

FIJI

1) Introduction:

Fiji contains nearly half the population of the South Pacific islands, excluding Papua New Guinea. The Fiji group of over 300 islands covers a land area of 18,200 sq. km. The principal islands are Viti Levu (10,384 sq. km) and Vanua Levu (5535 sq. km). Suva, the capital, is on Viti Levu.

With substantial communications facilities and its central position in the South Pacific, Fiji is often regarded as the hub of the tropical South Pacific. Nadi Airport is a staging post on trans-Pacific air routes.

Fiji has been inhabited since at least 1300 BC by Melanesians who, with some Polynesians, constitute the indigenous community. In 1874, following appeals by Fijian chiefs to Britain, Fiji was formally ceded to Britain. The arrival of indentured Indian labourers, recruited between 1879 and 1916, and the emergence of a large Indian population made constitutional advance a complicated process, and access to the land a major political issue. A ministerial system of government was introduced in 1967 and Fiji became independent in October 1970.

2) Domestic Preoccupations:

A major concern in Fijian political and economic life is harmony between the two dominant cultural communities. Fijians and Fijian Indians are closely balanced in numbers, with Fijians having entrenched land and political rights and Indian Fijians playing a predominant role in the economy. On a day-to-day basis the communities co-exist quite comfortably. The Prime Minister has attempted to form a coalition with the National Federation Party in order to broaden the basis of his Fijian-dominated government. Fiji faces a general election in 1982 in which polarity between the communities may be an important factor.

Sluggishness which marked the Fijian economy over previous years is likely to continue well into the 1980s, although there are good longer-term prospects for economic improvement as major development projects are completed. Unemployment will continue to be a significant problem. While the country's development is heavily reliant on bilateral and multilateral aid, private investment plays an increasingly important role. Production of raw sugar has reached high levels and sugar will remain the main source of export earnings. The tourist industry is strong and tourism is the second largest source of foreign exchange.