

Fiji independence day

Celebrating 40 years of fruitful relations with Japan

Isikeli Mataitoga
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE
FIJI ISLANDS

It is with great pleasure and honor on this memorable occasion to extend on behalf of the president of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, the government and the people of Fiji, warm greetings to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko and the members of the Imperial Household as well as to the government and people of this great nation, Japan. I extend warm greetings and "bula vinaka" to all Fiji nationals and friends of Fiji in Japan and to applaud them for their continued support to the embassy and for the various roles that they play in promoting Fiji.



The government and people of the Fiji Islands on Oct. 10 celebrated the 40th anniversary of our independence. Fiji gained independence from the United Kingdom on Oct. 10, 1970.

This Oct. 10 also marked the 40th year of formal diplomatic relations between Fiji and Japan.

The last 40 years

The government of Japan was among a few countries that formally recognized Fiji from the first day of our independence.

The Republic of the Fiji Islands and Japan have enjoyed friendly and cooperative relations since the establishment of diplomatic relations between

the two countries in 1970. Such relations have been developed through people-to-people exchanges and Japan's economic cooperation to Fiji under its bilateral assistance programs. Several of our nationals have during this period pursued their studies in various disciplines in some of Japan's renowned universities under Japan-funded scholarships and have excelled at key positions in various sectors back home. A small community of Fiji nationals now reside and work here and have also made Japan their home.

Japanese aid to Fiji

Japan remains one of Fiji's major donors in the economic and social sectors. Japan has provided funds for capital works, technical experts and volunteers, and has also facilitated long- and short-term training in Japan for many Fiji nationals. Japan has assisted Fiji greatly through the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV) program, providing Fiji with experts in various fields to assist, at no cost to the Fiji government or to the communities of the Fiji Islands, in various sectors that directly impact the lives and livelihood of the people of Fiji.

Japan's Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) program extended through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) continues to provide valuable assistance through technical training and human resources and project development in various sectors in Fiji. Japan's support and contribution has assisted great-

ly in building Fiji's socio-economic infrastructure in the health, education, information and communication technology (ICT), fisheries, meteorological and maritime transport sectors to name a few.

A tabulated summary of Japan's ODA and Technical Assistance to Fiji during the last 10 years is summarized in Table 1.

A tabulated breakdown of the major projects established in Fiji under Japan's Grant Aid Program since 1998 is summarized in Table 2.

Japan announced at the Pacific Leaders Meeting (PALM 5) held in Hokkaido in May 2009 the extension of ¥50 billion in aid to Pacific island nations for the next three years, to assist in countering climate change and other challenges confronting Pacific island countries. Japan has kindly set aside ¥6.8 billion from this funding initiative for solar energy and seawater desalination projects in Pacific island countries. This special funding initiative, when implemented, will further contribute to the social and economic development for the outer communities of Fiji. The assistance extended will further strengthen Japan's partnership with Fiji and her Pacific island neighbors.

Other assistance

In times of need following major cyclones and other natural disasters, Fiji has always found Japan and its people ready and willing to assist in the rebuilding and reconstruction work that needs to be undertaken. In those times, Japan gave gener-

ously and assisted selflessly. As Fiji's ambassador, I wish to express Fiji's deep appreciation for all you have done and continue to do.

Japan through its ODA program has furthered its commitment toward ensuring maximum reliability and accuracy from meteorological authorities in Fiji and the Pacific region through advanced infrastructure development and capacity building. The upgrading of the F\$16.6 million (Fijian dollar) Fiji Meteorological Center in 1998 under the ODA program is a strong testament of Japan's commitment in this area. Japan this year through its JICA representatives agreed with the Meteorological Service Department of Fiji for regional training courses to be conducted once a year for the next three years for Pacific island countries. The first training session is scheduled to be held this year in Fiji. Technical expertise and logistics arrangements for these training sessions will be provided by Japan.

OISCA assistance

The Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement (OISCA) continues to operate the National Youth Training Center in Sigatoka. Fiji is grateful for the continuous assistance provided by OISCA International through its capacity development and environmental programs over the years, empowering our young people with basic skills in agriculture, management of community development projects and environment conservation

activities.

OISCA has been instrumental in Fiji's mangrove replanting program that aims to restore natural coastal habitats and traditional fishing grounds that have been disturbed as a result of coastal development.

OISCA has also embarked on coral replanting programs in selected areas in Fiji.

Trade relations

Fiji continues to enjoy trading ties with Japan with an annual bilateral trade of ¥8 billion. Fiji continues to import from Japan vehicles, vehicle accessories, machinery and electronic items. Fiji's major export components include wood chips, marine products and beverages. In the last few years, we also saw an increase in the marketing in Japan of pearls grown in Fiji.

