AIDS, according to new US figures, and experts fear an upsurge of the disease after a decade of stability, reports AP.

While AIDS infections in the United States have fallen dramatically since their peak in the 1980s, public health officials worry that complacency about the disease has caused a resurgence — especially among young gay men — that could bring AIDS roaring back.

"I'm scared by the trends we are starting to see," said Dr. Helen Gayle, AIDS chief at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Gayle presented the latest data Saturday at a briefing hosted by the American Medical Association on the eve of the 13th International Conference on AIDS.

Currently, about 40,000 Americans contract HIV each year, down from the 100,000 new infections annually during the mid-80s. The improvement is attributed largely to safer sex

habits and avoiding dirty needles.

In an attempt to see how many Americans still act recklessly, the CDC analysed findings from several large-scale surveys. Their conclusion: Between 2 per cent and 4 per cent of the adult population — 4 million to 5 million people — still put themselves at high risk.

This includes having sex with someone known to be infected with HIV, engaging in prostitution for drugs or money, having male homosexual contact, using crack cocaine or injecting drugs.

Gayle said the study did not attempt to learn whether this level of risky behavior is increasing or decreasing, although there seems to be evidence on both sides. For instance, London's use has increased substantially since the 1980s, although only about 40 per cent of unmarried people and 23 per cent of drug users report using them.

Over the last decade, infection rates among gay men have

remained stable at between 1 per cent and 4 per cent. However, said Gayle, "We have seen troubling slings over the past year that we fear could signal a resurgence of the epidemic among gay men."

Last week, the San Francisco Department of Public Health reported a sharp increase in new HIV infections between 1997 and 1999. Also, gonorrhea and other sexually spread diseases have risen recently in several cities among HIV-infected gay men.

Experts worry that complacency about getting AIDS, fueled in part by the availability of effective HIV treatments, may be behind a return to risky sexual behavior.

One of the most impressive victories over HIV in industrialized countries has been the use of AZT and other drugs to prevent the spread of the virus from infected mothers to their babies during birth. In the United States, only a few hundred babies now get the infection this way each year.

## BRIEFLY



A large kite in the form of a laughing clown is being prepared for launch during the Jakarta International Kite Festival that winds up in the Indonesian capital yesterday. Participants from all corners of the Indonesian archipelago, as well as from several foreign countries, took part in the three-day festival held at the sprawling National Monument square in Central Jakarta. — AFP photo

## China bus crash death toll 65:

Rescuers pulled 25 more bodies from the wreckage of a crashed bus in a rain-swollen river in southern China on Sunday, raising the death toll to at least 65, the official Xinhua News Agency said, AP reports from Beijing.

No survivors have been found since the passenger bus veered off a bridge late Friday in Guangxi province, said a police official in the city of Liuzhou. The accident occurred in Liuzhou on a bridge over the Liujiang River. Heavy summer rains have swollen the river, hampering rescue efforts.

## Quakes rock Sumatra island:

Four earthquakes measuring between 4.7 and 5.1 on the Richter scale have shaken the west of Indonesia's Sumatra island but caused no damage, a month after a powerful quake in the same area killed at least 120 people, Reuters reports from Jakarta.

The official Antara news agency said that the tremors, which all hit on Saturday, had various epicentres in and around Bengkulu province. Since last month's major earthquake, which measured 7.9 on the Richter scale, thousands of aftershocks have hit the area.