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## PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 1980

SPEECH AT PARLIAMENTARY LUNCHEON FOR  
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF FIJI

Your Excellency, it gives me very great pleasure to welcome you here today.

Your presence adds to the growing history of a continuing and significant relationship between Fiji and Australia.

Of course, in the wider history of the South Pacific the name Cakabou has a distinguished place.

It was one of your predecessors who invited Queen Victoria to take possession of the Fijian Islands, to protect them from marauding outsiders.

It must confess that at the time, some of these marauders were operating from the Australian colonies.

Your Excellency, I can assure you, we have improved a little since then.

But this improvement has been necessary for both of us.

For too long, there had been a tendency for many countries like yours and ours in the South Pacific, to fail to recognise the common traditions that we share from our geography and our British connections.

These common traditions lead to common interests and facilitate common solutions to regional problems.

Your presence here today symbolises the commonality in our relationship but, Sir, you come to us as a distinguished visitor in your own right.

As the first Fijian National to occupy the office of Governor-General, you must reflect with pride on the fact that, during your period of office, you have witnessed the beginning of a new relationship between the people and the government of Fiji and Australia.

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Our contacts with the people of Fiji go back a long time - but until more recently the emphasis had been on contact through Australian companies operating in Fiji.

They failed to produce personal contacts on a scale comparable, for example, to those which existed between Australian and Papua New Guinea.

This made for shortcomings in understanding, and for failures in our appreciation of one another which we have only recently begun to correct.

But I think that, in the past few years, especially since your independence in 1970, we have done much to bridge the gaps which existed previously both with Fiji and with your neighbouring states in the South Pacific.

We have, of course, accepted that with the ending of colonial arrangements, we in Australia must accept special responsibilities as the most advanced and most developed nation in the region.

Your government, and those of your neighbours, have made it clear that they accept Australia as a member of the South Pacific community.

We have responded by taking up your invitation to participate in a wide range of regional activities.

In particular, I have attended several meetings of the South Pacific Forum, and my Ministers have attended meetings of the South Pacific Conference and Regional Meetings on shipping, civil aviation, health, labour, education and trade.

At the forum, we have been prepared to discuss political issues quite freely, and to demonstrate our commitment to the Pacific neighbourhood even when this has meant a partial derogation of our relations with more powerful states further afield.

We have been prepared to support this commitment with aid programmes and trade concessions.

In the aid area alone, we have recently lifted our forward pledge for the Island states from \$84 million to \$120 million over the next 3 years.

Of this, \$30 million in grants has been earmarked for direct assistance to Fiji.

In the trade area, we have offered duty-free or preferred access to our market for a wide range of products without any reciprocation, and I am optimistic that an accord can be settled in the next few weeks.

I would expect Fiji to be the major beneficiary of the concessions we have offered.

We have promised increased cultural exchanges.

We are also examining the needs of the Island states for maritime surveillance and enforcement systems.

Earlier this year, our soldiers worked together in Zimbabwe, closely and effectively.

In times which call for increased defence preparedness, we are expanding our, albeit modest, programme of defence co-operation in the region, most specifically with the Royal Fiji military forces.

Other relationships and special arrangements are possible in the years ahead, and these, and the programmes on which we are currently embarking, are certain to effect even closer ties between our countries.

But, importantly, we are consulting each other more closely and from the frequency and frankness of our contacts we are beginning to develop an empathy for, and appreciation of one another.

Your government Ministers and ours are more active in government to government discussions, and our officials are increasing their exchanges of views.

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In international conferences, the Pacific group is beginning to take on as much relevance as other groups to which Australia belongs, and the group of 77 to which Fiji and the Island States have felt allegiance.

Indeed, in international gatherings such as UNCTAD and the Commonwealth, Australia has promoted discussion of the problems and interests of small island states, especially those of the South Pacific.

In this I think we can claim some measure of success.

I am confident this success will extend to an enhanced appreciation at the people to people level.

I know you are proud of your Rugby footballers and they are always welcome and entertaining guests in Australia.

In fact our Rugby team leaves next month on a tour of Fiji and it is rumoured, Sir, that your visit has been timed so that you can take home intelligence on the Australian team.

But new ties are also being added at the people to people level to the traditional contacts between our countries.

Already some 50 Fijinationals a year are coming to Australia under sponsorship of Australian employers for paid in-service training.

An increasing number of your nationals are entering our institutions and colleges for courses of study.

And, more Australians are working as technical advisers and experts in your governmental ranks.

One of the more symbolic examples of these new links was your commissioning of Sir Arthur Tange to review your entire Public Service systems.

Just over 40 years ago, Sir Arthur worked in Fiji in the Bank of New South Wales and now, after a distinguished career in The Australian Public Service, he has been asked to return to pass on his knowledge and wisdom.

Your Excellency, most of the South Pacific, in which we have come to regard Fiji as the pivot, has recently undergone a transition from a colonial status to independence.

The Island States have rightly asserted their new status and sought to forge new links with other nations.

But with independence has come a need to stand on one's own feet, to meet challenges from those who would try to assert their will against the democratic choice of peoples and without respect for traditions and basic freedoms.

No-one could be more exposed than small island states standing alone.

Fortunately, it has been reassuring to find in our neighbourhood a collective will to reject any legitimacy in such advances and to eschew overtures for footholds from the Soviet Union.

This will is strengthened by a common intent in our region to preserve democratic rights and to protect national and regional interests.

When we, in Australia, suspended negotiations for Soviet Union fishing rights and terminated cruising rights for Soviet ships, each of the island states took its own form of appropriate action.

When the Australian Government called for a boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow, we found island governments doing the same.

We don't expect there always will be the same identity of view, but there is obviously a close similarity in will and action which we welcome.

Your Excellency, we, in Australia, do have an interest in the political stability and economic development of our neighbouring South Pacific region where Island Governments are dedicated to serving their own peoples.

Fiji is a large part of the South Pacific community, and without your example others in the area might weaken in their will to persevere with liberal approaches.

We stand ready to give close attention to the needs of your nation in achieving economic and social justice for the people of Fiji.

We want Fiji to prosper.

Your Excellency, I am confident about your nation's future and can assure you that Fiji can have confidence in our support for your endeavours.

You are an honoured and welcome guest amongst us today.