

Swearing-in of Fiji govt cancelled after 'civil war' warning

Rebels celebrate after bringing down another govt

SUVA, July 19 : Fiji was plunged back into turmoil today after nationalist rebels forced the swearing-in of a new government to be postponed with a warning that the country was 'veering on civil war', reports AFP.

President Josefa Iloilo was to have sworn in 20 new ministers and 12 assistant ministers including acting Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase at a ceremony at 11 a.m. (5:00 BST).

The ceremony was supposed to end the country's political crisis which erupted after years of simmering ethnic tensions between indigenous Fijians and ethnic Indians who make up 44 percent of the population.

But the president failed to show up, leaving Qarase to announce that he was 'indisposed', and that the swearing-in was being put off to an unspecified date.

The dramatic no-show followed a warning from George Speight, the leader of the rebels who overthrew the country's previous government and held it hostage in

parliament for nearly two months, that the composition of the new government was unacceptable to him and his supporters.

The new administration contained one close ally of Speight and a number of sympathisers but the rebels were largely excluded from key positions.

Speight's spokesman Joe Nata warned before the ceremony was due to take place that there would be trouble if the new government was appointed.

"If they swear in the government it will lead to civil war. It is not an empty threat," Nata told AFP shortly before the swearing in.

Speight told Fiji Broadcasting Commission (FBC) that the new government had to include "our people to champion our cause."

Speight and his supporters Wednesday moved out of Parliament and had moved to a village just outside of Suva, allowing the military to resume control of the complex.

Witnesses said several cars

were torched as Speight, a bankrupt businessman, left the complex.

Right up until 11 a.m. it appeared the administration believed the ceremony was still going ahead at Borron House, a state owned property.

As the planned new ministers gathered in a tent, minus nine of them who had not shown up, Qarase announced: "Ladies and gentlemen... regrettably His Excellency the President Ratu Josefa Iloilo is indisposed this morning. He is resting at home. So regrettably, the swearing in ceremony is deferred until further notice."

He said cabinet Thursday morning was also postponed. He gave no new swearing in time.

Iloilo, 79, suffers from Parkinson's Disease. He also has liver and heart ailments.

His deputy, Joel Seniloli, is a hardline Speight supporter. Fiji's political crisis began on May 19 when Speight and supporters seized Parliament, taking the government of ethnic Indian

Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry hostage.

The hostages were finally released last Thursday after Iloilo and Seniloli took executive power from the military with Speight advocating that all top government positions must be filled by indigenous Fijians.

Meanwhile, the nationalist rebels at the centre of Fiji's two-month-old political crisis were celebrating today after successfully blocking the formation of a new government from which they had been largely excluded.

The rebels, who overthrew the Pacific nation's elected government on May 19, forced the swearing-in of a new administration to be postponed indefinitely after warning that the country was 'veering on civil war'.

But after rebel leader George Speight warned of further unrest if the ceremony went ahead, Iloilo failed to show up, leaving Qarase to announce that the President was 'indisposed', and that the formation of a new administration was being put off to an unspecified date.



Fijian rebel supporters set fire to a piece of cloth inside a burnt out vehicle at the parliamentary parking lot in Suva yesterday. The rebels and their supporters left the compound early morning after setting fire to several vehicles, 61 days after mounting a coup and seizing power from the elected government of Fiji. --- AFP photo

Putin arrives in Pyongyang

SEOUL, July 19 : President Vladimir Putin arrived in North Korea today for the historic first visit to the Stalinist country by a Russian head of state, reports AFP.

Hundreds of thousands of cheering workers lined a 16 kilometre route into the North Korean capital streets following Putin's arrival, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

The Russian president had earlier been greeted by North Korean leader Kim Jong-il at Sunan airport.

A military band played the North Korean and Russian national anthems and Putin was honoured with a 21-gun salute shortly after arriving around 13:15 BST.

Putin wins right to sack governors

MOSCOW, July 19 : President Vladimir Putin today won the right to sack regional governors if they break federal laws or come under investigation after a vote in the State Duma, lower house of parliament, reports AFP.

