

## Rotuma

wide governments to deal with the new threats failed. Facing the prospect of continuing instability and insistent demands by outsiders, Cakobau and other leading chiefs of Fiji ceded Fiji to Great Britain on 10 October 1874 (DEED OF CESSION).

Sir Arthur GORDON was appointed the first substantive governor of the new colony. His policies and vision laid the foundations of modern Fiji. He forbade the sale of Fijian land and introduced an 'indirect system' of native administration that involved Fijians in the management of their own affairs. A chiefly council was revived to advise the government on Fijian matters. To promote economic development, he turned to the plantation system he had seen at first hand as governor of Trinidad and Mauritius. The Australian COLONIAL SUGAR REFINING COMPANY was invited to extend its operation to Fiji, which it did in 1882, remaining in the country until 1973. For cheap labour, he turned to India and to the system of indentured emigration. Begun in 1879, it brought over 60 000 Indians to the colony (GIRMITIYA). Most remained in Fiji.

In the 20th century, the three principal ethnic groups, Fijians, Indians and Europeans, remained largely separate and apart, encouraged by a colonial government intent on playing the role of an impartial mediator among them. The political system was racially based, with each ethnic group electing or nominating its own representatives in the legislative council. Demands for political change toward greater self-government were successfully resisted until the 1960s, when the winds of DECOLONIZATION reached the Pacific. A series of difficult, often contentious, constitutional negotiations in Fiji and in London paved the way for political reform, resulting in complete political independence on 10 October 1974.

Fiji's central location made it an important base for airlines, SHIPPING and telecommunications, and these advantages together with its cosmopolitan facilities attracted the headquarters of many regional and international bodies and the main campus of the regional university, the UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC. Post-colonial politics was organized essentially along racial lines, with the Fijian dominated political party, the Alliance, occupying the seat of government under the leadership of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Nonetheless, social and economic changes, caused in part by external forces, including the policies of the World Bank, produced forces which challenged the race-based political order, leading to the formation of a labour party in 1985 which won the 1987 election in coalition with the Indian-based National Federation Party. On

14 May, that government was overthrown in a military coup led by Sitiveni Rabuka (FIJI COUPS). Following months of turmoil and delicate negotiations, Fiji was returned to civilian rule in December 1987. A new constitution, entrenching indigenous dominance in the political system, was decreed in 1990, which brought the chiefs-backed Fijian party to political power in 1992.

The constitution, contested by non-Fijians for its racially-discriminatory provisions, was reviewed by an independent commission in 1996 (CONSTITUTION REVIEW IN FIJI), which recommended a more open and democratic system encouraging the formation of multi-ethnic governments. A new constitution, based on the commission's recommendations, was promulgated a year later, providing for the recognition of special Fijian interests as well as a constitutionally-mandated multi-party cabinet. Within a decade, Fiji had travelled from a military coup to constitutional reconciliation, and rejoined the Commonwealth of Nations. By any measure, it was a remarkable journey.—BVL

### Further reading

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## ROTUMA

**Constitutional status:** Part of FIJI ISLANDS.

**Population:** 2500 (1998 estimate).

**Physical environment:** Rotuma is the northernmost island of the Fijian group, lying a little more than 500 km north of Viti Levu, on the western fringe of Polynesia. The island is of volcanic origin, comprising a land area of approximately 43 sq km, with the highest craters rising to heights of 260 m. Rotuma's geographical location (between latitude 12° south and longitude 177° east) places it very near the intersection of the conventional boundaries of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia.

The vast majority of households in Rotuma maintain gardens that supply staples (taro, yams, tapioca, breadfruit and bananas). Pineapples, papaya, mangoes, watermelons and oranges are also grown in abundance to supplement the diet. While the island is exceptionally fertile, the eastern side is covered with stones and boulders, making it more difficult to work the soil. Rotation of crops is the common pattern; typically yams are planted the first season, followed by taro, then by tapioca and banana trees. Although only a few men engage in deep-sea fishing, the fringing reef surrounding the island is widely exploited for a variety of fish, octo-

pus, crustaceans, and edible seaweed. Chicken, canned corned beef, and canned mackerel supplement the daily diet, while cattle, goats and pigs are consumed on special occasions such as weddings, funerals and welcoming ceremonies. Since the latter half of the 19th century Rotuma's main export product has been copra.

