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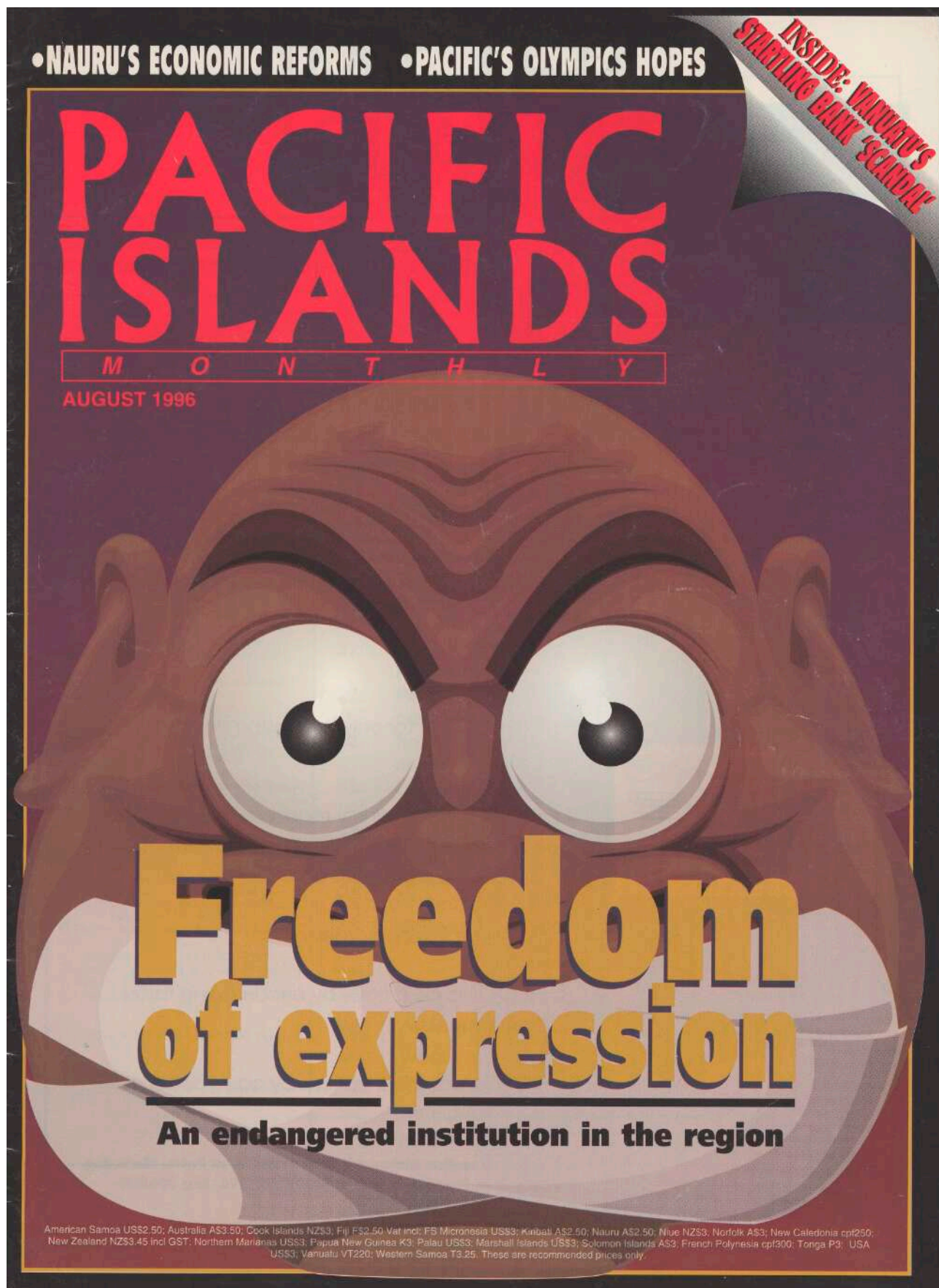
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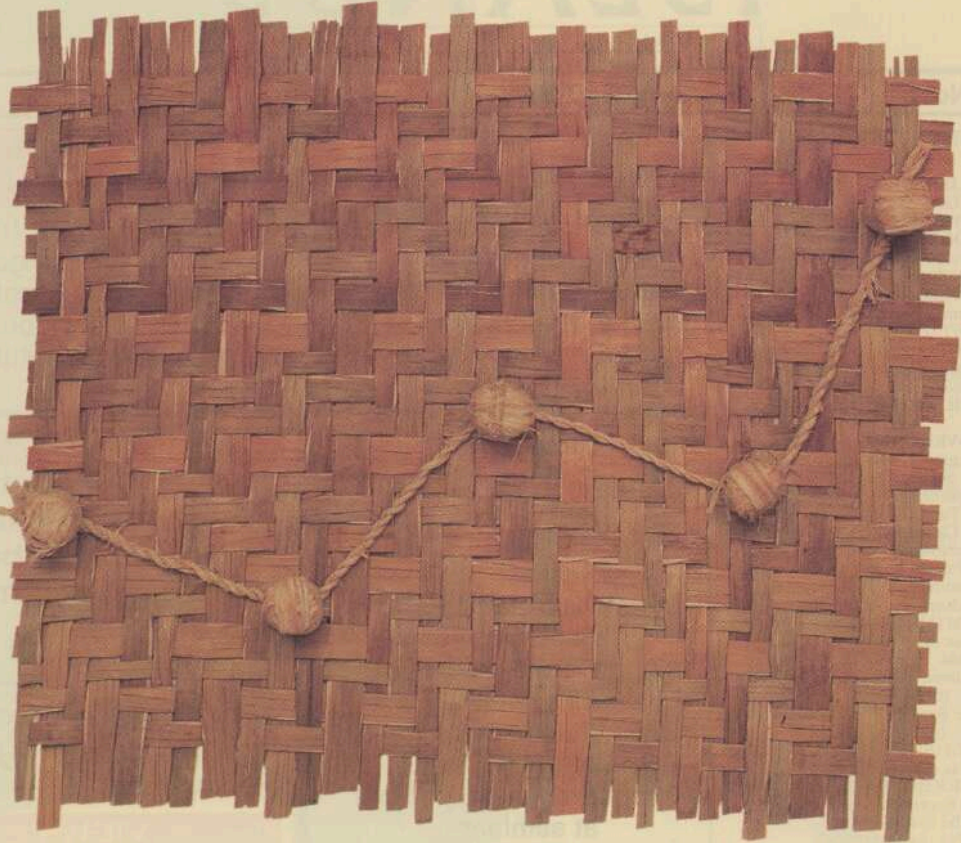
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Editorial

A cultural myth

Much is made of cultural sensitivity and the need to respect local traditions in the Pacific, a region so often referred to as Paradise for its white sandy beaches, clear blue waters and tropical sunshine.

However, for culture's sake, let us stretch the analogy a little further and consider our leaders as God and the people as the first human beings in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve. For being the devil's advocates that they are, let us cast the region's media organisations as Satan.

God, in his omnipotence, has banned Adam and Eve from partaking of fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, for reasons of cultural sensitivity, national stability and protection from nation-destroying negativism.

Satan, on the other hand, has full use of his capacity for thought and questioning and is determined to prove to Adam and Eve that ignorance is not bliss.

God, therefore, looks on Satan as a subversive element with no regard or respect for the culture and traditions of the Garden of Eden.

Ratu Jo Nacola, Fiji's new information minister, can appropriately be cast as the

messenger of God, the Archangel Gabriel. However, he has done the unexpected and admitted that God uses the excuse of "cultural sensitivity" to skirt issues sensitive to Him.

What is it that makes our God so sensitive to criticism, making Him stamp His feet and threaten censorship and exile from Eden (or deportation, as the case may be) each time the public seeks accountability and answers? It is fair that governments promote responsible journalism and expect accurate reporting of events. But it is not fair to expect journalists to stop asking questions and demanding answers.

Our leaders seem to have forgotten that their purpose is to serve their countries and their people.

As the Archangel has prophesied, the next millenium will be an era of communications and information.

So, let's hope God comes to His senses and leads this Paradise into the next century as an adult, responsible for and aware of the consequences of His actions, and not as a spoilt, tantrum-throwing child.

And as for cultural sensitivity, well, most of our cultures are as borrowed as the above legend. ■

PIM writers win awards



Former *Pacific Islands Monthly* writers Yunus Rashid (left) and Sophie Foster have received awards for the Best Magazine Journalist of the Year and Best Coverage of Women's Issues, respectively. The awards, for stories written for *PIM*, were presented at the inaugural Fiji Islands Media Association awards night in Suva, Fiji, on Saturday July 6. *PIM* graphic artist James Ranuku won the Best Cartoonist of the Year award. ■

Remember your Friend

There are times in your life when you feel your friends have been missing out on something good. Now's your chance to do something about it and share with them one of the good things you have. Buy your friend a subscription to *Pacific Islands Monthly* and let him or her join you and thousands of other people worldwide who are kept informed of the latest political, social and cultural changes taking place in the Pacific.

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Letters

And justice for all

Sir

Allow me to comment on Dr Vijay Naidu's letter titled "And justice for all", which was published in the June issue of your magazine.

In his letter, he points to the failure of political leaders in fulfilling their leadership role as one of the root causes of crime (paragraph 5).

While this may be true for some political parties, whose leaders are remnants of the rogue elements of the 1987 coups or leaders who deserted their people after the coups of 1987, it certainly does not apply to other political parties which have provided strong and decisive leadership in times of need. They continue to do so today.

Dr Naidu should try and get his facts right as it will give his letter the credibility that it deserves and to justify his position as a senior lecturer.

JOHN SAMI
Rifle Range
Lautoka
Fiji

Papua New Guinea elections

Sir

Papua New Guinea will go to the polls in the 1997 National Elections and many colourful people will be contesting the highest political office on the land.

The people are tired of the many empty promises often given by candidates during campaigns and allegations of bribery in the form of cash payments.

Most citizens would want to see a new, fresh blood of young participants who are God-fearing, dedicated and honest to lead the country and not those who are self-centred and greedy on taxpayers' expenses.

I write this letter as one of the intending candidates from my electorate of

Yangoru-Saussia in the East Sepik, PNG. I am confident and have a lot of support from the youth, church group and the village majority.

We hope and pray that 1997 will bring the best leaders into the PNG Parliament.

JOHN KRIOSAKI
Wewak
Papua New Guinea

Assistance offered

Sir

We are a retired couple prepared to offer assistance with short-term projects (three to four months) in countries in the Pacific region. We would prefer this to be outside the hurricane season.

We are financially self-sufficient and would require no salary. Assistance towards air fares and in finding suitable accommodation would be appreciated if this is possible.

We have experience in several Pacific cultures as tourists, but have attempted to live at local level not at Western-style hotels.

We envisage helping projects on an advisory basis rather than doing a specific job. We would like to pass on our experience and expertise to local people where this would be useful both during and after our involvement.

Our previous careers equipped us with the following qualifications:

Husband (aged 73) - welfare administration and personnel management; good at general handyman work and a hobby gardener.

Wife (aged 54) - primary teaching; librarianship (has set up two libraries on computer systems); since retirement has gained qualification in Teaching English as a Second Language.

We are active members of our local church, and can furnish both personal and professional references. Any government, organisation or community that is interested in contacting us in regard to our offer may do so at the address below. All replies will be acknowledged.

Margery Nash
12 Hazelwood Road
Boronia 3155
Australia

Other letters

From: *The Fiji Times*

Freedom of the Press

Sir

It is commendable that both dailies published the full text of the Prime Minister (Sitiveni Rabuka's) keynote address for the World Press Freedom Day.

Let's take a look at what was said.

Granted that certain information deserves protection from disclosure, such as state secrets, if it was not for the Freedom of Information Act, the United States government would still be suppressing the full facts behind the (John F) Kennedy assassination, atomic testing on humans, the after-effects of Agent Orange defoliant spraying and myriad other unpalatable secrets.

Who was breaking the rules?

The format of "Question Time" in parliament appears stilted and not extemporaneous responses to the issues.

Like they say in Washington, "spin doctors" are specialists in damage control. Respect for cultural traditions is vital and sets Fiji apart from many other countries.

But to cite governments such as Malaysia and Singapore as paradigms of progressive societies is questionable.

The operative concept there is conformity to a homogeneous state image. Corporal punishment and capital sentencing are bulwarks to the statue quo.

What has emerged as the real mirror of the people's view is right here in this section of the newspaper, not the ministry Press release.

Thank God for the Fiji Constitution which endows individual freedoms on the citizens of Fiji.

We are cognizant of the reasonable restraints on exercising those liberties for, as once stated by a US Supreme Court Justice, your right to swing your fist stops at the tip of the other person's nose.

STEVE HALLCY,
Suva
Fiji



The most neglected tragedy of our time

Each year in the Pacific, hundreds of women die in childbirth. Unlike other health killers, this one takes women in their prime – in their teens, 20s and 30s.

The tragedy for the family concerned is immense, especially for children who will have to grow up without a mother and for the woman's husband who will have to shoulder the burden of parenthood alone. For the woman concerned, death, whether it be from haemorrhage, infection, obstructed labour or other causes, is often an excruciating and drawn-out affair.

Many of these deaths are preventable yet there has been little public debate on this terrible toll or on measures that could be taken to reduce it.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is hoping to be the catalyst which changes that. It has made maternal mortality the focus of its 1996 edition of its Progress of Nations report. New estimates produced by UNICEF show that worldwide, 600,000 women die each year giving birth, almost 20 per cent more than previously thought.

More sobering is the fact that for every woman who dies, approximately 30 more "incur injuries, infections and disabilities which are usually untreated and unspoken of, and which are often humiliating and painful, debilitating and lifelong".

According to UNICEF, the toll of injury and disability from pregnancy-related causes is "arguably the most neglected health problem in the world".

The Pacific makes its contribution to these figures. Papua New Guinea has by far the highest maternal death rate. There, 930 women die for every 100,000 live births – the third-highest rate in the entire Asia-Pacific region, exceeded only in Nepal and Bhutan.

In other Island nations, the death rate is also too high. In Solomon Islands, official figures put the maternal death rate at 549 deaths per 100,000 live births or around 77 women per year. Vanuatu, Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Tuvalu also have maternal death rates of over 100 per one hundred thousand births. When one compares that with a rate of nine in Australia,

the enormity of the tragedy is more obvious.

The only area in the region in which maternal death rates come close to what women might expect from their governments is Polynesia. Cook Islands, with its hitherto generously funded health system, has the lowest rate with 46. Next comes Western Samoa with 50.

Fiji has 68 and Tonga between 70 and 80 per 100,000 births. Behind these figures are complex causes.

According to UNICEF, the facts that women are having many children close together, that they are having babies both younger and older, that in some areas women are forced – whether by necessity or by unsympathetic husbands – to work hard right up until they go into labour and that they are not able to make it to a clinic soon enough all add to the problem.

In many countries with fast-growing urban centres, the number of pregnancies among unmarried teenagers is booming. Married or otherwise, young women have always had babies but statistics reveal that when they do so before the age of 20, they double their chances of dying in childbirth.

In Melanesia, malaria is a particular danger to pregnant women.

It reduces a woman's haemoglobin, causing anaemia which weakens her ability to withstand or recover from haemorrhages.

In other places, the increasingly poor diet of junk food, tinned fish and rice is also contributing to the number of women who develop pregnancy-related diabetes and hypertension.

Despite these myriad of causes, there is one predictor above all others which gives a good idea of a woman's risk of maternal death, and that is access to a clinic with trained staff during pregnancy, at the time of birth and afterwards.

Many of the problems which kill can be minimised if women go for check-ups during pregnancy. For malaria, for instance, women can be given prophylaxis while they are pregnant and iron tablets if they develop anaemia. Simple urine tests can warn of diabetes and other risk factors such as previous problems in preg-

nancy or an unusual presentation of the baby can be assessed and the woman referred to a better equipped health centre before problems develop.

At the time of birth, a clinic (or even well-trained traditional birth attendants or low-level health workers) can offer antibiotics, which drastically reduce the risk of infection, and administer drugs which reduce another big killer – haemorrhage.

Five percent of all women having babies will require Caesarean birth – the only area in which measures to reduce maternal mortality will cost the health budget relatively dearly, particularly if transport is required from remote areas. Still, the benefits in terms of better survival and fewer disabilities for children as well as mothers has got to compensate to some extent.

One of the most fruitful areas for governments seeking to reduce maternal mortality is in the provision of high-quality family planning services to all who need them.

According to UNICEF, "meeting only the existing demand for family planning would reduce pregnancies in the developing world by a fifth, bringing at least an equivalent reduction in maternal deaths and injuries".

While Pacific governments have improved their family planning services over the past decade, more is still needed. Many of those who currently do not have access to contraception, whether it be for reasons of remoteness from health services, traditional cultural or embarrassment, are those most at risk – older women who have many children and do not want more and young women would gain added protection against the increasing incidence of sexually transmitted diseases in the region.

Better access to family planning will reduce the toll taken by repeated pregnancies close together and reduce the number of dangerous illegal abortions.

Dealing with maternal mortality will require breaking the silence surrounding many taboo subjects but perhaps it has been just this reluctance in the past which has allowed this problem to go almost unremarked. ■

OPINION



ALFRED SASAKO

The search for ACP-EU ties after Year 2000

Welcome to Apia, Western Samoa, the host for the six-monthly meeting of the Council of Ministers from 70 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states and the joint sessions of the ACP-European Union Council of Ministers.

A member of the South Pacific Forum, Western Samoa is only the second of the eight ACP Pacific states that has hosted the event since the ACP-EU marriage was sealed in a convention signed at Lome, the capital of the African nation of Togo in 1975. Fiji was the first in the region to host the meeting.

The Apia meeting was particularly significant. It put in train a process which, one day, will give birth to a new ACP-EU relationship. It is an important relationship.

There is little doubt this relationship will continue beyond the Year 2000 when all financial arrangements under the Lome Convention terminate.

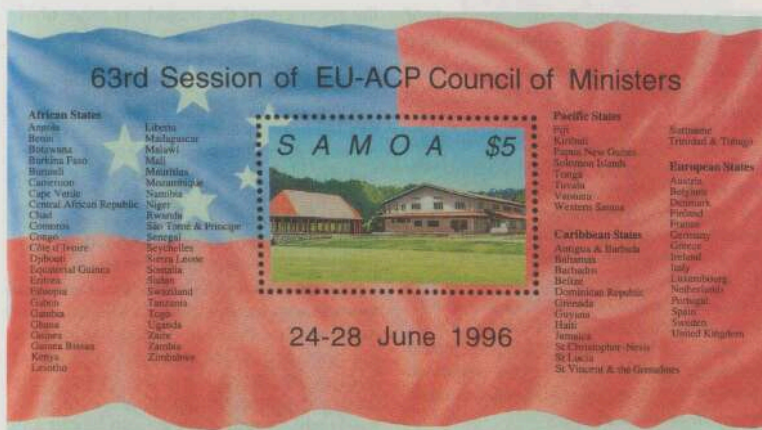
But important as it may seem, everyone at the Apia meeting had acknowledged that the ACP-EU arrangements under Lome is a relationship in transition. The European Union has made it clear that while there is still a need to maintain ties with the ACP member states, any new arrangement will not necessarily take the form of Lome. So what can the Pacific expect?

At this stage, no one really knows. Indeed, that is the crux of the question being hotly debated in the three world regions – Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Important as it is, whatever form this new relationship takes will, no doubt, be dictated by globalised economic events over which ACP countries have very little control.

For us in the Pacific, the work has begun. The South Pacific Forum Secretariat is developing a series of policy papers to help the eight Pacific states of the ACP Group in their search for a framework for this new relationship.

The eight – Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa – are also



Stamp, launched on June 8 shows the venue of ACP-EU meeting

members of the South Pacific Forum.

The Secretariat's Economic Development Division will produce the five policy papers. These will cover a number of areas such as:

- The impact of Lome Assistance on the budget of the Individual Pacific ACP states;
- an analysis of the consequences of declining trade preferences in both the tree crop and the tuna-canning sector;
- the effect of the Lome Commodity Protocols; and
- an analysis of the impact of possible changes to the Stabex regime and alternative aid modalities.

These are being put together in the hope that it will give the EU a clear overview of the economic importance Pacific members of the ACP Group attach to their EU relationship.

Senior ministers from Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa who attended the Apia meeting had expressed deep concern that any decision to terminate Lome without a successor would adversely affect the region economically.

"It is important to raise public awareness within the region as to the devastating impact, economically, if a broad-based

successor to Lome is not agreed on," according to the record of their special meeting in Apia.

"Given the importance of this issue, the 27th South Pacific Forum to be held in the Marshall Islands should also be made aware of developments...."

In the crusade to find a successor to Lome, the ministers have thrown their support behind a decision made in Mauritius last year that an ACP Leaders Summit be held next year to discuss a new relationship between the 15 member states of the European Union and the 70 African, Caribbean and Pacific states.

The Apia meeting has endorsed an offer by the African country of Gabon to host the summit either in August or September next year.

The idea is that since the ACP-EU relationship is so crucial, the ACP countries want to continue it along the Lome line. Hence, the proposed ACP Leaders Summit to discuss it at the highest political level.

For its part, the European Union will release in October a Green Paper, which is expected to outline its position on ACP-EU post-Lome relationships.

What is the Lome Convention?

Lome is the capital of the African nation of Togo. In 1975 a convention was signed there – hence the Lome

Convention – which guides the development relationships between the ACP and the European Union.

In the 21 years since, the 70 ACP countries have benefited enormously from the substantial financial assistance provided under Lome. With a population of 500 million people and growing, the ACP countries are concerned that any decision to terminate Lome without a successor will deal a heavy blow to their economies.

Speaker after speaker in the joint ACP Council of Ministers meeting had acknowledged that ACP members must now face the new economic realities of today.

"We live in an increasing globalised economy where reciprocity is the order of the day. It is the nature of that (new) relationship that we must identify," one Caribbean official said.

Others said there was a need for the ACP to remain as a group.

"We should seek a mechanism for the solidarity of the ACP Group to ensure the efficient implementation of EU-funded programmes," one other speaker said.

Still others have argued that the collapse of the export commodity prices which account for up to 90 per cent of some ACP members' overall export earnings have worked against them. This has resulted in a combined \$US20-billion debt for the ACP group. Some countries now

spend \$US10 billion a year in interest repayment alone. They argue that such debt, caused by events beyond their control, should be written off.

The ACP group lauded reports that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have hatched a \$US7.7-billion debt-alleviation plan for the world's poorest nations.

"The plan is in respect of an amount between \$US5.6 billion and \$US7.7 billion. Among the beneficiaries of this debt-alleviation plan are 17 countries which are members of the ACP group," the co-president of the ACP Council of Ministers, S K Syamujaye, said.

But other speakers are less convinced. They argue that the challenge facing the ACP group is to create an internal climate conducive to attracting foreign investment.

"We cannot talk about trade expansion and industrialisation without foreign investment. I think how we attract foreign investment is the challenge that we must address," a Pacific official concurred.

What do Pacific ACP members get out of the Lome arrangement?

The short answer is that we have benefited substantially, both financially and in kind, over the past 20 or so years.

For instance, the eight Pacific ACP states receive up to four per cent of total EU funding to ACP countries.

Statistically, it is the highest per capita aid allocation in the world.

Under the second financial protocols of Lome IV – the funding arrangement which takes us to 2000 – the eight Pacific ACP States can expect up to \$F170 million (\$US119) over the next five years.

This is part of a \$F25-billion (\$US17.5-billion) funding package to be made available to the ACP countries under the second financial Protocols of Lome IV.

For ACP members, the unexpected delay in ratifying the instrument has been frustrating.

It means that these much-needed funds will not be released until such time as two thirds or 48 of the 70 ACP members have done so.

Solomon Islands is the only Pacific ACP country that has ratified along with six other ACP members while Denmark is the only member of the 15-strong European Union that has ratified the instrument.

The joint ACP-EU Council of Ministers is scheduled to meet again in Luxembourg in November.

