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19 May 2000

'BUSINESS INTERESTS' BEHIND COUP D'ETAT

VESTED business interests rather than ethnic tensions were probably fuelling the armed takeover of the Fijian parliament, a former Fijian government minister said today.

Dr Nandan Satendra said if the gunmen were members of the army then the alleged coup would have added seriousness.

"But I'm not sure if the army, which is almost 100 per cent ethnic Fijian army, whether that is behind the coup," Dr Sartendra said.

"If the army is behind the coup then it is a pretty serious business. If it is just a handful of disgruntled and unhappy people who are dissatisfied with the current regime of the government then I think it will fizzle out.

"But the danger of course is you need only a handful of people to create violence."

Dr Nandan dismissed suggestions that the incident may be the result of ethnic tensions.

"I think it has to do with power politics in Fiji more than race," he said.

"One of the great successes under the current Labor Government under Mahendra Chaudhry has been that he's been profoundly successful in creating a feeling of racial harmony in Fiji, and working for the poor of all the communities rather than just one segment of the community."

The most likely explanation for the flare-up had to do with vested interesets who felt cheated by the Chaudhry Government.

"I think that this has worked against the people with vested interests, people that had entrenched power during the colonial and post-colonial period," he said.

"I think that some of these people have been sidelined and feel they can't be left out in the cold and are making a kind of a comeback much to the detriment of the whole society."

Dr Nandan said the two military coups Fiji suffered in 1987 when military strongman Sitiveni Rabuka took over had created the atmosphere for today's events.

One of the things Rabuka introduced with his 1987 coup was a culture of violence and a culture of violations of many things and think that could be pretty dangerous in any situation.

But this meant Fijian would also fight back against any unlawful takeover of government.

"People in Fiji are now much stronger in their feelings about coups ... I think they will take it in their stride and they will fight back," he said.

"I can not see that this would be accepted by the vast majority of the people of Fiji who elected a government through democratic means."

