



THE US FIJI TIMES

World's Largest Fiji Newspaper Out Of Republic of Fiji

January 2022 Monthly Publication - Subscription Available Pages 56 Volume: 209

Don't get a false sense of security with Omicron



Early studies suggest the Omicron variant may cause less severe disease than the Delta variant, which still makes up a considerable portion of US Covid-19 cases.

But because Omicron is much more contagious, the raw number of Covid-19 hospitalizations could get worse. "When

you have so many, many cases, even if the rate of hospitalization is lower with Omicron than it is with Delta, there's still the danger that you're going to have a surging of hospitalizations that might stress the health care system," said Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. And

Omicron might be more problematic for young children, said Dr. Scott Gottlieb, former commissioner of the US Food and Drug Administration.

"It does appear now, based on a lot of experimental evidence that we've gotten just in the last two weeks, that this is a milder form of the coronavirus

Miss Universe 2021 India: What do we know about Harnaaz Sandhu?



Curiously, there hasn't been a single Miss Universe from India in more than two decades, with Lara Dutta being the last Indian to win the prize 21 years ago, back in 2000.

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THE US FIJI TIMES PROUD OF ITS SERVICE

The US Fiji Times is ranked as the top newspaper being published outside of Fiji for the Fiji American community and all over the world. The paper's popularity has grown immensely in recent years due to its critical approach in impressing the need for charitable organizations to rise up in all occasions to help Fiji and the people back home. Visitors from around the world have commended the paper on its stand to serve the community. The US Fiji Times understands that like in any other field, there is competition and competing with "The largest newspaper out of Fiji" has been a difficult task for newer publications. This is not because of its magnitude and coverage, but because of its stability and growth capabilities.

The writers of the paper comprise some of Fiji's best. Even though they are not too visible in social functions, they are taking up their challenges very effectively. The marketing strategy handles by our CEO/Publisher Mr. Rocky Ali is the hallmark of the papers current strength. Despite lacking the front line journalist experience, he makes up for the deficiency with the sheer ability to jeep the media wagon rolling. His insatiable love to be involved with the community to cherish in this very noble cause is worthy of higher recommendation. We have a very vibrant community, so despite the paper being issued free, the expectation of the community is very high. The coverage of all the major events is a mist for the paper and we feel

very proud to be associated with major organizations to see that their events are properly covered with pictures, stories and awareness via our social media platforms.

The paper is being also sent to countries like Fiji, NZ, Australia, Canada, England and Sweden for Fijians abroad to also get the feel of the luxuries of USA. The feedback has been overwhelming in this regard and it has become a trend for many organizations to rely on US Fiji Times in reaching the desired success with adequate coverage.

The paper will strive to serve the community with the best of its ability and assures the community that there will be quality reporting at all times. Vinaka – Rocky Buksh

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USFT WEBSITE VISITED OVER 1.4 MILLION

Fiji's largest paper, US Fiji Times, has reached a milestone - with 1,000,000 visits to its website, usfijitimes.org. The CEO of USFT, Rocky Buksh, said that this is a major achievement given the fact that the paper was intended just for the Fiji community and indicates that people all over the globe are showing interest in Fiji through the website.

What has led to the recognition of the website has been the paper's presence at many of the World Sevens series, particularly the USA Sevens.

Mr. Buksh thanks all the readers and the advertisers who have promoted the paper to reach this significant milestone and he promises to continue serving Fijians abroad.

Christmas Greetings

Ambassador Satyendra Prasad Extends Christmas Greetings



To the Fijian diaspora in the United States, Canada and elsewhere, compliments of the season to you all. As we enter the festive season, we pause and reflect at the year that was, the achievements that as individual and families we have made. This is a time to pause and reflect on the challenges we have overcome. It is a time to offer our thanks to family, loved ones and to God almighty.

As a country and a people, Fiji has shown our great spirit and unity in truly astonishing ways. Fiji has faced down challenges, weathered climate catastrophes, contained the COVID-19 pandemic. From this month, we start our economic recovery by re-opening our borders. But this is also a time to reflect and offer our prayers for those whom we lost on the way. Everyone one of them and their families are in our thoughts.

The way in which Fijians around the world embraced our common humanity during this trying year has lifted us as country and as a people. The so many times we dug deep into our faith and community searching for pathways out of pandemic and its social and economic hardships has hardened our resilience. We remember these. We remember how friends, neighbors and strangers alike reminded us why we're on this Earth in the first place, to care for one another, to give what we can, and continue to be source of compassion and hope for each one of us.

To our vast diaspora here in North America and globally; I offer my sincerest thanks.

Fiji will continue to look with hope and with pride at its diaspora in North America and elsewhere as it commences its recovery and as it heals the wounds of the pandemic.

While the adverse impact of climate change remains the single most important threat to the development and security of our people, it is heartening to see Fiji re-opening its borders. This presents to many of us an opportunity to visit and reconnect with our families and friends back home during this festive season. For those who wish to invest in Fiji, the easing of travel restrictions could mean an opportunity for your new skills and expertise; your new knowledge that can help our nation's recovery and help its return to a prosperous path.

In this festive season, I hope we will find time to remind ourselves of the meaning of Christmas. Faith and family shape societies. Compassion and care make them great. With renewed enthusiasm and anticipation for a much brighter year ahead, my wife Kushma, and daughter Nehali and I extend to you and your families our best wishes for a merry Christmas and a happy and safe holidays.



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News

Fiji Airways supports Fiji Day in Dublin 2021

Fiji Airways gave two tickets to the Fiji Day held in Dublin, California with US Fiji Times helping in the distribution of tickets. Fiji's Honorary Consul in San Francisco Mr Jay Singh officiated at the drawing.



(l-r) US Fiji Times CEO-Publisher Rocky Ali Buksh, Honory Consul San Francisco Mr Jay Singh & Mrs Una Vunidakua.

A message from Fiji Muslim Sports Association of USA President, Shameer Buksh:



Assalamualikum brothers,

I hope everyone is doing well and staying safe from this challenging times and may our lord grant us the best of health.

FANCA 2022 is scheduled to happen during the last quarter of 2022. My board has decided to recruit players to represent our USA Muslim sports team for a tour to Fiji. We have an Open division, Masters & Veterans. There is also talks on taking a youth team next year.

To be eligible to represent team USA, in any of the above listed categories, you will have to player under FMSA of the USA organization. Failure to do so takes off your chances to player a higher level soccer. This message is to our community members unaware of the requirements in playing FANCA Tournament which happens every 2 years in either of the venues from each country(Fiji , Australia , New Zealand , Canada , America). FMSA of the USA has an upcoming local tournament on October 16, 2021 following another in November and a few more next year. All players to represent us will be selected during these events only.

With just under an year away, my main task as the President is to unite as one, take those talented players to play and represent our Team. There is so much more to do other than just selecting players, Fundraisers, Donations, Food drives and more so, your attendance to our events and supporting our efforts is the only way we can reach success.

I hope this message will reach to our Muslim players who had envisioned to play the beautiful sport of soccer without any politics. Do reach out to myself or my board. We would love to see all of you in our upcoming Tournament.

A big thank you to Rocky Buksh, CEO of the US Fiji Times to partner with us on our upcoming tour.

Once again, if you have any doubts, or have questions, please do call or message me at 209-342-8628

Jazak Allah

President of FMSA of USA
Shameer Buksh



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PM BAINIMARAMA'S 2022 NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE



Bula Vinaka and Happy New Year!

