



# Fiji Teachers Union

(THE CHILD OUR HOPE)

## Newsletter

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### GREETINGS

*“Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. We don't need unity in theory, we need solidarity in practice.”  
(Richard M. Rorty)*

Bula Vinaka and warm greetings to all members of the Fiji Teachers Union! FTU extends a special and warm welcome to the members who have joined this year!

Time has flown by, and we are into the last week of the academic term. FTU extends a warm welcome to Honourable Aseri Radrodro who was re-appointed the Minister for Education by PM. In his capacity as the Minister, FTU had a cordial and positive relationship with Hon. Radrodro, and the Union is ready to work with him to address the grievances of our members. Hon. Radrodro will also be the chief guest for our AGM and Annual Conference in Nadi.

FTU acknowledges all our valuable members for preparing their students for the academic challenges that they will encounter in life.

FTU also salutes teachers who have been sacrificing their afternoons and weekends to be with their sports teams. The satisfaction one gets from seeing the success of our children is beyond explanation. We wish our secondary schools all the best for the Coca-Cola Games. It's also pleasing to see that primary school students have started the battle on the sports field.

Members must note that although both Unions are invited by the Ministry for discussions on educational issues, something that was denied to us previously, we will not succumb to their demands and will continue to uphold the dignity of the teaching profession.

The Regularisation exercise, which was carried out by the Ministry together with PSC, was done without FTU consultation. For record keeping, FTU filed an injunction against the process. The first hearing was on 18th April.

We will do what is right and just and in the best interest of our members. We, as members of the Union, must also remember that FTU is not the promoting or demoting agents. Post processing and its outcome solely rest with the Ministry of Education.

Brothers and Sisters in Union, FTU is indebted to you for your unreserved and unwavering support last year, and we will need the same for the overall success of Union activities this year.

FTU has a rich history- one which is based on truth, ethics and the principles of dedication, commitment and calling **a spade a spade**.

FTU also congratulates our members who walked the aisle to collect their graduation certificate and honours. We urge members to continue to upgrade their qualifications.

As we conclude term one, we wish every member a blessed and eventful school break.

### INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

#### 1.0 RECOGNITION OF STTC, DTT/ IDTT

In September 2021, the then Education Minister, Hon. Premila Kumar, undertook the de-recognition of STTC, DTT/ IDTT awards, thereby depriving deserving officers of their rightful remuneration. This decision necessitated concerted efforts by the Secretariat to advocate for recognition. Pursuing various channels, including engagement with the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC) and the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA), the Secretariat diligently sought acknowledgment for these accolades. Following persistent endeavors, a letter of recognition from FHEC was procured and presented to the Permanent Secretary of Education, urging action. Subsequent to numerous follow-ups, the Honorable Minister for Education announced during the February Parliamentary session the full reinstatement of recognition for the aforementioned awards.

#### 2.0 CASE 32/2024

In a unanimous accord during the meeting, the Working Committee resolved to mount a legal challenge against the undemocratic and unconstitutional Regularization, affirming our commitment to upholding democratic principles. The case was officially lodged on 8th February, with the court setting the 28th for adjudication. Despite sanguine expectations, the anticipated stay was not granted, given its contentious nature versus the state. Nevertheless, the forthcoming proceedings, which commenced on 18th April, will pave the way forward.

#### 3.0 IRREGULAR APPOINTMENTS

As we thought gone are the days of irregular appointments, the same has started once again within the Ministry. One such glaring example is that in the HR section of the Ministry. The Secretariat wrote to PS in this regard highlighting that there were some very senior Education Officers within the Ministry who had considerable experience in the Human Resource Department. These individuals possessed the expertise and knowledge required to navigate the complexities of the role seamlessly. It is, therefore,

essential for the Ministry to consider internal talent to ensure a smooth transition and effective leadership within the Human Resource Department.

Furthermore, the Secretariat reminded PS that appointing an external candidate may not only disrupt the department's functioning, but also raise questions about the transparency and fairness of the recruitment process. He further urged the Ministry to prioritize internal talent, ensuring that those who have served diligently within the education system are given the opportunity to contribute to its betterment.