Deputies in the Duma approved by 362 to 35 with eight abstentions a bill granting Putin these powers. Three hundred votes were needed to cancel out a July 7 vote in the upper house Federation Council to reject the Duma-approved law.

Putin must now sign the bill for it to come into force.

Stateless Arabs go on rampage in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY, July 19 : Unidentified assailants have carried out two more attacks in Kuwait in an apparent protest at the government's legal action against tens of thousands of stateless Arabs, or *bidoon*, newspapers reported today, says AFP.

The assailants ransacked the car of a police station commander and damaged property in a house used by military personnel and left a note saying "Beware of *bidoon*", which means "without" in Arabic, Al-Rai Al-Aam paper said.

5 of a family killed in Nepali landslide

KATHMANDU, July 19 : At least five members of the same family were buried in a landslide triggered by heavy rainfall, in far western Nepal, reports said today, reports AFP.

The family of five perished Sunday, after two days of continuous rain swept away their home in Dandagaon in the Jajarkot district, 390 km west of here, local papers said.

At least 53 people have been killed in landslides, mudslides and floods in various parts of the country, since the start of the monsoon season in mid-June.

Civil aviation watchdog panel meets after Patna Boeing crash

NEW DELHI, July 19 : An Indian parliamentary watchdog on civil aviation began a meeting here today in the wake of this week's Boeing 737 crash near the eastern city of Patna that killed 55 people, reports AFP.

The Civil Aviation Ministry said the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Civil Aviation had called top officials connected with India's civilian air operations to attend the closed-door meeting.

"The crash will be one of the focuses of this meeting," a ministry source said.

A 20-year-old Boeing operated by Alliance Air -- a wholly owned subsidiary of domestic state-run carrier Indian Airlines -- slammed into a residential area just short of the airport in Patna on Monday.

Indian minister in Sierra Leone

NEW DELHI, July 19 : Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes has left for Sierra Leone to meet UN peacekeeping troops liberated in a military operation last week, officials said here today, reports AFP.

Fernandes left for the West African country on Tuesday night and will interact with UNAMSIL (UN mission in Sierra Leone) peacekeepers and return to India on July 22, a defence ministry official said.

Fernandes will also hold talks with Major General V.K. Jetley, the Indian commander of UNAMSIL, who supervised last Saturday's operation to free 221 Indian peacekeepers encircled by rebels since May in eastern Sierra Leone.

India remembers Frenchman for popularising its music

NEW DELHI, July 19 : Indian and French scholars are working to revive the memory of Alain Danielou, who single-handedly popularised Indian music, culture and religion in his native France and large parts of the Western world, reports AFP.

A fresh flurry of activity is focusing on the works of the Breton, who translated the Indian love text *Kamasutra*, helped promote the poems and novels of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and made Indian classical music universally popular at a time when it was unknown elsewhere. Born into a patrician family in 1907, Danielou's circle of close friends in his bohemian youth included poets Jean Cocteau and Max Jacob, the famed actor Jean Marais and composers like Stravinsky.

But his life was to change in 1935 when he and his companion Raymond Burnier, a scion of the family that owned the Swiss chocolate and dairy products empire Nestle, decided to travel to India from France by car. It heralded for Danielou the start of a lifelong love affair with India, a country he described in his last interview before his death in 1994 as "my real homeland."

Israel moves tanks into Gaza

KFAR DAROM, Gaza Strip, July 19 : The Israeli Army reinforced a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip with more than a dozen military vehicles, including tanks, early today, witnesses said, reports AFP.

They said they saw some 15 military vehicles, including several tanks, enter the Kfar Darom Jewish settlement in the central Gaza Strip.

The Israeli army, however, denied the report.

Since last month, Palestinians have accused the Israeli army of "provoking" them by arming Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with anti-riot gear and reinforcing the perimeters of the settlements with military vehicles, machine guns and sand bags.

The Israeli army has confirmed that it is building up the defences of the settlements, fearing they could come under siege if violence erupts should the two sides failed

to reach a peace agreement by a self-imposed September 13 deadline.

