

Friends of Fiji

News

Fall 2001 Vol. 10 Issue 3

a newsletter for returned peace corps volunteers, staff & all friends of fiji

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Fiji in the News

contributed by Murty Polavarapu

The Elections

Qarase Returns to Power

The long-awaited elections of August 2001 produced a racially divided parliament with a government led by the former Caretaker Prime Minister Lasenia Qarase. Qarase had who defied the constitutional requirement of including major opposition parties seats in the cabinet and now his election faces a legal challenge.

Eighteen parties and 351 candidates contested the 71 parliament seats in the elections of August 2001 that stretched over two weeks. The newly formed, Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua Party, SDL, led by Lasenia Qarase, captured the most seats, 32, including the delayed contest in Ra constituency. The deposed Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, spearheaded the Labour Party's return to Parliament with 27 seats, well short of the outright majority that the Party commanded after the previous election in 1999. Needing a coalition partner to be able to form the government, SDL made a deal with Conservative Alliance, formed by supporters of George Speight, who is currently in prison on treason charges stemming from the May 2000 coup. Speight, running under his Fijian name of Ilikini Naitini, won the Tailevu seat.

News, continued on page 8

President's Letter

As I write this in late September, it has been two weeks since the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington which led to the postponement of the Peace Corps' 40th anniversary celebration and our own annual meeting and fundraising event in Washington. Earlier today in Fiji, a mosque near Lautoka was burned in an arson attack and Fiji's ousted former leader Mahendra Chaudhry asked the high court to invalidate the new government of Laisenia Qarase because of its refusal to include members of his Fijian Labour Party. Thirty-four years ago, I was packing my bags to go to San Francisco to enroll as a Peace Corps Trainee in the first group of volunteers to go to Fiji. Sa!

"Sa!" was the name of the first PCV newsletter/magazine in Fiji. We chose this name because it was a universal expression in Fiji, used by Fijians, Indians, Europeans and others to express a variety of emotions depending on intonation. Shock, surprise (pleasant and not so pleasant), dismay – "Sa!" says it all. It seems like the only thing to say today.

We are all horrified by the attacks on New York and Washington. We are saddened by the fact that Indians are being excluded from the government of Fiji. We are acutely aware of the lack of understanding, the injustice, the prejudice and the hatred in the world. We grieve that the spirit and purpose of the Peace Corps - "promoting world peace and friendship" – has suffered in so many ways lately. Those of us who have lived and worked with people in the Middle East, with Fiji Indians, and with Muslims in various parts of the world, feel this in a special way.

But we are also encouraged by the spirit and expressions of cultural and ethnic sensitivity and by the generosity, volunteerism and service to others that we have seen over the past few weeks and by the voices of reason in the debate on how America should respond overseas. The second and third goals of the Peace Corps – promoting a better understanding of Americans on the part of other peoples and a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans – seem to become more and more important as time goes on. Those of us who are Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and staff continue have a special role to play, especially in times like these. I hope you will seize opportunities in your community and in our nation to continue to work for world peace and friendship.

David Downes

President
Friends of Fiji

Friends of Fiji Update

Board of Directors Elections

Due to the postponement of the annual general meeting until December 1, elections for the Friends of Fiji Board of Directors will be held at that time. To date, the following people have been nominated for election to the Board: Anne Baker, Amelia Catanasiga, David Downes, Cynthia Grant, Herbert Mauekwe, Fred Mosher, Teresia Owens, Jim Reiersen, Carolyn Waterman and Robin Weaver. Other nominations will be accepted up until the election. All those receiving at least one vote will be elected.

The annual general meeting will be held with a potluck dinner starting at 6:00 pm on Saturday, December 1, at the home of David and Willa Downes, 3327 Mantua Dr., Fairfax, VA 22031. For more information, call 703-641-0517 or email downesdd@aol.com.

Group 26 Holds Reunion

During the weekend of October 29-30, 2000, Mark Follis of Group XXVI hosted a 25th year reunion of Fiji RPCVs at his residence in Memphis, Tennessee.

The uninhibited exchange of banter, memories, and gossip made it very difficult to believe that so many years had passed since the halcyon days of being Fiji PCVs.

In addition to cold beverages, the guest RPCVs were treated to delicious fried catfish and barbecued ribs as well as a guided tour of the city. Besides the grand feasting and reminiscing, the host was ecstatic that Tennessee defeated Louisiana State in college football.

