

to them (NC, 6–7 Oct, 12 Oct, 24 Oct 2006).

After a month-long blockade, the police liberated Doniambo, but only two of its four ore sources upcountry were functioning. The RPCR and AE traded barbs over alleged political plotting behind the strike, while the CSTNC adopted USTKE's tactic of on-again, off-again picketing and blockages (NC, 14 Dec, 17 Oct, 20 Oct 2006). The CSTNC even shut down the local newspaper temporarily for what it considered unfair reporting (PIR, 7 Nov 2006), while repeated negotiations stalled. Nea went to court for his appeal of a conviction from the previous year of blockades that had condemned him to three months in prison. The judge upheld the conviction and sentence, but told Nea that he could appeal to a higher court, and that there would likely be a "more or less generous" amnesty granted after the 2007 presidential elections for union-related offenses. By mid-November, Nea was softening his general strike demands, was arrested for diverting SLN funds and, with two associates, was fined US\$20,000, and soon was offering to resign from the SLN (but not his union) if the company did not fire nine of his union members. After three months of striking and often-paralyzing rush hour traffic jams, the Filipinos were still working for Goro, the AE was still in power, and nearly every organization in New Caledonia was fed up with Nea, even if it supported aspects of his concerns (NC, 23 Nov, 20 Dec 2006). The SLN, which actually had little to do with his specific strike demands, claimed that it had lost US\$110 million from work interruptions and so much credibility

that it could get only short-term contracts overseas (NC, 19 Dec 2006).

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SOLOMON ISLANDS

For Solomon Islands, 2006 brought a lot of expectations for positive change, especially with regard to political leadership at the national level. Many Solomon Islanders hoped that the national elections, scheduled for April, would bring about a change of government. The government that had ruled since 2001 under Sir Allan Kemakeza was perceived by many as incompetent and had failed miserably on the credibility scale. There was hope, therefore, that the election would usher in a new government.

These expectations were backed by the fact that the 2006 election was the first truly free and fair election. It was the first election since the deployment of the Regional Assistance Mission

to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), which disarmed most of those involved in the years of civil unrest from late 1998 to mid-2003. Although the previous national election (in 2001) had been declared free and fair by international and domestic observers, many Solomon Islanders knew that because of the widespread presence of guns in the communities at that time, voters had not really been free to choose. There had been evidence of intimidation of voters in some places. Much of this occurred before and after the election, and thus was never seen by observers who were present mainly on the day of the election.

The 2006 election, however, brought drama that dominated most of the year. Much of it emanated from dissatisfaction over the outcome of the election of the prime minister. Further, the newly elected Solomon Islands government engaged in a protracted diplomatic row with its Australian counterpart. This was largely a result of what Honiara saw as Canberra's interference in Solomon Islands domestic affairs. There were also debates about the regional assistance mission and Australia's dominant role in it.

These events and debates highlight the vulnerability of post-conflict societies and the challenges of rebuilding societies and states that have been traumatized by conflicts. They also demonstrate the challenges for international intervention and the role of foreign governments in post-conflict reconstruction.

The year kicked off on an upbeat note as many people joined families and friends in villages around the country to celebrate Christmas and

New Year. But as most people enjoyed the holidays, those intending to stand for office were busy preparing for the elections. By the time registrations closed, a record number of 453 candidates were signed up to contest in the fifty constituencies. This was an average of 9.1 candidates per constituency, up from 6.6 in 2001. The election, held on 5 April, was declared a success by international and local observers.

By the time the votes had all been counted, half the sitting members of Parliament had lost their seats. Among them were Joses Tuhanuku, the leader of the Labour Party, and Alfred Sasako, the outspoken member for East Kwaio on Malaita. Some of the prominent figures in the previous Kemakeza-led government, however, retained their seats. These included Sir Allan Kemakeza himself; Snyder Rini, his deputy in the previous government; Laurie Chan; and Peter Boyes. The other Big-men of Solomon Islands politics who were also reelected were Job Dudley Tausinga (who ran unopposed in his North New Georgia constituency), Francis Billy Hilly, Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, Manasseh Sogavare, and Patterson Oti.