**Language and population:** Although Rotuma has been politically associated with FIJI ISLANDS since 1881, when the chiefs ceded the island to Great Britain, the Rotuman people are unique, forming a distinctive enclave within the Republic of Fiji. Linguistic evidence suggests that Rotuman belongs in a sub-grouping that includes Fijian and the Polynesian languages. Within this group Rotuman has a special relationship with the languages of western Fiji. The vocabulary shows a considerable degree of borrowing from Tongan and Samoan and traces of Indonesian.

The first census of Rotuma, taken in 1881, reported a population of 2452. Following a devastating measles epidemic in 1911, it declined below 2000, then gradually began to increase. As the total approached 3000, in the late 1930s, emigration to Fiji became an important means of alleviating population pressure. According to the 1936 Fiji census, 91.3 per cent of Rotumans were living on their home island. By 1956 the percentage had decreased to 67.7 per cent, and in 1986 it declined to 29.9 per cent. In recent years emigration has accelerated, not only to Fiji but to New Zealand, Australia and the United States. As a result, the population of the island has dropped to around 2500, representing less than 25 per cent of the total number of Rotumans.

**History and politics:** First recorded European contact was in 1791, by Captain Edwards in HMS *Pandora*, while searching for the mutineers of the BOUNTY. The first half of the 19th century was a time of increasing contact, as Rotuma became a favorite place for whalers to replenish their provisions. A substantial number of sailors jumped ship there, some marrying into the local population. Visiting vessels found Rotumans quite willing to sign on, and by the mid 19th century many Rotuman men had been abroad; some had visited centres of European civilization before returning home. In the 1860s English Wesleyan and French Roman Catholic missionaries established themselves on Rotuma, and the island was divided between them along geographical lines representing a prior factional division. Antagonisms between the two sides were exacerbated by religious rivalry, and in 1878 culminated in a war won by the numerically superior Wesleyans. The unrest that followed led the chiefs of

Rotuma's seven districts to petition Queen Victoria for annexation, and in 1881 the island was officially ceded to Great Britain. Rotuma was governed as part of the Colony of Fiji until 1970, when Fiji gained independence. Since then it has been an integral part of the Fijian polity, the chiefs choosing to remain with Fiji following the FIJI COUPS of 1987.

A wharf was completed in the district of Oinafa in 1973 and an airstrip was opened in 1981, helping to alleviate Rotuma's isolation. However, shipping has remained irregular, aggravating the problem of Rotuma's distance from potential markets. This has especially inhibited the development of agricultural exports. Rotuman oranges, for example, are famous for their quality, and are extremely abundant, but as yet they have not been commercially exploited because of difficulties with storage and transportation.

Land is important to Rotumans for its symbolic significance as well as for its subsistence value. The main land-holding unit is the *kainaga*, a bilineal group based on common descent from ancestors who resided at, and held rights in, a named house-site, or *fuag ri*. Individuals have rights in the *fuag ri* of their eight great-grandparents, although claims are made selectively. Associated with each *fuag ri* are sections of bushland; membership in a *kainaga* entitles one to rights in all its land. The person who lives on the *fuag ri* normally acts as steward of the land and controls access. He or she is obligated to grant usufruct rights to *kainaga* members for any reasonable request. At times land has been sold or given for services to specific individuals, but over generations it becomes *kainaga* land again. When the population of the island approached its highest levels, during the 1950s and 1960s, land disputes intensified and access was generally restricted to close relatives. In recent years, however, emigration has relieved tensions; the main problem now is often to determine which sibling will remain behind to steward the land and care for aging parents. Household size has declined in response to emigration, from an average of 7.5 persons per household in 1960 to 4.5 in 1988.

