

Fiji An Overview



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FIJI AN OVERVIEW

GEOGRAPHY

Fiji lies in the heart of the Pacific Ocean midway between the Equator and the South Pole and between longitudes 174° East and 178° West of Greenwich and latitudes 12° S and 22° south. Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone contains approximately 330 islands of which about a - third are inhabited. It covers about 1.3 million square kilometers of the South Pacific Ocean. Fiji's total land area is 18,333 square kilometers. There are two major islands - Viti Levu which is 10,429 square kilometers and Vanua Levu 5,556 square kilometers. Other main islands are Taveuni (470 sq km), Kadavu (411 sq km), Gau (140 sq km) and Koro (104 sq km). 87.9% of land is owned by indigenous Fijians while 3.9% is State land. Freehold land comprises 7.9% and Rotuman land is 0.3%. The capital is Suva and it is one of the two cities in Fiji. The other city is Lautoka and both are located on the island of Viti Levu.

CLIMATE

Fiji enjoys a tropical South Sea maritime climate without great extremes of heat or cold. The islands lie in area, which is occasionally traversed by tropical cyclones, and mostly confined between the months of November to April every year. At all seasons the predominant winds over Fiji are the Trade Winds from the east to south - east. On the western and eastern sides of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu however, day time breezes blow in across the coast. In general, the winds over Fiji are light or moderate, the most persistent being in the period July - December. Temperatures average 22°Celsius (72 °F) for the cooler months (May to October) while (November to April) temperatures are higher with heavy downpours. Although rainfall is highly variable, the average rainfall increases steadily inland from coastal areas. It usually increases between December - April, especially over the

larger islands, but in May - October it is often deficient, particularly in the dry zone on the western and northern sides of the main islands.

POPULATION

The estimated population of Fiji on December 31, 2004 stood at 840,201. Of the total 456,207 were Fijians, 320, 659 were Indians and 63,335 were others. For the last two official Census there was a net increase of 57,280 persons. Fijian numbers had increased by 65,694 persons. Indian numbers registered a decrease of 0.3 per cent as a result of high international emigration, and lower rate of natural increase. The annual average growth rate between the Censuses was 0.8%. Fiji has a relatively young population with about 53% or 413,100 persons below the age of 25 years. This percentage has declined from the 1986 figure of 58.7%. The economically active population in 1986 was 62% of the total population or 441,852 persons and in 1996 it was estimated at 67% or 523,428 persons. The number of people aged 60 years and over was estimated at 47,027 persons or 6% of the total projected population in 1996. This figure has risen from 4.9% or 35,395 in 1986. The dependency ratio in 1986 was 71 but declined to 70 in 1990 and 68 in 1996. This means that the percentage of people dependent on those who are working is decreasing. Fiji is becoming increasingly urbanized as internal migration to towns and cities continue. Extension of urban boundaries has also contributed to this trend. By 1996, some 46 per cent of the population was living in urban areas, up from 39 per cent in 1986. Around 41 per cent of Fijians and Rotumans now live in urban areas. The urban population has grown at 2.6 per cent per year between 1986 and 1996 and the rural population has been shrinking by 0.5 per year. The Capital Suva is the most populated city with 167,975 persons followed by Lautoka with 43,274 and Nadi at 30,884. Apart

from the indigenous Fijians, Fiji has accepted many other nationalities to its shores - Indians, Europeans, Chinese and other Pacific islanders.

CITIZENSHIP

Fiji does not recognize dual citizenship. A person may acquire citizenship of Fiji by birth, naturalization or registration. One of the main provisions under the new citizenship laws is the equal opportunities and privileges given to foreigners who are married to either male or female Fiji citizens in acquiring citizenship of Fiji. Applications can be lodged at any Immigration Office. Over 1000 foreign nationals have taken up citizenship in the country. Under Section 12 of the Constitution, 913 foreign nationals were granted citizenship by registration and under Section 13 of the Constitution, 317 were granted citizenship by naturalization.

