

High-tech plan for Parliament



Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, front right, accompanied by the Speaker Pita Nacuva, left, Opposition Leader Mick Beddoes, John Elferink (political adviser Northern Territory, Australia) and Hans De Graaff (UNDP Deputy Resident Rep) at the induction of parliamentarians at the Warwick Hotel.

Picture: ELIKI NUKUTABU

THE United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has devised plans to equip the Parliament secretariat with appropriate technology and information for a better service.

Deputy resident representative Hans De Graaff announced plans to post seven young professionals to be attached to the secretariat to provide required support, learn on the job and beef-up human resource capacities.

He said a critical aspect of the project was to help MPs understand, consider and incorporate in their debates and dialogues their policies and programs, lessons from around the world on what has worked in nation building.

He made the comments at an induction workshop for Members of Parliament and Senate at the Warwick yesterday.

He said the UNDP was aware that MPs were not born with the required skills but needed to learn of developments from around the world in order to serve the people.

"One such area of dialogue, for example, which we hope you will consider as providing you an opportunity to use as benchmark for monitoring national development is the millennium development goals or MDGs," said Mr Graaff.

He added that the project was one of three which formed the backbone of the UNDP's support on democratic governance in Fiji.

He said they were helping to strengthen the teaching of civic and human rights education in primary and secondary schools through inserting relevant context in the curriculum, develop teaching resources and train teachers.

The UNDP is building the capacity of community-based NGOs to work with the wider community on civic, human rights and voter education.

He said a particular issue for Fiji was that of persistent and stubborn and from some indication, widespread and increasing levels of poverty in rural and urban areas.

Schools need peer mediator

PEER mediators should be put in schools to help solve problems among students, says senior education officer Raj Put.

"The peer educators can be helpful in solving student problems," Ms Put said.

Schools, she said, had counsellors who acted as peer mediators.

Ms Put said different people should be assigned as peer mediators and the students were ideal ones.

"Students are familiar with student problems and related issues and will be the best people for the role."

She said such a setting would enable problems to be solved at minimal level and save time and resources.

"If the problem needs to be dealt with on extensive basis with teachers and the principal, it can be done."

She said the ministry was planning on training people to be mediators at school level and pass the skills to students.

Ms Put is a participant at a regional mediation workshop held at the University of the South Pacific.

The conference will be opened today by USP vice-chancellor David Tarte.

The conference started with workshops in the past two days.

Topics discussed included peer mediation, basic mediation refresher courses and other related mediation issues.

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Submit report or be dropped

By SOLOMONI
BIUMAIONO

PARLIAMENTARIANS who do not regularly submit their monthly constituency report for the next five years will be dropped from the party, says Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua Party national director Simone Rasova.

Mr Rasova made the comment after Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase announced that all SDL MPs would be required to submit monthly constituency reports.

Mr Qarase said the reports should include constituency visits, issues raised by constituents and the action taken to address the complaints.

Mr Rasova said the party had adopted the strategy to make it accountable to the voters and also make its work easier.

"If any of the MPs regularly miss submitting the report he or she will not be considered to stand for the SDL in the next election," Mr Rasova said.

He said the SDL party management had actually recommended that MPs

submit a quarterly report but because the PM had announced that it should be a monthly report, the party would respect his decision.

The Citizens Constitutional Forum commended Mr Qarase's initiative.

It said parliamentary rules should be changed so that all MPs were required to file monthly constituency reports, instead of just SDL party MPs.

CCF executive director Reverend Akuila Yabaki said monthly reports from MPs were an excellent idea but the rules needed to be extended to other MPs in the House of Representatives.

He said his organisation had learnt from the many workshops held before the general election that people wanted to see more of their MPs and some constituents were surprised that MPs received an allowance for constituency work.

Mr Qarase said Fiji Labour Party MPs and Mr Beddoes always took the time to talk and visit with their constituents.

Top-level talks deferred

A MEETING scheduled for today between the nation's three top political leaders to discuss the multi-party Cabinet has been deferred to next week.

Opposition Leader Mick Beddoes said the meeting between him, Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase and Fiji Labour Party leader Mahendra Chaudhry had been set for next Friday.

The meeting was postponed after Mr Chaudhry left for Australia yesterday.

Mr Beddoes said they had no problem arriving at a new date as Mr Chaudhry's travel

was planned beforehand.