First, let me give a warm welcome to families in the villages of Natale-i-ra (Tailevu), Nasauvakarua (Navosa), Navulivatu (Serua), Nabukelevu-i-ra (Kadavu), Qarani and Sawaieke (Gau), Losa, Hapmak, Noatau, Lopta and Itaiutiu (Rotuma) and Lakeba Island, who are the latest Fijian communities to receive access to television reception, thanks to Walesi.

It's wonderful to have you connected with us on Fiji's first truly national and free-to-air television platform.

This has been a Christmas season of connections and reconnections as our borders have re-opened and family and friends have re-united. For some of us, it has felt like an eternity since we've last been with our loved ones, with a year that seems to have passed with few fond memories. Now we can make them. But as we do, let's not disregard the rules that helped us get here.

We can lead normal lives if we keep our heads and follow what we know works: Mask up, physically distanced, and — this is the most important — get a booster jab when you qualify. Getting “boosted” is free, easy, and essential to us getting on with our lives and with a recovery that can carry us forward every day of the new year ahead.

Fijians punch above our weight. We know it and so does the world. This past year — despite being a nation of over 100 populated islands — we achieved one of the world's highest vaccination rates. That effort — which saw our front-liners traverse seas, rivers, forests, and mountains to reach our people — is saving lives as I speak. Next year, we must keep punching up through an economic recovery that reaches as far across our islands as those medical teams that administered those life-saving doses.

Our success has restored our freedoms. Now our mission is to Restore our future by recovering better, bluer, greener, and together. We will restore our livelihoods and create new ones —including from our forests and from our ocean — that secure Fijian's well-being now and for generations to come.

We will restore our children's future, and we will restore the pace of unprecedented progress that we set before this pandemic struck us. As a united people, a caring people and an ambitious people, we will Restore Fiji.

If we support one another next year we will reap big rewards because we have readied the nation for this moment.

Our vision through the pandemic has kept the bones of our economy strong, poising us for a sweeping victory that delivers the dignity of work and the prosperity it creates to every community.

Our high levels of vaccination mean our freedoms can remain. Our businesses' doors can remain open. Our borders can remain open. Our planes — from our national carrier — can keep flying.

Our ships can continue carrying our people through our islands. And our economy's surging strength will put new investments in communities — schools, seawalls, better and more reliable services, support for farmers, roads, and the essentials of the modern age — like the digital connectivity people can now enjoy through Walesi. And as more children between the ages of 12 and 17 become fully vaccinated, we have a clear plan to welcome our students back to school, filling in the final missing piece of our national life.

That is the future we want. And it is a future I'm asking all of us to work for. Let's not let anyone hold us back from achieving what each of us knows we can achieve as a nation. This is not a time to be distracted by dismay or by division, by negativity or by petty politics — we have far too much work to do together.

I ask you tonight to take faith in what we have done and keep hope in what we can do. If we embrace that hope as one nation and one people, as we have embraced it before, the best is most certainly yet to come.

I wish you all a safe and blessed New Year. See you in 2022, as our work to Restore Fiji carries on.

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you. And God Bless.

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News

REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

The Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts confirms that schools will open as advised earlier. Years 8 to 11 will start school on the 4 January, 2022 while Early Childhood Education (ECE) to Year 7 will start on the 10 January, 2022.

"We are having daily discussions with Ministry of Health and Medical Services, WHO and UNICEF and if the situation changes, I will make appropriate announcement. Right now,

Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, Heads of Schools and teachers are preparing schools for re-opening and also stand ready to implement any additional measures that may be brought in by Ministry of Health and Medical Services. I urge parents and students to take heed of the advisories issued by the MHMS," said the Minister.

"Some parents are saying that they don't want to send their children to school. I can only

say that we can't force them to send their children to school. It's their decision. Majority of the parents want their children to get back to school," the Minister added.

The Ministry places strong emphasis on education and would not want to compromise children's education through longer school closure. The decision to open schools or any other decision on schools will be made based on scientific data

and advice from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, WHO and UNICEF with whom the Ministry is liaising very closely.

"I expect the media to be responsible and report accurately rather than negatively hyping on issues that are not relevant. At this time particularly, we all need to come together and ensure that correct information reaches the public, teachers, parents and students," the

Minister reiterated. Every citizen has to be responsible for their own safety and the safety of those around them. The Minister emphasised that everyone should observe COVID SAFE MEASURES at all times and get their Booster shots. Parents are encouraged to get their children fully vaccinated. "I take this opportunity to wish everyone a very productive new year and hope that we will have better days sooner," said the Minister.



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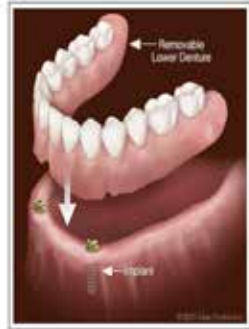
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News

NEW ZEALAND PROVIDES FJ\$58M BUDGET SUPPORT PACKAGE TO FIJI

The New Zealand Government has provided a further package of support to the Government of Fiji to help respond to the immediate socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A further grant contribution of FJ\$58m [NZ\$40m] in budget support to Fiji was earlier announced by the New Zealand Minister for Foreign Affairs Hon. Nanaia Mahuta as part of Aotearoa New Zealand's wider COVID-19 economic assistance to the Pacific.

New Zealand's High Commissioner to Fiji Charlotte Darlow said the budget support will focus on social protection.

"This budget support package demonstrates Aotearoa New Zealand's commitment to support Fiji to respond to the immediate economic impacts of COVID-19 and support a sustainable long term recovery," said High Commissioner Darlow.

"The impact of the pandemic has been felt widely across Fiji's

society and economy."

"This fiscal support will enable the Fijian Government to continue to support the needs of vulnerable households and sustain livelihoods," High Commissioner Darlow said.

"We appreciate another vote of confidence in our financial management through New Zealand's direct budgetary support to help kick start our ongoing recovery. For that recovery to be meaningful and sustained over the long-term, we must work towards a normalisation of trade and travel within our region. "As the region's hub, Fiji is prepared to help lead the Pacific into the new post-pandemic normal and, as nations with world-leading rates of vaccination, we look forward to re-uniting Fijians and Kiwis under both countries' reopening plans as soon and safely as possible," Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum said.

KOROKADI RICE FARMERS RECEIVE PORTABLE RICE MILLS

Three rice farmers' clusters in Korokadi, Bua received portable rice mills as an incentive to increase rice production in the area for local consumption.

While handing out the rice mills to the clusters recently, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Dr Mahendra Reddy said the rice mill was being handed over solely for the purpose of milling their rice for their own consumption and not for rice milling to be sold for commercial purposes.

"This rice mill is supposed to incentivise you to grow more rice but that rice you'll grow, you grow for the market and it'll be sold to Fiji Rice Limited. We don't want you to use the rice mill to mill the rice and sell it in the market, that's not the purpose of the rice mill," he added.

Minister Reddy elaborated that the portable rice mill being distributed by the Ministry was not intended for large scale milling of rice paddy in large quantities as this could damage the machine, which was meant only for small quantities of rice for home consumption.

"We're expecting that this will further boost you to grow more rice, and expand your rice cultivation. Of course, you'll raise the issues about ploughing delays and drainage, but we're investing, and every year we are pouring in money into this area - but production levels are going down. We hope that production trends will reverse and we will see more rice being grown here," he said.

Minister Reddy has also advised farmers of Korokadi against raising livestock within the designated irrigation scheme areas.

