



High Commission of the Republic of the Fiji Islands London

MEDIA

The media in Fiji includes radio, press, television and magazines. Some date as far back as 1869 and 1946 while a few as early as 1987 and 1992. It plays an important role in providing local and overseas news, current affairs, weather conditions, news about the economy, the public and society. It also helps to increase social cohesion by widening the base of common experience.

The media aids the integration of individuals into a society by continuing socialization process. It also promotes the advancement and enhancement of culture, tradition, art and music.

In Fiji, the government is committed to an open media policy and sees the media playing a "pivotal and mutual role" in nation building. The government recognizes the need to provide information, respond to questions and give accurate answers so that its point of view can be communicated. The Ministry of Information remains willing to provide information that is lawfully available.

MEDIA LEGISLATION

In September, 1996, two British Consultants arrived in the country to review Fiji's Media Legislation. Their terms of reference basically involved undertaking a comprehensive review of all existing legislation pertaining to the mass media in Fiji with a view to updating and making them more relevant to today's circumstances. The 44 page report prepared by the consultants, Ken Morgan (former Chairman of the Great Britain's Press Complaints Commission) and John Prescott Thomas (a Broadcast specialist) titled "Future Media Legislation and Regulations of the Fiji Islands" was handed to Government in November, 1996 for consideration. Government is currently in the process of drafting a new Media Bill. This Bill is based largely on the recommendations of the Thomson Foundation's study of Fiji's media.

A key element of this Bill will be the setting up of a Media Council. A professional operated Media Council bound by a Code of Practice and commanding the faith of the public is necessary.

The Press Corrections Act will be repealed once the New Media Act is enacted and the new Media Council's code and complaints procedures are effectively in place. There will be no amendment to the Commission of Inquiry Act to require journalists to disclose their sources and there shall be no licensing of the print media.

Government is keen to see the enactment of the Freedom of Information Bill. This legislation, in line with the spirit of the legislation, in line with the spirit of the Constitution, will ensure that members of the public have access to official documents of the Government.

The Freedom of Information Bill will allow the media greater access to public records and documents, and will maintain the government's promise to the nation of greater accountability and transparency in Government. The way forward for the media in Fiji is guaranteed in the fundamental provisions of the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1997. Section 30 of the Act provides for Freedom of Expression whilst Section 30 (b) specifically provides for Freedom of the Press and other media.

PRINT AND RADIO

Newspapers and radio services operate in Fiji's main languages - English, Fijian and Hindustani - and reach a vast majority of the population. The Fiji Times, (founded in 1869) the oldest media organization in Fiji and the Daily Post (established in 1987) are English daily newspapers. The latest edition in print industry is another English daily newspaper - The Fiji Sun which hit the streets on September 24. Fiji Times owned by American Rupert Murdoch has a circulation of 38,000 while the Daily Post, which is locally owned has a circulation of 16,000. Nai Lalakai (Fijian) and Shanti Dut (Hindi) are vernacular weekly newspapers published by the Fiji Times while the Daily Post publishes the Nai Volasiga (Fijian). Other magazines are Islands Business, and Fiji Business published by Islands Business International, The Review (monthly) published by Associated Media Ltd and Pacific Islands Monthly (PIM) published by The Fiji Times. Both the Islands Business and PIM are regionally based, but the Review is Fiji oriented. Various other magazines on tourism, trade and economy are also published regularly. There are other private public relations organizations operating in Fiji such as Island Business, Associated Media Limited, Sansom Design, Franklin Design, Matt Wilson Ltd and Information Services South Pacific. They provide consultancy services in advertising, public relations and general media work.

INFORMATION

The Ministry of Information which is the Government's major information agency provides the link between the government, media and the public.

The current policy regarding the media is to better inform the public about major national development issues and evolve an informed approach to

resolving them. The Ministry of Information produces publications, radio programs, news releases, photographs and posters of government activities and is the source of government news. A 40 minute magazine format TV program by the Ministry's Film and Television Unit (formerly Fiji National Video Centre) was launched through Fiji 1 Television in August, 1996. The items include a mix of development, current events, art, culture and tradition and stories on rural development, education, health and agriculture. Another recent addition has been the introduction of Indradhanush - a half hour Hindi weekly program. It is essentially a mirror of the one - hour weekly Dateline Fiji program produced by the Film & Television Unit. The program contains total local content and provides a medium to portray the governments policies, programs and development activities at all levels and segments of our society.

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

The people of Fiji experienced television coverage for the first time in October, 1991 when Television New Zealand was granted a temporary license to telecast live World Cup rugby matches. A license for a permanent national television service was awarded by the government in August 1993 to a consortium known as Fiji Television Ltd. The Cabinet later approved a Business Plan prepared by Television New Zealand and the Fiji Development Bank.

Shareholders in the consortium are the Fiji Development Bank with a 51% shareholding on behalf of the Provincial Councils and Rotuma, Television New Zealand 5%, Telecom Fiji Ltd 14% and 30% shares have been sold to the public. Fiji Television established new studio facilities at Gorrie Street, Suva in 1994. The Fiji 1 local television news service went on air for the first time on March 20, 1995. A 30 ñ minute bulletin replaced the government produced National Video centre news.

