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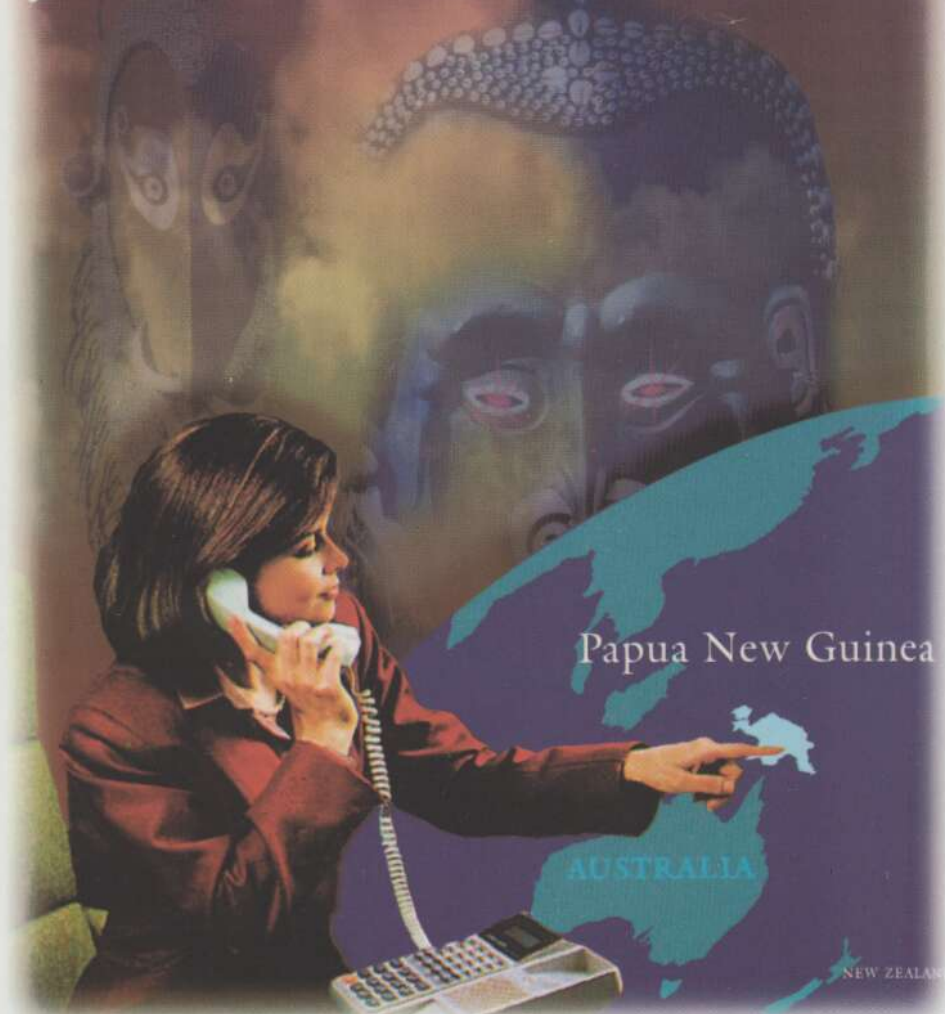
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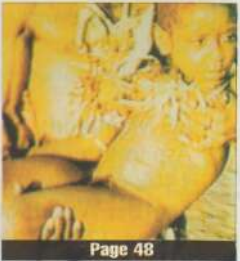


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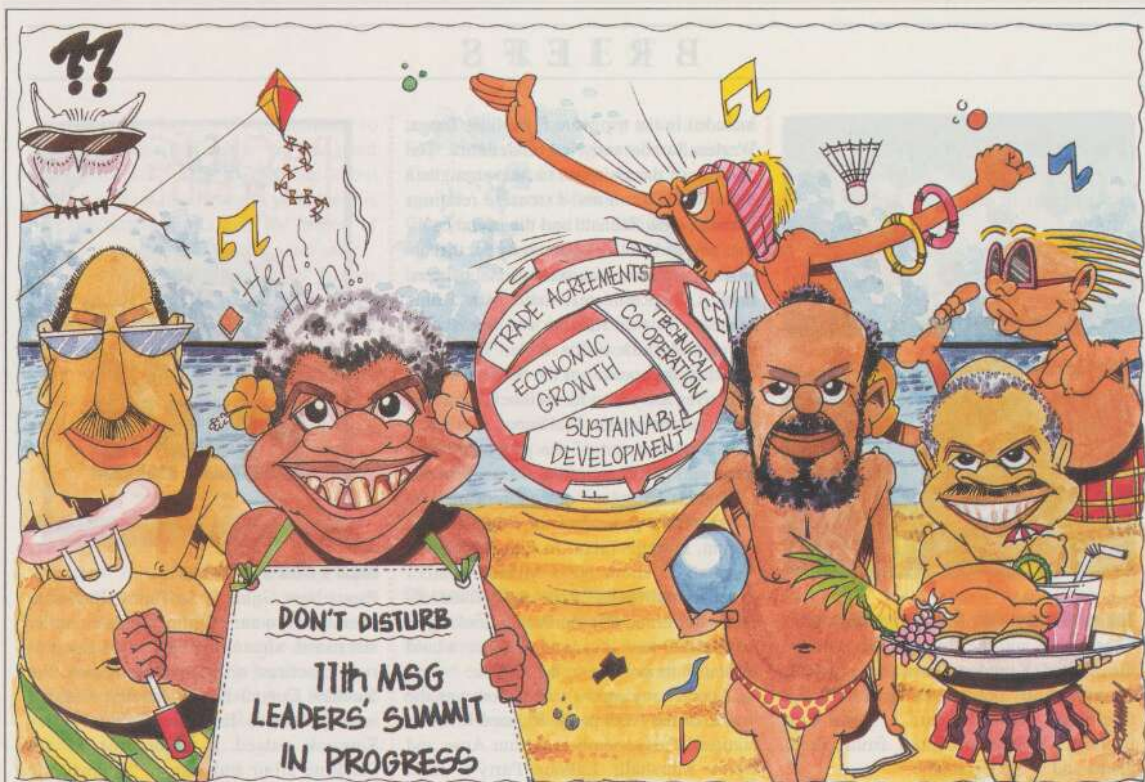


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Interview with John Momis



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EDITORIAL

Action, not mere words

May saw a gathering in Fiji of Melanesian leaders for the 11th summit of the MSG. Overriding all other issues affecting the region, of primary concern at the Melanesian Spearhead Group meeting was the need to turn the region into an important and viable economic force.

Much was made of the words "solidarity", "unity" and "cooperation" – of the need for these small island states to put up a joint front in tackling the region's dwindling economy. And much was said about common misconceptions about the region. According to Fiji's minister for foreign affairs, Filipe Bole, perceptions that we are small, isolated and lacking in natural resources are nothing more than fallacies and do not stand in the way of attaining economic success.

Any steps that are taken towards genuinely achieving this end would be most commendable. However, mere rhetoric will not see results. The MSG meeting was a chance for Melanesian leaders to put

their heads together and, through constructive discussion, to identify the problems and solutions in this area of the Pacific. It was not a time for picknicking.

Yet, at least according to the itinerary for the summit, just under three hours was allocated to formal talks over the four-day event. The rest of the time was taken up with travelling and receptions, with an entire day spent visiting the Fijian prime minister's home village.

In his speech to foreign ministers before the MSG proper, Bole was very vocal in his optimism about the region. But the proof of the pudding is, after all, in the tasting.

It is all very well to expound the virtues of trade over aid, to reject criticism as ignorant because it comes from outside the

region. But, let's face it, the Pacific is not doing so well economically.

As Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka said, with the end of the Cold War, the Pacific is no longer strategically important to the powers that be.

What does the Pacific have to offer?

Tourism? Asia offers better beaches and more cultural variety at a cheaper cost.

Labour? We cannot boast large populations and cheap manpower.

It is not good enough merely to say there is potential in the region. Sweeping statements are not enough. We must identify exactly what our advantages are and work on them. And island leaders must lead by example.

What hope is there if our leaders display the height of poor planning and inefficiency? It was, after all, Bole's foreign affairs department which went way over the \$F50,000 budget in organising the MSG summit in Fiji, spending over \$F250,000.

• Special Report on page 12

BRIEFS



The environmentally friendly credit card

Greenpeace and the Cooperative Bank in the United Kingdom have launched an almost entirely polyvinyl chloride (PVC)-free credit card. The card is made with Biopol, which is produced from cereal plants and is biodegradable.

While the Biopol itself is 100 per cent PVC free, the magnetic strip attached to it and some of the ink still contain PVC. The makers of the card are determined to produce a 100 per cent PVC-free card within a year. According to Greenpeace, both the production and disposal of PVC releases harmful chemicals into the environment, including dioxin, which has been linked to hormonal disorders and cancer.

PVC is one of the most versatile of plastic materials in modern society. But it is also one of the most harmful. It is used in many household items, including records, toys, window frames, doors, walls, panelling, pipes and gutters, venetian blinds, shower curtains, furniture and ball-point pens.

The card took over two years to develop and although biodegradable material was available since 1990, it was not possible until now to make such a card.

NZ works on Pacific relations

New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Don McKinnon and Minister for Maori Affairs Tau Henare visited several countries in the South Pacific in May in what was referred to as a microcosm of the coalition government in action. Countries

included in the trip were Fiji, Niue, Tonga, Western Samoa and New Caledonia. The purpose of the visit was to help strengthen the already warm and extensive relations between New Zealand and the island countries and provide an opportunity for discussions on regional and international matters. In Fiji, the ministers met with Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka and Minister of Foreign Affairs Filipe Bole. They also called on the speaker of the house of representatives and met with members of parliament and the senate. McKinnon received a first-hand account of the progress being made on Fiji's constitution review process.

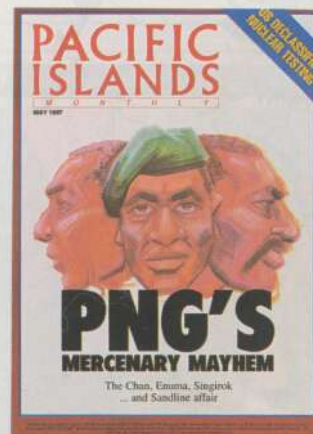
The New Zealand delegation called on the secretary-general of the South Pacific Forum, Ieremia Tabai. In Fiji, McKinnon also talked about NZ's Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) representation election system and Pacific Policy, looking at how NZ's new political system would influence its policies in the region.

Accompanying the delegation was the leader of the ACT party, Richard Prebble; National Party members Arthur Anae and Denis Marshall; Labour Party's Taito Phillip Field; and Graham Kelly and Rod Donald of the Alliance/Green Party.

There were also representatives from non-government organisations and members of New Zealand's business community. McKinnon said he was keen to enable a range of New Zealanders to familiarise themselves with countries which were New Zealand's nearest neighbours. Four senior school students also accompanied the delegation. They had been drawn from schools in the Wellington region and all were of Polynesian descent.



NZ Foreign Minister Don McKinnon



Inquiry clears Sir Julius

Papua New Guinea's Sir Julius Chan took over as the country's prime minister earlier last month after being cleared of any corrupt practices or illegal doings by the Sandline Commission of Inquiry. And, the inquiry found, Brigadier-General Jerry Singirok played a major role in the Sandline affair and was an "enthusiastic supporter" of the concept. AAP quoted the report as stating.

Sir Julius was forced to step down as PM in late March during a revolt led by Singirok because of his alleged involvement in PNG's hiring of Sandline mercenaries. The inquiry also cleared Deputy Prime Minister Chris Haiveta and Defence Minister Mathias Ijape over allegations of corruption in the \$A48-million (\$US33-million) mercenary deal to solve the Bougainville secessionist crisis.

Of the three ministers, Haiveta came in for the most criticism from the inquiry.

"The commission remains suspicious of Haiveta's actions and motivations and, in parts, rejects his evidence as untruthful," the report said. However, because of insufficient evidence, it could make no finding of corruption against Haiveta - nor Singirok, Ijape or any other public servant involved in the deal.

Cooks fires adviser

The Cook Islands government has sacked an adviser to the finance and economic management team, Colin Mellor, after he compiled a report critical of the government's asset sale programme, RNZI reported. The report referred to the sale pro-

B R I E F S

gramme as the biggest disappointment to date and states that while the budgeted asset sales are likely to generate about \$US1.5 million this financial year, there is no expectation of attaining the largest of \$US12 million in unbudgeted asset sales.

The future of the Cook Islands Development Bank has been under a cloud, which has led the Asian Development Bank to abandon a technical assistance grant, according to the report. The money was to be used promote private sector growth after the government was forced to lay off most of its employees.

Australian lawyer acquitted

On May 6, Vanuatu's court of appeal acquitted Australian lawyer Roger de Robillard, who was serving a two-month jail sentence in Port Vila's tiny jail for contempt of court. The sentence was pronounced on March 27 by supreme court judge and acting Chief Justice Vincent Lunabek, who found de Robillard in con-

tempt of court for failing to return case files to the attorney-general's chambers. The files related to a supreme court case against former British Chief Justice Charles Vaudin and the Vanuatu government at which de Robillard had applied for Lunabek's disqualification, claiming bias.

Australian barrister Michael Adams told the court told the court of a heated exchange in which Lunabek said to de Robillard: "I hold you in contempt of my court and I will deal with you... You sit down because of your character, you just sit down ... Don't direct my court anymore." De Robillard had replied: "You have to stop that kind of behaviour. This is ridiculous."

Fiji constitution review progress

Fiji's Great Council of Chiefs has accepted the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee Report on the constitution review. This was done at the council's annual meeting last month where in an historic event, Jai Ram

Reddy, the leader of the opposition, made up largely of Indo-Fijians, was invited to address the chiefs. This was the first time an Indo-Fijian leader was invited to speak at the meeting.

A resolution passed by the chief of the Cakaudrove Province, Senator Ratu Talemo Raiakale, to accept the report was passed with two requests by the council: that when the council's appointees in the senate voted on issues concerning entrenched legislation, it must reflect the wishes of the council; and that government continue negotiations with other political parties to declare Fiji a Christian state.

The JPSC has proposed the 71-member parliament comprise 46 communal seats and 25 national or open seats. The 46 communal seats will compromise 23 Fijians, 19 Indians, three General Voters and one Rotuman. The governing political party, the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT), is proposing that the 25 open seats be contested according to provincial boundaries.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Setting the record straight

Dear Sir,

The Death of His Excellency President Amata Kabua in December was a tragedy from which this young nation continues to recover.

In the aftermath of the state funeral, though, it was gratifying to see the extensive coverage of both the funeral and President Amata Kabua's distinguished and illustrious life, as contained in the February issue of *Pacific Islands Monthly*.

However, on behalf of the government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, I am obligated to request that your publication correct the following misstatements in the two articles:

- In the article entitled "A region in mourning", it is stated that the Compact of Free Association "provides the Marshall Islands with \$US1 billion as compensation for nuclear testing".

While the total economic benefits package provided to the Marshall Islands under the Compact is estimated to be approximately \$1 billion, the fact is that only \$150 million of that total is provided as compensation for the damages caused by the US nuclear testing programme.

- In the article entitled "Kabua dies, Olter replaced", it is stated that before President Kabua's death, "the Nitijela had selected Transportation Minister Kunio Lemari to serve as acting president".

The fact is that President Kabua himself had appointed Minister Lemari as acting president prior to his departure from Majuro for medical treatment.

That appointment remained in effect until the president's death, at which time, in accordance with the Constitution of the Marshall Islands (Article V, Section 9), Nitijela Speaker Kessai Note appointed Minister Lemari to continue as acting president.

- Also in "Kabua dies, Olter replaced", it is stated that, after President Kabua's death, "parliament appeared to ignore a constitutional provision that would have seemed to make the speaker of the senate, Kessai Note, the acting president".

In fact, there is no such constitutional provision.

As explained above, the constitutional authority of the speaker in such situations is limited to appointing an acting president to serve until election by a majority of the

total membership of the Nitijela.

Robert Muller,
Secretary of Foreign Affairs,
Republic of the Marshall Islands



The constitution and awareness

Dear Sir,

It was most encouraging to read the article written by Fiji's prime minister (*Fiji Times*, May 14, 1997) on the 10th anniversary of the military coup d'etat which removed the democratically elected Fiji Labour Party and National Federation Party coalition led by then Prime Minister Timoci Uluivuda Bavadra.

Sitiveni Rabuka hit the nail squarely on the head when he stated that there was a lack of understanding about the entrenchment of Fijian land ownership and customary rights over natural resources, Fijian administration, and Great Council of Chiefs' representation in senate in 1987.

Short of abrogating the 1970 constitution, there was no possibility of changing these entrenched clauses unless, of course, the representatives of indigenous Fijians, whose numbers remained fixed in both houses, supported fundamental changes. There was no likelihood of this.

Perhaps the single most damaging indictment of the Alliance Party, which effectively ruled Fiji from 1970 to 1987, was its complete failure to educate the people of Fiji, especially our indigenous communities, about the 1970 constitution. By the end of the first decade after indepen-

dence, the ownership of land and the entrenched indigenous institutions should have become non-issues in the political arena.

Indeed, the ownership of land should have been a non-issue since the 1940s with the establishment of the Native Land Trust Board.

We are all obligated to ensure that we understand our rights and duties in the amended 1990 constitution.

Ignorance of a community's rights enshrined in the constitution and the activities of demagogues should never be the basis for the toppling of democratically elected governments.

Power must come via the ballot and not the barrel of a gun.

With respect to the place of indigenous Fijians in the economy, it has to be said that the government of the day has the primary responsibility to pursue appropriate redistribution and affirmative action policies.

These policies should have clearly stipulated objectives and a time frame for their achievement as well as evaluation at various points to determine their efficacy.

No non-ethnic Fijian person has ever opposed such policies; many of us, including indigenous Fijians, have wondered about the effectiveness of some of these policies.

I agree entirely with Prime Minister Rabuka that we need to move forward, build bridges and meet the difficulties and challenges that face Fiji.

The preoccupation with the politics of ethnicity has done untold harm to the country, particularly to the aspirations of our young people, whose opportunities have been stifled.

Finally, I applaud the emerging vision of Fiji as exemplified in the recent statements of the president [Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara], the prime minister, and the leader of the opposition [Jai Ram Reddy], as well as Mahendra Chaudary and Josevata Kamikamica.

They deserve all our support as we face the challenges of the last three years of this century and move into the new millennium.

Dr Vijay Naidu
Suva, Fiji



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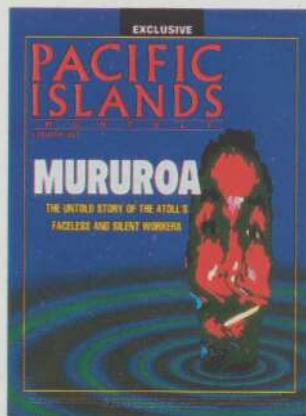
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

French testing



Dear Sir,

France's ambassador to Fiji seems to know so much about French Polynesia (*PIM* March, 1997). I decided to write a few lines so that we could clear the misunderstanding about human rights issues in the Pacific at the dawn of the second millennium.

The ambassador seems full of questions, so am I. People have been struggling for a nuclear-free Pacific for many years now. In Tahiti, as the ambassador wrote, some "anti-nuclear movements have been very active and have been free to do so".

France has remained passive in the face of these protests and tried to play down the concern of the people. But the Independent party won seven new seats in the Territorial elections held some six months after the incidents of September, 1995. People brave enough to peacefully protest against the French decision to resume testing at Mururoa – including women and young people – were shot at. They had been marching around the island of Tahiti for some days already; they were requesting dialogue with French authorities. They never got it.

