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Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Fri, 09/21/2012 - 19:26

Paper No. 271

06.07.2001

by Dr. S. Chandrasekharan

Rabuka and the Coup:

Whether we like it or not , we have been brought together by history and circumstances. The starting point in envisioning our future must be that Fiji is our common home- Sitiveni Rabuka.

This was the same Rabuka who in 1989 staged a coup to oust the lawfully elected government of Dr. Timoci Bavadra in the name of "returning Fiji to the Fijians". In the second forced ouster of the lawfully elected government of Mahendra Chaudhry by the thugs of Speight, it was initially thought that Rabuka had no hand. First reports emanating from Fiji after the incident, even praised Rabuka for negotiating with Speight's armed gang to release the hostages which included Mahendra Chaudhry the Prime minister and his ministers.

Now a year after the armed take over, more evidence is forthcoming that Rabuka was not all that innocent. Ratu Mara the then President has said that Rabuka was involved in the attempted coup of 19th May last year by a section of the army after the take over. The Daily Post reported that the coup plot was hatched in November 1999 itself by Rabuka's SVT politicians and some military officials. Acting editor Mesake Koros named Rabuka specifically as

one of the key persons behind the attempted coup. Yet no action is being contemplated by the Qarase regime to bring him to justice.

Worse still, many of those who participated in the unlawful assembly which resulted in "hostage taking", have been released. Some have been bound but a majority of them have been released without sentence. Not one of the Speight's group who was involved in the forcible take over has been sentenced.

Qarase's new political party: Instead of healing the wounds of the fractured community and bringing the country back to multiracial harmony, Qarase is making all efforts to perpetuate the division. On 9th May he launched a new political party Soqosoqo Duavatanl Lewenivanua (SDL) with the objective of unifying all races of the people in Fiji and maintaining **Fijian Supremacy** in the country. This in effect would mean going back to the racially discriminatory 1990 constitution.

It looks that Qarase would try to restore some of the provisions of the 1990 constitution by getting the Constitution Review Commission (CRC) make such recommendations. The CRC is supposed to give its report by 31st August while the elections under the 1997 Constitution are due to be held in the last week of August. Some political observers claim that the Qarase regime does not want elections in August as its new party has very little chance of getting enough seats to form the government. The regime could use the excuse that a new constitution is needed before the election and the whole process could be postponed.

Amnesty International has condemned the developments in Fiji in no uncertain terms. While referring to the Court of Appeal ruling in March, which upheld the Constitution and declared the government illegal, the authorities defied the ruling by having themselves reappointed as the caretaker government. The report added that "preparations for the elections in Fiji in August are being overshadowed by racism and government efforts to pursue racial supremacy for indigenous Fijians."

1997 Constitution and Elections in August 2001: There is an imperative need to ensure that the 1997 constitution which was racially equitable is continued as Fiji cannot continue to be divided by racial and religious prejudices. It is equally important to ensure that elections do take place in end August as scheduled and not postponed on any excuse.

Speaking at the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha's annual convention in Ba in end June this year, the Australian Ambassador Ms. Susan Boyd said that the "1997 constitution which the perpetrators of the May 19 event sought to overturn, was a milestone in enshrining the basic concept of social justice . . . there can be no lasting solution for the challenges facing Fiji unless the concept of social justice is accepted by all and enshrined in the constitution and laws. There could be no security for the citizens of Fiji unless social justice is accepted by everyone." Australia has offered 1.25 million dollars for election purposes and another quarter million to work on the institutions of civil society in the context of the elections.

Elections could be rigged: Many people in Fiji fear that the coming elections if held will be rigged by the Qarase regime. One of the reasons for their fear is that the regime in the preparations for the election has allowed 45 hours between the end of voting to the start of counting. This is unusual as counting always started the same evening in previous elections.

The UN is sending a team to Fiji to assess the preparations going on for elections. New Zealand has also offered 700,000 dollars towards election expenses. Their assistance would also include an international observer team to ensure that the elections are free and fair. New Zealand may also press for Election monitors from the international community to be involved in the elections. Foreign observers in large numbers may be necessary as questions have been raised about the impartiality of election officials who have been placed in their positions by the Qarase regime. Media reports indicate that Qarase has allowed three groups of foreign observers- the UN, the Commonwealth and the EU to observe the elections.

Speight & the Indian Lawyer: Political observers of Fiji were considerably surprised when reports indicated that on June 6 Speight had hired an American Lawyer of ethnic Indian origin to defend him and his brothers in the treason charge against them. The lawyer Navin Naidu was unknown to lawyers in Fiji and there were conflicting reports about his background.

Navin Naidu is reportedly a Singapore born, Indian, English educated and an American resident. Under Fiji law he had to file his papers in the courts before appearing on anyone's behalf. The papers filed by him on June 6 were found to be incomplete. He filed another set of amended papers on 8th June. Naidu told the media that he is an expert in constitutional and ecclesiastical law and has a law firm in Seattle, Washington USA. Enquiries made did not confirm the existence of the law firm in Seattle. Naidu was arrested on 12th June on three counts- perverting the cause of justice, tendering forged documents and making false statements on oath.

Another Coup? A section of the army is said to be restless and senior officials say that another army coup before or after the August elections cannot be ruled out. Fiji unfortunately has earned the reputation of a country of "coups and rugby". The standing army that it has, is more than what they need and the surplus is used in contributing regularly to the UN for peace keeping operations.

Ethnically the entire army consists of indigenous Fijians and the Indians had never shown any interest in joining the army. Now many want to join, but it is said that the slightly built Indians may not meet the rigid physical standards expected. This cannot be true and more Indians should join the security organisations of the country. Unless the current imbalance is rectified to some extent, the Indians would always remain at the receiving end.

What the Fijians of Indian origin should do? Besides joining the security organisations, the army and the Police, the Indians should also try to move away from their over dependence on farming as primary occupation. One of the reasons for the last coup was the fear that the Chaudhry government would disturb the current proprietary rights of the Chiefs and the indigenous Fijians on leased lands cultivated by Indians. The Indians could over a period of time look for opportunities in technical fields like computers and communications. More important for them would be to use their votes to choose the right candidates even if it means cutting across racial lines in the coming elections.

(Reference may be made to [Paper 226](#) ^[1] for more details.)

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