



The University of Fiji

(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)

The University of Fiji launches its Astronomy Society for Enthusiasts

The University of Fiji will launch a new initiative for astronomy enthusiasts in Fiji and the South Pacific region on February 22 at Saweni Campus from 6pm. The virtual event can be accessed on the link: www.unifiji.ac.fj/astronomy

Called the South Pacific Astronomers Society of Enthusiasts (SPASE), the Society aims to hold regular events with astronomers and staff and students of the University, as well as astronomy enthusiasts in the South Pacific region. SPASE will be launched by Dr. Nalin Samarasinha of the Planetary Science Institute in the United States.

SPASE was initiated by the combined efforts of two Schools of the University of Fiji, the School of Science and Technology and the School of Business and Economics because academic staff in these Schools were enthusiasts who wanted to create an interactive platform with other like-minded astronomy enthusiasts in our region.

The launch of SPASE will feature a keynote lecture by Dr. Samarasinha.

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Fiji, Professor Shaista Shameem said that the University was honoured to have Dr. Samarasinha launch SPASE as he had the wonderful distinction of having an asteroid named after him by the International Astronomical Union. Asteroid (12871) Samarasinha, found by the Lowell Observatory, was named after him, Professor Shameem said. Dr Samarasinha is the first native born Sri Lankan citizen to gain the distinction of having an asteroid named in his honour.

Professor Ranasinghe Amaradasa, interim president of the society and Dean of the School of Business and Economics, stated that the society aims to help students who are afraid of science subjects, particularly Mathematics and Physics, and to increase their interest in Science. He adds that despite their keen interest in space-related issues, Fijian communities have not been exposed to deeper knowledge and understanding of space.

The society will participate in activities such as informational or social star-gazing sessions, public face-to-face/virtual seminars, forums, and discussions with key individuals and organizations from Fiji, the Pacific, and around the world. Members will also compete in competitions such as telescope design and creative writing, according to Professor Amaradasa. He adds that the society's goal is to help astrophotographers develop skills that will allow them to take better pictures of space.

Young people and adults alike are invited to join SPASE where events and telescopic viewings of the night skies will regularly be held. Planetary scientists and astronomers will be invited to deliver lectures throughout the year at the Saweni Campus of the University. Those interested to attend the launch or become a member of SPASE can contact the University of Fiji for further information.

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