

Chapters 25 to 27 detail the military commander's vengeful antagonism towards Prime Minister Qarase; his volatile temperament; unwillingness to comply with Vice President Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi's attempt at mediation; and rejection of New Zealand government's efforts at averting the coup. This account presents Bainimarama as possibly of unsound mind following the trauma caused by the assignation attempt during the November 2000 mutiny.

Chapters 28 and 29, *Slow Strangulation* and *Miracle of the Check Points* conclude Part 1 of the book. On the 5th of December, 2006, the RFMF surrounded government buildings and offices, and set up road blocks. The Prime Minister's appeal to 'every soldier' not to participate in the 'illegal takeover' fell on deaf ears. His last plea to all citizens 'to come out and express your support for the rule of law and democracy in Fiji, and say no to an unlawful takeover of our country by the military' also failed to generate public outcry. Supporters gathered outside the gate of his residence were dispersed by armed soldiers.

Qarase correctly notes that before the coup, 'The country was at peace. The outlandish claims made by Bainimarama and his ingenuous resort to the 'doctrine of necessity' were baseless. The military man himself threatened to physically harm him (p. 174), and several 'abusive calls' were received from 'the top echelon of the military' who '...used unspeakable language and threatened to ship me to the prison at Nukulau Island.. the callers sounded heavily intoxicated. In the background was the sound of music and celebration. It was party time at the barracks' (p. 175).

Fearing for his life, Qarase accompanied by Leba escaped to Vanuabalavu. Enroute to Nausori Airport, armed soldiers waved their police car onwards. This is labelled 'miracle at the check points' because God 'gave those soldiers a vision problem that lasted long enough (for us) to pass through unnoticed' (p. 178).

Part 11 (chapters 30 to 53) covers Qarase's post-coup experiences: seven months exile in Mavana village, becoming a successful yam farmer, engaging with foreign journalists, and the Eminent Persons Group (EPG). The EPG did not accept that the military takeover was lawful, and noted gross violations of human rights. The judiciary was deemed to be compromised. EPG recommendations which included the return to civil rule, end of the state of emergency, and the return of soldiers to the barracks were ignored. Qarase implicates FLP leaders and officials in the 2006 coup as they had sided with the military commander, and created a 'strong perception that Mr Chaudry and a group of his senior people were supportive of Bainimarama's treason' (p. 193). This perception was reinforced by Chaudry and Poseci Bune accepting ministerial portfolios in the post-coup military regime (Ibid, p. 193).

Chapter 31 narrates the difficulties of litigating about the illegality of the coup against Bainimarama and the RFMF. Getting a seat on Fiji Airways flight out of Lakeba was not easy, finding a lawyer willing to take up the case was harder still, and the independence of the court was in doubt. Following two weeks of hearing, the court decided that direct presidential rule 'pending elections was valid and lawful as was his decision to promulgate legislation and to grant immunity.' (p. 209). In April, 2009 the Court of Appeal threw out this judgement and declared that the military coup, and the military backed government, illegal.

The relief and jubilation were short lived. The President swiftly purported to abrogate the 1997 constitution, 'assumed all government power' and disbanded the judiciary. Bainimarama was appointed prime minister. To Qarase in the Easter weekend of 2009, '...it was as though the country had been crucified on Good Friday' (p. 215), and 'Fiji was now firmly in the grip of tyranny' (p. 218).

Chapter 33 Abuse and Torture highlights some instances of detention, humiliation, intimidation, and brutal treatment of citizens by the security forces so that there is public pressure 'Until all members have a deep-rooted understanding that thuggery and illegal violence have no place in our country' (p. 219). The irony of a few of the senior military perpetrators who were themselves persecuted and hounded by the regime is pointed out. Amnesty International's 2016 report, *Beating justice. How Fiji's security forces get away with torture* in Chapter 34 reinforce the narrative of gross human rights violations and killings.

Qarase's sees the post-2009 *People's Charter* process as a smoke screen to legitimate the 2006 coup with high sounding principles of accountability, good governance and respect for human rights. He maintains that '*the might of the military approach to rule Fiji*' (p.267) prevailed over the good intentions behind the Charter process. The *People's Charter* went on the '*ash heap of history*' (p. 269).