On July 13, the Palestinian security services reported having sent letters of complaint to the Israeli army about the arms buildup at the settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Press details Barak plan on Jerusalem

Meanwhile, details of proposals on the future status of Jerusalem allegedly put to the Palestinians by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak were splashed over the front pages of Wednesday's Israeli papers.

In exchange for an extension of Israeli sovereignty over Givat Ze'ev, Maale Adumim, Efrat and Gush Etzion (West Bank Jewish settlements on the edge of Jerusalem), Israel would accept Palestinian control over Arab quarters of the Holy City, the daily

Haaretz said.

"The nature of this control is still to be decided, and the Palestinians are accepting nothing less than sovereignty," the paper added.

It said Barak had proposed that three roads restricted to Palestinians should be built across Israeli territory, with US finance.

The first would give Palestinians access to the Old City of Jerusalem, in particular the Compound of the Two Holy Mosques, the third most sacred site in Islam, without having to pass through any Israeli control points.

The second would include tunnels and bridges, and link the north and south of the West Bank, bypassing Jerusalem, while the last one would be a road bridge across Israeli territory, linking the Gaza Strip to the southern West Bank.

Clinton extends search for ME peace accord

CAMP DAVID, Maryland, July 19 : US President Bill Clinton has delayed a scheduled trip to Japan for 24 hours to give Israeli and Palestinian negotiators here extra time to reach a Middle East peace pact, reports AFP.

"The president regrets that he will have to delay his departure to Japan for one day," White House spokesman Joe Lockhart announced here early Wednesday, shortly after midnight.

"The president will now leave on Thursday and arrive in Japan for the opening of the G8 (Group of

Eight industrialised nations summit) on Friday," the spokesman added.

"The president believes that this is in the best interest of the Middle East peace process," Lockhart said without commenting any further on the ongoing negotiations.

Late Tuesday, White House spokesman PJ Crowley said that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat were ready to work another sleepless night.

"They are hard at work," Crowley

told reporters shortly before 10:00 p.m. (8:00 BST Wednesday).

"The leaders (Arafat and Barak) have spent virtually the entire day with their respective teams," he said, adding that Clinton was just "finishing up dinner" with negotiators on the terrace of his chalet at Camp David, without specifying which negotiators. Crowley said that Clinton had "an extensive meeting with our US Middle East team" earlier in the evening.

UN troops besieged in Kosovar town

KOSOVSKA MITROVICA, Yugoslavia, July 19 : The UN police force in the Serbian sector of this divided Kosovar town found itself under siege Tuesday after Serb protesters blocked access to their headquarters for the second day running, reports AFP.

Hundreds of demonstrators massed during the day in the centre of northern Mitrovica and blocked off a compound containing a jail, police station and court house, an AFP journalist at the scene reported.

Beyond the police headquarters the major routes through the Serbian quarter were blocked off by parked vehicles and at midday (16:00 BST) around 1,000 protesters had gathered.

Around 100 peacekeepers from the French-led battalion of the KFOR multinational force had been drafted in to provide additional protection for the police. At around 7:00 p.m. around 500 protesters again gathered to protest in front of the court house. This demonstration passed off peacefully, and by 11:00 p.m. the roads had been cleared of barricades, KFOR said.

Suu Kyi marks her father's death on Martyrs' Day

YANGON, July 19 : Aung San Suu Kyi and her sole remaining brother today attended a sombre ceremony to mark the death 53 years ago of her father General Aung San, the revered architect of Myanmar's independence, reports AFP.

General Aung San and seven other top leaders were gunned down by hired assassins just six months before Myanmar, then known as Burma, was declared a sovereign nation.

His death changed the course of history in this nation, which is now ruled by a military regime widely condemned for extensive human rights abuses. Aung San Suu Kyi, who leads the opposition National League for Democracy, arrived at Yangon's landmark "Shwedagon" pagoda wearing mourning black.

Troops on red alert in Assam as rebels abandon bases in Bhutan

TAMALPUR, India, July 19 : Troops in the Indian state of Assam have been placed on high alert along the border with Bhutan, amid reports that Assamese rebels are abandoning their bases in the Himalayan kingdom, reports AFP.