Mark is married to Ellen and the father of Caylen,¹² and Mark,¹⁰. Attending the gathering were Robert T. (Gunner) Gronski/Group XXVI, John Ragni/Group XXVII, and Jim Fitzsimmons/Group XXI. Bob traveled from Des Moines, Iowa; John from Arkadelphia, Arkansas, and Jim from Washington, D.C.

The RPCVs present began contemplating the next reunion, possibly as early as next year at a location yet to be determined. Anyone who served in Fiji in the late 1970s can contact Gunner via e-mail -- nrlcrg@aol.com -- and be kept informed of future Fiji-RPCV reunions.

Contributed by Jim Fitzsimmons

Friends of Fiji Gathering

A get-together was held on Friday May 18, 2001, at the home of Marylou and Frank Kavalier, 360 West 36 Street, N Y. Nine people, all PCRVs from Fiji, attended. The purpose of the meeting was to give NYC area people with an interest in Fiji an opportunity to meet, talk over old times and explore the possibility of making the group permanent.

The group, after a time to get to know each other, decided another get-together was warranted at which time we would decide whether we want to continue to meet and what our mission would be.

So, luckily for all those who missed the first, a second meeting will be held at the same place on Friday, November 9 at 6:30 pm. As before, drinks and a buffet supper will be served. If you are driving there is usually on street parking after 6 pm.

All NYC area residents with an interest in Fiji are invited to attend. Please call Frank or Marylou at 212-268-0176. If you attended in May and do not plan to attend in November, please call and let us know.

Thanks,

Frank Kavalier

Fiji II Volunteer, David Williams, Passes Away

From the Prescott Daily Courier

David A. Williams, 58, of Prescott, died Sunday, May 13, 2001, at Scottsdale Osborn Hospital after a long illness. He was born Feb. 4, 1943, in South Orange, N.J., to Gordon L. and Dorothy (Pampel) Williams.

Mr. Williams graduated from Bates College in Lewiston, ME, and received his juris doctor from Boston University Law School. As a Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji, he designed a fisheries cooperative in the capital city of Suva that is still in use today.

After returning to the United States, Mr. Williams was a public defender and also staff counsel for Pine Tree Legal Assistance of Maine. He was later an assistant attorney general of the state of Maine, and in 1976 was a Democratic candidate for state senator from Freeport.

Mr. Williams was a journalist for several years, first as the television critic for the Portland Press Herald in Maine, and later for the Arizona Daily Star in Tucson. He was elected president of the Television Critics Association in 1983.

He was a democratic candidate for state representative in rural Tucson, and at the time of his death was in private law practice in Prescott Valley. He is the former executive director of the Arizona State Bar Association, a non-profit legal aid society in Phoenix, and former president of the board of directors of the Prescott Child Development Center.

Surviving are his wife, Roseline; father Gordon L. Williams of New Jersey; sons, Andrew of Dewey and Robert Williams-St. Mary of Freeport, Maine; sister, Mary Jane Esser of New Jersey; and brothers, Richard of Michigan and Brian of New York.

The family suggests memorial contributions to Prescott Child Development Center, 1045 W. Whipple St., Prescott, AZ 86305.

Contributed by Jim Platts

House for Sale

Jill Weber, Fiji 69, has lived in Fiji permanently since 1994 "basically retired," she says, but she developed her own women's health education project as a side project. Now she is buying a new Fijian home and putting her house up for sale.

She describes the house as located in Korotogo, Sigatoka on the Coral Coast, a three minute walk to beach. It has 1/4 acre fully-fenced FREEHOLD LAND, with well-maintained gardens. The building is single-story, concrete, screened with 2 1/2 bedrooms and two tiled bathrooms, solar hot water throughout, all for US\$50,000 (and no property taxes). If you, or a group of you, are interested in a place in Fiji, contact Jill Weber (Fiji '69) at:

P.O. Box 990 Sigatoka, Fiji Islands.

Phone: +(679) 520-368

Email: jillweber@is.com.fj

Moving to Fiji

From John Hasset, Fiji 73

My wife Berit and I are completing plans to move to Fiji permanently early in 2002.

We would like to have this announced to our fellows in your next edition.

We particularly want Fiji 73 members to know that we intend to re-open contact with our hosts at Savu village. We would be most pleased to deliver any messages.

We can be reached at our e-mail address or (310) 556-1749 or 9709 Olympic Blvd 5, Beverly Hills CA 90212.

The above contact addresses will expire January 2002.

Thanks,

John Hasset

JandBhasset@home.com

Help a Fijian feel at home in the US

Editor's Corner

I am writing to ask for help for a Fijian man who recently came to Central Oregon to attend college. He arrived a couple of months ago and would like to connect with other Fijians and also Friends of Fiji. His adjustment to the States could be a little easier with these connections I am sure!