Chapters 36 and 37 entitled, *Full Moon and the Forum* and ***Rule of Law No Longer Operates*** respectively chronicle the response of the Pacific Islands Forum and other leaders to Bainimarama's failure to hold the promised general election in 2009, and records the Citizen Constitutional Forum's (CCF) concerns regarding the deterioration of the rule of law. Samoan Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi an '*extremely outspoken critic*' of Fiji's dictator questioned his state of mind (the full moon effect), and accused him and Sayed-Khaiyum of lying to the Forum. He also asked, '*Why does Fiji need an army?*' and sarcastically, if the military man '*fears a combined canoe attack from Tuvalu and Kiribati...*' (p. 275). The strongly worded criticisms of the International Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) and prominent jurists' reservations on judicial independence are highlighted (pp. 284-285).

Chapter 38 *Flabbergasted* tells of how this evidently compromised judiciary adjudicated FICAC Criminal Case Number (HAC) 26 regarding NLTB decisions, and the Criminal Case Number (HAC) 27 relating to Fijian Holdings Limited share transactions whilst being a director of the company. The latter charge of making individual gains and not declaring 'conflict of interest' went back to 1992 is strongly denied by Qarase.

Chapter 40 provides a detailed account of the FHL related trial which resulted in his conviction. Sentenced to 12 months imprisonment on the morning of 3 August, 2012 (p.294), Prisoner 302 became a guest of the government in Korovou Goal. Chapters 41 to 53 provide accounts of the history of the prison; the Makosoi cell shared with two other kindly inmates; work at the prison office; the 'unacceptable conditions' of the kitchen, dining facilities and dormitories; being among criminals; befriending Rupert (the mouse) and King Kong (a large rat); the enduring love of Leba and the family; the strengthening of faith; visits by relatives and friends; keeping healthy as a diabetic; experience at the infirmary; and continued community development work for Mavana. Qarase maintains that his boarding school background, faith in God, the deep love of his wife and family, the support of prison warders and fellow prisoners, and his close friends helped him meet the challenges of Korovou.

Part III is made up of 19 chapters that address a range of topics beginning with the author's appeal against his conviction. Chapter 54, *Confronting the Law Again* is about the long and tedious adjudication regarding the NLTB case and the pinning of a Vanua Investment Board decision on Qarase as the board chair. After 5 years FICAC filed a '*nolle prosequi*'. The case was costly and made Qarase 'virtually broke'. He wondered if the '*aborted prosecution was really to make a pauper out of me and my family*' and he asks, '*... how could people in national leadership harbour such pernicious ill-will?*' (p. 387).

The cruelty extended to delays in releasing him from goal (Chapter 57). He spent 243 days in Korovou.

Over 8 long years the Bainimarama government had stopped pension payments that he earned as PM. To make matters worse in 2012, his FNPF pension like that of 3,600 other pensioners was also reduced by the military regime (p.400).

The seven chapters that follow mainly address constitutional matters: the 'trashing' of the Yash Ghai commission's draft constitution; prime minister's unprecedented powers; his large salary and perks; absence of checks and balances; politicisation of state institutions; and sweeping immunity given to coup makers; the 2013 constitutional provision 131 that 'specifies that the overall responsibility of the RFMF is to ensure at all times the security, defence and wellbeing of Fiji and all Fijians' (p. 432). This provision, according to Qarase makes the military supreme. 'That is not democracy. It is military rule/dictatorship' (p. 433).

Qarase is also critical of the bill of rights clauses with their limitations and reservations (Chapter 64). He firmly disagrees with Fiji being a secular state. In his view, this is removing God from 'our national life' (p. 455). He argues for the primacy of Christianity but accepts that 'our different religions are woven deep in the fabric of Fiji' (*Ibid*).

Chapter 66 questions whether the 2014 poll was 'fair and free or a fraud?' He points to the Multinational Observer Groups' report accepting the elections as 'free and fair', but the report also cites several 'significant problems that might have influenced the results' (p. 465).