The ambassador said: "Tetiarahi's (NGO) movement was not in a position to contest even one seat. Why?" Yet, as we both know, NGOs work for the people outside the government only. If this had been possible for them, maybe the voice

of their long-standing anti-nuclear position could have been heard.

At school, in Tahiti, we were taught about the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings that ended the second world war in 1945. We were told about the power of the weapon but we were not taught about the horror which many Japanese experienced and will live with for years to come.

The ambassador said that the use of Mururoa as a test site had been known in French Polynesia in 1945. Why then, in January 1963, when President De Gaulle announced the intention to establish a nuclear base, did Tahitian leaders ask, in vain, for more information on the purpose of the site? Weren't they already showing opposition to the project?

In May, the same year, weren't they threatened with a dissolution of the assembly if they kept up their opposition?

Why did authorities not answer to the invitation made by Abilation 2000 to attend their conference in Moorea? Would they act the same for a meeting on the benefits and safety of French nuclear power? The local TV did not report any relevant information on this International Conference on Nuclear Disarmament held in Moorea-Tahiti between January 21 and 28, 1997. Instead, we were shown a documentary about American testing in the Marshall Islands (O'Rourke's *Half-Life*).

I feel really sorry for these Marshallese, people of Bikini, whose ignorance had been abused. Their suffering has saved the Tahitians from many 'scientific errors' which may make French tests 'safer'.

I wish we were able to watch such good films on our own case. I wish the ones I watched at the University of Hawaii in Manoa could be seen by my people on our far-reaching local TV in French Polynesia. For a long time now, I have been wondering: If nuclear testing is so safe, then why is it practised so far from France? So costly and far-away an adventure! Why do you praise the beauty of our islands for your government to taint with its nuclear activity? In June 1963, the United Kingdom, United States and former United Soviet States of Russia signed a partial ban treaty on nuclear tests.

In April 1964, Dr Albert Schweitzer

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

wrote, "Who ever pretends that nuclear testing is safe, is a liar." Gratefully, we will never be able to afford to become a nuclear power – another reason why we will never need it. We are already tattooed with its sad existence in the depth of our very selves, our *fenua*.

I wish my people could enjoy their beautiful islands for many more years to come. I wish you will not be abused as Pacific Islanders have been. I wish, I wish. There are only wishes left now. The damage has been done. However, I know we will again say to you, "*Haere mai, tipae mai I te fare nei* [Come, stop by at home]" because our welcome is one thing in our tradition you have not yet taken away.

Mr Ambassador, we are not that different, you and I. We are both prisoners of your hierarchy. Peacefully yours.

Bopp Maire,
Suva, Fiji

Chirac, the wolf

Dear Sir,
'allo, 'allo what 'ave we 'ere?
As soon as I saw this photograph of Jacques Rene Chirac, I felt that the following caption would be most appropriate to



From the outset of his career, Jacques Chirac (pictured), nominated to head France's new government by Pres Valéry Giscard d'Estaing on May 27, 1974, at the early age of 41, had stood out as the very model of the *jeunes loups* (young wolves) of French political life.

be placed underneath it: "I can't wait to get my teeth into you!"

The intense expression on his face and the set of his teeth is indicative that this is what he is indeed saying. In 1974, as a young wolf (see biographical caption taken from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* 1975 yearbook), he had ample opportunity to exercise his fangs, and, now, 23 years later, his ravenous appetite in the Pacific region has been well satisfied. It was only 11 years ago in 1986 that Jacques Chirac was first on the prowl in New Zealand and sheep farmers and politicians (especially Prime Minister David Lange, er Lange) felt very intimidated.

Indeed, their very sheepbrains were at stake.

Martin Leo,
Auckland, New Zealand

Conservation and culture

Dear Sir,
I have been a fan of your magazine for quite a long time. It is a great pleasure to read your magazine to update the information of this beloved region.

I understand that your readers are worldwide, including those who do not understand or, rather, try not to understand Pacific culture, and you ought to inform more on what the Pacific is and who the people in the Pacific are to the readers. I was made to feel that way when I read a letter from Inge Mathiesen (March, 1997). It was full of discourtesy and racism.

Needless to say, not only myself but all the people in this, our beloved region, are aware that we have to conserve our natural environment. However, I cannot see why we (though I am not originally from the Pacific) have to adopt the hysterical environmental policies urged by Mathiesen.

Mathiesen mentioned whales and turtles. I have eaten them and seen people catch no more of these creatures than necessary. I do believe that most of the people in this region catch them using traditional methods.

Will this cause extinction of these species? Is this not the most effective way to conserve both the environment and eating culture (I would rather call this culture than habit)?

It does not mean that I am encouraging people to be exploitative but, as long as people in this region are educated about their environment and maintain subsistence fishing as it is practised, I do not see any problem.

Finally, I wonder if Mathiesen has ever heard of the "Pacific Way". One of its meanings to me is mutual respect and understanding whoever one may be. From that point, how can he tell Timeon Ioane to be a turtle? What he has to do is encourage and give advice, not disgrace people in the region.

Be sane, Mathiesen. They have a "Pacific Way" in conservation as well.

Polycarp Smallfield,
Tarawa, Kiribati

CORRECTION

The last few lines of two stories last month were inadvertently omitted from the page:

• "Mine ready to negotiate" (Page 13)

The production had a value of K5.2 billion (\$US3.6 billion) which represented 44 per cent of PNG's exports in that period. Contributions to the national government in the form of taxes, duties and dividends were 17 per cent of internally generated government revenue over the period. ■

• "Caught napping" (Page 22)

What level of professionalism will be applied to the job by the next chief auditor, given the amount of bungy jumping the government did over Ah Chong's report, will be interesting. Ethics and accountability though could still be as hard to find as accurate Treasury accounts for public inspection, and the protection of human rights this Alesana administration built its name upon. ■

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■ SPECIAL REPORT

United we stand

MSG leaders seek solidarity for success

Reports by **BERNADETTE HUSSEIN**

The focus of the 11th summit of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, hosted by Fiji in May, lay largely on trade and economy in the region – issues pertinent to the Pacific as it heads towards the new millennium – and the need for solidarity and unity between the island countries. Small island nations could achieve their goals through this unity and use it to secure their needs and aspirations, Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka said in his welcome address as chairman of this year's meeting.

Rabuka reminded the delegates that, as small island nations, they had to keep pace with the rest of the world and look ahead with a clear sense of vision. "The Lome Convention with the European Union, to which all of us are parties as members of the ACP [African, Caribbean and Pacific] group of states, will expire in February, 2000. So, we must look beyond this to the 21st century and prepare ourselves to grapple with the realities of the new era."

He reminded the leaders that since the end of the Cold War, the West had lost interest in the Pacific because it was no longer regarded as strategically important. Because of this, the South Pacific was being treated and regarded as among the least important parts of the world market economy, the PM said. "In the last seven years or so, we have seen the withdrawal of Great Britain from the South Pacific Commission, the closure of the United States embassy in the Solomon Islands, the USAID offices, Asia Foundation and Peace Corps offices in Fiji and other Pacific countries," Rabuka said, pointing to these as examples of the decline in interest in the region.

He asked the leaders to keep in constant touch with policies and developments in overseas markets.

"The free trade rules of the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade [GATT] agreed to in 1993 are beginning to govern our trade

policies and relations through our membership with the World Trade Organisation [WTO]. We are told GATT has the promise of opening up new market opportunities for small developing countries and the new GATT rules impress on us that we have to trade to be competitive and to effectively take advantage of the opportunities.

"This requires us to have domestic policies that free up and deregulate our economies, policies on human resources development, wages and salaries, exchange rates and general costs of production that will all help to raise the level of our international competitiveness. Competitiveness means price competitiveness as well as quality and supply reliability of our exports.

"We have to secure our markets as well as identify new markets for what we can produce. This requires a level of sophistication in international market research in our private sectors as well as trade departments and our embassies overseas."

He said there was no morality or goodwill when countries had to compete for international export markets. Rabuka said the region should keep in mind that the world economy was shaped and controlled by the interests of powerful

trading nations and, at every international gathering, the endless clamour was to liberalise trade and open the market to reduce and ultimately remove tariffs. "Yet, the same big countries are busy forming themselves into trading blocs, such as the European Economic Community, the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and other looser groups of nations."

Rabuka said these countries were organised to promote and protect their interests collectively under the new trading regime which is why the region had to seek cooperation with those nations which had similar interests. These, he said, were the African and Caribbean nations in the ACP partnership and the European Union through the Lome Convention. And, as Asian nations forge ahead on the path to economic success, Rabuka suggested the need to ensure the region's voice was heard in forums such as APEC and ASEAN. Fiji Foreign Affairs Minister Filipe Bole had earlier, at the MSG foreign ministers' meeting, had talked of the importance of trade over aid and about what he referred to as misconceptions about



At the flag-raising ceremony on Vanua Levu, Fiji. L-R: Fiji PM Sitiveni Rabuka, Vanuatu PM Serge Vohor, Solomon Islands PM Solomon Mamaloni, PNG acting PM John Giheno and FLNKS president Rock Wamytan.

An expensive affair



A moment of relaxation

While there was much said at the Melanesian Spearhead Group meeting, there was also a lot said about the meeting. For example, what many expected would be a time of intense and constructive discussion and deliberation, was perceived by many as an excuse for a very expensive holiday, if the programme was anything to go by. Of the three full and two half days the 11th MSG summit was scheduled over, only two hours and 55 minutes was allocated to formal talks, according to the programme. The meeting, according to official figures, is costing the Fiji government a whopping \$F252,054 (\$US175,000) although only \$F50,000 (\$US34,500) was initially budgeted for. This was estimated in the 1997 budget estimates.

The organising committee approached government seeking an additional \$F70,151 (\$US48,500) from parliament, which was approved. However, this was still short of the \$F252,054. It is expected the remaining costs will be absorbed by other ministries and departments. Last-minute events saw a reduction in numbers of the parliament secretarial team assigned to cover the meeting because of escalating costs.

According to newspaper reports, this became necessary after their budget was reduced from \$F20,000 (\$US13,800) to \$F8000 (\$US5500). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Suva, Fiji, however, said it was glad with the outcome of the meeting, rejecting claims that the event was little more than a picnic for leaders. It was a chance, a ministry spokesperson said, for Fiji to display its hospitality.

the region and its resources. The islands in the region had to continually improve relations with each other, Bole remarked, adding that this could be done by encouraging trade and other economic relations and mutual assistance with each other in programmes which were practical, transparent and sustainable.

He did not give examples. He added that trade was the most important ingredient of international relations and aid, if available, should only supplement it. "Take away trade and we return to colonial dependence, economically and politically, on more advanced economies," he said.

Bole added that there were a number of misconceptions about Melanesia that were not true – that it was underdeveloped, small and isolated. Another theory, he said, which should be discarded was the contention of economists and academics, who declared them-

selves neutral and unbiased, that these countries had scarce resources. "All Melanesian countries are rich in minerals, timber and larger land areas for agriculture and other development," Melanesia was neither small nor isolated, he said. There were other nations which were smaller and more isolated. He said island nations of Melanesia comprised the major landmass of the Pacific and had the highest concentration of people, claiming an abundance of land and marine resources.

Rabuka, however, while not disputing that the Pacific had many resources at its disposal, highlighted the importance of being wary of exploitative measures. "We are in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and our natural resources, such as our fisheries, and unexplored potential resources, such as minerals, have been and will continue to be of interest to our more advanced neighbours."

But, the Fiji PM cautioned, while the region was moving in the path of economic growth it was important that sustainable development be kept in mind. "This is because it may lead only to depletion of our natural resources such as our forests, fisheries, and the degradation of our environment."

"There are benefits in increased trade for our people but the consequences can also be costly." He added that as they advanced into the next millennium, they had to keep their eyes wide open to take advantages of the benefits of modernisation that will strengthen our communities. Rabuka told the delegates that, as members of the MSG, they had to commit themselves anew to the principle of promoting increased economic and technical cooperation. "We must make full use of our partnership in the MSG to explore all avenues of collective cooperation to further the economic interests of our countries, both within our region and beyond."

As outgoing chairman, the acting prime minister of PNG at the time, Giheno, referred to Fiji's inclusion in the MSG as crucial to the enhancement of regional cooperation in politics, economy and cultural exchanges. Solomon Islands PM Solomon Mamaloni said Fiji was one of the more advanced countries in the region and expressed the hope that his country could learn a lot from it. Fiji played a leading role in international affairs and had a strong and steady economy like PNG, Mamaloni said. So, together, they would make a difference and be able to take an important role, especially on the international scene. Mamaloni said his country could take its cue from Fiji's tourism industry. He said tourism in Fiji was one of the most thriving industries in the region and to understand how this was achieved would be of tremendous help. In return, he said, Fiji could cash in on the Solomon Islands' lucrative tuna industry, which has managed to earn millions of dollars in revenue.

The MSG was formed in 1986 after heads of the Melanesian states of Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and PNG met in Goroka, PNG.

At this meeting, the leaders considered Melanesian solidarity as necessary at state-to-state level to effectively work on developmental issues in the region which had a direct, special and related relevance to Melanesia. This includes the Kanaky cause for independence in New Caledonia as represented by the Front Liberation National Kanaks Socialist. Rock Wamyton of the FLNKS from New Caledonia attended as observer.

■ SPECIAL REPORT

The communiqué

The 11th summit of the Melanesian Spearhead Group was held in Fiji from May 7 to 11. It was chaired by Fiji's Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka and delegates included Solomon Mamaloni, prime minister of the Solomon Islands; Serge Vohor, prime minister of Vanuatu; John Giheno, acting prime minister of Papua New Guinea; and Rock Wamytan, president of the FLNKS of New Caledonia was present as observer.

In convening the meeting Giheno, representing PNG as the chair of the 10th summit last year, gave a comprehensive report on action taken on the various decisions and initiatives taken by the leaders at the 10th summit.

As host leader, Rabuka stressed the critical importance to the members of the MSG group of maintaining their unity and solidarity in collectively promoting and safeguarding their interests.

After the meeting, the leaders put out a joint communiqué highlighting the various issues discussed and steps taken towards the betterment of the member countries:

- Solomon Islands, PNG and Vanuatu signed an agreement formally approving the admission of Fiji to the MSG Trade Agreement. This was seen as commitment to increase trade and economic cooperation among members.

- Solomon Islands and PNG signed a bilateral agreement on technical co-operation between their countries.

- PNG was commended for its initiative in the establishment of a Pacific Islands Regional APEC centre, to be based at Port Moresby, to undertake research and disseminate information on activities and developments in APEC of interest and relevance to MSG and South Pacific Forum Island countries. MSG member countries expressed their governments' support for the centre.

- Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and FLNKS welcomed PNG's proposal to actively pursue with APEC a LOME Convention-type agreement with MSG and Forum Island countries.

They agreed to give PNG their full backing on this, including pursuing their initiative at the 28th South Pacific Forum in Raratonga, Cook Islands in September.

- PNG was commended for the South Pacific Regional Support Arrangements and Regional Extradition Treaty. It was agreed that MSG members would cooperate in pursuing these initiatives in the Forum, and that governments' should cooperate in dealing with natural disaster prevention, mitigation and rehabilitation.

- Leaders discussed trade and economic issues. They adopted the comprehensive report of the Trade and Economic officials meeting in Honiara, Solomon Islands, in April this year and endorsed its recommendations for implementation.

- The Forum Finance and Economic Ministers meeting to be held in Cairns, Australia, this month was discussed.

Leaders agreed that finance ministers should hold consultations immediately before the meeting with a view to discussing issues

of common interest and coordinating common positions on the same.

- Possibility of establishing a regional MSG Business Council or Chamber of Commerce representatives of the private sector and their organisations to meet regularly was considered.

- On civil aviation, leaders agreed that this was a priority and needed close consultation and cooperation by MSG governments, civil aviation authorities and commercial carriers.

- It was decided that shipping was another high priority area for collective action by MSG member countries.

- Leaders agreed that telecommunications authorities and commercial operators in MSG countries should coordinate efforts on the modernisation of their systems, the standardisation and pooling of equipment and spare parts purchases, the appropriate regulation of the sector to encourage higher productivity and greater competition and dealings with foreign strategic partners in the industry.

- On forestry matters, the leaders noted that all MSG member countries had initiated national codes of conduct on logging. They agreed that MSG members should coordinate their efforts in dealing with the Asian market as well as with foreign commercial dealers in MSG countries.

- The leaders noted that while some MSG member countries had benefited from mineral development and others were aspiring to benefit from it in a number of areas, there were constraints to the development of mineral resources.

- In recognising the scope for regional cooperation, leaders agreed that a regional framework for resource development for MSG members be established to cater for data and personnel exchange; and the development of a suitable legal framework.

Leaders agreed that external support be sought for the establishment of this framework.

- On development resources, leaders agreed the feasibility of establishing an MSG Investment Bank be given further consideration.

- Leaders discussed technical cooperation and the Melanesian Arts and Cultural Festival to be held in the Solomon Islands in July next year.

- Leaders agreed to collectively assist Solomon Islands in seeking assistance from the governments of France, Japan, China, UNESCO, and other governments and organisations in hosting the festival.

- Leaders noted a paper on women's development circulated by Fiji and agreed this was an important area of national development needing increased attention.

They agreed that close collaboration by MSG members in regional women's programmes, such as those operated by the South Pacific Commission, be encouraged.

- Leaders agreed that observers not be allowed at MSG meetings, the only exception being the MSG Trade and Economic Officials meeting, which permitted the Forum Secretariat to sit in as an observer.

- Leaders reaffirmed their Kiriwana summit decision that each government set up its own MSG unit in one of its ministries/departments and assistance be provided to each current chair by the members if and when there is a need and request to do so. ■

COVER STORIES

Western Samoa's passport scandal



Secretary to government Vaasatia Komiti

Story and photography by **CHRIS PETERU**

Jailed Chinese businessman Jin Jipei will want to forget April 7, the day he flew into Western Samoa's international airport carrying a local passport as identification. Police arrested him for holding fraudulent documents – and

unlocked the scandal of the year.

Since the 45-year-old's arrest and pending court case, five immigration department officers have been suspended in connection with a racket involving the sale of Samoan passports for up to \$26,000 each in Hong Kong and possibly the Apia head office. Politically, the controversy has landed squarely at the door of 72-year-old

Prime Minister Tofilau Eti Alesana, who since 1991 has held the immigration portfolio. His response, so far, has been anything but prime ministerial.

Within days of the Jipei incident, the national daily, the *Samoa Observer*, claimed Samoan passports had been advertised in several Chinese newspapers, including the *Macao Daily* and the *Hong Kong East*, and sold for thousands to anyone needing one. Permanent residency status and work permits were offered.

Those claims were backed by another Hong Kong businessman. Michael Zhou arrived in the country with a local passport shortly after Jipei. He confirmed the *Samoa Observer's* version of events. Zhou, who came looking for business opportunities, said that after phoning the Samoa consul-general's office in Hong Kong, he was told by an unidentified person to contact a company called Pacific Life International for further details. Upon doing so, he was supplied by the company with prices in US dollars for passports, permanent residency and work permits. Zhou and at least seven other Chinese nationals with Samoan documents have been forced to return to Hong Kong in the wake of the scandal going public.

The newspaper also published correspondence from the New Zealand High Commission in Apia to the immigration department in March querying whether government authorisation to issue visas by another Hong Kong-based company, Chi Hang International Investments, late last year were in order. It is not known how the immigration department responded.

The government, however, quickly distanced itself from the *Samoa Observer* version of events, saying they had never authorised the sale of passports or visas to any Chinese nationals or delegated companies to act as distribution agents.

Deputy PM Malielegaoi suspects the Hong Kong advertisements to be the work of professional criminals. Even so, the consul-general for Hong Kong, Tuigamala Anetipa, was on a flight home within 48 hours of the story hitting news stands. He then held several private meetings with the PM.

