

International

Reinstate Mahendra : Fiji High Court

Govt rejects court ruling

SUVA, Nov 15: Fiji's High Court today ordered the pre-coup administration of Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry reinstated, but the military and its interim government promptly rejected the ruling, reports Reuters.

"The interim government will continue as the national government and legislative authority in Fiji," interim Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase said in a statement.

Both Qarase and the military said they would appeal against the court decision.

Analysts said that without military backing the ruling was only a moral victory for Chaudhry, Fiji's first ethnic Indian leader who was toppled in a May coup and held hostage.

"In real political terms there is no evidence that the legal solution will matter very much," Suva-based University of South Pacific associate professor Scott MacWilliam said.

"Fiji now has a government that is dependent entirely on military support. It cannot rule in any other means."

High Court Judge Anthony Gates said in his ruling that the post-coup government was unlawful and unconstitutional and called on deposed President Sir Ratu Sir Kamlesse Mara to recall parliament and reinstate Chaudhry.

Fallen businessman George Speight and gunmen stormed Fiji's parliament in May and toppled the Chaudhry government in the name of indigenous rights. Chaudhry was released after 56 days and the military appointed an interim indigenous Fijian government.

Speight is in jail awaiting trial on treason charges. A failed military mutiny on November 2 by the special forces unit which backed Speight's coup left eight soldiers dead and 22 civilian

wounded and further rocked Fiji.

"The George Speight coup was unsuccessful in its attempt to overthrow the democratically elected government of Mahendra Chaudhry," Gates said.

Chaudhry welcomed the ruling and urged post-coup authorities to recall parliament and return Fiji to democracy.

"The (Chaudhry government) coalition urges the authorities to abide by the high court ruling and to recall parliament so that Fiji is back to democratic rule," he said in a statement.

Qarase said he would continue to rule Fiji with the aim of securing the safety of citizens, rehabilitating the battered economy and working towards an eventual return to democracy.

He said he drew authority from the military-backed President Ratu Josefa Iloilo and Fiji's traditional power base, the Great Council of Chiefs.

He said his government was committed to a new constitution to "secure the future of indigenous Fijians" after the Great Council of Chiefs withdrew its endorsement of the 1997 multi-racial constitution.

But Gates said the abrogation of the 1997 multi-racial constitution, which had enabled Chaudhry to become Fiji's first ethnic Indian prime minister, was wrong and that the make-up of Fiji's multi-racial pre-coup parliament was still intact.

The high court ruling stems from a case by an Indian-Fijian who was displaced by the coup and forced to live in a refugee camp. There are a series of individual cases pending which challenge Fiji's post-coup administration.

The Qarase administration has said it plans to rule Fiji for the next 18 months after which it would hold fresh elections.



Chinese President Jiang Zemin (2nd L) shakes hands with US President Bill Clinton (R) as Russian President Vladimir Putin (C-back) follows on the way to group photo session at the start of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) world leader's forum in Bandar Seri Begawan yesterday.

--AFP photo



Philippines President Joseph Estrada gestures as he arrives to a lunch of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders prior to the start of the APEC meeting in Bandar Seri Begawan yesterday.

Estrada may testify at impeachment trial

MANILA, Nov 15: Philippine President Joseph Estrada may take the witness stand in his unprecedented impeachment trial next month when senators sitting as jurors will determine his fate on corruption charges, his spokesman said today, reports AFP.

The Senate is to convene as an impeachment tribunal in two weeks' time to pass judgement on charges of bribery, corruption, betrayal of public trust and culpable violation of the constitution lodged by the House of Representatives last Monday.

Estrada could not be compelled to testify without his consent, presidential spokesman Ricardo Puno said.

"But if he volunteers and he agrees and his lawyers feel that the rules at the hearing would be enough to guarantee his rights then the president may agree to testify."

But Executive Secretary Ronaldo Zamora stressed that it would be up to his lawyers. As of now they have not made a decision.

The Senate on Wednesday agreed to adopt the trial procedure followed by the US Congress during the 1998-1999 impeachment of President Bill Clinton, as well as to open the hearing to the public.