This will certainly discuss the EU position, as outlined in their Green Paper, regarding the future of the ACP-EU selection beyond the present Lome Convention which comes to an end five years from now. ■

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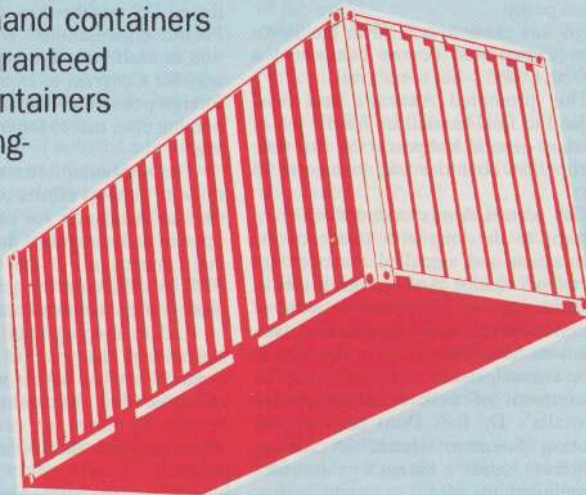
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OPINION



An exercise in transparency

The South Pacific Commission (SPC) is undergoing a major exercise in what could best be termed "an exercise in transparency", designed to ensure accountability, particularly in the face of tough competition for the region's dwindling financial and other resources.

The commission first accepted donor funding to expand its fisheries programme in the 1970s. It soon became hooked on the idea of enhancing its services to the Islands through competition for some of the bounteous extra-budgetary project funding floating around during the 1980s.

But transition from the conservative use of guaranteed membership funds was not easy. Coupled with this, there was also competition for extra-budgetary funds: The changing nature of donor priorities; the discipline of accountability; and problems in negotiations with donors to contend with.

Over the years, a lack of communication and financial accountability among many organisations has had aid donors perplexed and, in some instances, has shown the SPC to be an organisation which believed donors should simply give it money and then have the sensitivity not to be too pushy.

All this came to a head in the 1990s when exasperated donors confronted a protective SPC – but to no avail.

This prompted Australia and New Zealand to field candidates for the job of secretary-general last year – the first time metropolitan countries had done so in 25 years.

The gesture demonstrated their commitment to the long-term future of the organisation and signalled the need for operational change. And change, it seems, has since become the operative word of the commission's new management team. Variations have been made in the organisation's management style following the appointment of new secretary-general (Australia's Dr Bob Dun) and his two deputies (Solomon Islands' Dr Jimmie Rodgers and Guam's Lourdes Pangelinan).

This executive team has taken on a

more personal approach to running the commission and operational changes are definitely having an impact.

With fierce competition for extra-budgetary funds from metropolitan states and a rapidly decreasing core budget, the SPC is diligently trying to make the best use of its current funds while watching various mouseholes for the proverbial "pot of gold".

Dr Dun, in keeping with his initial priority towards enhancing SPC's reputation with donors, made initial contacts with the big five in the Pacific – Australia, New Zealand, the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme and France.

Valuable contacts with the United Kingdom, who recently withdrew its membership of the commission, the United States and Japan have also been made.

"If we fix the problem of a lack of financial reporting, donor confidence will bounce back. We can't serve the Islands well if the donors don't trust us with their money ... more of their money," Dr Dun says.

The US Congress, in a recent resolution, emphasised the importance of continued US membership in regional South Pacific organisations. While the resolution in itself lacks the force of law, it is a way for Congress to express its views on foreign policy and domestic issues and, if nothing else, makes for encouraging reading.

The resolution notes the need to continue to support efforts of regional countries in their quest for sustainable development and recognises the role and financial contribution of the US to assist the SPC in achieving the gradual self-sufficiency of its member countries.

And in keeping with the ideology of operational changes and cost-cutting, the commission has begun various cutbacks in executive expenditure, including restricting travel to essential commitments and the abolishment of travelling teams.

Electricity costs have been nearly halved with the SPC headquarters in

Noumea no longer being lit up like a battleship at night.

Dr Dun insists, however, that these savings are "just peanuts" and emphasises the need for a major lift in efficiency in light of over-committed administrative and service costs.

The commission is also undergoing a major review, conducted by an independent three-member team led by Savenaca Siwatibau of ESCAP's Pacific Operations Centre.

The review team's recommendations are currently being drawn up and will be tabled at the SPC's conference in Saipan in October following consultation with member countries and territories.

So far, the team's initial findings are encouraging and point to substantial cost saving through restructuring of the commission's present top-heavy framework.

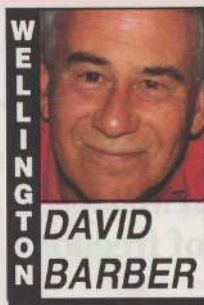
The team was scheduled to meet in Suva in mid-July. But, following a study of the commission's Noumea headquarters, the team suggested a re-examination of the relationship between the conference and the SPC executive team with the latter adopting a stronger managerial-style role and the former maintaining its policy control.

The team also felt the secretary-general should be held responsible for all actions and decisions affecting the commission. It stated that, as chief executive, he be judged on the organisation's performance and, if found wanting, dismissed.

While it is still early days to discuss programmes, it seems certain the review team will recommend a special programme for the region's small Island states.

And on the eve of this grand old lady's 50th anniversary of existence, Dr Dun sums it up when he says: "We're in the game of co-operation and service in the Pacific ... and we're going to be here for the next 50 better and brighter years." ■

Debbie Singh, former editor of *Pacific Islands Monthly*, is the Information Officer with the South Pacific Commission's Pacific Women's Resource Bureau



Tokelau to stand alone

Slowly and quietly, one of the Pacific's most remote peoples are preparing to take their place in the world community of nations.

For at least 1000 years, they have lived on three tiny atolls, nearly 500 kilometres from their nearest neighbour, largely unaffected by events in the outside world.

Today, in the colourful language of an Act recently passed by the New Zealand parliament, Tokelau has expressed a wish "to paddle its canoe to the greatest extent possible".

The three dispersed atoll communities have agreed, in the words of the Act, "to come together and become stronger, on the basis of their shared language and culture, as one family and nation".

This means Tokelau, legally a part of New Zealand for the past 70 years, is now firmly embarked on a course that will remove it from the United Nations' list of 17 remaining non-self-governing territories. There is no pressure from New Zealand to shed its last colonial responsibility. And the Tokelauans have come to their decision perhaps reluctantly and only after considerable thought.

They told three UN missions which visited in the 10 years up to 1986 they were quite happy with the status quo. But two years ago, they advised the fourth mission that they now felt ready to assume more self-reliance.

They confirmed that an act of self-determination and a constitution were "under active consideration".

Their strong preference, they said, was for internal self-government in free association with New Zealand – the same status Niue and Cook Islands have.

Since then, New Zealand and Tokelau have worked to bring this about. It has not been easy.

Even by Pacific standards, Tokelau is tiny and remote.

Its 1600 people live in three autonomous villages on islets within atolls separated by vast expanses of sea.

No atoll is more than 200 metres wide or higher than five metres above sea level. Each has a distinctive tradition and the

challenge is to create a form of central government to administer services, such as health, education, communications, that the individual villages cannot manage – not to mention handling external aid funds for development projects and revenues from Tokelau's 200-mile exclusive economic zone.

The problem is that while Tokelau is a cultural entity, with a shared language and customs, it has never been a political one. Each village council (elderly male-dominated) has been all powerful – the nearest translation for "law" in the Tokelauan language, for instance, is "custom of the elders".

This meant, as former New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange told parliament, that when he visited Tokelau the maximum penalty for murder was a fine of \$NZ200 (\$US136).

The challenge then is to produce a political system suitable for modern times and capable of dealing with the outside world while still honouring local customs and traditions.

It is not made easier by the fact that Tokelau has been one of the world's least-governed colonies so it has no experience of modern systems of government to adapt.

Since Britain transferred control to New Zealand in 1926, it has been governed from Wellington at arm's length – no New Zealand administrator has ever lived there, for instance.

With no pattern of colonial administration or institutions to follow, the examples of transition to self-government used in the other former New Zealand colonies – Western Samoa, Cook Islands and Niue – cannot be followed.

For Tokelau, a home-grown solution, in harmony with local culture and traditions, has to be found.

At the same time, it must be a system acceptable to the United Nations to ensure international recognition of the fledgling nation.

A start was made in the 1960s when the Tokelau public service was established to deliver enhanced education, health and other services and the General Fono began

working as a national policy-making body.

The public service, initially based in Apia, was subsequently brought home and in 1994, the New Zealand administrator's executive powers were delegated to the General Fono and the Council of *Faipule* (equivalent of a cabinet) when the Fono is not sitting.

The three *Faipule*, the elected leaders of each atoll, also assumed the functions of ministers of a national government.

They rotate leadership as *Ulu-O-Tokelau*, effectively taking the capital or base of government with them – a system that acknowledges equality of the atolls.

The Tokelau Amendment Bill now passed by the New Zealand parliament gives the General Fono power, for the first time, to pass laws – the essential right of a self-governing nation.

The next stage, at a still unspecified date, will be a referendum to choose the new nation's political status, or most likely to confirm self-government in free association with New Zealand.

Although Tokelau has resisted the temptation of air links and the tourists they would bring, it is not exactly starting from scratch in its relations with the rest of the world.

About 5000 Tokelauans live in New Zealand and one estimate says up to 90 per cent of those who remain at home have been overseas.

A \$NZ3-million (\$US2.05-million) satellite telecommunications system is being put in place to link the atolls and international services.

What the future holds for the Pacific's newest independent Island state remains to be seen.

But it is, as Lange told parliament: "A wonderful country ... a remarkable place, and its people are quite formidable... It is a country that will develop its own rationale". And as far as the Tokelauans are concerned, they are looking forward to the future.

They welcomed the move to give them independence, in the words of the Bill, "as a fresh breeze to fill the sails of Tokelau's canoe..." ■

FOCUS

Cohens – free at last

But what does the future hold for New Zealand's mother and son who made world headlines when convicted on drug charges in Malaysia? Will release from prison be able to give them a true taste of freedom?

By Atama Raganivatu

A sad and sordid episode ended on June 29 when New Zealanders Lorraine and Aaron Cohen were released from a Malaysian prison, 11 years after being convicted on drugs charges.

The story really began in 1960 and the time Lorraine gained a liking for heroin. By 1966, her intake had become so high that when she gave birth to Aaron that year he was addicted.

For the next 19 years, heroin ruled the Cohens' lives or, to be more precise, the pursuit of sufficient money to enable them

to indulge in their habit did. Between 1960 and 1982, Lorraine clocked up 38 convictions for prostitution, theft and drug offences.

Aaron, too, became a familiar figure in the law courts and was on bail when the two were arrested at Penang Airport in 1985 and charged with trafficking heroin.



Lorraine Phyllis Cohen and her son, Aaron, on board Malaysia Airlines to Kuala Lumpur after being released from prison in Penang for heroin trafficking

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Lorraine Cohen ... the expensive addiction to heroin led to all sorts of problems from 38 criminal convictions in 12 years to passing the addiction to her son, Aaron

Thirty months were required for the Cohens to come to trial. Both pleaded not guilty: Lorraine to trafficking in 140 grams of heroin and Aaron to trafficking in 34 grams of the same substance. Their cases always appeared feeble and Lorraine was sentenced to death and her son to life imprisonment plus six strokes of the ratan cane.

Despite Malaysia having originally introduced severe penalties for drug offences largely at the behest of Western "consumer nations" like New Zealand, a campaign commenced in the Cohens' home country to reduce their punishments.

An unlikely supporter was John Banks, an influential right-wing politician renowned for his law and order crusades who had once been a neighbour of Lorraine and Aaron.

Although not making an official protest over the sentences, the New Zealand government let its concerns be known through diplomatic channels.

The Malaysian authorities have, understandably, displayed cynicism towards Westerners who tolerate, and even encourage, Asian drug smugglers being hung but protest vehemently when their equally guilty compatriots face this ultimate indignity. Since Kuala Lumpur introduced the death sentence for narcotics trafficking in 1975, approximately 230 offenders have been executed. Among them were

Australians, Britons and Germans.

Malaysia's government, then, would not have been swayed solely by the noises coming from New Zealand. However, their good relations with Wellington almost certainly contributed to Lorraine's sentence being commuted to life imprisonment two years after an appeal was lodged.

The endeavours of the Cohen's energetic lawyer, Karpal Singh, in persuading the appeals court that the heroin she was carrying in Penang had been intended for her personal use and not for financial gain probably had equal weight in influencing the decision. The fear of bad publicity engendered through executing a woman would also have helped her. Aaron's appeal was dismissed though and, in December, 1991, he received six ratan strokes.

A greater trauma befell Lorraine during 1992 when she was diagnosed with cancer and, in November of that year, her left breast had to be removed. Lorraine's health problems formed the basis of Karpal Singh's annual applications for a pardon.

Thirteen years is the normal jail term those sentenced to "life" have to endure in Malaysia. And the Cohens can perhaps consider themselves lucky their releases came 11½ years after being first detained at Penang.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jim Bolger had "raised the matter" when meeting his Malaysian counterpart, Dr Mahathir, three months earlier. Such is the secrecy surrounding all aspects of international diplomacy, one can only speculate upon how significant that get-together was in the Cohens gaining liberty.

Conjecture over the Cohens' future would be equally inconclusive.

Singh claims both are now free of drug addiction, yet Lorraine recently admitted she "occasionally feels a pang for heroin" and friends of Aaron believe "he still has a problem". Media reports that Aaron is booked into an Auckland detoxification centre supports this pessimism. Drugs, apparently, are readily available in Malaysian prisons.

An exclusive story deal with a women's magazine will earn the Cohens at least \$US13,000 and the book they intend to write may well yield considerably more. Even so, the long-term prospects for Lorraine and Aaron, who are now 53 and 29 respectively, appear most uncertain.

First of all, they have to adjust to life beyond the prison walls. Once this has been achieved, the Cohens will discover the New Zealand of today is different from the New Zealand of 1985 and legitimate work opportunities for ex-criminals are rarer than ever before. Lorraine's age

also handicaps her in the job market.

The fact most of their friends and acquaintances are criminals augurs badly for them too.

It will not be easy for the Cohens to become part of the New Zealand social mainstream they have rejected in the past, if they wish to embrace it now, as both insist.

The Cohens will find the media spotlight irksome and intrusive as they endure affronts like Press headlines proclaiming Aaron contracted AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) in Malaysia (which he denies). They will hope that members of their very extended family can offer temporary shelter from the public's gaze.

Lorraine's four children have four different fathers. Alas, Aaron's is not on hand to help. Denny Cohen, a professional musician and long-time junkie, died in Bangkok two years ago.

Although Lorraine and Aaron are sure to relish their liberty from prison, they may never be able to savour true freedom.

The Cohens saga may yet have an unhappy ending. ■

As *Pacific Islands Monthly* went to press, *Woman's Day* magazine published its exclusive interview with Lorraine Cohen. Among the snippets included in the feature were:

- Lorraine's current attempt to give up using heroin is the 17th of her life;

- Lorraine claims she was denied access to drugs in Penang Prison, but Aaron received a constant supply. Apparently, warders in the men's section are more corrupt than their female counterparts;

- Lorraine had a miscarriage shortly after being arrested in Malaysia and flushed the baby down the drain without informing prison authorities;

- Aaron learned Malay in prison and is now fluent in the language – a fact which should considerably enhance his employment prospects;

- Lorraine was diagnosed as having cancer six months after alerting prison medical officers to the lump in her breast which proved to be malignant.

The Cohens are said to be residing in Auckland's North Shore district. To date, they have succeeded in maintaining a low profile. ■



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Freedom of expression – an endangered institution

By Bernadette Hussein

Freedom of expression is becoming a more and more fragile and endangered institution in the Pacific, with constant threats to control the media by the powers that be, justified by claims that such action would guard against cultural insensitivity and breaches of confidentiality and violation of privacy.

Media reports revealing facts which are negative or unfavourable are criticised for being culturally insensitive or threatening the security of a country.

And if the media organisation happens to be foreign owned, it is accused of not understanding local cultures and traditions.

There have been numerous incidents in Fiji, the reporting of which have seen the government cry foul and accuse the media of being culturally insensitive and working against the interests of the nation.

But it is not only the media which comes under pressure for speaking out.

In July 1995, three government ministers gave up their cabinet posts over an amendment moved by the prime minister. Leo Smith and Taufua Vakatale, the then ministers for infrastructure and education, respectively, voted against the amendment on an opposition motion condemning French nuclear testing. The third, then minister for information Isimeli Bose, had abstained.

The amendment was defeated and the next day saw Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka requesting the resignation of the three ministers. Vakatale resigned. Smith and Bose refused to resign and were sacked.

"If we are to be effective as a government, it is critically important to have a cabinet that is solidly together as a team," Rabuka was reported as saying at the time.

In his speech on May 6, Media Freedom Day, the prime minister told journalists that the government was looking into introducing confidentiality and privacy laws imposing restrictions on what could and couldn't be reported, citing Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand as examples.

The media in these countries accepted as essential checks and balances designed for national security, social cohesion and economic progress, he said.



Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka: "We must not be slaves to definitions of Press freedom"

"We must not be slaves to definitions of Press freedom and democracy propagated by the Western world," he said.

Doctor Tupeni Baba, however, places a somewhat different slant, on the government's motives to find it necessary to try and control media freedom by Doctor Tupeni Baba.

"The degree of sensitivity of the government is closely associated with its sense of insecurity. The more it becomes insecure, the greater is its sensitivity to media treatment that exposes its inadequacies as in financial dealings of its senior members or the financial affairs of the nation generally," Dr Baba said in *Media Aware*, a newsletter published by Fiji Media Watch.

In his piece, titled "Culture and the media", Dr Baba, a lecturer at the University of the South Pacific, urges the media to "expose aspects of Fijian culture to critical analysis".

This, he said, would lead to greater understanding of the culture and its relation to modern Fijians.

As Fiji's information minister, Ratu Jo Nacola, says, the media is a mirror held up before the community. It should reflect the truth and nothing but the truth.

The newly appointed information minister has supported what the media is doing in Fiji and has urged the government to leave the media alone. He has

asked for a responsible media free from government control.

"I think there are times the government makes a valid statement and there are times when the government uses it (cultural sensitivity) as an excuse for something that should not have been brought to public attention," Ratu Jo said.

But he has called on journalists to appreciate the rights of certain individuals or groups to do what they want and value.

For example, Ratu Jo said, although the people could be critical of the actions of chiefs, the criticism could not be voiced in public.

"I'm a Fijian and sensitive to culture and I will never write anything against tradition," he said.

However, Ratu Jo feels that for a country to move ahead, it is very important to have freedom of Press and expression.

A country which worked to suppress this could never be democratic, he stressed.

The most recent example of government control over freedom of expression in Fiji was the attempted ban on *The Fiji Times* columnist Doctor Ronald Gatty.

The government described Dr Gatty's columns as "racist" and branded the writer "irresponsible".

However, this government response to the column sparked outrage and protest from the public and opposition parties. The ban was lifted within a week and Dr Gatty was given leave to continue writing – but on the condition that he be "sensitive". Dr Gatty claims, however, that the government is still to clarify what it means by "sensitive".

About six years ago, the Fiji government planned to bring newspapers under annual registration control.

This move was widely criticised and it was only after media organisations and members of the public spoke up that government decided to go against it.

The law requires newspapers to register their publications at the start of business only.

But if the amendment had gone through, newspapers would have had to apply to register anew every year with the Administrator-General's Office. The Fiji government's reason for the move was that the new laws were aimed at instilling a sense of responsibility in the newspa-

COVER STORIES

pers. In Tonga last year assistant editor of *Timei O Tonga* newspaper Filo Akau'ola was arrested and convicted for printing a letter to the editor judged defamatory of Police Minister Clive Edwards. Akau'ola was given an 18-month suspended sentence. An appeal is pending. The Pacific branch of the International Journalists Federation said the arrest was the latest in a series of repressive moves against journalists in Fiji, Tonga, Western Samoa, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

In Vanuatu, the government has tightened control of its own media, which includes the radio, television and the *Vanuatu Weekly* newspaper.

Journalists working within the government media arm of Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation are reportedly having to submit all media releases from the opposition party and breakaway Serge Vohor-led faction of the UMP to the prime minister's first secretary, Yvette Sam, prior to being published (see Page 19).

In Papua New Guinea, the Constitution Review Commission (CRC) has reviewed the media industry in an attempt to make it more responsible and accountable for its actions. As in Fiji, PNG media laws were compared with those of Asian countries. Commission chairman Ben Micah visited China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia to look at media laws there. On his return, he informed the governor-general that PNG did not need media control nor an Internal Security Act.

However, he said, the media had to know where to draw the line between what should and should not be reported, taking care not to highlight unfair criticism (see Page 17).

People need to know what is happening and it is the work of the media to provide that information for them.

As Ratu Jo said, the media, like a mirror, should be allowed to portray things as they are. ■

Information minister highlights 'govt's savage law of survival'

By Bernadette Hussein

The next century will be one for information and freedom of expression, says Fiji's newly appointed Information Minister, Ratu Jo Nacola.

And governments around the region will have to work with media organisations to make this successful, he said.

The Fiji government, Ratu Jo agreed, could not take criticism and did want to be made accountable for wrongdoings. This, he said, was a reflection of the "savage law of survival".

"Everyone wants to watch out for themselves. People have to protect themselves, so why not the government?"

Ratu Jo agreed that the government often used the excuse that topics were "culturally insensitive" when it was faced with issues it didn't want to talk about or felt should not be brought to public attention.

Governments should lead by example if they want the media to play by the rules, he said.

By this he means governments should be fair in disclosing information, if they expect the media to report fairly.

"Governments must be open to criticism and should look at the fairest way of solving problems.

"There must be a rule for the game and everyone, including governments, should observe this because things cannot be one-sided.

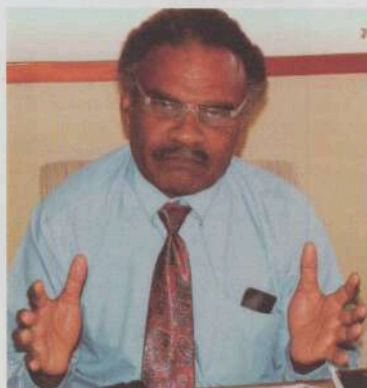
"All governments should support the media because of the important role they play in keeping the country informed. The media are like a mirror held up to the community, showing them the true picture of whatever is happening."

But while Ratu Jo seemed to support media freedom, he criticised the media for

Fiji Minister for Information
Ratu Jo Nacola



Government uses cultural sensitivity as an excuse to avoid discussion



You cannot question people involved. That is just tradition

"thriving on negative issues".

"Apart from the negative things, like corruption and crime, there are so many good things happening. But the media don't seem to be paying much attention to them. Compared to all the negative aspects, these good things receive very little coverage.

"I am not saying (the media) has failed in any respect – only that they should also address the good things in life."

According to the government, cultural sensitivity includes respect for chiefs and Fijian traditions, the minister said.

"The tradition is such that no matter what happens and who it concerns, you cannot talk about it in public – you can talk about it privately, but not in public.

"You cannot question people involved. That is just tradition."

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This was why government tried to ban Fiji columnist Dr Ronald Gatty from writing, he said.

"His columns portrayed his lack of understanding for the Fijian culture. He used disrespectful words and accused (Fijians) of being what they are."

But Ratu Jo said he personally enjoyed the column.

"At one level it is good reading and entertaining but at the same time, on another level, after the enjoyment there is another awareness that whatever is written is about the person reading it.

"From that point on, this person takes on the identity of part of the whole Fijian community. They feel that Dr Gatty has no respect for the Fijian community."

Ratu Jo said many people were offended because they did not see the light-hearted tone of the column. All they saw were the "harsh" words he used.

But continuing to ban the column would have been a futile exercise, Ratu Jo said. So, government allowed Dr Gatty to carry on. "The debate could go on so government decided him to let him continue – but with the sensitivity clause."

The minister has called on the media to be culturally sensitive.

"The demand is on the media to have a firm grasp of the cultures where they work."

He said this included other Pacific Island countries which were in situations similar to Fiji's.

But while Ratu Jo asked media in Fiji to be more responsible, he was totally against imposing media laws. He said he would prefer to see more dialogue between governments and the media to work out a solution.

To prepare the region for the next century, governments should allocate resources so there are highly qualified people ready to take on the next millennium.