Also puzzling is the total silence by Alesana as immigration minister. Normally outspoken, the PM has quietly removed himself from the spotlight since the first Chinese began arriving, fueling speculation as to why. In his place, Malielegaoi and newly appointed government secretary

COVER STORIES

Vaasatia Komiti have been left to do the explaining. Both men have defended the leader's failure to comment publicly, and believe the government's credibility internationally remains intact.

"If there are disputes involving the government, then we wait for investigations, find out who or what is involved before making any announcements – not just jump stupidly into it," said Malielegaoi.

On state-run television, Komiti took pains to disclaim any top-level involvement while calling media reports irresponsible and sensational.

"Maybe people think that if the PM goes on air then the thing will die away, but it could also work the other way – it could be interpreted by the papers as an admission," he said.

Malielegaoi dismissed notions that Anetipa was in any way involved in the passport sales, contradicting Zhou's claims to the *Samoa Observer*. "My understanding is he is not implicated. There is no involvement by the government at top level."

Komiti is adamant the HRPP has nothing to hide. "I can only say, as far as the government is concerned, we are not selling passports to people who are not citizens of this country. It is unfortunate there are impressions of a country condoning the

sale of passports because that is not the case, that is absolute rubbish."

Current laws allow travellers with ongoing tickets to stay in Western Samoa on a 30-day permit.

Completed investigations by a three-man government commission of inquiry has indicated that dozens of passports have gone missing from as early as 1994, although the newspaper now claims 1700

passports have disappeared.

The five suspended immigration staff include chief immigration officer Tuipolosa Suisala, who headed the office since 1979. A press release from the PM's department indicated that charges could be laid soon.

Suspicions that something was amiss should have been raised earlier. Despite meagre salaries – the 1995 budget had the chief officer earnings about \$19,000 a year – flash lifestyles that included late model

cars, trips abroad, rental houses and investments that went way beyond the officers' earnings were never investigated. Police have frozen several officers' bank accounts said to contain substantial amounts. On top of that, a small but conspicuous number of Chinese have been able to somehow negotiate residency laws and find work or set up businesses, often restaurants or catering outlets.

Hundreds of passports have been moved from the immigration department located in the basement of the nine-storey government complex to

a safe in Komiti's

fifth-floor office for security reasons. But

with the political transferral of

Hong Kong, the opportunity to sell

Samoan passports could not have been

better timed. Last month's scheduled

handing over of the former British colony, after

156 years of colonial rule, to China had for months

been preceded by scores of Hong Kongers snapping up

foreign passports and securing safe havens overseas as insurance

against the likelihood of fallout with the incoming PRC administration.

At home, the immigration department, like most government-run services, is vulnerable to bribes for preferential treatment while providing indifferent service.

In 1994, a passport shortage in Apia meant some Samoans travelled overseas



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COVER STORIES

using flimsy sheets of paper while awaiting a fresh batch to be printed and flown in from Britain months later. It has been alleged by a government source that, in 1995, diplomatic passports were issued to a visiting group of Chinese businessmen. One of the group was made honorary consul to Kyrgyzstan, on the northern border of China and Russia. Promises by the group to set up a bank and airline in Samoa never eventuated.

Komiti, who was on the inquiry team, says the findings would completely exonerate the government. "We are confident we will get to the bottom of this and the person responsible, whether here or overseas, will be brought to face the music. Notices have been sent to people we suspect are involved to cease from such practices."

The public feeling, though, is that the inquiry is little more than an exercise to clear the PM of any wrongdoing, while finding suitable scapegoats. Few are holding their breath in anticipation of the probe revealing anything more than that it was somebody else's fault. The HRPP government has gained a reputation for having a soft spot for loyal bureaucrats with shady backgrounds. For instance, former Minister of Post and Telecommunications Tolofuavalelei Leiatua who was found guilty of corruption during last year's elections has been given a senior post with state-run Polynesian Airlines. Airline secretary Muliaumasealii Leaupepe was the country's attorney-general until charged by New Zealand police with stealing over \$100,000 of clients' money while practising as a lawyer there. The list goes on.

Legal action against the *Samoa Observer* could be taken by the government if sufficient grounds for a libel action are established.

"When the police investigations have been completed then the hammer will strike the nail on the head," says Malielegaoi. "Those newspaper stories are so inflated they have almost touched the sky." But publisher Savea Sano Malifa says the paper is standing by what it believes is a "watertight" story.

In an editorial, he said his newspaper "would not be a party to this blatant attempt to cover this monstrosity with evasiveness, fabrications and half truths". It called on the government to resign and urged suspended immigration officials to disclose details of the scam to the public.

Relations between China and Western



Outside the Immigration Department

Samoa have, in the 90s, come increasingly close, in part due to the amount of aid China has provided. During the past four years, the \$25-million-dollar government complex, a \$2.5-million-dollar Women's Convention Centre plus the renovation of Apia Park, the home ground of the national rugby team, were provided for by the Chinese government. Western Samoa regularly sends delegations on trade and goodwill visits.

Given the current controversy, an index on corruption in last October's *Asian Wall Street Journal* is interesting. Comparing

corruption in 53 countries on a scale ranging from 0 (totally corrupt) to 10 (totally clean), New Zealand came out as the cleanest country in the world (9.43); Hong Kong came a credible 18 (7.01); and China (2.43) rolled up in 49th spot, five from the bottom.

"The chaos, corruption and lawlessness of China are Hong Kong's real worries after 1997," concluded the journal.

How that analysis of China will affect Western Samoa in the future is something the Tofilau government may now want to consider more carefully. ■

COVER STORIES

The Marshall Islands passport business

By GIFF JOHNSON

The sale of citizenship in the Marshall Islands has gone through a series of metamorphoses since the government first began offering passports to Asians in the mid-1980s.

And, in doing so, it has engendered complaints from the United States government, financial audits critical of the handling of passport revenues by government officials and unwanted international media coverage centring primarily on the false advertising claims made by sales agents of the benefits of passport ownership – and upwards of \$US15 million in revenue to the Marshall Islands government.

Officially, the government suspended sales of passports to foreigners last August, in large part because of objections raised by the US State Department and the impact these passport sales were having on Marshall Islanders entering the US. Non-Marshall Islanders continue to obtain passports in Majuro, however, leading to speculation that the programme was suspended to allow the government to get it under control. They add that it could be restarted at a later time once new regulations are produced and enforced.

"Passport sales were suspended in August 1996," said Foreign Minister Phillip Muller in late May. "We haven't done anything since then. The cabinet authorised [the Foreign Ministry] to come up with new regulations, but we haven't done it yet."

Passport sales were put on hold "because of concerns shared by both the Marshalls and the US governments", Muller said. "There was so much false information being given out about the passports. It was too loose. We needed to stop it." But, the foreign minister added, "It's a good programme if we do it right; if we come up with a way that is more transparent and will attract investors and bring jobs, not just the sale of passports."

Since day one, the Marshall Islands has had trouble with the agents it has hired to sell passports. In the mid-80s, Taiwan-based promoters issued colour brochures extolling the benefits of owning a Marshall Islands passport, including, they said, unrestricted entry into the US, a claim that had people lining up to buy the passports. Unfortunately, the claim was far from the truth – but it has continued to be made by subsequent agents as a way to attract buyers. Under the terms of the Compact of Free Association with the US, Marshall Islanders – like citizens from Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia – have privileges to travel, live, work and study in the US without needing a visa. But these same privileges do not extend to passport buyers. Indeed, the compact specifically states that anyone buying a passport for the purpose of emigrating to the US is prohibited from doing so. And for legitimately naturalised citizens, there is a five-year residency requirement before requests to emigrate will be considered.

While Marshall Islands passports are a ticket to America for Marshall Islanders, they most certainly aren't for naturalised citizens. But that 'technicality' hasn't limited the hype used to sell passports. Since the Marshalls has engaged numerous agents, it's a battle for customers. And a passport that claims to get you direct entry to the US sells better than one that doesn't.

The misleading claims of agents haven't been the only trouble surrounding the passport sales. Since the mid-80s, passport prices have ranged from a high of \$US250,000 to a low of about \$US30,000, involving a variety of schemes to attract long-term investors.

In the early 90s, an Australian promoter, Gregory Symons, began selling passports for the government. He was later charged in Marshall Islands courts and found guilty of embezzling more than \$US1 million. In early 1995, the government's auditor-general criticised the programme, saying "the passport sales pro-

gramme is inadequate with respect to its results and performance because management failed to establish a system to record transactions and safeguard government assets". The auditor-general indicated possible embezzlement and otherwise undocumented use of passport revenues in 1993 and 1994.

In the past couple of years, the US government has expressed increasing concern about the programme. By last year, passport sales had reached close to 1000, according to Marshall Islands officials, who said the vast majority had been sold to citizens of the People's Republic of China. Some passport buyers have attempted to enter the US using Marshall Islands passports, resulting in US immigration confiscating passports and initiating deportation proceedings against the Chinese. This resulted in a consequent backlash that has at times caused Marshall Islanders more difficulty when they enter the US – their passports are sometimes subjected to greater scrutiny to ensure that they are 'real' Marshall Islanders – as well as additional checks when Marshall Islanders apply for US social security or seek employment in the US, activities that didn't raise an eyebrow from US officials during the first years of the compact, beginning in 1986. Muller acknowledges that attempts by Chinese to enter the US using Marshall Islands passports has caused "more hassle to our people".

To be sure, US State Department officials in Majuro said recently that the passport sales would not cause the US to remove the visa-free entry privilege accorded to Marshall Islanders because it is guaranteed by treaty through 2001. What happens after 2001 is open to speculation. In fact, in response to concerns from the US, the Marshall Islands, in 1996, began stamping the passports being sold to Chinese with a "US visa required" announcement to distinguish them from passports used by Marshall Islanders. And then, in August, the Marshalls announced it was definitely halting passport sales.

Still, Muller believes, the programme can be implemented properly. "We need the money," he said, adding that US officials had shared information on model passport sales programmes in progress in other nations. "Many other countries, like the US and Canada, sell passports for investments," he said. "We can do it, too. But we need to sit with professionals and get the programme reorganised." ■

■ ECONOMY

Ministers tackle economy

By **ALFRED SASAKO**

Senior ministers from the South Pacific Forum will meet in Cairns in July to discuss, among other things, trade – the single major issue that served as a catalyst to launching the regional bloc a quarter of a century ago.

The July 10-11 meeting is expected to be attended by economic ministers from Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa.

Under close scrutiny will be what makes for sustainable economic development activities which are based on prudent, economic management, good governance, and which strengthen links with existing and potential joint-venture partner investors from Australia. Australia is hosting the two-day meeting in response to a decision by the South Pacific Forum last year that senior ministers from the region should meet regularly, particularly ministers with finance and economic development portfolios.

South Pacific Forum finance ministers have already met twice and are expected to meet on a regular basis. The Cairns Economic Ministers' Meeting signifies the importance the region's political masters attach to economic reforms and subsequent activities which serve to provide an environment conducive to sustainable development in the longer term. It will be the first time economic ministers from the region meet. No doubt, their discussions will centre on economic activities or lack of it in

the region and why comparable regions of the world have recorded enviable economic successes. Indeed, sluggish economic growth in the Pacific over the past decade has caused some unease within the Forum family, with political leaders demanding answers – answers that do not seem to be forthcoming. The situation has triggered an avalanche of criticism, particularly by

Australia and New Zealand domestic politics as they are to the often volatile politics in the islands. To the ministers, the freer global trading environment underlines the importance of the Cairns meeting and its outcome could have far-reaching consequences for the region. A mechanism to continue this process in the face of the ever-changing global economic environment is expected to be established at the meeting. Continuing changes in the market place, brought on by the creation of the so-called World Trade Organisation (WTO), also underlines the importance of this first-

ever economic ministers' meeting. For this reason, trade will, no doubt, receive equal billing during discussions. Australian officials organising the meeting are considering getting island ministers to meet on a one-on-one basis with Australian industry leaders and businessmen, particularly those who may be considering investing in the FICs. Australia's bilateral trade relations with its 14 island neighbours is certain to come under the microscope – an issue which rarely sits well in an

otherwise matured and neighbourly relationship. A huge trade imbalance in favour of Australia exists today.

The creation of SPARTECA, following the inaugural Forum meeting in 1971, did little to narrow the ever-widening gap in the deficit. Indeed, there are fears within some quarters that the creation of the so-called level playing field rules through decimation of trade barriers will deny island countries preferential treatment provided by SPARTECA and similar arrangements.

The disappearance of these will also render trading positions and their ability to compete as vulnerable and precarious as ever. And so, despite the usual pleasantries expected to be extended to the visiting ministers by their host, the unease over trade imbalances in favour of Australia and New Zealand will remain a contentious issue, perhaps for a long time to come.

QUEENSLAND EXPORTS TO PAPUA NEW GUINEA & OCEANIA

COUNTRY	1989/90 (\$)	1990/91 (\$)	1991/92 (\$)	1992/93 (\$)	1993/94 (\$)	1995/96 (\$)
New Zealand	284,924,000	284,459,000	302,177,000	311,630,000	399,535,000	441,700,000
Papua New Guinea	309,043,000	301,255,000	303,234,000	264,480,000	283,858,000	313,633,000
Fiji	15,775,000	23,596,000	38,067,000	34,449,000	30,233,000	36,078,000
New Caledonia	17,537,000	10,727,000	15,160,000	23,122,000	17,913,000	21,608,000
Solomon Islands	8,893,000	6,415,000	6,386,000	8,256,000	14,962,000	14,005,000
Vanuatu	5,776,000	5,608,000	5,992,000	6,473,000	6,846,000	8,897,000
Guam	3,828,000	6,624,000	14,445,000	9,846,000	6,445,000	6,866,000
French Polynesia	12,555,000	37,864,000	25,938,000	27,182,000	4,526,000	6,498,000
Marshall Islands	711,000	481,000	301,000	924,000	3,453,000	306,000
Fed. States of Micronesia	1,281,000	1,172,000	1,463,000	2,547,000	3,357,000	2,793,000
Western Samoa	2,254,000	2,447,000	2,789,000	2,742,000	2,916,000	2,901,000
Tonga	1,420,000	1,633,000	1,937,000	2,233,000	2,659,000	3,758,000
Kiribati	1,967,000	1,598,000	1,651,000	2,218,000	1,774,000	2,201,000
Nauru	943,000	621,000	1,032,000	1,642,000	1,149,000	802,000
Cook Islands	148,000	435,000	308,000	731,000	835,000	304,000
Tuvalu	190,000	276,000	317,000	222,000	472,000	302,000
Total Oceania	667,245,000	685,211,000	721,197,000	698,697,000	780,933,000	862,652,000

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

PIM GRAPHICS: James Ranuku

Australia and New Zealand – the two major donors in the region – that island members of the Forum are not doing enough. Of concern in particular has been the speed with which island countries appear to be giving Asian interests an open cheque book in terms of access to the region's very few lucrative resources such as forestry. A second concern is an environmental one. Foreign interests operating timber licences in the Pacific, for instance, appear to have little or no regard for the devastation to the environment through their ill-controlled practices. Island governments, on the other hand, argue that, in nearly all instances, they are faced with little choice. Mounting domestic and off-shore debts, high population growth and dwindling foreign aid are but some of the issues they have to contend with everyday – issues they feel are not as critical to

ECONOMY

Trade between Australia and island countries has been going on since the 1800s. Many island countries are, however, beginning to wake up to the fact that Australia's trade relations are deeply entrenched in its revolving aid programme. Considered in that context, Australia's aid is in essence geared to helping island countries pay for the goods and services from their big brother.

Australia's aid programme to the Pacific, excluding PNG, is relatively small. In its first budget handed down last year, Canberra's Liberal/National Party coalition led by Prime Minister John Howard, in fact, lost no time in slashing the region's multi-million-dollar aid programme by 10 per cent.

Canberra argued that the Pacific region came out relatively well ahead of other regions in escaping the razor gang of the new kid on the block. This is perhaps the heart of the argument: Australia's falling aid programme will only serve to widen the gap in the trade deficit.

Take, for example, Australia's much-talked about \$A320-million (\$US245-million) annual budgetary aid to PNG. Together with Australia's \$A4-to-5-billion (\$US3-to-3.8-billion) investment portfolio in PNG, it is a lot of money.

But it is a totally different picture when Australia's export to PNG is taken into account. According to figures provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (see Page 19), PNG imported \$A1.035 billion (\$US.79-billion) worth of Australian goods in the 1995/96 trading year. And the picture is the same for all other island countries receiving Australian aid, if export figures for the state of Queensland are to be taken as a guide. ■

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LABOUR

Fair wages and human rights for Marianas workers



The Reverend Dr Thom White Wolf Fassett, general secretary of the United Methodist General Board and Society (left) and George Miller at a press conference called by Miller to announce the Insular Fair Wage and Human Rights Act - Pictures by Shanta M Bryant, Christian Social Action

By **SUSAN PROKOP**

In the strongest statement ever issued by a US president about labour and immigration conditions in the Northern Mariana Islands [CNMI], President Bill Clinton sent a letter on May 30, 1997 to Governor Froilan Tenorio stating his intent to apply US immigration and minimum wage laws to the commonwealth.

As reasons for asking Congress to change CNMI's laws, Clinton's letter cites labour practices in the islands "inconsistent with our country's values", the "plainly inadequate" minimum wage, "persistent incidents of improper treatment of alien workers" and continued failure of CNMI officials to rectify the problems.

Clinton's letter follows the April introduction into the US House of Representatives by congressman George Miller of the Insular Fair Wage and Human Rights Act. The act would bring

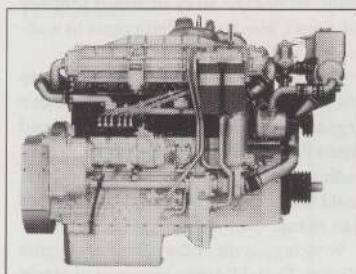
CNMI's minimum wage up to the US minimum wage level (\$5.15 beginning September 1, 1997) by 1999. It would also prohibit textile products manufactured in CNMI from bearing a "made in the USA" label unless workers are paid at least the new minimum wage and the company abides by US fair labour, health and safety standards. The act would also apply tougher US immigration laws on CNMI.

Miller, a Democrat, is the senior member of the minority party on the Resources Committee, which has jurisdiction over CNMI and has been an outspoken opponent of sweatshops on US soil. The measure has been endorsed by several church, labour and human rights groups, including the Asian Pacific Labour Alliance, the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, Asia Pacific Center for Justice and Peace, the US Catholic Conference, and Human Rights Watch.

At a press conference announcing his bill, Miller released a report detailing cir-

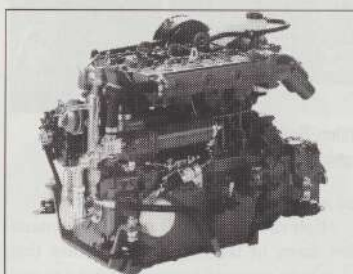
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■ LABOUR

cumstances in which workers from the Philippines, China, Micronesia and elsewhere in the Pacific are brought to CNMI – often under false pretences – and paid as little as 68 cents an hour for farm labour. Miller stated, "These workers are not free, and are not given the same opportunities and protections every other worker in the US or its territories is provided." Noting that companies operating in CNMI can use the "Made in the USA" label on products, Miller observed: "American manufacturers know that the 'Made in the USA' label signifies compliance with basic worker protection laws and human rights guarantees. But in the CNMI, that label is used to conceal systematic exploitation."

When it became a US commonwealth in 1975, CNMI was exempted from US minimum wage laws and was allowed to set its own immigration policy. Over the years, CNMI authorities used these exceptions to US law to import cheap foreign labour to work for low wages in local private industries.