The global economic slowdown has been a challenge to Fiji's economy as it has to other economies around the globe. Despite these recent setbacks, Fiji continues to maintain bilateral and multilateral trade relations with Japan. For this, we are thankful to our trading partners, agencies and companies in Japan for actively engaging with Fiji. We are also thankful for the significant roles played by the Pacific Island Center (PIC) and Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) for their resilience in facilitating the promotion of Fiji products to the Japanese market.

Fiji appreciates the confidence demonstrated by Japanese investors who despite our

difficult times have maintained faith in Fiji's investment potential. The establishment of 23 Japanese-managed companies during the last nine years to 2009 in Fiji is testament to the confidence that our Japanese trading partners have for the Fiji investment climate. A breakdown of investment by sectors is tabulated as shown in Table 3.

Tourism

Fiji's tourism industry remains one of Fiji's top foreign exchange earners and has also become one of Fiji's largest sources of economic growth in comparison with other industries such as sugar and garments. Fiji has long been a popular tourism destination that attracts visitors from around the world. The recent establishment of upmarket resorts affiliated with renowned international hotel chains will enhance the industry's capacity to accommodate existing demands and provide employment for our people.

A great part of the Fiji-Japan relations is underpinned by a flourishing people-to-people contact. The Embassy of the Republic of the Fiji Islands in Japan would not be able to make the impact we are able to make without the generous and selfless support of many non-government actors and from many Japanese friends of Fiji, who give voluntarily in support

Table 2

Grant Aid Project	Date of Completion	Assistance Amount
ICT Center (Phase 2) at the University of the South Pacific	Ongoing	F\$18 Million
ICT Center (Phase 1) at the University of the South Pacific	March 2010	F\$45 Million
New Pharmaceutical Center	2004	F\$17.65 Million
New Pediatric Unit at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital	2000	F\$21.8 Million
Construction of Marine Studies Facilities at the University of the South Pacific	1998	US\$11.9 Million
Fiji Meteorological Center	1998	F\$16.6 Million

Table 1

Year	Grant Aid	Technical
2004	1.65	8.69
2005	0.75	8.69
2006	0.75	8.17
2007	1.84	5.85
2008	6.78	5.72

(Amount in ¥ 100 Million)



Turquoise lagoon: Likuliku is Fiji's first resort with bungalows set up above the water. EMBASSY OF FIJI

of our work at the Embassy. It would be unfair if I refer to only some, suffice for me to thank all of them for their excellent support.

Approximately 23,000 Japanese visitors travel to Fiji annually. This number is now gradually increasing as a result of concentrated marketing by the Tourism Fiji Japan Office and collaborated efforts of our partners dealing with the Fiji tourism market. The introduction of new air routes connecting several Japanese cities with Fiji through Air Calin and Continental Airlines have contributed to the gradual increase in visitor arrivals.

Fiji remains an ideal destination for Japanese visitors to the region because it readily offers the following: a wide range of tourist products; cost effectiveness for products offered; transport interconnectivity for busy travelers; the "bula" greeting and smile that is associated with the friendliness of our people; and the well-developed infrastructure that sup-

ports the tourism industry.

Celebration

For the last 40 years, the Fiji-Japan friendship has been tested in the face of adversity and it has endured.

We can both be confident that whatever challenges will come our way in the future, we can face it and gain victory, if we do so with respect for each other's sovereignty, understanding, hard work and in the spirit of fraternity.

Our people have a lot to be thankful for during the last 40 years of our journey. Our nation is a beautiful island of tranquillity in the midst of worldwide upheavals. Fiji is blessed with peace and prosperity. We have a compassionate and resilient people of many races who have learned to live together over the years despite their differences.

May I take this wonderful opportunity to extend our sincere appreciation to all our corporate sponsors, the Japan-Fiji Friendship Society, the Japan-Fiji Parliamentary League, Friends of Fiji in Japan and members of the Fiji community for their support and genuine commitment to the promotion of good will between Japan and Fiji.

Thank you very much. May God bless Fiji-Japan relations in the years ahead.

Table 3

Year	Sector	No. of Implemented projects
2009	Construction	1
	Manufacturing	1
2008	Mining & Quarrying	1
	Manufacturing	1
	Fishing	1
2007	Construction	2
	Services	2
	Manufacturing	1
2006	Wholesale & Retail	1
	Services	2
	Education	1
2005	Services	2
	Agriculture & Forestry	1
2004	Services	1
2003	Services	1
2002	Services	1
	Fishing	1
2001	Services	1
	Tourism	1

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Congratulations to the People of the Republic of Fiji on the 40th Anniversary of Their Independence Day



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