

## Reflections on the 1987 Fiji Coups

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The coups of 1987 have become a bitter memory for the people of Fiji, but unanswered questions still linger about the whole incident. Did then Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, who claimed that intervention of the army in Fiji's political process was necessary to avert ethnic bloodshed (Rabuka, 2000: 9), act entirely on an instinct to save the indigenous Fijian race from the Indo-Fijian political designs, or were there other forces at work?

The deposed Prime Minister late Dr. Timoci Bavadra in 1988 sent an affidavit to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II stating that Fiji's Interim Leader late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was involved in the first coup. The sworn affidavit of former *Taukei* Movement member, Ratu Meli Vesikula, implicated Mara as masterminding military take-over on 14 May 1987. Richard Naidu (1988), spokesperson for the deposed Prime Minister Dr. Timoci Bavadra, confirmed that the coup was all about preserving power for those who were used to ruling the country. 'The Alliance government had been in power for seventeen years since independence. Ousted at the polls, its leaders and powerbrokers reacted violently'.

During the April 1987 election campaign, the newly formed Fiji Labour Party - National Federation Party coalition promised the people of Fiji a clean and an open government. After achieving victory in the elections, the coalition started implementing its ambitious people-based policies by first waiving the hospital fees for outpatients and reaching an understanding with Fiji's bus operators to waive fares for pensioners. In addition, there were moves to introduce tax free pensions for war veterans; social security benefits for individuals over the age of sixty, a review of the customs and excise duties, reduction of the interest rates on housing and agricultural loans, establishment of a unit within the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) to assist ethnic Fijians in commerce, and introduction of a fee-free education system up to Form four.

Before any of the coalition's programs could be implemented, the government was ousted by the Fiji army in the South Pacific's first modern era military coup. Despite the bloodless nature of the coup, a majority of the population, particularly Indo-Fijians, were politically marginalised and socially ostracised. Detention and harassment of Indo-Fijian dissidents became routine as the army established its grip on the nation. Before the coup, speculation in Fiji was rife regarding the involvement of foreign powers in Fiji's political affairs. It was initially alleged by the pro-Bavadra group that the US Central Intelli-

gence Agency (CIA) was behind the coups. The reasons for what has been termed as the 'CIA chimera', are many and varied (see Lal, 1990, and Scobell, 1994). Immediately after the coup, the Fiji Military Forces (FMF) embarked on a propaganda campaign, informing the coup sympathisers that the coalition had relations with the former Soviet Union and Libya and as such posed a direct threat to the western alliance and to Fijian traditions and values. Widespread rumours of the coalition being socialist and left-wing in orientation led some observers to conclude that the CIA was involved. Other observations, such as US Hercules carriers making brief and suspicious stopovers at the Nadi International Airport; the presence of US Ambassador to UN Vernon Walters in the country for talks with the coalition in response to the coalitions non-alignment policy; the appearance of retired US army officer Larry Mackenna at the US Embassy in full military uniform; and the dubious political activities of the USAID and members of the US Peace Corp, raised concerns that Fiji had fallen victim to US counter-subversion activities in the South Pacific (Howard, 1991: 233).

The counter-charges from the coup leaders were equally impressive. Following the coup, an Indo-Fijian Muslim, Amjad Ali, attempted to hijack an Air New Zealand airbus at the Nadi International Airport. Fortunately, Ali was overpowered by the flight crew, but the demand of the hijacker was used by the coup leaders to show that the coalition had Libyan connection. Apart from the 'Libyan chimera', the coup leaders emphasised that the policies of the coalition were 'Soviet-inspired'. Beyond the rhetoric and allegations following the May 1987 coup lay the dialectical interplay between the forces of multiracial governance on the one hand and race based communalism on the other. By probing such interplay, one can appreciate the forces that prevailed before and after the military take-over in 1987.

### The First Coup - 14 May 1987

The events of 1987 could be understood by critical analysing the historical, cultural, political economic, social and global indicators prevalent immediately before the coup.

In a speech prepared hastily after the military take-over, Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka stated that his action to oust the coalition was to keep the nationalist forces, such as the *Taukei Movement*, from continuing with its destabilisation campaign. 'What I would like them (*Taukei* militants) to now understand is that now they no longer have that excuse (that the government was under Indian control) and ask them to co-operate with the new regime to restore normalcy, go back to civilian rule and democracy' (Rabuka, 1987). The *Taukei Movement* was a militant indigenous nationalist movement formed after the defeat of the chief-led Alliance Party of Fiji in the April 1987 general elections. Many *Taukei Movement* members were former Alliance party members, suggesting that

the nationalist movement was organised and supported by the Alliance.