#### **4.0 IRREGULAR TRANSFERS**

Recent instances have arisen wherein members have been abruptly compelled to relocate from their current schools to accommodate others. These occurrences are managed by the Secretariat, sometimes initiated by the School Heads or directly by the Ministry. What is distressing is that in certain instances, affected individuals are not duly informed or consulted prior to the proposed relocation.

It is disheartening to observe that in some cases, Education Advisors are the primary instigators of such relocations. It is imperative for individuals to be aware that they possess the right to appeal their transfer to the Permanent Secretary-Education, with a parallel notification sent to the Secretariat. It should be noted that the imposition of the '6 year' rule' is not currently enforced. In instances where such occurrences have been brought to the attention of the Secretariat, measures have been undertaken to stop such arbitrary transfers.

#### **5.0 EXPRESSION OF INTEREST**

The Secretariat's office courteously extended its support to members who had submitted their aspirations for acting appointments in various schools.

#### **6.0 RECLASSIFICATION OF SCHOOLS**

As of the composition of this newsletter, the Unions had been formally invited to engage in consultations regarding the aforementioned matter. Comprehensive updates regarding the ensuing outcomes would be provided in due course.

#### **7.0 FORMER PRINCIPAL WINS CASE**

Mr. Wasu Deo, the former Principal of Saraswati College, Dilkusha, Nausori, who on 1st March, 2021, underwent suspension pending investigation and subsequently faced termination, purportedly treated as resignation, emerged victorious in his legal pursuit. The court decreed the termination of Mr. Deo as unlawful. He is to receive full gross remuneration for the balance duration of his contractual engagement with the ministry, along with a reimbursement of \$1000.00 in court expenses payable to FTU. Mr Damodaran Nair, FTU's lawyer, represented him.

### **AGM AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

After the success of last year's AGM and Annual Conference in Labasa, this year's Annual Conference will be hosted by Nadi branch at Swami Vivekananda College (SVC). The Annual Conference will take place during the first week of

the school holidays.

The details of the conference are as follows:

- Date: Monday 6th to Thursday 9th May
- Venue: Swami Vivekananda College (SVC)
- Theme: Together, Towards Tomorrow
- Chief Guest: Honourable Aseri Radrodro- Minister for Education

### **BIODATA- HON. ASERI RADRODRO- MINISTER FOR EDUCATION**



Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro was born and raised in his own village in Serea, Waimaro, in the province of Naitasiri. He was educated in his own village school, Soloira District School before he joined Queen Victoria School for his secondary education and has a Bachelors Degree in Accounting and Economics, and a Masters in Business Administration from the University of the South Pacific.

Hon. Radrodro has served in both the corporate and government offices before he joined politics in 2014. He has shown resilience and professionalism in his capacity as Education Minister in all the activities that he had initiated and continues to pursue since he took up office in December, 2022. Hon. Radrodro is committed to investing in teachers' welfare, so they are retained in the Ministry and equally important, promoting equity and accessibility to quality education for the children of Fiji with adequate capital and human resources.

The Minister for Education advocates the Coalition Governments commitment to leave no child behind and provide a holistic education platform for children to achieve personal, communal, and societal development goals. The Coalition Government remains steadfast in holistic education investiture to the children of our beloved Fiji.

## CONFERENCE PROGRAMME 🌸

### Monday 6th May 2024

10.00am	Pre-Conference Meeting
2.00pm	Sports Committee Meeting

### Tuesday 7th May 2024

8.30-9.00am	Registration of Delegates
9.15am	Guests and Delegates get seated
9.30am	Official Opening of the AGM and Annual Conference
	Presidential Address/ Introduction of Chief Guest
	Address by the Chief Guest
11.00am	Vote of thanks
11.10am	Morning Tea
11.30am	Annual General Meeting
	Resolutions (Part of AGM Agenda) Constitution Review
2.00pm	Lunch
3.30pm	Sports- Official Opening

### Wednesday 8th May 2024

9.00am	FTU-CTCL AGM
11.30am	Morning Tea
12.00pm	Women's Wing AGM
1.00pm	Lunch
2.00pm	Sports
7.00pm to 10.00pm	FTU-CTCL Social

### Thursday 9th May 2024

8.30am	FTU Sports
10.00am	Post Conference Meeting
5.00pm	Presentation of Prizes



Flashback- the FTU AGM and Annual Conference at Labasa Sangam College

## FTU-CTCL SOCIAL 🌸

Members must note that this year's FTU-CTCL social will take place at Nadi Civic Centre on Wednesday 8th May, beginning at 7pm and ending at 10pm. Dinner pass, which is the entry to the social, will only be issued to bonafide FTU-CTCL members. If a teacher is a member of FTU but not FTU-CTCL, then the dinner pass would not be issued.