"Please note that this Korokadi scheme is designated for rice, not for livestock, not for sheep, not for goat."

"This is a dedicated area for rice. If you want to raise goats, and sheep, sign a letter and give it to us and then you'll be withdrawn from this scheme, we're not forcing anyone to grow rice and neither are we forcing anyone to grow cassava, dalo or yaqona, we believe in farmers growing a particular crop or raising a particular livestock

that one, they have skillsets in and two, that they see good profits from and therefore a market, so if all the farmers here sign a letter saying that you want to raise sheep or goat, then that's perfectly fine, you can concentrate your efforts on that and we will support you with it too," he said.

"But what we don't want is to continue and maintain drainage, canals, irrigation systems and floodgates, etc and then we see goats and livestock being raised in this area, you cannot do that, it is illegal, under the Irrigation Act, you cannot grow anything else within this area apart from rice because this is a dedicated irrigation area.

Minister Reddy has also advised them to form a cooperative and to look at securing one third payment for a tractor to be owned and operated by them as a cooperative tractor.

Meanwhile, another two portable rice mills were handed over to rice farmers clusters in Natabe and Vagavaga respectively.

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Fiji News

The great FNPF robbery continues



If a robber accosted a law-abiding citizen on the street and violently stole \$40 from him, the police would be on him like a tonne of bricks. He would be arrested, charged and fined or jailed (or both) for his obvious crime. But between 2020 and 2021 (according to FNPF annual reports), the Government, by forcibly reducing the rate of FNPF contribution from 18 per cent to 10 per cent has taken \$168 million from the pockets of hardworking, law-abiding employees, and transferred them to employers' pockets.

Even though the rate of contribution has now been slightly raised to 12 per cent for the 2022 year, my rough estimates suggest that by December 31, 2022, somewhere up to \$382 million of employees retirement funds, will instead remain in the hands of employers. There has been no uproar from the police or the judiciary — or even employees who have been brutally intimidated these last fourteen years. Of course, there will be no protest from employers, who are gaining these massive sums of money without any effort on their part. But the Fiji public must ask: have any members of the FNPF board expressed any concern whatsoever on the impact of these laws on the future welfare of the FNPF members?

The Fiji public must also ask: do any of the members of the FNPF board have any conflicts of interest with the transfer of this massive amount from employees to employers? The

Fiji public must also ask: has the FNPF board or any of them individually, expressed any concerns whatsoever on the negative impacts of the robbery on FNPF's own finances? The employees of Fiji must demand to know why there are no employee representatives on the FNPF board.

What has occurred to the employees' FNPF retirements funds is truly tragic — as I call it, "legal robbery".

FNPF contributions are sacred

I remind readers of the legal sacredness of FNPF contributions. By law, all registered employers have for several years been required to contribute 18 per cent of their wage bill to the FNPF. They are allowed to deduct up to 8 per cent of the 18 per cent from their employees wages, which they usually do — which is why we say that 10 per cent comes from employers and 8 per cent from employees. If any employer unilaterally chose not to pay its required FNPF contributions, this would be breaking the law. This is seen as the employer "stealing" from the employees. Such employers would be prosecuted and punished by the Government (the police and the judiciary) fined (or worse), and forced to pay the required contributions into the employees' accounts.

Except that the Bainimarama Government has legally allowed the employer to keep a large

part of these contributions in his own pockets, and to keep doing so until December 31, 2022. By doing so, not only has the FNPF been put under financial stress, but the Fiji economy has also been deprived of much-needed development funds.

The facts

The massive reductions in contributions to FNPF are fully documented in the 2021 FNPF annual report which covers the period July 1, 2020 to June 31, 2021. Total Contributions to FNPF over those 12 months alone have declined by a massive \$270 million (the grey bars in the graph). Employers' contributions (black columns) have declined by \$168 million (which they have kept in their pockets). Employees' contributions have declined by \$102 million.

How have these historic reductions come about?

The first reduction

In the 2020 COVID-19 supplementary budget, the Minister for Economy (Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum) announced that from April 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020, FNPF contributions would be reduced from 18 per cent to 10 per cent. The employee contributions to their FNPF would be reduced from 8 per cent to 5 per cent, thereby putting \$80 million into their

pockets (presumably for spending or saving). Most sensible economists would be deeply concerned about this.

But of greater concern is that, by law, employers' contributions would be reduced from 10 per cent to 5 per cent with the minister announcing that "over the next nine months, this will keep \$130 million in their accounts". What the minister did not say was that, by law, this would move, over those nine months, \$130 million from employees' FNPF retirement funds, into the employers' pockets, forever: I call it "legal robbery". The minister justified it as "helping them sustain their business and cash flow and to minimise job losses and hour reductions". Australia also helped many employers maintain their cash flow during COVID, but they used their Jobkeeper Allowances paid for by taxpayers in general. It was not taken out of employees' superannuation contributions or retirement funds.

Then, in the July budget speech, that reduction of employers' FNPF contributions from 10 per cent to 5 per cent was continued from January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021. So based on the 2020 figures, that would put another \$140 million into employers' pockets.

Last week, the Bainimarama Government announced an "increase" of contributions to 12 per cent (6 per cent from employers and 6 per cent from employees) to go from Janu-

ary 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022: effectively transferring another \$112 million from employees to employers. Altogether, then, the employees will have forever lost up to \$382 million (=130+140+112) into the pockets of employers, by strokes of the pen of the Minister of Economy. Given the size of these "benefits", if you were an employer, wouldn't you want this government to stay in power?

Note also that by December 31, 2022, the FNPF retirement funds will have roughly lost up to \$658 million, adding to potential liquidity problems, because of historically high withdrawals by members. Given that the actual contributions would have been somewhat lower because of the contraction of the economy, the public can call upon FNPF to give far more accurate estimates than my rough numbers here.

FNPF under pressure

It is critical that the FNPF members understand how the nation's retirement funds have been badly dented by the Bainimarama government policies. Not only have they massively cut employer contributions (which have gone into their pockets) but they have very unwisely encouraged the FNPF members to draw down their savings.

Graph 2 shows these declines.

Graph 2 shows decline in the FNPF contribution. Graph: SUPPLIED

FNPF contributions fell from \$652 million per year in 2019 to \$321 million in 2021 (solid line in the graph). Withdrawals rose from \$356 million in 2019 to a record \$501 million in 2021 (dotted line in the graph). So, net contributions to the FNPF (that is, contributions minus withdrawals) fell. The number had been positive \$296 million in 2019. It declined to \$153 million in 2020 (still positive).

But by 2021 it had become a massive negative \$180 million.

I suspect that it will still be negative when the 2022 Annual Report is written.

But FNPF members must ask: who in the FNPF board have been looking after their finan-

cial interests while their retirement funds have been raided?

What of the FNPF board members?

One of the fiduciary duties of the FNPF board members is to look after the interests of the FNPF contributors — most of whom are employees in the formal sector of the Fiji economy.

Did any of the current board members (Dakshesh Patel, Sanjay Kaba, Mukhtar Ali, Shiri Gounder, Joel Abraham or Kalpana Lal) make known any concerns about the welfare impact of these FNPF contributions?

Indeed, do they have any conflicts of interest in these adverse developments for employees?

Board members who are

themselves employers, or shareholders in employers, would themselves benefit from these changes. One board member (Shiri Gounder) is permanent secretary in the Economy Ministry. Another is an executive in a public enterprise, both under the direction of Minister of Economy who made the legislative changes reducing the FNPF contributions.

