



# Special REPORT



## Fiji widens its vision to cover the world

Venkat Raman

A 12-member business delegation returned home last week after a five-day visit to Fiji, full of hope, ambition and entrepreneurial spirit.

In just five days (from July 30 to August 3) most of them have secured, or in the process of securing, Memorandum of Understanding followed by commercial arrangements with companies and businesspersons in Fiji. These moves will accord them the potential for a long, sustained and mutually beneficial business partnership with Fiji, which has unfortunately suffered economic and political sanctions from several countries of the advanced world, especially New Zealand and Australia (more of these later).

Harish Lodhia, Honorary Consul for Fiji in Auckland, Robert Khan, Owner & Managing Director of Radio Tarana and *Indian Newslink* Editor were the facilitators of the Delegation, details of which appear separately in this Special Report.

It was fun mixed with business for the businesspersons, some of who were visiting Fiji for the first time.

### Peace & harmony

They did not see military personnel patrolling the streets or policemen and policewomen guarding government offices or even media houses.

They did not see people panicking as they went about their daily business, selling the daily produce in the Nadi or Suva vegetable and fruit markets; or taking decisions in the air-conditioned comforts of their private office suites or board rooms.

They did not hear a single complaint of someone being 'harassed' or questioned, unless that someone went beyond the

tenets of the law.

What they did see was peace, harmony, friendship and most important of all, Fijians ready to engage with New Zealand businesses.

### Big neighbours fail

The fact that the Australian and New Zealand governments do not see eye-to-eye with their counterpart in Suva and the fact that most Fijian ministers and government officials are still not allowed

and literacy levels need to be lifted. But these are problems that confront every nation on earth.

However, the most critical challenge that Fiji in general and Mr Bainimarama in particular faces is to return the country to democracy, handing over the reins of the Government to a popularly elected Government. This is not an easy process in a country that has seen four coups in less than 20 years – the last one, on December 5, 2006, staged by Mr Bainimarama himself, was the most peaceful, earning the approval of a majority of people in Fiji and Fijians living overseas.

Ensuring equality to all is an integral part of the new Constitution, which will be unveiled this month, will allow time for people to understand their rights and responsibilities and be ready for the general election due in September 2014.

### Ensuring equality

Mr Bainimarama wants the world to understand Fiji and the formidable issues that it is confronting at home and overseas. He wants countries,

especially powerful neighbours such as Australia and New Zealand, to appreciate the efforts of his Government in putting the house in order before people can vote.

"We are finalising a new Constitution that specifically includes, for the first time, socio-economic rights for all Fijians. These are fundamental rights of economic participation, right to work, the right to a minimum wage, transportation and water. Our new Constitution will introduce long overdue democratic principles. For the first time, we will have an electoral system that removes the legal enforcement of ethnic



Explaining to the world- Bainimarama with UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki-moon after taking over as the Chair of G77 in January 2013 (UN Photo by Rick Bajornas)

to travel to these two countries (this is gradually changing) did not matter. Everyone in Fiji, including Prime Minister Commodore Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, is focused on one objective: to take Fiji forward, and accentuate economic and social development.

### Problems & challenges

Undoubtedly, there are issues and challenges that confront this small Island nation of about 860,000 people (December 21012 estimate). Infrastructure is basic and poor, a large number of Fijians live in poverty, healthcare is less than adequate

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