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Let me make it very clear that Mr. Chaudhry was illegally removed in a criminal act and I think the behaviour of the Great Council of Chiefs in bowing to Speight's demands has really been to betray the democratic institution of that country- John Howard, the Australian Prime minister to the Melbourne Radio.

Hostages released: On 13th of July, all the remaining twenty seven hostages including the deposed Prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry were released. The military gave in to all the major demands of Speight- of removing Chaudhry from the post of prime minister, scrapping the multi racial constitution and amnesty to Speight and his henchmen.

A large quantity of arms was surrendered to the army in the Parliament complex. The arms surrendered were all stolen from the Fijian army sources and judging by the quantity and the sophisticated nature, it was apparent that a section of the army was in league with the rebels.

Iloilo appointed President: The Council of Chiefs appointed 80 years old Ratu Josefa Iloilo as the new president. Iloilo is said to be poor in health. Laisenia Qarase was named the interim Prime minister. Qarase is a banker by profession. A 32-member cabinet was announced on 19th July but could not be sworn in immediately due to objections from Speight. Qarase on being sworn in later on 27th July amid tight security announced a 20-member all indigenous cabinet and eight assistant ministers, one of whom being an ethnic Indian..

Speight arrested: Speight continued to place obstacles in making fresh demands. He wanted the Bau Chief Adi Samanunu Talakuli, presently Fiji's ambassador to Malaysia as the Prime minister. Irked by the President's refusal to accept his demands, Speight moved to Kalabo village Suva with his followers. Worse still, he threatened that more unrest will follow if his demand of making Adi the prime minister is not accepted.

The army finally gathered courage and arrested Speight and 369 of his followers on 26 the July. Ilisoni Liairi a former member of SAS and twelve of his members were also subsequently arrested. Speight has since been moved to two nearby islands. Some of Speight's followers who have taken over the army barracks in Labasa are yet to be flushed out. The army is now in the process of dislodging them.

Backlash in Vanua Levu: A curfew has been clamped in Suva and since been extended for another fortnight from 30th July.

As expected there have been many incidents particularly in the second major island Vanua Levu. One of the first incidents was the taking of 44 Indo Fijians as hostages by the rebel supporters in Labosa town who were subsequently freed by the security forces. In another incident an Air Fiji jet was seized and the two New Zealand crew were taken as hostages at Savusavu only to be released at the intervention of village elders.

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Reports indicate that Indo Fijians are being victimised and there is general lawlessness in Vanua Levu. More than two hundred Indo Fijian youths have since been taken as hostages in and their fate is not known. Incidents of local Fijian thugs taking over the farms of Indo Fijians have also been reported. In another incident two of Indo Fijian Tailevu farmers were attacked in their farm house and driven away. Closer to Suva the Indo Fijian squatters have been evicted by other Fijians. In the interior some Indo Fijian houses have been burnt to ground. In the absence of proper communications reports of attacks on Indo Fijians and their properties are just coming in. India Abroad has reported a daring attempted rape of an Indo-Fijian woman on 27th night in Vanua Levu.

It remains to be seen to what extent the Army will be able to arrest the anarchy that has followed the arrest of Speight. There is no doubt that the country is reeling under a crime wave with Indo Fijians bearing the brunt. There have also been cases of Fijian homes being attacked. The farm of former President Ratu Mara at Seaqaqu up in the north in the main island has also been burnt down. *If the unrest continues there will be no alternative but to assemble an international force to bring law and order back to normal in the islands.* It is only Australia that can take the initiative.

Chaudhry insists on restoration of his government: As expected the released PM Chaudhry has rejected the interim administration set up by President Iliola. He was the Prime minister of a democratically elected government now overthrown by a criminal act. He is of the view that there could be no justification to legitimise the interim administration. .

Qarase has declared that the interim administration will govern for at least two years before elections are held under a new constitution. The interim budget he had declared already indicates the plans of the administration to go for affirmative action for local Fijians and against the interests of Indo Fijians. This is in keeping with a document released by Qarase before he took over which gives details of a "range of political, employment, financial, tax and education privileges proposed for the indigenous population. The document said that "the plan is to safeguard the paramountcy of indigenous people's interests in our multiethnic and multi-cultural society."