## BRANCH DELEGATES 🌸

Branch delegates should be appointed as per the FTU Constitution Section 32 Clauses 1-9. Branches are requested to bring large delegations to the Annual Conference and AGM. Unity is solidarity, and in solidarity we shall pursue! **Delegate registration is due to FTU HQ for vetting on Thursday 2nd May.**

## SPORTS 🌸

Branches are expected to prepare their teams well to participate in soccer, netball and men's and women's volleyball competitions. All sports matches will be held at Prince Charles Park. **Sports registration is due to FTU HQ for vetting on Thursday 2nd May.** Branch Reps must ensure that correct player registration is done. Players, who are not registered, will not be allowed to play.

## BILLETING 🌸

Branch Chairpersons have liaised with the Executives of Nadi branch for billeting. We urge members to take care of the school property if they are billeted in schools in Nadi.

## FTU AGM RESOLUTIONS 🌸

The Resolutions, that were received from the branches, would be discussed during the AGM.

## FTU JOURNAL 🌸

The Publicity Committee, under the guidance of the Chairperson, Bro Brij Bhan Singh, is working on the FTU Journal. Members were asked to write a one-page A5 article on this year's theme 'Together, Towards Tomorrow', sharing their experiences and thoughts on the theme. **Articles, that were emailed to HQ on ftu@connect.com.fj or to the Publicity Officer, Bro. Brij Singh, on email address brij359@gmail.com, have been edited and compiled into the journal.**

## BRANCH AGMs 🌸

All Branch Annual General Meetings, except Tailevu, were completed within the month of March. All branches celebrated Women's Day as well with a cake cutting ceremony. The Constitution Review team, led by the General Treasurer, Bro. Pranesh Kumar, presented the amendments made to the FTU Constitution.



Bua Women's Wing celebrating IWD

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 🌸

This year's International Women's Day was celebrated on Wednesday 6th March at the FTU HQ. The Chief Guest was Dr Unaisi Baba, who is the FNU Vice Chancellor. The theme for this year's IWD celebration was 'Invest in women: Accelerate progress'. FTU members gathered in numbers to take part in the celebration. Dr Baba delivered a powerful and inspirational address. We thank the branches for celebrating the important day during their branch AGMs.



Members gathered at FTU HQ to celebrate International Women's Day

## YEAR PLANNER 🌸

The FTU year planner has been transformed into a desk calendar. It was disseminated to the branches to be distributed to all the FTU members.

## CHANGE OF BRANCH 🌸

Members, who change branches, are asked to notify the office, and fill the Branch Transfer Form so that their membership records are updated.

## FTU WEBSITE/ SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE 🌸

We encourage members to take advantage of the FTU Website to retrieve information on the latest developments, press releases and information pertaining to industrial relations issues.

## DUTY HOURS OF TEACHERS 🌸

As per Circular No. 38/23, members and school heads must note:

**Monday to Thursday- 8am to 3.30pm**

**Friday- 8am to 3pm**

FTU urges school heads to adhere to the Circular and not force teachers to stay in school after 3.30pm. **The Minister for Employment, Productivity, and Industrial Relations, Honourable Agni Deo Singh, also stipulated the duty hours of teachers to be from 8am to 3.30pm.**

## CAPACITY BUILDING NATIONAL EXECUTIVE PD 🌸

Members of the National Executive met at the FTU HQ during the last week of the school holidays in January. A two-day PD session was organised by HQ for all the Elected National Executive members and Branch Reps on Wednesday 24th and Thursday 25th January. The first day focused on the review of the FTU Constitution, while the second day focused on the way forward in terms of membership drive, organising, capacity building and strategic planning.