After the statement from Colonel Rabuka, many coalition supporters asked why did the army not assist the coalition in apprehending the *Taukei* militants? And why did it have to oust an elected government to appease the *Taukeists*? Answers to such questions pointed towards a possible involvement of the army in assisting the destabilisation campaign against the coalition government. Immediately following the coup, Colonel Rabuka advised foreign journalists to behave in a responsible manner and went as far as to arrest, detain and ban journalists critical to the military takeover. In order to muster Fijian support, Rabuka explained that the coup was intended to protect the indigenous Fijian people, so that their rightful place in the country could be recognised and facilitated.

On 17 May 1987, the then Australian Prime Minister, Bob Hawke stated on *Radio Australia* that the political situation in Fiji had deteriorated with the widespread detention and harassment of journalists. The Australian High Commissioner in Fiji, John Piper, protested against the harassment of dissidents and demanded that he be given audience with the deposed Prime Minister, Dr. Timoci Bavadra. Meanwhile, Dr. Bavadra, held captive at the Prime Minister's residence at Veiuto by the army, requested assistance from the New Zealand government. A similar request was also sent to Buckingham Palace where the Queen was informed that the coup was 'illegal'. Britain responded Bavadra and requested the military authorities in Fiji to reinstate the deposed government.

Colonel Rabuka defied international pressure and gave blanket authority to the army to detain and harass foreign journalists. Australian Consul in Suva Andrew Nigel was detained for two hours following his attempts at negotiating the release of Australian journalists. Furthermore, Rabuka advised Australia and New Zealand not to interfere in Fiji's domestic affairs. While Rabuka was warning foreign countries, the chief Justice Timoci Tuivaqa, on 17 May, issued a statement declaring the military take-over illegal and invalid (*Australia News*, 11.15 a.m., 18/05/87). On 18 May, the Governor-General, now late Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, issued a directive calling on the army to return to the barracks. In addition, the Governor-General acknowledged that he no longer had the freedom of action to exercise the executive power under the 1970 Constitution.

From the ongoing talks between the Governor General and the coup leader, it was clear that Ratu Penaia had acquiesced to the demands of the military. On the night of 18 May, Rabuka was sworn in as the head of Fiji's government after he assured the Governor General that the members of the coalition government would be released from captivity. On 19 May 1987 Rabuka spoke to some seven thousand soldiers, reminding them that he could face death for the military take-over and that he carried out the coup to prevent possible bloody confrontation between the Bavadra government and the indigenous Fijian community.

At 4.00p.m. on 19 May, the Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau explained to the coup leader Sitiveni Rabuka that it was constitutionally impossible to swear in his Council of Ministers in view of the illegality of the military coup. Having said that, the Governor General did the inexplicable and dissolved the parliament. Legal experts questioned whether the Governor General had acted constitutionally. The deposed Prime Minister Timoci Bavadra had not made any request to the Governor General for the dissolution of parliament; he was a captive, and his government was incapacitated by the coup. Under the 1970 Constitution, the Governor General could only dissolve the Parliament if a majority in both Houses agree to this, or if the government was defeated in a vote of no confidence. Moreover, the elected Prime Minister has to communicate the view that he had lost confidence of the House before the Governor General could lawfully exercise executive power to dissolve parliament.

The Governor General also granted wholesale amnesty to the coup leaders. 'As the representative of Her Majesty the Queen in Fiji, I have the prerogative of mercy and have taken the Chief Justice's opinion on this matter and have decided that in order to bring about national reconciliation and national healing, I will grant this prerogative of mercy to those implicated in the illegal seizure of power' (Ganilau, 19 May 1987). The prerogative of mercy is only invoked in cases where a person had been convicted of an offence in a court of law. But no such proceeding took place against Rabuka. The pro-Bavadra group alleged that the Governor was actively involved in assisting Rabuka complete his coup mission. Realising that he was acting unconstitutionally, the Governor General requested the people of Fiji to remain calm and go about life as usual.

While the Governor General was arguing with Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka over the legality of his actions, Amjad Ali had hijacked an Air New Zealand aircraft at Nadi International Airport. The hijacker demanded that he be flown to Libya, and all detained coalition members be released and taken to Nadi from Suva within three hours of his message. The Council of Ministers headed by Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka denounced the hijacking as precipitated by those in collusion with the Russians and the Libyans. The Council felt that the Libyans were active in the Pacific region and that it had the potential for causing regional instability.