I met him in San Francisco airport on my way home to Portland, Oregon. There I spied a man in a sulu, shirt and tie and those brown Fijian sandals. I blurted out "Bula!" before I thought and his face quickly lit up and responded with "Bula Vinaka." He just got off the plane from Fiji and was entering the U.S. for the first time and was a little scared. We have stayed in contact.

He has been a math and physics teacher for the last six years in Micronesia, married with four children. He wants to get a college degree here. His wife and children can not get a visa at this time. So he is struggling, lonely and trying to get a job while attending school. I thought Friends of Fiji would probably like to help him out a bit. Could you please post his email address in your newsletter? And/or pass around his email to people who might be interested in contacting him?

Thanks for "listening" and hope you can help. Here's his email: arokoseba@hotmail.com. His name is Amani Rokoseba (Roki for short).

Vinaka, Vinaka,

Blake Mills, RPCV Fiji-93-95

Corrections:

In the last issue I replaced Murty's news column with wire stories at the last minute due to computer problems. I incorrectly left Murty Polavarapu's name as the contributing author. I apologize for the error.

This is a very important time for the nation, when our actions both at home and abroad are defining what is called our "national spirit." Now is the time when we choose our priorities -- we must pick between compassion and pride, greed and generosity, understanding and ignorance, possessions or people, support or an empty-hand.

Former Peace Corps volunteers know the benefits of compassion, understanding and support. Now is the time to attempt to foster those values in a nation seeking a way forward -- the United States. Now is the time for us to define our role as participating citizens in the global world, not, as some would have us be, as mere consumers. Shopping is not our only patriotic outlet as countless national heroes have recently shown us. We can help the poor, hungry, homeless, elderly and the attack victims in many ways.

As our nation creates a coalition to fight terrorism, let's work as citizens of a democratic nation to create a world coalition to fight its causes: poverty, hunger, and cultural ignorance. Peace Corps taught us how. Now is the time to share that knowledge.

Best Wishes,

Denise Trunk
Editor

National Peace Corps Association Update

Peace Corps 40th Anniversary Celebrations and FoF Fundraiser postponed until 2002

by Anne Baker, Fiji 56, Director of Global Education and Programs, NPCA

The National Peace Corps Association, (NPCA), and the RPCVs of Washington reluctantly decided to postpone the Peace Corps 40th Anniversary celebrations in light of the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001. The conference and gala, originally scheduled for the weekend of September 20-23, 2001, in Washington, DC, will be rescheduled for June 20-23, 2002, also in Washington.

The NPCA expects the rescheduled conference to include many of the key features of the original, including the keynote speaker, Alejandro Toledo, President of Peru, and such events as Advocacy Day, the Global Challenge, panel presentations, country updates, country of service reunions and more.

Those who had registered for the September 2001 conference received an official mailing from the NPCA, including the dates for the rescheduled conference and the policy for handling funds paid for registration. You may also get that information from the website.

Please check the NPCA website at <http://www.rpcv.org> frequently for updates.

Given the circumstances, the board of Friends of Fiji voted to postpone our bi-annual fundraiser, which will now be held in conjunction with the rescheduled conference. Stay tuned to the Friends of Fiji website, <http://www.fofiji.org>. We will provide complete details in the next issue of this newsletter.

Save the date: Saturday, June 22, 2002.

Peace, that Beautiful five-letter Word

by Loret Miller Ruppe, 11th Director of the Peace Corps

Excerpted from her speech given at the Peace Corps 35th anniversary celebration in Washington, D.C., on March 1, 1996.

“I ended many speeches when I was Peace Corps Director with this: Peace, that beautiful five-letter word we all say we crave and pray for, is up for grabs in the ‘90s. A question must be answered above and beyond this special forum: Is peace simply the absence of war? Or is it the absence of the conditions that bring on war, the conditions of hunger, disease, poverty, illiteracy and despair?”

When 50 percent of the children die in a village before they are five; when women walk miles for water and then search for wood to cook by; when farmers leave their villages where there are no jobs to flock to cities where there are no jobs; when neighbors ethnically cleanse their neighbors, then let’s face it, America, the world is not at peace.

And here at home, when 50 percent of our children live below the poverty level in many of our cities, when the homeless abound on our streets, when our nation’s capital is bankrupt and our schools require metal detectors, racial tensions abound and immigrant bashing and downsizing terrorizes loyal workers, then, let’s face it, America, we are not at peace.