And the only way he can see this happening is through government support of the media and freedom of speech and expression.

"A country without a free media has no democracy.

"The government needs to support the independence of the media, not get in its way and disallow freedom of speech.

"There should be something which will guide the media – not tell them what to do and what not to."

Ratu Jo feels the demand on journalists is far greater now than it was some years ago.

"This profession will be very instrumental in bringing Fiji into the mainstream – whether we talk of global culture, technology or communication.

"After all, the pen is mightier than the sword."

Constitution review threatens media freedom

By Sam Vulum

PAPUA New Guineans' "democratic and constitutional right" to freedom of expression and publication, and freedom of the media and information has once again been threatened.

The threat is the subject of a submission currently being prepared by a Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) for presentation to the National Executive Council (NEC) and parliament.

The move was the result of an undertaking by the government in 1995, under the CRC, to review the media industry in an attempt to make it more "responsible and accountable" for its actions. The CRC, which is also responsible for other major constitutional reforms, including provincial and local-level government changes, has been directed by cabinet and Governor General Sir Wiwa Korowi to enquire into media accountability and report back to both the NEC and parliament.

The government's proposal attracted widespread criticism, especially from the local media, churches and non-government organisations. Local media organisations, realising the dangers of such proposals, decided to lead other concerned parties to show their disapproval to the government by sponsoring a one-week media seminar in Port Moresby. Speakers from a wide variety of professions and within PNG, the Pacific and even Australia, including a representative from the CRC, were invited to present papers on various issues concerning different aspects of the media and other related rights issues.

Concerns raised at the seminar were brought to the attention of the government, resulting in the establishment of a media accountability committee, comprising some commissioners of the CRC, media representatives and other resource people. The committee compiled a report which is now before the CRC for review. The report was accepted en masse in June, subject to further review by the commission, its consultants and senior secretariat staff. The recommendations of the committee are that:

- Existing laws on the media are sufficient and the government should not propose, or get parliament to enact, any new restrictive legislation;
- an independent media commission be established;
- the Defamation Act, censorship laws, and all other laws on the media be

reviewed and amended to conform with current trends and practices; and

- parliament enact a Freedom of Information Act to allow access to government decisions, actions and omissions, consistent with Section 15 of the constitution which provides for the right to freedom of access to public information.

The committee said it considered freedom of expression and publication, freedom of the media and the right to freedom of information as cornerstones of PNG's democracy which had to be protected and observed at all times, subject only to qualifications provided for by the constitution or other laws. It had decided that for the media to flourish, the industry must not be further restricted or regulated by state. Instead, the media must account for its actions and omissions to the public and itself through self-regulatory mechanisms, including the journalists' code of ethics, to be strictly enforced independently by the Media Council or together with other acceptable bodies.

Commenting on the recommendations, CRC chairman, Ben Micah said the recommendations would form the basis of a submission to the NEC and parliament to overhaul PNG's information and communication regime, including the mass media, leading up to the Year 2000 and beyond.

"Information and communications is going to be the industry of the future and the committee's recommendations will form the basis of the CRC's submission to cabinet and parliament," he said.

Micah said the media committee had taken a "middle road" and he and his commissioners would work to strengthen the media. B20

At the final decision, the chairman stressed, rested with the NEC. The CRC's deputy chairman, Vincent Auali, said that when the governor-general announced the committee's terms of reference in October, many people had expressed concern about the government trying to muzzle the media. But the recommendations were proof that the people wanted to keep a free but responsible media. Micah earlier in the year told reporters: "If you do your work properly, I don't think the government has the right to interfere with your work. "We need freedom of expression in this country, but this freedom must be taken with responsibility."

In a lead-up to the formation of the media accountability committee, Micah went on a tour of four Asian countries in February 1996 to learn from their experi-

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weeks visiting China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. On his return, Micah said PNG did not need media control nor an Internal Security Act.

The chairman said he had learnt from those countries that "their number one objective is to allow for open government although there was a boundary beyond which 'unfair criticism' was not allowed".

That boundary, he said, was where the good image of the nation stood to be tarnished and related to reporting of matters such as riots or ethnic antagonism that threatened the stability of the country.

Micah said there was lack of investigative reporting in PNG, compared with the countries he visited. He said during the visit they covered relevant issues, which related to internal security, political stability and continuity and transparency of government. Micah said these were the things which had enabled those countries to establish strong viable economies.

Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan said publishers, editors and journalist were free to publish anything, but they must be responsible for any misreporting.

"They topple governments, swing votes, and destroy a person," he said. "I support freedom of the Press, but the proprietors and journalists must be accountable."

Sir Julius was also critical of foreign media ownership in the country. He emphasised that while the government recognised freedom of the Press, it was time to look at the operations of the PNG media, which he said was dominated by foreign media interests.

He said the government was concerned that as a sovereign nation, PNG and its national issues and events should not be influenced by foreigners through their control of the local media.

The current move is the fourth of any such attempts by successive governments to control the media in PNG. A former communications minister, Gabriel Ramol, whipped up dust when he announced a proposal to control the media in 1987. He told parliament he would seek to license all media organisations and set up a uniform code of fairness and standards of conduct.

It was probably the biggest threat ever to be taken against the media in the country and attracted widespread criticism, even from politicians. The media was forced to go overboard with its publicity against the move, highlighting wide-ranging impacts the proposal would have on the media industry and PNG in general.

Newspaper organisations, especially, reacted strongly against the proposal. Among other criticisms, the then-general manager of *Post-Courier*, Don Kennedy, said it was a scheme unknown – and in

many cases constitutionally prohibited – in other democratic countries.

The general manager of another daily, the now defunct *Niugini Nius*, Russell Wilkes, said: "To my knowledge this type of licensing, as far as newspapers are concerned, does not exist in other parts of the world." The move fell through when there was a change of government. However, in 1987, another former communications minister, Brown Sinamoi, proposed to localise the ownership of the national newspapers, the *Post Courier* and the then *Niugini Nius*.

This move was also dropped. Then again in 1993, another minister, the late Martin Thompson, announced plans to introduce a communications policy. To avoid attracting any repeated uproar over the policy, the minister invited those concerned, including media, church and non-government representatives to be involved in the drawing up of the policy. It covered wide-ranging aspects of communications in general, including the mass media. The policy, which received government approval, now appears invalid under the current moves.

There were other individual cases recorded in recent years. Among others, were the PNG National Censorship Board's banning of Channel 9's *60 Minutes* programme on EM TV in 1993 and Sir Julius' prevention of the airing of Roger Hau'ofa Kalang FM's talk-back show programme in 1995.

However, the most recent case involved the Papua New Guinea government's refusal to grant Tongan human rights activist Lopeti Senituli a visa to attend a three-day United Nations seminar in Port Moresby in June. Senituli, who is the director of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement Secretariat, was invited by the United Nations Decolonisation Committee to present a paper at the non-self-governing territories meeting in the Pacific (See Page 32). According to Senituli, he was informed in writing on June 3 by the UN Department of Political Affairs that the PNG government had agreed to grant all the seminar participants entry visa on arrival in Port Moresby. However, on June 6, he was informed by the counsellor at the PNG Embassy in Suva, Ponabe Yuwa, that he would not be granted a visa to enter PNG.

He said in a statement: "I cannot deny that the PNG government may have reasons to be angry with me and my organisation because we have been critical of their policies and actions."

However, Mr Senituli said the criticisms were balanced, unbiased and made with the support of "our partner organisations in PNG and certainly do not warrant my banishment from PNG shore". ■

Freedom of the Press – a difficult exercise

By Patrick Decloitre

In 1994, Vanuatu (along with Tonga and Fiji) was rated "partly free" in a survey published by Freedom House, a New York-based research organisation, which classified 10 other countries of the region as "free".

But since it came to power last December 1991, the Vanuatu government led by Maxime Carlot has on regular occasions indicated it promoted freedom of expression and freedom of Press. There have been attempts, indeed, but also some disappointed hopes.

Newcomer on the Vanuatu media scene this year is the young, French-funded TV blong Vanuatu, which runs four hours of programmes daily – alternatively in English and French.

From their newly built studios, adjacent to Radio Vanuatu, they have their new anchormen and new stars of the screen.

Their bulletins, 15 minutes every second day, still mainly consist of foreign news and footage. But they also carry Vanuatu news – in brief so far, with some footage now and then.

If they really start touching local news, they may experience some kind of pressure.

Their colleagues, the Government-controlled Radio Vanuatu and *Vanuatu Weekly* newspaper, know the feeling. Radio Vanuatu, which broadcasts in AM, has an FM sister, Nambawan FM 98, which solely broadcasts in the capital, Port Vila, and the other town, Luganville (Santo Island), mostly music and small news bulletins picked up from overseas radios and Radio Vanuatu.

In the printed Press, the rest of the non-government local media spectrum consists mainly of the *Trading Post* newspaper and another weekly newcomer, *Le Fenua Times*, published in Bislama (the local pidgin) only.

On a more regional basis, in 1993, the Pacific News Service agency, Pacnews, moved from Solomon Islands to Vanuatu, where it centralises stories from member media organisations in the region to put out a news bulletin of Pacific news twice daily.

Other foreign media agencies are represented in the capital through correspon-

COVER STOREIS

dents. There have been in the past some bans on specific matters which couldn't be mentioned on the national radio and weekly. Two years ago, when the UMP-NUP coalition split, it was not allowed to carry Press releases from the NUP "Lini faction". It was recommended to talk about the "Regenvanu faction".

But this was a long time ago.

Earlier this year, with a constitutional crisis involving two factions of the ruling Union of Moderate Parties (UMP) – more personally PM Maxime Carlot and quickly deposed former PM and UMP president Serge Vohor – in a fight for leadership both in parliament and at party level, the pressure came down again on government-controlled media.

The old argument came back: The public must not be "misled" or "confused". Hence, the need for a clear, legible and simple message, possibly not too conflicting and preferably favouring the stronger version, usually the one holding the reins of power. So much for the weaker or the opposition.

Between November last year and February, the government of Vanuatu changed three times.

Each time, when it was not happy about the news carried by the local and sometimes foreign Press, it exerted pressure.

For the *Trading Post*, which has gone

bi-weekly since last year, the number of threats is now a record in Vanuatu:

- Last year, its publisher, Briton Mark Neil-Jones, was close to being deported under a Carlot-Regenvanu government;

- last January, under the Vohor/Lini partnership for reporting the post-election sacking of public servants for political reasons; and

- under a new Carlot-Kalpokas government for reporting on the National Bank of Vanuatu.

Neil-Jones once said he was "surprised" at the accusations made against him by the Vanuatu government.

"As publisher and investor in Vanuatu, I am concerned about receiving constant threats every time a story is printed that people in power do not like," he said, adding on another occasion that he was walking through a "political minefield".

The past 12 months saw a news ban on the judicial row between British Chief Justice Charles Vaudin d'Imecourt and Australian Justice Robert Kent.

In June last year, the government media could no longer report any news related to the French nuclear tests in the Pacific.

Recently again, while TV was recruiting for journalists to present, an applicant the TV management wanted to select was vetoed by the PM's office.

No reason was given, except political affiliation.

The accusations are various but constant: They can be "irresponsible reporting" (assorted with reminders of earlier threats such as deportation or the "localisation programme"); "damaging the country's image"; "misleading the public"; or "abusing the privilege of freedom of expression".

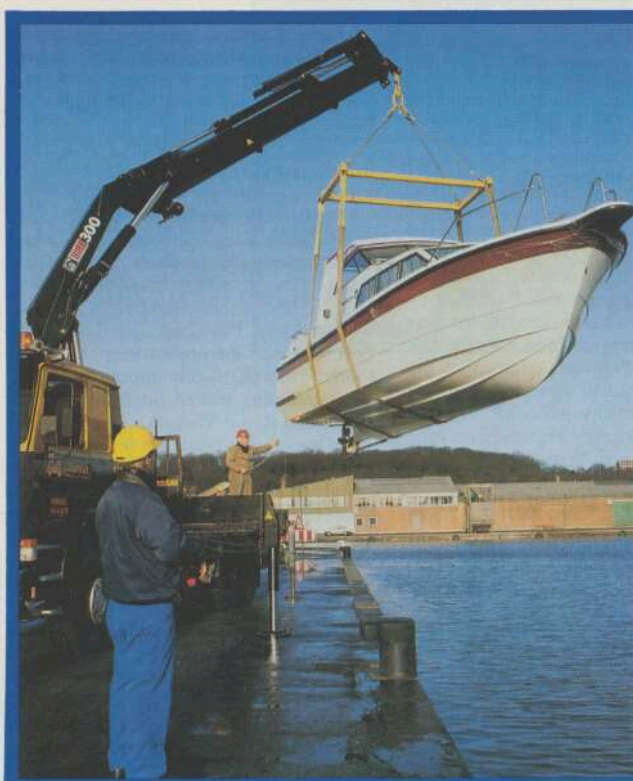
A popular item on the threat list is the cancellation of business licences, much prized by finance ministers, who are responsible for issuing (and therefore revoking) them.

Donald Kalpokas, when he was opposition leader, once expressed concern that then Finance Minister Willie Jimmy had threatened to use his licensing powers against a newspaper.

"It's time the government acts like a grown-up and accepts criticism from them media," Kalpokas said in parliament.

When overseas media carry news not favourable to Vanuatu, they often get blamed for their "outrageous attack" (Kent case) or the much-used "interference in Vanuatu's internal affairs" (most politically sensitive news).

Because Radio Vanuatu relays every morning news bulletins from Radio Australia and Radio New Zealand International, it is sometimes only through these channels that Vanuatu people have



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access to some news regarding Vanuatu.

Even the president, Jean-Marie Leye, has spoken on the issue. Last year, he asked parliament to "control newspapers which talk about people's private lives or carry untrue stories".

The official speech, however, is that the Carlot government has contributed a lot to improve freedom of Press since it came to power in December 1991.

And in all party platforms, during the last general elections campaign, no party forgot to mention their commitment to freedom of Press.

Laws have been passed to turn the previous government-owned "media services" into the Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation (VBTC) under an Act passed in 1992.

Theoretically, opposition and government alike have access to government-run media.

In practice, the discriminating factor is the degree of sensitivity of the news. The more it hurts, the more likely it won't get through to the official media.

And when it does, local journalists know what it means if they haven't asked first.

They usually get reminded of who pays them. Although VBTC was created in 1992, it still relies heavily on the government, which pays all the salaries and

expenses. This implies a de facto control on the national government-run radio and weekly. Officially, this is not control. The prime minister's first secretary, Yvette Sam, has said in the past: "Journalists in the region call this government control on media, but I don't agree."

"The government simply wants to make sure that its views are carried in any story which talks about government matters."

"This is not control. We think all journalists should do this. This is their responsibility to check they have both sides of the story."

"Unfortunately, some of them don't do this of their own initiative, so what we're doing is to remind them of their responsibility. That's all we ask."

Practically, on a day-to-day basis, she is informed of the radio's headlines to see if any news concerns the government.

"If there is news about us, then we make sure our view is carried too."

"That's what some journalists see as control. But sometimes I get the impression that some journalists here are printing or airing news which is rumour and has not been checked."

She said the procedure applied to all local journalists.

"The government wants freedom of Press, but at the same time, it has to ensure

that our journalists do their job properly. You can't change things overnight. As long as we don't have really well-trained journalists, we'll have to do this."

"We are responsible for liberalisation of the Press, but we also have to be responsible for the impact this can have," Sam told *Pacific Islands Monthly*.

In July, when the Ombudswoman made a report public, revealing the issue of letters of guarantee worth some \$US100 million and signed by PM Carlot, Finance Minister Barak Sope, Reserve Bank governor Samson Ngwele and Sope's first secretary, George Borugu, Carlot accused the Press (and the ombudswoman) of "destabilising" the government (See Page 23).

To make a "balanced" story (a principle often reminded), it wouldn't be fair not to mention that the principle known in the past as "green letters" (deportation orders for foreigners, including journalists) really seems to be a thing of the past, and that although there is still much room for improvement, the situation seems to have improved in Vanuatu. There are now more newspapers than ever since independence. And even if freedom of Press is not yet at its peak, there is at least debate over the issue. Even writing such a story about Vanuatu from Vanuatu would have been quite incredible only a few years ago. ■

Vanuatu government threatens newspaper with defamation lawsuit

All issues, when they become sensitive, do not mix well with freedom of Press with banking and money matters a particularly significant example. **Patrick Decloitre** looks at what happens when it hurts.

Early in June, the Vanuatu government said that the government-owned national bank (NBV) would sue for defamation the bi-weekly *Trading Post* newspaper for carrying a story on NBV's financial situation.

In a strongly worded Press statement, Finance Minister Barak Sope, who called "irresponsible, unfounded, unprofessional and inaccurate" a front-page story published in the *Trading Post*, said NBV "will commence legal action for defamation against (the paper), its editor and its owners".

The incriminating story, which referred to the recent dismissal of NBV's loans manager, Hendry Nin, and recollection legal officer, Kevin Mael, says government's lack of cash injections had placed NBV in a "financially poor situation".

A source within NBV said the dismissals were admitted to by the management, but not the information about the financial situation as reported by the newspaper.

"We're concerned it's going to take away the depositors' and customer's confidence from our bank," the official said.

He indicated that the Vanuatu government, which owns 100 percent of NBV's shares, planned to shortly increase the 200-million-vatu (\$US1.8-million) capital of the bank.

Sope, however, said the government doesn't subsidise the bank which, in his view, is "not in trouble" and is "not heading the same way as the National Bank of Fiji", as the paper had written. Sope alleged that the paper didn't seek to contact NBV's senior management to seek their comments on the issue.

In a brief statement, *Trading Post* pub-

lisher Briton Mark Neil-Jones, although he didn't wish to comment on the issue at this stage, maintained a journalist did contact NBV senior management.

"Vanuatu cannot afford such unprofessional journalism which can only have negative impact in the development of this country and perhaps severely damage its local businesses," Sope went on in the statement. Sources from other private commercial banks here confirm it is generally acknowledged that NBV, which was created in December 1991, lacked liquidity for some time, because a number of loans totalled larger sums than the bank's liquidity.

An NBV official source confirmed staff members borrowed large sums from the bank at preferential interest rates, "usually nine per cent instead of the 12 percent for normal clients, but not-zero interest loans". ■

COVER STORIES

Championing freedom of expression?

By Bernadette Hussein

There are deep and evil forces threatening freedom of speech and expression, says Dr Ronald Gatty, weekly columnist in the English language daily *The Fiji Times*.

Dr Gatty's controversial columns incensed part of Fiji's public, including the government who, on May 20, issued a warning to the spice farmer to cease writing.

After much public outcry, the ban was lifted three days later and Dr Gatty was allowed to continue writing, but only if he was sensitive to Fijian values, Permanent Secretary for Immigration Apisalomé Tudreu stressed.

But Dr Gatty is adamant that government pressure "hasn't changed the way I write".

"Freedom of speech exists only if people exercise it," Dr Gatty advocates. He feels there is pressure on him not to write about such issues as religion and the chiefly system and "these topics are too dangerous for me to touch".

"I think I would be killed if I spoke too openly on the chiefly tradition in this stage of Fiji's history," he said. "Religion is very close to people's hearts and they don't want anyone telling them how they should worship or what is the right type of worship."

But his columns of July 2 and July 9 spoke at length on religion and the chiefly system respectively. While his columns were labelled racist and insensitive to traditional Fijian customs, Dr Gatty feels this was not true. He said government was using cultural sensitivity as an excuse for anything it didn't want people to talk about.

"This is a false issue. You see, many of the Fijian traditions government doesn't want me to talk about are not Fijian at all, but British."

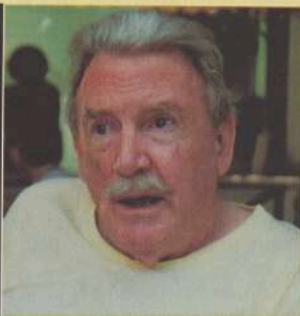
"For example, the whole Native Land Trust Board issue. That is a British creation. Fijians have the illusion that it is tradition, but the truth is that it is not a Fijian notion at all. It never was."

The Native Land Trust board was set up by the British in the colonial days to administer native Fijian land. The board is still running but is now managed by the government.

"For government to say you should be sensitive about Fijian tradition, it becomes very hard to identify what tradition they are talking about."

"They tend to pick the ones that are embarrassing to the administration or the ones that are a bit humiliating to the Fijians."

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In his column of April 30, Dr Gatty said: "No Fijian would ever be so bold as to speak the truth that he knows. We live in a pretend world. You might think that Fiji Indians are extraordinarily tolerant and patient by their silence (except for some strident and dumb belligerents). Fact is rather, Indians are afraid of Fijian violence and retribution."

"One result of all this is that some top Fijians tend to live in their own world, out of touch with reality."

"Without freedom of speech to bring them back to reality, politicians begin to believe their own racial and cultural propaganda. This is a nation where the dominating racism of some leaders clearly reflects resentment of white people and Indians."

Dr Gatty said he knew what he was talking about and it definitely wasn't to humiliate another race. The government's gagging of Dr Gatty sparked major outcry from all corners of society.

But, by the same token, there were many who congratulated the government for what it did. While there were a number of government officials who publicly criticised his column, Dr Gatty is confident there are many such officials who enjoy it. "I think a lot of people in government enjoy my column enormously. But the real problem is that we have a small segment of impotent, infuriated hardline *Taukei* (or the indigenous Fijian)."

When the ban on Dr Gatty's column was lifted, he was asked to provide a statutory declaration saying he was not employed by the newspaper as part of what Tudreu termed "a normal immigration exercise".

This represented a complete about-face by the Immigration Department which, when imposing the ban, declared that Dr Gatty had no right to write for *The Fiji Times* even though he was not getting paid.

Fiji's home affairs minister, Paul Manuelli, said at the time: "I have also reminded him (Dr Gatty) of his obliga-

tions under Fiji's laws advising that he ought to be more circumspect in his treatment of locally sensitive issues as provided for in the constitution."

The Fiji Constitution grants freedom of expression except "in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health ... for the purpose of protecting the reputation, the dignity and esteem of institutions and values of the Fijian people ... and values of other races in Fiji" (Section 13).

While many felt the ban had changed Dr Gatty's style of writing, he feels otherwise.

"It hasn't changed the way I write. It wouldn't. I am pretty inflexible. Those were positive pieces and were on a different issue altogether."

"I do think positive, you know. It would be pretty sick if I was negative all the time. We need to be both negative and critical as well as positive."

Dr Gatty feels it is healthy to say what is on his mind.

"People should say what they feel. I think it is healthy to come out on the table because people were privately talking about certain things. They would be better off saying these things aloud."

In his column of April 22, he said: "Even now, hardly anyone dares talk up. They handle it the Pacific Way. They talk behind your back."

According to Dr Gatty, "the tragedy is that the Indians, Fijians and other people are often (afraid) to speak up as they tell me it might hurt their business".

"I think that is a spineless thing to say when money and your business become the overriding thing in life," he said.

Dr Gatty said people needed to come out of their shells and change their way of thinking if they wanted to live in the changing world.

Dr Gatty was best known as a farmer who started Fiji's spice industry. He teaches Fijian villagers to grow and cure vanilla and helps market their vanilla crop. He added that those who criticised him should realise that what was sensitive for some may not be sensitive to others. If they came out of the time zone they would see the reality of his column, Dr Gatty claims. He said the reason people were complaining was because they couldn't cope with the modern world.

"Many of the local people are still stuck to the way of life of some 30 to 40 years ago. They must change."

"I feel strongly that we must fight the dark and evil forces that would suppress this."

And according to Dr Gatty, he has won the day for freedom of speech. ■

'Scam' nearly costs Vanuatu \$100 million

Reports by Patrick Decloitre

Vanuatu Prime Minister Maxime Carlot on July 8 denied allegations that the Island state could have faced bankruptcy after so-called "letters of guarantee" had been issued for twice its reserves, saying it had "avoided something very serious".

Speaking at a Press conference here, Carlot was reacting to a damning report made public by the Ombudswoman, Marie-Noelle Ferrieux-Patterson, who the week before had alleged Vanuatu could face bankruptcy because of a scheme involving letters of guarantee worth \$US100 million signed by Carlot, his finance minister, Barak Sope, first secretary, George Borugu, and Reserve Bank governor Samson Ngwele. The report said they had signed instruments to issue 10 letters of guarantee worth \$US10 million.