From 19-21 May 1987, the Great Council of Chiefs deliberated on the political situation in Fiji. On 21 May the Great Council decided that:

- the military leadership of Colonel Rabuka and his Council of Ministers continue;
- the military government study the 1970 Constitution with a view to change, abolish or abrogate the Constitution, in the quickest possible time and to ensure that Fijians are guaranteed the control of government at all times;
- the Great Council of Chiefs be the adviser to the change;

- the new Constitution be referred back to the chiefs before adoption; and
- no effort be spared in maintaining the link between Fiji and the British Crown (Great Council of Chiefs Resolutions, 1987).

The day before the Great Council of Chiefs resolutions, there was an ugly race riot in Suva. Scores of people were injured when hundreds of Fijians armed with garden tools attacked members of the Indian community. Further rumour of riots forced the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs to warn Australians not to travel to Fiji. Following Australia, Britain and United States issued similar warnings.

On 21 May, Dr. Bavadra and his Ministers were released from captivity and most went into hiding for fear of being recaptured and detained by the army. The same day, Dr. Bavadra sent a letter to the Governor General, advising him not to give in to the wishes of the coup leader and the Great Council of Chiefs. But the Governor General did the exact opposite and Rabuka became part of the Council of advisers on 22 May 1987. Rabuka's Council of Ministers ceased to exist at 7:40 p.m. on 22 May 1987 and a new line up with many old faces were appointed to office by the Governor General; the list included: Colonel Paul Manueli, Savenaca Siwatibau, Daniel Mastapha, Mumtaz Ali, Sitiveni Rabuka, Bill Cruickshank, Ratu Josua Tonganivalu, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Harish Sharma, Dr. Timoci Bavadra, Filipe Bole, Apenisa Kurusiqila, Josua Cavalevu, Tomasi Raikivi, Viliame Gonalevu, Jone Veisamasama, Livai Nasilivata and Ratu Sir Josaia Tavaiqa. Dr. Bavadra and Harish Sharma refused to be part of the Council of Advisers, which was stacked in favour of the coup conspirators. On 22 May, Colonel Rabuka called on the people to rally behind the new Council of Advisers. As for the ex Prime Minister and Tui Nayau, Ratu Mara, he too, much to the surprise of many, quietly accepted the post offered to him by the coup leader. In justifying his move, Ratu Mara stated that he did so with the understanding that he should offer assistance to the coup leader in running the Nation.

On 26 May 1987, protest demonstrations and meetings were outlawed by Public Emergency Regulations. New Zealand Federation of Labour announced that it intended to step up its ban on goods destined to Fiji. A journalist with the *New Zealand Independent Radio* told *Radio Fiji* in Suva that the New Zealand Federation of Labour was adamant on trade sanctions. In western Viti Levu, commercial activities and bus services came to a halt on 26 May. On the same day, the Great Council of Chiefs resolved that former Alliance Party members Apisai Tora and Senator Qio be granted amnesty from charges laid against them for illegal activities after the April 1987 general election. It also resolved that the Government of India, New Zealand, United States and Australia be asked to accept Indian refugees from Fiji and that Fiji government be asked to pay for repatriation; and that the Council of Chiefs hold two special meetings within the next two months to consider proposed Constitutional changes.

In Australia, the movement for the restoration of democracy in Fiji gained momentum after thousands of former Fiji residents and their Australian Sympathisers gathered at the Sydney Town Hall on 26 May to hear the former Permanent Secretary of Dr. Bavadra, Dr. William Sutherland appeal for a trade embargo on Fiji, including suspension of all on-going military co-operation and freezing of Fiji government assets abroad. At home, the civil service was being purged with the suspension of five senior Indian staff members at the Nadi International Airport. Members of the pro-coup Fiji Port Workers Union advised foreign unions not to boycott Fiji products and warned that the present boycott was manipulated by local Indian trade union leaders. While those in the Ports Authority were busy trying to stifle the impending boycott of Fiji by the international community, the United States embassy in Fiji clarified that then US Secretary of State George Schultz had not given a blessing to the new political arrangement after the coup (USIS, 1987). Rumours were rife that the US had given tacit support to the unlawful acts of Rabuka and the Governor General. Ratu sir Kamisese Mara was said to have been given assurances of US support despite international condemnation. The United States embassy in Suva was particularly disturbed by such allegations. In a press release on 15 May 1987, however, it denounced the coup and supported restoration of the constitutionally elected government