GOVERNMENT, EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND CONSTITUTION

Fiji became independent in 1970, after nearly a century as a British colony. Fiji is a sovereign democratic state and the Constitution is the supreme law of Fiji. The Constitution Amendment Act 1997, to amend the 1990 Constitution came into operation on July 25, 1998. In principle, the new Constitution gave regard to recognising, respecting and upholding the rights and interests of all ethnic groups in the country. The passing of the new Constitution led to Fiji's readmission as a member of the Commonwealth in October, 1997, restoring some of the links with the Crown. The 1997 Constitution also conformed to all of the major United Nations instruments relating to land rights, customs, traditions and cultural inheritance. With the 1997 Constitution, Executive Authority is vested in the President who is appointed by the Bose Levu Vakaturaga (Great Council of Chiefs). The President serves for a five-year period. The President appoints

the 32 senators. Fourteen (14) are indigenous Fijians appointed on the advice of the BLV, nine (9) on the advice of the Prime Minister, eight (8) on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and one (1) from Rotuma appointed on the advice the Rotuma Island council.

Fiji's Parliament largely follows the procedures and customs of the British where there is an elected House of Representatives and a nominated Senate. The House of Representatives comprises of 71 members - 25 MPs elected on open rolls, and 46 MPs elected on communal (ethnic) rolls. The candidates for the 25 open seats can come from any ethnic group. The 4 Communal seats are distributed as follows: Fijians 23, Indians 19, Rotumans 1 and Others 3. The Upper House or the Senate consists of 32 members of whom: 14 are appointed by the President on the advice of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga, 9 are appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister, 8 are appointed by the President on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and 1 is appointed by the President on the advice of the Council of Rotuma.

The Senate complements the work of the House of Representatives through the scrutiny and revision of Bills coming to it. Whilst the Senate has limited powers in respect to Money Bills, it can guide opinion and clarify issues in general debate and by motions, petitions and adjournment speeches.

In January 2007 Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama was appointed Prime Minister in the Interim Government of Fiji and elections are expected to be held within the next two years.

JUDICIARY

The Constitution guarantees the independence of the judiciary by placing the appointment of judges in the hands of the President after consultation with the independent Judicial and Legal Services Commission. Members of the judiciary cannot be removed except under a system of checks and balances. The Constitution allows for three courts-the High Court, Fiji Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court - all independent of the executive or any other authority and the subordinate courts.

The Magistrates' Courts exercise both limited civil and criminal jurisdiction within the limits of the Division within which they are situated. Their jurisdiction also extends to territorial waters adjacent to the Division. The distribution of business between Magistrates' Courts within a Division is subject to the direction of the Chief Justice. At the present time, there is a Chief Magistrate and 14 resident magistrates centred in the main towns. In 1991, the Small Claims Tribunal Decree was enacted by legislation to transfer the resolution of small claims from the Magistrates Courts to the newly created Small Claims Tribunal.

Under the Decree, the Tribunals are divisions of the Magistrates' Courts. The Tribunal has jurisdiction in respect of any claim which does not exceed \$2000 in value and such other jurisdiction as conferred upon it by any other law. The High Court has jurisdiction to hear and determine any question relating to protection of fundamental rights and freedom of individual. It has unlimited original jurisdiction to hear and determine any civil or criminal proceedings. It also has unlimited powers to hear and determine appeals in both criminal and civil matters from courts subordinate to it. The Fiji Court of Appeal, however, hears appeals generally from any person

convicted of any offence from the High Court. The final appellate court is the Supreme Court and under the Constitution, it determines any appeal from a final decision or order of the Fiji Court of Appeal. It also has powers to review, modify, reverse or affirm such decisions or orders and make such other orders, it sees necessary in the interest of justice.

EDUCATION

About a quarter of the entire population is of school-going age and although education is not compulsory at any stage, over 98 per cent of children between 6 and 14 years of age is attending schools. In 1996 about 70 per cent of the population had already received some secondary education (74 percent Fijians and 66 percent Indians). Nearly all children 6-8 years of age were enrolled in schools. In the same year, the literacy rate was 92.9 percent) and was higher among Fijians (92.9 percent) than among Indians (89 percent). The rate was higher among males (94 percent) than among females (91 per cent).

Government also encourages school attendance by rural and poor children through measures like the free tuition scheme for primary and secondary schools and per capita grants and remission of fees for secondary students. The number of registered /recognised schools totaled 1404 in 2003. Of this number there were 569 pre-schools, 17 special schools, 712 primary schools, 157 secondary schools, 4 teacher training colleges and 63 vocational centres. The primary teachers' establishment in 2003 was 5129 and the number of civil servant teachers in secondary schools was 2419. A total of 70,616 students were enrolled in secondary schools in 2003 - 68,178 in straight classes i.e. in forms 1 to 7 and 2,429 in vocational courses. A total of 7,016 students attended as boarders in 56 boarding schools. There is a high degree of community participation in the

delivery of education services which is the strength of the system that needs to be maintained, which includes religion (Christian, Hindus, Muslims) and community organisations as well as localised communities. Most schools are managed by non-government organisations. Government operates only 0.3% per cent of the 712 primary schools, 8 per cent of the secondary schools, 8 per cent of vocational and technical education schools, and 2 out of the 5 teacher training institutions. Fiji also has an international school which caters for the international community based locally. International School Suva is an independent co-educational day school offering pre-school, primary and secondary education. The school was established in 1973 and caters for students from 3 to 18 year olds.