Today, foreign workers constitute half the population and three quarters of the workforce. Meanwhile, the indigenous population suffers double-digit unemployment as people compete for limited government positions out of reluctance to take poorly paid jobs in the private sector.

Mikel Schwab, an assistant US attorney in Guam, asserts that these immigrants contribute to the CNMI economy and should enjoy the rights and protections accorded to anyone living under the US flag. Yet, because of their alien status, they have no political power on the islands and are hounded and threatened whenever they attempt to organise for better working conditions or seek redress for crimes committed



Miller: Fighting for fair wages and human rights for Marianas workers

ted against them by their employers.

High-ranking CNMI officials contend that many of the incidents of abuse that have been reported happened long ago and have been addressed. The CNMI government has also spent \$US1 million on a public relations campaign aimed at the traditionally pro-business Republican majority in the US House of Representatives. Thus far, no Republicans have signed on to support Miller's legislation. Hope for success in Congress may rest with the other congressional player, the US Senate, which passed a CNMI minimum wage bill two years ago only to see it blocked by the house. In the meantime, human rights

advocates and US officials in the region continue to fight the exploitation of immigrants in CNMI with some success, albeit sometimes temporary.

The US federal prosecutor's office in CNMI won back wages for Filipino teachers in a suit against the public school system only to see the teachers deported by the island government the following year. Meanwhile, the US Department of Labour won a \$US12-million judgment against international conglomerate chief Willie Tan, whose garment factories in CNMI have been among the most frequent violators of worker rights.

And there have been individual victories in overcoming CNMI's harsher realities. Dr Eddie del Rosario, a physician in Guam, relates the story of Isabel (not her real name), hired in the Philippines to waitress in a restaurant in Rota.

Arriving in CNMI, she was forced into prostitution by her employer and became pregnant. Her infant son, Kyle, developed a heart defect. She went to Saipan to seek medical help in the US but no hospital would send her with her son because of her alien status.

Working with other human rights activists, Dr del Rosario managed to obtain a humanitarian visa for Isabel and

Kyle to get care in Honolulu. Kyle's life was saved and Isabel met and married an American businessman. Although he prefers to see improvements sooner, Dr del Rosario believes Kyle should go back to CNMI someday and run for governor so that he might end the abuses and corruption once and for all.

Dr del Rosario says it would be "a perfect example of divine justice if that comes to pass". ■



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INTERVIEW

War and peace

During a visit to Papua New Guinea last month, **Kalinga Seneviratne** spoke to John Momis, the regional member of parliament for Bougainville, who was kidnapped by the BRA. Momis suggests devolution of powers as a solution to the crisis. The following is an edited version of the interview recorded two weeks before his kidnapping. When this issue went to press, Momis had not been released

PIM: How do you see the impact of the Bougainville conflict on national politics here?

Momis: It is having a detrimental impact on national politics because some leaders, in their zeal to once and for all solve the Bougainville crisis, are falling easy prey to temptations of using force and unethical means of resolving the crisis by engaging Sandline mercenaries, for example, and by using the military option. The Bougainville crisis has its root causes in alienation, effects of government policies, CRA's Bougainville copper mine activities and their policies, and the general trend in this country today where people's resources, including human resources, are taken for granted as being cheap – whereas our constitution specifically calls upon us to treasure our resources and to use certain strategies based on justice, respect and equity to develop our resources so that the people of PNG, including resource owners, must be seen to be involved in the decision-making in developing our resources. Our constitution specifically talks about doing certain things to prevent such crises from arising. The best way of pre-empting such crises with



John Momis ... suspected kidnapping by BRA

respect to resource development, law and order and other human aspirations and needs in the country is to involve the people. If you don't allow them to be effectively and meaningfully involved, you are planting the seeds of dissension and rebellion.

PIM: The Bougainville crisis started with

landowners not being happy with what they were getting out of mining operations, didn't it? Now, it has become a big military issue. Looking back on the last 10 years can you say what went wrong?

Momis: From the very beginning, the government did not take the people's rights as legitimate owners of these resources seriously. They saw the land and the resources as commodities; that the government could generate revenue from for the country. This is wrong because the resource owners are the people. There is a very strong bond between the people and the land. So, they should not be alienated. People must be the centre of development, they should be involved.

PIM: Since you are resource rich, if Bougainville is to secede, can you have a viable economy?

Momis: Bougainville could easily have a viable economy therefore we can be independent. But current circumstances will not allow Bougainville to become politically independent. First of all, the PNG constitution does not provide for Bougainville to secede. Secondly, the United Nations policy will not allow it. The only ways Bougainville can become independent are by fighting and winning the war or for the PNG government to voluntarily allow Bougainville to become independent. Both situations are not feasible, I don't think.

PIM: How do you see your role in national politics here?

Momis: I'm the leader of the Melanesian Alliance. One of the platforms of our party is to empower people through devolution of government powers and responsibilities – through decentralisation.

We believe it is quite possible – through negotiation – for Bougainville to get autonomy – as much autonomy as is possible – within the parameters of the PNG constitution; that is, giving them freedom and powers to manage their own affairs, but not secede. This is feasible within the PNG constitution.

PIM: When Sir Julius Chan became prime minister he tried to negotiate a settle-

INTERVIEW

ment with the BRA and, it seems, they were the ones who derailed it. How confident are you of a negotiated settlement now?

Momis: I don't view it the same way. I think the government was not sincere in giving Bougainville genuine autonomy within the parameters of the PNG constitution. The government was forcing this so-called provincial government reform, which only talks about giving services to the people without giving them governmental powers. A lot of people saw through what Prime Minister Chan was trying to do. His commitment was not in giving real powers but providing services by maintaining central control of governmental powers.

PIM: After the elections, if a new government comes to power, how would you see a negotiation process beginning?

Momis: Number one, you have to restore services to the people – education, health, infrastructure – as per our constitutional responsibility.

Secondly, you've got to negotiate the issue of autonomy within the constraints of the PNG constitution. The other important issue the government has to face is granting amnesty to those who have committed crimes during the nine-year-old crisis.

That means both sides – the BRA, soldiers, as well as others involved. Both sides are known to have been involved in extrajudicial killings, and so forth. After that, you've got to address the question of the mine as well. You can't blame the Bougainville crisis [for the economic problems of PNG]. The Bougainville crisis is the end result of the ongoing process of alienation our people have been subjected to for a long time. [Operators of the] Bougainville copper mine for a long time refused to listen to the legitimate grievances of landowners, which we were expressing to the government at the time.

Panguna mine was the engine room of the national economy [thus] the government was more interested in listening to the developers, not the people. I hope from the Bougainville crisis the developers may have learned some lessons [and] be a bit more enlightened and sensitive to the aspirations of the resource owners. ■

■ RELATIONS

We're not anti-US, says Marshalls



One of the US radars on Kwajalein Atoll used for missile tracking

Story and photos by **GIFF JOHNSON**

It could hardly have happened at a worse time for the Marshall Islands. The appearance at the end of March of a *New York Times* feature headlined "Resentment in the South Seas: Yankee, go home. Send cash", had Marshalls officials scrambling to assuage Washington and avoid a political backlash that could hurt the Marshalls in the final four years of the Compact of Free Association treaty with the United States. Foreign

Minister Phillip Muller was angered by the latest *New York Times* story depicting Marshall Islanders as anti-American but, at an interview, he downplayed the impact it would have on relations with the US.

The article, by Tokyo bureau chief Nicholas Kristof, reported a conversation in a Majuro bar between Kristof and President Imata Kabua and other Marshall Islands leaders, who were said to be drunk (See *PIM* May, 1997).

The article, the second by the *Times* in a two-week period in March reporting on the same interview, appeared at a sensi-

■ RELATIONS



Eight re-entry vehicles from a "Peacekeeper" (MX) missile streak to their targets around Kwajalein Atoll

tive time as the Marshall Islands attempts to get discussions started with the US about future aid commitments.

The Marshalls is increasingly dependent on declining foreign aid. And the end of the Compact in 2001, ending 15 years of guaranteed funding that to date has totalled about \$US800 million, looms large against the difficult economic situation on the islands.

In the story, Kabua said he didn't like the compact and that it should be renegotiated. A senator in his company is quoted as repeating, "I don't like America." Kristof makes the sweeping statement that "the United States is broadly resented" (in the Marshall Islands) and observes that, "something went badly wrong, for usually it is possible to be resented without paying \$1 billion for the privilege".

It is a conclusion about the Marshallese that irks former ambassador to Washington

Wilfred Kendall, now a senator in the Nitijela (Parliament). "From my experience in the US capital, I know how much damage the *New York Times* article has done to the Marshall Islands and its relations with the US," said Kendall, who represented the Marshalls in the US for more than nine years.

It gives ammunition to opponents of aid to the Marshalls in the Congress, as well as many governments that are lobbying the US to increase aid to their countries, he said. "All responsible people here should react negatively to this story," he said. "Clearly, those involved in the story and the author do not represent our views."

He termed the anti-American comments of Marshallese leaders "irresponsible". But the foreign minister shrugged it off as overblown media editorialising. "The president was only restating what we've said in the past," Muller said. "He just said it in a

different way, but his message is we need to renegotiate the document. The Compact of Free Association (treaty) is not a perfect document and both sides need to sit down and discuss what's worked and what hasn't. But, he added, "the bottom line is we value that relationship with the United States".

He emphasised, however, that it must be based on mutual respect and benefits. "It cannot be a treaty where only one side gets what it wants and the other waits and waits," Muller said.

He said the Marshalls was concerned that some US obligations were not being met. Specifically, he said that:

- \$18 million (for economic development) is owed to the Marshalls under the compact. "After 10 years we're still asking, 'When will it be available?'"
- Nuclear test compensation funds are virtually "depleted and there are thousands of personal injury and land claims still pending".
- Kwajalein landowners continue to complain about second-class treatment and double standards in pay scales for

Marshallese and American workers at the army missile testing base. "These issues are frustrating relations," Muller said. Commenting on the *Times* reference to an anonymous senator who is quoted as saying "I don't like America", Muller said: "It's a free country and any citizen is free to express their views. But that does not mean they are speaking for the government."

Muller wonders why the *New York Times* published two articles very similar in nature about the Marshalls.

He said that, personally, wondered if the *Times* writer "was here to report on us or to try and embarrass us" and that he was frustrated by reporters who came into the Marshalls not knowing the history of the islands and its long relationship with America.

"They refer to money under the Compact as 'foreign aid' but it's not,"

■ RELATIONS



Radar, telemetry equipment and infrared cameras for tracking incoming missiles

Muller said. "The money was paid for leases at the Kwajalein missile range, and for moral and legal obligations to the people (of the Marshall Islands).

"Two friends can disagree. We don't always see eye to eye but, at the end of the day, the relationship is good for us and good for them. We want to reassure our

friends in Washington that we attach value to our relationship."

Kendall doesn't believe it will be that easy to repair the damage. The anti-US comments play right into the hands of people in Washington who want to cut back funding to the Marshall Islands, Kendall said. "There are a lot of new faces on the

Hill who have no historical ties to the Marshalls," he said. "These type of comments give them ammunition against the Marshall Islands. It can really hurt us."

It will take time to defuse the resentment in Washington to the story, he said.

"There's a lot of work to do to get our image back," he said. ■

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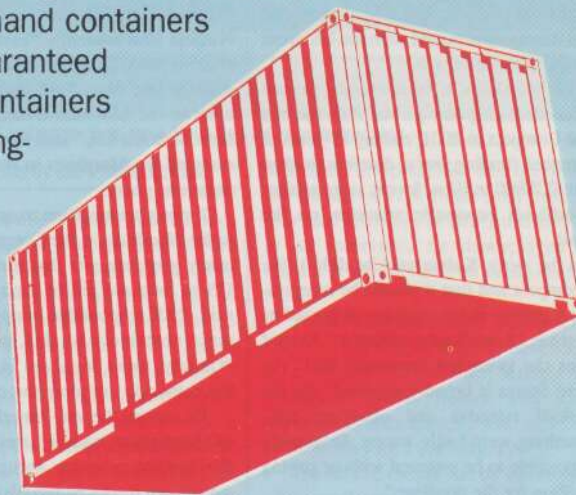
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■ SPORTS

Racism at play

By LILI TUWAI

Should racial and religious vilification be accepted as an intricate part of sporting life? Should the past approach to "keep it [sledding] on the field" remain?

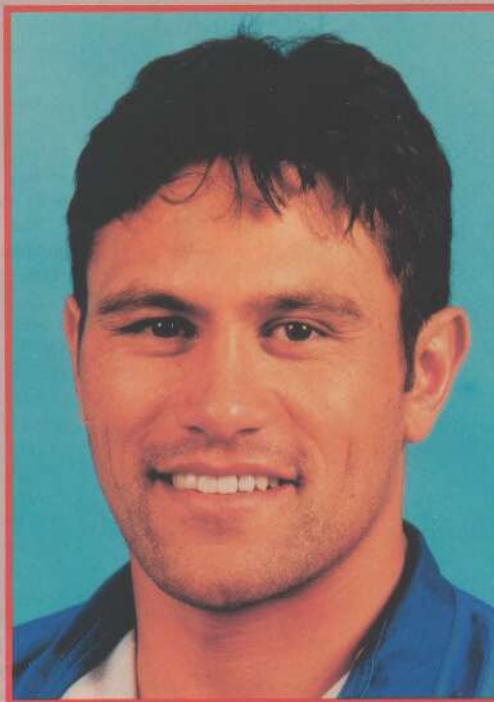
These are some of the questions that Australian sporting organisations and sportspeople have been seriously grappling with. According to Fijian rugby league player Eparana Navale, recent controversy around these issues will work to deter players who practise racism on the field.

"The possibility of the offending player receiving heavy fines will make such players think again," said Navale, who has lived in Sydney for three years. Since switching clubs to Parramatta Eels earlier this year, Navale says he has not had to deal with racist sledding as he had previously.

The first half of 1997 ushered in a clear message from black sportsmen in Australia. An increasing number of black footballers in all four major codes – Australian football, rugby league, rugby union and soccer – have let the nation know they will not accept any level of disrespect on or off the field. Today, in Australia, young black players are enlisting into the football codes at a rate unimaginable a decade ago.

Various clubs throughout New South Wales have sizeable portions of Aboriginal and South Pacific Islanders in their teams. Many of these players have made it clear that they expect support from whites in order to help combat racial abuse.

The stand from black players had led sporting bodies to not only take steps to stamp out racial discrimination on the field but eradicate it from the minds and mouths of those who engage in such practices.



John Timu: Sledding "is a big part of the game"

Leading the way in dealing with the issue of on-field racial abuse is the Australian Football League (AFL). According to AFL's Melbourne-based communications manager, Tony Peek, an incident in 1995 between players Damian Monkhorst, from Collingwood, and Aboriginal Michael Long, from Essendon, forced the AFL into taking a no-nonsense stand to support their black players.

Long claimed he had been racially harassed and abused by Monkhorst. His claims were later proven to be correct but, says Peek, "unfortunately at that time we didn't have any system in place to be able to deal with the issue of on-field racism".

Peek told *Pacific Islands Monthly* that AFL would be the first to admit that, at that time, white Australians' understanding of

the issues were minimal because they had not been exposed to that type of thing before. He said, "We did not understand what it meant to be part of a minority group in society and be abused because of your skin colour or race."

AFL's racial and religious vilification rules apply to players from any background but, to date, the focus has been on Aboriginal players because five out of six cases reported have involved players from Aboriginal background being racially abused.

There has only been one complaint that has been dealt with through confidential mediation involving a player from another ethnic background although there have been comments in the press from players of Italian and Croatian backgrounds expressing disgust toward racial abuse hurled at them by players or someone in the crowd. There is widespread belief in Australia that racism in sport is not nearly as bad as in other Western countries, and that an equal playing field exists for all players. But,

according to Professor Colin Tatz, "racism in Australia has been as bad or, in some instances, worse than in South Africa or America".

He prefaces his statement by saying, "The struggle for Aboriginal people in sport has been an incredibly difficult one." Tatz is the author of two books, *Obstacle Race* and *Black Diamonds*, which document the involvement of Aboriginal people in sports. Tatz suggests that Australia has a lot of work to do in the sporting world before claims such as those can become reality.

Twenty-seven-year-old Maori John Timu is in his third season with the Canterbury Bulldogs. Timu started off

Continued on page 45

■ ADVERTISING FEATURE

■ SOLOMON ISLANDS

Looking back ...



Solomon Islands Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni

This month, Solomon Islands celebrates 19 years of independence and, as it does so, the people will look back on its history and the events leading up to independence.

The second largest island chain in the region, the Solomons has a population of around 350,000 spread across an area of 28,530 sq km.

The capital, Honiara, is on Guadalcanal, known the world over as the site for some of the bloodiest battles of World War II.

The country is a scattered double chain of islands which extend 1667 km in a

southeasterly direction from the strife-ridden Bougainville in Papua New Guinea.

Some of the islands are rugged, heavily wooded and mountainous; others are tiny, low-lying coral atolls.

Much of the Solomons is covered with dense rainforest, with mangrove swamps occurring along parts of the coast. Most islands have coral reefs and lagoons around them. Many have formed around an initial volcano cone which has since been overlaid with colourful, level-topped terraces of coral rock. Other islands are former reefs lifted high out of the water by volcanic activity. Natural vegetation in the

large islands is mainly dense rainforest. Mangroves are prolific around river mouths and along stretches of the coastline. A variety of introduced tropical trees and shrubs have proliferated.

Native animals are few and consist mainly of possums, bats, different types of rats, and mice. There are over 150 species of birds and many varieties of insects – brilliantly coloured butterflies and spiders – toads and frogs. Over 170 species of reptiles, including turtles, crocodiles, lizards and snakes, are found here.

The reefs are home to hundreds of species of tropical fish, colourful coral and other marine life. There are many varieties of rare and poisonous shells. Deep-sea fish, whales, dolphins and dugongs frequent these waters.

The Solomons is divided into eight provinces, each headed by a premier with a secretary as overall supervisor of the administration of the province. The provinces are Guadalcanal, Central Malaita, Makira/Ulwa, Isabel, Temotu, Western, Choiseul and Bellona. Guadalcanal is the country's largest province.

In the early 1560s, rumours swept Spanish-occupied Peru of the existence of a group of islands, or even a great continent, far to the west in the Pacific. Inca legends told of a sea journey made in the mid-15th century to these islands by one of their kings.

In 1567, Don Alvaro de Mendana left Peru to find the legendary islands and, on February 7 of the following year, sighted a large island and named it Santa Isabel.

On August 11, Mendana sailed back to Peru with descriptions of the island.

Initially, the name used by Mendana and his crew was "Western Islands" but about two years later, the name "Yslas de Salomon" or "Solomon Islands" became more commonly used.

Many whalers visited the archipelago from 1798 onwards. They were followed by the sandalwood traders who came between the 1840s and late 1860s. They bought pigs, turtle shells and mother-of-pearl shells in the Solomon Islands to barter for sandalwood with islanders in Vanuatu (New Hebrides at the time). The ships then sailed to China where the sandalwood was sold at very high prices.