Fiji's most prominent chief Ratu Mara was also under public scrutiny. There were allegations of his involvement by members of the deposed government. This forced him to convene a press conference with overseas journalists on 27 May 1987. When asked of the reasons for him participating in the Council of Ministers appointed by the Coup leader, he replied that all he wanted was to help the country when it needed him the most. Mara's explanations to overseas media did not dispel the widely held belief that he was the mastermind behind the coup. Many Indians, and in particular Indian academics, saw Mara as indirectly involved in activities to destabilise the Bavadra government. The actions of the Governor General also raised the possibility that he also may have been involved in the coup. The speed with which amnesty was granted to the coup leaders and the establishment of the Council of Advisers with many coup sympathisers, were seen as pre-planned and pre-meditated acts.

Australia and New Zealand suspended trade with Fiji. New Zealand suspended defence co-operation with the Fiji military because of their involvement in overthrowing an elected government. In an announcement by the New Zealand Defence Minister Frank O'Flynn, some 38 Fiji soldiers training in the country were to be sent back to Fiji.

In other developments, at the South Pacific Forum (SPF) meeting in Apia, Forum leaders struggled with the Fiji situation. The Governor General of Fiji, Ratu Penaia had advised the Forum not to give audience to members of the deposed coalition government at the meeting to lobby for their cause. As a re-

sult of the Governor's directive, deposed coalition members Krishna Datt and Tupeni Baba were asked to leave the meeting by the Director of South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation, Henry Naisali. Baba was quoted as stating that the Forum in rejecting the delegation from the deposed government in Fiji had rejected the people of Fiji. The Chairman of the Forum Meeting, Western Samoa's Prime Minister expressed hope that Fiji will be able to resolve its political crisis.

On 31 May 1987, New Zealand's Prime Minister announced that a three member team of eminent persons - Australia's PM, Bob Hawke, Solomon Islands' PM, Esekiel Alabua, and Director of SPEC Henry Naisali - may be sent at the approval of Fiji's Governor to explore the possibility of finding a satisfactory solution to the present political situation. Meanwhile Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister, Pias Wingti, elaborated that Fiji shall not be condemned outright and further reiterated the earlier Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) resolution to support the efforts of Ratu Penaia in bringing normalcy.

On 1 June 1987, the Governor General met with fifty representatives from the Indian Community led by Sir Vijay Singh, the Chief Executive of the Fiji Sugar Cane Growers Council. Indians voiced concern over public security and the state of the economy. By 2 June 1987, most shops and businesses in the western division closed for the day. People who planned to hold gatherings were advised to obtain approval from the military. The Ministry of Information stated that the move to restrict public gathering was in the interest of public safety. In fact, people saw the restrictions as further attempts to control anti-government protests which were sweeping across western Viti Levu. Soldiers had set up roadblocks and carried routine search in an effort to confiscate anti-army publications, which were circulating throughout the country, with some finding their way overseas. Harassment and detentions of dissidents continued, with the diplomatic corp also caught up in the military net. On 2 June 1987, British High Commissioner Roger Bartrop had a confrontation with the soldiers, who defiantly shot and flattened the tyres of the Commissioner's vehicle. On 3 June, Governor General Ratu Sir Penaia expressed his profound apologies for the shooting incident.

On 8 June 1987, Dr. Bavadra's campaign for the restoration of his deposed government was not getting the required support when Her Majesty refused to meet with the ousted Prime Minister after receiving advice from the Governor General of Fiji against such a meeting. In New Zealand Fiji's Consul General in Auckland Mikaele Yasa asked the New Zealand government to give him and his family political asylum (*The Fiji Times*, 8 June 1987). In Fiji, the chiefs and the people of Ra expressed full confidence and support for the Governor General's leadership. The assurances came after it was revealed that Fijians in western Viti Levu were planning to form a separate government with its own armed forces.

By 9 June 1987, rumours of midnight army raids on Indians, mass detentions, and rapes began to surface. So powerful were these rumours that Indians in large numbers began fleeing the country. As for the legality of the political order under Governor General's Council of Advisors, the Fiji Law Society, in a five-point legal submission, argued that any dissolution of Parliament should be in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister. The Society confirmed that between any dissolution of Parliament and a general election, the position of Prime Minister should continue. The submission of the Fiji Law Society clearly indicated that the Governor General was acting outside his constitutional authority and as such his proclamations and decrees were unlawful and void. It was, however, noted that the Governor General had confused his executive and legislative powers. Under the 1970 Constitution, there are no legislative powers vested in the Governor General. Only Parliament could pass legislations. While the Governor General, Ratu Penaia Ganilau, was accused of acting illegally, the repeated inference to the US involvement in the coups and speculations led the US embassy in Fiji to issue a press release on 17 June 1987. In it, the embassy denied claims of US involvement and dispelled further rumours that a US official had provided money to the *Taukei Movement* before the coup.

