A NUMBER of highly esteemed politicians and statesmen are in Honiara this week to share their experiences in governance and leadership with new members of Parliament. Recently elected national leaders will learn about the role of Parliament, their constituency responsibilities and functions of government institutions during a week-long induction programme. The program draws on local and regional experts with key speakers and facilitators from Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Zealand and Australia.

"This induction programming is blazing a trail for other countries in the Pacific to follow. "It sets the pace for the next few years by introducing Parliamentarians to regional and global best practices, ideas and concepts early on in their tenure," says Richard Dictus, regional representative of the United Nations Development Programme, which is coordinating the induction programme. The Speaker of Parliament, Sir Peter Kenilorea, urged MPs to attend the programme in his concluding speech before Parliament recently adjourned.

"The aim of this induction programme is to assist Members in their important responsibilities as public leaders, as the representatives of their constituencies and in their work in Parliament," he said. The Speaker cited an assessment of legislative needs carried out by the UNDP at his request which found that Members lacked the necessary information to do their jobs properly and did not fully understand the role of Parliament.

To address these gaps, the induction programme includes sessions on the responsibility of Parliament to scrutinise the government, the role of committees, procedure for passing laws, public speaking and relations with the media. These topics will be addressed by prominent politicians and academics from throughout the Pacific region including Dame Carol Kidu, PNG's Minister for Welfare and Social Development; Hon. Ron Mark, Member of New Zealand Parliament; John Elferink, former member of the Legislative Assembly of Northern Territory, and Dr Michael Morgan, the former deputy director of the Centre for Democratic Institutions (CDI).

An initiative of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands and a component of a UNDP project to support and strengthen Parliament, the induction programme is supported and funded by CDI in Canberra, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, London, The Machinery of Government (RAMSI), the Office of the Clerk of the New Zealand's House of Representative, and the University of the South Pacific's law faculty in Vanuatu. Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare and the Leader of Opposition, Fred Fono, officially opened the induction programme at the weekend, with a joint appeal to members to participate and learn from a programme designed to assist them in their role as MPs and leaders of Solomon Islands.
Parliamentarians cautioned
Submitted by Arthur Wate on 31 May, 2006 - 11:08am.

PARLIAMENTARIANS have been cautioned to be mindful of their actions as the decisions they make and their behaviour will affect lives of Solomon Islanders.
Australian academic Dr Michael Morgan when addressing the MPs in Parliament in their Induction Workshop yesterday said: "The decisions you make here, your activities, your behaviour will necessarily affect the lives of all Solomon Islanders."

Most of the MPs are attending the four days workshop, which is the first of its kind in the region. Dr Morgan said only the MPs have the power to make laws for peace, order and good government of Solomon Islands.
"You can never escape the fact that by virtue you have been entrusted by the people of Solomon Islands to lead," he said.
However, the Australian said that without the confidence of the house "the executive is dead in the water".
Dr Morgan said often confidence or lack of it has been used instrumentally to change governments in Solomon Islands on the floor of the house.
"As a parliament you are entitled, obliged to hold the executive to account in the public interest," he said.
Meanwhile, Dr Morgan hopes that locally driven, locally relevant induction programs and ongoing support for MPs will become a regular feature of parliamentary governance in Solomon Islands.
"What we want to avoid are lectures in which we Australians or New Zealanders tell you Solomon Islanders how to run your parliament.
"We have also sought to avoid a dry, nuts and bolts, approach to parliamentary work," Dr Morgan said.
He added that the emphasis is on providing the MPs with an opportunity to discuss parliamentary work with their colleagues in the country and abroad.
PEOPLE’S expectations of their members of parliament pose a formidable challenge for politicians, who are expected to be “Jack of all trades,” or as Dame Carol Kidu, Papua New Guinea’s only female MP puts it, “Jill of all trades – including the doctor and the undertaker”.

Back in her own constituency, she had suggested that what was needed was not just a code of conduct for leaders but a “people’s code” so that the public would have more realistic expectations of their elected reps.

