

For the first time, a review of Irian Jaya is included in this issue.

FIJI

In his new year address to the nation, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka urged the people of Fiji to make 1996 the year of “national consensus.” It was perhaps an appropriate refrain, given the expected challenges that lay ahead. Uppermost in the prime minister’s mind was dealing with the findings of the Constitution Review Commission. Its report was due to be handed to President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara sometime in the middle of the year. But if 1996 was remarkable for one thing, it was the prime minister’s ability to confuse and confound political foes and allies alike. In a year marked by economic gloom and political uncertainty, the prime minister’s quest for “national consensus” seemed to raise more questions than it answered. How serious and genuine was Sitiveni Rabuka? More important, was he capable of forging national consensus in Fiji, providing the strong and enlightened leadership so desperately needed?

The national consensus initiative got off to a rocky start in February, when the ruling party, the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT), held “National Consensus Talks” with the two Indian opposition parties, the National Federation Party (NFP) and

the Fiji Labour Party. It was expected that these would continue in the lead-up to the handing over of the Constitution Review Commission report. But overshadowing the national consensus talks was the government’s handling of the highly charged land issue. Agricultural leases are due to expire in 1997, under the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act (ALTA). In February, leader of the House of Representatives and government backbencher Koresi Mata-tolu announced that his newly formed Fijian Canegrowers Association would campaign for the nonrenewal of cane leases for Indian farmers. He also claimed that Fijian cane farmers (who currently make up about 25 percent of the farmers) would “take over the sugar industry by the year 2000.” What incensed the Indian opposition was the government’s (and Rabuka’s) silence in the wake of these claims and their failure to censure Matatolu. Instead there was a general plea from the deputy prime minister for “greater sensitivity” on all sides.

By March “Fijian unity” seemed to have replaced “national consensus” as the government’s first priority. The Fijian Association Party leader, Josefata Kamikamica, failed yet again in his bid to win the Tailevu seat in the House of Representatives, his third loss since the general elections in 1994 and the second in a by-election. He lost to the SVT candidate, Ratu Manasa Seniloli. Immediately after the by-election, Rabuka offered the Fijian Associ-

ation Party (FAP) a possible coalition partnership with the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei*. The offer was made through President Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. It was suggested by Rabuka that Kamikamica could be given a seat in cabinet through appointment to the Senate. Observers speculated that Rabuka's invitation to the Fijian Association Party, which caught everyone—not least Kamikamica—by surprise, was motivated by Rabuka's need for Kamikamica's help in managing the nation's economic problems. It was also suggested that Kamikamica's entry to the cabinet might have a "calming effect" on the Indian opposition, insofar as he was regarded as a moderate on constitutional issues. But there was also the possibility that this was part of a ploy by Rabuka to exert control and leverage over the SVT caucus—a way to ensure cooperation and unity within caucus when dealing with issues like the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act and the constitution.

Whatever the intention, the initiative failed to materialize and the coalition talks broke down after barely beginning. In April, Rabuka accused the Fijian Association Party of setting conditions, including the requirement that Kamikamica be the coalition leader. It was later found that Rabuka had based his claims on inaccurate media reports and no such condition had been made. Rabuka also stated that talks with the opposition leader, Jai Ram Reddy, were going well, removing the need for a coalition with the Fijian Association Party. But while the idea of a government of national unity was being bandied around in the

media, there was no consensus on the prime minister's position on the issue. As one observer noted, "No one can recollect whether Rabuka had actually mentioned a government of national unity in any definitive form" (*Review*, May 1996, 20).

The prospects for a marriage between the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* and the Fijian Association Party seemed to be killed by the death of Ratu Manasa Seniloli, the newly elected representative for Tailevu. Known to be terminally ill at the time of the election, his death only weeks into his term unexpectedly forced the issue of whether or not to field a joint SVT-FAP candidate. Rabuka had mooted the idea in the media the previous month, suggesting that Kamikamica could be nominated unopposed for the seat in any future by-election. In May, talks led by SVT powerbroker Inoke Kubuabola were held with the Fijian Association Party on the issue of a joint candidate. But Rabuka was reportedly against the idea, stating that he did not need the Fijian Association Party. Both parties subsequently fielded separate candidates.

