

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 18/01/00

**EXTRA 49/00 Fear for safety/possible "disappearance/fear of ill-treatment**  
**FIJI Mahendra Chaudhry, Prime Minister of Fiji**  
**Adi Koila Mara Nailatiku (daughter of President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara),**  
**At least 30 Government Members of Parliament**

**Rajendra Chaudhry, son of Mahendra Chaudhry (feared "disappeared")**

Gunmen are holding the Prime Minister, the President's daughter and at least 30 government Members of Parliament in the parliament buildings in the capital, Suva. The gunmen reportedly beat the Prime Minister's son, who is also his private secretary, and his whereabouts are now unknown.

The gunmen's leader, former businessman Sam Speight, has declared that he has seized executive power. President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara has ignored this, and has declared a state of emergency. The governments of India, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have publicly condemned the detention of cabinet members.

The group are reportedly being held at times in the dark, have been threatened with machine guns, and are not allowed to speak to one another. The speaker of Parliament has been released on grounds of ill health.

Amnesty International is concerned that politicians, human rights activists and members of the judiciary may be at risk of arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Forty three percent of Fiji's population are ethnic Indians, and over half are indigenous Fijians. There has been long-standing friction over political and economic inequality between the two ethnic groups. These tensions were addressed in a new Constitution in 1997, which established fundamental human rights in Fijian law, including freedom from discrimination on grounds of race or ethnicity. While seeking to foster reconciliation between major ethnic groups, the Constitution specifically preserved the interests of indigenous Fijians. Mahendra Chaudhry is Fiji's first elected ethnic Indian leader: he came to power one year ago today.

Sam Speight has declared that he has seized power "on behalf of every individual member of the indigenous Fijian community". He has also declared the suspension of the 1997 Constitution, but local sources indicate there is no widespread support for his action.

Fiji has made great progress in protecting human rights since two coups in 1987, which saw hundreds of politicians, journalists, trade union officials and academics arrested and imprisoned as prisoners of conscience. Some of those arrested in 1987, including a number of those who have been held hostage today, were reportedly ill-treated, and thousands fled the country.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in your country, calling on them to use their influence to ensure that all possible measures are taken to:**

- ensure that all those held in parliament buildings are safely released;
- clarify the whereabouts of Rajendra Chaudhry;

- ensure that politicians, human rights activists and members of the judiciary are not subjected to arbitrary arrest or ill-treatment.

**APPEALS TO:** Minister of Foreign Affairs in your country

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Fiji accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 June 2000.