In the days following the national election, members of Parliament gathered in Honiara to prepare for the "second election"—the election of the prime minister, which would also determine who formed the government. This period, as usual, was characterized by intense lobbying, both among the members of Parliament and from lobbyists outside. This is also a period during which, in the past, there were allegations that powerful individuals with big money would often bribe members of Parliament to

ensure that any government that was formed would favor them. Members of Parliament usually form coalitions or “camps” and try to lure enough other members to make up sufficient numbers to form a government.

The election of the prime minister was held on 18 April, with three candidates up for the post: Tausinga, Rini, and Sogavare. Rini eventually emerged as winner, bringing back into power the old Kemakeza-led government. This was a coalition between the People’s Alliance Party, Lafari, and the Association of Independent Members. Also with the group were Sogavare and four of his followers who had defected from the other side only days before.

The hundreds of people who gathered outside Parliament that day found the result unacceptable. They jeered at the newly elected prime minister, demanding that he step down and allow Tausinga to take over the reigns of power. Some demanded that the members of Parliament go back into the chamber and vote again. The crowd soon became rowdy and their actions quickly deteriorated into violent confrontations with the police.

When the police deployed tear gas, the protestors moved into the main streets of Honiara, destroying and looting Asian (mostly Chinese) businesses. By the end of that day, most of the shops in Chinatown had been looted and burned. The destruction went on into the next day, prompting hundreds of Chinese families to flee. Australia sent in troops from Townsville, Queensland, to help local and RAMSI police stop the violence. It was the worst public destruction ever seen in Honiara.

The Chinese—or *waku*, as they are known locally—were targeted because of a widespread perception that it had been Asian businesses who bankrolled Rini’s group and influenced the result of the election. Francis Billy Hilly, for example, alleged that large sums of money changed hands to win over the support of certain members of Parliament. He claimed that as much as \$1\$30,000 to \$1\$50,000 had been offered to individual members to vote for Rini (*Solomon Star*, 18 April 2006). This assertion, like similar allegations in the past, has never been substantiated.

In the days that followed, protestors continued to demand Rini’s resignation. The newly elected prime minister, however, refused to give in, arguing that he had been elected through a constitutional process and could only be ousted through that process. But despite his persistence, on 26 April—only eight days after being elected into office—Rini was forced to resign on the floor of Parliament. This became necessary after Sogavare and his followers crossed the floor and joined the Opposition. In announcing his resignation, Rini said that he did so “because I did not have the numbers this morning in parliament, I had no option but to resign to give way for the election of a new Prime Minister. I did not resign as a result of calls by the protestors. I did not yield to the calls of the protestors because I did not want to set a bad precedent for future Prime Ministers of this country” (Government Information Service, 26 April 2006).

Rini’s resignation made way for another election. Manasseh Sogavare and Fred Fono, the member for

Central Kwara'ae, contested, and Sogavare was elected as prime minister. He subsequently chose Job Dudley Tausinga to be deputy and moved to form a Grand Coalition Government with a number of political parties and some independents.

In announcing his cabinet, Sogavare included Charles Dausabea and Nelson Ne'e, two Honiara members of Parliament who had allegedly incited and organized the riots. At the time of their appointment, both had been charged and were in jail awaiting trial. Dausabea was appointed minister of Police and National Security, while Ne'e was minister for Culture and Tourism. Their appointments attracted widespread criticism, both locally and internationally. The criticisms intensified when, in setting up a commission of enquiry into the riots, the Prime Minister's Office included in the commission's terms of reference items that were perceived as prejudicial to the court processes and were seen as aimed at exonerating the two controversial cabinet ministers. Among those who expressed concern about the terms of reference was then Attorney General Primo Afeau.

Criticism also came from the Australian government through Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer, who expressed disappointment and concern over the appointment of the two controversial members of Parliament as cabinet ministers. But Canberra was also concerned that the terms of reference for the commission of enquiry were designed to place blame on Australian Federal Police serving on RAMSI.

Sogavare, who has never been a fan of Australia, lashed out at Canberra,

accusing the Australian government of interfering in Solomon Islands domestic affairs. The *Solomon Star* (9 May 2006), for example, reported that Sogavare had accused Foreign Minister Downer "of interfering with the domestic affairs of Solomon Islands." Sogavare said that "Australia's condemnation of the ministerial appointments of two Members of Parliament is clearly an interference in local politics." He even threatened to terminate RAMSI, arguing that it was dominated by Australia.

