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Confident: Speight (centre) inspected Suva in a police car

Rebels holding the elected Prime Minister of Fiji, Mahendra Chaudhry, are reported to have made a renewed threat to shoot him.

One of his captors said Mr Chaudhry was dragged onto the lawn of the parliament building and had a gun placed at his head.

Shortly afterwards, President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara again called for the gunmen who seized parliament last Friday to lay down their weapons.

President Ratu Mara told a news conference in the capital, Suva, that the self-proclaimed regime of the coup leader, George Speight, was not recognised either in Fiji or abroad.

He said Mr Speight should enter into talks about his grievances, and he again pledged to take the concerns of the indigenous Fijian majority community into account.

The president, who holds full executive powers under a state of emergency declared after coup attempt, has declined to guarantee that he will reappoint Mr Chaudhry to the job once the crisis is resolved.



Mr Chaudhry is the country's first ethnic Indian PM

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But a former military leader of Fiji has warned the leader of the attempted coup, George Speight, that his actions could split the Fijian community.

Sitiveni Rabuka, who himself came to power in a coup in 1987, said he had told Mr Speight that dividing the community would be bad both for Fijians and for the country.

Mr Rabuka, who briefly mediated between the government and Mr Speight, said he supports the aims of the armed rebels - but not their methods.

Public support

He said that many indigenous Fijians support Mr Speight.

Mr Rabuka is due to chair an important meeting of the influential Great Council of Chiefs on Tuesday.

The BBC's Phil Mercer in the capital Suva says the meeting could be critical in finding a solution to the hostage crisis as the chiefs have great influence across Fiji.

Mr Speight said he would "retire" if the Great Council of Chiefs did not back his coup attempt.

Suva came to a standstill on Monday as troops took up key positions and large crowds gathered in support of Mr Speight's coup attempt.

Shops, banks and schools were closed and supporters of the coup were milling around at a market where a violent protest march erupted Friday.

But the streets have been quiet as large numbers of police and soldiers enforce a dusk-to-dawn curfew.

Journalists have been banned by a presidential decree from reporting Mr Speight's statements, and television cameras have been told to move one kilometre away from the parliament.

Ready to rule

Mr Speight left the parliament building on Monday to tour the country's looted capital in a police car.

In a sign of increasing confidence, the coup leader spent 45



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The tense stand-off continues for the fourth day

minutes inspecting central Suva with one police officer and an armed member of his own group.

Mr Speight says he is ready to come out of the parliamentary complex and take his men - whom he describes as his ministers - into Suva to assume their duties at their respective ministries.

Police authorities said they had not arrested Speight for fear of endangering the hostages.

The bold public appearance added to the political confusion in Fiji, where the indigenous population has been pitted against the country's large ethnic Indian minority.

The rebels are meanwhile continuing to hold Mr Chaudhry and some members of his administration.

Mr Chaudhry's son and the daughter of President Ratu Mara are also among the hostages.

Mr Chaudhry is the first ethnic Indian prime minister in Fiji, where 43% of people are of Indian origin.

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