The Peace Corps family must respond again to “Ask not what your country can do for you, rather ask what you can do for your country.” And today, in our world it is, as President Kennedy said, the ‘towering task.’ We can do it!”

Gaddi H. Vasquez, President Bush's choice to be the next director of the Peace Corps, is the object of strong opposition from national newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe* and *The LA Times*, as well as members of the RPCV community. These voices cite Vasquez, a former California public official who was forced to resign, as a poor choice because, they say, he has no Peace Corps nor international experience; he has no development organization experience, and there are questions about his ethics. For more information, visit www.peacecorpsonline.org, an independent news site.

President Bush Nominates
Gaddi Vasquez as Peace
Corps Director

Washington, D.C., July 25, 2001 -- President George W. Bush announced today his intention to nominate Gaddi H. Vasquez of Orange, California, as Director of the Peace Corps. Mr. Vasquez is currently Division Vice President of Public Affairs of the Southern California Edison Company.

Mr. Vasquez has been named six times as one of the 100 Most Influential Hispanics in the United States by Hispanic Business Magazine and was given the Award for Outstanding Leadership from the California State Assembly. He is a graduate of the University of Redlands and has completed Executive Studies programs at both Stanford University and Harvard University. -Peace Corps Press Release

NPCA Position on the Intent to
Nominate Gaddi Vasquez as Peace
Corps Director

Ed Crane, Advocacy Coordinator
9/13/01

The NPCA president wrote to the Transition Team in January 2001 and the Board Chair to the White House in February urging the Administration to appoint an RPCV as Peace Corps Director. We presented a list of qualified Republicans. Some of these individuals were interviewed for the job. The NPCA is very disappointed that the Bush Administration did not accept this counsel.

The NPCA encourages Mr. Vasquez to meet with RPCVs informally in advance of the hearings on his nomination to indicate what his qualifications are for the Director job and what directions he intends to take the Agency, if confirmed. (At this time the nomination of Mr. Vasquez is not yet formally before the Senate). The NPCA encourages its members to give Mr. Vasquez a fair hearing, keeping in mind that several non-RPCVs have been competent directors of the Peace Corps and that some were strongly criticized in advance as not having good qualifications for the job.

The NPCA encourages its members - and indeed all RPCVs -- to express their views on the nomination of

Gaddi Vasquez both to the NPCA staff and other members, including affiliate groups, to their representatives in Congress and to members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which will examine the qualifications of the candidate.

The NPCA strongly urges that the Deputy Director and a substantial majority of senior staff at the Peace Corps be chosen from the ranks of RPCVs. Competent RPCVs have an understanding of the context in which Volunteers work and of their needs, an understanding which is critically important.

Jody Olsen Tapped for Peace Corps Deputy Director

Washington, D.C., September 20, 2001- President Bush's announced of his intention to nominate Josephine K. "Jody" Olsen to be Deputy Director of the Peace Corps.

Jody is currently Senior Vice President at the Academy for Educational Development in Washington, D.C. For eight years, Jody served at the Peace Corps in a variety of positions and from 1966 to 1968, Olsen was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Tunisia.

Peace Corps Press Release

Friends of Fiji News continued...

Government Challenged

The newly formed Qarase government now faces a legal challenge by Mahendra Chaudhry who is disputing his party's exclusion from the cabinet. The present constitution requires that major opposition parties be included in any government. Qarase grudgingly extended an invitation to Chaudhry publicly saying that an acceptance would lead to unworkable government. Never one to turn away from a confrontation, Chaudhry forced Qarase's hand by accepting his offer. Qarase later rejected Chaudhry's acceptance citing unacceptable conditions. Even Fiji's Chief Justice Sir Timoci Tuivaga was quoted as saying that the exclusion of Mr. Chaudhry's party from the new government is illegal.

Elections Monitored

Observers from the Commonwealth and United Nations were in Fiji to observe the elections and reported that despite minor procedural issues, the elections were fair. The Carter Center, however, was unable to participate in the monitoring process due to delays in obtaining proper approvals.

Fiji still out of Commonwealth

Fiji's hopes to return to full membership of the Commonwealth were dashed following the exclusion of Labour Party from the post-election government. Fiji was suspended from the policy-making bodies of the 54-nation organization after the overthrow of the elected Government in May 2000. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group decided to end Fiji's outcast status if the elections were free and fair and if the new Government was formed in accordance with the constitution. Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon said, "I am not fully satisfied that the second precondition set for Fiji's return to full Commonwealth membership has been met."

New Zealand yet to normalize relations with Fiji

New Zealand says it will not normalize relations with Fiji unless the new government settles the question of its legitimacy.

