

Inspired by the Pacific Island Media Association conference, *Te Waha Nui* looks in-depth at the region's media issues. More stories at: www.tewahanui.info

Fiji needs 'crisis manual'

by Lorna Thornber

The possibility of another political uprising in Fiji means local reporters need a "crisis manual" to help them avoid repeating the mistakes of those who covered the 2000 and 1987 coups, says a former reporter for Fiji's *Daily Post*.

Christine Gounder, a masters student at Auckland University of Technology, is investigating media coverage of the crisis when George Speight and a band of renegade soldiers overthrew the government of Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry.

Her findings show that most Fijian journalists who covered the coup have changed professions or moved overseas.

If a similar crisis occurs, new journalists could repeat serious mistakes, she says.

There was also an exodus of journalists after Fiji's first military coups staged by Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka in 1987.

Gounder, a reporter for *NZ Catholic* newspaper, says that considering the current political climate in Fiji and the likelihood of the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill being passed in the Fijian

Parliament, another political uprising is a real possibility.

The bill contains provisions which grant amnesty to those who were involved in the coup for "traditional", not criminal reasons.

Speight and other jailed rebels are expected to be set free when the bill becomes law.

"So the next few months will be interesting, especially with the Fijian elections next year," says Gounder.

She travelled to Fiji last August to interview around 20 editors and journalists from local media organisations about their coverage of the coup.

None of the organisations had any sort of written guidelines about what reporters should do in the event of another crisis.

"Of course one cannot predict when a national crisis might happen but since Fiji is so coup-prone with three coups already, it might be a good idea for media organisations to have a crisis manual."

Gounder says many reporters who covered the 2000 coup found it difficult to remain objective because of either their own or their families' political allegiances.

Some of the reporters who camped inside Parliament during the 56-day ordeal and were given food by Speight supporters suffered from the Stockholm syndrome, she says.

Stockholm syndrome means situations when hostages begin to identify and sympathise with their captors.

"Reporters who suffered from the Stockholm syndrome swayed towards the rebels and started supporting Speight," says Gounder.

Radio reporters, for example, allowed Speight and his rebel supporters to champion their causes and call for support live on air.

Similarly, print reporters wrote "unbalanced reports" that contained quotes from only Speight or his supporters and not from the president or the military.

Gounder says many international reporters' reports on the crisis were also wildly inaccurate, largely because they knew little - if anything - about Fijian culture.

"There were some parachute reporters

who didn't have any idea about Fiji and the political situation; who got their background knowledge from reading *Lonely Planet* on the plane to Fiji."

Gounder, who was a reporter during the Speight coup, says that while some international reporters wrote very good analytical pieces about the coup, many reports were overly-sensational.

Gounder advises international reporters to align themselves with local media organisations if a similar crisis occurs and to ask for help.

She says the proposed crisis manual should be written by reporters who covered one or more of Fiji's last three coups and include information about problems faced and how they were resolved.

"A lot of experienced reporters have left the profession because of the poor pay and work conditions, taking with them institutional memory and knowledge," she says.

"If this was documented, it could help younger, more inexperienced reporters out should another national crisis occur."

Gounder believes the proposed manual would also be useful to reporters covering major crises in other countries.

"It could also be useful in areas where there are often floods, tsunamis or other natural disasters."

Dr David Robie, an associate professor in AUT's school of communication studies, agrees reporters in Fiji need better training on how to cover coups.

"Given their history, you'd think they'd have the best expertise in the Pacific for covering coups."

"But because most of those who covered the last coups aren't in the media anymore, that simply isn't the case."

Fiji has one of the youngest median ages for reporters in the world and many have no formal training.

There are some very good Fijian reporters, says Robie, but the younger and less experienced ones certainly need more guidance about covering coups.

Robie does not think a crisis manual would be a "cure-all" to the problems associated with covering coups but does think it is a step in the right direction.

"Since Fiji is so coup-prone... it might be a good idea for media organisations to have a crisis manual."

Workshop aims to educate Kiwi journalists

by Nicholas Moody

The Pacific Cooperation Foundation plans to begin a series of journalism training workshops next month to increase the New Zealand media's understanding of Pacific Island societies.

The foundation is an independent private/public sector trust that promotes media, cultural, business and education programmes.