Workers of Fiji should be actively protesting that since the 2006 Bainimarama coup, all union representatives have been removed from the FNPF board.

This means that, today, there is no board member who employees can ask to speak up for their interests.

The Government, of course, is a major employer. So these changes hand the Government

huge cash savings of its own.

So among the employees who have lost large amounts for their retirements are all civil servants of Fiji, including those who work for the RFMF, the police and prisons.

Also adversely affected are journalists in some media companies who have been uncritically pro-Bainimarama Government.

FNPF and development funds

We must also understand that the reduction of FNPF contributions does not just hurt employees, but also the Fiji economy in the long run. One of the massive national benefits of the FNPF is that has more funds to lend out than all the commercial banks put together. The Fiji Government and many

public enterprises are the largest borrowers from the FNPF, largely investing their loans for Fiji's development (though sometimes mistakes are made in those investments). There are also many private enterprises which borrow from FNPF and help to grow the Fiji economy.

Reduced contributions to FNPF thereby inevitably reduce the funds available for FNPF to invest into Fiji's economy and future growth.

The Bainimarama Government has not only betrayed the employees of Fiji, but it has put downward pressure on the Fiji economy into the future. Will these issues have any impact on the next general election?

UNEMPLOYMENT Assistance Guidelines

WHO CAN BE ASSISTED?

1. Member who has a General Account entitlement.
2. Member who has resigned, terminated, non-renewal of contract, seasonal worker, laid off or made redundant from work.

WHAT IS THE AMOUNT THAT CAN BE WITHDRAWN FOR UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE?

1. The maximum withdrawal permitted is \$2000 provided member has General Account entitlement.

DOCUMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED WITH AN APPLICATION

1. The member must apply on the prescribed application form.
2. Evidence of termination letter from employer stating the termination date, non-renewal of contract, laid off or made redundant or letter of acceptance of resignation from employer.

3. Original or certified full extract of birth & marriage certificate printed after year 2000 (if applicable).
4. Member's latest bank statement.

METHOD OF PAYMENT

1. Payment is made direct to the member's bank account.

OTHER IMPORTANT NOTES

1. If the member had previously withdrawn for Unemployment Assistance, member can be assisted again provided he has been in continuous employment for at least 2 years prior to any of the unemployment reasons stated above.
2. Member must apply for this assistance within 6 months from the date of unemployment.
3. Acceptance letter of resignation on own accord and cases pending disciplinary tribunal can be assisted after 3 months from the last date of employment.

FIJI NATIONAL PROVIDENT FUND



Miss Universe 2021 India: What do we know about Harnaaz Sandhu?

Indian model Harnaaz Sandhu was crowned the 2021 Miss Universe in a ceremony that took place on December 12 at Universe Dome in Eilat, Israel.

Curiously, there hasn't been a single Miss Universe from India in more than two decades, with Lara Dutta being the last Indian to win the prize 21 years ago, back in 2000.



As many as 80 contestants from various countries participated in the competition, with Miss Paraguay Nadia Ferreira being runner-up, followed by second runner-up Miss South Africa Lalela Mswane. The person to hand the crown to Sandhu was Miss Universe 2020 Andrea Meza from Mexico, with the event having been live-streamed online and hosted by American television and radio presenter Steve Harvey. Last year's competition was held in May as it had to be postponed for around five months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Israeli Tourism Minister Yoel Razvozov expressed his joy for the fact that the event was held in Israel, who have been trying to promote their tourism through international events held in their country.

"Despite the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic placed in our path, we knew how to

maintain the balance between health and the economy, to bring tourism back to Israel," Razvozov declared. "We needed to create tourism anchors that will promote and present Israel to the world as a vaccination nation that invites tourists to visit. The Miss Universe pageant is, without [a] doubt, an important and significant anchor of this plan."

Who is Harnaaz Sandhu?

Sandhu is 21 years old, but she took her first steps into modelling several years ago, having won awards such as Times Fresh Face Miss Chandigarh 2017, Miss Max Emerging Star India 2018 and Femina Miss India Punjab 2019. She was also crowned Miss Universe India 2021 in October and has participated in various Punjabi films such as Yaara Diyan Poo Baran and Bai Ji Kuttange.

Nick Name	Harnaaz
Career	Modeling
Height	In centimetres- 176 cm
In meters-	1.76m
In feet & inches-	5' 9"
Weight	In kilograms- 50 kg approximately
In pounds-	110lbs
Physical	34-26-34
Eye Color	Brown
Hair color	Brown
Achievements	Title- Femina Miss India Punjab 2019 Miss Diva 2021 Winner Miss Diva UniverseNext Competition Miss Universe
Date of birth	March 3, 2000
Age (As of 2021)	21 Years
Place of Birth	Chandigarh, India
Zodiac sign	Pisces
Nationality	Indian
Hometown	Chandigarh, India
Education	School- Shivalik Public School, Chandigarh
College-	College For Girls, Chandigarh
Education	Bachelor Of Information Technology
Hobbies	Cooking, Traveling, Dancing

News



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HOMEBUYERS 2022



HOW TO NEGOTIATE WITH DIFFICULT SELLERS

Some sellers are challenging – they don't want complications or compromises. They can demand all-cash offers, no inspections and for you to pay over list price. The only thing you can do is make it hard for the seller to be difficult.

Ask your Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices network professional to contact the seller's agent to find out what the seller wants as far as terms, if they're open to doing any repairs, and if other offers are on the table. The seller will appreciate knowing you're trying to craft a reasonable offer.

Consider the seller's feelings and don't be critical. Keep your intentions to remodel or tear the house down quiet. Low-balling a seller will only make them angry, so make your offer fair. Include a copy of your lender's pre-approval letter, along with a cover letter summarizing your strengths as a buyer and why you love this home. You can also include a copy of the comparable market analysis you used to illustrate how you arrived at the offer price.

The more your offer matches up with the seller's needs in terms of price, move-out dates and closing, the more likely your offer will be graciously accepted.



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- The flexibility to make the space your own
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- The sense of stability

In the same survey, 41% of respondents say they'd rather own a home than rent because of the unique way homeownership builds wealth over time.

Bottom Line

With home prices expected to continue to appreciate in coming years, homebuyers have an opportunity to start the long-term wealth-building process right now. Let's connect today if you're ready to begin your journey on the path to becoming a homeowner.

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Official: Nearly 1K homes destroyed in Colorado wildfire

A Colorado official says nearly 1,000 homes were destroyed, hundreds more were damaged, and that three people are missing after a wildfire charred numerous neighborhoods in a suburban area northwest of Denver



SUPERIOR, Colo. -- A Colorado official says nearly 1,000 homes were destroyed, hundreds more were damaged, and that three people are missing after a wildfire charred numerous neighborhoods in a suburban area at the base of the Rocky Mountains northwest of Denver. Boulder County Sheriff Joe Pelle also said Saturday that investigators are still trying to find the cause of the blaze that erupted Thursday. Officials had previously estimated that at least 500 homes — and possibly 1,000 — were destroyed. They also announced earlier Saturday that two people were missing. The wind-whipped wildfire blackened entire neighborhoods in the area between Denver and Boulder.

Authorities had said earlier no one was missing. But Boulder

County spokeswoman Jennifer Churchill said Saturday that was due to confusion inherent when agencies are scrambling to manage an emergency. Pelle said officials were organizing cadaver teams to search for the missing in the Superior area and in unincorporated Boulder County. The task is complicated by debris from destroyed structures, covered by 8 inches (20 centimeters) of snow dumped by a storm overnight, he said.

