



The University of Fiji

(An Entity of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji)

UniFiji launches platform for astronomer enthusiasts

The University of Fiji has broken new ground by launching a platform to get more enthusiasts into the study of astronomy in Fiji.

In launching the new South Pacific Astronomers Society of Enthusiasts (SPASE) last night via zoom, Dr Nalin Samarashina of the Planetary Science Institute in the United States said on the virtual platform, “anyone can become an astronomer.”

“No higher training in astronomy is required to be an amateur astronomer hence you do not need to have a Masters or PhD but you should have dedication. Amateur Astronomers can do astrophotography and it requires a digital camera. If you had a telescope, it would be better,” said Dr Samarashina.

He explained that the best time in Fiji to monitor variable celestial phenomena would be from June to September when there is less cloud in the skies.

“If you are doing something scientifically, there are a lot of things because of your geographic location which would be helpful. Of course, you would need to have a telescope to do this. You can measure the brightness variation due to rotation of asteroids, variations of coma features of comets, brightness variation of variable stars and variable atmospheric features of Jupiter,” he said.

He explained that if a person wanted to pursue a career in astronomy, typically the person would need to need to complete postgraduate degrees (Masters in Science and Doctor of Philosophy).

The person would also need to study mathematics and physics, but can specialize in other related fields too including geology, chemistry, computer science, and even biology.

Dr Samarishna is optimistic that more students will take up the challenge and learn about astronomy.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Shaista Shameem said the university was taking a holistic look in its strategy for the next five years.

She was delighted with the response to the virtual launch of SPASE.

“The university is exploring new frontiers in learning and teaching.

“SPASE is part of a larger project that the university is engaged in called the Drua Voyage Project which offers a short course on celestial navigation to facilitate the university's focus on climate change resilience in Fiji as part of our community work,” said Professor Shameem.

UniFiji hopes to partner with like-minded universities in the Pacific region.

The interim President of the Society and Dean of the School of Business and Economics, Professor Ranasinghe Amaradasa, said the society aims to help students who were afraid of science subjects, particularly mathematics and physics, and to increase their interest in science.

He adds 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, creative writing and also help astrophotographers develop skills that will allow them to take better pictures of space.

The event was well attended and saw dignitaries including the UniFiji's Chancellor and Honourable Speaker of Parliament, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, Sir Anand Satyanand, Pundit Bhuwan Dutt, Ambassador Kamlesh Arya and more.

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