

Fiji widens its vision (continued from page 11)

voting, enshrines one person, one vote, one value and helps voters focus on the merits of the policies offered by respective political parties," he said.

Call them Fijians

There was a general feeling among Indo-Fijians in Fiji to rebrand themselves as 'Fijians,' to reflect the commonality of their citizenship and in consonance with the Government's desire to bring about equity for all. The term 'Fijian' is therefore being widely used to refer to people of Fijian origin living anywhere in the world.

The motto of the Business Mission was 'Fijians to Fiji.' It emphasised the need for all people of Fijian origin to be called, 'Fijians,' and not as 'Indo-Fijians,' 'Fijian Chinese' and 'Ethnic Fijians.'

Eradicating corruption

Mr Bainimarama is also keen to ensure that the Government, both existing and emerging, will be transparent and accountable to Parliament in the first instance and to the people of Fiji ultimately.

Corruption has been a major problem faced by Fiji over the past several decades. Low salaries, absence of legalised minimum wage and poverty have been the

factors that bred corruption in high and low places.

Neither Mr Bainimarama nor the Accountant General and Justice Minister Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum made any apology for the stringent action against bribery.

A political observer told me that corruption was so endemic in ministries and government departments that it was essential to take tough measures. "That is the reason for many military officers holding civilian posts," they said.

Corruption is a swear word in today's Fiji. Hoardings asking people to report corruption can be seen in many parts of the country, especially Suva, the seat of the Government.

Global engagement

While Mr Bainimarama, his ministers and officials welcome New Zealanders and Australians to visit as tourists or investors, there was an indubitable feeling of hurt over the drastic (and in their view unjustifiable) action that Wellington and Canberra took soon after Mr Bainimarama ousted the allegedly corrupt Laisenia Qarase Government and installed his own military regime on December 5, 2006.

Foreign Minister Inoke Kubuabola has no qualms about stating how disappointed Fiji feels, both at public meetings such as the Australia Fiji Forum (held in Brisbane recently) or in private conversations.

"Australia and New Zealand chose to punish Fiji for finally addressing the deep divisions in our society, lack of equality and genuine democracy and the corruption that was destroying our country from within. Our doors were always open to you but you chose not to enter," he said.



Delegation meeting- Mahesh Reddy, Alkesh Sharma and Sudha Karan in Suva

North & South

Mr Kubuabola said that Fiji no longer confined its vision to Australia and New Zealand as its natural allies and protectors but is expanding its vision towards the wider world.

"Jolted from our complacency by the doors that were slammed in our faces, we looked North, to the great powers of Asia, especially China, India and Indonesia and more recently to Russia. We looked South, to the vast array of nations, big and small, that make up the developing world and we currently chair the G77, the biggest voting bloc at the United Nations.

"And we looked to our Melanesian neighbours, to forge closer ties with them and use our collective strength to make our voices heard in global forums and secure better trading deals for us all," he said.

Brightening prospects

If our readings are correct, Fiji will continue to march ahead, regardless of the tough stand taken by Australia and New Zealand. It will continue to engage with our businesses, rewarding them with contracts and commercial opportunities, wherever it deems fit to do so.

As an independent nation, Fiji values its sovereignty and integrity and hence will not allow, as Mr Bainimarama said, anyone to 'bully us.' Korea has also evinced interest in Fiji's infrastructure development

- Mr Kubuabola met a delegation from that country when we were in Fiji - and hence, this South Pacific nation will have the luxury of several options. Australia and New Zealand would have cause to regret, if they do not give up their stand and extend a hand of friendship to Suva.

Fiji would emerge as a stronger nation next year after its general election. Canberra and Wellington may find



Frank Bainimarama with Feroz Ali

themselves in a mood to discuss restoration of ties with Fiji but this country will do so on its terms.

As Mr Kubuabola said, "Our attitudes have changed irrevocably. We are keen to rebuild the relationship but not on the same basis. We want mutual understanding and respect and to be regarded as equals, just as we pursue all of our international relationships under our overarching policy to be friends to all."

Such hoardings have helped tackle bribery

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As confidence builds, higher growth forecast

The economy of Fiji is robust and with the return of business confidence, future prospects for growth are bright, Reserve Bank of Fiji Governor Barry Whiteside said.

Addressing the members of a business delegation from New Zealand in Suva on August 1, 2013, he said that Fiji would follow New Zealand's projected growth of 2.7% this year, while Australian economists had predicted their country's rate of economic growth would be about 2.5%.

However, a day later, Mr Whiteside, who is also the Chairman of the Macroeconomic Policy Committee, said that the Fijian economy would expand by 3.2% this year.

"After a detailed reassessment of the relevant data and information available, this revision from the earlier growth forecast of 2.7% announced in the 2013 National Budget would be possible," he said.

The revised growth projection for 2013, if achieved, will be the highest since 2004.

According to him, growth this year is projected to be broad-based with positive contributions from all the sectors, except for the mining and quarrying sector.

The contraction in the mining sector reflects lower production levels and is largely due to the extraction of low grade ore by the Vatukoula Gold Mines Limited. The manufacturing; agriculture; wholesale and retail trade; communication; financial intermediation; construction and the transport & storage sectors provide the major impetus to the 3.2% growth in 2013.

The main drivers for the upward revision in growth this year are due to better-than-expected performances in the wholesale & retail trade; communications; construction and the transport & storage sectors.

According to Mr Whiteside, the revised

growth projection reflected the growing sense of optimism in the economy and was consistent with the strong growth in various partial indicators.

"These included net Value Added Tax collections, inward personal remittances, domestic cement sales and borrowing by the private sector for



Barry Whiteside speaking to the New Zealand delegation on August 2

consumption and investment purposes. This is further validated by the Bank's Business Expectations and Retail Sales Surveys and direct feedback from a wide cross section of industries and sectors," he said.

He added that the upward revision to the economic growth projection mirrors the increased investment by the private sector, statutory corporations and Government, which is estimated at 28% of Gross Domestic Product for 2013.

Mr Whiteside said that the Fijian economy is estimated to have grown by 2.2% in 2012, marginally lower than the earlier forecast of 2.5%.

"This was because of lower-than-expected tourist arrival and decline in sugar cane and gold production," he said.

- Staff Reporter