Speight still in prison

Despite winning in the recent election, George Speight remains in confinement pending his trial on treason charges. His appeal for bail to attend the opening ceremony of Parliament was rejected. The Conservative Alliance was unsuccessful in winning the release of those still in jail on coup charges in return for the support to SDL-led coalition.

Significant Election Losses

Jim Ah Koy, SVT, a wealthy businessman from Kadavu and former Minister, lost to Konisi Yabaki of SDL. **Tupeni Baba**, who formed New Labour Unity Party, lost from Samabula/Tamarua. **Inoke Kubuabola**, former Information minister lost his seat from Cakaudrove Fijian constituency. **Adi Kuini Speed** of Fijian Association Party lost her Serua/Navosa seat. **Filipe Bole**, former minister, lost from Suva Urban. **Lavenia Padarath**, former Minister and Peace Corps Medical Officer lost from Nausori.

Ratu Epeli as Speaker
 Ratu Eplei Nailatikau, Bau Chief and Deputy Prime Minister in the Caretaker Government, is the new Speaker of the lower House. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure was elected as the Deputy Speaker.

Party Break-down	
Labour Party	27
Conservative Alliance	6
National Federation Party	1
New Labour United Party	2
SDL	32
United Generals Party	1
Independents	2
TOTAL	71

Notable Wins

Pita Nacuva, former Fiji Ambassador to the United States won from the Nadroga/Navosa Fijian Provincial Constituency. **Poseci Bune**, former Ambassador to the United Nations, who joined the Labour Party prior to the elections, won the Labasa open seat. **Mahendra Chaudhry** retained the Ba open seat. **George Shiu Raj**, the lone Indian member in Qarase's cabinet, won the contest from Ra that was delayed due to a candidate's death.

The New Government

Laisenia Qarase - Prime Minister & Minister for Fijian Affairs

Qoroniasi Bale - Attorney General & Minister for Justice

Ratu Jone Yavala Kubuabola - Minister for Finance and National Planning

Ro Teimumu Kepa - Minister for Education

Tomasi Vuetilovoni - Minister for Commerce, Business, Development & Investment

Joketani Cokanasiga - Minister for Home Affairs & Immigration

Kaliopate Tavola - Minister for Foreign Affairs & External Trade

Pita. K. Nacuva - Minister for Health

Ilaitia Tuisese - Minister for Regional Development

Konisi Yabaki - Minister for Tourism, Culture, Heritage & Civil Aviation

Jonetani Galuinadi - Minister for Agriculture, Sugar & Land Resettlement

Solomone Naivalu - Minister for Fisheries & Forests

Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu - Minister for Lands & Mineral Resources

Asenaca Caucau - Minister for Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation

Josefa Vosanibola - Minister for National Reconciliation, Information & Media Relations

Mataiasi Ragigia - Minister for Local Government, Housing Settlement & Environment

Kenneth Zinck - Minister for Labour, Industrial Relations & Productivity

Irami.U. Matairavula - Minister for Public Enterprises & Public Sector Reform

Savenaca Draunidalo - Minister for Works, Telecom, Energy, Road Transport & Shipping

Isireli Leweniqila - Minister for Youth, Employment Opportunities & Sports

George Shiu Raj - Minister for Multi Ethnic Affairs

Qarase's letter to President Bush after the tragic events of September 11

We, here in Fiji, have been deeply moved by your broadcast to the American people following the tragic events earlier today. We have been deeply shocked and utterly dismayed by these wanton acts of terrorism. Our prayers are with your Government and people, including the families of those who have lost their loved ones. Following the appointment of our new Government today, I convened a special meeting of our National Security Council, and I wish to assure Your Excellency, not only that we shall take all necessary measures to strengthen security for your Embassy in Fiji, but also that we shall give your Government all possible support at the United Nations and bilaterally to assist in your efforts in bringing those responsible to justice. Once again, please accept our sincere condolences for these very sad and tragic events. With assurances, Your Excellency, of my highest consideration. Signed, Laisenia Qarase

Economic Impact on Fiji

Fiji's Reserve Bank expects that the negative economic impacts following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington will be balanced by the more favorable domestic conditions. In a statement on 20 September, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Mr. Savenaca Narube, said that with events still unfolding as to how the US Government will respond to the terrorist attacks, there are numerous scenarios and various possible implications of its effects on Fiji. Narube clarified that the tourism sector will be the most affected driven by an expected fall in US tourists which may only be partially offset by the redirection of tourists from other destinations. Garment exports to the US are also anticipated to decrease. There may also be delays in the movements of airfreight between Fiji and the United States. Mr Narube, however added that more favorable domestic conditions in recent months are expected to limit the adverse effects of the external developments. The year-end inflation forecast for 2001 is expected to remain at around 3 percent. Fiji's foreign reserve levels remain comfortable and the year-end projection is still unchanged at over \$800 million.

