



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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**Country Advice**  
**Fiji**

FJI36559 – Fiji – Fiji Labour Party – New  
Labour Unity Party – Professor Rajesh  
Chandra  
28 May 2010

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1. Deleted.

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3. **Please provide information on Professor Rajesh Chandra and, in particular, any connection with the Fiji Labour Party or the current Fijian regime.**

Publicly available information found on Professor Rajesh Chandra relates primarily to his role as an academic, including his Vice Chancellorships of the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of Fiji.

No information was found to indicate that Professor Chandra has had formal connections with either the Fiji Labour Party (FLP) or the current regime other than through his work as an academic and university administrator.

In broadest overview of relevant events, Professor Chandra was controversially “overlooked” for appointment as the Vice Chancellor of the government-controlled USP immediately following the coup in May 2000 and again in 2004, before being appointed Vice Chancellor of the University of Fiji, which was newly founded to “provide a home for Indian students” in 2005. Since the current interim government came to power in 2007, Professor Chandra has reportedly been approached for consultations regarding the proposed People’s Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, has succeeded in being appointed Vice Chancellor of the USP and has been appointed chairman of the Higher Education Commission. More detailed information regarding these events follows.

Professor Chandra, already a senior USP administrator and academic, was recommended for appointment to the position of Vice Chancellor at a meeting of the USP Council at the time of the coup which ousted the government of Mahendra Chaudhry in May 2000, but the recommendation was rejected. In October 2000, a new committee recommended the appointment of ethnic Fijian Savenaca Siwatibau, an economist and the director of the regional office of the United Nations’ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to the position of Vice Chancellor and that recommendation was endorsed.<sup>1</sup>

In February 2001, *The Australian* reported that the USP had “about 300 faculty members, roughly half of them Indo-Fijian” and served twelve member countries and territories, but also observed that the university reflected the political tensions that had divided Fiji and that the decision to appoint Siwatibau over Chandra was “the most divisive issue” confronting it at that time.<sup>2</sup>

Professor Chandra subsequently acted as Vice Chancellor of the USP following the death of Siwatibau in 2003. Professor Anthony Ashton-Tarr, a South-African born Australian, was

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Fijian economist and UN bureaucrat wins USP top job’ 2000, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 19 October – Attachment 8.

<sup>2</sup> Cohen, D. 2001, ‘A campus under siege’, *The Australian*, 21 February – Attachment 9.

selected as the new Vice Chancellor in 2004, however, prompting suggestions that Professor Chandra had again been overlooked because of his ethnicity. Opposition FLP parliamentarian Pratap Chand reportedly criticized the government for not supporting Professor Chandra's candidacy, stating that "this is very discriminatory action on the part of the government"<sup>3</sup>, and the FLP's parliamentary leader Mahendra Chaudhry reportedly questioned whether it was "because he is an Indian he is not getting the top job at USP?"<sup>4</sup>

The chief executive of the Prime Minister's Office claimed that the USP Council's decision had not been influenced by the Fiji government<sup>5</sup>; however, a statement by the the Solomon Islands Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education Snyder Rene conversely observed that "Fiji, Kiribati and Samoa were in the selection committee and from the beginning, they were trying to get the support of other countries in a bid to appoint someone else. I personally feel that the issue was not what Professor Chandra can do, but who he is."<sup>6</sup>

Professor Chandra was reported to have also commented that his failure to be appointed Vice Chancellor of the USP had been "a race issue"<sup>7</sup>, but only after the announcement of his appointment as the Vice Chancellor of the newly opened University of Fiji in March 2005<sup>8</sup>.

It has been observed that the founding of the University of Fiji was "prompted by the need to provide a home for Indian students who perceive themselves to have been marginalized under the affirmative action schemes of successive governments since 1987", and two FLP Members of Parliament – Ganesh Chand and Kamlesh Arya – had been "most closely identified with the establishment of the university". A dedication function at the university was not attended by invited FLP leaders, however, and neither Chand nor Arya contested the 2006 election for the FLP.<sup>9</sup> While Professor Chandra may have been supported in his appointment as Vice Chancellor by members of the FLP, there is no indication that his appointment was the result of connections with the party.

In 2007, after the current interim government had come to power, Professor Chandra reportedly was approached for consultations regarding the proposed People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress, an initiative of the interim government he viewed as "a unique opportunity for the country to realise its full development potential".<sup>10</sup>

In November 2007 the University of Fiji received, for the first time, a grant from the state and Vice Chancellor Professor Chandra reportedly commented that this new allocation "indicates that government recognises the valuable work that the University of Fiji is doing".<sup>11</sup>

On February 2008 it was announced by the interim Education Minister that Professor Chandra had been appointed chair of a new higher education advisory board.<sup>12</sup>

In May 2008 he was appointed Vice Chancellor of the USP. As reported by the *Pacific News Agency Service*:

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<sup>3</sup> 'Australian reportedly chosen to head University of South Pacific' 2004, *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, source: Fijilive website, 31 October – Attachment 10.