"Our troops are on a state of high alert and we are taking all possible measures to deal with any rebels being pushed into the state," Brigadier N.D. Prasad, commander of the 107th Mountain Brigade near the Indo-Bhutan border, said Wednesday.

The Royal Bhutan Army has intensified operations against Assamese rebels after the Bhutan National Assembly -- under strong pressure from New Delhi -- ordered greater efforts to flush out the separatists holed up on the Bhutanese side of the border.

Highly placed police sources said small batches of militants

had already begun to abandon their cross-border bases and drift back into Assam and other adjoining states in northeast India.

The outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), both fighting for independent homelands in Assam, have long established bases in southeast Bhutan.

The rebels have used them over the past three years to organise hit-and-run guerrilla strikes against targets on the Assamese side of the border.

Indian estimates that more than 4,000 armed rebels are operating from across the border.

Reports here say Bhutanese soldiers have stepped up patrols along the Kalokhola and Daifam sectors of the border, where most of the rebel bases are located.

The chairman of the Bhutanese

government, Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, said recently that national stability and security were being hampered by the presence of Indian militants.

"The presence of ULFA and Bodo militants inside the country continues to be a serious problem," Ngedup said.

The government's persuasive efforts towards a peaceful solution have not been successful so far.

The Assam STATE government has accused Bhutan of allowing Assamese separatist groups use of their diplomatic bags to smuggle money to Southeast Asia to purchase arms.

Assam Chief Minister Profulla Kumar Mahanta said recently his government had "documentary evidence" to back up the allegation.

Abu Sayyaf rebels free 7 Malaysian hostages

JOLO, Philippines, July 19 : Muslim extremists today freed seven Malaysian hostages among 38 captives held on the southern Philippine island of Jolo, sources close to negotiators said, reports AFP.

The hostages and several government emissaries boarded a boat en route to the southern city of Zamboanga at 2 p.m. (12:00 noon BST) after the Abu Sayyaf handed the captives over in the Jolo village of Tis Kutong, the sources said.

"We have information that they left via the shoreline of Iganang village in Patikul on a speedboat and are heading to Zamboanga,"

a security intelligence source told AFP.

A government emissary said three million dollars had already been paid to the Abu Sayyaf for the release of the seven Malaysians as well as their two compatriots who were released earlier this month.

The seven Malaysian hostages were expected to be handed over to Malaysian officials before being put on a plane home, sources said.

The guerrillas released an ailing 56-year-old German teacher Renate Wallert on Monday, also after reportedly receiving a ransom of 100,000 euros on April 23.

Biggest birthday party ever for Queen Mother

LONDON, July 19 : Britain's Queen Mother was facing the highpoint of her centenary celebrations today with a vintage display of military pomp, gushing words and a bizarre assortment of animals, reports AFP.

Billed as the biggest 100th birthday party ever, it features a guest list of more than 12,000 people, including 20 members of her own family.

They will look on as some 7,000 uniformed soldiers and costumed civilians file past a dais on which the royal matriarch will hold homage.

A Spitfire flypast, 25-foot (7-metre) birthday cake and a rare, if brief, public speech by the grand dame of the British royal family herself will top off the 90-minute spectacular.

In fact, it all rather anticipates

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother's real 100th birthday on August 4, but few care.

An entire alphabet of civil associations patronised by the Queen Mum, from the Automobile Association to the Youth Clubs of the United Kingdom, were to join the parade.

The varied nature of her affiliations means that an exotic assortment of animals, including six camels, several chickens, bulls, sheep and even a few winkles, were also due to line up to render homage.

One notable absentee was to be Queen Elizabeth herself. "I suppose she doesn't want to steal her thunder and has other engagements anyway," an official said.

12 tigers' death sparks battle in Indian cabinet

NEW DELHI, July 19 : The death of 12 rare tigers in an Indian zoo has prompted a call within Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Cabinet for the resignation of Environment Minister T.R. Balu, the Indian Express newspaper said today, reports AFP.