Jale to Washington

Permanent Secretary to Public Service Commission, Anare Jale, is slated for the post of Ambassador to the United States. Currently, the embassy is operating at the Charge'd Affaires level.

Australia lifts sanctions but New Zealand Says no

As reported by Reuters, New Zealand said it would not remove sanctions against Fiji until the validity of the South Pacific republic's new government was resolved next year.

A range of diplomatic, military, sporting and aid sanctions imposed on Fiji after a coup in May last year would remain until the Fijian Court of Appeal ruled on whether a government elected in September was constitutional, Foreign Affairs Minister Phil Goff said in a statement. Goff said the Court would hear the matter in February.

The Commonwealth has also deferred a decision on lifting Fiji's suspension from the 54-nation grouping of mainly former British colonies, Goff said.

Australia removed a similar range of sanctions earlier this month, saying clear progress had been made towards democracy.

Former Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, the ethnic Indian head of the government deposed last year and now the leader of the opposition, has lodged a legal challenge after the new government excluded opposition MPs from the Fijian Cabinet.

Link up to Fiji

Stay connected by checking out these sites:

Our current site is located at <http://www.fofiji.org>.

A recipe for palusami, and other fish recipes can be found at:

www.spc.int/coastfish/asides/recipes/recipes.htm
(Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Fisheries)

www.internetfiji.com has recipes for Vuaka Vavi Ena Lovo (Pork baked in a lovo) and Kokada as well as links to news sites, tourist information, etc.

Fiji news can be found at:

Pacific Islands Report

<http://pidp.ewc.hawaii.edu/pireport/text.htm>

Fiji Post: <http://www.fijipost.com/>

Australia Morning Herald <http://www.smh.com.au/>

US Government sources include:

US State Department Background Notes

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/bgn/>

CIA Factbook

www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/fj.html#Intro

US Embassy in Fiji

<http://www.amembassy-fiji.gov/>

Site of interest:

http://www.moon.com/closer/fiji_customs.html

<http://peacecorpsonline.org/>

Contributed by Jim Reierison

One View of the 2000 Coup

The Ecumenical Center for Research, Education and Advocacy, formerly known as the Fiji Council of Churches Research Group, has launched "Fiji: Finding a Path Forward," a video documentary which examines the impact of the May 2000 coup as an opportunity to develop a greater understanding of some of the critical issues which face Fiji society today as a result of the crisis.

Fiji: Finding a Path Forward, which was produced last year, not only chronicles some of the events of this traumatic period in Fiji's history, but it also looks towards finding a solution, a path forward for Fiji's multi-cultural society during this period of post conflict rehabilitation and national reconciliation.

The video, together with an associated publication, "Mending Bridges Within Our Communities" is part of ECREA's project entitled "Creating a Culture of Peace, Justice and Reconciliation." This project aims to address values of respect, care, compassion and a session of justice, through community dialogue.

ECREA says they hope the video will go "a long way towards restoring good and positive relationships."

For more information please contact Koila Costello-Olsson at telephone 679 307588 or at fccrgroup@is.com.fj

Some Things Change, Some are Recycled, Others Just Lose Their Hair

by Jeff dick (Fiji 68)

I had a lot of questions when I returned to Fiji in May 2001, one year after the coup. Were neighbors getting along? How was the economy? What about the future?

With the departure of the Peace Corps, I had another nagging, though trivial, question: Could we still get into the Golden Dragon for free? You know the story--some mythical volunteer installed their lightning system years ago and, instead of payment, asked that volunteers always be admitted gratis. It was a nice perk as that rumored cost of living increase never came through in the early '90s.

Before heading to Suva, however, I caught a running cab from Lautoka to Ba (still only \$2) to visit my old gang in Nukuloa. Before I could get a bus, a young woman squealed "Mr. Jeff!" A former student whose name was, was... I guessed Salote but it was Manaini. No matter, I spent a couple days with her family that included a trip to the interior where I drank grog from a tanoa large enough to bathe a small infant. The body ain't what it used to be -- my crossed legs seized after 15 minutes, my stomach cringed on the fifth kilo and my appreciation for "older" volunteers increased tenfold.