The *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* nominated former Commissioner Western Lagisoa Delana, while the Fijian Association Party decided to try a new tack and nominated Bau high chief Ratu Epenisa Cakobau instead of Kamikamica. The Fijian Association Party hoped that the Cakobau name would carry enough weight to swing the votes in their favor. This was not to be, and the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* once again scored a victory in the by-

election held in June. Reflecting the divisions in the chiefly establishment, the SVT candidate had been strongly supported by the two powerful sisters of the Fijian Association Party's candidate, Adi Litia Cakobau and Adi Samanunu Talakuli.

While the two Fijian parties failed to resolve their differences, there were signs of greater cooperation between the Fijian Association Party and other political parties. The Fijian Association Party invited NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy to address a fundraising dinner in May, and there was agreement between the National Federation Party, the Fijian Association Party, the Fiji Labour Party, and the General Electors Party to field joint candidates in the up-coming municipal elections, under the banner of a new Ratepayers' Association.

The *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei*, meanwhile, indicated that it might be prepared to change the racial exclusivity of its party. In May a committee reviewing its constitution suggested that the party be opened up to other races. This was interpreted as a revival of the "three-legged stool" concept of the old Alliance Party of Ratu Mara, which was a combination of the Fijian Association, the Indian Alliance, and the General Electors Association. Some observers believed the proposal was an attempt to instill credibility in the government, while others saw it as a sign that the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* recognized it could not solve the nation's problems without the participation of all races.

Rabuka's thoughts on this issue were not made public, but he was clearly troubled by problems of unity

and discipline within his ranks. In May, the volatile and unpredictable backbencher (and Rabuka's uncle), Militoni Leweniqila, publicly threatened to bring down the Rabuka government. He had made similar threats in previous years. Although the outburst was quickly quelled, and a public and tearful apology made by Leweniqila was accepted, the incident appeared to be the catalyst for a cabinet reshuffle. Rabuka announced the new cabinet line-up in June, the ninth in four years. It was widely regarded as creating Rabuka's best cabinet to date, with the inclusion of several highly competent ministers. Also included were some well-known and outspoken critics of the prime minister, Leweniqila among them. But if Rabuka had sought to strengthen party unity with his new cabinet line-up, the manner in which the reshuffle was announced seemed highly provocative. None of the cabinet ministers dropped by Rabuka were personally informed of their removal, and Rabuka flew out of the country just hours after finalizing the reshuffle. For those former ministers, justifiably dismayed at their demotions, this treatment would have caused some disquiet and resentment.

The country awaited the release of the Constitution Review Commission report with some trepidation. The Indian opposition parties attempted to sound hopeful and optimistic, but this was a difficult task given the anti-Indian tone of the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei*'s own submission to the commission in October 1995. That submission had rejected the need for any change to the 1990 constitution. According to Jai Ram Reddy, "We take

it one step at a time. I have put my good faith in the decency and good faith of all races and I am working on that premise. If at the end of the road that does not work out, then we will look at other options" (*Review*, May 1996, 19).

The issue of land and the review of the ALTA legislation highlighted the problem of forging national consensus. In a poignant reminder of how deep the racial gulf remained, Indian farmers reported their inability to discuss the future of their land leases with Fijian landowners. One farmer from Sabeto admitted he had not held any talks with his landowners on the renewal of his lease, fearful that doing so would cause bad feeling. "What if they ask for money to renew? How do I react?" (*Review*, June 1996, 53). Confusion and uncertainty prevailed on both sides, especially on the issue of whether the renewal of leases was something to be decided between the tenants and the landowners, or by the Native Lands Trust Board (NLTB, the official landlord). There were numerous cases of landowners demanding premium payments for the renewal of leases, contrary to board policy. Many farmers preferred to comply with these demands, rather than risk antagonizing the landowners. There was criticism of the government's failure to clarify the future of land leases and to assuage the fears of Indian tenants. A survey being carried out by the Native Lands Trust Board on the amount of land to revert to landowners was not expected to be completed until the end of the year.

Also testing the government's will to build national consensus was its han-

dling of numerous allegations, and actual cases, of mismanagement, corruption, and abuse of office. The Native Lands Trust Board itself became the focus of a police investigation after a former assistant auditor alleged misuse of a total of F\$200 million by the board. There was no way of immediately verifying the allegation, as NLTB accounts had not been audited since 1989. Other targets of inquiry were the Housing Authority and the Fiji Public Service Credit Union. In the latter case it was revealed that office bearers had taken out loans far in excess of the value of their shares. But it was the National Bank of Fiji, declared "technically insolvent" in 1995, that created the most political and economic waves. In March it was revealed by the new management that the problem of bad loans, previously thought to be F\$120 million, actually stood at F\$220 million. It was estimated that up to F\$160 million would have to be written off. As a way of managing this, the bank would be restructured into a good bank (a personal bank) and a bad bank (an asset management bank), which would serve as a specialized recovery unit. A government bond would be issued to buy the problem loans and transfer them to the bad bank. It would also be necessary, as part of cost-cutting efforts, to implement staff redundancies.