Facilitating a workshop on public leadership, part of an induction program for new MPs being held at Parliament this week, Dame Carol could commiserate with the Solomon Island member who complained that constituents expected their parliamentary representative to be a development officer.

“And to win again you have to be a development officer. I know this story,” said Dame Carol, who is currently serving her second term in office and is currently the Minister of Welfare and Social Development.

Discussing the question of what voters expect, Dame Carol was blunt.

“Let’s be honest. Voters expect cash. And they want you to solve all their personal difficulties. It is one of the biggest problems we face.”

The high expectations, she said, come out of a culture based on reciprocity that is shared by both Solomon Islanders and the people of Papua New Guinea.

“People don’t see the government; they just see the person they voted for,” was the view of one member.

They see their members as administrators, responsible for delivering services, he said.

It was argued that if the public administration was strengthened so that it could better delivery services, the politicians could get on with their real job of developing policies and passing legislation.

“How do we make that paradigm mental shift away from cargo culture?” asked Dame Carol.

One way, it was agreed was to provide civic education so that people understood better the role and responsibilities of the members.

Another is good communications with one’s constituents, so that people know what decisions their MPs are making on their behalf.

Frequent home visits and local constituency offices were also identified as a way of keeping in touch with the electorate.

But as Dame Carol pointed out, these need to be fully funded by Parliament.

Back in the capital Honiara, MPs also need more support especially for their Parliamentary committee work.

“Members are very much on their own,” said Dame Carol, who identified the need for well educated, post graduates to support the MPs by providing research and committee assistance.

The UNDP’s Parliamentary Strengthening Project has recently employed seven such graduates to provide these services for the Parliament.

A good wife is the best support a MP can have, offered one new member who pointed out that long-standing MPs were always backed by a supportive spouse. This provoked a few chuckles but no denials.

Public leadership is just one aspect of good governance that will be discussed throughout the week-long induction program.

Other topics include scrutiny of the executive; question time, lawmaking and committees.

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MEMBERS of Parliament were cautioned not to lie during question time.

Major Ron Mark, a member of the New Zealand House of Representatives, issued the warning in his presentation on the topic 'Parliamentary Question Time' at the induction program for newly elected Members of Parliament in Honiara this week.

He said Question Time is an essential means of scrutinizing the Government - a time to 'question, grill, interrogate and cross examine Ministers of the Executive in the full glare of the media headlights.'

However, Major Mark said, there is one golden rule: "don't ever, ever lie and don't ever, ever make it up."

A veteran Solomon Island politician admitted that in the Solomon Islands, members don't always tell the truth.

"It is a very serious thing for a minister to lie in the house," according to Major Mark.

"If Ministers do lie, then they run the risk of being found out and being charged with a breach of privilege. He has seen numerous Ministers forced to resign their posts, undermined by questions so badly that they eventually lost their posts."

Major Mark has also seen government proposals and policies attacked so effectively during Question Time that they have been discredited and abandoned.

"In Question Time, reputations can be made and forever lost," he said.

While government backbenches have the right to ask questions of their Ministers, these are often not adversarial but posed to make an announcement or promote a certain policy. In New Zealand, these are irreverently called "patsy questions." However, for the Opposition, Question Time is an important tool with which it carries its main function, which is to keep a close and critical eye on the Government.

To use this time most effectively to their own advantage, Opposition members must be well prepared. In fact, said Major Mark, the member may very well know the answer already but is posing the question to make a point, to raise an issue or simply to lure a Minister into taking a position.

On the other hand, the question may be deliberately broad. It is a strategic decision the Opposition has to make. "Do you want the Minister to see the bullet when it comes or do you want to nail him at a certain point?" Major Mark asked rhetorically.

While Ministers have four days notice of initial questions, enough time for their permanent secretaries to draft well researched answers, supplementary questions, are made in response to the Ministers' answers.

"That is why supplementary questions are so important: no one can draft the answers," stressed Major Mark.