<sup>4</sup> Gopal, A. 2004, 'Labour not happy with university appointment', *Fiji Times*, 1 November – Attachment 11.

<sup>5</sup> Catanasiga, V. 2004, 'Council agreed on candidate', *Fiji Times*, 5 November – Attachment 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ali, I. 2004, 'Anger over varsity move', *Fiji Times*, 30 November – Attachment 13.

<sup>7</sup> 'Academic Claims Racism in University Appointment' 2005, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 14 March – Attachment 14.

<sup>8</sup> Naivaluwaqa, T. 2005, 'Professor crosses campus to head new university', *Fiji Times*, 6 March – Attachment 15.

<sup>9</sup> Prasad, J. 2007, 'The role of Hindu and Muslim organizations during the 2006 election' in *From election to coup in Fiji – The 2006 campaign and its aftermath*, eds Fraenkel, J. and Firth, S., ANU E Press website, pp.330-331 [http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/whole\\_book.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/whole_book.pdf) – Accessed 4 July 2007 – Attachment 2.

<sup>10</sup> 'Ratu Joni rejected regime in invitation' 2008, *Fiji Times*, 2 February – Attachment 16.

<sup>11</sup> '\$24m cut leaves education unfazed' 2007, *Fiji Times*, 20 June – Attachment 17.

<sup>12</sup> 'High profile people fill education board' 2008, *Fiji Times*, 18 February – Attachment 18.

Led by the interim Education Minister Filipe Bole – the Fiji delegation had to lobby hard with regional delegates in Tonga to support the candidature of Professor Rajesh Chandra.

The appointment was made unanimously by the USP Council meeting in Nukualofa Tonga yesterday.

In what has been described as the first for Fiji, the candidate had the full backing of the interim Fijian government.<sup>13</sup>

Following the formal announcement of his appointment, Professor Chandra was reported to have stated that he looked forward to transforming the USP “into a much more cost effective organisation and make it much more responsive to the needs of the governments and the people of the Pacific”.<sup>14</sup> In the first months after his taking up the position, Professor Chandra was reported to have “said the council had taken action to reduce the salaries of senior management and the vice chancellor” and staff had been asked to accept a pay cut<sup>15</sup>; he was subsequently confronted by strike action by members of the university union.<sup>16</sup> Later reporting indicates further moves “resulting in some staff losing their jobs”<sup>17</sup>.

In October 2008, the interim Education Minister announced the appointment of Professor Chandra as chairman of the new Higher Education Commission, which replaced the advisory board established earlier that year.<sup>18</sup>

No further relevant information specifically regarding Professor Chandra was found; however, it should be noted that the US Department of State’s report on human rights practices in Fiji in 2009 states that “University of the South Pacific contract regulations effectively restrict most university employees from running for or holding public office or holding an official position with any political party”.<sup>19</sup>

#### **4. Are there any reports of former members of the New Labour Unity Party being discriminated against or harmed by the current Fijian regime?**

No reports were found of former members of the New Labour Unity Party being discriminated against or harmed by the current Fijian regime.

Sources indicate that the New Labour Unity Party (NLUP) was formed in April 2001 by Dr Tupeni Baba as a breakaway from the Fiji Labour Party (FLP).<sup>20</sup> In the 2001 election the NLUP won two seats, but by the 2006 election had “vanished without trace”.<sup>21</sup>

Dr Tupeni Baba stood unsuccessfully for the ruling Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua party (SDL) in the general election of May 2006, and in October 2006 was appointed Fiji’s new permanent representative to the United Nations, based in New York.<sup>22</sup>

Other members of the defunct NLUP – including “general secretary and unionist Tomasi Tokalauvere”, referred to in the previously cited Wikipedia article as leader of the “rump” of the NLUP<sup>23</sup> – rejoined the FLP in 2006.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Fiji citizen appointed as USP Chancellor’ 2008, Pacific News Agency Service, 22 May – Attachment 19.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Chandra wants to transform USP’ 2008, *Fiji Times*, 28 May – Attachment 20.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Payout for USP staff’ 2008, *Fiji Times*, 9 August – Attachment 21.

<sup>16</sup> ‘USP union strike illegal – Management’ 2008, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 11 September – Attachment 22.

<sup>17</sup> ‘USP scraps courses, jobs to go’ 2009, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 3 February – Attachment 23.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Vice Chancellor to head commission’ 2008, *Fiji Times*, 28 October – Attachment 24.

<sup>19</sup> US Department of State 2010, *2009 Country reports on Human Rights Practices – Fiji*, March, Section 2(a) – Attachment 25.