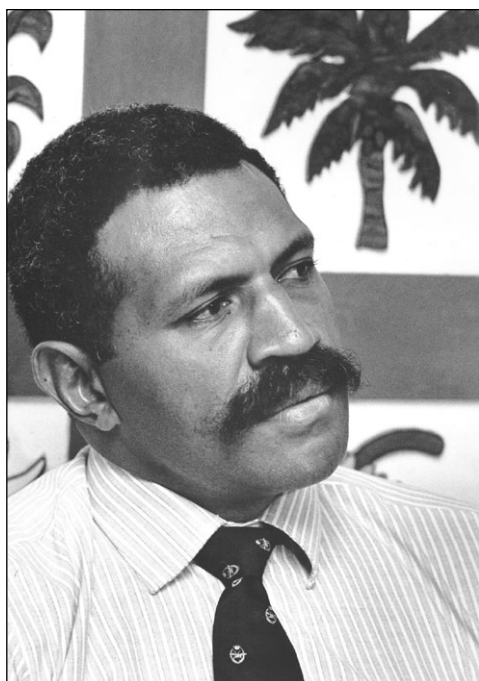
TVNZ, TV3, the *New Zealand Herald* and Auckland's suburban newspapers will be the first media organisations to participate in the workshops.

Foundation programme manager David Vaeafe hopes to encourage good reporting about Pacific issues.

"In an ideal world every newsroom should have two or three Pacific Islanders. But with this programme we'll build in-house Pacific capability until there are enough Pacific journalists who can go in there and fill those spots."

Initially the foundation will work with sports reporters and presenters to improve their pronunciation of place names and family names. There are plans to also create a Pacific pronunciation database.

TVNZ Pacific correspondent Barbara Dreaver says the training workshops sound "absolutely fantastic".



SITIVENI RABUKA: Fiji's first coup leader.

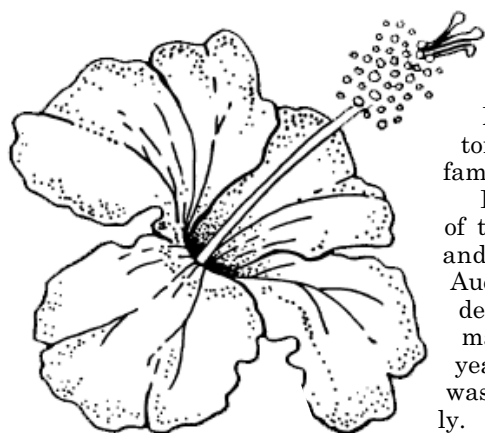
PHOTO: ASIA PACIFIC NETWORK



DAVID VAEAFE: PCF's foundation programme manager.

PHOTO: NICHOLAS MOODY

Niuean paper needs local support for survival



Niueans living in New Zealand need to embrace the *Niue Star* if it is to survive, says Michael Jackson, editor and owner of the family-run business.

Fortnightly editions of the *Star* are back up and running from Auckland after a cyclone destroyed the printing machinery in Niue last year, where the paper was being printed weekly. Financial constraints

prevent re-establishing the Niuean office.

The situation may not be ideal, but "two weeks delayed news is still news for Niueans," says Jackson.

While the *Niue Star* is the only printed media available in Niue, the larger Niuean community in Auckland is crucial to the paper's survival. Two hundred copies of the paper are sent to Niue, 30 copies to Australia and 700 are circulated in New Zealand.

Jackson says these figures are good as a ratio of the Niuean

population of about 1500-2000, but the the 2001 census shows about 20,000 Niueans are resident in New Zealand.

Jackson also thinks the paper plays a role in the survival of the Niuean language among the younger generation of Niueans living in New Zealand. The last census recorded only 28 per cent of New Zealand Niueans could hold a conversation in Niuean.

"What we're doing is for the sake of the people."

The *Star's* content is about 60 per cent Niuean and 40 per cent English.

While elderly Aucklanders are the *Star's* main audience, Jackson thinks a lot of younger people are starting to take an interest in their Niuean roots.

Other factors important in maintaining the Niuean language are the use of Niuean at home and at official functions and church occasions.

On the list of Jackson's challenges to tackle is getting more families in New Zealand to read the *Star* and improving the quality of the paper.

— Fiona Robertson