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Let Fijians sort out their own problems

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THE Fijian crisis serves as a new barometer to gauge the finesse-level of the various parties concerning international diplomacy.

As I was writing this letter, the Sydney Morning Herald website featured a strongly worded statement by Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer as events unfolded in Suva, the capital of Fiji.

Downer said Australia would not agree to coup leader George Speight receiving a pardon or "taking a role in the future Fiji Government".

That the situation in Suva remained fluid and that the immediate aim was to end the hostage-taking crisis and a swift return to normalcy did not seem to matter very much to Downer.

Soon afterwards the same website quoted Speight's objection to military intervention in the Fijian crisis. Now Speight knows that a powerful neighbour is against him getting a pardon.

Asean member countries would have handled such a crisis differently. Perhaps such angry pronouncements prompted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to make his recent comments about Australia.

I quote: "If Australia wants to be a friend of Asia it should stop behaving as if it is there to teach us how to run our country."

Downer also had this to say about the Fijian military intervention: "We want the military, as soon as possible, and I don't mean by that months later, but as soon as possible, to restore civilian and democratic Government and we hope very much that this is going to be a step towards that final outcome."

If Downer had not added the word "hope", it would have sounded like an order.

Naturally one is tempted to offer one's views about the Fijian crisis, but ultimately it is the Fijians who will sort out their problems.