High blood pressure gene linked to obesity

WASHINGTON, Nov 15: A quirky gene variation that has been linked to high blood pressure has been shown to also predispose people to obesity, which could help researchers find new ways of treating both diseases, reports AFP.

The discovery of the variant GNB3 825T gene could pave the way for a new approach to the study of obesity and hypertension, according to the study's lead author, Achim Gutersohn of the University of Essen in Germany.

Those who inherit a copy of the gene from both parents are more likely to be obese, although a mere two hours of exercise a week appears to block the tendency, Gutersohn said.

This underscores that obesity is not only a genetic disease, but that certain genes -- in connection with environmental or behavioural factors -- can increase the likelihood of obesity," Gutersohn concluded Monday at a meeting of the American Heart Association.

The researchers followed a group of 1,291 healthy white volunteers who carried the variant gene to document its effect on hypertension and obesity.

"One significant finding of our study is the strong effect of the gene in white individuals with a sedentary lifestyle," Gutersohn said.

They also examined the presence of the gene in non-white populations and observed that the gene was most common in black Africans and black Americans.

First French genetic baby

PARIS, Nov 15: The first French baby selected genetically to be exempt from an incurable disease has been born at Clamart, a southern suburb of Paris, the daily Le Parisien reported today, reports AFP.

Monday's birth was the result of pre-implantary diagnosis, or genetic analysis and selection of embryos.

This procedure, authorised in France for just over a year but already used in other countries, enables parents carrying the gene of a particularly serious and incurable genetic disease to try for a baby that is free of the gene.

In a first stage, doctors 'create' embryos in vitro from eggs from the mother and sperm from the father. They then remove a cell from each embryo, when the embryos have reached the eight-cell state, and submit them to a genetic test. Finally they implant those embryos without the disease-bearing gene in the mother's uterus.

Le Parisien quoted its unnamed sources as saying the baby, whose sex was not given, was born prematurely and the doctors had decided to wait for a few days before deciding on the success of the operation.

Palestinians mark anniversary of independence declaration

One more Palestinian shot dead in Gaza

GAZA CITY, Nov 15: Deadly violence flared today in the Gaza Strip as Palestinians across the territories planned action to mark the anniversary of Yasser Arafat's symbolic declaration of independence 12 years ago, reports AFP.

Israeli troops shot and killed Ahmed Samir Basal, 20, on Wednesday at the Karni crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip, hospital officials said. There were no other serious injuries there.

His death brought to 224 the number of people killed since violence broke out in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Israel on September 28, most of them Palestinians.

Medical officials said Israeli soldiers also shot and wounded 15 Palestinians in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip near the border with Egypt after residents there threw stones at soldiers who had razed farmland in the area to increase visibility from

their army posts. Six of the injured were considered in serious condition, hospital officials said.

Also in Rafah, several thousand Palestinians attended a funeral for one of three Palestinians killed on Monday. Thousands more attended the funeral in Gaza City and in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Several hundred Palestinians from a handful of political factions also marched in Gaza City to demand that the Palestine Liberation Organisation immediately announce the creation of a Palestinian state to coincide with the anniversary of Arafat's 1988 independence declaration in Algeria.

That largely symbolic announcement was made during the last major Palestinian intifada, or uprising, that raged from 1987 to 1993.

Arafat's political and militia faction Fatah in the West Bank called on Palestinians to march in

a 'day of challenge' against Israeli occupation and for Palestinians to block settlers and soldiers from entering all occupied areas.

The Israeli army arrested 15 Fatah members overnight that it suspects of shooting attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers, an Israeli cabinet minister said on Wednesday.

The operation was aimed at halting attacks and violence and putting on trial those responsible, the army said in a statement. "Israel's armed forces will continue such operations any place and any time against those who practise terrorism."

Witnesses and Palestinian police said earlier that the soldiers arrested 10 members of Fatah -- six of them brothers -- in two villages in the northern West Bank.

Two Palestinians were also injured in Nabulus overnight when the Israeli army fired heavy machine-guns at the Palestinian-run city.

Mubarak's party wins two-thirds of seats

CAIRO, Nov 15: President Hosni Mubarak's party held onto the lion's share of seats in Egypt's parliament but Islamist and other opposition members made inroads, early results showed today after elections ended, reports AFP.