"Evidence has emerged that Vanuatu has been and still is at this moment the victim of a fraudulent scam," she said.

She said that IOUs had been circulating internationally and "if these IOUs are presented Vanuatu can be bankrupted". She alleged that letters had been provided to the Finance Ministry which appeared to indicate that \$US250,000 would be generated from the \$US100,000 by April 1998.

"This, in my view, is not possible in any circumstances," she wrote in the report. She recommended the finance minister be dismissed and the prime minister be "at least" reprimanded by the state president. "The ombudswoman has gone too far, she based her report on rumours," Carlot said, adding Ferrieux-Patterson should have observed the Secrecy Act and that she and the Press had "destabilised" the country.

He told journalists he did not intend to follow the ombudswoman's recommendations in dismissing his finance minister.

The ombudswoman the same day stressed she met Carlot and his deputy, Donald Kalpokas, on June 13 to present a preliminary report. "I'm bound by the constitution and the Ombudsman Act to give my report to the authorities concerned and to make it public. This implies publication in the media," she says.

On July 9, the ombudswoman responded to Carlot's comments against her as



The Vanuatu Reserve Bank

"unjustified attacks", saying that although she had requested comments from Carlot, Sope and Kalpokas, no answer came.

"It is not the duty of the ombudsman to collude with the government to keep quiet about violations which they wish to cancel or label 'confidential'. The prime minister declared again and again that he would have eventually taken action without the ombudsman's intervention. I leave to the public to decide on the worth of this claim... Somebody at least was acting as a watchdog for Vanuatu interests ... I have acted according to law throughout. It is the government which has not acted in accordance with the law and made grave errors," she said.

Vanuatu's opposition leaders on July 11 demanded that Carlot resign for being involved in the alleged scam. Speaking at a Press conference here, former prime ministers Serge Vohor and Walter Lini and opposition leader Willie Jimmy said action needed to be taken quickly to remedy "a very serious" political situation. Jimmy said he was "ashamed to see the PM defend this scandal and lie to the people".

"He has just sold the country for \$US100 million."

"If after this conference, we hear he resigns, our hearts would be lighter," Lini said.

"Until the court case is over, we cannot ask anybody to resign," Carlot said, adding he was surprised to see Jimmy ask for his successor's resignation when

Vanuatu lost around \$US70,000 of public funds to the Waratah Group, a similar fraud when (Jimmy) was still minister of finance. Jimmy, a finance minister until late February, was last November found guilty by the ombudswoman of breaching the leadership code when he last year granted "special" 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week business licences to a liquor shop he was the major shareholder in.

Meanwhile, an Adelaide-based 44-year-old Australian "financing consultant", Peter Swanson, who was arrested June 22 here in connection with the letters, is remanded in custody pending his trial here and further advancement of the police investigation. On June 25, the Supreme Court charged him with "obtaining property via false pretences".

He was granted bail on condition that he surrendered the letters of guarantee, put up a surety of 90,000 US dollars and handed in a Vanuatu diplomatic passport which the court heard was issued by the Foreign Affairs Department. The Australian said he was "quite innocent" and that the operation he is alleged to have masterminded is "totally valid".

"He infiltrated Vanuatu and the Ministry of Finance as a technician, a champion for winning money. The finance minister believed him, but the government investigated. And if we decided to arrest him, this is because of our findings," Carlot said. "We didn't believe him and now there's a liar in our jails. If someone has to pay, it will be him, not the govern-

SPECIAL REPORTS

ment. But I confirm we have perhaps avoided something very serious," he admitted.

Carlot announced the 10 letters, which were held by a custodian bank there, had been repossessed by British police in London, and were to be shortly repatriated to Vanuatu "through diplomatic channels".

"Not one vatu (the local currency) has been committed into this scheme, but because this report was made public, we lost 150 million vatu (\$US1.3 million)" from investors freezing planned spending in the Island state or selling their vatu. "Our reserves are untouched and safe," Carlot said, adding all documents and powers of attorney had been revoked.

The bank guarantees state "the undersigned (...) hereby irrevocably and unconditionally without protest or notification promise to pay against this Bank guarantee to the bearer or holder thereof, at maturity, the sum of \$US10 million". The Ombudswoman quotes Carlot as saying he "only signed the bank guarantees because he saw the signature of the governor of the Reserve Bank and thereby assumed that all proper authorisations had been given".

"Swanson and his associates have claimed to be international securities dealers," Ferrieux-Patterson writes. "The promise was that the government of



Barak Sope ... dismissal recommended

Vanuatu would receive, on a risk-free basis, \$US250 million over a 40-week period," she adds, pointing out the "similarities" with the recent Cook Islands scam. "In the Cook Islands, a power of attorney was also sought, it was not given. In Vanuatu, it has been given." Public Prosecutor John William Timakata said the Vanuatu police were liaising with several law enforcement agencies overseas, including FBI, Interpol and Australia Federal Police.

After filing her report with the Vanuatu government 21 days ago, she stated the only reply she obtained from Sope (who formed a local company called New Resources Group Vanuatu Limited with

Swanson) was that the matter was "highly confidential" and "an essential project of the highest nature for Vanuatu".

Vanuatu's attorney-general, Oliver Saksak, also said the report had been released "prematurely". Saksak said because the report contained classified documents on a politically sensitive matter that could have undesirable effects that could affect the safety of this country, it should not have been made public.

"It contains documents which are classified, so it's still a classified document. Also, the matter is still before the Court and is currently being investigated," Saksak said.

Article 63 (3) of the Vanuatu Constitution states that the report of the Ombudsman shall be public unless he decides to keep the report, or parts of it, confidential to the prime minister and the person in charge of the relevant public service, on the grounds of public security or public interest.

"I sent the Ombudsman a letter by fax asking her not to release the report prematurely, but it is obvious that she has decided to go ahead", the AG said.

"Everyone has to respect the law; under the constitution, the Ombudsman can release a report but she also has to observe provisions of secrecy," he added. ■

Ombudswoman speaks out on Vanuatu

Marie-Noelle Ferrieux-Patterson, who was appointed two years ago, is Vanuatu's first ombudsman. Just after releasing her report, on 4 July, she explained what her perception of the alleged scam was.

PIM: Mrs Marie-Noelle Ferrieux-Patterson, the report you released early July reveals what you call a scam. What is this all about?

MNFP: It appears that country leaders in Vanuatu were duped into believing that visiting groups of so-called promoters or financiers were able to secure vast profits for Vanuatu if the country leaders would provide them with written guarantees for US\$100 million, and then they would be able to secure on that financing several infrastructure projects. As I said in my report, for whatever reasons - whether ignorance or greed or both, our leaders at the highest level went along with this incredible plot.

PIM: You call this plot a scam?

MNFP: Yes, it appears from my research that this is a scam.

PIM: You also say that Vanuatu is facing bankruptcy? How real do you think this threat is?

MNFP: At this stage, there are bank guarantees circulating overseas and

because of the amount involved in this transaction, if anything goes further, that represents twice the foreign reserves of Vanuatu.

PIM: You accuse top level leaders of Vanuatu...

MNFP: The main one involved is the finance minister who organised and followed up the scheme from the foreign proposals. He convinced and got signatures of both the prime minister and the governor of the Reserve Bank, even though they were reluctant.

PIM: So what do you recommend?

MNFP: I recommend that Finance Minister Barak Sope be dismissed, because there are gross breaches of the law and in Vanuatu, like in many countries, there are financial rules which are there to prevent this type of accident happening.

Also, some reprimand should occur between the president of the Republic and the prime minister because there should be commitment for everyone to respect the laws of Vanuatu.

Some other people should be dismissed, like the governor of the Reserve Bank and the first secretary of the minister of finance.

I think it is vital for Vanuatu's good name that my recommendations are car-

ried out quickly.

It is important from the point of view of a responsible and accountable government.

PIM: Do you think these recommendations will be followed?

MNFP: My office wouldn't have conducted this investigation if we didn't expect the recommendation to be carried out.

PIM: Last year, you made similar recommendations regarding the previous finance minister and at the time, you had to be placed under police guard. Do you think your personal security is endangered?

MNFP: No, I think sometimes there might be a bit of reaction like this to fear, but I don't (need) anything like security in my daily life.

One of the advantages of living in Vanuatu is that concerns like this have always been minimal.

And, generally speaking, I've always had support from the highest leaders in the country, including the prime minister himself.

PIM: Do you think he would still support you on that matter?

MNFP: Prime minister Maxime Carlot created my position, which was provided for in the Vanuatu Constitution. He initiated

Borogu defends ministry action

The Finance Ministry's first secretary, George Borogu, was one of the signatories to the letters of guarantee. On July 6, he explained what his impression of the whole operation was. From the Finance Ministry's point of view, there was nothing wrong.

PIM: Mr Borogu, this operation involving signing letters of guarantee was not a scam, to your understanding?

GB: No, this programme was not a scam. It involved a trip to Europe by our Ministry of Finance and Peter Swanson. They went to London and Zurich, where they met reputable banks which were to be the custodians for these documents. The governor of the Reserve Bank declined to go with them for reasons similar to the accusations of the ombudsman.

PIM: What sort of banks did they meet?

GB: Barclays, Loyds, Deutschebank in London and in Zurich Credit Suisse and Swiss Corporation Bank. Now, if it was a scam, it would not involve genuine reputable banks like this.

PIM: What was the idea on the Finance Ministry's side?

bank 'scam'

ed the creation of the ombudsman and I think he will respect the constitution.

PIM: What help did you get from financial experts in your investigation?

MNFP: First, my own background is banking at the highest level. I was also chief executive of a trust company for some time, so my background is very much in my field.

But to confirm what the suspicions were, we have used experts in the financial field here, in Australia, in the United States, and we even hired international solicitors in the States who have checked our suspicions and have confirmed that they were correct.

PIM: An Australian citizen is still in jail in Port Vila in connection with this scam. Has your report helped arrest him or lead to his arrest?

MNFP: Yes, there is a relation. But the public prosecutor is also investigating the matter, and I'd rather not say anything that could prejudice their own investigation.

PIM: Will this matter go further in the Supreme Court?

MNFP: I believe, yes, this matter will go before the court and will be probably be exposed further. But that's the responsibility of the public prosecution and the court.

GB: The idea originally was that we put the proposal together and if the Council of Ministers says OK, we do it. If not, we withdraw it. So we put together a 80-90-page report for the Council of Ministers' consideration. Then the council of ministers decided we should withdraw from the programme. This is what has been done and the Ministry (of Finance) finds it difficult to accommodate. We haven't done anything wrong yet. We were still at the stage of preparing the report. If we had gone right to the end of the programme and ended up with negative results, the Ombudsman's Office then could have accused us. But we're still at the initial stage of the programme. How can you say this is a scam when you're only at the first month?

PIM: You were expected to gain some \$US250 million in a few weeks by issuing letters of guarantee worth \$US100 million. What was this money for?

GB: This was the total of the cost of several development projects put together. At present, we want to increase private participation in national development programmes at the planning and implementation level. This was to finance a project of generation of geothermal energy on the north of Efate (Vanuatu's main island). This project, as early as 1982, was identified in the national plan objectives and it is believed it could generate about 10 times the quantity of energy produced by the electricity company here.

Currently, the price of electricity is so high it's become a prohibiting factor to development. One of the other projects was a cement factory in the same area.

PIM: But how did you understand this scheme was supposed to work?

GB: It's a use of guarantees. According to our advice, this is a normal business between banks. It's not something new. The idea was that the trading would generate profit and the profit would be used by government through a company. Money would then be used by this company, New Resources Group Vanuatu Limited, which was formed here, to fund government projects.

PIM: Is it like a loan?

GB: It's not a loan. We did not sign a guarantee for a loan. It's an instrument the trading banks in London are going to use to trade. So, it's a guarantee for investment rather than a guarantee to loan money. The guarantees were going to be held by custodian banks and the profit would be used to finance development projects identified by the government.

PIM: Were you not surprised that it could be so easy to make so much money

in such a small time?

GB: No, I wasn't surprised because I was aware of that trading going on.

PIM: So you had no doubt it was a legal operation?

GB: I don't say it's a scam because I know this trading exists. The Ombudsman's Office say it's a scam because they're not aware of it.

PIM: To your understanding, is this a similar thing to what happened in the Cook Islands? What was the advice you received on this type of operation?

GB: I don't know much about what happened in the Cooks. All I know is the Cook Islands have been mentioned. But all the advice we have received were in favour of the programme and they were not saying it's a scam.

PIM: Did you seek advice from experts and specialists?

GB: Yes, we received advice from specialists internally and overseas, including a law firm in Australia. They all said we could do this. I know it exists. I had no doubt we would succeed in generating the profits.

PIM: Didn't you think because of what had happened in the Cook Islands, you had to be extra careful?

GB: No, I never envisaged this possibility. We were at a preparation stage. The advice from the PM's office was that we should follow the steps.

PIM: And this Australian 'financing consultant', Peter Swanson - how did you first hear of him?

GB: We've known him over the last four years. He's a financier. Before we asked him to be involved, we asked him to submit his CV and backgrounds of all people who were going to be involved. They're all people who exist in Australia - not fictitious people - and genuine banks in London. Peter Swanson is a member of several reputable banking organisations.

PIM: The ombudsman report alleges he's been declared bankrupt more than once. This didn't affect the good image you have of him?

GB: No, we heard he had entered about 10 different businesses and only two companies were bankrupt. But who in this world is not bankrupt?

PIM: He was also was given a Vanuatu diplomatic passport although he's not a Vanuatu citizen.

GB: That was from the beginning (of this government) when the government asked him to deal with this. To show some commitment, that was issued to allow him to travel on behalf of the government overseas. It was after the government was formed.

ECONOMY

Nauru attacks its fiscal problems

By David North

Poverty is more dramatic when it hits the once rich, as opposed to the perpetually poor.

There is (perhaps wrongly) more interest when the millionaire sells his last yacht, or the ageing actress has to pawn her last diamonds, than when the peasant family, yet again, eats only one meal a day.

So it is with Nauru. Once touted as the nation with the world's greatest per capita income, the phosphate island falls into the ex-millionaire category.

The symbol of Nauru's financial crisis is not a yacht or diamonds but the loss of its own version of the White House. Nauru quietly decided a few months ago to tear down the State House, the president's residence, as well as the government houses for the chief justice and the speaker of parliament.

Why? So that the Nauru Phosphate Corporation can mine the phosphate rock beneath the houses; the Island needs the money and is rapidly running out of phosphate.

What Nauru is doing

President Lagumot Harris and his reform allies, notably Education Minister Kennan Adeang, narrowly won control of parliament last November, promising that they would try to straighten out the Island's tangled and wasteful finances. (Nauru's president, like the one in the Marshall Islands, carries that US-sounding title, but is chosen, in the Westminster manner, by a majority of the members of parliament.)

The Harris government began money-saving measures immediately, but did not have to face up to a new budget until June. Meanwhile, confidence in the local economy had dwindled so badly that currency disappeared, presumably to be hidden in island mattresses or stashed in off-island bank accounts.

The Harris budget was a blockbuster, a pail of cold water tossed into the face. It included, among other things:

- No wage increases for government workers for two years;
- considerable reduction in the "over-staffed Works Department";



Nauru ... little more than a moonscape

- drastic cutbacks in hiring of new government staff;
- privatisation of numerous, previously subsidised government agencies, such as the radio and television stations, the government printing office and the computer bureau;
- fewer off-island hospitalisations for islanders; and
- (a couple of easy ones) fewer government jobs for expatriates and fewer consulates overseas.

Earlier the Harris government had re-organized Air Nauru, laying off some staff as it converted from a two-plane to a one-plane operation. It was only three years ago that Nauru borrowed \$US80,000,000 to buy two Boeing 747-400s for its wasteful airline; it made no downpayment, borrowing 100 per cent of the costs. (See "Where Has the Money" *PIM*, Aug '93)

The government now plans to bring more off-island physicians to the Island, while reducing the flying of patients to off-island hospitals. This makes sense. While a visiting physician is expensive, he or she can treat many people.

The off-shore treatment (with a companion sometimes going along), on the other hand, can help only one person. Many of Nauru's citizens, unfortunately,

have picked up the worst of the West's eating habits; there is widespread obesity and a remarkable amount of diabetes, which in its advanced stages can lead to amputation of legs and arms

Not spelled out by the government, at least not yet, is the probable impact of the fiscal cutbacks on Nauru's long-standing and ambitious off-shore education scheme, the sending of many young people to universities and vocational schools in Australia. This practice may have to be reduced as well.

Speaking of young people and airplane trips, it will be interesting to see if Nauru's enthusiastic funding of its sports teams – some competent golfers and a world-class weight-lifter – will be hurt by the new budget. These athletes usually have to go to distant sites to compete, running up the government's already substantial travel bills.

What Nauru is saying

The planned reduction in government expenditures was announced by one of the most painfully honest Press releases I have seen in the last four decades. A three-page fax, emanating from the 50th floor of Nauru House in Melbourne, Australia, had

this to say about the island government: "... greatly overstuffed public service with high salary bills and little funding for maintenance of buildings and equipment. The departments lacked clear objectives and performance criteria.

"When the Harris government came to power, it found substantial unsecured loans with the Bank of Nauru both public and private. There was a critical cash-flow crisis on the island. Much of the country's investment had been collateralised to meet government debt..."

What Nauru is not saying

Meanwhile, honest as the Press release was, it barely scratched the surface of the financial problems of Nauru.

For example, it mentioned these reforms: "Visitors to pay user-charge fees for medical services" implying that medical services, in the past, have been free for off-islanders who became sick on the island. It spoke of "amalgamation of hospitals on the island".

Nauru, for reasons not clear to me, an island with 8000 inhabitants in a compact area, had two hospitals.

The Press release said that were to be "significant increases in import duty for alcohol, tobacco and second-hand cars".

When American television viewers last saw the Island described on television, CBS-TV commentator Morey Safer was seen waving a cocktail glass and saying that "Nauru has the cheapest liquor in the world".

It is not that Nauru produces the hard stuff efficiently. (Nauru produces nothing but phosphate.)

What happens is that the stuff is imported, and then barely taxed.

Further, Nauru may be the only place in the world where there is no income tax and no sales tax.

The government, in short, can mend its balance sheet by cutting waste and bloat, and by imposing a few taxes. None of this, of course, is very popular among the voters.

In addition to the fast-disappeared phosphate that once created the Island's prosperity, Nauru has three other major financial problems:

1. Although the figures sound horrifying, the least of Nauru's problems has been that outsiders, ranging from accountants in Melbourne to international connemen, have stolen money from the Island's inept financial managers in the past. Three years ago Nauru lost \$US10-20,000,000 to connemen selling "Prime Bank Notes", in a swindle something like the one that hit the Cooks recently.

2. A continuing, more significant problem has been foolish investments of the phosphate moneys, that were supposed to

guarantee prosperity for Nauruans even after the last of the phosphate was sold. Nauru's leaders, traditionally, distrusted stocks and bonds so they bought real estate, such as hotels and the tower in Melbourne. Some, such as the holdings in Honolulu, turned out well, others were disasters.

They then turned to the Tokyo stock market, just as it started to collapse, and lost a bundle there. And, about three years ago, Nauru decided to mount a musical comedy in London, which just happened to be the property of Duke Minks, a fast-talking financial adviser to then Nauru Government. Nauru dropped \$US3 million on the musicals which dealt with the relation between the painter Leonardo Da Vinci and his most famous model, the Mona Lisa.

Kelly Emiu, then secretary of the cabinet, and the chief "Leonardo" enthusiast, kept his job after the musical bombed but is not on the payroll of the Harris government.

3. The most serious of Nauru's financial problems, as the new government readily admits, is waste.

The government spends enormous sums on overseas travel; all of its food and water have to be imported; there are too many politicians and civil servants on the payroll — with a compact island of 8000 people, Nauru had indulged in the luxury of two governmental structures, the national government and a municipal one, each with its own elected leaders, executive staff and hangers-on.

Meanwhile, though most of the island is a moonscape, ravaged by the surface mining for phosphate, Nauruans have not been doing the physical work needed to restore the landscape to its earlier condition when it was called Pleasant Island.

In recent decades, Nauru could have used some of its wasted money to pump sand and dirt from the bottom of the surrounding ocean onto its desolate shore, but that did not happen. Nor did Nauru use the presumably empty holds of the arriving phosphate ships to bring in top soil from Australia.

The new government promises that rehabilitation of the Island remains a priority but, if done at all, it will probably be done by off-island contractors using off-island technologies and off-island workers.

The significant news, however, is that Nauru has finally made an effort to face the grim fiscal reality it has dodged for years.

Maybe, just maybe, the Harris government can avoid bankruptcy and the need to evacuate the Island, on the grounds that there is neither an Island left, nor any money remaining to support human life on it. ■

Transition hits home in the Cooks

By Lisa Williams

The T-word that's been joked about openly, but dreaded in private by thousands of public servants finally hit the Cook Islands cabinet as it met and discussed its 1996/97 budget early last month. Transition services, the subject of the special meeting held in Suva, Fiji, in June, is being funded by a special New Zealand government package of more than \$NZ8 million (\$US5.5 million) — most of it from their annual budget support programme to the Cooks.

And if the sting of the public service paycuts by up to 65 per cent wasn't enough warning to bring home the reality of the recession to Cook Islanders, Transition will serve as the final notice that, after three months, those on the special "family bridging support" paycheck will be on their own.

The \$60-million-plus budget last year may have done its last legs in June towards paying the public servants already on 35 per cent of their former pay, but an estimated \$NZ40-million (\$US27.4-million) current budget has finally hit home the message to leaders criticised for being slow to implement the hard-hitting reforms designed to put the Cooks back on the track: No more jobs for the boys.

Early in July, workers across the Cooks received the standard memo from the Public Service Commissioner. In line with the FEM "transparency" reforms on open government, their jobs were being declared "acting" and positions in each department were being advertised. They could apply — and would either end up winning a job in the new public service, or spending three months on pay in "transition" readying themselves for being off the government payroll.

The letter hit home to many the fact that there would be no more "uncles, cousins, or campaign managers" to protect their jobs — even if departmental heads are political appointments — and, disappointingly enough, most of them are. The new FEM laws on financial management are going to whip both ministers and their favourites into shape. The government has dropped from 44 offices to

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26 — leaving 15 ministries and 11 departments being pruned back even more. "If they want to pay workers under them what they are worth, then they can't afford to have hangers-on and 'surplus' positions at all," says one officer close to the haggling over budgets in June/July.

At village level, though, the signs of acceptance of the Transition reality are not looking good. In one household the day the 'memos' were given out, the oldest public servant could not believe the news. His son was bitter at a government that had ruined the country, and another daughter, a clerical worker, was pondering over travel to New Zealand if she could not get work locally. All were public servants and their attitudes mirror what is happening generally.

While the Transition concept is being sold as a positive move for workers to "take control" of their lives, for many it means losing the job around which their identity and social network revolved.

Departmental heads began giving out letters to all their employees and advertising the drastically cut positions. They will now run on even tighter budgets than they've had in the past. But for almost 2000 public servants who are on the move to "Transition" and training for the private sector, the "denial phase" will influence just how positively they view their new environment. Early in the piece, while fighting for public servants to be given enough notice of job cuts, Public Service Association president Gill Vaiimene was one of several officials struck by the lack of interest in the coming Transition.

"Everyone's wearing these rose-tinted glasses and thinking 'it's someone else's job that will cut, not mine'," she said.

"They are in what I call a denial phase, where they are not accepting that job losses are going to happen." And that was only the attitude from workers based on Rarotonga, where many have been close to the news of and felt the urgency for reforms. On a briefing trip to the Outer Islands, where officials had to tell hundreds of public servants of the impending loss of their jobs, they were shocked by the "everything will be taken care of by my member in parliament" attitude. There was outright refusal to believe what they were being told, says one official, who adds Outer Islanders may only believe what they are being told once they hear the prime minister break the news to them on radio. But anyone who has lived long enough in the Cooks knows it is the system itself which is partly to blame for many public servants being so out of touch. The same voters who did not bat an eyelid at the exposes of the Letters of Guarantee scam, the Winebox, and high spending by former officials of the Sheraton Hotel project have long con-



Natural resources, warm climate and tourist potential should be enough to kick-start people into focusing on their talents

doned a public service system open to nepotism, favouritism and political interference — regardless of which government was in power. And the government's slow shuffle towards finally tabling its current budget has been reflected in the move to a ministry which is by its very nature meant to soften the blow of losing a government job.