Another island product which was popular with the Chinese was beche-de-mer. They paid high prices for it even though



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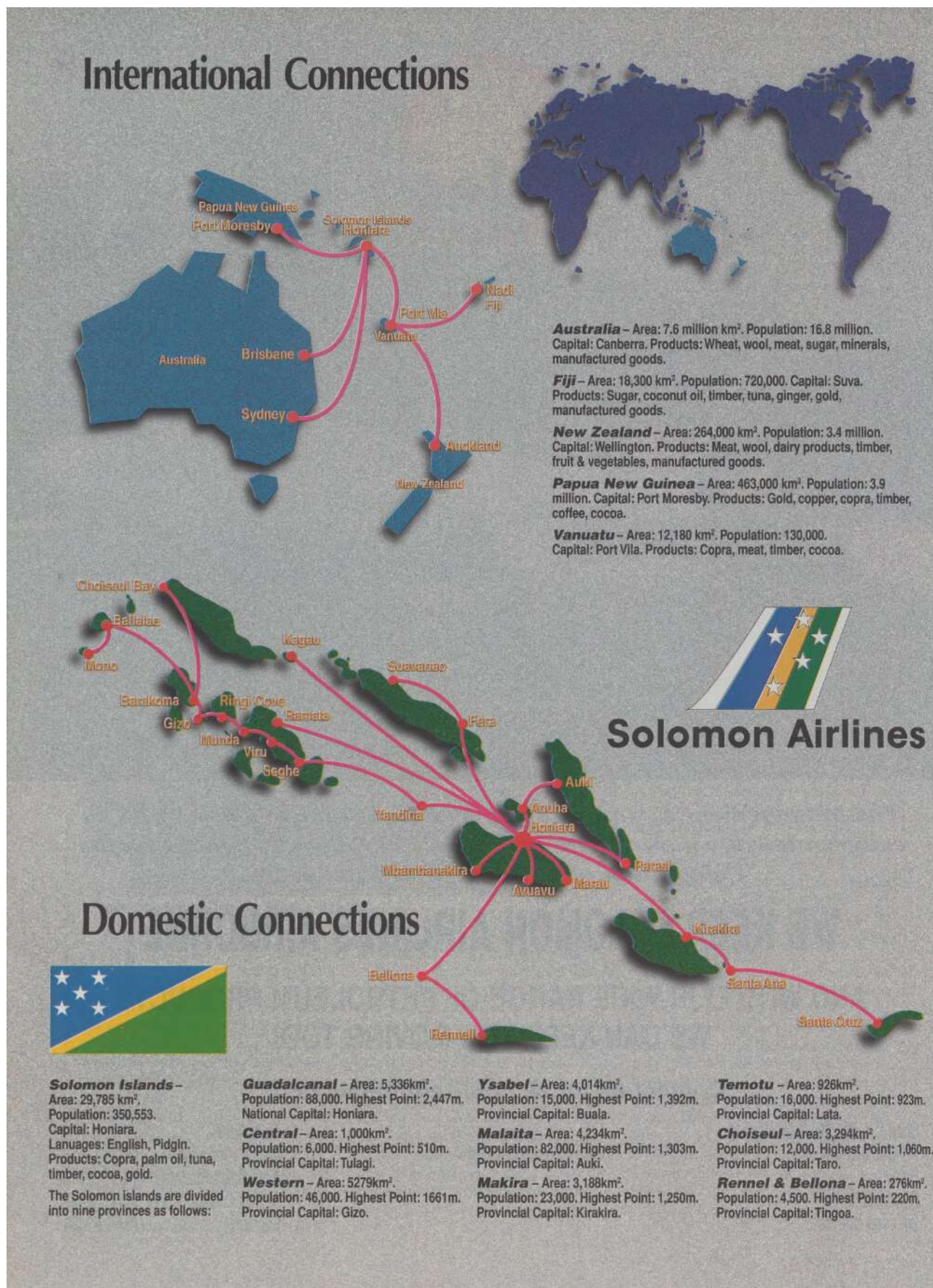
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International Airport Information and Allowances Guide

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Distance to City	10Km	25Km	10Km	11Km	6Km	8Km	14Km
Bus Fare	SBD10.00	NZD10.00	AUD6.00	PGK5.00	VUV100	—	AUD8.00
Taxi Fare	SBD30.00	NZD35.00	AUD20.00	PGK20.00	VUV800	FJD8.00	AUD25.00
Airport Tax	SBD40.00	NZD20.00	AUD27.00	PGK15.00	VUV2000	FJD20.00	AUD27.00
Duty Free Allowance	2 litres 200 cigs	1.125 litres 200 cigs	1 litre 250 cigs	1 litre 200 cigs	1 litre 200 cigs	2 litres 500 cigs	1 litre 250 cigs
Exchange Rate	1USD=3.50SBD	1NZD=2.60SBD	1AUD=2.90SBD	1PGK=2.70SBD	100VUV=3.35SBD	1FJD=2.60SBD	1AUD=2.90SBD

* Information as shown is to be used as a guide only and is subject to change without notice.

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they were in abundance. On October 6, 1893, Britain claimed a protectorate over the southern part of the island group. This claim was extended in 1897 and again in 1898. Education and health issues were left to the missions, as money was scarce.

During the second world war, the country was used as a base by the Japanese. After the war ended, recovery was slow. As Tulagi was gutted, the Quonset-hut township of Honiara was replaced as the capital.

Honiara is the main port of entry. It is built on both sides of Point Cruz where Mendana anchored in 1568.

It is also a post-World War II town, which stands on the site of a former coconut plantation. The Japanese had a small base on the site in 1942 and later the Americans built a much larger one after defeating the Japanese in a bitter struggle. The post-war civil administration used many of the wartime army buildings as offices and quarters until the early 1960s when both the government and private sector carried out a vigorous building programme.

The early 1960s were years of political awakening in the Solomons, leading to the creation of an elected governing council in 1970.

The British Solomon Islands protectorate was renamed the Solomon Islands five years later and gained independence on July 7, 1978.

Solomon Islands is a constitutional monarchy with the British monarch as the head of state, represented in the country by the governor-general appointed on the recommendation of parliament every five years.

With an agro-based economy, income is largely derived from goods and services performed with cash transactions.

About 84 per cent of the people live in rural areas and are self-sufficient in traditional foods – root crops, vegetables and fruits – as well as fishing and livestock husbandry.

Most settlements are coastal and close to freshwater springs. Each family has a small coconut plantation for copra production and cash income, and a few scattered vegetable plots. There are often bushes and rainforests nearby which provide traditional crops, wild nuts, ferns and fruits, as well as material for thatched houses and canoes.

Solomon Islands' main natural resources are its large number of commercially useful fruit trees, forests, fisheries

and minerals. Over the years, there has been a considerable diversification from a copra-based, one-product rural economy of the colonial era. The seas have become one

Islands has many of the natural resources required for successful eco-tourism. Approximately two-thirds of children attend school with church-run schools a



Japanese war memorial



Reminder from second world war

of the country's principal resources. Fish, especially tuna, has become the largest export earner; timber the second; while copra, cocoa and palm oil come jointly third.

Tourism is growing and has potential but currently provides only a minor contribution to gross domestic product. Solomon

vital part of the education system. The overall objective of the education system is to provide a coordinated programme which can meet the country's needs for skilled labour as well as provide basic education suited to the village environment where the majority of the population resides. Primary education is not yet compulsory and chil-



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For more information please contact:

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Solomon Islands ... living tradition

dren between the ages of six and nine are admitted into Grade One. There is a preparatory grade for children between the ages of five and eight.

The secondary school system is composed of national and provincial schools. Eight national schools provide an academic-oriented education over a five-year period which leads to the Solomon Islands School Certificate at the end of Form Five.

The provincial schools have a more vocation-oriented syllabus catering for those students who choose to live in their village rather than pursue tertiary education or employment in urban centres.

Approximately 30 per cent of students who complete primary school, attend one

or the other of secondary schools. Archaeological research has revealed that Solomon Islands has been inhabited for 3000 years. Material excavated on Santa Ana, Guadalcanal and on Gawa in the Reef Islands has been radio-carbon dated to about 1000 BC.

Red pottery thought to have been related to Lapita ware was also found on Santa Ana, where it was estimated to be from between 140 and 670 AD. Similar pottery has been found on the Reef Islands.

The immense variety of the Solomon Island culture and customs reflects the existence of 107 indigenous languages and dialects among a population of only 346,000. Officially, there are 63 indigenous

languages and a further 44 dialects. In addition there are three new languages. They are Solomon Islands Pidgin, English and Gilbertese. It's quite common for Melanesians from a few kilometres apart to speak different languages. Dances, ceremonies, funerals, weddings, initiation ceremonies, status and authority often differ from island to island.

The Solomon Islands, like most other Pacific Island countries prides itself in having a rich and diverse culture. Cultural displays are colourful and varied, with islands having their own unique dances and costumes.

Weaving is part of Solomons tradition and most weaving is done without looms, using split bamboo, vines, cane and dried coconut and pandanus leaves. Bukaware baskets, trays, tablemats and coasters are made in several parts of the Solomons, especially Guadalcanal.

The word *kastom*, meaning custom, is used when villagers refer to traditional beliefs and land ownership. Songs, dances and stories about the past are still common. They are usually to do with war, harvesting and hunting or the natural world.

Another word which is used frequently is *tabu* (taboo). *Tabu* is a very important part of village and island life although rules will vary from place to place. Places which are traditional *tabu*, can only be visited with permission from the owners.

Religion plays an important role in most communities, with the church being the central focus in most villages. Christians make up 95 per cent of the population.

Solomon Islanders love sports and take their soccer, basketball, rugby, tennis and athletics quite seriously. Activities such as fishing and swimming are more necessity 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.

As Solomon Islands, like other countries of the world heads into the next millennium, it faces the similar challenge of other island countries – how does it enter the new century as a nation that is progressive and able to make an impact on the world scene while at the same time managing to conserve the necessary and important facets of its cultural heritage. ■

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■ VANUATU

17 years after birth - innocence is lost

The problems and the solutions



Vohor (left) and Carlot (right) ... "The war hatchet is buried" - Picture by Patrick Decloitre

Reports by **Patrick Decloitre**

Just like a 17-year-old teenager, Vanuatu has just gone through another phase in its growth, some even say it has lost its innocence. After 17 years of independence, Vanuatu's last 12 months have been marked by political instability. Since late 1995's general elections, governments have changed four times,

motions of no confidence are something the public is no longer surprised by. A report from Vanuatu's ombudswoman, Marie-Noelle Ferrieux-Patterson, says there has been no gynaecologist/obstetrician since December, 1993 despite offers from Britain to provide assistance.

She adds that "between 1991 and 1992, the number of deaths of babies at birth doubled, and tripled the years after - following the departure of experienced midwives and

the absence of a gynaecologist in the country". But all is not bleak - there are signs of a willingness to take steps to remedy the current problems. Under the auspices of the Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB), Vanuatu has embarked on measures to define and later implement a comprehensive reform programme, of which the aims include a larger recognition of the private sector and a 'rightsizing' of its public service. Since the last general elections, it seems that Vanuatu has

become more mature; paradoxically, the context of political instability has entailed more freedom of the local press.

When Vohor took office last September, he pledged to promote more freedom in the media.

Ten months later, it seems that the words have been followed by deeds. Political interference in the government-run media has significantly decreased and a Pres Klab blong Vanuatu was formed last year. The island state is also to host this month's Pacific Island News Association (PINA) regional convention. Vohor's first secretary, in charge of media, Antoine Pikioune, recently told a press meeting here that because of political instability in the past 18 months, every party and its politicians had at one time or another been in opposition, thus realising the importance of free media to be able to convey their views to the public. And, in all this chaos, Pikioune admitted that the media had shown they were responsible, provided they could do their job without political interference.

As President Jean-Marie Leye told parliament while opening its first ordinary session last May: "1996 has been a hard year for the nation but, at the same time, lead-

ers should learn a lot of lessons from it. I ask leaders to find every possible way to encourage investment, including from overseas.

This will help us reduce our social problems, like unemployment, which rises all the time. "In the interest of the nation, it is everyone's duty to ensure stability remains in this country at all times to create an environment which will welcome investors". ■

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■ VANUATU

Vohor and Carlot reconcile

Late May, Vanuatu Prime Minister Serge Vohor carried out a major reshuffle in his government, getting rid of Donald Kalpokas and his Vanuaaku Pati (VP) and welcoming back old foes Barak Sope and Maxime Carlot to form a new majority and revamped cabinet.

In a surprise move, Vohor dumped coalition partner and deputy Kalpokas, whose Vanuaaku Pati (VP) had just gained the support of five more MPs, totalling 20 in the 50-seat house.

The move marked Vohor and Carlot's formal reconciliation after an 18-month battle for prime ministership.

"There's no more 'him and I', there's only UMP. The war hatchet is buried," Vohor and Carlot both said. Vohor, who came to power nine months ago after a vote of no-confidence in then Prime Minister

Carlot, had formed a first cabinet in October with Sope, only to sack him two weeks later and form a new government with VP leader Kalpokas, whom he appointed deputy prime minister and minister for education.

Kalpokus is now again leader of a one-party opposition, a position he has held many times.

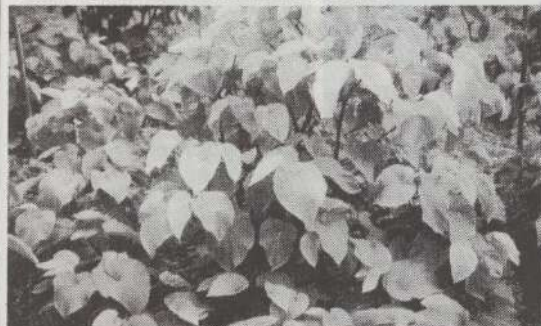
The new coalition consists of Vohor's Union of Moderate Parties (UMP), which reunited with Carlot's Natora faction and holds 21 seats, independent father Walter Lini's NUP (three seats), and Sope's MPP (five seats). It holds a 29-member majority in the house.

In spite of Vohor's offer, Carlot declined the foreign portfolio for the sake of UMP's reunion and a balanced representation in the cabinet of MPs from all regions of Vanuatu. Sope was appointed deputy prime minister and minister for commerce and trade. ■

The government

- Prime Minister: Serge Vohor - Union of Moderate Parties (UMP)
- Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Commerce and Trade: Barak Sope - Melanesian Progressive Party (MPP)
- Lands and Natural Resources: Sato Kilman - MPP
- Finance: Willie Jimmy - UMP
- Transport, Civil Aviation, Telecommunications: Demis Lango - UMP
- Education: Louis Carlot - UMP-Natora (Carlot's faction)
- Health: Charlie Nako - UMP-Natora
- Justice, Culture and Women's Affairs: Walter Lini - National United Party (NUP)
- Home Affairs: Robert Karie - NUP
- Foreign Affairs: Vital Sokso - UMP-Natora
- Agriculture: Amos Andeng - UMP-Natora

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■ VANUATU

A baccalaureate of the South Pacific ?

Jean Geoffroy, from the French ministry of education, spent two weeks in Vanuatu in April to assess the education system and explore possibilities of creating a South Pacific version of the French baccalaureate.

In practice, if the concept eventuates, it would set the rules for a new examination at the end of secondary education.

"Vanuatu's linguistic history is complicated and students must be open to all systems," Geoffroy says, adding that if this new examination is to come into existence, it must be recognised by all further education institutions of the region – English-speaking and French-speaking."

After his stay in Vanuatu, where he met education officials, Geoffroy met officials from the Université Française du Pacifique (UFP) and asked them to liaise with other institutions of the region, the main one being the University of the South Pacific (USP) based in Suva. It, however, remains unclear as yet what this new diploma will consist of: "There could be something like the French baccalaureate, but there could also be a professional, more technical, 'bac' because, here, technical skills are very important. One thing for sure, it has to take into account the two teaching channels currently existing in Vanuatu, that is, French and English."

In Vanuatu, a former French-British condominium of the New Hebrides and independent in 1980, the linguistic legacy still remains: the two languages officially recognised by the constitution in education are French and English, hence, according to Geoffroy, the possibility of coming up with an examination in two languages – but one not necessarily being a verbatim translation of the other.

"It's also important to be in touch with the economic sector, the administrations, the private sector, through technical schools." "It's going to have to be a compromise. In any case, this is a country of compromises. It's only through regional cooperation that we can manage a regional education system."

■ ADVERTISING FEATURE

■ VANUATU

Michael Visi becomes Vanuatu's first indigenous bishop

It was a national event throughout Vanuatu: April 13, the whole country celebrated the ordination of Michel Visi, the first indigenous bishop of the Roman Catholic was appointed last December by Pope John Paul II.

From northern Ambae Island (250 kilometres north of Port Vila), he takes over from American Francis Lambert, who has reached 75, the age limit set by canon law.

The new Vanuatu bishop, who studied in seminaries in neighbouring New Caledonia and Fiji's Pacific Regional Seminary (of which he was rector until last year), obtained a degree in canon law in Canada and will be in charge of a diocese covering the 80 scattered islands of this Y-shaped archipelago.

Vanuatu's Catholic mission has 14 local priests and now, over 110 years after its arrival in Vanuatu, an indigenous bishop.

On the eve of this historic event, Visi said he was ready.

"I prepared myself especially. I spent a 30-day retreat in Australia with the Jesuits. I think the mission of a bishop requires a lot of tranquility in heart and mind."

On the said day, over 1000 people from every outer island of Vanuatu and over 200 overseas visitors converged on the capital.

Tribal dancers from all over the archipelago (including Visi's home island of Ambae) came in hundreds to perform before the new local bishop.

Vanuatu's linguistic and religious legacy is strongly related to the presence of missionaries who were often, in the early last century, the first permanent white settlers in these South Pacific islands.

The celebrations were a harmonious mix of liturgy and traditional tribal dances, once labelled "evil" and banned by the missionaries.

The celebrations, which lasted two

days, started with the official ordination on Port Vila's largest open ground, the Independence Park. On Sunday, Visi said his first mass.

In Vanuatu (170,000 inhabitants for some 80 inhabited islands), which defines itself in its constitution as a Christian country, churches are grouped into a council with the prominent ones being the Roman Catholic (around 22,000 believers), Presbyterian and Anglican churches.

The Catholic church, in Vanuatu since 1887, makes its presence known through its primary and secondary mission schools. Over the years, it has developed a reputation of tolerance: the first priests were much more tolerant than Presbyterians or Anglicans, who often banned tribal and traditional practices, saying they "belonged to the Devil".

Former Deputy Prime Minister and a pastor with the Presbyterian Church, Sathy Regenvanu, after watching this weekend's celebrations and profuse tribal dances, admires this tolerance.

"One thing the Catholic church has been able to do which we [the Presbyterians], for example, haven't been able to do as effectively is to go to the grassroots and live and share and be involved with the local people, without telling [them] to do away with their customs, culture and tradition," Regenvanu said.

"What they [Presbyterians] did was to tell the people that their way of life – their culture – was not compatible with Christianity, therefore they had to make a complete break with those before they could be accepted into the church."

The nuncio, Irish Wellington-based Archbishop Patrick Connevey, officially represented Pope John Paul II. He saw in the event a sign of maturity in the Roman Catholic Church.

"The episcopal ordination of a son of this country shows an acknowledged maturity [of the church]," he said, adding "*papa god i blessem Vanuatu*" (God blesses Vanuatu) in the local pidgin.

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Post Fiji reviews operations one year later



Peni Mau ... "We have become a better and more efficient company"

A year ago, Fiji Post and Telecommunications (FPTL) split into two separate entities. Post Fiji became a separate company and set out to make it on its own.

Looking back a year after the split, Post Fiji's general manager, Peni Mau, sees the survival of the company as commendable.

He said Post Fiji had become stronger and was able to concentrate better on its weaker areas of business now that it was on its own.

"We have become a better and more efficient company."

The government of Fiji decided to corporatise the company in a bid to boost the private sector and the economy. At the

time, the government said its decision to corporatise reflected its policy to divest itself from those activities which would best be undertaken on a commercial basis.

When Post Fiji was part of FPTL, Mau said, the telecommunications division was regarded as the provider of greater and better services.

"Despite that, we had always maintained a high standard of customer satisfaction and the separation equipped us to fully handle and carry out our service requirements to a more reliable and effective degree.