## TRADE UNION RENEWAL 🌸

The Trade Union Renewal workshop, which was organised by the Council of the Pacific Education at the Hideaway Coral Coast in Sigatoka, was attended by NP Bro. Sashi Shandil and GS Bro. Muniappa Goundar and the two trainers (VP Sis Urmila Singh and AGS Bro. Rajnesh Lingam) and Heads of Schools (Primary and Secondary). The workshop aimed at renewing trade Union activities, membership drive and organising activities at the branch and national level. FTA was also part of the two-day training. The facilitators were from Australia.



FTU members with the facilitators

## COPE REGIONAL CONGRESS 🌸

We were invited to attend the Council of Pacific Regional Congress at the Tanoa International from Friday 1st to Sunday 3rd March. FTU was represented by NP Bro Sashi Shandil, GS Bro Muniappa Goundar, GT Bro Pranesh Kumar, VP Sis Urmila Singh, Personnel Officer Bro Rameshwar Lal, and Sis Mohini Datt (Nadi).



## MUTUAL AID BENEFIT SCHEME

Members must take note that the following doctors have been removed from the MABS list of doctors- Rubina Medical (Nadera) and Dr Atinesh Prakash (Labasa). Dr Sheenal Singh (Labasa) was added to the panel, but the services have been put on hold.

## STAFF MATTERS

FTU thanks Mrs Archana Narayan, who was our Insurance Officer, for her service to FTU. Mrs Narayan resigned for greener pastures. This position was advertised, and an interview was conducted based on the applications received. Mrs Rishika Sharma has replaced Mrs Archana Narayan as the Insurance Officer.

## WORKSHOP ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Members of FTU and FTA Southern division gathered at HQ for a workshop on climate change on Saturday 20th April. Funding was provided by Education International via the Council of Pacific Education. The Chief Guest was Ms Selina Kuruleca- PS Education. She addressed the members on the impact of climate change on students and communities and the roles the Trade Unions and the Ministry played in mitigating these impacts.

## CONCLUSION

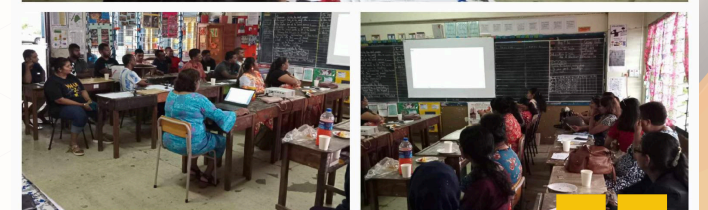
**“Unity to be real must stand the severest strain without breaking.”** (Mahatma Gandhi)

Despite the trying times, as a Union, FTU has provided the best service to the membership in terms of industrial relations and social security benefits.

There have been challenges, but things have been done and results have been achieved. FTU is optimistic about good days ahead, and we plead with our members to have patience.

FTU looks forward to the AGM and Annual Conference in the Jet Set Town and we urge members to come out in numbers.

The Union extends its sincere thanks and appreciation to the membership for the faith and support! Wishing one and all a happy and rewarding school break!



*A “team” is not just people who work at the same time in the same place. A real team is a group of very different individuals who enjoy working together to help their organization achieve its goals and purpose.*



Fiji Teachers Union general secretary Muniappa Goundar.

WORKING HOURS

# Union To Lodge Claims

## North families lodge complaints of unexplained overtime of teachers.

SHRATIKA NAIDU  
LABASA

The increase in complaints from families regarding teachers being required to stay at school until 4.30pm and even later has led the Fiji Teachers Union (FTU) to consider filing claims for allowances.

FTU general secretary Muniappa Goundar said the latest complaint they received was from a husband of a teacher teaching at Seaqaqa Central College, Macuata in Vanua Levu.

The husband claims his wife and other teachers were held back by the principal, especially on a Friday until 4:30pm.

"This is the second time we have received com-

plaints about this school, and others in Vanua Levu," Mr Goundar said.

A circular from the Ministry of Education - Number 38/23 which was issued on March 31, 2023, by the Ministry of Education clearly states the duty hours of a teacher.

The circular states that teachers working hours from Monday to Thursday were 8am to 3.30pm, and Friday 8am to 3pm due to the supervision of students during lunch hour.

"FTU will never regret submitting monetary claims for extra hours of work done to heads of schools if teachers write to us.

"Heads of schools will be held liable to pay because they are their immediate supervisors."

Attempts to obtain a comment from the acting permanent secretary Timoci Bure were unsuccessful when this edition went to press.