At a time when jobs in private business are being met with a flood of applicants, only four people applied for the eight jobs advertised in the Transition services.

Transition secretary Nga Pierre says the problem lies with people thinking they won't be in transition and can still hang on to their public service jobs. He says while applications have formally closed the service still wants to hear from people who want the jobs, either full time or as a two-month contract. With Transition is NZODA consultant Diane Buchan, whose job is to help the Transition committee set up the Transition structure and process and ensure the funding is in place, but the lack of response to the Transition ads have made the set-up difficult, says Pierre.

"We suspect the reason is that people still don't believe that they are not going to have a job. And so why should they apply for a job outside the public service?"

The four who responded came from around 80 application forms that were picked up. The pitiful response has made Pierre put out the feelers for contract workers just to get the service up and operating. "And they can hold the fort — until people realise they actually don't have a job, then we would readvertise and hopefully get people into those positions."

The Transition committee is trying to get through to people that the coming cuts have nothing to do with skills or a lack thereof, but that there's just no money to fund the jobs they hold. They are convinced there will be many highly skilled and motivated people who will lose their jobs in the down-sizing and be available for a position in the Transition Service.

Despite the slow response, Pierre is hopeful that the office can get the motivated team it needs, whether from the private sector or from the public service. From the

sounds of it, though, it is the transition in the mind that is needed most from those losing their jobs. Buchan says resilience, resources and mental attitude "make an incredible difference to the recovery of a community, where you've got really good leaders who are innovative and enthusiastic and can stop people getting bogged down in misery". She says finding people with vision to lead the way out of the crisis doesn't necessarily mean looking to politicians for all the answers, but grass-roots village people and those doing their bit in the private sector.

And even those who want to collect their pay and use it to start up in New Zealand will find that difficult — there will be no lump-sum payments given to the Transition 2000, because the three-month period is seen as essential time for the "reality to sink in, so they can think about their future options", says one official.

The equivalent of their salaries or wages will be paid into their accounts with the only difference that deductions for power, loans, insurance and the phone bills will have to be made by the person concerned. That news has had the three local banks, already worried by the rising number of defaults on loans, anticipating more problems. They are clamouring for lists of names once Transition staff are on the payroll, so they can contact loan clients before they skip the country.

"Loan defaults have been considerable," says ANZ general manager Chris Lancaster of the trend since he took over the helm earlier this year.

"Many borrowers are exiting the country without facing up to their obligations, which is very disappointing."

He warned that clients running out on their loans were compounding the problem, because many of them were flying to Australia or New Zealand — countries where they can be blacklisted with credit-listing organisations. They are also making it harder for those who stay behind to lend, warns Lancaster of tighter lending criteria to come if the problem continues.

Still, Transition head Nga Pierre and many others in the government are hoping

that most Cook Islanders will "stay here and help our country recover". A slow drift of workers with skills, initiative and drive has been noticed leaving the country — even as they are also the ones needed to get the economy back on its feet. Transition advisers, in the meantime, are actively campaigning for people to think of where they will be in a year's time.

With training for job skills, one of the most important briefs of the temporary office, they say the easiest ones to train will be those who have an idea of what they want to do with themselves. It might be a little too much to tell public sector employees in transition they live in a land of opportunities, but that's exactly what they will hear for their three-month stint on full pay.

Sure, things are going to be hard, but you know there's more hope here than a lot of places I've worked in," says Buchan. Lots of natural resources, a warm climate, and huge tourist potential combined with the services provided by Transition should be enough to kick-start people into getting organised and focusing on their talents, she says.

And those with vision will be eligible for a special revolving fund coming from the Transition millions for small business assistance — even, as one expert says, if it will take 18 months before many get ready to take on whatever they want to do...if they haven't taken on the key exit Cook Islanders have as a way out of the country's recession — NZ passports offering a second chance in either New Zealand or Australia.

There is one worry on the minds of politicians which could well come true if the results of the July by-election for the Nikao-Panama electorate vacated by former MP Vincent Ingram is anything to go by.

The Cook Islands Party candidate, a businesswoman with a hard-hitting anti-government stance, still came home with a surprising defeat, and had to blame voters' anger at the government party she represented.

As for the winning candidate, a strong community leader with family ties, to many of her voters the win was a double first: "Auntie" Ngamau Munoko became the only woman in the Cook Islands parliament, and she is the first candidate to win a seat under the Demo-Alliance opposition party banner.

The government caucus took their party's landslide defeat at the Nikao polls as a warning for the general elections two years away. "The message to government is loud and clear, the message to caucus is loud and clear, and the message to our political party is loud and clear," said one senior minister, "we've got a lot of work to do."

Abandoned, the Pacific almost loses out

By Kalinga Seneviratne

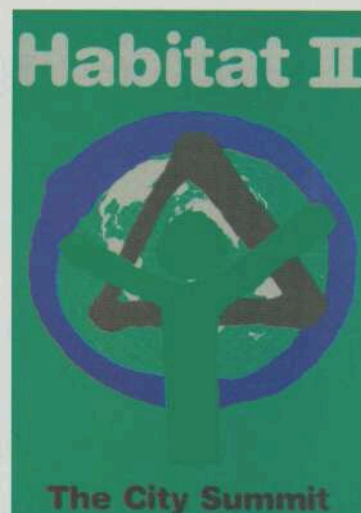
The South Pacific has given leadership to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) at previous United Nations global conferences such as the Rio Earth summit in 1992 and the Cairo Population Summit in 1994, but at Habitat II in Istanbul they kept a very low profile almost until the last day of the two-week meeting.

The South Pacific delegations in Istanbul were small and led mainly by senior public servants or their ambassadors to the United Nations based in New York. While the Caribbean island nations, led by Jamaica, and co-ordinated by their regional inter-governmental agency, CARICOM, were leading the fight against an attempt by the United States and European Community to delete all references to SIDS from the draft Global Plan of Action (GPA), the Pacific kept mute.

When questioned about it, one Pacific delegate told *Pacific Islands Monthly* that South Pacific nations were not even talking to each other to co-ordinate a regional strategy against the US and EU push because of a lack of co-ordination by the South Pacific Forum, whose secretariat had not sent a single official to Istanbul. Many other officials delegates and South Pacific non-governmental organisation (NGO) delegates to Habitat II felt that the Forum had abandoned them at Istanbul.

The conference gave NGOs unprecedented access to the official UN conference sessions. But, here too, top Pacific NGOs such as the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO) — which addressed the Cairo summit as the representative of Southern (Third World) NGOs — and the Suva-based Pacific Concerns Resource Centre were missing. Thus, at the parallel NGO Forum, the Pacific made hardly a sound. It was not until June 12 (two days before the end of the meeting) that Forum member delegates had their first meeting here. That, too, had been organised by a group of Pacific NGO delegates at Istanbul.

During the last two days of negotiations on the GPA, the South Pacific was thus able to have some say, garnering the support of the Group of 77 (developing countries) to foil attempts by the US and France to delete Clause 126 from the draft of the GPA, which reinforced the "polluter pays" principle with respect to con-



tamination by nuclear testing. The paragraph in question concerns the safe resettlement of populations and restoration of economic activity in areas affected by radioactive contamination as a consequence of the development and testing of nuclear weapons.

At Istanbul, Solomon Islands moved to amend Clause 126, introduced by Marshall Islands at the third Prep Com in New York, to broaden its scope to beyond the effects of US testing in the Marshalls and encompass other areas. The move immediately met with French resistance.

"France thought that we were picking them out and they objected to it," Rex Horoi, permanent representative of Solomon Islands to the United Nations, told IPS. Solomon Islands highlighted commitments already in the document on rehabilitation and reconstruction following armed conflict and human-made disasters. Japan supported the text, along with the G77.

Horoi was disappointed by the lack of co-ordination among Pacific countries at Istanbul — even on an issue of direct concern to them. "It's rather sad that we didn't have the co-ordination of the Forum ... when the Habitat agenda covers all that the Forum stands for," he observed, adding that the secretariat had cited lack of funds for its inability to send someone to Istanbul. Earlier in the conference, when the GPA negotiating committees were debating whether to delete clauses recognising SIDS' vulnerability to global warming, it was the Caribbeans who car-



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REGION

ried the battle to the West (who were worried about committing any financial assistance to anyone here).

"In this last important conference of the UN this decade, that should be speaking about human settlements all over the world, we are finding SIDS are not given special recognition, especially since in many instances, there's been emphasis on larger cities," Easton Douglas, minister for the environment and housing of Jamaica told *PIM*.

"We see this as a conference on human settlements, as well as on cities," Byron Blake, assistant secretary-general of CARICOM, told *PIM*. He was disappointed that his organisation and the Forum were not able to co-ordinate the input of the SIDS.

Horoi said most Pacific delegations lacked manpower to cover all of the committees and plenary sessions and had to depend on the G77 to be their mouthpiece. Wesley Aruga, the alternative head of the Papua New Guinea delegation, also admitted that the Pacific had not prepared well for Habitat II.

As PNG holds the current chairmanship of the Forum, one Pacific delegate told *PIM* that it was the duty of that country's delegation to call a meeting of Forum member states at Istanbul.

Aruga admitted that Pacific delegates were working independently but said his delegation had done what it could at Istanbul, adding that they had encountered funding problems internally to get a delegation in the first place. Aruga complained that when the Forum Heads of State meeting was held in PNG last year, preparations for Habitat II were not included in the agenda.

He observed that even the regional report launched here by the Bangkok-based Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), a regional agency of the United Nations, was titled "Living in Asian Cities".

He had suggested a follow-up report to be titled perhaps "Living in the Pacific Islands". Jens Overgaard, chief of the ESCAP-UN Centre for Human Settlements joint section on Human Settlements, told *PIM* they planned to commission another report on the state of the cities in the Asia-Pacific region which would include cities in the South Pacific.

Meanwhile, Aruga hopes that the Istanbul experience will make the South Pacific leaders realise the importance of regional co-ordination, so the region's voice will not be drowned out in future. We hope after Habitat, when we get back home, we can bring together the Pacific Island nations and work out a strategy to deal with the issues raised at the Habitat meeting here," he said. ■

France singled out at decolonisation seminar

By Sam Vulum

The facilitation process for the 1998 New Caledonian Kanaks' referendum received further boost in June at the Pacific Regional Seminar of the UN Special Decolonisation Committee in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

The plight of the Kanaks, which was extensively discussed during the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) meeting in the Trobriand Islands in the Milne Bay province earlier in the month, received special mention from PNG Prime Minister Sir Julius Chan during the United Nations seminar.

Sir Julius called for an early, orderly and absolute end to colonialism in New Caledonia, with specific safeguards for the rights of indigenous Kanaks. At the MSG summit Sir Julius, who is chairman of both the MSG and South Pacific Forum said: "Papua New Guinea's concern for New Caledonia does not rise from any hostility or disregard for France. It is the product of our desire to put the colonial period behind us and develop relations on the basis of mutual benefit and regard."

He said both the Forum and the MSG believed that following the decision to stop nuclear testing in the Pacific, France be readmitted as a post-Forum dialogue partner. However, he said member nations of the Forum and MSG were disappointed in the breakdown of recent talks between French authorities and the pro-independence group in New Caledonia, FLNKS.

New Caledonia is one of 17 non-self-governing territories around the world. Four of these, including New Caledonia, are located in the South Pacific. The others are Wallis and Futuna, Tokelau and Pitcairn. The seminar was aimed at assessing situations in the non-self-governing territories, focusing on the status of their political evolution towards self-determination by the Year 2000. This is in the line with the General Assembly Resolution 1514. The resolution consists of a declaration proclaiming, among other things, that the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitute a denial of fundamental human rights is contrary to the Charter of the UN that all peoples have the right to self-determination. PNG's permanent representative to the UN and chairman of the committee, Utula Samana said the committee was asked to seek suitable ways for the speedy recovery and total application of the declaration to all territories yet to achieve the

objective of the declaration and submit to the General Assembly a report with recommendations on all territories to which the declaration applies. The decolonisation seminar, which is the sixth of its kind, has entered its final stage under General Assembly resolution 43/47 of 1988.

The resolution, titled International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, declared the period 1990 to 2000 as the decade for the eradication of colonialism and requested the UN Secretary-General to submit a plan of action aimed at ushering into the 21st Century, a world free of colonialism.

Samana said that seminars such as this provided an effective mechanism to interact with representatives of the non-self-governing territories as well as experts in the fields of decolonisations. He expressed the committee's satisfaction at the constitutional development being taken in Tokelau.

"On behalf of the committee, I should like to record our thanks to New Zealand, the administering power, for assisting the people of Tokelau in exercising their right to self-determination," the chairman said. On New Caledonia, Samana said that although the committee was happy with the Matignon Accord and the framework towards some form of self-determination, there were some critical factors, such as immigration, causing an imbalance of the population (made up of Melanesians and French settlers or Caldoches) and how that would affect the outcome of the plebiscite or referendum planned for 1998. FLNKS Independence party president Rock Wamyton expressed similar concern over increased migration of French nationals into the country.

Meanwhile, spokesman for the United States mission to the UN James Rubin said, "We think such a meeting is a junket for bureaucrats at the expense of services for the people." The committee expected five of its members as well as representatives of non-government organisations and several UN staff to attend at an estimated cost of US\$150,000. He hoped the "ridiculousness of having such a meeting on a subject which people increasingly realise is obsolete would increase the chances of being able to kill this committee altogether". He said US Ambassador Madeleine Albright was particularly upset by the decision to go ahead with the seminar at a time when she was asking a frugal US Congress for hundreds of dollars to pay UN dues. ■

Leaders mull over employment opportunities

In the face of the economic crises of the region and the need to down-size public service bodies, the 5th Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders looked at ways to boost the economy and create more jobs

By Margaret Wise

The creation of employment, in the formal, informal and subsistence sectors is the greatest challenge facing Pacific Island countries today.

Delegates to the Fifth Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders held in Fiji recognised job creation as vital if the region was to improve its standard and quality of life.

"When people have a livelihood and when they go home to their families and are able to bring a paycheck home, there is less friction – so there is a lot of joy in work," said the special guest speaker, world-renowned tennis player and management guru, Peter Burwash.

Employment is created by two things: Great leadership and outstanding service, Burwash told the three-day conference at the Sheraton Resort in Nadi, Fiji.

On discussion of the conference theme, Population, Employment Creation and Resource Management, Pacific Island leaders concluded that the problems and solutions identified were not new. But they valued the opportunity to share experiences and realise that not only must they act decisively within their respective countries, but that they must act together in a concerted effort to help each other whenever necessary.

The key to employment creation is economic growth. Pacific Island countries and territories are inexorably a part of the global economy. And strong and sustained growth can only come about when governments adopt policies which would enhance their international competition. To achieve such growth, the leaders agreed to support the private sector and, in turn, be open to foreign investment for the much-needed capital, technology and expertise. The leaders agreed to ensuring within their countries an environment of political stability and one where investors, local and foreign, would feel secure. The leaders identified increased investment in small- and medium-sized businesses, export-based industries, service industries like tourism, the development of natural resources, including agriculture and agro-



Delegates to the 5th Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders held in Fiji

based industries, timber and minerals, and marine resources as the highest priority.

They agreed that public-sector reform, particularly the reduction in size and cost of governments, was urgent. None of the Island countries have welfare systems to support the unemployed. Those made redundant would have to be retrained – an exercise requiring resources.

Of particular concern, was the financial difficulties faced by the East West Centre in Honolulu, Hawaii. Drastic cuts in United States federal grants to the centre have severely affected the Pacific Islands Development Programme's applied research activities. The research programme focuses mainly on business-related studies. Following the 1994 US Congressional elections, the EWC appropriation was cut by more than 50 per cent this year from \$US24million to \$US11.75 million. Chairman of the Standing Committee Sir Geoffrey Henry called for a review of the legal and institutional status of the PIDP within the EWC. Because the PIDP is an integral part of the centre, it cannot directly receive financial contributions from outside sources. Sir Geoffrey recommended that the status of the PIDP secretariat be changed to a con-

sortium, allowing it to maintain links with the centre as well as free it to develop co-operative research arrangements with other universities. Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka was appointed chairman of the Standing Committee of the conference to supervise the work of the PIDP until the next conference.

The leaders expressed concern about the natural and social environment and agreed to do all they could to ensure that the exploitation of their primary resources would not result in the wholesale degradation of their physical surroundings.

Also of concern was the need the leaders felt of protecting their cultural heritage while modernising the economy, which would lay emphasis on the value of individual effort and material success.

However, the leaders felt that for Island countries, communal harmony and spiritual development of the people were as important as their material well-being and progress. Here, perhaps the best advice came from Fiji President and founding father of the PICL Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who said that in planning and executing new strategies, it was better to "build on what you have rather than scrap the lot and start again". ■

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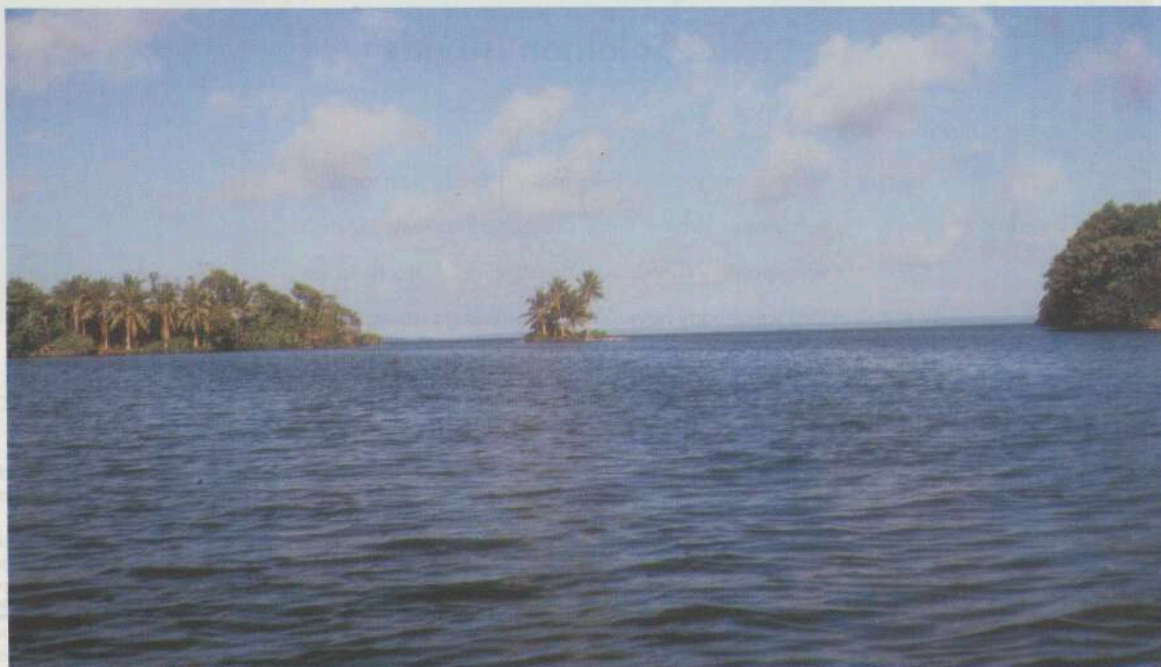
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SOLOMONS FEATURE

From British colony to independent Island state



The clear blue waters that surround the island group ... a natural resource for food

Last month, the Solomon Islands celebrated their 14 years of independence and, while doing that, the people looked back on history and all the events leading up to this very important date on their calendar.

A member of the Commonwealth, the Solomon Islands' first discovery by the Europeans was in 1567 by Spanish explorer Alvaro de Mendana.

The country consists of a double chain of six large islands and many smaller ones. The major island is Guadalcanal and is the location of the capital, Honiara.

In 1567, Mendana set out from Peru to seek the legendary Isles of Solomon.

In February 1568, after sighting Nui in the Tuvalu group, Mendana came upon a large mountainous island which he named Santa Isabel. Other large islands, including Guadalcanal, Malaita and San Cristobal, and a number of smaller islands were discovered over the next six months.

The most interesting episode in the early history of European contact with Solomon Islands was during the time of French explorer La Perouse. In January 1788, together with his ships *Boussole* and *Astrolobe*, he arrived at Botany Bay. He sailed the following month and was never seen again. Despite many rumours and an official search by the d'Entrecasteaux expedition, no positive clue was found to

La Perouse's fate for almost 40 years.

The mystery was unveiled by Captain Peter Dillion, an Irishman, who came across some articles of European origin during a visit to Tikopia in 1826. He was told that the articles were from the neighbouring island of Vanikolo.

Dillion visited Vanikolo and found more articles which had washed ashore. He was told the Frenchman's ships had been wrecked in a storm and the survivors had lived ashore for a while during which they built a boat from local timber.

They had eventually sailed away and were never heard of again.

In 1893, Britain declared a protectorate over the southern Solomon Islands and in

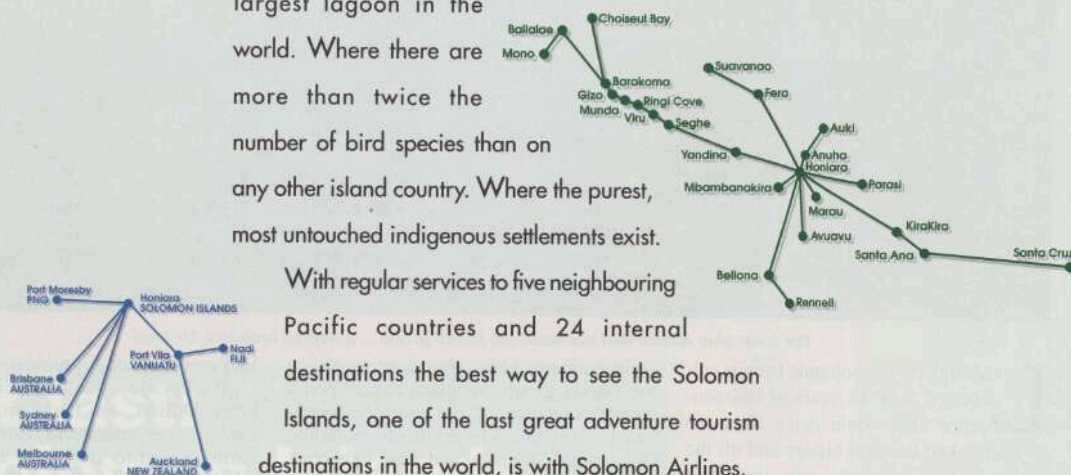


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SOLOMON S FEATURE



Remnants of Solomon Islands history

1898 and 1899 the islands in the Santa Cruz group.

There were further additions in 1900.

When the protectorate was established there were over four dozen European traders resident in the group.

In 1905, there was a move to open up the country commercially. Traders came in and bought land where they started cultivating. A few years later Burns Philp and Co Ltd of Sydney and the Malaita Co acquired interests. The economic development of the country progressed very slowly before World War II. After the Japanese entered the war in 1941, most of the planters and traders were evacuated to Australia. Soon afterwards, the Japanese occupied the main islands.

When civil administration resumed after the war, it was found that Tulaghi, the former capital on an islet off Florida, had been destroyed. It was then decided to establish a new capital at Honiara.

It was around this time that the administration re-established an advisory council. In 1960, the council was superseded by a legislative council and an executive council was created as a policy-making body for the protectorate.

In 1970, under a new constitution, both the legislative council and the executive council were replaced by a single govern-



ment council. After the governing council with its committee system had been in operation about 18 months, its members agreed that a system under a chief minister would be more practical.

A new constitution was adopted in April 1974. Under this, the high commissioner became governor, the chief secretary became deputy governor, the governing council became the legislative council

with 24 elected members and three officio.

The leader of government business became chief minister with the right to select his own cabinet. The current prime minister, Solomon Mamaloni, was appointed the first chief minister.