The four-week elections were marred by clashes that left a total of 14 people dead, including four in the last round of voting Tuesday, but they were less violent and considered more transparent than those five years ago.

After the third and final round of voting ended on Tuesday, Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) held at least 304 of parliament's 454 seats, according to results published by the state-run MENA news agency.

Russia keen to play more active role in Middle East

CAIRO, Nov 15: Visiting Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov here on Tuesday voiced Russia's desire to play a more active role in the Middle East peace process, reports Xinhua.

Ivanov, who arrived here Tuesday on the second leg of a Middle East tour, discussed with his Egyptian counterpart Amr Moussa the worsening situation in the Palestinian territories, the official Middle East News Agency reported.

Moscow has not contributed as a major partner with the US in the peace process "because of many objective, subjective and political

reasons," said the Russian minister.

However, Moscow wishes to play an effective role in pushing forward the peace-making drive, he added, saying that Russia will make efforts to coordinate with Egypt and the international community in a bid to bring the stalled peace process back to normal.

He said Egypt, which backs the Palestinian position in negotiations with Israel, has often played as a mediator between the two sides.

Earlier in an interview with the Egyptian Television, Ivanov said

that after the Russian internal situation has stabilized, Moscow is ready to pay attention to the Middle East, which is of strategic importance to it.

He said Russia can play an active role as a co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process due to its close ties with many countries such as the US and the European states.

Russia, the United States and Egypt, together with other countries, should try to bring Palestinians and Israelis back to the point they had reached before the current crisis, he said.

DPRK accuses ROK navy ships of violating its waters

SEOUL, Nov 15: North Korea accused South Korea's military of trying to destroy detente on the divided Korean peninsula by infiltrating navy vessels into its territorial waters, South Korea denied the charge, reports AP.

North Korea's official foreign news outlet, KCNA, reported late Tuesday night that four South Korean navy patrol boats, escorted a number of fishing boats, penetrated deep into its waters in the Yellow Sea earlier in the day.

When challenged by North Korean navy warships, the South Korean naval ships retreated with the fishing boats, KCNA said.

"We cannot but construe this as a deliberate attempt by South Korea's military to reverse the amicable situation shaping up on the peninsula," the report said.

South Korea said the North Korean charge was false.

"A North Korean patrol boat approached the restricted Northern Limit Line, to which three navy vessels from our side responded. None of the ships crossed the line," said a statement from South Korea's office of the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Gen. Cho Young-gil.

The Northern Limit Line is a neutral zone set up near the western sea border to avoid possible armed clashes between the two Koreas.

The KCNA report, monitored in Seoul, reported similar South Korean naval violations in the area twice last week and once on Monday.

Bombs explode in Lahore

LAHORE, Pakistan, Nov 15: Three bombs exploded in a crowded area of this eastern city today but no one was injured, police said, reports AFP.

They said residents of the eastern Harbanspura district saw a man attach a shopping bag containing a device about half-way up an electricity tower before running away shortly after midnight.

An explosion followed soon after, they said, but no one was hurt despite the crowds in the area.

Police said three bombs went off simultaneously and a fourth was defused after failing to explode.

"It seems like it was a terrorist act and the purpose was to cause widespread inconvenience to the public," Lahore Deputy Inspector General of Police Javed Noor told AFP.

He said the perpetrators were attempting to bring down the tower and cut the electricity supply to a major part of the city.

The blasts occurred a long way from the Gaddafi stadium where England is playing Pakistan in the first of a three-Test cricket series.

There's nothing to worry about US election: Clinton

BANDAR SERI REGAWAN, Nov 15: President Bill Clinton today assured the world it had "nothing to worry about" over the tangled US election because both his potential successors stood ready to lead the global economy, reports AFP.

With no end in sight to the legal wrangle over who won last week's election, Clinton used his final appearance at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Brunei to play down the global ramifications of the saga.

Texas Governor George W. Bush and Vice President Al Gore both stood for strong US leadership on trade, Clinton told a forum of business leaders on the sidelines of the 21-nation summit.

His remarks appeared in part to be a bid to soothe financial markets spooked by the continuing uncertainty over who will lead the world's most powerful economy.