With the supplementary questions, he advised the Opposition to "Hit the minister and hit the minister and hit the Minister again until you have made your point."

As well as researching their questions, Members of the Opposition should also research a Minister's own past record. This way his current answers can be compared to previous statements he has made.

"We have Ministers we call gonnas because they are gonna do this and gonna do that and in fact do nothing," said Major Mark.

Question Time may be an effective means of scrutinizing the Government. The problem is that it may be too effective. As one Solomon Island Member of Parliament pointed out, often the Government fails to reconvene Parliament just to avoid uncomfortable interrogation during Question Time.

"Well, if you are not satisfied with the way your Parliament is run, that is even more fodder for Question Time," said Major Mark.
AN academic says Solomon Islands parliamentarians are not doing enough as lawmakers, describing their 25 days a year average meeting record as insufficient.

Professor Graham Hassall of the University of South Pacific said parliament has to evolve in order to maximise the capacity of the MPs.

"That has yet to happen in the Solomon Islands," the professor told the Solomon Star yesterday after addressing the MPs in the third day of their Induction Workshop.

Prof. Hassall said there is a lot more to be done by parliamentarians and the 25 days per year sitting is not enough.

He said sitting time is required if MPs are to fully maximise their duty as law markers.

The lecturer said parliamentarians are public servants and they are voted in to make laws.

"If they are not having enough meetings then what are they doing for the four years," the professor asked.

According to Pro. Hassall oversight is also vital in ensuring that government's mechanisms are properly monitored.

He said corruption and lack of diligence occur because of weaker oversight.

The professor cited the Fisheries audited report which revealed millions of dollars being lost through the government system as a classic example of a weak oversight.

The USP lecturer yesterday lectured the MPs about the Western Parliamentary system based on the British monarch.

He then suggested a multi-party government as an alternative to the Westminster system.

He told the MPs that in a Melanesian parliament there is a need to maximize the potential of the committee system and how to make best use of the talent in parliament.

Professor Hassall cited Fiji's experiment as an example where it allows supporters of all parties to have their views and policies considered within government and overcome opposition policies and focus on issues.

Meanwhile the academic said that the recent riots by angry mobs after the outcome of the parliamentary election of prime minister Snyder Rini was a bad precedence.

He said there are better ways in which the people should vent their anger, not by directing it at shops in town.

The professor said such action could lead to mob rule, which is dangerous because it will easily lead to anarchy when there is no rule of law.
"MPs induction is answer to all prayers"
Submitted by Moffat Mamu on 2 June, 2006 - 1:42pm - Nation

THE inducting of Members of Parliament is God's directive in answers to all prayers, a church leader says.
Rev Jansan Beti said the initiative of inducting the members of parliament is a new thing to be done in Solomon Islands.
"It is also a God’s directive in answer to all good prayers of all Christians in Solomon Islands."
He thanked the Speaker of Parliament, Sir Peter Kenilorea, and the General Secretary of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) for their fruitful and worthwhile conversation over the idea of inducting parliamentarians.
Rev Beti, who is also the Chaplain of Helena Goldie Hospital in Western Province, suggested that the same tone be adopted by all provincial assemblies to confirm that Solomon Islands is a Christian Country.
The sad part, he said, is that not all 50 Members of Parliament attended the induction service.
"Whoever they are, they must justify their reasons of not attending the induction service to their people who mandated them to be their representatives in parliament.
"I believe they have their own personal reasons of not attending.
However, what ever reasons they have for not attending, God knows them all," he said.
Rev Beti said the first public statement of Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare after his election, which he handed over Solomon Islands to God, is well appreciated by all good Christians and this was confirmed by his presence in the induction service.
"I personally appeal to all good Christians of Solomon Islands despite of what denominations we are in, to pray for the Government for Gods Guidance and wisdom upon our Leaders," he said.
By JAMES BATLEY & PAUL ASH
of RAMSI

SOME of you were members of the previous House which invited RAMSI into this country and some of you will be more familiar than others with what we will say. In the time available, we hope to give you a quick outline of RAMSI, how it works and its current activities. I think we all know why RAMSI was invited into Solomon Islands in the first place. I don’t need to remind you about the tensions. I don’t need to remind you about how dangerous the situation had become - for the very survival of this nation.