Towards the middle of 1975, the name Solomon Islands was officially adopted in place of British Solomon Islands protectorate. And on January 2, 1976, Solomon



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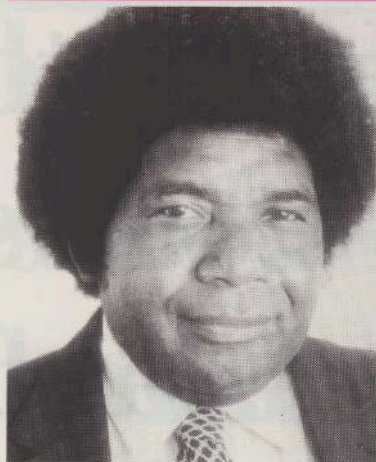
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SOLOMONS FEATURE



Mamaloni ... ushering the Solomons into the next millenium with peace and harmony

Islands became an internally self-governing state. Independence followed on July 7, 1978. Since independence politics has been generally stable although there have been frequent changes in prime minister ship.

The official language on the islands is English although the effective language is Pidgin. In addition, about 87 different vernacular forms of speech are used, with people living in villages only a few miles apart frequently unable to understand each other. There is no common vernacular.

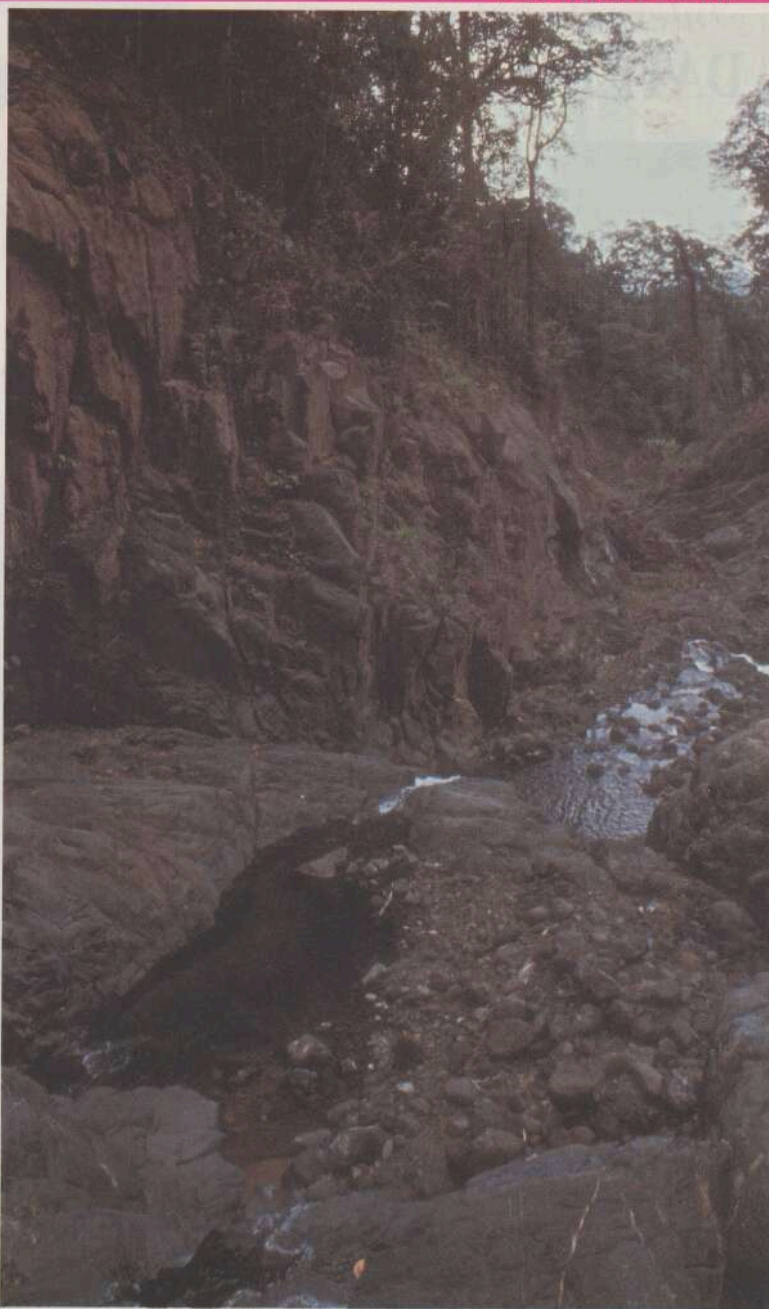
Both Pidgin and English are used in parliament. Religion plays an important role in most communities with the church a central focus in most villages. Extended families, tradition and custom dictate a major part of daily life. Christians comprise 95 per cent of the population.

Solomon Islanders love sports and take their soccer, basketball, rugby, tennis and athletics quite seriously.

The primary production for the country includes copra and alluvial gold.

Activities like fishing and swimming are more necessities than choice; the first for food, the second for cleanliness.

Traditional canoes can still be seen, particularly in the outer islands, where people are proud of their production and sailing. Craft work is also of high quality with much work done with wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Although there has been a decline in tourism over the past few years, the country has great potential to attract adventure travellers interested in scuba diving and in wilderness areas. Solomon Islands has many of the natural resources required for successful ecotourism. Archaeological research has revealed that Solomon Islands has been inhabited for at least 3000 years. Material excavated on Santa Ana, Guadanacanal and on Gawa in the Reef Islands has been



A scenic view of Guadacanal

radiocarbon-dated to about 1000 BC. Red pottery thought to be related to Lapita ware, was also found on Santa Ana where it was estimated to have been used between 140 and 670 AD.

Similar pottery has been found in the Reef Islands. As Solomon Islands, like other countries of the world, heads into the next millennium, Mamaloni has chal-

lenged the people to ensure that the country does so in peace, harmony and with greater confidence. He said the past 12 months brought many mixed blessings as well as trials and tribulations. He said while these might be taken for granted, people must not complain about events and issues threatening the peace and harmony of the nation. ■

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TONGA FEATURE

Getting to world's Island



Copra and coconuts ... one of Tonga's major agricultural exports

know the smallest kingdom

THE Kingdom of Tonga, the world's smallest kingdom, consists of 150 islands of which only 36 are permanently inhabited. The largest is Tongatapu which is distinctively flat, its highest point being only a few metres at a low hillock near the royal palace. The capital is Nuku'alofa which is on the island of Tongatapu.

The other islands are the Ha'apai Group, Vava'u Group, Niuaus, Niuatoputapu, Tafahi, Niuafo'ou and Falcon Island.

The first European discovery of Tonga was by members of the Dutch expedition of Schouten and Le Maire. They came upon the northern Tafahi and Niuatoputapu in 1616 when crossing the Pacific to the West Indies.

In 1643, their countryman, Abel Janszoon Tasman, approached the archipelago from the south.

He sailed with the ships *Heemskerck* and *Zeehaan*. He sighted the southernmost island, Ata, before coming upon 'Eua and Tongatapu, which he named Middleburgh and Amsterdam respectively.

He spent three days at Tongatapu, and a week at Nomuka to the northward, taking in provisions. Nomuka was named Rotterdam.

In 1767, Captain Samuel Wallis, the first European to come across Tahiti, came upon the two northern islands as seen by Schouten and Le Maire.

Unaware of their prior discovery, he gave the name Boscawen to Tafahi and Keppel to Niuatoputapu - names they bore on European charts for the next century or so.

In October 1773, Captain James Cook made the first of the three visits to Tonga.

In the following June, Cook returned to Tonga. His third visit was in 1777. It was during this visit he named Lifuka (Ha'apai) group the Friendly Islands.

Captain Alessandro Malaspina was the last European explorer to visit Tonga before the arrival of the first permanent European settlers.

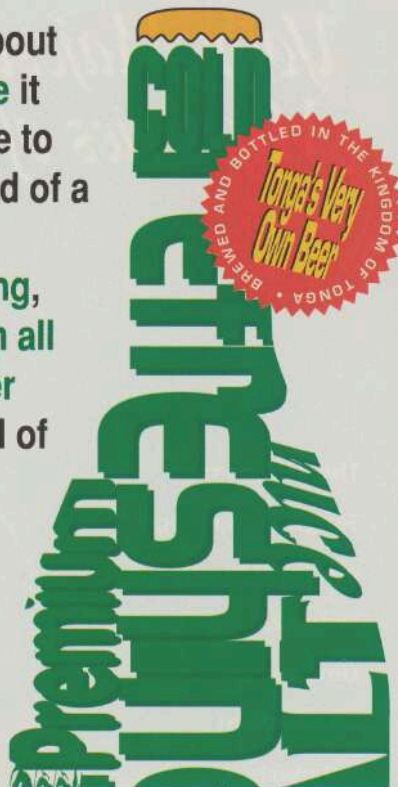
Tonga is the only island in the South Pacific which, even after 26 years of independence, has a monarch as the head of state. Although Tonga is a constitutional monarchy on the British model, the king, in fact, exercises wide influence. The government consists of the king, the privy council, cabinet and the legislative assembly and the judiciary.

The constitution was handed down by King Tupou I on November 4, 1857. The king voluntarily limited his own powers after emancipating his people from the semi-serfdom which they had lived in for centuries.

The members of the legislative assembly are the speaker, members of the cabinet, nine nobles elected by the 33 nobles of Tonga and nine representatives of the people elected by the universal adult suffrage. The prime minister is the head of government and admin-

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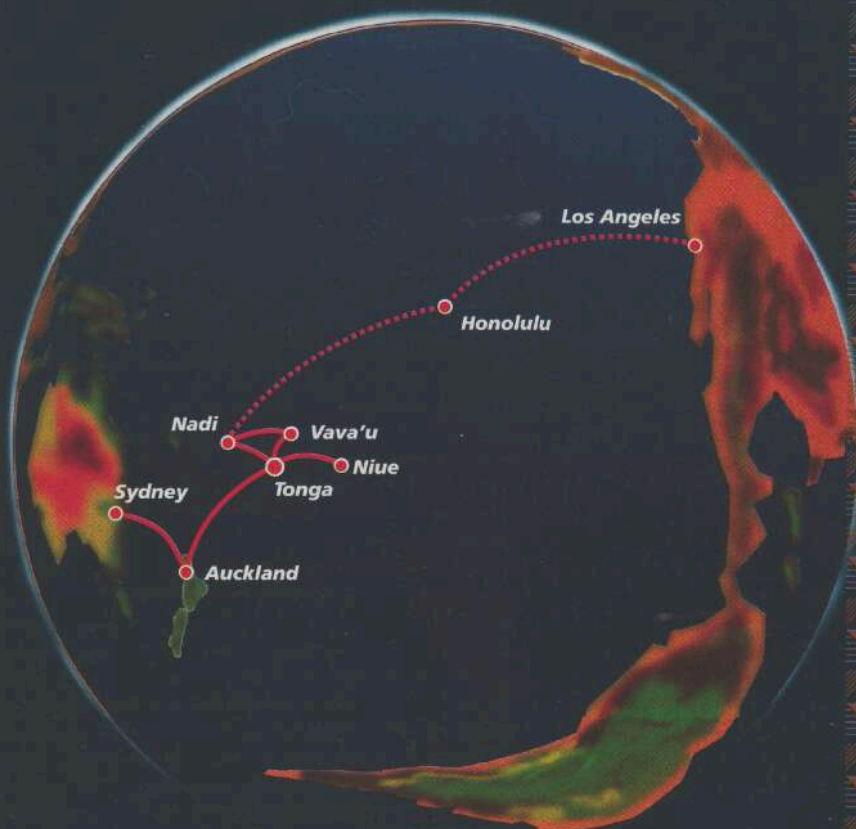
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TONGA FEATURE



World's smallest Island kingdom

isters a number of ministerial departments as well as district and town offices. The king appoints the speaker and the cabinet which includes ministers of the crown and the governors of Ha'apai and Vava'u, presided over by the prime minister. All the ministers are permanently appointed by the king and retain office until retirement. The only form of local government is through town and district officers.

Town officers make up the government in a village. District officers have authority over a group of villages. Ha'apai and Vava'u have their own governors.

Tonga gained its independence from Britain on June 4, 1970. Up until 1953, Tonga was still very much out of the limelight as far as relationships with the outside world were concerned.

But two events brought Tonga into the world spotlight.

In June 1953, Queen Salote attended the coronation in London of Queen Elizabeth II and spent about two months in Britain during which she endeared herself to all who saw and met her.

In December of the same year, Queen Elizabeth accompanied by her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, visited Tonga.

In 1958, a new treaty of friendship was signed between Tonga and Britain and tacitly in May 1959.

The treaty provides for the appointment of a British commissioner and consul to be responsible to the Governor of Fiji, who held the office of British chief commissioner for Tonga. In 1965, the British commissioner and consul of Tonga became directly responsible to the British secretary of state for the colonies.

When Queen Salote died in 1965, Prince Tungi acceded to the throne as King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV and his brother, Prince Tu'ipelehake, became premier.

After independence the title prime minister was substituted for

Part of the entertainment at the Heilala Festival

A right royal celebration

For any Tongan, one of the most significant dates on the calendar is the birthday of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV. The date not only marks the birth of the king, but is the one time of the year when work is forgotten and dancing, singing and merrymaking are the order of the day.

To mark this important event on the Tongan calendar, the festival of Heilala is celebrated with much pomp and ceremony.

The Heilala Festival is held annually to coincide with the King's birthday.

This is one festival which speeds up events in the normally slow-paced Island kingdom.

Brass bands, military parades, traditional dancing, singing, sports, a float parade, a choral festival and a fishing tournament are just some of the many activities that go on.

The highlight of the festival is the Miss Heilala beauty pageant where young Tongan women are joined by contestants from the Tongan communities in New Zealand, Australia and the United States to contest the Miss Heilala title.

While sophistication, beauty and glamour are important, the girls are also judged on their knowledge of the Tongan and English languages, Tongan culture and communication skills.

The one event which makes the festival truly unique is the

King Tupou IV ... awarded a world peace prize on his 76th birthday



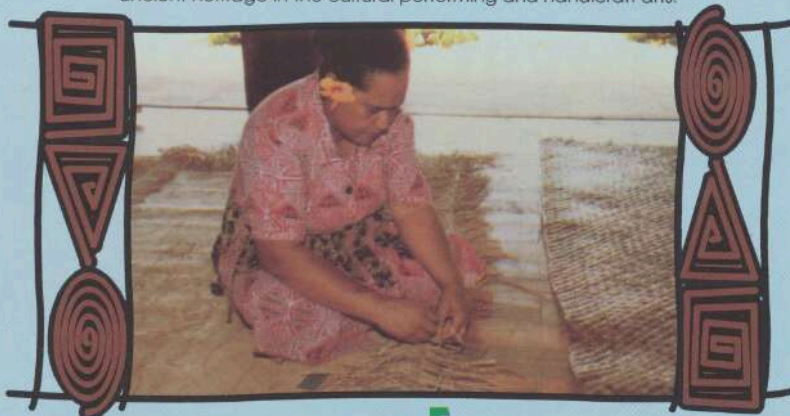
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TONGA FEATURE

premier. Also after independence Britain appointed a high commissioner to Tonga and Tonga joined the Commonwealth and appointed a high commissioner in London.

Recent archaeological research has revealed that the Tongan archipelago was inhabited at least 3000 years ago.

The Tongans of those days were makers of elaborately decorated Lapita pottery, like that found in Fiji, but a few centuries later they were only making plain ware. Only a small amount of pottery was in use when the first European explorers arrived.

The Tongans are Polynesians and the Tongan language is part of the widely scattered language family known as Austronesian or Malayo-Polynesian.

It was reduced to written form by the Wesleyan missionaries of the early 19th Century. The first book in the Tongan language was printed on April 14, 1831.

Tongans actively maintain many of their traditional customs in their daily lives.

The wearing of the *ta'ovala* and *kiekie*, fine mats and fancy waist decorations, which show respect for authority is perhaps the most observed custom. The fancy *kiekie* is often worn by young women over their jeans, an interesting sign of cultural transition.

There is a pyramid of social hierarchy, with the royal family at the pinnacle, followed by 33 nobles. The rest of Tongan society form the base.

Agriculture, fisheries and forestry are

the leading productive sectors. Products which Tonga exports are coconut oil, desiccated coconut, bananas, vanilla beans and root crops.

Tourism is a major contributor to the economy and attractions include game-fishing and sailing around the islands of Vava'u.

Tonga has one weekly newspaper, the *Tonga Chronicle*, which is published every Thursday in Tongan and English. It is government owned and covers items of local and international interest.

There is also an independent Tongan language paper, *Ko'e' Kele'a*, a bimonthly *Matangi Tonga* and a monthly magazine called *Tonga Today*.

Currency used is *pa'anga* (banknotes) and *seniti* (cents). ■

A right royal celebration

Miss Tau'olunga competition. The Tau'olunga is a classical solo dance traditionally performed by the daughters of the royal family and nobility.

Each aspect of the dance presentation is judged according to strict criteria by a panel of cultural dance experts. The judging takes into account costumes, movements, the grace, art, natural charm and beauty of the dancer.

Such is the importance of this title that it is regarded as prestigious as the Miss Heilala title.

Apart from the beauty pageant, sports also play a very important role in the Heilala festivities.

There are the usual sports like soccer, for both men and women, and rugby.

To provide that extra competition teams from neighbouring Pacific Island countries are also invited to compete. Other sports include tennis, cricket, golf, basketball, snooker, touch rugby, gamefishing, netball, rugby league, a fun run, tug-of-war and rowing.

Dignitaries from around the world visit the island to take part in the celebrations.

But the most spectacular event is the festival of Tupakapakava, the traditional torch-lighting ceremony.

King Tupou IV is the guest of honour at the festivities which are marked by both young and old. King Tupou IV, 76, is a direct descendant of the late King George Tupou I, who was styled by historians as the founder of modern Tonga.

Born on July 4, 1918, King Tupou IV was the eldest son of Queen Salote Tupou and Prince Viliami Tungi Mailefihi. He was educated at a special primary school established by the Free Wesleyan Church in Nuku'alofa. In 1927, he entered Tupou College at Nafualu, the first secondary school to be established in the South Pacific in 1866. The college was run by the Free Wesleyan Church.

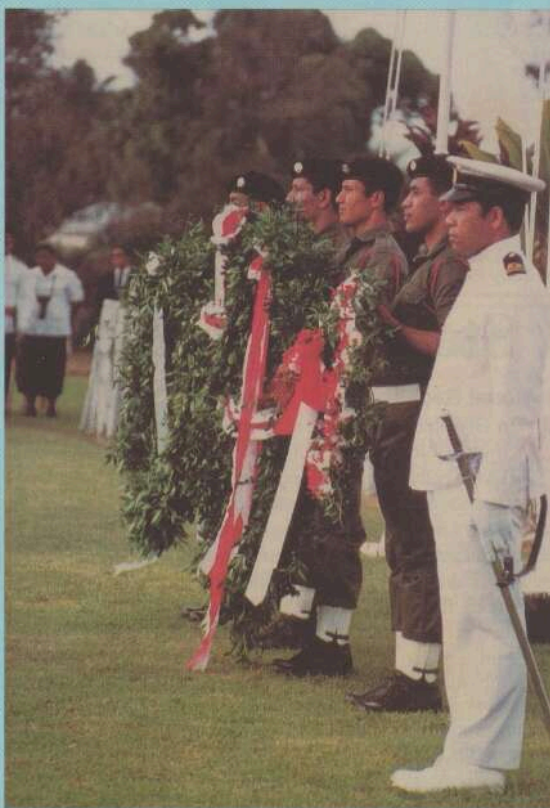
During his years at Tupou College, the Crown Prince was both an outstanding student and sportsman.

After completing his early education, he went to Australia to continue his education at Newington College in Sydney.

From there he entered the University of Sydney and became the first Tongan to receive a university degree. He gained a Bachelor of Arts degree and an LLB. A keen mathematician, the king is a member of the International Mathematics Association.

His interests lie in music and while minister of education in the mid-40s, he wrote a booklet on reading the English musical notation and its translation into the Tongan notation. The booklet is still in use.

During his 16 years as premier he did much to firmly estab-



The stoic and sombre Tongan military

lish ties with overseas nations. The king has also received overseas honours. He was awarded the CBE in 1951 and in 1958 the KBE by Queen Elizabeth II.

On his 78th birthday this year, the King was presented a world peace award. The award recognises him as a human cultural asset and roving ambassador for peace.

He married Halaevalu Mata'aho on June 10, 1947 and the royal couple have three sons and a daughter. ■

OLYMPIC GAMES

Flying to the Olym



Tony Philp ... gold medallist hopeful

By Atama Raganivatu

South Pacific athletes travelled to the Atlanta Olympics, which commenced as *Pacific Islands Monthly* went to press, with unprecedented hopes of success.

It is highly unlikely that any of them will emulate American Samoan diver Greg Louganis, who won a brace of gold medals at both Los Angeles and Seoul (in 1984 and 1988 respectively). However, never before have so many of our competitors had the capability to match the best in an Olympiad. Nauruan weightlifter Marcus Stephen is the region's prime prospect (see accompanying story). However, men's windsurfing will probably be the event followed with most interest for we have two amongst the world's top seven in the sport.

New Caledonian Michel Quintin, a former Olympic-class world champion who represents France, and Fijian Tony Philp both have the potential to secure gold medals in what is expected to be a very open competition. Quintin ranks one

notch above Philp in the world and has had the better of what were virtually head-to-head confrontations at the last three South Pacific Games, but most observers consider the Suva native to have the better technique.

Questions are continuously asked about Philp's physical strength. He has dominated one class windsurfing, but finds a similar authority for the more demanding Olympic class to be elusive and won the first race (of seven) at Barcelona '92 only to fade and eventually finish 10th. Encouragingly, Philp was reported to be in peak condition as he ended his preparations for Atlanta.

There is little to choose between the world's top 10 windsurfers and races involving them are always something of a lottery. The chances of Quintin (should he have survived the tough French qualifying trials) and Philp appear to be as good as anybody else's.

Fijians and New Caledonians will also be watching the women's marathon closely, due to the likely presence of Nadia Prasad. French born, New Caledonian

Stephen – worth Nauru's weight in gold

By Atama Raganivatu

An Olympic medal long seemed an impossible dream for Pacific Island athletes. Lack of worthwhile competition through isolation and inadequate training facilities were handicaps our competitors found impossible to overcome in the past. However, thanks to the enhanced financial aid now available to all elite representatives, they are making a bigger impact than even before.

The individual to have made the greatest impression in an Olympic sport is Nauruan weightlifter Marcus Stephen and he presents the South Pacific with its best hope for glory at Atlanta '96.

Stephen's story is the stuff of Hollywood features. When he left his remote island to attend St Bede's College in Melbourne as a 15-year-old, he had little knowledge of organised sport.

His only exposure to it previously had been through the video tapes of Australian rules football matches which were flown to Nauru each week and played over and over again by that game's many followers there. Active sport in Nauru has traditionally been the preserve of guest workers

engaged in phosphate mining. The locals' interests were once confined to spectating or pretending to be motor-racing aces while speeding around the road encircling the island. Stephen changed that.

Aussie rules was the sport Stephen firsts tried in Melbourne upon becoming exposed to the Australians' love of participation sports.

He proved himself inept at it. Nor did the Nauruan teenager achieve much during a brief flirtation with boxing. Then, aged 16, Stephen turned to weightlifting. That was the first major milestone of his sporting life. The second occurred when meeting Paul Coffa.

Coffa had been the Australian weightlifting coach since 1978 and was in the process of elevating Australia from non-entity in the sport to a major power. He succeeded. Dean Lucan's super-heavy-weight gold medal at the 1984 Olympics is probably the most quoted testimony to his ability, but the Island continent's haul of 17 Commonwealth Games medals 10 years later better reflects Coffa's achievement.

Coffa adopted Stephen as an honorary member of the Australian squad in 1985, thanks to federal government sponsorship,

and he has been his guiding light ever since.

The 1987 Commonwealth and Oceania championships in Canberra provided Stephen with the first taste of international competition. The Oceania Championships at Tahiti the following year produced his initial international success. 1988 also saw him become Australian national champion.

Fortunately, Stephen stayed in Melbourne after leaving St Bede's – ostensibly to attend the city's Royal Institute of Technology – and remained under Coffa's wing.