What infuriated the public, the unions, and the opposition parties was the government's refusal to take action against those in positions of authority, who were ultimately responsible for what has emerged as the biggest financial disaster in Fiji's history. They included former Finance Minister (and

current Home Affairs Minister) Paul Manueli. Instead the bank's employees looked set to pay the price for the folly and greed of their superiors. About 340 workers were to be made redundant. In July, as parliament began debating the National Bank of Fiji restructuring bill, bank workers went on strike in protest against the size of the redundancy package offered by management. It became one of the longest running strikes in recent years. After two weeks, a compromise package of F\$7.8 million was agreed to, but not before Prime Minister Rabuka provoked public outrage by suggesting that civil servants should perhaps take a 2.5 percent pay cut to help keep the bank workers on board. This went down like the proverbial lead balloon with the Fiji Public Servants Association, which had a 3.5 percent pay raise pending.

In parliament, both the National Federation Party and the Fiji Labour Party sought to capitalize on the public anger over the National Bank scandal. Jai Ram Reddy planned to move a motion of no confidence in Paul Manueli. This was deferred until the September session. Labour leader Mahendra Chaudhary called for the resignation of the governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji. Most observers remained skeptical that police investigations into cases of fraud at the National Bank would lead to successful prosecutions.

As the Constitution Review Commission neared the completion of its report, there seemed to emerge a renewed spirit of consensus, at least among the main political parties. This was evident with the decision taken by

Reddy in August to not pursue his motion of no confidence in Manueli over his role in the bank scandal. Ostensibly this was because the prime minister would be overseas at the time. But it was apparent that Reddy's (and Rabuka's) main concern was not to sour relations in parliament as it prepared to receive the commission's report, and not to undermine unity in Rabuka's cabinet. The other sign of political consensus was far more self-serving. Government and opposition parties in parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of a pay raise for parliamentarians, which had been recommended by the Parliamentary Emoluments and Benefits Committee, chaired by prominent businessman Lionel Yee. The pay increase would cost an estimated F\$700,000, with remuneration for cabinet ministers and the opposition leader increasing by 44 percent.

There was no dissent in parliament on the recommendations, although outside parliament the move caused widespread consternation, if not contempt. Some union leaders vowed to follow the parliamentarians' example and push for their workers to receive comparable pay increases. Then, in an embarrassing about-face, Rabuka ordered that the raise be put on hold. It had been brought to his attention that increases in field allowances for soldiers serving in peacekeeping operations, approved in 1993, had so far not been implemented because the government could not afford the increase. But there were questions about the "legality" of Rabuka's actions in stopping legislation that had been agreed to by parliament, and the cabinet later ruled

that the raise for parliamentarians should go ahead.

September saw the long-awaited release of the Constitution Review Commission report. The three commissioners, Chairman Sir Paul Reeves, Dr Brij Lal, and Mr Tomasi Vakatora, handed their 699-page unanimous report to the president on 6 September. The day before the report was tabled in parliament its contents were leaked to the *Fiji Post* newspaper. This was the first indication that the commission had recommended far-reaching changes to Fiji's constitution. Full details were not available until after the tabling of the report on 10 September at a joint sitting of parliament that was addressed by the president, the prime minister, and the leader of the opposition and witnessed by an impressive gathering of business leaders, public servants, senior diplomats, the media, and academics. Later that day the government hosted a gala party on the grounds of parliament, to celebrate the release of the report and perhaps demonstrate its goodwill and commitment to the review process, whatever the contents of the report might be. But not everybody was in a celebratory mood that day.