This triggered a tense diplomatic standoff between Australia and Solomon Islands that eventually led to the declaration of Australian High Commissioner Patrick Cole as a persona non grata. He was accused of interfering in local politics and was expelled from Solomon Islands in September. This tension between the two countries dominated political discussions throughout 2006 and into 2007, marking the lowest period, so far, in the history of diplomatic relations between Solomon Islands and Australia.

To add salt to the wound, in December, Commissioner of Police Shane Castle (an Australian national), while on holiday in Australia, was declared an "undesirable immigrant" and banned from reentering Solomon Islands. Minister of Foreign Affairs Patterson Oti said that the decision was made "after long deliberations based on the Police Commissioner's conduct on several instances, including his role in the 2006 riots and the well-publicized raiding of the Prime Minister's Office" (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2007).

Throughout 2006, the diplomatic

row with Australia overshadowed Solomon Islands foreign relations in particular, and political discussions more generally. A new Australian high commissioner was not appointed until early 2007. Peter Hooton presented his credentials to Prime Minister Sogavare in March 2007, after waiting for almost two months to be received.

The situation between Australia and Solomon Islands was exacerbated by the appointment of Julian Moti as attorney general, replacing Primo Afeau, who was sacked for opposing the terms of reference for the commission of enquiry on the riots. Moti, an Australian citizen, is a lawyer with a shady past. In 1997 he was charged for statutory rape in Vanuatu, but was later acquitted. Moti is close to Sogavare, with whom he shares a dislike of the Australian government and its policies in Solomon Islands.

Not long after he was appointed attorney general, Canberra announced that Moti was wanted in Australia for the 1997 rape case in Vanuatu. This raised questions about Canberra's motives: Why did the Australian authorities wait until now to charge him? Canberra's action was seen as politically motivated—an attempt to ensure that Moti, who publicly expresses anti-Australian views, does not become attorney general and thereby exert more influence in Solomon Islands government policies toward Australia.

In an interesting twist to the Moti saga, neighboring Papua New Guinea (PNG) was dragged into the diplomatic standoff with Australia after Moti escaped from Port Moresby while waiting for extradition to Australia. In September he was arrested

in Port Moresby by PNG and Australian authorities. He appeared in a Port Moresby court, and was taken into custody while awaiting arrangements to be extradited to Australia. In early October, however, Moti escaped to Solomon Islands on a clandestine PNG Defense Force flight. Canberra then lashed out at Port Moresby, banning PNG politicians from entering Australia. Allegations that people high in the PNG government assisted in Moti's escape led to the establishment of a commission of enquiry to look into Moti's escape and how rules had been broken to facilitate it. The commission's report pointed to wrongs committed as far up as the Prime Minister's Office. It put Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare in a difficult political situation.

By October the Moti affair had set the stage for a standoff between the Melanesian countries and Australia at the Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Nadi, Fiji. Solomon Islands demanded a review of RAMSI, with the objective of scaling down the Australian involvement. While the Forum agreed, nothing has yet been done. In the meantime, the diplomatic tension with Australia persists, although officials from the two countries have been working to mend relations. Australia has come to realize that dealing with its Melanesian neighbors will not be easy.

Politically, the Sogavare-led government is united. But there is general public discontent in Solomon Islands over its poor diplomacy, especially in relation to Australia, whom many people view as saving the Solomons from militant control. In particular, there is concern about the anti-RAMSI rhetoric

and the threats to expel RAMSI. Public dissatisfaction with the Sogavare-led government's policies has been exacerbated by the government's intention to rearm the Close Protection Unit of the Solomon Islands Police Force. Many Solomon Islanders still do not trust the police because of the involvements of some officers in criminal activities during the civil unrest.

All this negative publicity and poor diplomacy overshadowed the government's positive initiatives. The focus of its policy, for example, was on rural development—an attempt to involve the majority of people, who live in rural areas, in the development process. Although this is not an entirely new initiative—the rhetoric has been used before by successive governments—the Sogavare-led government believed it could deliver development to rural people through its "Bottom Up Approach" strategy. In his speech marking the country's twenty-eighth anniversary of independence, Prime Minister Sogavare pointed to the fact that Solomon Islanders had benefited only marginally from development in past years. He attributed this to the fact that Solomon Islanders never really participated in the development process. Consequently, he stated that his government was "determined to improve the active participation of Solomon Islanders in development by emphasising development at grassroots level" (*Solomon Star*, 10 July 2006). He said that development also depends on people allowing their resources to be used for development and the government to protect the rights of resource owners. By the end of 2006, a strategic plan had been drawn for the implementation of the "bottom-up

approach." The verdict on whether or not it succeeds will, however, come a few years down the road.

