

Fiji marks 50 years of independence

The South Pacific archipelago of more than 300 islands became a sovereign state on October 10, 1970, after almost a century of British colonial rule

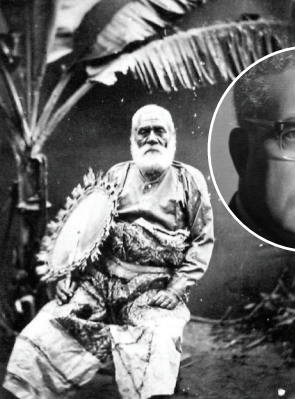
FIJI HISTORY

3,500 years ago
First settlers arrive in Fiji from islands of Melanesia

1643: Dutch explorer **Abel Tasman** is first known European to sight Fiji



1830s
Arrival of first Christian missionaries



1871: European settlers on Levuka island organise national government and name **Ratu Cakobau** (above) as king of Fiji following local disorder

BRITISH RULE

Oct 10, 1874: Cakobau and other chiefs cede Fiji to Britain

1879-1916: More than 60,000 indentured Indian labourers brought to Fiji to work on sugar plantations



Above: Indian migrants were encouraged to become permanent settlers after their contracts ended

1904: Legislative Council, consisting of elected Europeans and nominated Fijians, set up to advise British governor

1963: Women and indigenous Fijians given right to vote, alongside male European and Indo-Fijian population



Oct 10, 1970
After 96 years of colonial rule, Fiji achieves independence with **Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara** as prime minister

POST-INDEPENDENCE

1972: First election held under 1970 constitution, won by Fijian-dominated **Alliance Party (AP)**

Apr 1987: Indian-dominated coalition wins general election, ending 17 years of AP rule

May/Oct
Two military coups, led by army chief **Sitiveni Rabuka**, take place



in quick succession. Fiji becomes republic

1990: Introduction of new constitution enshrining political dominance for indigenous Fijians

1997: Under increasing pressure, Rabuka unveils new constitution calling for return to multi-ethnic democracy

1999
Mahendra Chaudhry becomes Fiji's first prime minister of Indian ancestry after his **Labour Party** wins election



2000: Coup by group of armed civilians led by failed Fijian businessman **George Speight** topples Chaudhry government in two-month hostage standoff. Speight is later jailed



2006: Fourth coup, by Fijian military leader **Frank Bainimarama** (above), deposes Prime Minister **Laisenia Qarase**

2013: New constitution signed into law, removing race-based electorates and increasing protection for indigenous Fijian land

2014: Bainimarama (right) becomes prime minister in first democratic elections following eight years of military rule



FIJI PROFILE

Population: 900,000

Area: 18,376 sq km

GDP per capita
\$6,220 (2019)

Major languages
English, Fijian, Hindi

Life expectancy
67 years (men)
73 years (women)

Feb 2016: Fiji becomes world's first country to ratify UN climate treaty. Days later, Fiji is hit by **Cyclone Winston** – worst storm ever recorded in southern hemisphere

Aug: Fiji wins first ever Olympic medal, taking gold in rugby sevens

Cyclone Winston affected about 540,000 people – 62 percent of Fiji's population