Rotuma is divided into seven autonomous districts, each with its own headman (*gagaj 'es itu'u*). The districts are divided into sub-groupings of households, *ho'aga*, that function as work groups under the leadership of a sub-chief (*gagaj 'es ho'aga*). All district headmen, and the majority of *ho'aga* headmen, are titled. In addition, some men hold titles without headship, although they are expected to exercise leadership roles in support of the district headman. Titles, which are held for life, belong to specified house-sites (*fuag ri*). All the descendants of

previous occupants of a *fuag ri* have a right to participate in the selection of successors to titles. On formal occasions titled men, and dignitaries such as ministers and priests, government officials, and distinguished visitors, occupy a place of honour. They are ceremonially served KAVA to drink, and are served food from special baskets. In the daily routine of village life, however, titled individuals are not especially privileged. As yet no significant class distinctions based on wealth or control of resources have emerged, but investments in elaborate housing and motor vehicles by a few families have led to visible differences in standard of living.

During the colonial period the Governor of Fiji appointed a resident commissioner (after 1935 a district officer) to Rotuma. He was advised by a council composed of the district headmen. In 1940 the council was expanded to include an elected representative from each district and the assistant medical practitioner. Following Fiji's independence in 1970, the council assumed responsibility for the internal governance of Rotuma, with the district officer assigned an advisory role. Until the first coup, Rotuma was represented in the Fiji legislature by a single senator. In the post-coup legislature they were given a seat in the house of representatives as well.

Prior to cession, rivalry between chiefs was intense, and warfare, though modest in scale, was endemic. During the colonial era political activity was muted, since power was concentrated in the office of resident commissioner or district officer. Following Fiji's independence, however, political rivalries emerged again. Contention over titles and competition between districts for scarce resources have resulted in numerous disputes. Following the second coup, when Fiji left the British Commonwealth, a segment of the Rotuman population rejected the council's decision to remain with the newly declared republic. Arguing that Rotuma had been ceded to Great Britain and not to Fiji, they declared Rotuma independent—and were subsequently charged with sedition. Majority opinion appears to favour remaining with Fiji, but rumblings of discontent remain.

Churches and religious activities are central to social life on Rotuma. In addition to the Wesleyan and Catholic congregations, a SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST church has been built serving a number of families, and a small group of Jehovah's Witnesses meet together regularly.

Rotumans today are widely scattered around the globe, forming identifiable communities in Fiji, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, as well as on Rotuma. Travel between these communities is

becoming increasingly frequent, and remittances are now an important source of revenue for families on Rotuma. With a new satellite dish on the island, allowing for direct-dial telephone communication, and improved air service, Rotumans are able to maintain their links with one another more easily, forming an interactive world-wide community that is evolving in concert.—AH & JR

### Further reading

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## FRENCH POLYNESIA

**Constitutional status:** Overseas Territory of France.

**Head of State:** President of France represented by High Commissioner Jean Aribaud.

**Head of Government:** President Gaston FLOSSE (1998).

**Main cities/towns:** PAPE'ETE (capital, on Tahiti, population 25 500); Faa'a (on Tahiti, 27 000); Uturoa (Ra'iatea, 8600); Fare (Huahine, 4500).

**Land area:** 3521 sq km (35 islands and 83 atolls).

**Sea area (EEZ):** 5 030 000 sq km.

**Population:** 228 785 (1999 SPC estimate); 70 per cent Polynesian; others mainly European and Chinese.

**Official languages:** Tahitian, French.

**Currency:** CFP (French Pacific franc).

**Time:** -1000 hours UTC.

**National day:** 14 July.

**GDP per capita:** A\$27 000 (1996).

**Principal export earnings:** Tourism; fishing; black pearls.

**Political system:** French Polynesia is a French Overseas Territory, operating under a statute (of September 1984) of internal autonomy which allows the territorial government to control socioeconomic policy but not defence, law and order, or foreign affairs. In addition to having its own municipal and territorial levels of government, the territory elects representatives to the French national parliament. The government is headed by a high commissioner, appointed by the French Republic.

The 1984 statute permitted the conduct of certain local affairs (local budget, health services, primary education, culture, social welfare, public works, agriculture and sports) by a 41-member territorial assembly, elected by universal adult suffrage. The