

Australia and Fiji 'family' agreement ends 13-year diplomatic freeze

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Australia and Fiji are 'family' again after Scott Morrison's visit to the Pacific, ending a diplomatic freeze in place since a 2006 military coup. Even a stoush over the citizenship of terrorist Neil Prakash could not derail Mr Morrison's meeting with Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama.

The pair announced a "vuvale" agreement - named after the Fijian word for family - covering economic, security, cultural and sporting support. Australia and Fiji are officially 'family' once again after a bilateral agreement was met. (AAP)

"It's clear now more than ever that we can put this behind us in the past, letting bygones be bygones," Mr Bainimarama told reporters in Suva today.

A key plank of the agreement is allowing Fijian workers to access Australia's Pacific Labour Scheme, which brings workers into rural areas for up to three years.

"We believe these programs can really provide support to both skill Fijian workers, who will have the opportunity to work in Australia, but also share those skills when they come back and work in Fiji," Mr Morrison said.

Australia will also spend \$84 million training Fijian teachers, and \$17 million sending 1000 hours of new Australian television programming each year to Pacific TV networks.

During Prime Minister Scott Morrison's Pacific islands trip, an end to a 13-year-old diplomatic freeze was met with Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama. (AAP)

Peter Dutton's department under fire over \$450,000 'wine and dine' bill

'Labor is not going down that path': Bill Shorten declares he won't move Australia Day

Rob Oakeshott to contest Cowper at federal election

Meanwhile, in a number of crucial Queensland seats ahead of this year's Federal election Opposition Leader Bill Shorten kick-started his own campaign today.

Mr Shorten has promised to visit 16 towns across 1400 kilometres in the state on the 'Bill Bus', targeting eight marginal seats. "Better wages, better penalty rates, not bigger banks or bigger tax cuts for corporations," he said.

Over in Fiji at the same time, Mr Morrison said Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton's attempt to cancel ISIS fighter Prakash's Australian citizenship had not come up.

Meanwhile, Bill Shorten today kick-started his Federal Election campaign with the 'Bill Bus', aiming to visit eight marginal seats and 16 locations. (AAP)

Melbourne-born Prakash has a Fijian father but Fiji says he is not a citizen. "This matter had already been dealt with before our meetings today," Mr Morrison told reporters.

Mr Morrison also brushed off former international development minister Concetta Fierravanti-Wells' questions about why Australia would saddle Pacific nations with more debt. Australia has announced a \$2 billion Pacific infrastructure loan fund, but Senator Fierravanti-Wells said Island nations already owed \$5.5 billion to banks and China.

The agreement will mark the resume of economic, security, cultural and sporting support. (AAP) "I don't agree with the perspective that she's offered," Mr Morrison said. "That facility is made up of two components - \$500 million in grants, not loans... (and) \$1.5 billion in concessional finance."

Senator Fierravanti-Wells said overseas aid funding should be used instead of loans. Australian aid funding has dropped to its lowest level ever under the coalition government.

"The chaos and division inside the coalition continues to undermine Australia's engagement in the Pacific," Labor's foreign affairs spokeswoman Penny Wong said.

As part of the vuvale agreement, Australia will contribute to the travel costs of a Fijian team in a NSW rugby league competition in 2020, and the Fijian netball team's travel to the July World Cup in the United Kingdom.

Mr Bainimarama was head of the Fijian army when he staged a coup in 2006, before being elected prime minister in 2014.

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