Chapter 67 *A Thesis too Far* critically analyses Sayed Khaiyum's masters in law thesis. Qarase maintains that the thesis was, 'the undeclared manifesto for the Bainimarama- Sayed-Khaiyum governments' (p. 478). They sought to reduce indigenous Fijian cultural autonomy and end indigenous 'separate power centres. Qarase engages in a lively defence of Indigenous institutions such the Fijian administration, and questions the 2010 Land Use Decree and the Land Bank which seriously undermine customary land owners' rights over land (pp. 489-491).

The next chapter is on Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna 'devoted servant and leader' who was the primary architect of the indigenous institutions that were being eroded. It is to him that Fiji owes the modern land tenure systems.

Chapter 69 *Sideshow* comprises snippets on conman Peter Foster deceiving the military, Lieutenant Colonel Ratu Tevita Ului Lakeba Mara's dramatic escape to Tonga, and Nur Bano's company becoming the pay master for government.

The last three chapters of the book, *Rocky Road to Reconciliation* (Chapter 70), *Something of a Miracle* (Chapter 71) and *Reflections* (Chapter 73) are contemplative. Qarase makes a positive assessment of his governments' achievements between 2000 and 2006. However, the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity bill based on South African style restorative justice to heal the nation, 'provoked outrage and protest' (p. 506). Bainimarama joined the opponents of this bill who saw it to free George Speight and other perpetrators of the 2000 terrorist acts. Although he had 'endured prosecution and imprisonment by the Bainimarama-Sayed-Khaiyum military regime', he was 'unbowed' with his 'faculties and energy intact', and his 'health in reasonable order' (p. 524) but financial problems concerned him daily (p. 529). He writes Bainimarama's venomous hatred towards him because of the SDL government's 'independence of action' (p. 533). 'I believe greed for political power and wealth became a driving force for him, and many military colleagues and other supporters outside the military' (*Ibid*).

He strongly opposes the constitutional provision that elevates the RFMF 'above the elected civilian leadership' (p. 536), and that, 'Fiji needs a full review of every aspect of the RFMF'. For a 'small and relatively poor nation' the military is burdensome and takes away much needed resources for improvements in infrastructure, utilities, and services (Ibid, p. 536). He is supportive of a small military for peacekeeping and expanding the navy.

Qarase asserts that Bainimarama's treason and the horrific murders of soldiers after the 2000 mutiny will be 'his burden and nightmare'(p. 534). His observation that 'no one stays in power forever' became a reality in December, 2022 with the electoral loss of Fiji First Party. He believes that the 'image and reputation of the military is now tarnished'.

Other topics of reflection include his failure to stop the 'rogue military leader'; apology for victims of coups; reconciliation; local government; rejection of racist label; a democratic system that co-exists 'with the traditional systems of authority' (p. 542); political leadership to 'fear God'. The chapter concludes with expressions of gratitude to Jehovah, for the opportunity to be Prime Minister, to his supporters inside and outside of prison, and to Leba and the family.

The appendices that follow provide a record of SDL achievements whilst in government.

Prisoner 302 is an interesting book that provides a personal account of Fiji's recent turbulent past, the atrocious treatment Qarase received, and how he managed to withstand the many difficulties and challenges that he faced.

There is a failure to adequately account for not complying with the power sharing provisions of the 1997 constitution following the 2001 general election to form a SDL-FLP government. Instead, SDL aligned itself with the minority ethno-nationalist CAMV Party. The imprisoned George Speight was a successful candidate of this party. Unsurprisingly, Qarase's government did not have the confidence of Fiji's minorities. SDL's affirmative action policies stated in the plan '50-50 by 2020' also alienated Indo-Fijians, and other minorities. These groups by and large supported the 2006 coup because of their perception that the Qarase-led government before the general election of that year was racist, and when the power sharing government with FLP became a reality, the damage had been done.

Qarase's advocacy of the co-existence of a form of democracy with traditional systems of authority is not fully explored.

The book provides a clear message to citizens and the military that the illegal overthrow of democratic elected governments is harmful. It is a must read for civil and military leaders, scholars of Fiji, journalists, the clergy, and the public at large.

Without a conscientised citizenry, democracy can be so easily lost.