Reviews of the Region and West Papua are not included in this issue.

**Fiji**

The repercussions of the political crisis caused by George Speight’s attempted coup of May 2000 still had overwhelming impacts on sociopolitical and economic arrangements in Fiji throughout 2005. In fact, the tasks of both the interim government since the crisis of 19 May 2000 and the elected government after the general election in 2001 have been difficult and challenging. Not only did these governments have to deal with restoring the economy, but more important, they also had to initiate solutions to minimize, or better still, totally eradicate Fiji’s coup culture. Diverse sociopolitical and economic interests had to be negotiated and harnessed for the sake of political stability and economic growth. These were top priorities, given the fact that all states are now part of a global political economy in which there is little control over changing economic circumstances. Political instability as experienced in Fiji after 1987, when the first two coups occurred, has inevitably complicated the chances of economic development.

The year 2005 was greeted in Fiji with ongoing political dilemmas, which were expressed through a continuous war of words between the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua/Matanitu Vanua (SDL/MV) coalition government of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces and its commander, Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama. Both the SDL and the MV parties were formed after the 2000 political crisis. The SDL was formed by Qarase during his term as interim prime minister, and the MV was first formed in Vanua Levu (Fiji’s second biggest island) by chiefs and people who supported the Fijian cause advocated by coup leader Speight. Qarase’s solution to political instability centered on a reconciliation process, whereby an independent unity commission would be established through legislation to offer solutions for the causes of the 2000 crisis. On the other hand, Commodore Bainimarama strongly advocated applying the rule of law to all offenders. By January 2005, Bainimarama had issued warnings against the perpetrators of the 2000 coup, whom he believed were still not being dealt with by the law. He warned, “For the financiers and the supporters of the rebels . . . I am anything but an officer and a gentleman” (*The Review*, Jan 2005, 1–5).

Fiji’s continuing political tensions, strongly expressed in 2005, are multi-layered. Beneath the much-explained interethnic conflict, which emerged as part of Fiji’s colonial legacy, are other struggles that have evolved from time immemorial and intensified through modern competitions for power. The ongoing conflict between government and the military highlighted both modern and traditional conflicts expressed through state institutions. Bainimarama’s consistent stand on
national security issues and the need to bring the 2000 coup perpetrators to justice became the center of controversy between the military and the SDL/MV government, which has its power base in a number of coup-prone vanua (land-based traditional political entities). Qarase’s belief in reconciliation as a long-term solution to Fiji’s political instability resulted in a Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill, which is currently before Parliament. The bill promotes reconciliation through the principles of restorative justice, where the “wrong” and the “wronged” are brought together to discuss and resolve their problems. Based partially on the Fijian customary way of veisorosorovi (traditional apology), it is envisaged that in the long-term, this process of reconciliation will heal wounds and permanently solve problems (Durutalo 2003; FIB, July 2005, 11–14). However, using the traditional methods of veisorosorovi to appease the wrongs already committed has not been nationally acceptable to the different ethnic groups in Fiji. Even before consideration of the bill in Parliament, opposition intensified when a few of the “chiefly perpetrators” of the 2000 coup were released from prison to serve their sentences extra-murally. These included former vice president of the Republic of Fiji, Bau high chief Ratu Jope Seniloli; the Tui Cakau and high chief in the Matanitu of Tovata, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu; and Viliame Savu, a pioneer Fijian nationalist (Fiji Times, 5 Jan 2005, 1; 5 Feb 2005, 6).

Different groups expressed concerns about the bill on a number of grounds. First was the appearance that, if passed, the bill would endorse two sets of laws in Fiji: the introduced rule of law and a semblance of customary law. The latter, based on restorative justice, would cater mostly for some groups of indigenous Fijians. Prime Minister Qarase explained: “The bill is an approach to justice adopted in other nations that have been driven and damaged by internal strife. It is undeniable that large numbers of active sympathizers of that upheaval felt they were standing for indigenous rights. But their actions were against the law. What they did was related to the grievances, insecurities and fears of the Fijian people, born out of a colonial decision to bring to Fiji settlers from India. Two distinct ethnic groups, with quite different cultures and religious beliefs were thus living in our islands. Colonial policy largely kept them apart. . . . This polarization brought us to the coups of 1987 and 2000 and to the legal initiative we have launched to spur and complement efforts for accomplishing justice and reconciliation” (FIB, July 2005, 11).

The application of the rule of law has become problematic to different groups of Fijian leaders. While the military commander believes in equality before the law and its application as a deterrent to crime, the prime minister believes that wholesale application of the rule of law would ignore the nature of crime committed by the coup perpetrators. The logical conclusion of this argument would be that the British colonizers were responsible for the coups in 1987 and 2000. Since Fijian involvement was only secondary, then the rule of law should be modified accordingly. Through recon-
ciliation, the wrong and the wronged can forgive each other; the wrong will never re-offend, and long-lasting peace can be an end result. The twist in this argument is the belief, as argued by the prime minister, that: “The country won’t enjoy stability and hence peace, progress and prosperity unless Fijians remain on top politically. That is the way it is in Fiji. It will remain so until indigenous Fijians feel confident about their place in a land where they are now nearly 54 percent of the population, having recovered from a minority position” (FIB, June 2005, 8).