Nauru's sole entrant at the 1990 Commonwealth Games, Stephen won one gold and two silver medals in his section – the 60-kilogramme class (older fans still refer to it as the featherweight division). The sight of Coffa dancing in delight as his charge clinched gold provided the Auckland festival with one of its most memorable moments.

Amazingly, Stephen was very nearly deprived of the chance to compete, Nauru being admitted into the Commonwealth Games Federation just two days before competition got under way. The 1991 South Pacific Games in Port Moresby,

pics on high hopes

raised and married to a Fijian, Prasad won two gold medals when 15 years old in the 1500 metres and 3000 metres at the 1983 South Pacific Games. She concentrates on the marathon these days and is regularly ranked amongst the world's top 20. Most experts believe that she has yet to run the race of her life and Atlanta would be the ideal place to produce it.

Like Prasad, Western Samoan discus-thrower Beatrice Faumuina is a dark horse with the ability, in the best Olympic tradition, of coming through to snatch a medal. Currently the world's number 10, Faumuina has limited expectations of herself in Atlanta; believing she is there largely to gain experience for Sydney four years hence when a gold medal will be a definite goal. With no pressure upon her, the 21-year-old might just pull an exceptional throw out of the bag, as she did when poaching a silver medal at the last Commonwealth Games. The boxing arena was the scene of the South Pacific's greatest moment in Barcelona, when Western Samoan David Tua claimed a bronze medal, and we are entitled to harbour

hopes for a similar success this time.

Tongan super-heavyweight Paea Wolfgramm has already gained a formidable international record. At the 1995 Oceania Championships, he knocked his Western Samoan opponent, Fai Falamoe, out of the ring just 84 seconds into their final. The pair were also scheduled to meet on the last evening of the Oceania Olympic Qualifying Tournament at Sydney this year, but Falamoe was unable to fight through what may well have been a fortuitous injury sustained in his semi-final.

A Commonwealth Games bronze medallist in 1994, Wolfgramm has benefitted from a stint under the wing of famous American trainer Lou Duva last year. Duva polished the giant Tongan's ringcraft. However, awesome punching power remains his best asset.

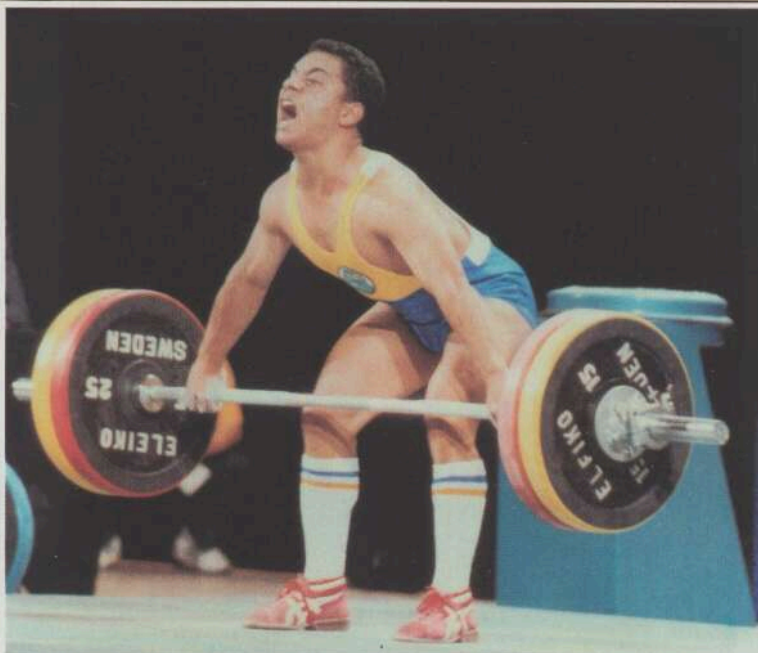
Papua New Guinea's Henry Kungsi is a very different boxer. A true stylist, he totally outclassed the highly rated Australian John Simpson to win the lightweight division in Sydney. Kungsi, though, is a virtual unknown outside of

Oceania and the element of surprise may well prove invaluable to him in Atlanta. Given some luck, particularly with the draw, he could enjoy an extended run.

Wolfgramm and Kungsi are the best performed of the 10 South Pacific boxers expected to front up in Georgia. Five qualified through their efforts in Sydney, while the rest benefitted from the International Olympic Committee's wildcard scheme.

This scheme was devised to increase the opportunities for athletes from the "developing countries" to participate in world sport's most glamorous carnival. Thus, Fijian weightlifter Rupeni Varea, Tongan boxer Shane Heaps and Western Samoa discus thrower Chris Mene, among many others, have been given the opportunity to rub shoulders with the likes of Carl Lewis despite failing to meet their original qualifying requirements.

It is the Vareas, Heaps and Menes who make the Olympics a very special occasion, and taking part will always be more important than winning. However, wouldn't it be wonderful to see our boys and girls on the winning dais? ■



Stephen ... the stuff Hollywood dreams are made of

Papua New Guinea, yielded three more gold medals and, internationally, Stephen was featuring in the top 10 rankings.

During that same year, he finished ninth and eighth respectively in the World Championships and World Cup.

These placings would normally have guaranteed Stephen an opportunity to compete at the 1992 Olympics. However, as Nauru had not yet acquired International Olympic Committee membership, his involvement briefly became a matter of contention and when he did take the stage in Barcelona it was as a Western Samoan representative. Stephen finished ninth. He had no peers at the 1994 Commonwealth Games and claimed all the gold medals at stake in the 60kg class – for clean and jerk, snatch and combined. Upon the cleansweep being completed, it was revealed that he participated despite having badly injured both his hands during a training accident just two days earlier. "This is absolutely incredible," Coffa exclaimed at the time. "It's a miracle that Marcus can even grasp the bar, let alone lift the weights!" Coffa ended his association with Australian weightlifting at the end of the Victoria Games.

Frustrated by the federal government's reluctance to provide the funding which, he believed, would enable him to make Australia the dominant force in the sport, Coffa quit to become Nauru's director of sport. The new position gave him access to almost unlimited financial backing and more time to concentrate on Stephen's training. Coffa also assumed responsibility for developing a variety of other sports

OLYMPIC GAMES

in the tiny republic – notably boxing, wrestling, Australian rules football and cycling. However, weightlifting is his main priority as, due to Stephen's feats, it has become the national passion.

Both Coffa and Stephen, whose official job description is "financial manager", now reside on the Island. It is Coffa who ensures that Stephen maintains a rigid training routine, which requires 36 hours working with weights each week, and oversees a strict diet consisting of coconut cream, steak, rice, vitamin supplements and raw fish in exactly the right quantities.

"It is essential that Marcus eats, drinks and breathes weightlifting," Coffa insists. "All his rivals for medals in Atlanta are just as dedicated. Only by being utterly single minded will he succeed there."

Having Coffa's expertise on tap has already proved immensely beneficial to Stephen. Last year, he began to challenge Eastern Europe's long-standing dominance of his division. During preparations for the World Championships in China, he equalled the world record for the clean and jerk by lifting 170 kgs – approximately three times his body weight. In Auckland five years earlier, he had managed just 142.5 kgs. The difference gives a fair indication of his progress in the interim.

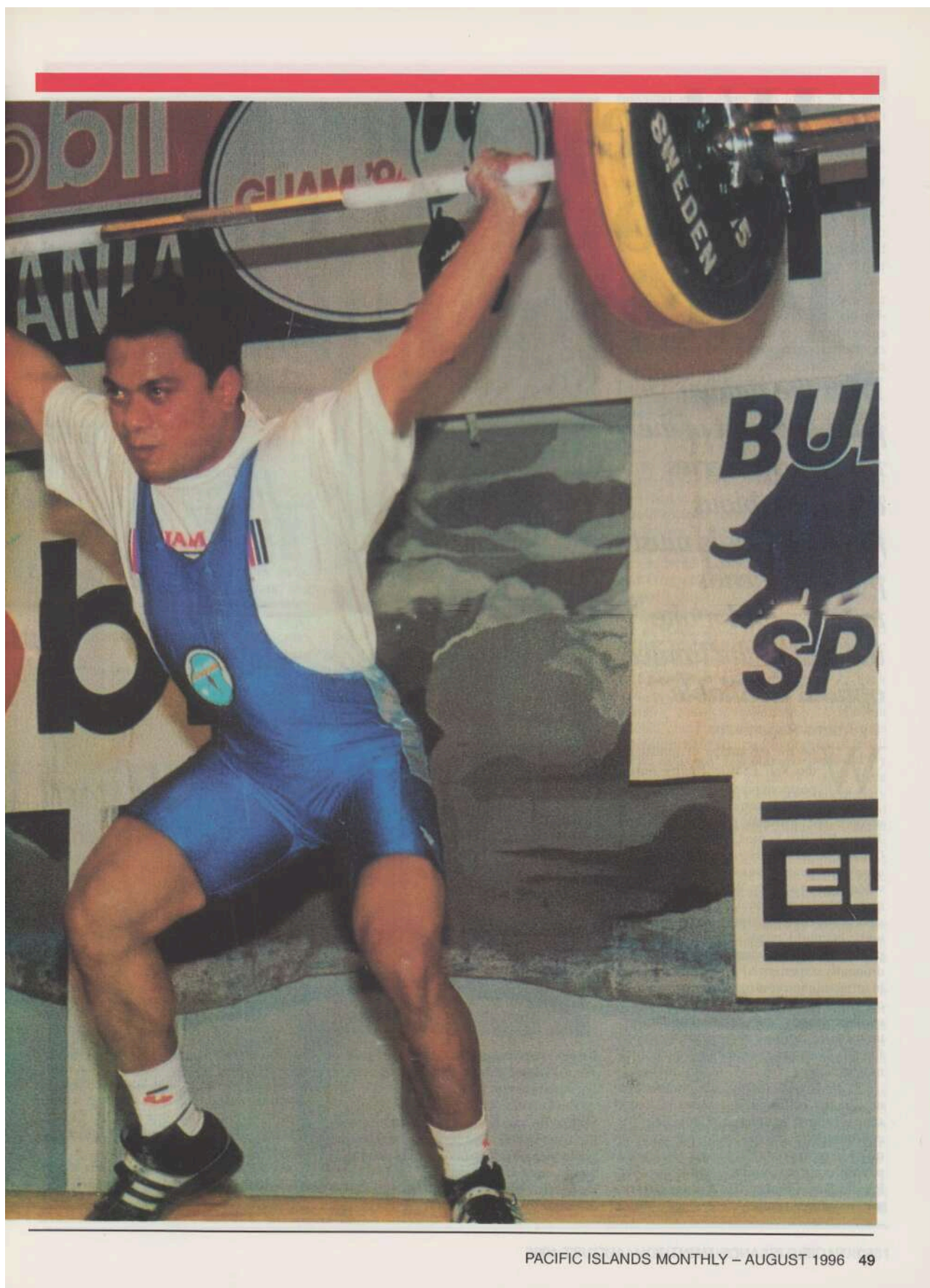
Failure to reproduce the record-equalling lift in China probably robbed him of a medal. However, fifth placing proved he is improving quickly and must be regarded as a genuine contender for the dais at Atlanta. Stephen's exploits have made him a national hero and the role model for nearly every young Nauruan male. Virtually all the Island's youth wish to emulate "The Pocket Battleship", as he is known throughout the weightlifting world.

Coffa today has over 60 weightlifters in his stable, each eager to become the next Marcus Stephen. One, Rudin Thoma, is, the Australian declares confidently, "going to be the greatest athlete the Pacific has ever seen". It is hard to dispute that claim as Thoma exceeded the South Pacific Games record last year – when only 16 years old. However, the spotlight will be on Stephen until the Atlanta Games are completed and, much to his delight, it was Nauru's flag which he marched under at the opening ceremony, for the republic became the 192nd member of the International Olympic Committee last year. Stephen already has more than 40 titles to his name, won at Victorian, Australian, Micronesian Games, Mini South Pacific Games, Oceania, Commonwealth Games and Samoa Games championships.

Hopefully, the biggest prize of them all will be added in Atlanta. ■

Marcus Stephen ... raising Nauru's hopes





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SPORTS

Where to now for South Pacific rugby?

With the sudden postponement of the Pan Pacific series and its dubious future, officials must put their heads together and make the best of the limited options available

By Atama Raganivatu

With the advantage of hindsight, the Pan Pacific Rugby Series postponement was no surprise.

The proposed series, which was to involve the national selections of Fiji, Tonga, Western Samoa, the United States, Canada, Argentina, Hong Kong and Japan, always appeared suspiciously unviable when viewed soberly. What would be little more than international rugby's third division featured three true "rugby nations" with, in world terms, minute economies plus five countries where the game has traditionally experienced immense problems in attracting interest from either the public or corporate sponsors. Moreover, it required massive funding to send the participants to farflung corners of the globe for the 31 matches scheduled over three months.

To become a reality, the competition needed the enthusiastic support of major sponsors and international broadcasting concerns. With the marketing personnel of many huge sporting extravaganzas always paying court to both elements, the Pan Pacific Series looked like a plain girl trying to attract judges' votes at a Miss



If South Pacific rugby is to die, let us ensure that it at least dies fighting

Universe pageant.

And yet the series organisers, Carnegie Sports International, were so positive in their statements right up to announcing the postponement, that one had to assume it would come to fruition.

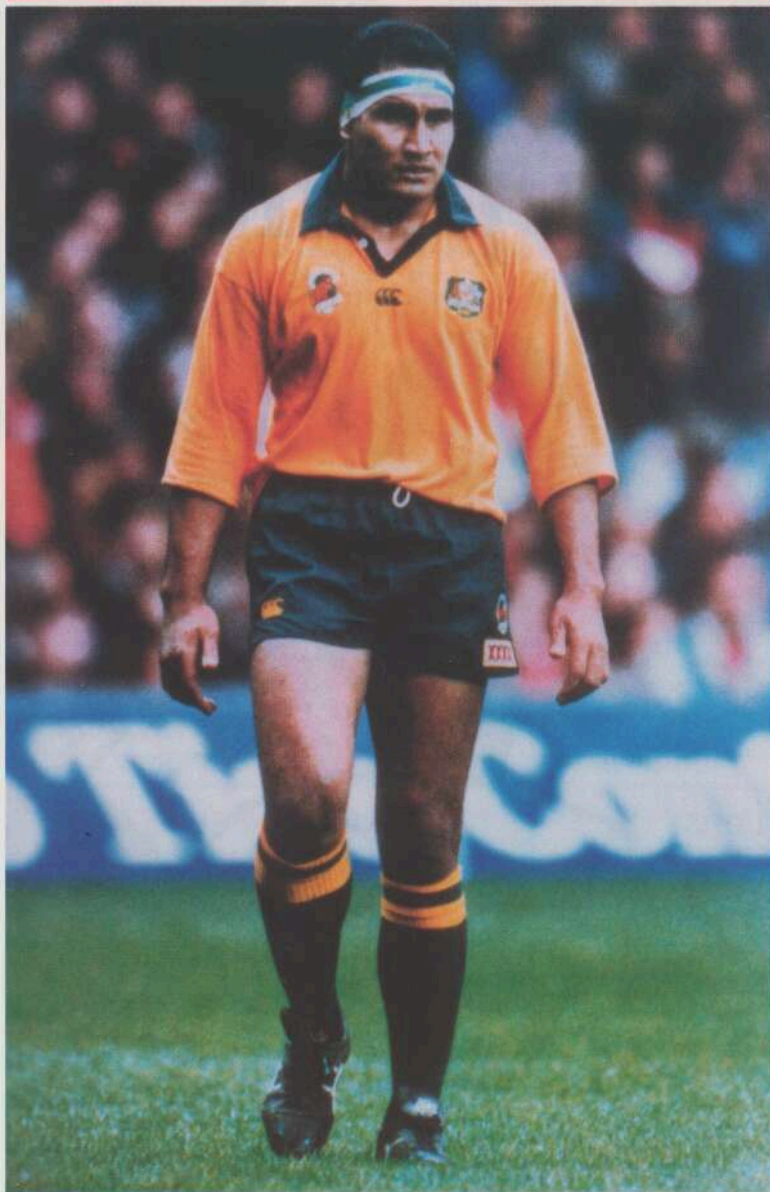
In November last year, Carnegie direc-

tor Lindsay Singleton assured me that he was "95 per cent certain that the Series will proceed" and on January 25 he "confirmed" the competition's commencement in a Press release peppered with "wills" and "haves" and containing not a single "perhaps", "might" or "but".

Carnegie's inability to unveil either a significant sponsorship or meaningful telecasting deal during the media launch in Hong Kong should have set alarm bells ringing. It didn't due to those attending being informed the Series was "now up and running", "a dream realised" and "a great new development for the game of rugby". Was it, we must now ask, a mere coincidence that those utterances were made on April Fool's Day?

Less than a month later and one week prior to the planned first games, Carnegie pronounced that they were withdrawing their pledge to underwrite the series which had, consequently, been curtailed until 1997. It is highly unlikely that Carnegie's actions have any sinister overtones. Unfortunately, their history does include some failures – notably in soccer, basketball and netball. There is a definite possibility the Pan Pacific Series will be added to these in 12 months, when lucrative sponsorship and television contracts will, almost certainly, be just as difficult to secure as they are now. In Tonga, Fiji and Western Samoa, the Pan Pacific was viewed as a lifeline after South Africa, New Zealand and Australia made it clear that there was little scope for the South Pacific trio in their vision of professional rugby. None of the Southern Hemisphere's rugby triumvirate have plans to include any Pacific Island team in their tremendously successful Super 12 championship and endeavours to add the New Zealand Maori XV to the annual South Pacific tri series were given the cold shoulder by the New Zealand Rugby Football Union, although Maori rugby administrators are known to be keen on the idea.

As Kiwi, Aussie and Springbok rugby officials strive to generate the money necessary to finance their elite players'



Ofahengaue ... one of the seven most influential players in modern rugby

\$US150,000-plus salaries, contacts with poor relations will inevitably become even less than they are today. In the meantime, we can expect the plunder of our stars by overseas teams to continue unabated while Fiji, Western Samoa and Tonga slip down the international rankings.

So, what can our rugby officials possibly do to turn the tide should the Pan Pacific not proceed next year? Sadly, they have few options open to them but must be brave, visionary and adventurous if the region's rugby is to face the future with any confidence. My own preference is for

Fijian, Tongan and Western Samoan rugby union executives to get their heads together and create a commercial company whose aim it would be to assemble and administer a composite team to be fielded at Test level. Moreover, instead of complaining at the injustices inflicted upon them by the new professional era they should exploit it fully and gain the inside running on our international rivals.

Upon its formation, the company should issue five million shares. Each national union would retain a million of these with the remainder being offered to

financial institutions and lovers of South Pacific rugby around the world (of which there are very many) at \$US2 per share.

Once a reservoir of shareholders' funds has been created, the first task of the company would be to secure the services of players eligible to represent Tonga, Fiji or Western Samoa but who, for financial reasons, are committed to other countries. No fewer than eight members of the Auckland Blues squad that recently won the Super 12 fall into this category.

Add to them the handful of other prominent Australian- and New Zealand-based players with similar circumstances and the seven or eight top-class performers already appearing for our sides and a formidable team would have taken shape.

But a composite side's true potential is better gauged by imagining that one is now in existence and have access to every Fijian, Western Samoan and Tongan player who has pledged his allegiance to Australian or New Zealand rugby union or switched to rugby league. Such a selection would include seven of the most influential figures in modern rugby union – Frank Bunce, Walter Little, Olo Brown, Michael Jones, Jonah Lomu, Viliame Ofahengaue and Graeme Bachop – as well as rugby league giants Noa Nadruke and Va'aiga Tuigamala. They would not only be capable of winning the World Cup, but would smash attendance records everywhere through their breathtaking style of play.

Sponsors would be lining up to back this cross between the West Indies cricket team and basketball's Harlem Globetrotters and all other national teams clamouring for fixtures against them to fill their stadiums. The money produced by the "dream team" could not only have ensured the players are paid adequately but also bankroll talent identification and coaching programmes, training facilities at grassroots level and stadium upgrading as well as rewarding shareholders (the shares might even be traded on the stockmarket, like those of European soccer clubs).

To add to the excitement of this concept, envisage Test matches against the world's top international teams being staged regularly in Suva, Apia and Nuku'alofa.

The one advantage Pacific Islands have over major rugby-playing countries is our ability to produce raw talent in greater abundance than them. It is a tragedy other nations gain the glory from cultivating that talent.

Of course, the idea I have outlined has no guarantee of success and would present a huge risk for investors. It might not even be feasible. However, only similarly radical moves will prevent our current stagnation from becoming irreversible.

If South Pacific rugby is to die, let us ensure that it at least dies fighting. ■

SPORTS

Pacific gatecrashers prove a point

*Snubbed by Super
12 organisers,
Island players
flaunt their style
with the New
Zealand side*

By Atama Raganivatu

The Rugby Super 12 was intended to be a tournament that discarded South Pacific participation. The South African, Australian and New Zealand organisers made it clear from the outset that no place existed for Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa in their professional extravaganza.

Our region's rugby fans, therefore, must appreciate the delicious irony of the Auckland Blues beating Natal 45-21 in the Super 12 final with a lineup including one Fijian, five Samoans and three Tongans. In addition, one Samoan and a Fijian were on the Blues' replacement bench.

The Fijian who played, Joeli Vidiri, would have been favourite for a best-player poll had one been organised, scoring 10 tries (the second highest tally overall) and creating many more. He was in dynamic form throughout the tournament and on several occasions overshadowed his illustrious teammate on the opposite wing, Jonah Lomu.

Vidiri may have been the player of the tournament, but Charles Riechelmann was certainly the Super 12's greatest revelation. Previously only a fringe member of the Auckland squad, Riechelmann made appearances as a flanker and a prop. None of the many eminent players he faced eclipsed him. But for an injury sustained in the final, the 24-year-old would almost certainly have emulated Lomu and become the second Tongan to gain All Black selection.

Although their influences were not as



Joeli Vidiri ... stealing the show from Jonah Lomu

profound as in Auckland, Pacific Island players effected the fortunes of Australasia's other Super 12 teams too.

There were so many Tongans and

Samoan in the Otago Highlanders side that wit suggested they should have been renamed Otago Islanders.

The Highlanders/Islanders lost

momentum after a wonderful start and failed to qualify for the semi-finals. Even so, they provided the Super 12 with many thrilling moments and, in Brian Lima and Kupu Vanisi, two of its most exciting personalities.

Lima, despite being only 24, had already played over 50 games for Western Samoa and appeared in two World Cups at the beginning of the season.

However, questions remained unanswered about his ability to compete amongst rugby's elite. He dispelled those doubts in the Super 12 and must today be acknowledged as a winger of the highest calibre.

In contrast to Lima, Kupu Vanisi had played but a handful of first-class matches before 1996. The dreadlocked Tongan is a familiar and respected figure throughout Southern Hemisphere rugby now though and, if able to add a little more determination to his game, should reach the very top.

Like Otago, Wellington Hurricanes experienced a patchy Super 12 campaign. Samoans Alex Telea and Alama Ieremia were amongst their better performers.

Waikato Chiefs proved equally erratic. An injury to Fijian maestro Walter Little did not help their cause, even if his mid-field partner, 34-year-old Niuean Frank Bunce, continues to defy time.

Fiji's national team captain Joeli Veitayaki enhanced a steadily growing reputation while on chief's duty and, typical of a prop, seems to be approaching his peak at 29.

Canterbury Crusaders struggled off the field because of an administration woefully ill-prepared for professionalism and on the field due to a lack of playing depth. Had Fijians Philippe Rayasi and Tabai Matson and Manu Samoa captain Pat Lam been free from the injuries which rendered their inputs negligible, the Crusaders would have fared better. Nevertheless, Tongan fullback Pita Alatini gave them much-needed bite after being drafted.

Across the Tasman Sea, Queensland Reds introduced several Pacific Island players but none could establish himself in the team.

Magnificent Fijian Manasa Bari arrived in Brisbane too late to make his presence felt, but is expected to be a key man for the Bananabenders next year.

Fitful form cost New South Wales a place in the semi-finals as Fijian Sam Domoni and the Tongan pair of Daniel Manu and Viliame Ofahengaue all flitted in and out of the side.