While many had expected, and perhaps hoped, that the three commissioners would agree to recommend a move away from the overwhelmingly communal nature of the country's electoral system and the racial biases inherent in the 1990 constitution, no one fully anticipated the breadth of change that was being proposed. The commission had boldly defined a new vision for Fiji, one that aimed to ensure that all racial groups could feel

confident and secure in the land of their birth. The report, titled *Fiji: Towards a United Future*, had at its core the position that all races must be able to share in the government of the country, and this required the emergence of multiethnic parties or coalitions, which was not possible under the present communal electoral system. In order to promote multiethnic power sharing, the commission recommended the introduction of a common roll system for 45 seats in the 70-seat House of Representatives. The remainder should be communal (at least for the time being) and be allocated according to population as follows: 12 Fijian seats, 10 Indian seats, 2 general electors' seats, and 1 Rotuman seat. While the Upper House would not be based on ethnicity, the provinces would form the bases of the constituencies, with two candidates elected from each province. This system would probably favor Fijians.

On the question of Fijian paramountcy, the Constitution Review Commission's position was that while Fijian interests needed to be given special protection, this should not be through relegating other races to a lesser status. "We find no basis on which the paramountcy of Fijian interests or Fijian political paramountcy can be elevated into a right," the commissioners declared. Thus, apart from the position of president, no positions or proportions of public offices should be reserved for people of a particular race. The approach they recommended was "entrenchment" in the constitution of provisions concerning Fijian interests relating to land, natural resources, chiefly titles, customary law,

and dispute settlement. Under the current system, policy over such areas may be subject to amendment or appeal by act of parliament. Entrenchment was also recommended for the role and powers of the *Bose Levu Vaka Turaga* (the Great Council of Chiefs). Among other things, the commission recommended that the Great Council of Chiefs be given direct power to veto legislation that might affect Fijian interests. In general the commission elevated the Great Council of Chiefs to a position of political power not currently enjoyed under the present constitution. This was seen as providing greater protection for Fijian interests than the current system provided.

Sensing the need for calm, both the president and the prime minister sought to allay Fijian fears that what was being recommended would harm their interests. Addressing the joint sitting of parliament, Rabuka said, "The country needs a constitution that gave all citizens a feeling that this is their home" (*IB*, Oct 1996, 37). He also mentioned the need to meet international obligations and to restore local and foreign business confidence. But it was clear that building consensus around this report would not be an easy task. The immediate challenge came from within Rabuka's own party, when a number of prominent SVT parliamentarians and cabinet ministers voiced their strong disapproval of the report "because the CRC has totally rejected and disregarded the party's submission." It was even suggested by some that Rabuka should not chair the Parliamentary Select Committee that would consider the report, because his pro-multiracial stance would compro-

mise Fijian interests. Rabuka's response to this was unequivocal: "As Prime Minister I wish to ensure the success of consensus building within the committee. I need to be there" (*FT*, 24 Sept 1996, 1).

Fijian politicians from other political parties, including the Fijian Association Party, the Vanua Independent Party, and the Fijian Nationalist Party of Sakeasi Butadroka, found common cause with the SVT hardliners in opposing the Constitution Review Commission's recommendations. The prime minister was condemned for forsaking the cause of the 1987 coup. This forced Rabuka to issue an ultimatum to government ministers who were speaking against the report: those who preferred the path of the Fijian Nationalist Party and others advocating civil unrest should resign. None did.

The other main challenge came from the provincial councils. Rabuka's own province of Cakaudrove voted to reject the report "because it did not protect Fijian rights." This meeting had been chaired by SVT hardliner and Deputy Prime Minister Ratu Inoke Kubuabola. While some provinces voted as Cakaudrove did, others decided to wait for the recommendations of special council committees, which would study the report and provide a more informed opinion to the provincial councils. This approach was adopted by Lau, but only after strong pressure from President Ratu Mara and Lauan Senator Filipe Bole. Ratu Mara reportedly warned delegates to the Lau Provincial Council: "If anyone is contemplating throwing out this report, I have a good mind to do the same to him" (*FT*, 8 Oct 1996, 5).

Other political parties, as well as international opinion, were clearly pleased with the report's findings, although none wanted to sound too confident. NFP leader Jai Ram Reddy preferred to remain circumspect in his comments, declaring that he did not want to preempt the deliberations of the Parliamentary Select Committee. Reddy had agreed with Rabuka that the committee should meet in camera, with no reporting of its deliberations until its work was done. It was also agreed that normal parliamentary sessions, after the budget session in November-December, should be suspended until the committee completed its work. This is expected to be around March 1997. The review process needs to be completed by July 1997, as stipulated in the 1990 Constitution. The task of the Select Committee is to agree on the recommendations of the report, to be adopted by parliament through an amendment to the 1990 Constitution. The committee's recommendations must first be approved by the Great Council of Chiefs. The Select Committee comprises 24 members from the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei*, the National Federation Party, the Fiji Labour Party, the Fijian Association Party, and the General Electors or General Voters Parties.