On the sugar front, the presence of soldiers in the cane fields and the uncertainties surrounding cane payments led to calls for a harvest boycott. Realising that farmers were looking for assurances from those in authority, on 18 June 1987 the Governor General issued a statement in which he promised the farmers that they will receive the full forecast price of \$23.50 per tonne of cane to be paid on delivery. In addition, the Governor General stated that he had given directions to the Fiji army to restrict its presence in the cane fields. Promises from Ratu Penaia were enough to satisfy the cane farmers, but a greater problem was emerging with the pending return from overseas of Dr. Bavadra, who was accused by the Fiji government of spreading falsehoods abroad. It was revealed that on 16 June 1987 Dr. Bavadra and Dr. James Anthony held a press conference, where false written allegations were distributed on forged government letterheads. The Governor General requested that Dr. Bavadra return to Fiji and hold discussions with the authorities in Fiji. The *Fiji Sun*, which re-started publishing after closing its office on 15 May, questioned whether Bavadra and his entourage will be arrested when they returned.

Bavadra was not arrested on his return, but the army continued to harass and intimidate his group. It was on 23 June 1987 that the Governor General outlined plans for a constitutional review at Nasekula village in Labasa. It was revealed that there will be a Constitutional Review Committee consisting of sixteen members. The statement of the Governor General indicated that any new political arrangement for Fiji would be based on Fijian political paramountcy. As the Governor General and the coup leaders informed the world that the political turmoil was over, the Fijian dollar was devalued (on 29 June) by 17.75

per cent against the basket of five currencies. It was envisaged that the devaluation would assist the export sector such as tourism, sugar, gold, timber, ginger, and others. Following the devaluation, the Governor General announced the names of the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC). Under the terms of reference of the Committee, the CRC hearing would begin on 6 July and conclude on 24 July 1987. The Committee was asked to deliver a report on its findings to the Governor General by 31 July 1987.

In the middle of the review, on 21 July 1987, the Great Council of Chiefs met and heard submissions from two USP academics, Dr. Asesela Ravuvu and Malakai Tawake, and a Suva lawyer, Kelemedi Bulewa, that Fiji be declared a Republic. Rumours that Fiji will soon be declared a republic were spreading in the country; it was believed that the *Taukei Movement* was behind such a move. The Great Council of Chiefs also heard the views of the coup leader, Sitiveni Rabuka who stated that an increase in the number of seats in the House of Representatives for Fijians would meet the coup objectives. The Council, however, did not give any consideration to the deposed coalition government viewpoint. The Governor General was aware of the fluidity of the Fiji situation and knew very well that the coalition would not agree to anything short of a balanced constitution in which the rights of all the ethnic groups were enshrined. To proceed with the review and to receive quality legal advice, the Governor General appointed Professor Keith Patchett as his adviser on constitutional affairs. Patchett was from the United Kingdom and had been the First Dean of the Faculty of law at the University of Wales.

Meanwhile, Dr. Bavadra filed a legal action in the Supreme Court, challenging the measures introduced by the Governor General after the coup. On 14 August 1987, the Supreme Court Judge Justice Rooney threw out three of the claims brought to the court by Bavadra. Rooney's decisions had a far reaching effect in legitimising the actions of the Governor General. At the end of August 1987, there was a report from the Constitution Review Committee that satisfied virtually no one. Instead, the report reflected prevailing racial attitudes and beliefs. By the end of first three months after the coup, questions still lingered about those who acted covertly in destabilising the Bavadra government. Denials from official sources that there was no one other than Colonel Rabuka and the *Taukei Movement* that was responsible for the coup, hardly stood up to scrutiny. The coup polarised the already divided Fijian and Indian communities and brought to surface fears of militant indigenous nationalism. The second coup in September completed the process started in May of defeating multiracialism by promoting and institutionalising racism.