The government's rural development focus is being supported by aid donors and international funding agencies. The World Bank, European Union, and AusAID, for example, have funded the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy, which focuses on facilitating rural people's participation in the cash economy. This will be implemented jointly by donors and the Ministry of Planning and Aid Coordination.

In terms of economic development, the economy is growing slowly. This is due to smallholder producers as well as the reopening of some of the major industries like the oil palm plantation in the Guadalcanal Plains. The plantation was abandoned by its former owner, the Solomon Islands Plantation Ltd (a subsidiary of the Commonwealth Development Corporation) during the height of the civil unrest. It has since been bought by the Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Ltd, a subsidiary of Kulim Bhd, a Malaysian-registered company that also has plantations in New Britain in neighboring Papua New Guinea. It put a lot of money into the rehabilitation of the plantation, started production, and exported its first crude oil to Europe in mid-2006. It has recruited over one thousand local workers to rehabilitate and reconstruct the plantation.

By the end of 2006, negotiations for the establishment of another oil palm plantation in Auluta on Malaita Province had been finalized and work on it is expected to begin in 2007. This is a major breakthrough, given that it would be the first large-scale develop-

ment on Malaita, the province with the largest population in the country.

In the meantime, the Gold Ridge gold mine, which had been destroyed during the civil unrest, was bought by an Australian consortium, the Australia Solomons Gold, and is expected to resume production by the end of 2007. Work on rehabilitating the mine began in 2005.

So, while the diplomatic debacle between the Solomon Islands and Australian governments was going on, public servants and ordinary Solomon Islanders were hard at work trying to rebuild the economy and their own lives. It was, however, a difficult and uphill battle. Life for average Solomon Islanders has become more difficult because of the rapidly increasing cost of living (especially in urban areas) and the unavailability of or limited access to social services. Those who are employed find that their income is often insufficient, and villagers have little or no access to sources of income generation. In January the national secretary of the Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions, Tony Kagovai, acknowledged that in 2006 many employees "would find it difficult to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and education" (*Solomon Star*, 8 Jan 2006). As the year wore on, that became more evident and has contributed to social problems.

Law and order has improved significantly since the deployment of RAMSI because guns have been taken away from the communities. However, new challenges have emerged relating to increasing use of drugs like marijuana and home-brewed (and distilled) alcohol, known locally as *kwaso*.

Despite police raids on *kwaso* production, the problem persists, because for many people it is their only source of income. This has led to other problems, especially in the urban areas. RAMSI continues to work with local authorities to address this.

In the meantime police continued to investigate allegations of corruption among elite Solomon Islanders. Earlier there were concerns that RAMSI had not arrested the "big fish"—politicians and public servants who were allegedly emptying government coffers. Among those whom people pointed to was former Prime Minister Kemakeza. In April, then Police Commissioner Shane Castles told Radio New Zealand that Kemakeza was being investigated for allegations of fraud, following the tabling of a revealing audit report by the country's auditor general. This is with regard to money missing from compensation payment when Kemakeza was the minister for National Unity and Reconciliation. It was alleged that more than US\$5 million went missing and that many of the compensation claims, which included one submitted by Kemakeza, were excessive and falsified. In October, Kemakeza was arrested and charged with robbery, larceny, intimidation, and demanding money with menaces. The charges relate to allegations that Kemakeza had instructed former militants to intimidate and rob a legal firm, Sol-Law, in 2002 (RNZI 2006).

Another issue that featured prominently in 2006 was the continuing debate about the relationship between Solomon Islands and the Republic of China (Taiwan) and how that has influenced domestic politics. In the

past, concerns had been expressed that Taiwanese aid had a negative impact because it was being used to finance certain politicians. In fact, in the lead-up to the April election Joses Tuhanuku alleged, "Taiwan's dirty money comes flooding forward for the politician or candidate of the prime minister's choice. . . . Now in the past few months leading up to the election, these Special Projects are being used as the chief source of campaign funding for the Prime Minister's favorites whom are expected, once elected, to back him and his Republic of China cronies" (*Solomon Star*, 15 March 2006).