Transmission coverage includes the majority of the population of Fiji. FIJI TV's nightly news service regularly attracts between 40% and 50% of the potential audience, an extremely high figure by international standards. Two satellite- receive dishes allow a wide range of international programming to be retransmitted live within Fiji. The current transmission areas for Fiji Television Limited, which is called the "viewing area" comprises the urban and peri-urban areas of Suva, Nausori, Lami, Navua, Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Labasa, Savusavu and a defined number of rural and other urban tikinas in all of the provinces of Fiji. Fiji Television Limited 's board of directors have approved capital expenditure for the purchase of transmission equipment to provide signals to those areas that do not have access to television. The areas include the Coral coast, interior of BA and Northern Lau .Currently transmission times are from 4.00 p.m. to 11 p.m. on weekdays and midday to 11 p.m. on weekends. The population of the viewing area, aged 5 + years is estimated to be 456,808 people.

Another major development in television lately was the introduction of Pay TV service. Sky Fiji, the name of Fiji Television Limited's Pay TV service, began a free trial service in June, 1996.

Many homes in the country are now taking advantage of Sky Fiji. A television set, an outside aerial and a basic decoder is required before Sky Fiji can be available. Sky's subscription cost is \$35 for a basic decoder and \$40 for a deluxe decoder. Sky gives a wide choice of exciting sports coverage including live rugby, soccer, cricket and tennis . Other entertainment programming includes Hindi and English language movies and TV series, Cartoon Network, TNT Classic Movies, talk shows, national geographic series and other movies.

BROADCAST SERVICE

Fiji has two radio broadcasting stations ñ Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited (FBCL) and Communications Fiji Limited (CFL). FBCL provides the country's most extensive broadcasting service in the three major languages (English, Fijian and Hindustani). FBCL is divided into two divisions ñ the commercial arm known as the Bula Network; and the public service broadcast side commonly called PSB.

The Bula Network comprises three radio stations - Bula 100FM (English), Bula 102FM (Fijian) and Bula 98FM (Hindustani) and is solely funded from commercial advertising revenue. The PSB arm is partly funded by a government grant and operates Radio Fiji One (Fijian) and Radio Fiji Two (Hindustani). A Public Service Advisory Board appointed by the Minister of Information advises Government on PSB.

Under a contract with the Fiji Government, FBCL's two public service broadcast stations are contracted to provide a specified percentage of public service programs.

These include religion, culture, education, family issues, health, agriculture and information relating to national emergencies like cyclones.

Both PSB stations have adopted a more proactive program format incorporating shorter talk programs, regular news, sports, weather updates, a wide range of music, and a series of educational programs. RF1 and RF2 are the only stations that offer an extensive message service, signifying the effectiveness of radio as the communication medium. There is limited advertising on both PSB stations. It is intended that FBCL's public service stations will reproduce the national or ethnic cultures of the audience so that the audience can always keep in touch with their history, language, arts, religion and other cultural values and tradition. Communications Fiji Limited, on the other hand, operates three independent commercial stations FM 96 and Navtarang and Viti FM. FM 96 started in July 1985 and it provides a 24 hour service broadcasting - a mix of music, news, sports and community information in English FM 96 broadcasts on 96 MHz to an area which includes Pacific Harbor, Suva and the Rewa Delta area, Nadi, Lautoka and BA including most of Vanua Levu and other islands. The second station Navtarang commenced operations in September 1989. Navtarang also broadcasts 24 hours a day and provides similar programs to FM96 only in Hindi. It can be heard on 98.8 MHz in Suva and surrounding areas, Rakiraki and BA; 97.4 MHz in Lautoka and Nadi; and 101.6 MHz in Sigatoka and

Vanua Levu. Communications Fiji Limited's new Fijian language radio station Viti FM Nai Matai hit the airwaves on November, 1996. The new station which is targeted at the older Fijian section of the market broadcasts 24 hours.

Another recent development in radio is the government signing of the license for the University of the South Pacific's FM Radio. The license is valid for five years. The radio station as under the license will provide FM sound broadcast programs to students and staff of the USP.

Radio reception will be confined to the USP main compound.

Programs to be broadcast should promote the advancement of education and culture.

It should also raise and maintain high standards of decency and decorum and provide for variety and content.

The principles of good citizenship must also be provided for.

The Fiji Broadcasting Act of 1953 is to be repealed and replaced by a new updated Broadcasting Act.

The current system of awarding license to utilize radio frequency spectrum by radio broadcasters will be retained.

FIJI JOURNALISM TRAINING INSTITUTE

The opening of the Fiji Journalism Training Institute at Ma'afu Street, Suva in November, 1995 marked a milestone in the development of journalism in the country. The institute is the result of a three-way partnership between journalists, government and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Fiji Islands Media Association worked for two years on the plan; government provided a building to house the Institute and UNESCO provided the initial US\$50,000 grant to get the project underway. The Japanese government has donated computers and other necessary software for the Institute.

From early this year, the Fiji Media Council has also become a partner of the Institute. With another \$100,000 from UNESCO, Fiji plans to introduce advanced level training programs for young journalists. More than 50 students from the print and radio mainstream have qualified with a certificate from the institute.

Fiji Islands Media Association (FIMA) was established a decade ago to look after the interests of journalists and promote training. Similarly, The Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) a regional media organization based in Suva coordinates training programs for the media organizations in the region. The two new media bodies which have set up their office in Suva are PAC News and Pacific Islands Broadcast Association (PIBA).