The attempt to introduce a Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill contributed to the challenge of bringing about economic growth in Fiji. Expiring and non-renewed land leases contributed to increasing urban squatter problems, while global economic reforms caused declining export earnings from sugar and garments. Unemployment rates were slowed somewhat as mostly Fijian males were recruited for reconstruction work in Iraq and Kuwait. By April 2005, approximately 20,000 Fijians had applied for reconstruction work through two recruiting companies, Meridian Services Agency and Global Risk (FIB, April 2005, 3–7).

As part of an effort to look beyond Australia and New Zealand for new trade partners and markets, a trade mission visited India in 2005. India offered Fiji a soft loan of $86 million and a team of technical experts to overhaul the ailing sugar industry. The model would be the industry in the Indian city of Mysore, a highly integrated producer of sugar, electricity, ethanol, and organic fertilizers. In addition, four memoranda of understanding were negotiated, along with two bilateral agreements concerning water resources management and coconut industry development. The four memoranda, focused on health and medicine, tourism, information, and communication technology, enabled the establishment of a joint trade commission, which will meet annually (FIB, Nov 2005, 8). India has a lot to offer Fiji in the area of health, and a number of patients are sent to India for medical treatment. Tourism development may benefit both countries.

Recently Fiji and Nauru have joined Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Tonga in abandoning the “One China” policy and courting Taiwan. In mid-2005 Taiwan’s President Chen Shui-bian was accorded a full traditional Fijian ceremony of welcome and received by Fiji government delegates at Fiji’s Nadi International Airport. China’s ambassador to Fiji, Cai Jinbiao, expressed his government’s disappointment with Fiji for officially recognizing the arrival of Chen Shui-bian. Relations with China deteriorated further in mid-May, when Fiji and Papua New Guinea supported Taiwan’s bid to join the World Health Organization (FIB, June 2005, 23–24).

New laws and regulations regarding global and regional trade have incited conflicts between Pacific countries including Fiji, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea. Fiji responded to Vanuatu’s ban on Fiji’s biscuits by imposing its own ban on Vanuatu kava. Vanuatu is not a member of the World Trade Organization, and so avoided the rules disallowing such trade bans. However, the two coun-
tries discussed lifting their bans during the sixteenth meeting of the Melanesian Spearhead Group in Goroko, Papua New Guinea, in 2005. Also discussed at the meeting was Fiji’s earlier ban on imports of Ox & Palm corned beef after a negative report about the processing plant in Papua New Guinea (FIB, Sept 2005, 32–33).

Fiji has maximized its benefits from tourism through innovative changes by the government’s visitors bureau. Tourism is now the biggest earner of foreign exchange, with visitor arrivals reaching a record 495,008 in 2005, up from 430,800 in 2003. The Fiji Visitors Bureau forecasts that in the year 2007 there will be 610,000 visitors, and a total foreign exchange earning of a billion dollars (FIB, Sept 2005, 10).

The boom in the tourist industry also caused some indigenous Fijian owners to think seriously about how to protect and profit from their natural resources. In 2005, a bill for the state to return qoliqoli (traditional fishing grounds) to their indigenous owners was finally introduced in Parliament. A request by chiefs for the return of qoliqoli had been granted by the British Crown as early as 1881, but nothing had ever been done about it (FIB, June 2005, 20–21). Traditional qoliqoli owners located near hotels (which are almost wholly foreign owned) have been unable to get access to traditional fishing grounds because the state still “owns” the resources and has given access through leases to hotel owners. Some resource owners are also concerned about the damage done to the natural environment through the construction of large hotels. In 2005, Fijian landowners from Mobi and Nabila villages in the district of Nadi on the western side of Viti Levu threatened to disrupt the construction of the Marriott Fiji Resort because of damage to their traditional qoliqoli. The Fijian Resource Owners Group, led by retired politician and western Fijian chief Ratu Osea Gavidi, has been vocal in highlighting these concerns. On the other hand, the hotel owners are urging consideration of the benefits that the government gains from tourist dollars (FIB, June 2005, 21).

Whichever party wins in the 2006 general election, Fiji’s leaders will continue to face the challenges of enhancing the country’s economic growth while promoting political stability.

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References


NEW CALEDONIA

The “post-colonial” process of nation building continued in Kanaky/New Caledonia in 2005, as the new government elected in May 2004 entered its second year. The political stars of Avenir Ensemble (AE, or Future