As a (supposed) writer, I was fishing for some reaction to the coup. It seemed indigenous Fijians were more reluctant to talk about it than Indo-Fijians. On the wall of Manaini's flat was a Fiji Times story about Ilisoni Ligairi -- a former SAS officer who was Speight's military man during the coup. "We call him Qase--the mastermind," said Manaini. "He's my auntie's cousin brother."

This was a familiar refrain. Even those who didn't support the coup were quick to claim a relationship to Speight or the other rebels. Manaini's family were cane farmers who, like many western Fijians, supported Chaudhry, though they seemed to come around to the rebel side of ethnic Fijian leadership being the best thing for Fiji.

Once I headed inside to the Indo-Fijian settlements. I saw signs of abandonment. More than 1,300 families didn't get their leases renewed before the coup and took up with relatives in the cities or bought freehold land where they could.

The nearest abandoned farm to my old school was the Prasads. When I arrived in 1991, their son Praveen's wedding was the first I attended. Now the compound was being choked by weeds and there was nothing left but a foundation, a couple concrete gables too stubborn to remove, and a forlorn flipflop.

I visited the Prasads at their new home on freehold land outside of Nadi near the "Vancouver Flats" subdivision. With a Nissan Bluebird, a tractor and a sugarcane lorry parked in front of their new four-bedroom concrete house it was hard to see the Prasads as "victims" or "refugees." Struggling in my dusty Hindi, the grandparents told me how upset they were when they had to leave their 40-year home, but maybe it was better now. Praveen had a cheap bus ride to his job in Nadi and no one wanted to farm sugarcane anymore.

Others expressed similar resignation. They didn't blame their neighbors, either for taking back their land or for the coup --Suva politics were beyond and unconcerned with the villages -- but they had little hope for the future. Most people were looking out for themselves, hoping to get their own leases renewed for another 20 years.

As it was ten years ago, every Indo-Fijian was looking for a way out of the country. But it was different this time -- ethnic Fijians were leaving too. "It will take 20 years for the economy to recover," said Pio, an ethnic Fijian finalizing his paperwork to emigrate to Australia.

In Suva, the desperation and hard times were more apparent, though there are only a few burned out buildings still unrepaired from the post-coup violence. Fijian shoe shine boys hustled the streets from 7 a.m. until midnight hoping to gross \$10-15.

Petero, a huge doe-eyed man approached me at a snack bar and asked me to review a brochure promising international oil rig jobs -- with free videos every night -- if a \$400 registration fee was submitted. "An Indian guy at the American embassy told me it was a scam but I didn't believe him," he explained. "Keep your money," I told him.

This is a lot of what I experienced. Life on the surface looked pretty decent, but at home everyone is scraping by, unsure about the present or the future. Nor did anyone hold out much hope that the election would resolve anything.

Fiji and its people are as beautiful as ever -- the colossal and still growing Lami trash pile notwithstanding -- but it's a long bumpy road ahead.

And the Dragon? I said "Peace Corpse" and was immediately waved inside. I was slightly disappointed the tiny lady with glasses wasn't minding the door. The Dragon is still dark and sweaty and the Bitter is sold in big bottles. It's a USP hangout and the dance floor was covered with beautiful people from all over the South Pacific.

The place seemed unchanged until I caught a glimpse in the mirror of a balding, middle-aged tourist, the kind of guy I used to make fun of when I had hair. I finished my beer and went home early. (FOF)

An Interview with deposed Fiji Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry
Conducted May 24, 2001
By Jeff Dick

In 1999, Mahendra Chaudhry became Fiji's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister. He moved quickly, in a country where nothing moves quickly, to weed out corruption and institute reforms aimed at improving life for common Fijians.

Chaudhry was labeled arrogant, confrontational and out of touch with the ways and culture of the majority of indigenous Fijians. On May 19, 2000, eight masked gunmen stormed Fiji's parliament building in the name of indigenous rights and took Chaudhry and 30 other ministers hostage. Fifty-six days later the hostages were released, the rebels walked away with an amnesty agreement and the Chaudhry government was consigned to the rubbish pile of Fiji history.

On the anniversary of the coup, I met a defiant Chaudhry in his Suva office to talk about his time in captivity, the forces behind the coup and his prospects in the upcoming election.

JD--Who was behind the overthrow of your government?

MC--It was a combination of the politicians defeated in the last elections, certain elements of the security forces and some corrupt business people. Under the former administration, the government and the civil service had become very corrupt. We were weeding that out and we were removing some monopolistic controls certain businessmen had over key sectors of our economy.

JD--Will they ever be brought to justice?