If Rabuka was disappointed that the Constitution Review Commission report had seemingly shown little regard for the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei*'s submission, he did not show it. His statements reiterated the national consensus theme: "The stance of Fiji for the Fijians won't work" (*Review*, Nov 1996, 15). He also publicly condemned the Fijian

Nationalist Party and newly revived Taukei Movement for their threats of civil unrest. There was speculation that the prime minister was finally rising above communal and racial politics. However when the *Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei* suffered a crushing defeat in the municipal elections in late September, against the multiracial Ratepayers' Association, Rabuka was quick to blame the common roll electoral system, among other things, for its poor showing. Such a system, he said, did not guarantee Fijian representation for Fijians. Claiming that Fijians needed to have seats reserved for them, he suggested amendments to the Local Government Act to allow the appointment of village representatives on municipal councils. This response struck at the heart of the approach advocated by the Constitution Review Commission in its report and led the *Fiji Times* to editorialize that "the call was a throwback to [the prime minister's] philosophy at the time of the coups: if you can't win, change the rules."

In what was probably his most surprising performance of the year, Rabuka broke down and cried at a Christian interdenominational thanksgiving service in November. The tears were shed, he said, in asking for forgiveness from the people of Fiji. He would not specify, though, what he was asking forgiveness for. Some speculated that perhaps he should be asking forgiveness for the shocking revelations in the *Auditor General's Report for 1993-94* (released in late October), which chronicled widespread mismanagement and abuse of office by government officials, includ-

ing theft and misappropriation. Nepotism was found to be rife. The result was considerable loss of revenue from government coffers (and taxpayers' pockets). More worrying perhaps was a loss of morale and a creeping culture of corruption. The main problem was seen to be laxity in taking disciplinary measures and in following proper procedures and guidelines.

Following closely on the heels of the auditor general's report was the first of the high-profile prosecutions in the National Bank of Fiji saga, involving senior bank management, business-people, and politicians. Appearing in court for the first time were former National Bank of Fiji General Manager Visanti Makrava, two SVT parliamentarians (and former cabinet ministers) Koresi Matatolu and Ratu Ovini Bokini, and prominent fishing company executive Graham Southwick. While Matatolu was charged with fraudulent conversion of F\$200,000, Ratu Ovini was charged with official corruption—accepting bribes from Southwick among other things. All the accused pleaded innocent, but Matatolu was eventually forced to stand down from his position as leader of the House of Representatives.

The state of the economy in 1996 was perhaps also cause for tears. In January, Minister for Trade and Commerce Jim Ah Koy confidently predicted that "1996 is going to be the year of the turnaround" for the Fiji economy (*Review*, Feb 1996, 23). He cited as evidence the number of new projects that would see fruition that year, including the Namosi copper mine, Vulani—a new tourism develop-

ment near Nadi, and the recently privatized shipyard. Unfortunately, by the end of 1996, Placer (the company developing the Namosi copper mine) had announced that it was withdrawing from Fiji because it had been unable to find a partner to share the risk. Placer had raised hopes, at one time, of generating around F\$600 million a year from the Namosi venture. The government's first case of privatization also proved a disaster when the New Zealand partner in the shipyard deal announced it had gone into receivership and was pulling out. No investors came forward in the Vulani development, although the nearby Denarau resort was taken over by new owners with the promise of major new development. Meanwhile the Levuka-based Pacific Fishing Company was forced to shut down, laying off five hundred workers (until the government injected an emergency cash flow of F\$5 million into the company). The company's problems included poor productivity, erratic tuna supply, competition from other producers, and loss of markets overseas.

There were few positive economic indicators in 1996. On the bright side, Emperor Gold Mine announced plans to open two more mines on Viti Levu. Garment manufacturers anticipated a boom in exports in the next few years, rising from F\$200 million to F\$500 million by the year 2000. The long-term future of the industry looked increasingly uncertain, however, given the unwillingness of Australia and New Zealand to relax the rules of origin under the SPARTECA trade agreement. Cane production in 1996 was high, but the industry reported a loss

of earnings due to inefficiencies in production and low sugar content of cane. On the other hand, a severe decline was reported in the retail sector, and the property market remained depressed. Lack of consumer confidence was pervasive, and businesspeople worried about the inaction of the government, especially its failure to implement any of the recommendations of the 1995 Economic Summit. In response to such criticism, Rabuka released a budget strategy document in May, titled *Action Now*. It stated that the government would aim for a balanced budget by the year 2000, and set a 3 percent growth rate for the next four years.