"We will never look at mail the same way again since our separation from Telecom. Where we were once a supplement to the major money earner – Telecom – mail has become the core business in its own right."

He said the split had enabled Post Fiji to release its energy.

"When Post was part of Telecom, we were overshadowed by Telecom. And now, because of the split, we are able to focus our energy on our priority and objective – and what we really need," Mau maintains.

"As a result, financially, Post has been able to go from strength to strength. The level of profit which the company is feeling now has never been experienced before.

"This is due mainly to the changes that have been brought about."

"One of the things which was given a lot of attention was bringing in the high trust culture – where having trust and confidence in the employees was one of the key ways to getting the job done efficiently.

"At Post Fiji, we have woken up to the concept of a stand-alone entity. We are now an independent company and our future depends on how well we can perform in the postal business, and realising how important the customer is."

Mau said that in the past or in "civil service days", the organisation was run on a laissez faire basis, but that this approach was gradually being phased out.

"Our focus is gradually shifting to one that is customer driven and our mission is to seek, satisfy and retain our customers."

To make this possible, staff have been put through vigorous training programmes and, Mau says, this has reflected greatly in their work.

"People are getting efficient and are actually enjoying the work. In addition, we

■ ADVERTISING FEATURE

have brought in new blood who will act as catalysts in establishing the customer-first culture."

Besides facilitating a customer-oriented culture within the staff, plans are also in the pipeline to take on board and utilise the relevant technology that will help improve the standard and quality of service to customers.

There are several other plans to make the postal business a success and one is the one-stop-shop concept for post offices around the country, the general manager says.

"This concept will mean that customers will be able to get all services under one roof. They will be able to pay all their bills at a post office as well make payments for department stores and [carry out] other business.

"There will also be the post shops."

The post shop concept has already been implemented in all post offices around the country and this was one of the things which helped make the company more profitable, according to Mau.

All of Post Fiji's 51 post offices – both

in rural and urban areas – have a post shop.

"Twenty-seven of these post offices were running at a loss and, with the introduction of the post shops, they are now breaking even.

"This year, I am even looking at some of these post offices making profits – something which will be another achievement for the company."

Among the changes apparent since the split, Post Fiji has been able to offer a range of products new to Fiji.

"A lot of companies are competing for a market when there is no market, but I believe my company is competing for opportunities. We look at what opportunity is available and then create products which will suit the market.

"As a result, you see, in the last year, we launched quite a few products and the response to these products surprised even us. It shows that all the products and services that we have lodged have experienced very high rates of growth. It also shows that the demand is there.

"In the past, marketing of postal products were non-existent. However, now that

Post Fiji is forging its own way and, with the public's high expectations, marketing has become an essential tool."

Some of the new products which Post Fiji launched over the past year are:

- **International Fastpost.** Launched last year, this service allows mail to get on the first available international flight as quickly as possible to its destination from any major town in Fiji.

- **Adpost** is Post Fiji's addressed circular advertising. It is a mass advertising medium designed to help businesses, non-profit organisations and church groups reach their customers by mailing all their flyers, brochures, catalogues and circulars.

- **Business Reply Post** makes it easier for businesses to get responses from their customers. Each business supplies self-addressed postage envelopes and business cards based on specific requirements. A major benefit of this service is that users get faster replies and orders. Postage is only paid for customers who respond.

- **Prepaid Post Envelopes** were introduced to provide customers with a more convenient and efficient mailing system. It

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- Messenger Post is Post Fiji's newest service. It is for urgent, same-day deliveries. Currently, this service is only available in the capital city of Suva but will soon be available at other major centres throughout Fiji.

Post Fiji also acts as agent for a number of organisations for which it provides various services and included in its services is mail management, whereby Post Fiji collects, collates, stamps, cancels and dispatches statements as and when required by a company. This service is carried out at

fully secured premises to ensure total confidentiality of the statements. Mail management provides customers with cost-effective means of statement collating and processing; increases the efficiency of existing staff; and is time efficient in processing and dispatching of statements.

The telegraphic money order, or TMO service, has been improved with less documentation with the newly designed carbon documents.

This has made the process faster and more efficient, Mau states.

Mau said the split had also allowed Post Fiji to look more closely at the services it

was providing and at ways of making them more attractive and efficient. One of the improvements Mau points out is Post Fiji's mail operations.

"Modern sorting frames and face-up tables standardise and speed up the process of sorting mail. They have created a comfortable, work-friendly environment for the staff. Thus, productivity has increased," he said.

And shifts have been changed to match delivery promises. As a result, carry-overs are greatly eliminated, allowing for flexibility to improve existing products and introduce new ones, Mau says.

"There has also been an increase in the number of vehicles in our fleet to meet the new delivery schedules.

"The security on mails has been emphasised with the installation of cameras in the mailroom.

"More post boxes have been installed to meet the demands of our customers. In addition, box holders are regularly advised of their uncleared mail." But all the improvements are not being carried out behind the counter.

Post Fiji's new management also brought about a number of physical changes to match what it believes is the organisation's new direction.

Fiji Post has a new look, a new logo and a new image.

"The general post office has undergone renovations. It now flaunts a modern, new look that portrays the new professional image. The bold colours of blue and red, along with the innovative logo, now grace all our post offices and postal agencies throughout Fiji.

"We have changed from being a government-type office look to a commercial look. This does help." And, despite economic problems in Fiji, business was doing really well, Mau said.

"This is supported by the fact that the kind of money the company is making in this quarter is what it usually makes around the few months in any year which were usually the peak season for mail – being Christmas and New Year."

He said post was a very competitive business and they were working very hard to keep up with the market.

"You name any service and product I have and there is a competitor. We are in no way a monopoly but we are trying hard – and achievement over the past year is a proof of our hard work." ■

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■ SPORTS

Continued from page 27

playing rugby union for Provincial in Otago and then spent five years with the All Blacks before he made the switch to rugby league.

"A lot can happen in the heat of the moment on a footy field.

For example, in heated situations, players can lash out and punch someone – whereas if they were in the street they would be had up for assault. So, there are a lot of things that we really have to put in perspective when we are looking at sports, especially physical sports like league and rugby.

"I have been fortunate enough not to be a part of sledging or have been sledged against, but I have seen and heard of circumstances when players have definitely been sledged and it is a big part of the game."

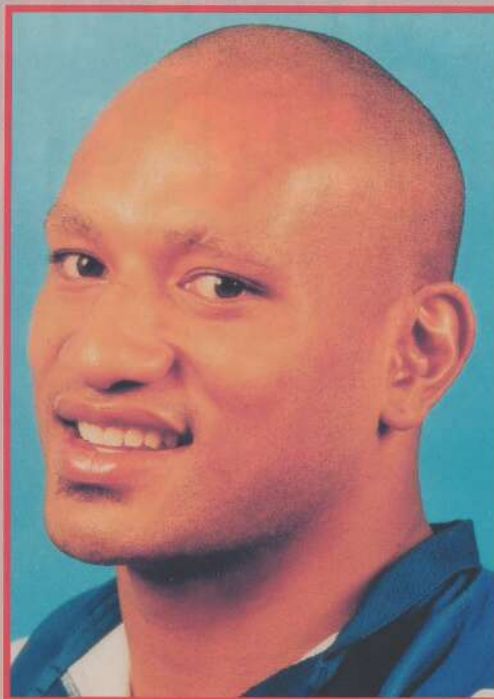
Another very popular Canterbury Bulldogs player is Tongan Solomon Haumono. He states that, while working on a professional level, he has not experienced racial abuse but admits that he was subject to it on occasion during games when he was younger. Haumono said that, although he hadn't personally come across racial sledging at the professional level, he knew players who had.

"Some guys use it just to distract the game, but I have always been taught the best strategy is the player's skill."

Super League's Auckland Warrior team mates, Western Samoans Joe Vagana and Tony Toimavav, have strong opinions regarding the use of sledging in a game. "Sledging has long been part of the game," says Vagana. "For 80 minutes everybody is really competitive and, at times, it brings the verbal abuse stuff out – but under no circumstances should racial sledging come into it." Toimavav expressed that he had had limited experience with racial sledging. "You get the odd bloke that does make racial comments but usually after having a beer, then everybody gets along with everybody else."

One Australian Rugby League (ARL) player declares: "I couldn't really give two hoots about the whole thing.

"It's just part of the game," says Sydney City's part-Chinese, part-Papua New Guinean halfback, Adrian Lam. Lam said



Solomon Haumono ... "The best strategy is the player's skill"

that he often experienced racial abuse on the field but was prepared to ignore it. Gold Coast Chargers Aboriginal halfback Wesley Patten made international headlines earlier this year when he successfully sued the NSW Police Department for \$A25,000 (\$US17,600) after being called a "coon" by police on a national television programme. Patten says he would accept some forms of sledging during a game but would definitely not accept racial abuse.

In a letter circulated throughout AFL clubs in April, Wayne Jackson, the chief executive officer, stated: "While the terms of our racial and religious vilification rule – as recommended to us by such organisations as the Human Rights Commission and Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria – require confidential mediation to be part of the process, it would appear that a small minority of players has not heeded the message. Put simply, on-field racial abuse is not acceptable and we urge all players, coaches and clubs to understand our position on this matter.

"In the broader community and work place, abusing someone on the basis of his race or religion is against the law. More importantly, it is against the Australian

ideal of a 'fair go' for everyone. We believe football can play a major role in educating all sections of the community, with particular emphasis on the children of Australia, and that racial abuse has no place in our society."

Tatz believes that if the Australian population had a better understanding of Australia's complex history, it might help shape some of the ignorant attitudes that exist. "You listen to some of these people and you would think that Aboriginal people have always been playing Aussie rules and rugby league. Basically, Aboriginal people began to play rugby league in the late 50s and early 60s. Really, the avalanche of players only begins in the 80s and 90s."

Toimavav said he was not too clear about the colonial history of Aboriginal Australia but stressed that if Aboriginals were being harassed, then that was serious. He added that as a Pacific Islander in this country "I am a bit removed from what has actually been going on". "Sports is good for those who make it," expresses Tatz. Drawing a parallel with the Michael Jordan phenomenon, he said: "There has been a study done – for every 100,000 black kids that think that sports is the avenue to social mobility, one makes it.

"There is one Tiger Woods and maybe a dozen Michael Jordans and footballers, basketballers and so on. If you really look at the incredible numbers who try to go that route, you see what kind of a trap sport is for African-Americans or indigenous Australians who believe that the sports world is the way to succeed.

"For everyone that makes it, there are several thousands that don't. Sport is a way for social mobility, for success – a couple of dozen at the very top, but that is about it."

Racism within sports is something that can be beaten down by the individuals who are the victims, says West Indian Keith Connor, the head coach for the NSW Institute of Sports.

"If you continue to let people get to you with racist taunts, they will continue to use it. But if you get up and do what you are supposed to do out on the field, you will not be disadvantaged."

Heartening times for Pacific soccer



By **ATAMA RAGANIVATU**

Another milestone in the evolution of South Pacific soccer was reached when six nations from the region were represented at the 1997 World Under-17 Championship's Oceania Qualifying Series, staged in Christchurch, New Zealand. Never before had so many congregated at a single venue for a tournament organised by FIFA, world soccer's ruling body. Of the teams eligible to compete, only Papua New Guinea and Tonga were absent.

All six gained some degree of encouragement in Christchurch, though none of them reached the final, which saw New Zealand inflict a shock 1-0 loss upon the overwhelming favourites, Australia.

The FIFA-appointed tournament commissioner, Solomon Islander Alan Boso, was delighted by the competitiveness of the Pacific Island teams and reserved most of this praise for the Cook Islands, who were making their debuts at an international age-restricted championship. "The Cooks really surprised us," he enthused. "They did particularly well in holding Fiji to 3-0. We feared they would be hammered in that game but, in the end, Fiji were flattered by the margin of their victory."

Modesty may have prevented Boso from focusing his attention upon the Solomons' efforts. "Sol" dominated the eventual tournament winners for long periods of their preliminary-round clash after conceding an early goal, and the eventual 0-3 loss must be regarded as nothing less than a travesty. They had what appeared to be a perfectly good goal disallowed and only after goalkeeper Jeffrey Arnae was sent off did the Kiwis gain supremacy.

The boys from Honiara recovered and beat Fiji 3-0 in the playoff for third place, thanks to a hat trick by Chris Douglas, who was one of the event's outstanding strikers. Richard Kiriau, Peter Konata, Andy Alisiosi

SPORTS

and James Dania also caught the eye.

The hard-working Fijian combination, despite having an inadequate build-up, acquitted themselves well before meeting the Solomons. A 2-1 victory over archrivals Tahiti virtually assured them of a place in the semi-finals where New Zealand required an 84th-minute goal to clinch their 2-0 success. Goalkeeper Maika Nasema, in particular, earned spectators' admiration. After being beaten by both Fiji and Australia, Tahiti produced their best form when it did not really matter to demolish the Cooks 9-0. Axel Tamartua claimed six of the goals and his emergence may well have made the Tahitians' journey worthwhile.

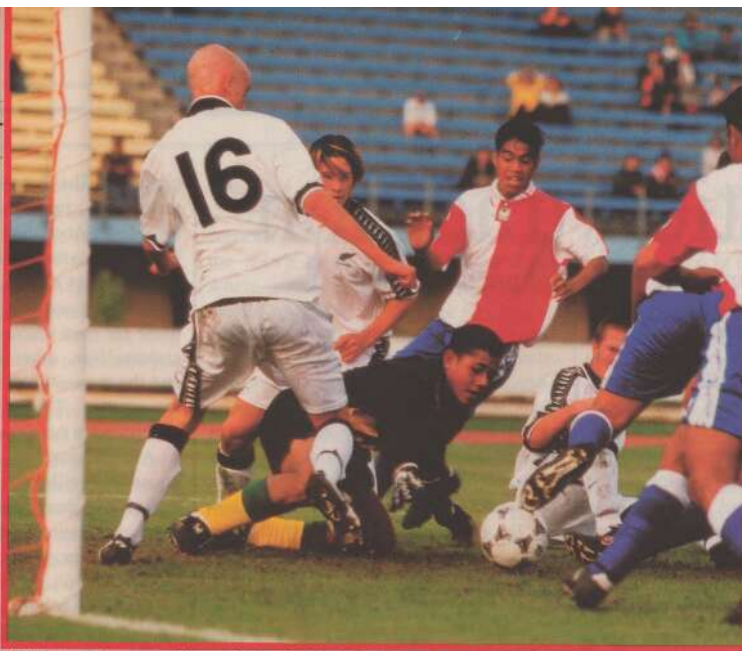
Vanuatu were involved in, arguably, the competition's most entertaining game when going down 2-0 to the Solomons. Earlier, their lack of power in midfield and a disturbing lack of fighting spirit were primarily responsible for an 8-1 hammering by New Zealand (despite taking the lead after 10 minutes) but Vanuatu's flair enabled them to overwhelm Western Samoa 6-0.

The Samoans were expected to be everybody's whipping boys when arriving in Christchurch, yet their courage ensured they would not be further disgraced and New Zealand required a 66th-minute goal to prevail against them. The Solomons, too, experienced several anxious moments before winning 4-0.

All the Pacific Island teams, then, had moments to savour during the tournament and further glory came to the region, albeit of the reflected variety, when New Zealand won the tournament because the Kiwis' squad included a Fijian, Nitesh Krishna.

If Krishna is named in the New Zealand party which travels to Egypt for the World U17 Championship finals this September, he will be the first Pacific Islander to feature in the finals of one of FIFA's three World Cup competitions.

The Oceania tournament proved the small island nations have a fair share of gifted young players, but that has always been



The Western Samoan defence determinedly deals with a New Zealand attack

the case and the adequate development of this pool of talent has been a perennial difficulty, simply through a woeful lack of resources. There is genuine hope, though, that the problem will be eased to a significant degree in the coming years.

The national associations of Fiji, Tahiti, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Papua New Guinea and Western Samoa can each anticipate receiving SUS1 million from FIFA's 1998 senior World Cup finals receipts.

The deal the Oceania Football Confederation negotiated last November with Hong Kong-based marketing company Asia Sport Group should also swell local soccer coffers in the long run (despite the ASG having maintained a low profile of late).

What money is received, however, cannot possibly stretch far enough to be a panacea for all Pacific Island soccer ills and must be targeted carefully to where it will be of most benefit.

The establishment of national leagues in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and PNG is of paramount importance in those countries.

At the current time, there are far too many quality players in the outlying areas who simply vegetate due to the low standard of the localised competitions they appear in. Nationwide championships offering all participating teams up to 20 games a season would be a major boost for the game in the regions and provide a far greater pool of talent for the national selectors to choose from. Fiji's national league commenced in 1977 but it has been stagnating for some time now. Hopefully, the Fiji Football

Association will use their financial bonanza to introduce semi-professionalism and revitalise the league with a competent marketing programme that stimulates public interest and guarantees a constant cash flow.

The disciplinary problems which have long dogged Fijian soccer will almost certainly be greatly alleviated once players are faced

with reduced incomes should their conduct become unacceptable. Tahiti boasts the strongest domestic infrastructure in the South Pacific. However, it would certainly have no problem in utilising any extra money which becomes available.

A programme to recruit French-based professionals who are eligible to represent the Tahitians through their ancestry could well prove costly but, if successful, might enable the national side to challenge Australia for supremacy in Oceania.

The needs of the Cook Islands, Tongan and Western Samoan national soccer associations are far more basic.

They urgently require equipment such as balls, training aids, rule books and coaching manuals to be distributed throughout their areas of responsibility. Every Pacific nation would profit immensely by the appointment of capable and committed coaches from overseas, for tactical naivete remains evident in all our sides.

All being well, some money will be earmarked to bolster the Oceania Football Confederation's staff numbers.

Due to its own lack of resources, the OFC has been forced to disregard such peripheral activities as promotions, publicity, public relations and media liaison.

As a result, it is prone to widespread ridiculing. This has often bordered on contempt in Australian soccer circles.

The confederation has worked strenuously to bring the smaller Pacific Island countries into international soccer's mainstream and deserves a much better image than the one it is burdened with at the present time.

■ CULTURE

Initiation tradition

PNG's oldest surviving male circumcision rites

Sitting astride a wooden dish, Namir could not help but stare at the blood from his severed manhood, forming into a pool at the base of the dish. Mixed tears of relief and pain were streaming down his eyes, dropping off the cheeks and into the pool. The pain was exacerbated by the open wound glaring back at him. Namir had just gone through what every young male child in the Cape Gloucester district, West New Britain province dread most – one of Papua New Guinea's oldest surviving and most sacred traditional practices, the male circumcision ritual.

Although he was told about what to expect, everything happened so fast that all was over before he was able to work out what had happened to him. However, he remembered that there were no pain killers of any kind used before he was operated on. Instead, he was made to bite on a hard betelnut to contain the pain. He had seen other village boys his senior go through the ritual but he had never imagined the degree of pain they were subjected to, until that moment. He was about six years-old.

Namir, who was circumcised with several other boys, was wailing by the time everything was over, as he was carried to the verandah of the family home. The ritual is usually performed in front of the men's house. It took some effort to calm him until his mother came to his side. The wailing was reduced to sobs and heaves as he sat there motionless, listening to his mother's words of comfort. She told him that within weeks, the pain would subside and the wound be healed. She said he had to suffer to avoid being ridiculed in front of women and other men when he grew up. His blood in the dish was later buried safely in a secluded area and he was taken to the men's house, which became his home – away from his mother, a younger sister and friends – for a

month. Namir spent the period with the other boys confined to the men's house. They only went out to use the toilet. Guardians took care of their food, water and ensured that the wounds did not become infected. No medicine, neither modern nor traditional, was used on the wounds and they also went without showers. The guardians adorned them daily with



After circumcision - Picture from PNG's National Film Institute

red soil, mixed with coconut oil. They were told to stay naked for at least a week. There were other precautions they had to take to prevent any inflammation of the wounds. However, there was one that Namir will never forget.