A strong legal foundation
What I do want to mention today is that RAMSI’s presence in your country is based on a strong legal foundation.

The first part of this is an international agreement – a treaty – which was struck between Solomon Islands and contributing countries from the region, “concerning the operations and status of the police and armed forces and other personnel deployed to Solomon Islands”.

This international agreement came into force on 24 July 2003.

The second part of RAMSI’s legal foundation is the Facilitation Act. This law puts into practice the undertakings that the Solomon Islands government made in signing the international agreement.

The Facilitation Act remains the key to RAMSI’s presence in this country.

One of the things the Act stipulates is that an International Assistance Notice must be tabled in Parliament each year. The deadline for that is 23 July 2006.

Who are we?
RAMSI started with commitments of finance and personnel from 10 countries. Fourteen countries from our region are now contributing funding and/or personnel to RAMSI.

We continue to have three distinct parts: the Police element is the largest. All 14 countries are represented in the PPF, and the PPF is present in all provinces.

The PPF itself is still supported by our military contingent, although the military contingent is now smaller than it was at the beginning of the operation. Five countries contribute personnel to the military contingent.

We now have about 180 civilians, from eight countries. Of these civilians, 36 are working in line positions (mostly in the DPP and Public Solicitor’s Office) the rest are in advisory roles.

What is RAMSI trying to achieve?
In a nutshell, Honourable Members, RAMSI’s aim is to foster – in partnership with the people and government of Solomon Islands – a nation that is peaceful, well-governed and prosperous.

RAMSI personnel are working alongside their Solomon Islands counterparts in three broad areas, each of which contributes directly to an element of our overall aim:

• Law and Justice
  – Police
  – Prisons
  – Courts
• Economic Governance
  – Department of Finance and Treasury
  – Economic Reform Unit
  – Customs
• Machinery of Government
  – Public service
  – Accountability institutions
  – Electoral Commission
Each individual program in the various areas outlined has been the subject of detailed discussion and planning followed by specific agreements with the government.

**Key principles**

That explains what we are doing. What is perhaps more interesting is how we are doing it. RAMSI is a unique operation, not just in our region, but around the world, and it is attracting a lot of attention internationally for its approach.

Our approach can be summed up in a few key principles.

First, RAMSI is a partnership. What does this mean? It means that RAMSI does not replace government in this country.

It does not have a mandate to work in all areas of government. It works with the elected government of the day. It follows and implements Solomon Islands laws and regulations.

An example of this partnership working in practice is the Solomon Islands Government-RAMSI Consultative Forum, which was established in November 2005, and which brings together RAMSI’s leadership with Permanent Secretaries of our counterpart departments to discuss cross-cutting issues which affect all of RAMSI’s operations, and to give us a better insight into the government’s priorities and concerns.

Part of the idea of partnership is an important principle of mutual obligation. We are here to help, but it is not RAMSI’s job to solve every problem in Solomon Islands.

The elected government of the day must take responsibility – responsibility for setting and following clear priorities, responsibility for upholding the law, responsibility for sharing costs, responsibility for meeting commitments and undertakings which have been made.

Another obligation on the part of Leaders such as yourselves is to inform yourselves as best you can on the important issues affecting your country: and indeed, we see today’s session as providing an important opportunity for Members of Parliament to inform themselves about RAMSI.

Second, capacity building is central to our efforts. We know that our work will not be sustainable if Solomon Islanders themselves are not building the skills and capacity to take this country forward.

We know that capacity building is not only about developing individuals, it is also about developing strong institutions. In fact, that is one reason we are supporting this very seminar for Parliament. That is why the PPF are now actively putting the RSIP in the driver’s seat. That is why our officials in Finance and other areas are told that it is their job to develop the capacity of their counterparts.