The budget, handed down in November, was notable for being the first billion-dollar budget in Fiji's history but also, more disturbingly, for having the highest deficit to date (F\$219.7 million or 8.2 percent of gross domestic product). It included a provision of F\$133 million for the National Bank of Fiji's "bad bank." The national debt was estimated to be F\$1.167 billion, with an annual interest of F\$108.8 million. Opposition parties warned that the country was heading toward bankruptcy. The government set 1999 as its target for achieving a balanced budget. But with no new tax raises or spending cuts, it was difficult to see how this would be realized. One revenue-generating idea, the dubious Asia Business Migration scheme, was revived by cabinet. It is a deal between the government and a Hong Kong-based company that will allow a maximum of seven thousand four-person "units" into the country, each paying US\$30,000 as an initial

investment. A second investment of US\$100,000 would later be required, paid into an investment account administered by the Hong Kong-based company.

Addressing the fundamental economic problems of the nation will, however, require more substantive measures. What many regarded as Fiji's principal problems—low investment levels by the private sector coupled with unemployment and poverty—may only be alleviated through the resolution of political issues: the constitutional review, the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act, greater accountability in government, and an improvement in its overall economic management.

As the year drew to a close, many in Fiji were probably pleased to see the end of 1996 and hoped for a better 1997. It had been a shocking year for the unprecedented number of road deaths (112) and reported violent crime, including gang rapes and murders. Race relations did not seem any better, with a number of reported cases of vandalism and theft at Hindu temples and other places of worship. Migration figures revealed a continuing high number of Indians leaving the country (4463 in 1995, out of a total of 4931 emigrants that year). With many Fijians probably uneasy at the recommendations of the Constitution Review Commission, it falls on all parties to promote reconciliation and compromise. But perhaps most critical is the role and leadership of Rabuka. Will there be a satisfactory outcome to the constitution review process and the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act in 1997? Much depends on the prime

minister. Whether he has the fortitude, goodwill, and determination to bring it off remains to be seen.

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IRIAN JAYA

During 1996 Irian Jaya featured even more prominently in the national and international media than during the previous year, when reports of human rights abuses in the area of the Freeport mine had brought the easternmost province of the Republic of Indonesia under the closest international scrutiny since its incorporation in 1969. Freeport was in the news again in 1996, when rioting in the townships of Tembagapura and Timika forced the mine to close briefly, but the outstanding media event of the year was the taking of twenty-four hostages—seven of them European—at Mapnduma by guerrillas of the *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (OPM). A compound of media attention during the previous year, the presence of a large press contingent over the five months of the Mapnduma hostage crisis, and the continuing development of Internet and other communications links, produced an unprecedented flow of information about the province. This information is of variable quality, and reports of the same event from different sources rarely concur, but the net result has

been that events in Irian Jaya are now more openly reported and more widely discussed than ever before.

A series of clashes between the military and the *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* in the vicinity of Timika and the Freeport mine during late 1994 and early 1995 had resulted in an undetermined number of deaths among the local Amungme community. Reports of up to seventy-seven deaths and a number of other serious human rights abuses during this period made international news after the release of successive reports, first by the Australian Council for Overseas Aid in April 1995 and then by the Bishop of the Jayapura diocese, Monsignor Munninghoff, in August 1995. Investigative missions by the Australian and United States embassies and by the National Commission for Human Rights (Komnas Ham) could find no evidence for the direct involvement of Freeport security personnel in these events, but forced the army, which had denied the veracity of the reports, to launch its own investigations. Four soldiers—a lieutenant and three privates—were arrested and appeared before a military court in January 1996 in connection with a massacre near Hoesa village, where between three (the army's estimate) and eleven people had been killed; the privates were sentenced in February to jail terms ranging between one and three years, the officer to a sixteen-month term. A further consequence of this trial was the release of a fifteen-page booklet by the chief of the regional Trikora Regional Command, Major-General Dunidja, outlining the army's code for conduct in relation to human rights.