

Press Release USP.

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DARK DAY REMINDERS - GEORGE SPEIGHT

It's two months to the day since George Speight, semi-indigenous failed businessman, pyramid scheme seller and terrorist, stormed into the Parliament grounds of Suva taking the democratically leaders of government as hostages. Last week they were freed.

Speight gloated as he achieved most of his goals - the resignation of the President Sir Kamisese Mara, the abrogation of the new Constitution, the resignation of a new interim government. He proved beyond all reasonable doubt that the Fiji army was composed of loyal soldiers, traitors and possibly a large number of cowards who would not fire on their own citizens.

Police stood by while their city looted and burned. The police chief departed overseas. Villagers took guns away from soldiers, raided their armouries, stole weapons, seized military posts, and aligned themselves with local chiefs who publicly declared they were Speight supporters. The army placed a military guard over the Monosavu Dam electrical power station, which supplies around ninety per cent of the electric power to the country. A small group of villagers armed with sharp bamboo spears and rhetoric disarmed the soldiers. They switched off Fiji's power supply. Two weeks later the country is still experiencing power cuts despite repeated rhetoric from the military that this part of the crisis is being resolved.

At the University of the South Pacific electrical power is switched off at ten in the morn, on again at noon, off at two o'clock and on again at four o'clock. Work output is at a low level. The main activity of the day is for the few working staff to remember to switch off their computers off before the power cuts cause them to crash. Academics sitting in their offices are having problems trying to assess whether they should pass or fail students who had their first semester studies arrested by the terrorist gang. The university is still trying to get itself back into gear, but it is being controlled by the outside events. The first semester was restarted, failed to start, exams were set, and the exams stopped after a shoot-out between Speight and the army. Vijay a young student said his examination was cancelled one hour before he was due to attend the examination centre. He listened to the radio on Speight and his actions. He still has to sit the examination.

There are no allowances for his stress factor. Today Vijay listens to the radio. Dr. Mitchell, a local GP is speaking about increasing number of migraine patients visiting the clinic. Most of them are young people of Vijay's age or a little older.

The morning news brings another shock to his young system. The new President is supposed to swear in the new government, the second within a fortnight. It is arranged with due pomp and ceremony that goes with such occasions. But the Speight nominees failed to arrive at the swearing in, and so do a few other nominees. Five minutes before the ceremony is due to begin it is announced that the President is indisposed. That's the official story. Insider information gives a different story. How could a new President swear in only part of a new government? There would be a considerable loss of face.

Speight puts on a bolder face for his last day in the decaying parliamentary grounds. He denounces the proposed government. A car is burnt outside the Parliament complex. Eight cars inside the complex are set alight during the time the government swearing in ceremony is scheduled to take place. One story coming out of the Parliament grounds (unconfirmed) is that before the first car is set alight, it is draped in a traditional masi cloth. The systematic burning of vehicles continues during the time when the government swearing in ceremony is supposed to take place. Later that day Speight and his large band of followers leave the complex and drive to an area outside Suva. A local chief invites them to a feast. On the way the hungry supporters stop at a local market and steal fish and vegetables from the indigenous people.

Speight has had a splendid week. A terrorist who died after a shoot out was buried in the Parliament grounds. Speight gave the authority for the burial. One radio station reports that a Speight "soldier" has been buried and that all Fiji mourned his death. Others are more cautious and talk of a Speight "supporter" being buried and the large crowd of mourners.

Speight must have laughed as he walked out of the Parliament with an amnesty for himself and the army traitors who supported him. The army officers retained their commissions and went back to normal duties. Speight then flouted the military Immunity Decree with the burning of a number of vehicles in defiance " Decree Number 18 of 2000 " which says:

(3) Subject to section (4), this Decree does not extend to any other person who committed an offence under any law within and outside the Parliament Complex between the 19th day of May, 2000 and the 13th day of July, 2000 in respect of any act done without the directions, orders or instructions of George Speight or any member of the Taukei Civilian Government.

As this dismal day moves to its end an army spokesperson, Major Politini expresses disappointment with Speight's actions. His words reflect the view of this disturbed nation, and their own deep "disappointment" with the lack of leadership in the Fijian army, the Police and the Great Council of Chiefs who failed or were too frightened to stop the triumphal march of George Speight as he left for his feast and thanksgiving ceremony.

The final gesture for the day goes to former Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry who announces plans to set up a government in exile. It will be in the West of the country. This is the area, which has shown the least support for Speight and his terrorists. It is also the richest part of Fiji with the sugar cane fields, a gold mine and what was once a flourishing tourist industry.

Two Fijian members of his coalition are expected to hold the ranks of Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in exile. Mr. Chaudhry is named as Finance Minister. This government in exile will surely get recognition, survival and development money from Australia and New Zealand. It looks like being a powerful force.

There will be plenty of talk about money and lack of it during the next few weeks. The headlines in the Fiji Times is "Civil servants face massive pay cut". The small print talks of a twelve and a half percent cut starting on August 1. Do we say Bula Fiji or Isa Lei ?