At least 991 homes were destroyed, Pelle said: 553 in Louisville, 332 in Superior and 106 in unincorporated parts of the county. Hundreds more were damaged. Pelle cautioned that the tally is not final. The cause of the blaze was under investigation. Pelle said utility officials found no downed power lines around where the fire broke

out. He said authorities were pursuing a number of tips and had executed a search warrant at “one particular location.” He declined to give details.

At least seven people were injured in the wildfire that erupted in and around Louisville and Superior, neighboring towns about 20 miles (32 kilometers) northwest of Denver with a combined population of 34,000. More than 500 homes were feared destroyed. The blaze, which burned at least 9.4 square miles (24 square kilometers), was no longer considered an immediate threat — especially after an overnight dumping of snow and frigid temperatures Saturday. The bitter cold compounded the misery of Colorado residents who started off the new year trying to salvage what remains of their homes.

At least 6 inches (0.15 meters) of snow and temperatures in the single digits cast an eerie scene amid still-smoldering remains of homes. Despite the shocking change in weather, the smell of smoke still permeated empty streets blocked off by National Guard troops in Humvees. Utility crews struggled to restore electricity and gas service to homes that survived, and dozens of people lined up to get donated space heaters, bottled water and blankets at Red Cross shelters. Xcel Energy urged other residents to use fireplaces and wood stoves to stay warm and keep their pipes at home from freezing. Families filled a long line of cars waiting to pick up space heaters and bottled water at a Salvation Army distribution center at the YMCA in Lafayette, just north of Superior.

Monarch High School seniors Noah Sarasin and his twin brother Gavin had been volunteering at that location for two days, directing traffic and distributing donations. “We have a house, no heat but we still have a house,” Noah Sarasin said. “I just want to make sure that everyone else has heat on this very cold day.”

Hilary and Patrick Wallace picked up two heaters, then ordered 2 hot chocolate mochas at a nearby cafe. The Superior couple couldn’t find a hotel and were contemplating hiking 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) back to their home; their neighborhood was still blocked off to traffic. The family slept in one room on New Year’s Eve. Both teared up when a man entered the shop and joked aloud that he’d lost his coffee mugs — and every-

News

thing else — in the fire. The man was in good spirits, laughing at the irony of the situation.

“I have a space heater and a house to put it in. I don’t even know what to say to them,” Hilary said, wiping away a tear. Superior resident Jeff Markley arrived in his truck to pick up a heater. He said he felt lucky to be “just displaced” since his home is intact. “We’re making do, staying with friends, and upbeat for the new year. Gotta be better than this last one,” Markley said.

Not everyone felt as positive.

“It’s bittersweet because we have our house, but our friends don’t. And our neighbors don’t,” said Louisville resident Judy Givens as she picked up a heater with her husband, Rusty. “We thought 2022 might be better. And then we had omicron. And now we have this, and it’s not starting out very well.” Dozens trudged through the snow to determine the condition of their homes and take belongings. Brian Williams, a resident of Superior, used a sled to evacuate his son from their home as the fire raged. It survived the blaze but was filled with ash and lacked utilities.

“We had to get our badges for work and medicine and stuff,” Williams said. Donna O’Brien bundled up with her son Robert to make the 1.5-mile (2.4-kilometer) trek to check on their home. “I think we’re still in kind of shock,” she said. “This is our neighborhood and it happens everywhere else, but it’s not supposed to happen where you live.”

The wildfire broke out unusually late in the year, following an extremely dry fall and amid a winter nearly devoid of snow until the overnight snowfall. Scientists say climate change is making weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive. Ninety percent of Boulder County is in severe or extreme drought, and it hadn’t seen substantial rainfall since mid-summer. Denver set a record for consecutive days without snow before it got a small storm on Dec. 10, its last snowfall before the wildfires broke out.



News

COVID-19: 805 new cases and two deaths reported

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services has reported 805 new cases of COVID-19 in the last three days ending at 8am this morning.

"Since the last update on 29/12/2021, we have recorded a total of 805 new cases; of which 316 new cases were recorded on 30/12/2021, 223 new cases were recorded on 31/12/2021, and 266 new cases in the last 24 hours ending at 8 am this morning," stated the ministry in a statement this morning.

"Overall, there have been 54,077 cases recorded in the 2nd wave, with 71% of the cases from the Central Division, 27% of the cases from the Western Division, and 1% of the cases from the Eastern Division, and 1% from the Northern Division."

"Of the 805 cases recorded since the last update, 388 cases were recorded in the Northern Division; 134 cases were recorded in the Western Division, and 283 cases were recorded in the Central Division."

The national 7- day rolling average is 18 daily cases calculated for 28th December 2021.

There are two COVID-19 deaths to report.

The first COVID-19 death to report is of a 67-year-old male from Raiwaqa who died at home on December 29 in respiratory distress. He had a number of severe pre-existing medical conditions that have been assessed to also have contributed to his death. He received his first dose of the COVID -19 vaccine by the end of July and his second dose by the end of August. This means he was fully vaccinated.

The second COVID -19 death to report is of a 76-year-old male from Nadawa who died at home on December 31 in respiratory distress. He had a significant pre-existing medical condition that may have contributed to his death. He received his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by mid-July and his second dose by mid-September. This means he was fully vaccinated.

While both these deaths occurred in individuals who have been immunized with 2 doses of vaccine, they both had significant underlying medical conditions and were over the age of 50. It is known that these

factors place a person at higher risk of severe disease, even if fully vaccinated.



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World News

The 'gals' behind Samoa's first woman PM

There are fewer women in politics in the Pacific Islands than in any other part of the world, according to UN Women. But this year Samoa elected a woman as its head of government - only the second Pacific Island nation to do so - thanks in part to a network of women friends who supported her every step of the way.

The United States Fiji Times Congratulates Prime Minister Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa



"This is the margarita circle," the first woman prime minister of Samoa says, raising a salt-rimmed cup. "It's a place for honest confessions." Her friends raise their glasses. "Manuia!" they reply - "Cheers!" It's a Sunday afternoon and a group of around 10 have just left the village church to gather for a buffet lunch on the veranda of Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa's family home in Lotofaga village.

Behind them, the clear South Pacific ocean twinkles just beyond a strip of white sand. "Do you remember how this particular journey started for us?" asks Tauiliili Alise Stunnenberg, an independent tourism consultant and Fiamē's distant cousin. "It was just over a year ago," replies the prime minister, "the

day after I resigned."

On 11 September 2020, Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa quit her position as deputy prime minister for Samoa's governing Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), objecting to controversial plans to remove the right of appeal against rulings of a traditional Samoan court dealing with land ownership and chiefly titles.

As she left office, the most senior woman in Samoa's government told the media she feared the country was "sliding away from the rule of law". The next day she went to a friend's house for their "Foodie Club" evening - an occasion when a group of girlfriends either visit a restaurant or cook each other a meal.

"As she walked in we started playing the Helen Reddy song,

I Am Woman - Hear Me Roar," recalls Alise. "And we said, 'It's time for you to take charge now.'"

"Give me a break, I only just resigned!" was Fiamē's reply. Within nine months she would win enough seats to be declared - eventually - the only woman head of government in the Pacific Islands. Lotofaga village was home to Naomi Mata'afa's father, one of Samoa's senior chiefs and its first prime minister, who shepherded the country towards independence in 1962. Her mother was a member of parliament and later Samoa's High Commissioner to New Zealand.