"One of the things that both

Vice President Gore and Governor Bush agreed on in this election is that the United States should continue its strong leadership for a more integrated global economy and for expanded trade," he said.

"And as nearly as I could tell there is virtually no disagreement on that."

"On the question of leadership for trade, I think the world can rest easy because both our candidates made strong commitments to do that."

Gore and Bush's legal teams are currently locked in an intense legal battle over the length and scope of vote recounts in Florida, with the Texas Governor currently enjoying a razor thin lead in the state of only 300 votes.

The saga appeared no closer to resolution on Tuesday, as Gore's campaign slammed a bid by Florida's Republican Secretary of State to cut off a manual vote count in some crucial counties.

Later, before meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin, Clinton told reporters the continuing uncertainty would do nothing to

hinder US relations with other major powers.

World leaders would have the same 'pretty relaxed' reaction as the American people to the unfolding situation, he said.

"We have plenty of time, there is nothing to worry about."

"We'll let the process play out, both sides are very well represented and they'll argue their points and we'll see how it works."

Clinton said the Russian people were "anxiously" watching the tussle "with respect to the feelings of the American people."

National Security spokesman P.J. Crowley who is traveling with Clinton on his Asian tour, which includes, a historic stop in Vietnam, told reporters Clinton was ready to discuss the election if other leaders, including China's President Jiang Zemin, raised it.

"The president will express his confidence that this is proceeding under the rule of law... that this is democracy in action," he said.

Kidnapped Indian film star released after three months

BANGALORE, India, Nov 15: Kidnapped Indian film icon Rajkumar, who was abducted 108 days ago, has finally been released from the jungle hide-out of his bandit captors, top government officials said today, reports AFP.

Rajkumar was released late Tuesday and is reportedly in good health, said S.M. Krishna, chief minister in Rajkumar's home state of Karnataka.

The news spread rapidly through the streets of the Karnataka state capital Bangalore, where frustration over the delays in securing the film star's release had threatened on several occasions to boil over into violence.

Rajkumar was resting Wednesday in Erode town, on the border between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu state.

Krishna said no final decision had been taken on when the actor would return to Bangalore, although other officials said he was expected later Wednesday.

The news was quickly relayed to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee who was presiding over a func-

tion at his New Delhi residence.

"I have some good news, Rajkumar has been released," a beaming Vajpayee told reporters.

Rajkumar and three others were kidnapped by India's most wanted bandit, Veerappan, on July 30 in Tamil Nadu.

The actor's abduction initially fanned ethnic tensions and violence in Karnataka.

Rajkumar belongs to Karnataka's dominant Kannadiga community, while Veerappan is a Tamil. The two communities have a history of ethnic strife.

"We have many lessons to learn from this experience," said Chief Minister Krishna, who thanked the "different linguistic groups" in Karnataka for "not indulging in any untoward incidents."

Rajkumar's release came after official mediators left for a sixth round of negotiations with the kidnappers on Sunday.

It would also suggest that Veerappan had abandoned his core ransom demand -- the release of 51 jailed associates and the dropping of criminal charges against 70 more.



Lieutenant General Abdul Qayyum (C), Chairman of Pakistan Ordnance Factories briefs President Rafiq Tarar (R) about machine-gun after the Inaugural session of the three-day international arms exhibition in Karachi on Tuesday.

Pak defence equipment show opens

KARACHI, Nov 15: Pakistan's first-ever defence exhibition was opened Tuesday, aiming at finding buyers for Pakistani military hardware and seeking foreign collaboration and investment in defence production, reports DPA.

The president of Pakistan, Mohammad Rafiq Tarar, declaring the exhibition open, said IDEAS 2000 will provide opportunities to the exhibitors to find new areas of collaboration and investment.

Some 150 exhibitors from Pakistan and other countries are participating in the defence show and delegations from various countries have come to assess Pakistan's potential.

At the exhibition Pakistani-manufactured bullets, guns and missiles are on display, but sophisticated long and medium-range Ghauri and Shaheen missiles were not for sale, the Pakistani president said. The exhibition continues till November 17.

Four troops killed in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, Nov 15: An Indian army officer and three soldiers were killed today when Muslim militants ambushed their patrol in the restive state of Kashmir, reports AFP.