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# Unions: Be proactive

FROM PAGE 1

on every platform.

"The confusion might not have lied on the School Closure Notice but on a similar Notice circulating about the 30 schools which were to receive water today (yesterday)," Ms Kuruleca said.

However, the union's general secretary, Mr Goundar, said: "Not all parents and students are on social media and not everyone checks their mobile phones early in the morning due to rush hour.

"There were many parents who had already prepared their children's breakfast, lunch and helped them board the 6am bus and gone off to work to avoid traffic on the road."

Some parents, by the time the release was sent yesterday morning, they had already prepped their children for school, some students were probably boarding school buses or taxis, or waiting by the road to catch a taxi.

Students from Adi Cakobau School learned of the notice while on board their chartered buses heading to the HFC Bank Stadium for the Triple N Zone athletics meet. They had to turn around and head back to Sawani, Nausori.

Parents too were already making their way to the stadium. The competition was also deferred to a later date.

Meanwhile, yesterday afternoon at around 6pm, the ministry released another statement maintaining its stance on the school closure today due to the continuous water disruptions.

The decision was made following consultations with the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Water Authority of Fiji and National Disaster Management Office.

Mr Goundar said there were many working parents who struggled to arrange caregivers or babysitters to look after their children.

He added: "Maybe some parents had to apply leave from work or chose to be absent to look after their children or take them back home.

"It seems like the people in the ministry are sleeping on the job," he said.

"The water problem was there throughout the night, and many knew by 8pm and how can we expect the ministry being unaware."

He suggests the ministry should try to send out advisory messages

on the same night of such incidents, and not the next day.

### Working parent frustrated

Kasanita Liku, who is a working parent and mother of three children, expressed frustration about the events yesterday.

She only learned about the notice after 9am.

She said her only son, the youngest of three, was the only one left to finish school.

"I'm a working mother who does not have time to check her phone, and every morning I make sure my son leaves home at 7.30am."

After she found her son returning, she then started checking the internet for updates.

"Things like these should be communicated to us in good time," she said.

Another parent of four children but did not want to be named shared similar sentiments.

"I'm not someone who is used to internets and computers and all," she said.

"I prepared my children's lunch and all in the hope that they would go to school today (yesterday), and I was met with this news again from them."

Ms Liku is not alone. On social media, a call for the ministry to do better is the common message by parents, guardians and teachers alike.

### FTA response

Same sentiments were shared by Fiji Teachers Association's general secretary, Paula Manumanunitoga.

He said the ministry should be on their toes while delivering key messages concerning school closure.

"Not all parents have access to digital platforms to get directions from," he said.

"The Fijian Teachers Association believes that for any decisions as such, all decisions must be made before mid-night."

Mr Manumanunitoga said it should also be the responsibility of the ministry to set up water tanks in all schools, which could suffice them for half the day.

"We would like to raise the issue of deciding for students to stay home when parents are at work and there needs to be a form of parental guidance and supervision when they are at home.

"So, the FTA urges if children are not going to work, parents should not report to work too."

Feedback: inoke.rabonu@fijisun.com.fj



Selina Kuruleca.



Paula Manumanunitoga.



Muniappa Goundar.



Kasanita Liku.



Permanent Secretary for Education Selina Kuruleca.

# Unions call on PS to abide by the law

IVAMERE NATARO  
SUVA

The Fiji Teachers Union general secretary, Muniappa Goundar, has called out Selina Kuruleca, on the issue of appointing acting positions within the Ministry of Education.

He urged the Permanent Secretary for Education to abide by the law.

"I would like to remind the PS to follow the due process of the open, transparent, competitive selection process based on merit and not to

make subjective appointments under the 'internal code' process," said Mr Goundar in a statement yesterday.

"We respect your constitutional powers, but those powers should be exercised within the ambit of the rule of law under which exercise of unfettered powers has no room."

He said if due process was followed, then the appointments would've been backdated from the date the appointees started acting in the position.

Mr Goundar was responding to two contradicting statements made

by the Minister for Education, Vilame Gavoka, and Ms Kuruleca on March 11, 2024.

Mr Gavoka stated the regularisation of acting appointments was done in consensus with the teacher unions and Ms Kuruleca stated the FTU was not involved in the process.

