



# A·P·O *news*

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ASIAN PRODUCTIVITY ORGANIZATION

## APO Governing Body convenes in Fiji

*On 3–5 September 2003, the tropical paradise of Fiji was the venue for the 45th Session of the APO Governing Body. Forty-two delegates comprising APO Directors and their advisers attended the meeting. In addition, there were two observers representing Australia and one the Confederation of Asia-Pacific Employers' Associations. A contingent of staff members from the APO Secretariat provided secretarial support. Fiji's Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase inaugurated the meeting and Minister for Labour, Industrial Relations & Productivity Kenneth Zinck gave the welcome address. The meeting was hosted by the Training and Productivity Authority of Fiji (TPAF).*

**O**utgoing APO Chairman Manu Leopairote presented the opening statement at the inaugural session. He congratulated the TPAF on its founding, which was a repositioning of the former Fiji National Training Council with an expanded mandate to bring productivity into the center of Fiji's national socio-economic development and to foster a productivity culture in the country. He pointed out that as the business and economic environments were dynamic and changing constantly, the NPOs must not stand still and keep doing the same things year-in and year-out. They must continue to remain relevant and effective and contribute more to the national economy and to business competitiveness, he added. He mentioned that repositioning, as in the case of the TPAF, was one way to achieve this, adding that there were other possibilities.

Mr. Manu further said that as the NPOs must change and adjust to stay relevant and effective, the APO, as the apex body of the productivity movement, must do likewise and set the pace for the NPOs to follow. He pointed out that the APO provided a unique avenue for member countries to learn from each other and to be inspired and encouraged by each other's success. He called for more support for the APO.

*(Continued on page 5)*



*Delegates to the 45th GBM*

Volume 33 Number 10  
October 2003

**"If you stop  
learning today,  
you stop leading  
tomorrow."**

*Howard Hendricks*

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*Published by*

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*Printed on Recycled Paper*

Minister Kenneth Zinck, in welcoming the delegates, advisers, and observers to the meeting, commended them for their work in promoting and facilitating productivity and quality, a vital part of the development process for all APO member countries. He said that Fiji had gained considerable benefits from the activities of the APO. He expressed his appreciation to the organization for choosing Fiji as the venue for the 45th APO GBM.

In his inaugural address, Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase mentioned that Fiji's productivity performance, estimated to have increased by just 1% in 10 years, called for a radical change in attitude, especially on the part of the unions and the workers. "To them, productivity seems to mean having to work harder, with less job security, and fewer benefits. Looking at the international scene where corporations shed employees by the thousands so that they can produce an acceptable return on investment, perhaps this is understandable," said the Prime Minister, adding that there was a need to allay their fears about productivity. He called for mutual support and trust between employers and employees. "Productivity must be viewed as a way of preserving and creating jobs and as a key to improving benefits and sharing them fairly."

The Prime Minister next pointed to one productivity challenge that affects all economies—the need for institutions to be flexible. "When markets and cultures alter themselves to the degree that existing institutions are no longer relevant or not productive enough to satisfy changing demands, the institutions themselves must be open to change. Flexibility is the key to survival." In countries where there is institutional nimbleness, the economy

grows at a rate that is greater than those with similar resources but with a rigid institutional mindset. He further declared, "We can never lift our economic performance by locking land, labor, and capital into low-yield activities. Achieving growth will inevitably mean continuing review and change." The Prime Minister said that the sugar industry in Fiji, in its present outdated and inefficient form, could not compete internationally without preferential arrangements. The industry could be turned around only if there were comprehensive restructuring, including the introduction of new technology and work practices. All this calls for change and flexibility.

The Prime Minister expressed interest in the APO Green Productivity concept with its focus on strengthening competitiveness while protecting the environment and maintaining social fairness. He said that Fiji was finalizing a sustainable development bill that includes identical notions. "We in the Pacific have very real concerns about the effects of greenhouse gases and global warming on sea levels." Prime Minister Qarase concluded his statement with a reminder that the aim of the productivity movement is to enhance the quality of life of the people.

A traditional feature of the GBM is a special presentation by a guest speaker from the host country on a topic of current interest. This year's presenter was Governor Savenaca Narube of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, who spoke on "The Quest for Productivity and Global Competitiveness—The Imperative for Change in the Pacific Island Economies." The *APO News* will carry excerpts from his presentation in the November issue. 