MC--There is a lot of evidence. We have asked for independent inquiry, but that hasn't been convened as yet. The Commissioner of Police was supposed to be at the head of the investigation, but he himself is implicated. He was cleared by a bogus inquiry headed by the Chief Justice who himself is discredited by the legal fraternity.

Chaudhry *Continued on page 14*

Chaudhry, continued from 13

JD--Did you develop any rapport with Mr. Speight?

MC--We had about three meetings where he wanted to impose his views on indigenous rights on us. It was very racial and it was all about that democracy was not the right way, that they wanted the Fijian system of government, that Fijians were going to run this country and the Indians will not have any say -- this misguided nationalism. It was kind of a monologue, he would go on for hours but there was nothing of any substance.

JD--After you were released, you said you've forgiven the rebels. Have you forgiven?

MC--Yes, for what happened to me personally, because by the end of this period of captivity there was some awakening in Speight and his people that what they did was wrong and they had been used. So they tried to come closer to us by revealing things to us. Although I suffered, we shook hands when I was released and I don't have any personal animosity.

JD--Fijians say you wanted to take their land and give it to the Indians. Indians say that you were in favor of not renewing their leases and just providing compensation to relocate. Which is it?

MC--It is the latter one, because 83 percent of the land is native land. We have laws about land ownership and the government is not in control in that area. If the landowners do not want to renew the leases, the best thing for any government to do would be to pay compensation to those being displaced so they can use that money to rehabilitate themselves and find some other economic activity to earn a livelihood. We can't throw them out on the streets.

JD--You've been called abrasive and confrontational. Were you sensitive, particularly to the Fijians?

MC--Yes, this is a label they want to give me. The point is, if you stand up here for what you believe in and pursue your policies you are branded as arrogant. If you tell the businessman he must pay his taxes and he will not have his concessions because it is not fair to other businessmen, you will be seen as arrogant. If you want to bring in some changes to the status quo, you are seen as a revolutionary person, arrogant or insensitive—no—Fiji needed to change the way in which it was governed. We have not been progressing—if you look at our GDP, if you look at our per capita income since 1982 there is a decline in our real income. So all these things you've seen through the country—these huge landmasses lying idle with nothing happening—how will the Fijian people have progress if the resources that they own are not utilized for productive gain?

JD--How close is the country to being bankrupt?

MC--The economy is pretty bad. Even after the elections, economic recovery is not going to come overnight. It will take many, many years. We've been through this once before. This time around it's going to take longer because people are fleeing the country with their families and skills. It's not going to be easy for any government that comes in to deliver. (PoP)

Recipe Corner

Tin Fish Curry

Excerpted from www.spc.int/coastfish/asides/recipes/recipes.htm

by Rani Dhanjal

Gourmet fare it is not. Even so it is a famous and authentic taste of Fiji. Tinned fish (especially mackerel) is not a substitute for reef-fish, but it is seen as a culinary item in its own right, with its own distinct flavour. "Roti parcels" --chapati or roti wrapped into a neat parcel around a highly spiced filling of chicken, vegetable, or tinned fish -- are one of the most accessible quick lunches available in Fiji --and one of the tastiest. I'm surprised that no one has set up a roti parcel franchise chain yet (or maybe they have).

The following is one type of filling, but any curry which is not too runny can be used. This curry does not have to be used in roti parcels of course, but can be eaten separately with roti or rice as part of a "table" meal.

Ingredients

- * 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- * 1 "knob" of fresh ginger, grated
- * 1 onion, grated
- * Half a teaspoon of ground turmeric (haldi)
- * Half teaspoon cumin seed (jeera)
- * 1 teaspoon mustard seed (sarso)
- * 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- * 1 (flat) teaspoon garam masala
- * 2 tins of tuna (skipjack, in oil) or 1 tin mackerel
- * Chilli pods - depends on your taste and the type of chilli
- * Tin of garden peas or cup of frozen peas

In a frying pan over a good flame, add the oil from one of the tins of tuna (or add a tablespoon of oil if using fish in brine or tomato sauce). In this, fry the garlic and ginger together with the cumin and mustard seed, until the mustard starts to pop. Add the onion and fry a little longer until the onion is soft. Add some water or some more oil if necessary to stop the mixture sticking. Add the turmeric and tomato and allow it to form a paste. Add the tins of fish, the chilli, and garam masala and cook until heated through. Salt to taste (depending on the saltiness of the fish used). Like most curries, it helps to develop the flavour if left for a few hours before consumption, but this is essentially fast food.

From the SPC Coastal Fisheries Programme home page.
<http://www.spc.int/coastfish/asides/recipes/recipes.htm>

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