<sup>20</sup> ‘New Labour Unity Party (NLUP)’ 2005, *Political Parties of the World* – Attachment 26.

<sup>21</sup> Fraenkel, J. and Firth, S. 2007, ‘The cycles of party politics’ in *From election to coup in Fiji – The 2006 campaign and its aftermath*, eds Fraenkel, J. and Firth, S., ANU E Press website, p.67  
[http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/whole\\_book.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/whole_book.pdf) – Accessed 4 July 2007 – Attachment 2.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Fiji names new envoy to UN’ 2006, *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, source: Fijilive website, 9 October – Attachment 27.

Tokalauvere was a candidate for the FLP in the 2006 elections, but was not elected.<sup>25</sup>

No further reports relating to former members of the NLUP were found.

## 5. Deleted.

### Attachments

1. Deleted.
2. Fraenkel, J. and Firth, S. (eds) 2007, *From election to coup in Fiji – The 2006 campaign and its aftermath*, ANU E Press website  
[http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/whole\\_book.pdf](http://epress.anu.edu.au/fiji/pdf/whole_book.pdf) – Accessed 4 July 2007.
3. Deleted.
4. Deleted.
5. ‘New Labour Unity Party (Fiji), Wikipedia  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New Labour Unity Party \(Fiji\)&printable=yes](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New_Labour_Unity_Party_(Fiji)&printable=yes) – Accessed 21 May 2010.
6. Deleted.
7. Deleted.
8. ‘Fijian economist and UN bureaucrat wins USP top job’ 2000, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 19 October. (FACTIVA)
9. Cohen, D. 2001, ‘A campus under siege’, *The Australian*, 21 February. (FACTIVA)
10. ‘Australian reportedly chosen to head University of South Pacific’ 2004, *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, source: Fijilive website, 31 October. (FACTIVA)
11. Gopal, A. 2004, ‘Labour not happy with university appointment’, *Fiji Times*, 1 November. (FACTIVA)
12. Catanasiga, V. 2004, ‘Council agreed on candidate’, *Fiji Times*, 5 November. (FACTIVA)
13. Ali, I. 2004, ‘Anger over varsity move’, *Fiji Times*, 30 November. (FACTIVA)
14. ‘Academic Claims Racism in University Appointment’ 2005, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 14 March. (FACTIVA)
15. Naivaluwaqa, T. 2005, ‘Professor crosses campus to head new university’, *Fiji Times*, 6 March. (FACTIVA)
16. ‘Ratu Joni rejected regime in invitation’ 2008, *Fiji Times*, 2 February. (FACTIVA)
17. ‘\$24m cut leaves education unfazed’ 2007, *Fiji Times*, 20 June. (FACTIVA)
18. ‘High profile people fill education board’ 2008, *Fiji Times*, 18 February. (FACTIVA)

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<sup>23</sup> ‘New Labour Unity Party (Fiji), Wikipedia website  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New Labour Unity Party \(Fiji\)&printable=yes](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=New_Labour_Unity_Party_(Fiji)&printable=yes) – Accessed 21 May 2010 – Attachment 5.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Fiji Labour “dissidents” return to fold’ 2006, *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, source: Fijilive website, 27 March – Attachment 28.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Election Results by the Count – 47 Tailevu Ovalau Open’ (undated), Elections 2006 website  
<http://www.elections.gov.fj/results2006/constituencies/47.html> – Accessed 25 May 2010 – Attachment 29.

19. 'Fiji citizen appointed as USP Vice Chancellor' 2008, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 22 May. (FACTIVA)
20. 'Chandra wants to transform USP' 2008, *Fiji Times*, 28 May. (FACTIVA)
21. 'Payout for USP staff' 2008, *Fiji Times*, 9 August. (FACTIVA)
22. 'USP union strike illegal – Management' 2008, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 11 September. (FACTIVA)
23. 'USP scraps courses, jobs to go' 2009, *Pacific News Agency Service*, 3 February. (FACTIVA)
24. 'Vice Chancellor to head commission' 2008, *Fiji Times*, 28 October. (FACTIVA)
25. US Department of State 2010, *2009 Country reports on Human Rights Practices – Fiji*, March.
26. 'New Labour Unity Party (NLUP)' 2005, *Political Parties of the World*.
27. 'Fiji names new envoy to UN' 2006, *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, source: Fijilive website, 9 October. (FACTIVA)
28. 'Fiji Labour "dissidents" return to fold' 2006, *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, source: Fijilive website, 27 March. (FACTIVA)
29. 'Election Results by the Count – 47 Tailevu Ovalau Open' (undated), Elections 2006 website <http://www.elections.gov.fj/results2006/constituencies/47.html> – Accessed 25 May 2010.
30. Deleted.