Police said the militants ambushed the patrol of the 29 Rashtriya Rifles -- an elite counter-insurgency unit -- in Pattan town, 30 kilometres north of the Kashmir summer capital Srinagar.

An army captain and three soldiers were killed, and another six injured.

Army reinforcements cordoned off the area where the ambush took place and ordered local residents through loudhailers to evacuate their homes.

Witnesses said intermittent firing from both sides was continuing.

DNA decoders say Adam and Eve never met

WASHINGTON, Nov 15: Science may have caught up with the Bible, which says that Adam and Eve are the ancestors of all humans alive today, reports Reuters.

But in the scientists' version, based on DNA analysis, "Adam," the genetic ancestor of all men living today, and "Eve," the genetic ancestor of all living women, seem to have lived tens of thousands of years apart.

How could this be?

Peter Underhill and colleagues at Stanford University in California have an explanation. "They had different molecular clocks," Underhill said in a telephone interview. "Fewer men participated in reproduction than women did."

His team, working with top geneticists across the United States, Europe, Israel and Africa, did a genetic analysis of DNA samples from the Y chromosomes of more than 1,000 men from 22 geographic areas and determined that their most recent common ancestor was a man who lived in Africa around 59,000 years ago.

Only men have Y chromosomes and researchers can look at gradual genetic mutations in them to 'count' generations.

Other studies have used mitochondrial DNA, which women seem to pass down virtually unchanged from mother to daughter, to show that the genetic "Eve" lived 143,000 years ago.

ethnic and geographic groups. "People look at a very conspicuous trait like skin color and they say, 'Well, this person's so different' ... but that's only skin deep," Underhill said. "When you look at the level of the Y chromosome you find that, gee, there is very little difference between them. And skin color differences are strictly a consequence of climate."

But the differences, while tiny, are enough for experts such as Underhill's team to try to figure out how many generations you have to go back to find a single man who is related to all living people today. "The history of our species is something on the order of 4,000 or 5,000 generations," Underhill said.

Women were good at passing on their genes, while some men were less lucky, Underhill's team found evidence bottlenecks that shortened the male genetic legacy.

What could explain them? Real-life scenarios from recorded history provide plenty of explanations.

"One tribe conquers another tribe. The dominant tribe, the successful tribe, gets to mate with all the women -- their own women plus the women they conquered," Underhill said.

Polygamy, a common practice, would also explain it. A few dominant males get to marry and have children, and the rest see their genes consigned to the rubbish heap of posterity.

Even nature itself can play a role. "I'm a man and if I get married and just by chance, a flip of the coin, I only have daughters, that is a random chance event. It has nothing to do with my being inferior or superior," Underhill said.

Tracing our ancestors genetically can be almost as hard as using a piece of skull or a tooth to date a fossil, but Underhill and his team developed a new method of looking at chromosomes called denaturing high performance liquid chromatography. They can use it to compare the Y chromosome of one man to another, something that used to be laborious.

"By using this new method, we could do it far, far faster," Peter Oefner of Stanford, who also worked on the study, said in a telephone interview. "When anatomically modern humans left Africa 45,000 to 60,000 years ago, they expanded rapidly across the world. The reason I can say this is because there is a nice relationship between (genetic) haplotype and geography."

The genes reflect known history. "There was the Ice Age and so people couldn't migrate much. So they stayed local and accumulated all the changes that allow us basically to trace them back," Oefner said.

The same group reports in the latest issue of the journal Science that they used their method to determine that 95 per cent of European men descend from about 10 'Adams' who in turn can be traced back to three different waves of migration.

The oldest male lineage they found dates back to the Old Stone Age or Paleolithic period 35,000 to 40,000 years ago. A second lineage dates to about 22,000 years ago and is associated with the Gravettian culture, known for its Venus figurines and shell jewellery and for using mammoth bones to build homes.

The third group, about 20 per cent of the men, seem to date from more recent times, having come to Europe between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago. They were probably the first Neolithic farmers who migrated from the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East.

Fossil records suggest that Homo sapiens, or modern humans, first appeared in Africa about 150,000 years ago, then moved out and spread across the world fairly quickly; perhaps 50,000 years ago to Europe and as long as 60,000 years ago to Australasia.