They were told to avoid contact with cobwebs, especially while going to the toilet. Cobwebs are seen to be the most dangerous substance and able to cause serious infection to the wounds of newly circum-

cised boys. They were only visited daily by their fathers, guardians and other men from the village. According to custom, both during circumcision periods and at any other times, women are not allowed near or into the men's house. It's the central meeting place for men where decisions regarding circumcision, other traditional practices and the general well-being of the village are made. The decisions are later announced to the women by a village elder.

After about two days in the men's house, the villagers brought in several smooth and shiny rounded stones. Each of them was represented by a stone. The stones were placed above their beds in gourds filled with water. The belief associated with the stones is that they will pass on special supernatural powers to newly circumcised boys. The stones, which are usually collected from a special creek, are later returned at the end of every confinement.

Namir, who is now a grown man, has come to accept the practice as being part of his people's since the dawn of time. The pain he had gone through and the sacrifices he had to make have been overshadowed by the realisation of the value and importance of the practice to his people's lifestyle. While men in other parts of PNG and the world choose to be circumcised for health or other reasons, for the Cape Gloucester people, the practice is compulsory. It is a rite of passage for men. It gives men pride, identity, power and status. It is a ceremonial event, which involves a lot of feasting and dancing.

The men display this pride and power through the use of an imaginary and sacred spiritual entity, or the *tumbuan* in Melanesian pidgin. The Cape Gloucester people believe that the *tumbuan* lives among them. It is regarded as a godly being which has special deadly powers. Its human form is seen through prominent and respected elders in the society, who are usually sorcerers. People are expected to show respect and obedience to the *tumbuan*. Those who fail to do so will be punished, with death through sorcery being the ultimate form of punishment. The *tumbuan* is represented in the circumcision ceremonies by two types

■ CULTURE

of dancing masks which are worn by men during the feasting and dancing.

The *tumbuan* is the core of the event. The first type consists of a colourfully painted head guise and a huge umbrella-type lower body embellishment, woven out of cane leaves and worn from the neck down. The second consists of a cone-type decorated head mask and a lower body outfit made of dried banana leaves. Only men are allowed to take part in all activities relating to the *tumbuan*. Everything they do must be kept secret from the women. There are certain rules which men and women are expected to observe. They are not allowed to complain about their properties being confiscated and used upon the request of the *tumbuan*. They must not also refuse a request from the *tumbuan* to perform a special chore for the circumcision ceremonies. It also has the power to marry the young. Most often partners are forced to live together, even without love.

Young men are not allowed to be introduced to the *tumbuan* unless they pay their way in, using traditional currency such as shell money, wooden dishes, clay pots and

pigs. This is the second part of the initiation process after going through the circumcision ritual. Once a young man enters the men's house and the sacred camp where all decorations for the dancing masks are made, he will not be allowed back home during the entire duration of the ceremony period.

He'll be exposed to the sacred practices of the *tumbuan* and he will also be taught how special ornaments are made. This is followed by a public flogging to be carried out by several *tumbuan*, in front of the men's house which completes the initiation process. During the actual circumcision of the children, several *tumbuan* form a shield around them to bar off women. A specialist performs the ritual and he is paid handsomely by the children's parents.

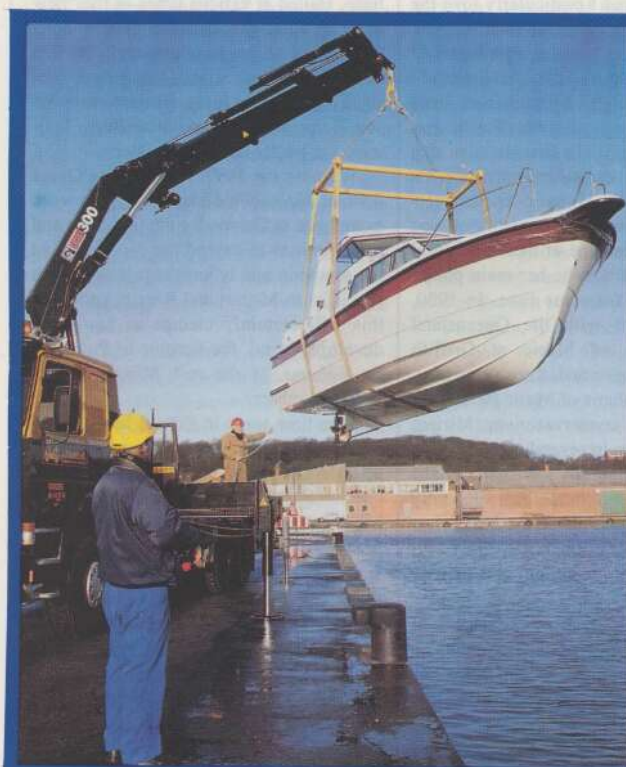
During the dancing, the men beat the drums and sing while the *tumbuan*, usually numbering to about 10 to 20 in huge ceremonies, and the women dance around them in a circle. The women also sing along with the men. Villages from near and far are invited to attend and take part in such ceremonies. Heavy supply of roasted and live

pigs and food, together with shell money and other traditional monetary items are given to the representatives of each village in appreciation of their part in the celebrations.

The fact that the practice survives is arguably because it is free of health risk, unlike nose and ear piercing, tattooing and other related PNG traditional practices. With the advent of HIV/AIDS, these practices have become increasingly dangerous. However, while PNG health authorities have regularly warned of the other practices, the circumcision practice remains free from concern.

As far as history of the practice is concerned, no one has ever suffered or even died from an infected wound. The practice is very much entrenched and alive today in Namir's society as it was many years ago. Its importance can be seen from the fact it is performed on deceased male children before burial.

Those who live and work in towns and cities are required to arrange with relatives for their male children to be circumcised while on holiday in their villages. ■



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■ MUSIC

Miriam scales the heights



Miriam Gormley: "I love my profession"

By **ATAMA RAGANIVATU**

When, at some future time, a definitive history of the South Pacific is written, it will surely recall the 90s as the decade in which people from the region proved themselves able to excel in virtually all fields of human endeavour.

Opera, a branch of the arts traditionally associated with sophisticated Latin males and formidably plump Teutonic women, is among the latest provinces to be "infiltrated" by Pacific Islanders. Papua New Guinea-born Miriam Gormley spearheads this friendly invasion. Established as one of Australia's most talented young sopranos for several years now, Miriam is currently with the Vienna State Opera and sharing the stage with many leading European opera stars.

Miriam's first 10 years were spent in Port Moresby before her Australian father, fearing political upheaval as PNG's independence loomed, moved his family to Nambour in northern Queensland. Curiously, neither of Miriam's parents are particularly musically inclined. Her father occasionally plays the violin and owns a few orchestral and jazz records, while her mother's interests extend little beyond traditional PNG songs. Even today, although two of their daughters are professional sopranos (Clare Gormley, six years Miriam's junior, has been attached to New

York's celebrated Metropolitan Opera since 1992), they fail to be enchanted by opera's glamour. "We may as well be electricians," Miriam laments and then adds that two of her brothers actually are electricians. The third is a plumber.

Irrespective of where Miriam's desire to entertain comes from, it became apparent at

an early age. While at school, she staged theatrical plays for her classmates, developed an interest in ballet and learned to play the cello. It was a passion for theatre which originally led her to opera. "I love my profession and I particularly love the acting aspect of it," she enthuses. "Getting singing and acting together in a balanced way is the challenge I particularly relish."

Initially, though, Miriam had little opportunity to display her flair for the dramatic side of opera. The first tentative step towards stardom was taken in the late 70s when her high school music teachers persuaded her to enter aria competitions. She won a large percentage of these and vocal competitions were to be her main public artistic activity for some time. In 1980, Miriam enrolled with the Queensland Conservatorium of Music at Griffith University, Brisbane and, three years later, she gained a Diploma of Music (vocal).

While at the conservatorium, Miriam enjoyed successes in several more contests and collected numerous scholarships. She continued entering competitions (usually winning them) up until making her professional debut with the Lyric Opera of Queensland, as Barbarino in *The Marriage of Figaro*, in 1985.

A year later, Miriam took advantage of the most significant of the scholarships accumulated to spend a year with the London National Opera Studio at the British capital's famous Covent Garden. She was the youngest there, had received

far less vocal training than her fellow students, found the teaching methods confusing and was slightly overawed by the experience. Back in Australia, though, her career thrived as she appeared with all the Commonwealth's major operatic organisations and was showered with further awards.

Twice, she was offered the opportunity to join the company of the world-renowned Australian Opera but declined for personal reasons. Instead, Miriam prefers to operate as a freelancer. Apart from the fruitless trip to Covent Garden, her only career hitch to date came in 1993 when a loss of confidence led Miriam to turn her back on performing for 10 months and seek the tutoring of Melbourne voice trainer Gary May.

Her self-assurance regained, Miriam moved into other areas of music and appeared in concert performances of popular musicals *Showboat* and *Porgy and Bess*, toured Queensland with the Queensland Pops Orchestra and sang seasonal songs at Sydney's magnificent *Carols in the Domain*, a pre-Christmas extravaganza watched by many thousands live and millions on television. But opera remains her forte. Hailed at various times as the "new Kiri Te Kanawa" and the "Dame Joan Sutherland of the next century", Miriam possesses the magnetism, fervour and sensuality to develop into a true international star. Being attractive and disarmingly feminine are hardly handicaps either.

Winning the 1997 Vienna State Opera Scholarship enabled Miriam to gain work experience in Europe for the first time and opportunities to extend her repertoire. At the moment, she is known primarily as a specialist in Mozart and Rossini parts, but this will certainly change as her voice develops. Mimi, the heroine of Puccini's *La Boheme*, is the role Miriam covets above all others.

The time spent in Europe has whetted her appetite for more engagements in opera's heartland. Recently, she stated: "Before going to Vienna, my entire career had been spent in Australia. Up until a year ago, I hadn't really felt ready to work overseas. But it feels right now."

If Miriam does fulfil her ambitions and gain lead roles performing in the major opera houses of Europe, her feat will be every bit as meritorious as David Tua's heroics in the boxing ring, Vijay Singh's exploits on the world's golf courses and Jonah Lomu's deeds on the rugby pitch. ■

■ LITERATURE

The power of words

Recording the Gilbertese oral tradition in writing



By **NICOLAS
ROTHWELL**

The pioneering I-Kiribati ethnologist, Kambati Uriam, has an unusually direct personal connection with the tales and historical narratives that form the subject of *In Their Own Words*, the most important study yet published of Gilbertese oral tradition. Uriam recounts, at one point in this detailed and enthralling account, his own memory of listening to a particular tale-teller, who was keen to make his audiences laugh.

"As far as I can recall from my childhood," writes Uriam, "he used to be an occasional visitor to our home to tell jokes and share his stories.

I loved his stories, but I hated his smoking pipe which he would not hesitate to burn me with every time I dozed off to sleep.

"The anecdote gives something of the flavour of this unusual, indeed path-breaking, book: engaged and informed, embracing both the objectivity of anthropological study and the commitment of a patriotic history.

The doyen of studies of Kiribati society, H E Maude, notes in his forward that Uriam's work will be definitive, "as writing has made the composition of new oral traditions unnecessary – but it is hoped it will prove to be the prototype for similar studies covering the traditions of other Pacific Island groups".

Uriam has an intriguing aim, which is more than fulfilled by this detailed, scholarly and suggestive work.

He hopes to trace Gilbertese history through the oral tradition that flourished for centuries on these low islands strewn through the heart of the great ocean.

His argument is that the Gilbertese tales preserve a detailed version of the historic

past – as understood by the people of the islands. For generations, they have been handed down by word of mouth, providing a factual record that tallies strikingly with the findings now emerging from other avenues of investigation. Uriam found, during his field-work, that his own sense of history deepened: "If there is a hope I wish to convey," he writes, "it is that the Gilbertese people will take pride in being I-Kiribati and treasure with all jealousy the wisdom and knowledge of their ancestors as found in the traditions."

Through a swirling, complex recreation of the tales and their telling, their style and their content, but above all their place in the community, Uriam succeeds in capturing the subtle, shimmering quality of the oral narrative as one of the key elements in Gilbertese self-definition: art-form, magical incantation, historical record, political weapon – the tale was all of these and served as a means of making claims and aligning relations between families, groups and islands.

For, as *In Their Own Words* quickly makes plain, there are great variations between the different islands, both in present character and in history.

Indeed, Uriam spends much time picking apart the traditional stories to show how well they reflect the patterns of settlement, the various ancestor groups, the points of origin and way-stages in the journeys of the first islanders to the atolls.

This, then, is the tracing of history and geographic spread through mythology – and, as such, it has a certain political component, for, as Uriam underlines, the coming of European culture to Kiribati has coincided with the effective ending of the oral tradition and the descent of a feeling of impotence, of lack of ability to control and dispose of one's own fate.

In these conditions, the disappearance of the tales and tale-tellers from Kiribati society has an even more devastating effect because of what the tales could do for their society: "Apart from giving information concerning the activities of the ancestors, or providing identity, they offer explanations for social processes and cultural activities as they are or should be.

But, more importantly, oral traditions provide a charter for communal reflection and innovation, and courage to the communities to change for a better society. They are inseparable from communities: without traditions there are no communities, and vice versa."

Hence, the urgency of Uriam's quest to trace and capture the traditions, to keep their memory alive, to provide examples of the connection between the narratives, the functioning of that particularly Gilbertese social and political organism, the *Maneaba*, and the continuing evolution of the society of the independent nation of Kiribati.

Preservation of oral tradition is viewed by Uriam as vital, for, as he puts it movingly, the past has a crucial role to play; in fact, it is, or has been, almost everything: "It provided a Gilbertese with knowledge and skills, joy and laughter, friends and enemies, and land and wealth to live and enjoy a long and contented life."

There are, unfortunately, signs of a revival of tradition – a revival Uriam is keen to encourage, and one which he believes is amply justified, given the tremendous achievements of customary Gilbertese society as the most efficient specialised atoll culture in the world.

Yet there is a profound threat to the endurance of this society; the same threat that has already taken its toll across the islands of the Pacific: "Today," cautions Uriam, "the community ethos, its ethics and values, has been disrupted by a rash of foreign influences, for the most part European.

Gilbertese life is in a state of flux: housing, clothes, food, material culture, all are changing, and with them many of the certainties, the motivations, aspirations and pleasures that made life meaningful in the past.

Change must come; the danger lies that with it Gilbertese society will, unless we are alert and careful, become an amorphous and rootless mass of individuals, without pride in the past or hope for the future."

It is a warning that applies, of course, to all the Pacific's surviving traditional cultures. ■

• *In Their Own Words – History and Society in Gilbertese Oral Tradition* by Kambati K Uriam, published by the Journal of Pacific History, Australia, 1996. \$A30.

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■ YACHTING

From poverty to plenty

Story and photography by **SALLY ANDREW**

Our parting impression of Poverty Bay was of early morning light dancing on Young Nick's Head. This white-cliffed headland was named for Captain Cook's cabin boy Nicholas Young, the first person on board the *Endeavour* to sight New Zealand in October 1769. The Maori had already named the headland Te Kuri o Paoa – Paoa's dog – because it looks like a crouching dog watching the sunrise.

FellowShip was bound for the Bay of Plenty, sailing north along Tairāwhiti, the coast upon which the sun shines across the water. This eastern region of New Zealand's North Island is the ancestral land of Maori who arrived in Aotearoa centuries before Captain Cook. Maori history and culture thrive in the area and local tradition tells how the first settlers arrived in the region in two big sailing canoes – the descendants of those in the *waka Horouta* settling north of Gisborne, and those of the *waka Takitimu* to the south. Today, tiny Maori communities dot a coastline characterised by bare hills, bush-fringed coves and long empty beaches.

Hugging the coast we sailed past Wainui Beach where, in 1970, a pod of 59 sperm whales beached themselves and Whangara where legendary Maori explorer Paikea arrived after travelling to New Zealand on the back of a whale. We anchored for a night at Tolaga Bay. Captain James Cook spent six days at Tolaga repairing the *Endeavour* and taking on water and supplies. The most easterly cape in New Zealand is feared and respected by most mariners, and has earned its reputation. Adverse currents, offshore shoals, wicked weather – East Cape sticks out into the path of tropical cyclones and snags antarctic depressions, creating treacherous sailing conditions.

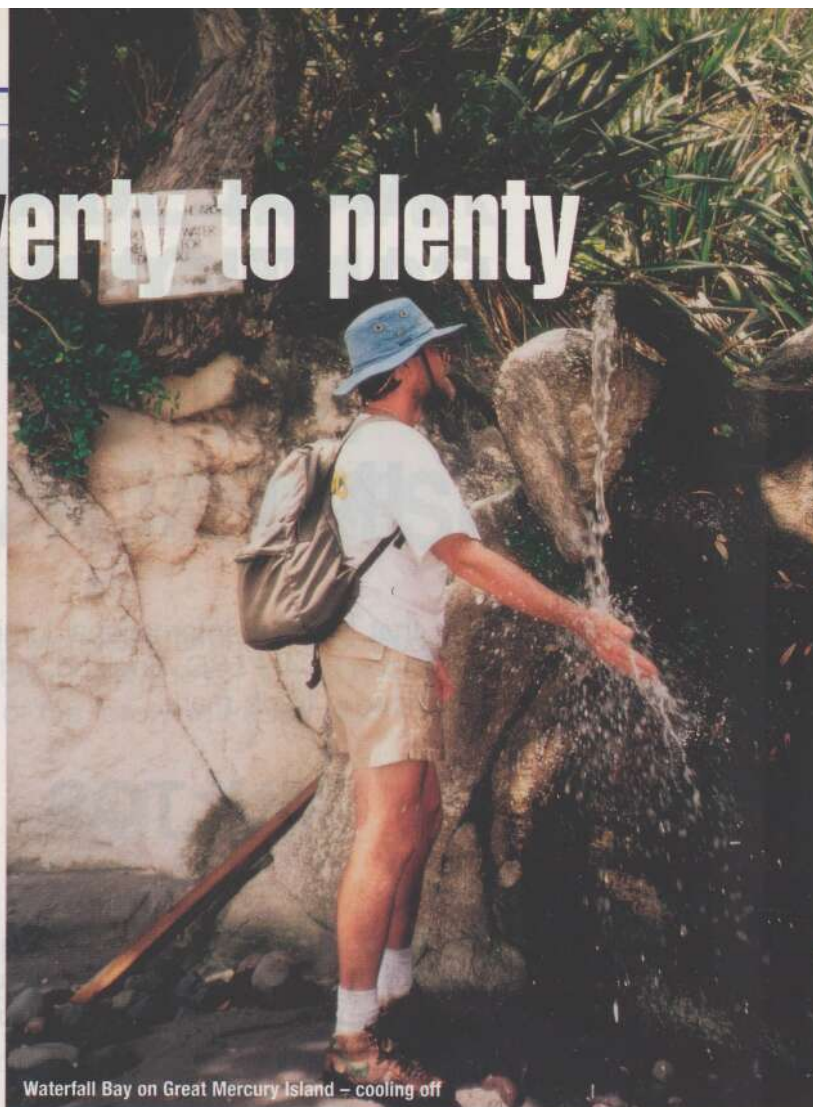
I stood watch as we went by, scared because the bright beam from the lighthouse looked too close. East Cape Lighthouse, built in 1906, stands 154 metres above sea-level and can be seen far out to sea. Using a GPS, depth sounder and chart, I knew we were a safe distance offshore, given the weather conditions, but I plotted our position every

15 minutes anyway to ease my worried mind. Unfortunately, navigation at night can make you seasick really quickly. At sunrise we rounded Cape Runaway, named Whagaparoa by the Maori, where two legendary canoes – the *Tainui* and the *Arawa* landed. This cape marks the beginning of New Zealand's thermally active Bay of Plenty which captain Cook named after the abundant supplies of food he found there.