Manu did sufficient to retain his Australian Test jersey but many fear that Ofahengaue's distinguished international career is now over.

Australian Capital Territory were the Super 12's surprise packets.

The universal choice for wooden spoonists before the competition commenced, they very nearly snatched a semi-final spot.

Nobody contributed more to their success than Tongan World Cup player Ipolito Fenukitau. I have no doubt that Fenukitau will now be proclaimed one of the world's best loose forwards if he represented higher profile selections.

The Super 12 certainly confirmed the abundance of talent produced by the South Pacific.

But it seems likely that the tournament will continue to provide us with only reflected glory. There are no plans to include Western Samoa, Fiji and Tonga in the foreseeable future (despite the organisers' excuses for their exclusion being banal).

To add salt to the wound, Super 12 officials were reported to be regarding Victoria – an Australian state where rugby union has meagre support – as a likelier participant than any teams from our region should the competition expand.

It appears that we are expected to remain content with crumbs from the rich men's table and be placated by the exploits of our boys in the colours of Australian and New Zealand teams. ■

INAUGURAL MEETINGS OF

***Pacific Islands' Indigenous Tourism Operators Association and *National Australian Aboriginal Tourism Operators Association.**

These will take place in Sydney on 9th and 10th of December, 1996 at Oxford Koala Hotel.

They are initiatives to assist existing operators and other native persons seeking to operate tours, hotels, lodges, craft entertainment and other businesses serving the national, local and overseas visitors and tourists.

Preliminary objectives of the Associations are to: Assist native peoples throughout Australia and the Pacific Islands to operate, set up, finance, and promote tourism businesses owned, operated and run by local indigenous peoples and to control numbers of visitors in respect of conserving their environment, culture, crafts, traditional music and entertainment, sovereignty, economic sustainability, childrens education, languages and villages.

At the same time there will be a seminar, private meeting rooms, and space provided each year for present operators to learn, promote or discuss their business to the Sydney public, Australian tourism industry, inbound and outbound wholesalers, overseas visitors in Sydney, financiers or potential joint venture partners.

Anyone interested in the outcome, attending, speaking, exhibiting or participating in any way at either the Tourism Operators Association inaugural meetings or Indigenous Business Leaders Conference should write to Marc Aussie-Stone, Director, Sydney based ongoing Conference Secretariat, FAX 61 2 319 6334
PHONE 61 2 319 4803 write P O BOX 185, Strawberry Hills, Australia, 2012.

PLEASE SEND NAME AND ADDRESS OF ANY ONE WHO SHOULD BE SENT A FREE COPY OF THE CONFERENCE BROCHURE.

3RD PACIFIC INDIGENOUS BUSINESS LEADERS CONFERENCE AND CONSULTANTS & PRODUCT SUPPLIERS EXPO.

These will take place in Sydney on 11th to 13th of December, 1996 at Oxford Koala Hotel.

The Conference will include Keynote Speakers experienced in the following industries and issues. Tourism, hotel design, bio diversity, internet, economic sustainability, business plans, financing, joint ventures, patents protection, mining, cultural and environmental conservation, cultural centre development, gaming and ecotourism.

The objectives of the Conference are to:

- * continue the rationales developed at the 1st Pacific and Aboriginal Ecotourism Design Conference of 1994 and the 2nd Pacific Islands and Aboriginal Business Success Models Conference of 1995.
- * Assist Pacific Governments foster and develop more native owned businesses which retain increased foreign exchange earnings and conserve traditional culture, values, environment and language. Of the 200 hotels in Fiji, none are 100% owned by native Fijians.
- * further promote the value and importance of the model Vatukarasa Village Reconstruction and Culture Hotel project located on Fiji's Coral Coast to the Fiji Government.
- * provide facilities in Sydney each year for private financing or joint venture presentations and networking.
- * provide an exhibition area where consultants and suppliers can present their goods and services to delegates and Pacific Business leaders each year.

LITERATURE

A political dissection

By Nicolas Rothwell

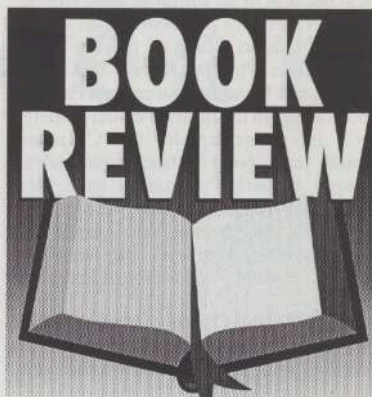
One splendid Monday morning, during a recent stay in Port Vila, I was sipping coffee in an elegant patisserie, reading the local Press and contemplating the chaos of Vanuatu's politics, when a metallic-grey Hyundai drew up outside. Into the patisserie came Walter Lini, father of Vanuatu's independence. He was relaxed; he smiled. Escorted by his wife, he sat down beside one of the country's best-known business entrepreneurs. The sound of their laughter filled the cafe for the next half-hour.

Just how, I wondered, did Vanuatu get from the glorious optimism of its first post-independence days, in 1980, to the confusions and instabilities of 1996? How did Father Lini evolve from his starring role as Vanuatu's first prime minister and an international symbol of good leadership, to his cameo part in this February's upheaval, when, as outgoing minister of justice, Father Lini tried to replace the key figures in the nation's legal system?

Some of the answers to these questions lie in the pages of an extraordinary new book, *Melanesian Politics – Stael Blong Vanuatu*, a collective volume edited by Howard Van Trease and produced under the auspices of the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies and the University of the South Pacific's Institute for Pacific Studies. Let it be said at once: This book is a masterpiece of political analysis, one of the key works of post-colonial Pacific history, and by far the most valuable volume yet to appear on modern Vanuatu. Its relentless, almost obsessional devotion to detail, its attention both to regional and to national issues, its dissecting of traditional custom structures and factional fights within the established parties combine to make it a crucial work of reference. Among the authors are almost all the political leaders of the country, and they write with often startling candour of their aims and their behaviour.

The ostensible subject of the book is the 1991 national election. This was the first vote in Vanuatu's history that resulted in no single party gaining a clear majority, and hence it proved the cusp point in the transition from stable government by the long-dominant Vanua'aku Pati (VP) to the present system of shifting coalition rule.

The true focus of the book, though, is far more inclusive: The origins of the country's political system, the efforts of



the French colonial authorities to cement in place a significant francophone ni-Vanuatu population, the uproar in the run-up to independence – all these are well covered by Van Trease in his introduction.

The gloomy background to the 1991 electoral campaign is briefly given – the severe stroke suffered by Father Lini in 1987 and his partial recovery; the leadership challenge by Barak Sope and the bitter split in the VP's ranks. The election's ambiguous outcome serves, of course, as a pointer to the current, mid-90s pattern of Vanuatu politics. But the most valuable section of *Melanesian Politics – Stael Blong Vanuatu* is a detailed, chapter-by-chapter breakdown of voting trends and allegiances over time in the individual islands of the archipelago. Each of these is written by a ni-Vanuatu expert, and the level of detail included is such as to transform an outsider's appreciation of regional politics. Piece by piece, the individual segments cohere into a ground-level history of Vanuatu's development since independence, with local pressures and influences, especially those of rival religious organisations, given their true significance. Intriguing snippets of island information are conveyed in authoritative fashion, bringing to vivid life voting patterns that have long seemed bizarre when viewed from the distant comfort of a Port Vila tally-room.

Howard Van Trease's cautious conclusion seems more than justified. The 1991 election, he says, "can be described as the return to a more Melanesian style of politics in Vanuatu in which the extreme diversity of the population – 105 different languages in a population of just over 150,000 dispersed over a multitude of islands – and significance of local person-

alities re-emerged to replace the artificial dominance of a single political party".

In this light, the subsequent five years, with their delirious power struggles, feuds and reversals of alliances, now seem like business as usual: Vanuatu is no longer "beyond pandemonium". Indeed, for close to a decade the pattern has been one of turmoil and instability.

As one reads the historical record analysed in *Melanesian Politics – Stael Blong Vanuatu* and considers the events of the year to date, it remains unclear just how this pattern could be broken. In the first days of May, conspiratorial attempts to create a new government were well under way, while furious petitions were being presented to the chief justice in a bid to overturn the results of the recent election of the prime minister. At least the members of the present government are familiar with all this infighting: No fewer than six of the ministers in the current coalition are contributors to Howard Van Trease's volume. I stayed in my seat in the Port Vila patisserie, and watched as Walter Lini laughed and joked with his new friends. The scorching essay by Grace Mera Molisa in *Melanesian Politics – Stael Blong Vanuatu* lay open on the table before me: "The Vanua'aku Pati was too strong for any opposition party to threaten its position and the only way its unity and solidarity could be undermined would have to come from within. That is, in fact, what occurred. Insidiously, gradually, irreversibly, fatally, the VP self-destructed at the core of its leadership."

Father Lini got to his feet as I was reading, and made his way outside. There are, of course, many sides to each story in Vanuatu politics and, sadly, Father Lini's own views and those of his supporters are absent from this book – perhaps because they would have found it too painful to recollect the decay of the old VP, that beacon of radical Pacific politics. Despite this notable absence, however, I was glad to have Howard Van Trease's masterful volume tucked under my arms as I went out that morning into the unchanged, uncertain streets of Port Vila. ■

Melanesian Politics – Stael Blong Vanuatu: Edited by Howard Van Trease; published 1995 by the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, New Zealand (Price: NZ\$NZ49.50); and by the Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, PO Box 1168, Suva (Price: \$US 39, or \$US 49 for airmail. French edition also available from USP).

Protecting our wetlands

By Liz Thompson

Wetlands appear in many forms, including bays, coral reefs, lakes, rivers, flood plains, salt pans, springs and waterholes. These areas are often home to particular species of flora and fauna which only thrive in wetland environments and which provide a habitat for some of the world's greatest congregations of wildlife. Wetlands, in fact, represent some of the most productive ecosystems in the world.

Twenty-five years ago, the Convention on Wetlands was established. A group of concerned researchers from a number of organisations wanted to initiate some kind of protection of wetlands for migratory birds. Also involved were a number of non-government organisations keen to instigate a treaty to protect wetlands. They managed to persuade a number of governments to draw up a convention to protect wetlands and migratory birds. This convention was then adopted at Ramsar, in Iran, and marked the beginning of the Ramsar convention.

When initially set up, the convention focused on protecting the migration routes of birds moving between Europe and Africa. It has now expanded its mandate as well as its membership. The Ramsar Wetland Convention is now the largest environmental conference to be staged in

Australia with around 1000 delegates from nearly 120 countries. Today, Ramsar includes 93 member countries around the world and has a strong membership in almost all continents and regions except the Pacific. This year, the triennial conference was held in Brisbane with the specific intention of trying to raise the membership of Pacific nations. There were a significant number of observer nations which included representatives from Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Much of the Pacific is made up of coral reefs and mangroves, both vital wetland habitats. However, these environments are facing a number of serious threats. As a result of increasing populations, there are concerns that there is a slow breakdown of the traditional systems of management of fishing and that areas are often over-fished. In South-East Asia, one of the most important timber resources is mangroves, which are extensively cut for firewood, woodchips and sometimes construction timber.

Mangroves are vital as fish nurseries and because they are being over-harvested or destroyed, fisheries resources are shrinking, which will ultimately affect vast numbers of people. Wetlands are being cleared for shrimp ponds and urban expansion in the face of increasing population, particularly of atoll lagoons, over-dynamiting of reefs, coral mining for construction materials, and a fair bit of land

fill for extra housing as the population continues to grow.

The convention is hoping to assist Pacific countries in developing plans and strategies for managing their resources. In the Pacific region particularly, a great many people make their living from wetlands fishing or harvesting marine resources and it is critical that wetland areas be maintained. For this reason it has been of some concern that, excluding Australia and New Zealand, the Ramsar conventions bureau identified 25 Pacific Island states and territories with only one of them being a member of the convention. The Ramsar directory lists 640 wetlands in the Pacific; the area of those wetlands is considered to be around 10 million hectares. One of the points made at the 1996 Ramsar convention was that one of the major threats to wetlands in the Pacific is resource consumption, logging, mining and overfishing by regional powers such as Australia, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan. These countries are responsible for much of the logging of forests, particularly in Papua New Guinea, Solomons and Vanuatu. It was suggested that these resource-consuming countries contribute to wetland conservation in the Pacific.

In many other countries the value of wetlands has been tragically neglected with the result that many important wetland areas have already been lost or



Tourist with a guide on a watery expedition through Wasur National Park in Irian Jaya Picture: MARGUERITE YOUNG

ENVIRONMENT

irreparably damaged. In Australia, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) reports that a great number of the continent's wetlands have been filled or drained, including 75 per cent of coastal wetlands in New South Wales and Western Australia's Swan Coastal Plain; 89 per cent of wetlands in south-east South Australia; and a third of Victoria's wetlands. The 1993 *Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia* identifies 520 wetlands of national significance. A vast number of these are not protected by any kind of conservation reserves and only 42 are listed under the Ramsar Convention, which should provide them special attention and a commitment to their protection.

However, of the 42 Ramsar Wetlands, WWF believes 62 per cent are threatened by poor management or proposed developments. The impacts are numerous – wetlands are 'reclaimed' and filled in for building development, agriculture and recreation. Governments drain river systems to provide a carrier of human waste to ocean outfall and in Australia, the high agricultural activity demands extraction of water from river systems. According to David Butcher of WWF: "Blue-green algae blooms, increasing salinity, drying out swamps, fish die-offs, acidification of estuaries, declining fisheries and dramatic changes in coral reefs are all warnings that what we are doing is unsustainable."

Launched at the Ramsar Convention was the East Asia-Australasian Shorebird Reserve Network. However, the network is missing a critical component, the wetlands of Queensland's south-east Gulf of Carpentaria. The gulf area is the most important site for shorebirds in eastern Australia and one of the most important sites on the whole East Asia-Australasian flyway for migratory shorebirds.

According to the Queensland Conservation Council, this site is home to over 200,000 wading birds – equivalent to all other Queensland wetlands combined. The former Queensland government was about to nominate this site for the Ramsar

list of internationally significant wetlands. The new government, however, is pulling away from this position, arguing that it may take them two years to identify the proper traditional owners.

In fact, the Queensland Conservation Council believes the government is delaying any protective measures until the massive CRA Century Zinc mine can be developed. They argue that this mine will drain the underground aquifer believed to feed the only perennial river system in arid Queensland and pump a slurry of heavy metals across the gulf plains to the export port at Karumba. Representatives of Friends of the Earth Australia (FOE) and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) warned delegates at the conference of the dangers of uranium mining in Australia's Kakadu National Park.

The facilities at Jabiluka, site of the proposed new mine, are, according to FOE and ACF, already at their limit. A new mine will put them under further strain. A series of water-management problems at the mine culminated in last year's plan to release 500,000 cubic metres of contaminated water into the Ramsar-listed wetlands on Magela Creek. The release was only averted by the onset of the dry season. FOE campaigner Steve Barker pointed out: "As the new Jabiluka mine will be partially underground, it is possible that another evaporation pond will be needed for contaminated water pumped out of the mine. If this goes ahead, a larger area of Kakadu's wetlands will be put at risk."

Barker is critical of the fact that, in his opinion, the Australian government was ignoring the fact that these areas had already been highlighted for protection.

WWF Australia has initiated a project to assist in the sharing of information related to wetland management in Asia-Pacific. The Australian Conservation Agency, the Department of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation in Indonesia (PHPA) and the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) in Papua New Guinea announced the details of a proposal for a co-operative programme to manage over three million hectares of wetlands in Irian Jaya, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

The three-nation management and training programme links three wetland reserves in Australia, Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea. According to WWF, Kakadu National Park in Australia, Wasur National Park in Irian Jaya and Tonda Wildlife Management Area in Papua New Guinea represent the least disturbed, most extensive and diverse wetlands in the Asia-Pacific region. All three areas are of great importance to the many indigenous people who live in the area, particularly in the case of Irian Jaya and Papua New

Guinea, and also to the migratory waterfowl and waders.

All three wetlands are subject to similar conservation issues, including the presence of indigenous people who utilise resources from the wetlands, the presence of feral animals and pest plants and the need for fire management. The idea of the link between these three sites is that experiences and ideas can be communicated in the hope of developing the most appropriate management systems. Indigenous people's traditional knowledge and skills in wetland management is considerable and is a vital source of information. According to Marguerite Young of WWF, "The conservation of these areas is to a large extent dependent on traditional management by local/indigenous communities."

Kakadu has a long history of mining and the experience may prove useful for Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea, given their experiences with mining companies. Through the use of training workshops, staff exchanges and joint research projects, it is believed far better management systems can be developed. Kakadu staff and traditional owners will visit Wasur Park in Papua New Guinea to help the community work out what their training needs are. Members of the Wasur Park community will then visit Kakadu to undergo training. As awareness slowly grows as to the critical role wetlands have to play in the eco-system, a greater emphasis is gradually being placed on their protection. An impressive number of resolutions and recommendations were established during the 1996 Ramsar conference. These included: Encouragement for catchment catching; coastal zone management and better attention to coral reefs; measures addressing toxic chemicals in wetlands; provision of good quality information on listed wetland sites, and on changes in their condition; a range of specific actions called for at named sites around the world where conservation problems are being experienced; a call for proper assessment of the state of the world's wetlands; emphasis on involving local communities.

The 1996 Convention, held in Brisbane, consolidated the treaty by setting out a work plan and modernising it to ensure it is a more active, broader statement. Jamie Pittock, conservation officer with WWF believes: "Australia and the Pacific made a greater commitment to wetlands conservation than ever before. We are already seeing results in Australia with new sites being listed and a commitment by Senator Hill to pledge \$A2 million (\$US1.4 million) toward an international fund to support wetland initiatives."

In 1999, the Ramsar convention will be held in Costa Rica. ■

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The land of Ta-Har

By Sally Andrew

The sailing distance from Santo to Pentecost in Vanuatu is about 50 miles (80 kilometres) to windward. We never imagined that our pilgrimage to the "Land or Ta-har" would take two weeks and 125 sea miles.

After saying goodbye to friends in Venui Bay, on the south coast of Espirito Santo, we sailed to nearby Aore Island and anchored near the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) settlement at Port Latour. Strong south-easterly trade winds dictated that we head south in short hops to the east coast of Malekula. From there, we hoped to have a better lay across Vanuatu's inland sea to our ultimate destination in northern Pentecost.

Steep waves caused by wind against tide made life aboard *FellowShip* uncomfortable as she sailed through the Bruat Channel between Aore and Malo Islands towards tiny Malokilikili. But the anchorage offered protection in lagoon-blue waters and good holding in a sandy bottom. At low tide we walked around three small islets, stopping to talk with some women who were catching fish in tide pools using poison from a local fruit.

Since the forecast offered no respite in the wind, we hauled the anchor and headed further south to Vao, one of Malekula's "Small Islands" on the north-east coast. In the sheltered lee of the island, canoes litter the white sand beach – over a hundred are pulled up on the shoreline each night. The kids are eager traders and paddled out to *FellowShip* daily to try their hand at "Let's Make a Deal".

It began to look as if we would never get a good slant on the wind. As we went south, the wind went east and increased. So, early one morning, when the wind seemed lighter, we decided to try our luck. We had none.

By two o'clock it was apparent we would not make Pentecost before dark. The wind was too close to our heading and the seas too rough.

So I pushed the tiller to starboard and slacked the sheets, reaching towards the island of Ambae. What a difference! On her new course, *FellowShip* flew along at 7.5 knots and idyllic sailing. The wind still screamed through the rigging and, as we closed on the coast, we kept our fingers crossed.

The Land of Ta-har – the matrilineal islands of Ambe, Maewo and Raga (northern Pentecost) – is poorly charted, as is much of Vanuatu, but friends had reported



Special poison is extracted from fruit and used to catch fish in tide pools Pictures: Sally Andrew

an anchorage near Devil's Rock as good protection from reinforced trade winds. As we approached, we became suspicious. What anchorage?

Suddenly, we found ourselves in the lee of the island in a delightful sanctuary and we dropped the hook.

What a stunning spot, with remarkable red cliffs and an extraordinary rock

pinnacle standing tall offshore. The best guide to the area, *Vanuatu* by Lonely Planet, tells how the spirits of Ambae's dead come here.

Legends say they leap from Devil's Rock into the sea and turn into sharks – one explanation for the number of sharks in the area!

We rowed ashore to stretch our legs

YACHTING



The anchorage near Devil's Rock

and met Jimi Wilbur, a descendant of a Canadian beachcomber. While we walked to his garden, Jimi told us his own story of Devil's Rock.

Devil's Rock was once known as Gwala, and its female companion was Vuinako Rock at Lolowai. Both rocks lived together near the village of Vureas

until they had a falling out over a pig. Gwala then fled to the western tip of Ambae to escape Vuinako's wrath.

Jimi elaborated: "Vuinako kept saying - 'I can still see you...' and Gwala kept moving down the coast until it arrived safely at the western tip, right off my village." Jimi offered us fresh provisions from his garden, and at dusk we returned to our boat.

FellowShip's pilgrimage to Ambae was in the wake of earlier sea folk who voyaged from Malekula's "Small Islands" of Vao, Atchin and Wala to the traditional home of Ta-har (or Tagaro) in sailing canoes capable of holding as many as 30 men.

According to anthropologists working in Malekula in the early 1900s, Ta-har was related to the Polynesian Tangaroa, a creator god of light and happiness.

These early sailors sailed in search of trade goods such as tusked boars and fine red-dyed dancing mats. These mats were worn every day by both men and women - wrapped around the hips like a skirt by the women, and through the legs and hanging down in front, like a loin-cloth, by the men.

Today, they are worn in ceremonies, used as currency and, like pigs, they are exchanged and presented as gifts.

Traditionally, young men from the "Small Islands" took their first sea voyage to a beach just a few miles south-east of

our anchorage at Devil's Rock, where they underwent special initiation rites into the mysteries of life and love.

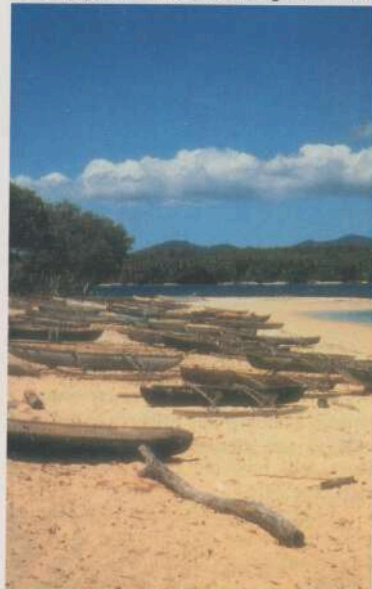
Even today, voyages to Ambe are shrouded in mystery. The island is known by a plethora of different names - Ambae, Oba, Aoba, Omba, Opa, Lepers Islands, Bali Hai - and official charts of the area show sketchy outlines with a few deep-water soundings and warnings that islands may be as much as five miles out of position.

We had begun to wonder if we could reach Pentecost. Reinforced tradewinds had slowed the journey and a semi-serious medical problem that had delayed us in Santo needed follow-up surgery in Port Vila. We questioned the wisdom of the detour. But in our hearts, it was important that we return.

We had promised to *kangbakagen* (come back again) to the Land of Ta-har, where an adoption and name-taking ceremony had been planned. It finally seemed we were within striking distance.

So, the next day, we rose before the wind and slipped around the top side of Ambe, motoring in light winds in the lee of the island, anchoring beside the waterfall at Asanvare on Maewo for the night. In the morning we pressed on to Pentecost.

Who knew that surprises were in



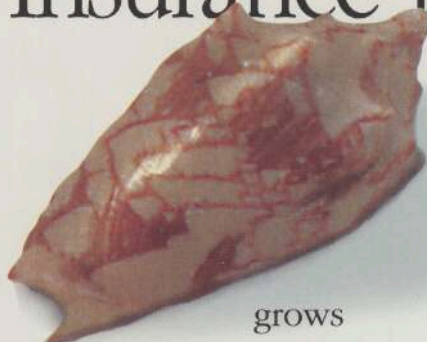
Canoes litter the beach at Vao

Continued next month

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