tional, but the issue was still before the
supreme court at the end of the year
(smh, 14 Nov 1990). The adjournment
frustrated legislative attempts to reduce
the frequency of these unseemly
maneuvers. The session was termi­
nated before the necessary second vote
(the first was in July) could be taken on
a constitutional amendment that
would extend an incoming prime min­
ister's period of immunity from votes
of no confidence from six to eighteen
months.

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Some of this material appears in my
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SOLOMON ISLANDS

At the beginning of 1990, there was still
much optimism about the ability of
Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni’s
Peoples Alliance Party (PAP) govern­
ment to direct events in Solomon
Islands at the dawn of a new decade.
Things turned out somewhat differ­
ently.

In January, the Public Service Com­
mission appointed new officers to the
three top administrative posts in each
of the country’s seven provinces. The
posts of provincial secretary, deputy
provincial secretary, and provincial
treasurer had been upgraded toward
the end of 1989 in order to attract qual­
ified personnel to the provinces. The
move was in line with the government’s
decentralization policy and its promise
to serve the rural majority (ss, 12 Jan
1990).

The only notable privatization exer­
cise to take place in 1990 was the sale
of National Fisheries Development
Limited to a Canadian firm, British
Columbian Packers. The sale was a
relief to the government, which
regarded the company as a burden
because of its inability to generate prof­
its. The remaining 20 percent of the
shares in the Kitano Mendaiia Hotel,
previously reserved for indigenous
Solomon Islanders, were also sold.
Japan’s Kitano Corporation bought a
majority of the shares in 1989.

As the drive to develop the tourist
sector continued, the minister of Tour­
ism and Aviation commissioned a
national development plan with help
from the Suva-based Tourism Council
of the South Pacific. The government
hoped to improve on the previous plan,
which it described as “limited and inadequate to allow for a significant expansion of visitor traffic” (*BN*, June 1990).

The Anuha Island Resort, off northern Nggela, Central Province, was re-opened during the year. It had been closed in 1988 following protracted disagreements between the landowners and the Australian operator, Pacific Resorts Limited, over compensation payments (*SN*, 14 Aug 1990). The government was instrumental in getting the landowners and the new operator, Core Consolidated Limited, also of Australia, to the negotiating table. A new five-year lease agreement was signed, allowing the resort to reopen.

The addition of a Boeing 737 aircraft to Solomon Airlines’ small fleet in June is expected to enable the carrier to bring in more money-spending tourists from more overseas markets. Guadalcanal Province also demonstrated its ambition to develop tourism. In June, Premier Eric Seri led a delegation to Australia to negotiate funds of about SI$360 million for hotel, casino, and resort projects near Honiara (*ST*, 5 July 1990).

A report released mid-year by the Public Accounts Committee revealed massive illegal government expenditures of SI$81.254 million between 1985 and 1987. The committee, chaired by MP for Rennell and Bellona and former trade unionist Joses Tuhaika, concluded that part of the problem rested with an “ineffective and unrealistic” budgetary process, but noted that “successive governments were unwilling to control expenditure.” The committee recommended that three appropriation bills be introduced in parliament to legalize the expended money, and that charges be brought against any accounting officer who overspends the authorized budget in future (*SS*, 5 July 1990).

The Solomon Islands government continued to support Papua New Guinea as the Bougainville conflict lingered on. In March, the two countries agreed to close their common border until the conflict was resolved. At a later meeting they agreed on combined border surveillance for the purpose of monitoring the movement of illegal border crossers, especially those with ulterior motives (*SN*, 14 Aug 1990). In September, the minister responsible for immigration, Edmond Andresen, banned the entry of all Bougainvillean. In the same month, nine members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) paid an unexpected visit to the premier of Western Province, Jerry Buare. Buare later disclosed that the unofficial visitors to Gizo urged him to be tough with “rascals” who crossed the border in the name of the BRA. In the previous month, the BRA had handed over seven alleged criminals to Solomon Islands police. In December, the High Court in Honiara sentenced them to an average of ten years in prison for illegal entry and robbery.

The BRA does not view Solomon Islands as neutral ground, as was evident mid-year when it refused to send its delegation to proposed peace talks with the Papua New Guinea government. Concerns about safety on the part of the BRA may have been well founded. On the eve of the proposed talks, two Papua New Guinea patrol boats sailed into Point Cruz harbor without prior warning and were
ordered to leave by the government. Police also found that an advance party from Papua New Guinea were armed with high-powered rifles and complete communications equipment, suggesting different intentions (ss, 22 June 1990).