"The union has received numerous concerns from members whose teachers who are inferior in seniority, qualification, no proven leadership experience and with only one major being appointed," Mr Goundar said.

"We are not acting for the elite as claimed but for the interest of all members.

"FTU urges the PS to refrain from making rhetoric statements and respect the principles of good faith, collective bargaining and the rule of law."

Mr Goundar said the teacher unions were monitoring how policies were introduced and implemented and were not rulling out any possibility of a notice to conduct a secret ballot in the future.

Feedback: ivamere.nataro@fijisun.com.fj

# Union slams minister

By REPEKA NASIKO

THE Fiji Teachers Union says it was not involved in the consultation process for the regularisation of teachers in acting posts. FTU general secretary Muniappa Goundar claimed they met Minister for Education Villame Gavoka and his permanent secretary, Selina Kuruleca, once on January 29 when the union was informed about the regularisation of heads of schools who had been sitting on acting posts for

a while. "As the general secretary of Fiji Teachers Union, I vehemently deny and reject the recent statement made by the honourable Minister for Education Villame Gavoka regarding the alleged collaboration and partnership with teacher unions in the regularisation process," said Mr Goundar. "Contrary to the minister's claims, the Fiji Teachers Union wishes to clarify that there has been no consensus or agreement reached between the union and

the ministry during the meeting held on January 29, 2024. "As the general secretary, I categorically rejected the proposed regularisation process, citing numerous shortcomings that render the entire process undemocratic, unconstitutional and detrimental to the interests of our esteemed teachers." He said it was important for the public to be accurately informed that the union stance on the process remained unchanged. "We express our deep concern over the misrepresentation of

facts by the honourable minister. "The statement made by the minister, expressing appreciation for collaboration and positive discussions, is completely misleading and does not reflect the reality of the union's position." Mr Goundar added that FTU's meeting with the minister and Ms Kuruleca in January was the first- and last-time engagement with the ministry regarding the matter. "Any statement suggesting otherwise is false and mislead-

ing. "We call upon the ministry to rectify this misinformation promptly and uphold the principles of transparency and honesty. "Fiji Teachers Union stands firm in its commitment to protecting the rights and interests of its members, and we will continue to object to any breach of the principles of good faith and collective bargaining." Questions sent to Mr Gavoka and Ms Kuruleca remained unanswered.



Standing in solidarity are, from left, Sashi Shandil (FTU national president), Nesselinda Meta (COPE general secretary), Professor Unaisi Baba (chief guest) and Urmila Singh (FTU national vice president) during the International Women's Day celebration in Suva on Wednesday. Picture: ELIKI NUKUTABU

## Singh makes his stand

By NACANIELI TUILEVUKA

THE Fiji Sugar Corporation will not sell off its property to settle its debt, according to the Minister for Sugar Charan Jeath Singh. Mr Singh said the organisation's assets would not be used for hotel resorts, or shopping complex developments, unless such projects directly benefit the corporation. "These are my instructions to the organisation's executives," he said. "If the Fiji National Provident Fund wants to build a shopping complex here, they will have to build it for us." The PSC, he said, owns a sizeable plot of land in Lautoka with a scenic sea view, which presents an opportunity to address the shortage of hotel rooms in the western division. "Advertisements will soon be published in newspapers, inviting expressions of interest from companies keen on building international standard hotels on this land. "Under the proposed arrangement, the selected company would operate the hotel for 20 years before returning the property to the Fiji Sugar Corporation." He said this initiative aims to meet the growing demand for hotel accommodation in the western division.

## Ministry liaising with unions regarding log of claims

By SHAYAL DEVI

THE Ministry of Civil Service is liaising with worker unions about issues surrounding their pending log of claims. Ministry of Civil Service permanent secretary Parmesh Chand said the unions had regularly reminded the ministry about the log of claims. "Immediately, we also have to address the log of claims which have remained on our table for a long time," he said. He added that any conversation on sal-

ary increments will need to go through the proper process. "There was a dilemma whether it will be performance linked or is it linked to just cost of living adjustment. Now that we have got a fair idea of what those claims are and what the actual situation is on the ground, we should be able to, more constructively, discuss this with the worker representatives and come to some solution and feed into the budget process. "I don't want to inflate the expectations of my fellow civil servants, but this is the right time for us to be thinking about