HEALTH

Fiji generally has a good standard of health and compares well with other Pacific island nations. The country's health status meets or exceeds most of the World Health Organization's goals for the Year 2000. Such a status is due to improved health standards, sound comprehensive health care programme and the untiring effort of the Ministry of Health in promoting healthy living for people. The Ministry of Health has formulated its new Strategic Plan for 2005 -2008 and will focus on five main thematic areas of:

1. Provision of affordable, well planned, quality health services (preventative, diagnostic, clinical, pharmaceutical, rehabilitative) to everyone in Fiji.
2. Protection of Health of citizens through the review of formulations of appropriate policies, legislation, regulations and standards that safeguard health.
3. Promotion of Health through the development and maintenance of effective partnerships that empower all stakeholders of health promotion so as

to reduce risk factors related to communicable and non-communicable diseases.

4. Development and retention of a valued, committed and skilled workforce to enhance the delivery of quality health services.

5. Development and use of an integrated management system to empower managers to maximize resources and promote continuous improvement at all levels of health service delivery.

Primary health care involves the provision of primary medical treatment, preventive medicine and health education. About 95 per cent of primary medical care is provided by doctors in government hospitals, health centres and nursing stations throughout the country. They are complemented by general practitioners in private practice in most urban centres. The hospitals, health centres and nursing stations provide outpatient medical treatment, antenatal and postnatal care, family planning and development and screening of children. Divisional hospitals provide screening for cancer of the breast and cervix, immunisation, clinical laboratory facilities, health education and dental care. Psych-iatric care is provided in a separate institution. All school children are medically examined at regular intervals by school health teams. Health education activities and training are important ongoing programmes for the sector. The public is encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles to ensure their well-being and to learn proper use of health services through media, publications, audio visuals and counseling. Nutrition, a major determinant of health, is being addressed by the Food and Nutrition Committee which was established by government to encourage the public to adopt better and healthier eating habits.

The government continues to push for improved curative services. The focus

has been on the quality of treatment provided, staffing, upgrading of existing facilities and the provision of equipment and technologies to meet current demands. There are a total of 307 doctors in the public service providing inpatient and ambulatory care. The private hospital system is also emerging as an alternative means of medical care provision in Fiji. Government continues to acknowledge and encourage the private sector which supplements the efforts of the Ministry of Health. A new private hospital run by the Colonial Group has been established in the capital Suva and offers state of the art medical equipment and highly trained staff.

RECREATION & SPORTS

Sport, with its intrinsic values, plays an important role in nation building programme. It provides lucrative employment opportunities and promotes Fiji as a tourist destination. Fiji is gaining an increasing reputation for hosting a range of sporting events. Fiji has proved its resilience with the hosting of what is being called the biggest and the best South Pacific Games ever. The 12th SPG games were held from June 28 - July 14 2003 and altogether 22 island countries participated. With the financial support of the Government of the People's Republic of China who spent \$25 million on the development of sporting facilities and a contribution by the Fiji Government of \$17 million for the upgrading of sporting facilities, the event presented the largest and most complex organisational challenge. With the untiring efforts of FASANOC, the SPG organising committee, government and the Suva City Council, the games provided an ideal opportunity to rebuild the country and to promote the spirit of multiculturalism, of togetherness and working for a common goal.

The games have seen the development of new facilities namely the Multi

-purpose Hall which has the potential to seat up to 4000 spectators and houses three competition size basketball courts with sprung timber flooring identical to that used for the Sydney Olympics. The National Aquatic Centre features a 50 - meter competition pool and a 25-meter warm up pool, fully lit at night training and the National Hockey Centre has the facility to seat up to 500 spectators and features a water base synthetic pitch, which is the finest playing surface available. The new facilities also include a Netball Centre, Beach Volleyball Centre and Baseball Grounds. The Fiji Sports Council was established by an Act of parliament in 1978 to promote and develop sport in Fiji. It is currently the main sporting body. The present government accepts that sports development must be part and parcel of national development.

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