Brought up in the capital, Apia, Fiamē would often visit Lotofaga with her family.

Thatched-roof houses lined the coast and people cast their fishing nets by moonlight - which in Fiamē's memory was as bright as daylight. "It was magical," she says.

"Now most of that community have moved to higher ground, away from the rising sea level," she adds. "Most of our villages are based on the coast and more and more [people] are relocating."

In some Pacific Island countries, sea levels have risen at nearly four times the global average rate, and the region has seen extreme weather events increasing in frequency as a result of climate change. "We in the Pacific Islands contribute the least to carbon emissions and are the most affected," Fiamē says.

ame says.

Satellite image of Samoa

At the age of 11, she moved to New Zealand to go to boarding school. She remembers that her parents would still make an effort to come watch her sports days and tease her about her splashy swimming style. In 1975, when she was 18, her father died and Naomi Mata'afa was granted his chiefly title, Fiamē. She was now the leader of her clan, or matai. "I remember asking her how she felt then, with this sudden weight of responsibility now thrust on her," says Alise Stunnenberg. "Fiamē replied: 'It's always been in me.'" Sensing that the path her parents had taken in national politics would be her future, Fiamē moved to



Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa as a young woman, with a member of the royal family, Afioga To'oa



Microsoft

BBC



Lotofaga village after her return from New Zealand.

“The Fa’a Samoa (Samoan culture and customs) revolves around the matai framework in rural communities,” says Fiamē. “And I wanted to understand those leadership structures and how decisions are reached at local community levels.” In her spare time, she would sit by the Lotofaga beach shore and speak to the local fishing community - largely led by women - about their concerns. Often these were to do with “their journey as women, which included the cultural, the biological, the political and economical”, Fiamē says. In 1985 she entered politics, and by 1991 she had become Samoa’s first woman cabinet minister. Fiamē and her friends try to see each other a few times a month.

“We do a lot of activities together; salsa, cooking and supporting each other’s work,” says Nynette Sass, a businesswoman and chair of Samoa Women in Sport.

“We all have careers but we’re there for each other. After Fiamē resigned as deputy prime minister, we were there for her.” The group rallied round, informally calling themselves Friends 4 Fiamē. Over dinners at each other’s houses or drinks in a bar nearby, they discussed Fiamē’s political future. It was time to think about the highest elected office in the country, they told her. In 2021 when Fi-

ame decided to run for Prime Minister with Samoa’s new opposition party Fa’atuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (Fast), which means Samoa United in Faith, her friends sprang into action. Joining forces with Fast party campaigners, Friends 4 Fiamē helped organise a national roadshow to reach voters in villages. “It was all a learning curve. We, her friends, are political virgins,” says Alise.

“It was hilarious to watch the reactions as these good-looking and glamorous women, my friends, turned up with me to village council meetings with male chiefs and religious leaders,” says Fiamē. “The men definitely sat up straighter when they arrived.” The women organised a series of talanoa - a Pacific Island form of inclusive and open dialogue, where people are encouraged not to hold back.

“We have a rich oratory culture in Samoa where elders and chiefs, who are mostly men, speak to the community, but this was to include everyone, especially younger women and rural women,” Fiamē says. The strength of support they heard for the idea of a female prime minister, especially from younger women, was unexpected and encouraging. Watch The Eco Prime Minister on BBC World News from Saturday 11 December - [click here for transmission times](#)

Samoa’s election results on 9

April 2021 were a dead heat - 25 seats for the HRPP, which had governed for nearly 40 years, and 25 for the new Fast party.

A single independent candidate then sided with Fast, but the election commission noted that only 9.8% of MPs were women, fractionally below the obligatory quota of 10%, and appointed an additional female MP - from the HRPP party. Then things got chaotic. After the Supreme Court ruled in Fast’s favour, Fiamē went to parliament to be sworn in, and found that the HRPP had locked her out. The ceremony went ahead in a tent outside, but Fiamē’s rivals argued it was illegal.

As further court cases took place, Samoans asked Siri and Alexa who their prime minister was, and posted videos of the answers on social media; even the voice assistants refused to be drawn into the political crisis, naming both candidates.

The impasse came to an end only on 23 July when Samoa’s court of appeal ruled that Fiamē was the legitimate leader, and that the creation of an extra MP had been unconstitutional. Congratulations to Fiamē from New Zealand’s Jacinda Ardern and Australia’s Scott Morrison followed, and the man who had been Samoa’s prime minister since 1998, Tuila’epa Sa’ilele Malielegaoi, finally conceded.

Independent Samoan journalist Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson says that Fiamē appeared calm

throughout the constitutional crisis, not resorting to attacking her opponent in the media. “It was almost as if she was unbothered by the frivolity of the opponents’ grasp for power.” “Samoa is a family,” Fiamē told the BBC at the time. “I’m not worried. I know it will be OK and we will work out a way peacefully.”

Short presentational grey line The Pacific Islands have the lowest representation of women in politics in the world. Just 6% of MPs are women, on average, and three countries - Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Micronesia - have no women in parliament at all.

Fiamē is only the region’s second elected woman leader, behind Hilda Heine, president of the Marshall Islands from 2016 to 2020. This, say political watchers, comes with intense and often unkind scrutiny. Journalist Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson says that there was a deluge of “vile and ugly gendered online trolling” on social media, which seemed to focus on her status as an unmarried woman.

“People questioned her sexuality and leaders made veiled remarks about her marital status and the fact she does not have children,” she says, adding that she never saw her opponent trolled in this way when he was in power. Fiamē says she doesn’t dwell much on it. “Hopefully they’ll move away from asking those kinds of silly

questions,” she says. But there were legitimate questions too, about the kind of leader Fiamē will be for women.

She has, for example, appointed a man to serve as minister for women.

When challenged, Fiamē replies: “I don’t necessarily have a problem with men being ministers for women’s issues - in fact, I think I’m the only woman who has ever served as a Minister for Women in Samoa, we have so many more men in politics - as long as they’re able to recognise the policy needs.”

Samoa’s chiefs

Each extended family appoints a chief, or matai, but there is a hierarchy - some families are more prestigious than others

At the time of the last survey, in 2015, 7% of Samoa’s 200 or so villages had women as their matai

Only matai can be elected to parliament
According to the Ministry for Women, nine villages do not allow women to become matai

Horoscope January 2021



- March 21 - April 20

Praise will be yours if you have been pursuing your goals. Try to curb your habits, or you could find yourself in an awkward financial position. You may jump from the frying pan into the fire if you make a move this month. Uncertainty regarding your direction is likely.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Friday.

Taurus Information

- April 21 - May 20

You can expect opposition at work. Don't let your competition be privy to information that could be incriminating. Think before you act. Sign up for courses that will help you understand yourself better. Don't blame every thing on your mate.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Tuesday.

Gemini Information

- May 21 - June 21

Difficulties with females you live with could cause emotional stress. You can raise your standard of living if you pick up some freelance work on the side. Adventure will result in added knowledge. Tell it like it is.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Monday.

Leo Information

- July 23 - August 22

You can expect opposition at work. Don't let your competition be privy to information that could be incriminating. You will find that you are able to clear up a number of small but important details. Plan to visit friends or relatives. Stress may cause minor health ailments.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Tuesday.

Virgo Information

- August 23 - September 22

You may want to stay in the background this month. Hidden assets can be doubled if you play your cards correctly. You can make wonderful contributions to any organization that you join. You can invest in profitable ventures.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Wednesday.