it. To know that we're talking about the budget for 2024/2025, any inputs on salary adjustments, we'll have to go through that process." Mr Chand added they were not only thinking about salary, but also the health and wellbeing of workers. These include talks about the restoration of health in terms of life insurance and health cover. "We have got proposals from various providers. And we are doing analysis on that. We are in consultations on that to see what the government can viably afford

in this area, because the health and wellbeing of workers is very important. "We have started a number of initiatives such as wellness day, largely Wednesdays are wellness days, and then we have just released our guide to healthy catering in the civil service. "We will also be going into the Civil Service Day to promote wellness and collegiality. Collegiality, meaning civil service, is all about acting like a family and moving together, leaving nobody behind. "So there's a lot of work happening other than the salary review."

### TEACHER EXODUS

## Fiji to Feel the Pinch

FROM PAGE 1

to permanently residing in New Zealand. This poses as a lucrative offer for teachers in Fiji. "Shortages in secondary teachers, especially those in specific regions and subject skills such as Science, Technology, and Mathematics, have been an ongoing challenge for the New Zealand education workforce," Ms Stanford announced. "This Government is committed to turning around declining levels of achievement and ensuring that every child in New Zealand receives a world-class education," she said. "To attract skilled teachers New Zealand must be a highly competitive destination for overseas talent so that all schools have the best people with the right experience. "To achieve this, the Government will move secondary teachers from the Green List Work to Residence pathway to the Straight to Residence pathway." The Ministry of Education has lost 735 teachers through resignations in 2023, its Permanent Secretary Selina Kuruleca had revealed. Ms Kuruleca said the biggest challenge the ministry faced going into the new school year was the number of teachers who had left the ministry for greener pastures. Reacting to the announcement by the New Zealand government, Fiji Teachers Union general secretary Muniappa



Muniappa Goundar.

Goundar said the Ministry of Education needed to "pull up its socks". "I am aware of the incentives that the New Zealand government is offering and this will definitely be a loss to Fiji and a gain to New Zealand," Mr Goundar said. "The ministry needs to step up and ensure that our teachers are retained here," he said. "The ministry needs to wake up! The bells are ringing and they need to look at means and ways. "Teachers will remain if they are paid well," he added. "Who doesn't want a residency in New Zealand?"

- He said to retain teachers, the ministry needed to:
- Increase the salaries of the teachers which has been long overdue.
  - Implement incentives
  - A conducive teacher's environment is needed
  - Develop a more relevant teaching

curriculum, teacher friendly and student savvy. Teachers' welfare needs to be priority for the ministry, teachers being harassed, assaulted. They need to be protected. He said the teacher to student ratio in classrooms were unbelievable. "We have one teacher looking after 50 to 60 students. In an earlier interview on the same subject, Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) National Secretary Felix Anthony said to retain employees and stop the massive migration of skilled Fijian workers overseas, employers need to start paying their employees right. NZ govt offer New Zealand's Minister Stanford said having secondary teachers on the straight to residence pathway supports the Government priority of attracting highly skilled migrant. "This add to our economy and delivery Better Public Services in education by reducing teacher shortages," Ms Stanford says. "Overseas teachers are a valuable part of our education system; the majority bring more than five years' experience and extra learning opportunities to our schools," she added. Queries sent to the Minister for Education Villame Gavoka and Acting Permanent Secretary Timoci Bure remain unanswered when this edition went to press. Feedback: inoke.rabonu@fijisun.com.fj

## Singh confirms knock off time

By NACANIELI TUILEVUKA

TEACHERS are to knock off by 3.30pm, according to Minister for Employment Agni Deo Singh. This is in response to reports emerging of some teachers being instructed not to leave the school premises before 5pm, sparking debate over their working hours. "Teachers' working hours are only from 8 to 3.30pm," said Mr Singh adding that teachers were also on duty during

lunchtime and required to remain on the school grounds throughout the day. "Teachers cannot leave school during lunch time, they must stay at school." He said their lunch hour was considered part of their duty. "They are to oversee the students' movement. "So, lunch hour is regarded as their working hour." Mr Singh said teachers could leave an hour earlier after the students leave for home.

# Flashback 2023 Labasa AGM