Interestingly, when Sogavare came into power, he had indicated that he would reconsider the country's relationship with Taiwan. But as Taiwan poured money into politicians' slush fund, or the Rural Constituency Development Fund, the government opted to stick with it. Taiwan has, over the years, provided important source of assistance to Solomon Islands and cannot be disposed of easily by politicians. The nature of Taiwanese involvement in Solomon Islands and the impact on the country's domestic politics will continue to be an issue of debate in the future.

The political highlight of December was the provincial elections. In Malaita, the provincial premier in the previous assembly, Reuben Moli, lost his seat, while the Guadalcanal provincial election saw only four provincial members retaining their seats. Isabel and Western Provinces elected new premiers. The election results showed a desire for change of leadership even at the provincial level.

The year was rounded off with the

resignation of Deputy Prime Minister Job Dudley Tausinga. This followed disagreements between Tausinga and the prime minister over the "illegal shipment" of logs by a company that operated in Tausinga's North New Georgia constituency. In an interview with the *Solomon Star* (20 Dec 2006), Tausinga said that he "had been forced to take the action I did because certain people were forcing me to apply a political solution to a legal issue. For me, that is wrong. You cannot continue to apply political solutions to legal issues." But despite Tausinga's resignation, the government remained strong.

By the end of December 2006, the political wheels turned more slowly. But the year had been packed with drama, especially in foreign relations. In terms of development issues, it seemed as though the government was saying the right things, at least rhetorically, through its rural development focus. Whether or not these policies will succeed is yet to be seen. One thing is certain, even if the Sogavare-led government dislikes Australia, they need Canberra's assistance if they are to successfully implement their policies and drag Solomon Islands out of the problems left behind by the civil unrest.

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VANUATU

Perceived lack of government action on various issues and indecisiveness or lack of coordination within the governing coalition led to three proposed motions of no confidence against Prime Minister Ham Lini during 2006. While Lini survived all of these challenges, the price of the government's survival was high. Large pay increases were awarded to public servants and police, while the Vanuatu Commodities Marketing Board (VCMB) declared price increases for the purchase of copra and kava.

The Lini-led coalition government was first established in December 2004. Throughout 2005 there were several changes to the coalition. By February 2006 the government consisted of eight political parties, including the National United Party (NUP) and the Vanua'aku Party (vp); People's Progressive Party (PPP); National Community Association Party (NCAP); Melanesian Progressive Party (MPP); Vanuatu Republican Party (VRP); People's Action Party (PAP); and two backbenchers from the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP) (*PVPO*, 2 Feb 2006).

The first major challenge the government faced in 2006 was a motion of no confidence in March. By early March all the Green Confederation (GC) members of Parliament and the

Melanesian Progressive Party had left the governing coalition. These two parties, along with the Union of Moderate Parties, formed an opposition bloc that supported Sela Molisa as the new prime minister (*PVPO*, 21 March 2006). Although politics in Vanuatu frequently appears to be dominated by personalities rather than policies, in this instance there were clear policy motives for the proposed motion. They included "the delay in appointing a police commissioner (for more than 18 months), [the failure to resolve] Air Vanuatu/Vanair's strike and the Vanuatu Commodities Marketing Board (VCMB) saga [relating to listing kava as a prescribed commodity]" (*PVPO*, 14 March 2006). Other issues included "unresolved issues such as unsuccessful motions of non confidences that cost a lot to the people of Vanuatu, illegal terminations from the government . . . high school fees, the issue of the two new Chinese donated ships awaiting routes, the late start to operations of Pekoa International Airport and the court case of the termination of the former chief executive officer of Air Vanuatu that is costing millions of vatu in compensation" (*PVPO*, 21 Feb 2006). Underlying all of these issues was the perception that the Lini-led government was indecisive or unable to make decisions when needed. This is at least in part due to the need to gain agreement of all members of the coalition before decisions can be made.

There were some legal maneuverings prior to parliamentary debate on the motion of no confidence, with the government proposing a counter motion to censure the members involved. This was ruled to be uncon-