Libra Information

- September 23 - October 22

Check into art objects or precious stones. You can do well in group endeavors. Arguments with employers or colleagues will be to your detriment. Wait and get all the information before consulting your boss. Children may be demanding, and entertainment could cost a lot more than you can really afford.



scorpio Information

- October 23 - November 21

You will meet a person who may turn out to be more than just a friend. Curl up with a good book or go for a drive in the country. Authority figures may be less than accommodating if you have done something deceitful. Do the necessary chores and then do things that please you.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Monday.

Sagittarius Information

- November 22 - December 20

Minor health problems will flare up if you don't take care of yourself. You have to let go of your past if you wish to get out of any sentimental mood that might be hanging over your head. Use your high energy and dynamic approach to win favors from superiors. You can make financial gains through investments and dealing with other people's money.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Friday.

Capricorn Information

- December 21 - January 19

You will get drawn into groups that are not favorable to you. You need to mingle with people who can spark enthusiasm and confidence in you. You can make money if you put your savings into conservative investments. Take care of your own responsibilities before you help others.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Wednesday.

Aquarius Information

- January 20 - February 18

You can open up to your mate and let them know what you expect out of this relationship. It might be time to do some of those chores at home. Stick to your work and avoid emotional confrontations. Social events should be the highlight of your day. Your partner may be reluctant to tell you how they feel.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Wednesday.

Pisces Information

- February 19 - March 20

The personal problems you may be having are interfering with your productivity. Don't let others put unreasonable demands on you. Don't point your finger unjustly at others. Small business ventures can earn you extra cash.

Your luckiest events this month will occur on a Sunday.



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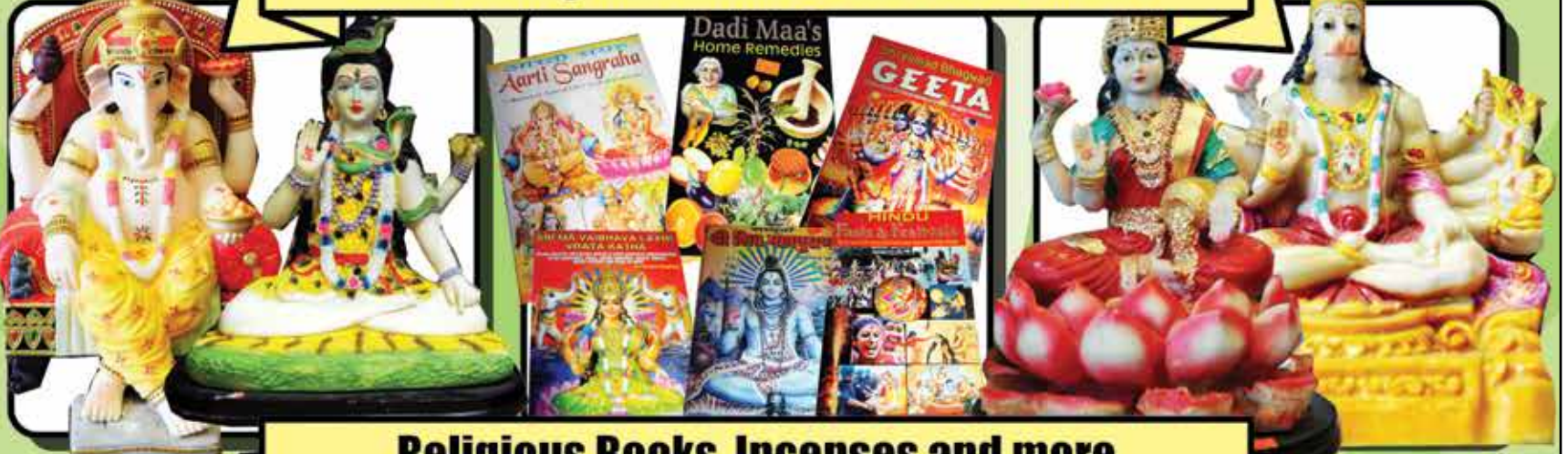
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2022 Calendar

January

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

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February

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
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20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	1	2	3	4	5

○ 8 ○ 16 ○ 23

March

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
27	28	1	2	3	4	5
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27	28	29	30	31	1	2

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April

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
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May

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June

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
29	30	31	1	2	3	4
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26	27	28	29	30	1	2

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July

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
26	27	28	29	30	1	2
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31	1	2	3	4	5	6

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August

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28	29	30	31	1	2	3

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September

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
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October

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23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

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November

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27	28	29	30	1	2	3

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December

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
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18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

○ 7 ○ 16 ● 23 ○ 29

Sports

Bula Boys hope for four warm-up matches



The Fiji National Football squad wants at least four international matches prior to the World Cup qualifiers later this year. As the national team prepares to ramp up training next week, Fiji Football Chief Executive Mohammed Yusuf says it is important that they have a few international matches. The team has not played any international match in the last two years.

Fiji Swimming opts for an expatriate



The operations manager for Fiji Swimming (FS), Trisa Cheer-Dunn confirmed that the hunt for an overseas high performance coach to develop elite swimmers in the country was high on their list.

Cheer-Dunn said the hiring of a high performance coach was a “great step-forward” for FS. “The issue was discussed during our three-day workshop that was held earlier in the year,” she said.

“It is part of our strategic development plans. The appointment of a high performance coach will assist FS in adequately preparing the swimmers for the upcoming games. “We’re determined to develop our

swimmers for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, 2023 Pacific Games and the 2024 Olympics.

“We hope the appointment of a high performance coach will build confidence in the athletes to perform to their optimum level. The future for FS is to build a competitive squad of swimmers at national, regional and international level. We want to become a force in competitive swimming.”

She said it was a fantastic step to assist FS in building a squad that would be able to contribute to Fiji’s success in international events. “We have put the word out verbally and are waiting for the necessary funding from Fiji National Sports Commission

and Oceania Swimming Association.

Hopefully, it will be an Australian high performance coach for our swimmers.” Cheer-Dunn confirmed that the appointee would commence work with FS as early as next month.

She added FS was hopeful that the appointment of a high performance coach would enable the swimmers to qualify on merit at international competitions through the A or B qualifying times instead of participating through the allocated quota spots that has been the norm.

Weightlifting Fiji completes certificate course



Weightlifting Fiji (WF) has successfully conducted the first International Weightlifting Federation International L2 coaches certification in the Pacific. The course was conducted by IWF coach educator and WF president Della Shaw, who is accredited to lecture in IWF’s L1 and L2 coaching certifications.

Those selected to sit the certification had earlier completed the Level 1 program in October, 2020. There were six coaches from Kadavu, Serua, Suva, Levuka with one attending online from New Zealand.

They completed the L2 course from December 13 – 17. The course focused on kinesiology, exercise prescription, faults and corrective measures, auxiliary lifts and exercises, and training programs. Other significant topics were weightlifting for children and adolescence (youth resistance training), coaching female athletes. Practical sessions

were run at the National Fitness Centre and were targeted specifically at corrective exercise and auxiliary exercises with the Suva Weightlifting Club being the practical athletes. The program was officially opened by the chief executive officer of the Fiji National Sports Commission, Peter Mazey, who highlighted the important roles of the coach in the development and spread of the sport nationwide.

Shaw thanked the IWF and the FNSC for their continued support in the development and establishment of clubs.

The newly certified coaches will begin to work with WF national development officer to take the sport throughout the country.

WF life member and former president Vidhya Lakhani presented the certificate to the seven participants who passed their exams.