By mid-morning White Island lay off our bow, smoke billowing out of her belly. We gave the island a wide berth and stayed upwind, avoiding the possibility of an untimely and dangerous belch – the deposit of a mud plop would be capable of bringing down our rig and/or sinking us. White Island is New Zealand's only active volcanic island. The imposing show of power and moonscape surface evince images of the dynamic forces involved in the creation of the earth.

FellowShip continued running downwind to Mayor Island, an unspoilt bush-covered island with two volcanic lakes and masses of native birds. The southeasterly wind was blowing right into South East Bay, where a beach resort nestles amongst huge pohutakawa trees and obsidian cliffs. So we anchored in the lee in a snug little cove called Northwest Bay.

What a beautiful spot. Wide black bands of obsidian streak the island's geologic structure, glittering in the sun like glass. Above the high tide line, fresh water flows out of hot springs on the beach. We dug a hole in the sand and luxuriated in a warm bath, gazing out at *FellowShip* tugging at her anchor. When the pool collapsed, we'd refortify it with rocks and sand, let it fill with clear warm water and climb back in. Just what the doctor ordered after a long sail. When the wind shifted, so did we, over to the Mercury



Waterfall Bay on Great Mercury Island – cooling off

■ YACHTING

Islands. The discoverers of Aotearoa called the island group Ahuahu. Despite this, French explorers renamed them Isles d'Haussez. The English labelled the group Mercury Islands after Cook observed the transit of the planet Mercury in nearby Whitianga and Mercury Bay in 1769, and this is the name used today. Great Mercury is a private island owned by Sir Michael Fay and operates as a cattle station. Many of the trees and most of the scrub is gone, and the open fields are full of stones and thistles, cattle and sheep. The shoreline is dotted with remote beaches interspersed with rocky outcrops. Big black cows and fat sassy sheep graze happily on the hills – soaking up the blue sky and hot sun and gazing upon an undulating ocean of greens and blues and blooming red pohutukawa. White woolly clouds and the sliver of the moon at midday made it postcard perfect.

With *FellowShip* safely anchored in Parapara Bay, we went walking. The island invites rambling exploration as cow trails lead off in every direction, making the venture easy. Very few patches of old growth forest remain standing. Instead, a ship-shape pine plantation with trees all marching in straight lines has been started. Following the edge of a sandstone cliff, we eventually reached a grassy knoll and detoured down to the long beach at Waterfall Bay. Low tide had created a wide expanse of sand and several sailboats lay at anchor offshore. Water tumbling down a mini-waterfall was diverted into a plastic pipe, facilitating water collection for visiting yachts. The natural wonder of Great Mercury is the majestic white cliff of the sun – named Parenui te Ra – on the windward side of the island. These rock walls climb sheer from the water, rising 600 feet or more, and catch the rising sun. Facing into the Pacific, they must have been an impressive sight when the first people arrived to settle Aotearoa.



White Island ... billowing volcanic smoke and dust



■ Parenui te Ra - great white cliff of the sun

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■ OPINION

Howard's end?

Will Aust PM's handling of Aboriginal issues lead to his downfall



Jemima Garrett

SYDNEY

John Howard gained political stature when he stood up to the gun lobby in the wake of the Port Arthur massacre. Since then, events have shown that the firm and thoughtful leadership was just a minute of political sunshine.

In other areas he has proved himself a small man. His long silence on the views of independent MP Pauline Hanson left countries in Asia and the Pacific wondering whether Australia was returning to its inward-looking Anglocentric approach of the past. Lately, his handling of Aboriginal affairs has revealed him as mean and visionless.

Howard's approach to the Stolen Children Inquiry is a stark example. The inquiry, conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, looked into why large numbers of Aboriginal children were taken from their families right up until the 1970s. Children, from days old to 18 years, were taken to live in training centres or children's homes where conditions were appalling and abuse, including sexual abuse, common. In many cases, the welfare authorities took light-skinned children, leaving their dark-skinned siblings. Children had their names changed and were often sent long distances to ensure links with families were severed. In a confidential submission, an Aboriginal woman called 'Rose' told her story. She was the oldest of five children. In 1958, when she was nine, her mother and father took her out of school because welfare authorities had begun to turn up there and take Aboriginal children. They built a small shelter out of town where Rose would look after her younger siblings while her parents were working. One day, when Rose had left the camp to get help from her mother the welfare turned up. The intervention of her parents did not stop her younger brother and sisters being taken away.

The case came to court and the judge ordered that the kids be sent to children's homes unless Rose's parents could find a house and her father a steady job, which was impossible. Rose's parents were so upset at losing their family that they took up drinking and eventually split up. Rose was brought up by other Aboriginal families and didn't see all her siblings for 27 years.

"We try to make up for all those lost years. But something's missing. Could you put yourself in the situation that we were put through?" More than 100,000 Aboriginal children were taken from their families. The large number of Aboriginal children still in care or in correctional institutes is testament to a legacy of

mental illness, alcoholism and family breakdown suffered by the "stolen generation". When the separation of Aboriginal children from their families began, the prevailing view among non-Aboriginal Australians was that the Aboriginal race was dying out and part-Aboriginal children should be 'saved' by assimilating them into white society. Others justified the policy on the grounds that the children were living in poor conditions or poverty (conveniently ignoring the fact that much of that poverty had been caused by dispossession).

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) gave no quarter to these views, pointing out that for the past century there had been those who had spoken out against these practices. Its report declared the removal of Aboriginal children was genocide – defined in international law as "acts that intend to destroy, in whole or in part, a racial group...[including] by forcibly transferring children of the group to another group".

The Australian government, it said, should make reparation in a five-part strategy including, acknowledgement of the truth and an apology, guarantees that the situation will not be repeated, measures of restitution, rehabilitation and monetary compensation. Howard's response was to delay issuing the report and attack the motives of one of its authors. Before the report was tabled in parliament, Howard ruled out monetary compensation but said other recommendations needed further consideration.

A personal apology made in the last week of May to the landmark Reconciliation Conference held in Melbourne was seen as inadequate and insincere. While Howard said he felt "deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of past generations towards indigenous people" and apologised for the "hurt and trauma" many people continue to feel, he did not apologise on behalf of the Australian government and went on to so qualify his apology as to give it little meaning.

"In facing the realities," Howard stressed, "we must not join those who would portray Australia's history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism, exploitation and racism. Such a portrayal is a gross distortion and it deliberately neglects the overall story of great Australian achievement... Such an approach will be repudiated by the overwhelming majority of Australians." No one, including members of the 'stolen generation', is asking Howard to take on sack cloth and ashes. All they are asking for is official recognition and an apology for one shameful part, something that must be a prerequisite if there is to be any genuine reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Why can't Howard apologise?

Is it that he thinks that is what the majority of Australians want? In which case, if a recent Newspan is to be believed, he would be wrong. It found 50 per cent of people believed he should make an official apology while 40 per cent believed he should not.

Is it Howard's obsession with an heroic view of Australian history or a belief that people at the time thought they were acting in the best interests of the children?

At the time of writing, Howard was yet to make his full response to the recommendations of the HREOC. Let's hope that when he does, he understands the appropriate response to an obvious injustice. Who knows, he might even decide to compensate the "stolen generation" just as he did gun owners forced to relinquish their automatic weapons. ■

■ OPINION

From colony to republic

It seems a Republic of New Zealand will be inevitable. The question remaining is ... when?



David Barber

WELLINGTON

While Fiji makes moves towards returning to a constitutional monarchy, New Zealand is embarked on the inexorable path towards ditching the Queen as head of state and becoming a republic.

As Prime Minister Jim Bolger says, "We are well advanced on the long journey from a dependent colony to the status of an independent republic within the Commonwealth."

Now Mr Bolger is biased – his views no doubt coloured by his Irish ancestry, he is an avowed republican. But he has been joined in his belief that the creation of a Republic of New Zealand is inevitable by Helen Clark, leader of the main opposition Labour Party, indicating a bipartisan approach to the question.

Thus it is only a matter of time before a president of New Zealand replaces the British monarch as head of state. The actual timing is unclear.

Bolger once suggested the year 2000 as an appropriate time for such a sweeping change but found little favour for the idea within his National Party, which retains a strong conservative and loyalist constituency.

It is not on the party's policy agenda and, given the government's narrow majority and opposition from Maori within New Zealand First (the junior coalition partner), Bolger is not likely to force the issue.

But he will keep raising it in a bid to stimulate debate, keep it in the public eye and, he hopes, eventually persuade his opponents. "This is an important debate," he says, "which is not about being against the past or present but about being what is right for the future."

There have already been moves in the republican direction. The age-old British honours system has been dropped in favour of a New Zealand-based system.

Plans to abolish the Privy Council as New Zealand's final court of appeal were well in train until early this year when they were spiked by the NZ First party, whose Maori members see it as an important and symbolic link to the sovereign.

But even those who oppose the change now acknowledge that, at some time in the future, New Zealand will have to bring its final appeal process within its own jurisdiction. It is all part of nationhood or, as Bolger puts it: "How do we want to see ourselves? How do we want to identify ourselves in tomorrow's world?"

The views of Maori are critical when answering that question. This is a point Bolger seemed to have overlooked when he first flew the republican kite in a speech to parliament just over three years ago, saying, "The sweep of history is going in one direction."

The point is: the Treaty of Waitangi was signed on behalf of Queen Victoria and her successors and the Maori tribes, and replacing the monarch with a president will have far-reaching consequences for the indigenous population.

If New Zealand becomes a republic, Maori leaders have said, there will need to be a written constitution and Maori will insist the treaty is written into it to protect their interests.

The treaty established civil government in this country, they say, and is a sacred compact.

It will be a complicated process but is not an insuperable problem. The government of New Zealand is, after all, the successor of the British Crown as today's Maori tribes are the descendants of their forebears.

There is no reason why they shouldn't conclude an agreement on a constitution embodying the treaty and honouring the concerns of both parties. As Bolger says, "New Zealand's journey to nationhood began in 1840 and has been one of constant evolution since then."

But it will be sensitive and will require a long period of consultation and negotiation with Maori before the change can take place. It is sometimes overlooked that Pakeha and Maori alike have legally been New Zealand citizens for less than 50 years. Until 1948, they were all British subjects.

It has taken New Zealand a long time to overcome this background, and nowhere is that more evident than in the United Nations. There, New Zealand still sits as a member of the so-called Western European and Other Group of nations. It is an anachronism that is patently absurd as Asian-Pacific economies now account for 70 per cent of the country's trade, and New Zealand's political interests have shifted accordingly.

It is even more absurd when you look at New Zealand's changing population mix. On latest figures, there are 523,000 Maori (about 14.5 per cent), 180,000 Pacific Islanders (more than five per cent) and 82,300 Chinese (2.3 per cent) – that's getting on for a quarter of the population who have no traditional allegiance to Europe. It's time, Foreign Minister Don McKinnon said recently, that New Zealand looked at joining the Asian Group at the UN. Not just time, I would say, it's well overdue.

The problem is, it's not just a matter of New Zealand electing to switch from one to the other. It will involve a radical restructuring of the UN's five geographical groups – and the world body (like New Zealand when it talks about becoming a republic) does nothing quickly. ■

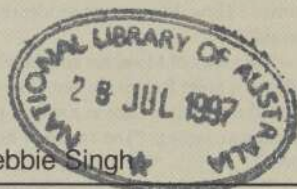
■ OPINION

An important 50 years



Debbie Singh

SPC, NOUMEA



By the time this is read, delegates to the South Pacific Commission's (SPC) meeting of the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA) would have long put away their documents and would probably be preparing to attend the organisation's annual conference in October.

But this is not to downplay the importance of the CRGA in the SPC calendar of meetings as it plays a major role, as the organisation's governing body, in monitoring SPC programme delivery. In a report to the meeting, SPC Director-General Dr Bob Dun said the organisation was riding the crest of a wave since the last South Pacific Conference in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), last November.

He said much of the executive's energy had been directed to follow-up action, including the planning and writing associated with decisions requiring further input from the CRGA following the SPC's organisational review last year.

These include: relating the appointment sequence and terms of employment of the director-general to the change to biennial meetings of the annual conference; devising transitional arrangements in reshaping and renaming SPC's top structure; reassessing burden sharing amongst members in funding SPC's core budget; and creating a new name for the organisation acceptable to all members.

This year has been important for the organisation in terms of its 50th anniversary celebrations, and the meeting heard that a street survey by the SPC in February indicated some confusion in the minds of many Noumeans between the commission's locally used acronym CPS (Commission du Pacifique Sud) and the local garbage collection service. "Well," said Dun. "Now, there are many thousands who appreciate the SPC ... as an interesting and valuable part of their community and which, through its service, brings the whole Pacific to their doorsteps rather than just the humble trash can."

Director-General Dun registered his concern at the marked change in the proportional mix of islanders against those of European and Asian decent in the commission's professional staff over the past 12 months. "When I commenced work in January 1996, professional staff recruited from Pacific Island

countries made up nearly half our complement. This is now down to one-third.

"Looking for explanations, some substantial part is obviously due to the acquisition of new programmes into the SPC which were either staffed by non-islanders or which required appointees with skills hard to find in the Pacific." Dun also said there has been a major change in the SPC's staff selection system with preference being given to islanders if rankings were equal.

"[But] because competition for positions has been intense, it has been difficult for islanders to win," Dun said.

"I am alarmed that if this trend were to continue, SPC members might find themselves with a well credentialled and efficient staff but its social ambience as a Pacific organisation could be damaged. We obviously have to do more to attract islanders to apply for positions." As always, the critical issue of funding received much more attention, with Dun saying: "Commenting generally, we continue to note the media projecting the occasional criticism of donor dominance in the Pacific and no doubt this flows from major concerns about money as power and the wish of island countries to be fully independent economically as soon as possible.

"In this respect, it was heartening to see the ready acceptance by island members of an increase in their overall contribution to the core funding of the SPC. However, it's worth remembering that our metropolitan members and other donors still provide about 96 per cent of the the SPC's total budget, counting project contributions as well as core, and they do so despite their lack of any effective capacity to control the organisation's policies," Dun said.

"The islands have the numbers. There is some real altruism lurking there. Without donors, SPC's capacity to address regional priority issues in resource management and social engineering would largely disappear.

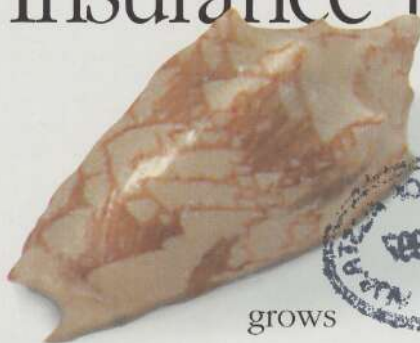
"Despite its own budgetary problems, the government of France continues to give very strong support to the SPC. Both New Zealand and Australia carried through their 1997 budget discussions in the latter half of last year again helping with strong programme support combined with substantial advance payments.

"It is impressive to see the strengthening of the NZ economy being reflected in their overall aid volume. Our two other large donors, the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme, have also proved extremely helpful at a time when they have been much concerned with programme review and prioritisation."

In addition, Great Britain recently provided the SPC with a £100,000 (\$US172,500) contribution to mark the organisation's 50th birthday and provide a kickstart to its Small Islands Development Fund. Taiwan continues to support funding of the SPC's fisheries network and Japan recently funded a lecture theatre for the Community Education Training Centre (CETC) based at Narere in Fiji.

"Certainly, for the SPC, I'd like donors to think that when their money comes to us it is spent wisely and cost effectively and that for our island members there will be an appreciated island service to talk about. It would be great if an island-controlled organisation like the SPC could deliver its essential regional programmes without donor support - but that goal is still some years away," Dun said. ■

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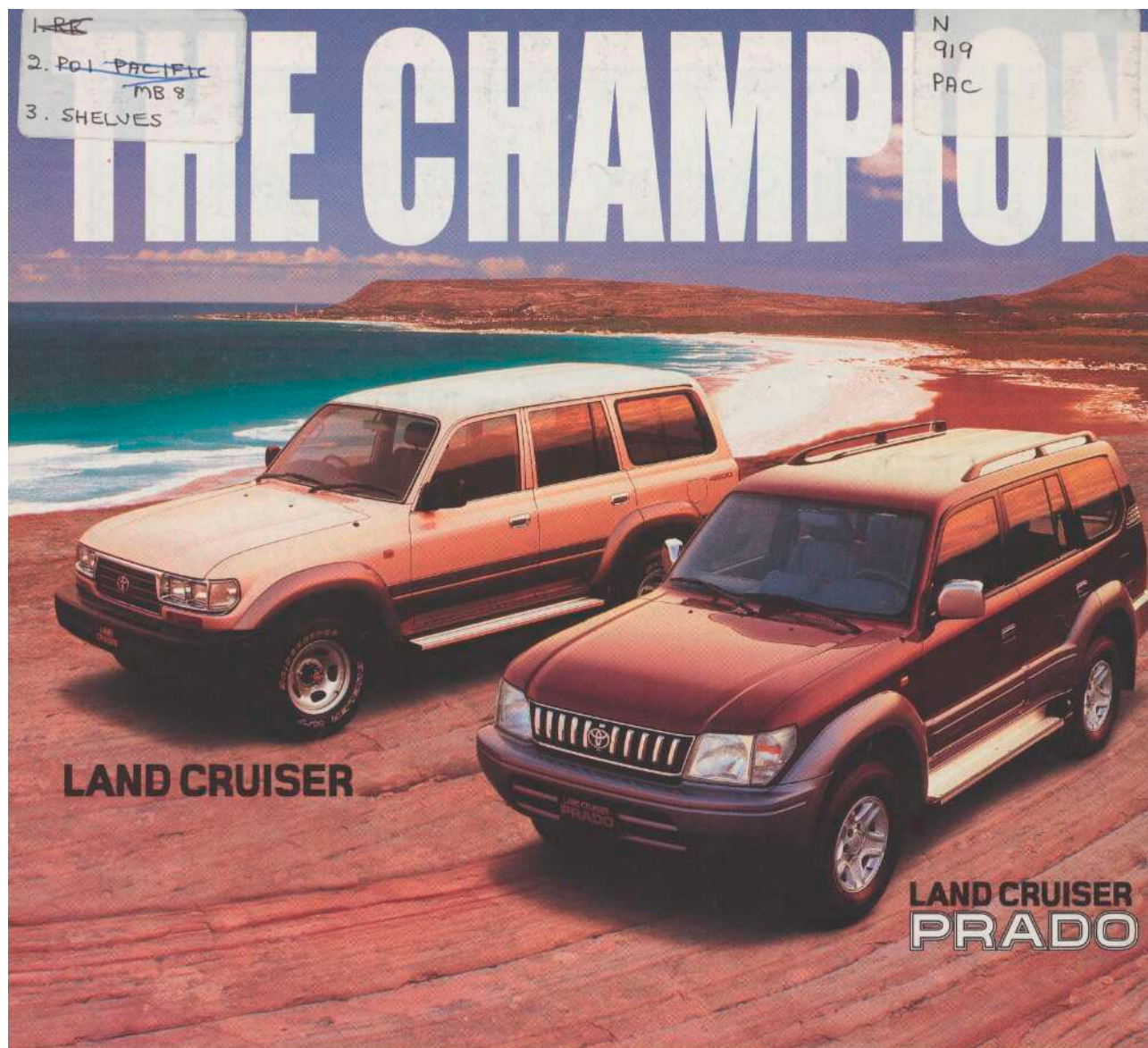
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