### **The Second Coup - 25 September 1987**

The second military coup was staged by Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka on 25 September 1987. This coup, unlike the previous one, ousted the Governor Gen-

eral, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau and imposed military rule. In fact, before the fateful day, the militant *Taukei Movement* had intensified its campaign against Indians by rampaging through the streets of Suva and maliciously setting fire to Indian businesses. The *Taukei* onslaught was aimed at instilling fear in the Indian community and undermining the talks between the NFP-Labour coalition and the Alliance at Deuba. The talks, initiated by the Governor-General and the Interim Prime Minister, Ratu Mara, were aimed at bringing about national reconciliation. Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka saw the Deuba talks as a retreat to the pre-coup days. If the understanding reached at Deuba was implemented, and in all likelihood the nation was heading in that direction, the aims and objectives of the coup would have been seriously undermined. Once again echoing the rhetoric of protecting Fijian aspirations, Rabuka resorted to force. Soon after the second coup, the then Prime Minister of New Zealand, David Lange, deplored the actions of Rabuka, stating that it is 'tragic that at the very point when the Governor General had brought together the rival political factions, and had secured their agreement to set up an interim government designed to restore democracy in Fiji, the military should not have taken this deplorable action' (Lange, 1987).

The then Minister for Foreign Affairs in the New Zealand government, Russell Marshall, confirmed that the intention of Rabuka was to establish a regime in which the rights of Fiji's citizen of Indian origin would be drastically downgraded. In noting that, he assured that co-operation with Fiji will be suspended in areas of capital aid, technical assistance and military. While New Zealand had outright condemned the coup, Australia went a step further stating that it will not recognise any new government established by Colonel Rabuka (Hayden, 1987). International condemnation of the coup forced Rabuka to chair consensus talks on 30 September 1987. This meeting, however, considered procedures for ongoing dialogue and discussions among the security forces, and with Ratu Mara and Dr. Bavadra. The British government advised military rulers that Britain continued to regard the Governor General as the sole legitimate authority in Fiji (British High Commission, 1987). However, Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister Pius Wingti, warned that 'any external intervention in the internal affairs of Fiji would be both illegal and unhelpful' (Wingti, 1987).

In Fiji, the chiefs from around the country had come out in support of Rabuka's actions. Among those who sent messages of support to the army leader were Tui Macuata, Tui Tavua, Tui Naviti, Tui Magodro, Tui Nadru, Ratu Mai Verata and Vunivalu of Natewa. On 29 September, 1987, Fiji Broadcasting Corporation reporter Aswin Singh asked Colonel Rabuka as to why he staged the second coup? Rabuka replied that he received intelligence report that there would be widespread violence. Recounting events leading to the coup, Rabuka clarified that destruction of pine forests in western Viti Levu and arson in Suva indicated general unrest. A day before, on 28 September, Tony Melbon interviewed a *Taukei Movement* Leader, Ratu Timoci Vesikula, who confirmed that

Colonel Rabuka had aligned himself with the nationalist elements and was facilitating their cause. This revelation confirmed fears that Rabuka all along encouraged and supported the views of the Movement. That a commoner so easily and without much protest ousted the Governor-General, was unFijian. But a greater surprise was the support Rabuka received from the Vunivalu Ratu Sir George Cakobau (Radio Fiji News, 30 September, 1987). Seeing support from the highest of the Fijian traditional authorities, Rabuka had no hesitation in proceeding with his plans and abrogated the 1970 Constitution, and declared Fiji a republic on 3 October, 1987.

On 7 October 1987, the Fiji dollar was devalued by a further 15.25 per cent. In addition to the devaluation, there were other measures put in place to tighten monetary policy. Residents' foreign travel allowance was reduced from \$2,000 to \$1,000 per person per overseas trip and the commercial banks were advised to put tight control on increases in credits. The same day, Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka formally declared Fiji a republic.

On 15 October, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II received the following message from the Governor General of Fiji: 'Your Majesty, with humble duty, I wish to submit to you the following advice, acting in my capacity as your representative in Fiji. Owing to the political and constitutional situation in Fiji, I have now made up my mind to request Your Majesty to relieve me of my appointment as the Governor General with immediate effect' (Ganilau, 16/10/87).

The Queen accepted the resignation and the Commonwealth leaders, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Vancouver British Columbia in Canada on 16 October 1987, acknowledged that on the basis of established Commonwealth conventions, Fiji's membership of the Commonwealth lapsed with the emergence of a Republic status on 15 October 1987.

In a speech, Rabuka stated that he will institute an interim government which will ensure a new social contract for returning the government to the people. In that interview, the Colonel confirmed that work will soon start on a new Constitution. On 20 October, 1987, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Filipe Bole confirmed that France had pledged support for Fiji. Apart from France, which sent two patrol-boats to the Island on 2 October 1987, a commercial delegation from the Republic of Indonesia visited Fiji from 2-7 November at the invitation of the government. In Fiji, the former Leader of Opposition and the NFP Leader Siddiq Koya met with Colonel Rabuka on 30 September, 1987 and briefed him on the negotiations leading to the 1970 Constitution. After the discussions, Rabuka remarked that Koya expressed his personal sympathy for the struggles of the indigenous Fijians (Ministry of Information, 30/09/87).