Sports

United States striker Ricardo Pepi set for \$20m move to Augsburg - sources

FC Dallas and United States international forward Ricardo Pepi is close to finalizing a deal that would see him land with Bundesliga side FC Augsburg, sources confirmed to ESPN.Fabrizio Romano and 90min were the first to report the impending deal.

The sources said that if the deal is completed, the trans-

fer fee would be in the neighborhood of \$20 million plus add ons, with a 10% sell-on percentage going to Dallas in any future moves. The base transfer fee would be the highest for a homegrown player in Major League Soccer history. Alphonso Davies' move from the Vancouver Whitecaps to Bayern Munich was in excess

of that number, but that included incentives.

Pepi's arrival in Augsburg would see him bolster an attack in desperate need of goals. Augsburg is in 15th place, just above the relegation zone. Its haul of 17 goals in 17 games is tied for the fourth-worst mark in the Bundesliga as it headed into the winter break.

Bundesliga rivals Wolfsburg were thought to be the front-runners to land Pepi, but now it appears that Augsburg have won the race to sign the American.

Pepi has seen his reputation and form skyrocket in the last 12 months. He scored 13 goals in 31 league appearances this season for Dallas. That re-

sulted in a call-up to the U.S. men's team where he scored three goals -- all in World Cup qualifiers -- in seven appearances.

All told, Pepi has scored 16 goals in 57 league and playoff appearances for Dallas.



Born: January 9, 2003
(age 18 years),
El Paso, TX
Nationality: American

Height: 1.85 m (6 ft 1 in)
Current team: FC Dallas
Number: 16
Position(s): Striker



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Sports

Fijian star Roy Krishna unveiled as OFC Ambassador

One of Oceania football's biggest stars, professional Fijian striker Roy Krishna, will help drive the growth of football in the region through his new role as an Oceania Football Confederation Ambassador.

As part of the OFC's three-year partnership with Score Sportswear Limited, Krishna will take on the role and participate in social media campaigns and activities aimed at fostering the game in Oceania.

Krishna says it's a privilege to have the opportunity to assist the game as an OFC Ambassador.

He says his dream is to see more island boys and girls playing beyond their region.

Krishna adds we truly have the biggest opportunity to become some of the best in the world if we all work together.

OFC General Secretary Franck Castillo said Krishna is an inspirational figure who will be a fantastic ambassador.



ATK Mohun Bagan
Indian Super League
League level: India First Tier
Joined: Aug 1, 2020
Contract until: May 31, 2022



Date of birth/Age: Aug 30, 1987 (34)
Place of birth: Fiji, Macuata
Citizenship: Fiji
Height: 1,70 m
Position: Centre-Forward
Current international: Fiji
Caps/Goals: 41/29



Sports

Ben Gollings appointed as new Fiji Sevens coach

The Fiji Rugby Union (FRU) has confirmed that after a vigorous recruitment process and due diligence, they have appointed of former England Sevens international Ben Gollings as the next Fiji Sevens head coach for the next three years.

FRU chief executive John O'Connor confirmed that Gollings stood out in the interviews and the board and management are confident that he is the best person to take on the challenges that are ahead of the union and take the Olympic Gold medal winners to even greater heights with the upcoming World Rugby Sevens Series, the Rugby Sevens World Cup, Commonwealth Games and beyond.

O'Connor highlighted that Gollings was thorough in presenting his detailed plans for the Commonwealth Games, the World Cup, the World Rugby

Sevens Series and ultimately, the Olympic Games in 2024.

Apart from being a World Rugby Level Three coach, Gollings also has a Certificate Four accreditation from the Australian Institute of fitness which is of vital importance since the FRU are in transition phase, and they have a new strength and condition coach with Naca Cawanibuka moving on to the Fijian Drua. Great track record

He has been involved in Sevens at the highest level for 20 years, having now coached six national teams and most recently been engaged with the Sri Lanka Rugby Union. Gollings has also been the high-performance consultant and head coach of the Singaporean national team and most recently he was the assistant coach of the Canadian Men's Sevens team.

As a player Gollings brought tenacity and leadership to the English team during his playing days and most Fijian fans would remember him as the greatest threat every time Fiji had played England during those times.

FRU board chairman Humphrey Tawake thanked the FRU board directors that constituted the interview panel which was given the most difficult task of interviewing the caliber of coaches who had applied and were shortlisted. Tawake highlighted that the full board endorsed and fully supported the recommendations of the interview panel and welcomed Gollings' appointment.

"I would like to thank everyone involved in the interview process and special thanks to the shortlisted candidates who made the interview panel's work so difficult," he said. "I fully support the appointment

of Ben in the role as he represents everything that Fiji Rugby had envisioned in the new Head Coach, and I am sure he will lead the team to greater success."

Gollings is expected to start in his new role from January 1 and he is very excited and honoured by his appointment.

"We had many great battles when I was playing over the years but since I have shifted into coaching, I think it's no better opportunity to coach the World's best team in the 7s arena.

"I am thankful to Fiji Rugby for giving me the opportunity to coach this team and am looking forward to working with the exceptional group of boys in Fiji," he said. "The immediate focus of course is towards the HBSC Sevens Series, Commonwealth Games and the Sevens World Cup next year in South Africa."

"Winning two gold medals back-to-back is something special and I know it's a big challenge to take on but I believe that my passion for the game meets the passion of the nation so if we can match the two together and enhance the talent in Fiji then we could achieve our ultimate goals in the coming years.

"I was in Dubai during the first two legs, and I got to watch the Fijian Sevens performance live. Obviously, it's a very new look team so I think my first real focus is just to observe and have really important conversations and start building some key relationships, understanding and the way they have been training so that I really push on the right button."



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As you book your ticket out to Fiji with Fiji Airways, please:

- ✓ Check your country's travel requirements to and from Fiji
- ✓ Familiarise yourself with entry requirements for Fiji's Travel Partner countries
- ✓ Book with a Care Fiji Committed Certified resort or an approved transfer or tour operator. [Click Here](#)
- ✚ Travellers entering Fiji must have medical travel insurance, with international coverage that covers COVID-19 before travelling.



PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

We can't wait to welcome you on-board, so please don't forget the following:

- ✓ Provide proof of your full vaccination with a Fiji recognised vaccine (Astra-Zeneca, Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines)
- ✓ Produce a negative RT-PCR test 3 days prior to boarding your flight.
- ✓ Present a confirmed booking (at least 3 Nights) with a certified CFC accommodation provider before boarding your flight.
- ✓ Download and activate the careFIJI contact tracing app to use in Fiji.
- ✗ Defer travel if you're symptomatic or feel unwell.
- ✓ For travellers coming to Fiji for holiday purposes, please show evidence of adequate medical insurance



ON HOLIDAY

Whenever you're in public, please practice these simple steps to keep yourself and others safe:

- ✓ Take a rapid COVID-19 test at your certified CFC accommodation provider 48 hours after your arrival in Fiji.
- ✓ Use only CFC approved tourism operators and experiences in the first 48 hours
- ✓ Follow Fiji's COVID-safe protocols (mask and social distancing where appropriate, check in to the careFIJI app)
- ✓ Please avoid vulnerable communities in "low vaccination" zones.
- ✓ Be prepared to provide proof of vaccination on request.



RETURNING HOME

Moce mada and see you again soon. Keep your return home as stress free as possible by:

- ✓ Meeting your country's re-entry protocols by getting either a Rapid Test or RT-PCR Test in Fiji in time, before heading home.



For more information please visit our [Travel Ready](#) hub

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