"When the Prime Minister set the date for the meeting he was not aware that Mr Chaudhry had to travel abroad and did not consult anyone on his travel," he said.

"We have sorted out the date for the meeting which will be Friday next week at Mr Qarase's office", he said.

Mr Chaudhry was not part of a week-long induction workshop for members of Parliament and senators at the Warwick Hotel that ends tomorrow. Mr Qarase had called the high-level meeting to set ground rules for the

multi-party Cabinet.

"I believe the sooner we agree on some ground rules the better it is for the multi-party Cabinet and the better it is for Fiji, particularly when we move in this style of government," Mr Qarase said this week.

He was reacting to Mr Chaudhry's comments after the Labour party's national council meeting in Nadi last weekend.

Mr Chaudhry had said that the interest of the party must remain paramount regardless of whether parliamentarians were in Cabinet.

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Leadership act to be enacted

□ KIRTI SHARMA

PRIME MINISTER Laisenia Qarase yesterday said that a Standards of Leadership Conduct Act will be enacted into a law which will demand high levels of integrity from all holders of high State office.

Speaking at the Fiji Parliamentarians Induction Programme at the Warwick Hotel in Sigatoka yesterday Mr Qarase said this will include the president, vice president, ministers, members of parliament, chief executive officers and those who hold statutory appointments or executive positions in statutory authorities.

Mr Qarase said although the Constitution itself obliges the politicians to a Code of Conduct which is part of the framework for good governance the Standards of Leadership Conduct Act will be more effective.

• "The Code of Conduct calls on us to avoid conflict between our private interests and public duties," he added.

"We must not compromise the fair exercise of those duties or use our offices for private gain.

"We must not permit our integrity to be called into question or cause respect for or confidence in the integrity of Government to be diminished.

"In addition to these already existing provisions, a Standards of Leadership Conduct Act will also be made into a law."

He added that parliamentarians must set an exemplary example of personal behaviour in public office.

"We must be role models, demonstrating the qualities of good citizenship, respect for the law, devotion to duty, moral integrity, love for our neighbours and a patriotic love of the homeland.

"These are the touchstones for public leadership. The standards are very high but we have taken on a high calling," Mr Qarase added.

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Address the poor, says envoy

Members of Parliament and senators were yesterday told that the poor and the disadvantaged could have their economic and social status adequately addressed through their representatives in Parliament.

The parliamentarians heard that there were many ways to ensure the participation of people, including through opportunities to participate in public hearings, through the media, through their political parties.

Hans De Graaff, the United Nations deputy representative, said there was no means better than through Parliamentarians and the representatives of the people.

"It is through you, and how you maintain constantly your links with the grassroots, how you capture their concerns and wishes, how you articulate these in the Parliament,

how you insert these into the policies, programmes and the laws, that you can truly claim to be performing your designated roles," said Mr De Graaff.

He said it would be their challenge to move away from sectorally based, personal and petty debates and arguments, that we sometimes see in the parliament, to meaningful dialogues, debates, and discussions on seeking the best policies, programmes and legislation to deal with issues that truly matter to the people.

"It is your role to ensure that the resources of the nation are truly directed for the benefit of all, for national development.

The UNDP he added was greatly encouraged by the very positive recent developments, such as the multi-party government and the display of good will from all the stakeholders to put aside differences and focus on national issues and national development.

Speaker urges MPs to broaden minds

Speaker of the House of Representatives Pita Nacuva has urged members of Parliament not only to be familiar with national concerns, but of regional and international issues as well.

The problems recently experienced in the Solomons he said, is no laughing matter.

"As members of Parliament, we are not only required to be familiar with national concerns but also with issues that affect our region and the interna-

tional community as a whole."

He was speaking during the opening of the Induction Programme for MPs held at the Warwick Hotel on the Coral Coast.

"It is my hope that members leave here not only with a better understanding of parliamentary practices and how to use them more effectively but also with ideas of how they can help Fiji and our South Pacific neighbours overcome and address the challenges we currently face," he said.

The programme he said, was important in that it would give MPs a basic understanding of their roles as members of Parliament of Fiji, the system of Government and the important law-making and scrutiny functions that Parliament is required to perform.

Also attending the programme are members of Parliament from around the region who will share their experiences on the work they do as parliamentarians in their respective countries.

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