By 30 September, Australia and New Zealand, two of Fiji's major trading neighbours, imposed trade sanctions, the result of which was particularly felt in the tourism industry. The industry's spokesperson Radike Qereqeretabua stated that the embargo hurt mainly the working people. Supporting Qereqeretabua

was the Secretary of the National Union of Hotel and Catering Employees, Isimeli Volavola, who reiterated that the two thousand five hundred strong union members opposed the sanctions.

In addition to the on-going boycott debate, there was a larger issue: that of foreign intervention. It was rumoured that a peacekeeping force was being set up to overthrow the regime of Colonel Rabuka. In an interview on *Radio Australia*, the Australian Foreign Affairs Minister admitted that there were calls for such a force to be sent to Fiji, but shrugged off suggestions of Australian government involvement. The security situation in Fiji deteriorated when on 3 October, 1987, a policeman was injured in a bomb blast at the Nadi Police Station. Police spokesman Romanu Tikotikoca confirmed the incident and urged public not to temper with suspicious parcels and objects. After declaring Fiji a republic on 7 October, 1987, Colonel Rabuka announced the appointment of a nineteen member Council of Ministers which went with the title 'transitional authority'. The new members were Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, Filipe Bole, Ratu Josua Cavalevu, Isimeli Bose, Dr. Apenisa Kurusiqila, Sakeasi Butadroka, Livai Nasilivata, Irene Jai Narayan, Taniela Veitata, Ratu Meli Vesikula, Adi Litia Cakobau, Ratu Sir Josaia Tavaiaqia, Major Avolosi Buivakaloloma, Apisai Viliame Gonelevu, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, and Lieutenant Colonel Ilaisa Kacisolomone.

Despite the efforts to create a veneer of normalcy, the night curfew, imposed after the second coup from 8.00 p.m. to 5.00 a.m., was seen as a measure to restrict freedom of movement and deter anti-government protests. In addition, the security forces carried out routine checks of all vehicles and detained individuals suspected of engaging in any anti-government activity. While the people of Fiji suffered under night curfew and constant harassment from the army, the Israeli government decided to set up its embassy in Suva. Fiji and Israel established diplomatic relations in June 1971 and since then successive Israeli ambassadors to Australia had been accredited as non-resident ambassadors to Fiji. The Israeli move, at a time of heightened racial tension and military oppression, was seen by many observers as political support for Rabuka.

On 15 October 1987, the Minister for Information, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola cautioned the diplomatic corp not to interfere in Fiji's internal affairs (Ministry of Information, 15/10/87). He disclosed that certain members of diplomatic missions in Fiji pursued political discussions with individuals hostile to the government. The same night, in an Australian *ABC International Report* programme, former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser stated that Indians in Fiji were deprived of their political rights. The programme noted that the military-imposed curfew and the ban on Sunday trading were imposed to harass Indians. A day after the programme, a bomb exploded outside Morris Hedstrom in Suva, injuring two women and an elderly man. The explosions were a sign of anti-government protest. In another such incident a person, an employee of the University of the South Pacific, died on Queen Elizabeth Drive in Suva.

The trade ban was slowly losing its effect. By 20 October, 1987, the New Zealand Maritime, Transport and General Workers Federation, agreed to lift trade bans imposed on Fiji since the second coup. Other unions, including the Australian Airline Industry unions, decided to ban all flights between Fiji and Australia from 1 November 1987. Immediately, the Minister for Internal affairs, David Pickering, accused the airline unions of political interference. Finally, on 20 October, the Australian Council of Trade Union suspended all proposed flight ban. While Fiji criticised Australian unions' campaign against Fiji, it did receive with gratitude the support from Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed who called for understanding and support for the military leaders. Upon receiving a sympathetic note from Malaysia, the Fijian regime immediately set out to establish trade links with that country. On 4 November 1987, government clarified its position on 'Sunday ban' by emphasising that non-Christians were allowed to worship on Sundays. However, the military government cautioned that religious places were not to be used for political gatherings, and meetings were prohibited under the Sunday Observance Decree No. 23.