On 28 July 1990, private businessman and former diplomat Francis Bugotu was appointed to a three-year term as Solomon Islands permanent representative to the United Nations, ambassador to the United States, and high commissioner to Canada. The post had been vacant since the former incumbent, Francis Saemala, was elected MP for Central Malaita in 1989. The country’s second office abroad was established in June 1990 in Brisbane, Australia, in order to attract foreign investment and promote trade.

In September, the government terminated all serving permanent secretaries in an attempt to get rid of “dead wood” and make the public service more effective and efficient. These top public service jobs were then advertised as contract positions, with annual salaries of SI$59,255, free housing, vehicles, 36 days’ annual leave, and a 20 percent gratuity after four years of service. Only two of the fifteen former permanent secretaries decided not to reapply, and there was a total of seventy-two applicants. The Public Service Commission took three working days to interview all the applicants. Seven of the former permanent secretaries were reappointed, and the remaining six challenged the termination procedures in the High Court.

Among the new appointees was Francis Saemala, MP for Central Malaita, but he turned down the top job in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade after “careful consideration.” He was replaced by Phyllis Taloikwai, the first woman ever to be appointed permanent secretary. As the newly contracted permanent secretaries took up their positions, another contract employee entered the limelight. East Honiara MP Bart Ulufa’alu resigned his seat in parliament to take up a two-year contract as a government consultant. Ulufa’alu had been Mamaloni’s finance minister in the 1981–1984 government. His appointment is in line with the government’s policy of employing national, rather than foreign, consultants.

The parliamentary strength of the PAP was first tested in May when opposition leader and MP for Are Are, Andrew Nori, moved a motion of no confidence in Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni. The motion was overwhelmingly defeated, indicating the party’s coherence, at least in parliament. To support the motion, Nori relied on his revelation in parliament of a suspicious SI$250 million loan proposal involving the prime minister, Finance Minister Columbus Abe, Alex Bartlett, MP for Small Malaita, and a representative of an Italian financial institution, Robert Coppola. The prime minister challenged the opposition to prove that his involvement in the deal was illegal. Nori promised to take legal action against the prime minister and continued to warn of “ghost money.” The Central Bank also warned of “phoney loans” (ss, 8 June 1990). However, the government was keen to obtain the loan “to finance priority development projects in Solomon Islands” and was not deterred (ss, 4
May 1990). In September, with a plan in the pipeline to send two ministers, their permanent secretaries, and Alex Bartlett to Italy to sign the loan deal, news broke that Robert Coppola was in the hands of the Italian police (ss, 28 Sep 1990).

On 9 October, Solomon Mamaloni resigned from the PAP and from the parliamentary leadership, but took advantage of a constitutional peculiarity to retain the prime ministership. His resignation came a few weeks before a likely attempt to remove him as parliamentary leader at the annual PAP conference, and allowed him to abandon the party's Programme of Action and the 1988–89 Election Manifesto (st, 13 Oct 1990). To secure his political survival, Mamaloni masterminded a coalition that he dubbed a "government of national unity and political reconciliation." Five PAP ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Danny Philip, were dropped from the government, but nine were retained. The new cabinet included two former prime ministers, Sir Peter Kenilorea and Ezekiel Alebua, both members of the United Party and former rivals of Mamaloni. By 17 October three of the new ministers had been sworn in. Sir Peter, who was abroad when his appointment was announced, was sworn in on 26 October, despite the disapproval of his party. Only Alebua refused to be sworn in. Instead he joined forces with the remaining opposition members and the ousted PAP ministers, who vowed to vote Mamaloni out of office in the parliamentary session that began on 12 November.

While the new government was beginning to settle down, the Solomon Islands Public Employees Union called on its members to stage a sit-in strike on 2 November. The union demanded a pay structure based on the package offered to the new permanent secretaries. The strike was called off on the following Monday, when the government referred the matter to the Trade Dispute Panel. However, one trade union official warned that the panel will not be able to deal adequately with the dispute.

The much awaited motion of no confidence against Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni, to be moved by Danny Philip, the former deputy prime minister, was ruled out of order by the Speaker, Waita Ben, on 16 November. Standing orders forbid such a motion to be moved against the same person in two consecutive sessions of a parliament, and one had been moved in May. The ruling proved again that Mamaloni is a master survivor. It will take a united opposition with an agreeable leadership to remove him, characteristics not evident in the present group. Given that the government is likely to continue to implement the major policies set in motion by the previous all-PAP government, the emphasis on the private sector will continue into 1991 and beyond.

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ABBREVIATIONS

bn Bisnis Nius
sn Solomon Nius
ss Solomon Star
st Solomon Toktok