We measure RAMSI’s success by the extent we are building local capacity.

The third important principle is that RAMSI comes as a package.

When RAMSI was first designed, there was a clear determination that Solomon Islands’ problems could not be addressed simply through a law and order approach, or through a traditional aid program.

RAMSI contains elements of both of these but all of its parts work together and reinforce each other: for example, our work in the courts reinforces the changes we are helping to bring about in the RSIP and the Prisons Service.

Our work in the Finance Department reinforces the government’s ability to implement its programs right across the board.

Of course it is only natural that, over time, we will make faster progress in some areas than in others, but even so the strength of our approach – the benefits it brings to ordinary Solomon Islanders – comes from the fact that it is an integrated whole.

Finally, while RAMSI will of course not be here forever, RAMSI is still a long term commitment.

When putting RAMSI together, the countries of the region accepted that they could not do a quick fix. The crisis that this country faced was a serious one, and it was not going to be solved overnight, or even in two to three years. The people of this country wanted the confidence to believe that the region’s support was firmly behind them.

How long will RAMSI stay?

The Pacific Islands Forum’s Eminent Persons Group visited here around a year ago to review the impact of RAMSI is its first two years.

The Group’s main recommendation was that “the tenure of RAMSI should be measured by the achievement of tasks rather than be time bound”.

So, how do we measure our progress? How do we know where we stand in relation to achievement of tasks?

We all know that RAMSI has had a major impact since it arrived.

- Law and order has been restored; guns are no longer used by criminals
- Government revenue has gone from $258 million in 2002 to $688 million this year – almost triple
- Seven recruit classes of new police officers and 70 new prison officers have been recruited and trained
- 1000 public servants have received training in the re-established Institute of Public Administration and Management
The economy has been recovering strongly. New sectors are starting to open up – for instance tourist boats are visiting many parts of the country such as Shortlands, Gizo, Marovo, the Floridas, Santa Ana, Lata, Utupua and Tikopia. Recently, we have developed a more systematic way of measuring what we are achieving. We call this the RAMSI performance framework; we hope to complete the first RAMSI performance report by July this year.

This process will enable us to measure our performance in a systematic way, year by year. This will help us to report our progress to the government and people of Solomon Islands, and to the governments of the region.

It will also help to ensure our work is consistent with the government’s own development priorities, which must be our guidelines too.

As part of the process:
- We now regularly review our effectiveness in building capacity
- We will undertake an annual survey to ascertain whether people feel that their lives are improving or not.

We think these tools will give us and the Solomon Islands government a much clearer idea of how long RAMSI needs to stay.

Challenges for leaders
- For all that has been achieved over the past three years, Solomon Islands remains a post-conflict society.
- That means that is has not fully recovered from the crisis which the nation underwent in the early part of this decade.
- Much remains to be done:
  - The task of rebuilding peace is a serious challenge. The lack of trust between communities continues to affect national life
  - Second, in our assessment, without good management and serious reforms, the economy is at grave risk of going backwards in the life of his Parliament. That will affect government revenue, and that, in turn, will affect the government’s ability to provide services to the population
  - Finally, the task of rebuilding capacity – of individuals and of institutions – remains a critical one. Solomon Islands cannot survive as a nation without strong institutions, and without capable people to run them.

Conclusion
- People still ask me the question: can Solomon Islands survive as a nation?
- The answer to that question is: Yes, of course it can. But the answer to that question is not in RAMSI’s hands, it is not in the hands of the donors or the region.
- It’s in your hands, the elected leaders of this country, and the elected government of the day.
- We believe – the region believes – that RAMSI can help, that we are part of the solution to your challenges.
- RAMSI is not the only answer but it brings the vital ingredients of stability and confidence, which can help you, and can help the government to achieve better outcomes for the people of this nation.
- We remain ready to play our part.
- This presentation was delivered to the Induction Program for MPs, which ended last Friday.