Indians in the country were generally dissatisfied with the state of affairs. In Sydney, one Indian political activist, Noor Dean, informed his counterparts in Australia that Fiji soldiers had carried out mass detention and rapes. To calm down Indian fears, the new Minister for Indian Affairs, Irene Jai Narayan, on 5 November 1987, tried unsuccessfully to reassure the Fiji Indians that this was not the case. By 12 November 1987, the daily curfew was lifted. On the same day the commander of the Fiji Military Forces, Sitiveni Rabuka, was promoted to the rank of Brigadier. In justifying the promotion, the Fiji Public Service Commission (PSC) explained that the promotion was made on the basis of the additional responsibilities which were discharged by Rabuka. Once promoted, and the support for the republic from the chiefs secured, Rabuka went ahead and formed an 'Anthem and Flag Committee', the task of which was to consider and make representations on the national flag, national emblem and national motto. On 12 November 1987 the committee was formally announced by the Minister for Information Ratu Inoke Kubuabola. Its members were Rev. Manasa Lasaro, Ali Asgar, Esther Williams, Manu Korovulavula, Archie Seeto, Clive Amputch and Vijay Raghwan.

On 18 November, then President Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau was officially extended an invitation to become the first President of the new Republic of Fiji. Rabuka, however, clarified that the acceptance by Ratu Penaia of the invitation was contingent upon the latter's concurrence with the provisions of the proposed new Constitution of Fiji. The moves to appoint a new President and design a new flag were pending issues, but a more urgent attention was needed towards the national economy that was severely battered by the two coups. The Minister for Economic Planning, Isimeli Bose, on 10 November 1987 outlined an interim plan to boost the economy (Ministry of Information, 19/11/87). It

was proposed that Free Trade Zone and Tax Free Factories' provision would immediately be introduced to lure foreign investors. Essentially, the TFZ/TFF guidelines were: a) companies operating under the scheme will be free from all statutory fiscal obligation; b) all the output of the designated areas will not be subject to any fiscal levies; c) the TFF may import anything duty free, including building materials for the factory; d) the factory or zone would be under strict excise control; and e) the factory must produce 95 per cent exclusively for exports.

On the diplomatic front, the Republic of Marshall Islands formally approached the government of Fiji to establish formal diplomatic relations between the two Pacific countries. New Zealand and Australian Foreign Ministers were invited to visit Fiji to see for themselves that the 'situation' was rapidly returning to normal. In a press release, the Ministry of Information noted that Fiji had returned to normal. In fact, the situation in Fiji was far from normal. Indians who had not been purged from senior government positions after the first coup had their employment terminated after the second coup. Rumours of midnight raids and detentions and harassment of coalition supporters and Indians generally created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. While the curfew was relaxed, the 'Sunday ban' was strengthened to restrict freedom of movement. Abroad, pro democracy activists involved in campaigns for restoring elected authority in Fiji came increasingly under attack from respective authorities which accepted Fiji government propaganda - that the political situation in Fiji had normalised. Critics of the Fiji regime were reminded that there were moves underway to set up a constitutional government. On 5 December, 1987, an Executive Council met to discuss a draft Constitution for Fiji. In fact, two drafts were prepared: one by the officers of the Fiji army and the other by the Attorney General.

On 5 December, 1987, Ratu Penaia was appointed the first President of Fiji. In an address to the nation on the same day, the President stated: 'People of Fiji, let us be sure of one thing. You have heard Brigadier Rabuka tell you that he is confident that his objective will be achieved. You should trust him. We both clearly understand each other and agree on the objective, and it is therefore essential for you to realise that the future protection of the indigenous Fijian interests is in safe hands'. By 7 December, 1987, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was appointed the new Prime Minister of the new interim government. In a statement on 8 December, 1987, Mara categorically and unequivocally declared that he was not involved in any way with the military coups. Calling for support from all the sections of Fiji's multiracial community, Mara assured that he was not an opportunist and that he decided to accept his appointment as the Prime Minister of Fiji after a long and a hard consideration.

By the end of 1987, it was clear that there would be a new Constitution for the new Republic of Fiji. It was also by then a foregone conclusion that the

new Constitution was to be in favour of indigenous Fijians and the army, and that the political rights of Indians would be restricted in the new Fijian order.

In 1987 Sitiveni Rabuka unleashed into the open the often hidden racism that had its roots in colonial Fiji. Besides that, Rabuka had also ensured that the Fiji military was a significant stakeholder in Fiji's political development as well as other indigenous institutions such as the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB), the Great Council of Chiefs, the Methodist Church of Fiji, and the Fijian Provincial Councils.

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