

# Sources say coup attempt is stopped

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP)--Shooting broke out early Sunday near the presidential palace, and a source close to the government said loyal soldiers had foiled an attempt to overthrow the government of Lt. Gen. Prosper Avril.

A few hours earlier, sources in Haiti said military commanders had ousted the 6-month-old government. It would have been the third coup in this Caribbean country in less than a year.

**'Reports that there has been a change of government.'**

—Spokeswoman for U.S. Embassy

There was no way to immediately confirm any of the reports, which came four days after four top army officers were discharged after being accused of drug trafficking.

Haiti's international airport was closed, a move taken after previous coups, and large numbers of soldiers were at the palace and on the streets.

State-run radio and television continued regular programming and made no mention of a coup several hours after the initial reports of shooting.

Susan Clyde, spokeswoman for the U.S. Embassy in Haiti, said there were "reports that

there has been a change of government," but that the capital of Port-au-Prince appeared calm.

Five soldiers of the Presidential Guard arrived at independent radio station Liberte at 11:45 a.m. to deny the reports Avril had been ousted.

An announcement read by a soldier identified only as Georges Metayer said: "President Avril is in the National Palace. . . . There's no problem in the army."

A source close to the government said soldiers in the Presidential Guard had foiled rebels who tried to stage a coup.

Gunfire was heard twice near the palace in the pre-dawn hours, witnesses said. Several hours later, renewed gunfire, described as heavy, broke out in the same area. There were no reports of casualties.

A Haitian government source said shortly after daybreak three military officers, including Maj. Gen. Herard Abraham, the army commander-in-chief, had overthrown Avril and that Abraham was placed in charge of the government. The source spoke on condition of anonymity.

One source said, however, that Abraham had refused to accept the presidency. Abraham was foreign minister under the government of Lt. Gen. Henri Namphy, whom Avril replaced.

There were other unconfirmed reports from sources that Avril and Col. Acedius Saint-Louis, the interior and defense minister, were being held at the Leopard Corps barracks in suburban Port-au-Prince.

Another Haitian source, who also spoke on condition of anonymity, said the coup leaders included Gen. Guy Francois, commander of the Dessalines military barracks in Port-au-Prince; and Lt. Col. Himmiler Rebu, commander of the Leopards battalion, an elite commando corps.

Richard Melton, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Caribbean affairs, visited Haiti on Monday and told Avril resumption of U.S. aid depended in part on Haiti's efforts to crack down on the narcotics trade.

On Wednesday, four top army officers accused of involvement in the drug trade were discharged.

Hubert de Ronceray, a conservative political leader, said those dismissals might have triggered the coup attempt.

The violence also came about two weeks after Avril partially restored the suspended constitution of 1987, including one provision that bars former top supporters of the Duvalier dictatorships from holding public office.

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April may have fooled you, but it didn't fool us! If you breathed a sigh of relief today when you saw no April 1 jokesters, think about what is upcoming in the mighty month of May -- another holiday! If it pleased you to see today's outstanding omission, don't pucker just yet. Catch us in May. Candy and treats won't be all that's in your basket! Tee-hee, tee-hee!

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