Indian policy on right track: Except for the initial delay in sending a ministerial team to ascertain the developments, the Government has been correct so far in handling the issue. In a sensitive issue like this, the government took the correct stand that the priority is to get the PM Chaudhry released. Having done this, the next step should be ensure the safety and security of the Indo Fijians.

The Australian Prime minister spoke to Chaudhry by telephone and reportedly promised that his views will be awaited before any policy decision is taken towards the Suva regime. Chaudhry is in Australia today to meet the Australian Prime minister. While rejecting to accept the interim administration Chaudhry has demanded the restoration of his government. We understand that Chaudhry is likely to visit India sometime after the middle of August.

The second priority should be to ensure the safety of the lives and property of Indo Fijians.

Third, will be to restore the multiracial constitution of 1997 and that of the government. This is no easy task as the interim administration will do its best to legitimise its government and restore the badly shattered economy.

In any policy towards Fiji, it is Australia and Australia alone which can take the initiative. What has happened in Fiji is a threat to democracy and the stability of the region. Australia took the initiative in enforcing smart sanctions and persuaded other countries, New Zealand, U.S.A. and UK to follow it up. It has appealed to Japan also. Smart sanctions have only a limited effect and the interim government is not likely to be affected. More than fifty percent of all Fijian trade is with Australia and the assessment in Australia is that harsher sanctions would have an "undesirable impact on Fiji itself and neighbouring Pacific nations like Tuvalu, Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga".

The Foreign minister of the interim administration Kaliopate Tovala has said that he would like to visit Australia and New Zealand. In the name of "constructive engagement", there is the danger of the Australian government lending legitimacy to an unrepresentative and illegitimate government. It would require all the skills of diplomacy on the part of India to ensure that this does not happen. One should recall the events in Myanmar where a democratically elected government has been kept out of power for more than ten years. In the name of constructive engagement more and more countries are normalising its relations with the

military government. In the earlier two coups of 1987, after some initial hesitation Rabuka was received with full honours reserved for Head of State by Australia.

In the first week of July "World Forum on Democracy" was convened and top leaders like Madeline Albright and UN Secretary General participated. A parallel meeting of foreign ministers was also held to discuss ways of further strengthening the democratic cause. Two Fijian Army contingents are working under UN flag in Sinai and Lebanon. The UN could also use its influence on Fijian army to restore democracy.

If Democracy is to survive in Fiji, only full scope sanctions will work. In Fiji 90 percent of people of Indian origin are not rich enough to go elsewhere and they will have to stay. They cannot be suppressed indefinitely and if there is no outside help they will in course of time find their own way to defend themselves.

Trinidad Tobago may go the same way and there is need to watch: One cannot but draw a parallel between the situation in Fiji and that of Trinidad Tobago. People of Indian origin form forty percent of the population and for the first time Trinidad and Tobago got its first ethnic Indian prime minister in 1995. Ethnic tensions and racially and politically motivated protests have been taking place against the Panday government. Panday's style of functioning is said to be very similar to that of PM Chaudhry. Panday should take note of genuine grievances of the Black community and strive for national unity before it becomes too late.

Looking beyond Fiji:

The travails of Fiji will not be over with the arrest of Speight. Despite his arrest, the problems faced by Indo Fijians will continue. In a way it is a legacy of colonial era where the People of Indian origin were kept out of the Army and Police. After independence, Indians were being taken in the Police force and roughly form 40 percent of the lower cadres. There is no representation in the Army. Prior to the taking over of Parliamentary complex in the current crisis, the Indo Fijians in the Police were aware that the procession taken out by opposition would take a violent turn. Yet they could do nothing as the Local Police Chief had ordered that the procession should not be disturbed.

In the long run the Indo Fijians should take a legitimate place in the security set up in the country. There has to be some representation at the higher levels in the Army.

People of Indian origin form a sizeable number besides Fiji in Guyana, Trinidad-Tobago, Suriname and Mauritius. There is a tendency amongst them to expect India to look after their interests. In the past India has done nothing or acquiesced when people of Indian origin were disenfranchised or treated as second class citizens (Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia and Uganda).

In March this year, When the Indian Prime minister Vajpayee made a statement in Mauritius in March this year that though separated by the Indian ocean a call from their shore would bring India to them, there was a thunderous applause. But this cannot be done that easily in the present day international environment. Our advice to them is that their priority is racial amity and only this could bring about stability and harmony in the long term. Their future and well being is in their country.

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