Maneka Gandhi, who holds the portfolio of social justice in Vajpayee's government, told the daily that Balu should quit over the deaths of the tigers earlier this month in a state-run zoo in eastern Orissa state.

The cats, including seven rare white tigers, died within three days of each other, after undergoing treatment for a parasitical

infection. It remains unclear whether they died as a result of the ailment, or from a reaction to a drug.

The incident provoked a public outcry in India, amid accusations that the Nandanakanan zoo authorities were negligent. Maneka, the estranged sister-in-law of India's main opposition Congress party chief, Sonia Gandhi, said Balu had no moral right to continue as environment minister.

"The minister should be blamed for the incident. He should take moral responsibility and resign," Maneka, told the Express.



An employee of the Parana refinery in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil shows Tuesday a fisher martin contaminated by an oil spill in the Barigui River on July 16. Four million liters spilled into the Barigui and the spill is threatening the Iguazu River as well. --- AFP photo

New immigration policy blueprint

Australia to lure more IT professionals

SYDNEY, July 19 : Temporary migrants with skills to suit a hi-tech economy will outnumber traditional permanent settlers to Australia under plans unveiled today in a proposed new immigration policy blueprint, reports AFP.

Young Asian professionals with financial or information technology skills are expected to be among the best suited to meet Canberra's new immigration programmes, Immigration Minister Paul Ruddock said.

In an article redefining the official attitude to immigration for a new millennium, Ruddock said Australia must leave behind the 1950s "anachronistic and confining arguments" of "populate or perish."

Ruddock said Australia had now to adopt a shrewder approach to attracting the people it wants, in competition with other countries which had never previously tried to attract immigrants.

"We have to be far more clever with our approach to immigration in order to attract people with the

skills and qualities that will benefit this country," he said in the article written for Options magazine.

"We can't afford to return to the days where permanent resettlement numbers were the end goal, and skilled migrants and economic advancement were unregarded concepts."

Business leaders and representatives of migrant groups are currently involved in an immigration department review of temporary visa arrangements and findings are expected within the next few months.

A spokesman for Ruddock said long-term temporary migrants would come from countries with a wealth of personnel skilled in the necessary areas.

"Asia has a fairly extensive background in information technology," he said. "Certainly India is an emerging giant in that area, and people from the more traditional financial and technology centres such as Hong Kong and Singapore are likely arrivals."

Last year, 28 percent of all

16,334 temporary long-term visas were issued to people from South-east Asia.

Temporary long-term visas are valid from between two to three years, and can be extended.

Findings from the review, which includes a discussion paper and public consultation period, are expected to be released within the next few months, said the spokesman.

Ruddock said the dot com industry and globalisation of labour meant Australia must adapt immigration policies to its maximum advantage in the new economic environment.

Ruddock, who is facing renewed criticism over Canberra's hardline attitude to illegal immigrants, thousands of whom are currently in detention centres, gave no hint of any intent to relax the official view that they are queue jumpers with few entitlements.

Countries not traditionally viewed as migrant nations were now luring skilled people, and Australia had to compete by offer-

ing packages to the right candidates, he said.

The new "Skill Stream," brought in 3,000 temporary visa arrivals during the second half of last year.

The minister's spokesman said the government was aware of the need for a balance between having a streamlined system for those with beneficial skills and ensuring it did not take jobs away from Australians.

Long-term temporary entries are expected to exceed 50 percent of Australia's net immigration this year, after reaching 49.3 percent last year. According to departmental statistics, the figure was less than 20 percent under a Labour government six years ago and only 4.4 percent in 1991.

Ruddock said the result of the new policies would allow sponsoring companies to hold on to the skilled migrants they attract, and allow employers and employees to "try out a relationship" without permanent commitment.



Former South African president Nelson Mandela poses for photograph Tuesday at his Houghton home in Johannesburg, where he celebrated his 82nd birthday with (L to R) his daughter Rochelle and her son Sabata, his wife Graca, and her daughter Zindzi and her granddaughter Zenani. --- AFP photo