

Chaudhry now wants to be Fiji's leader of opposition

Suva (Fiji) - In another twist in the ongoing drama of government formation in Fiji, Fiji Labour Party (FLP) leader and former Indo-Fijian prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry has said he wants to be leader of the opposition while having his own party MPs as members of the new multiparty cabinet.

Reports here said Chaudhry's new wish contradicts his stand in 2002 when he had refused to take up the opposition leader's post saying his party was waiting to join the new government.

Fiji TV showed a signed statement by Chaudhry in 2002 in reply to President Ratu Josefa Iloilo's letter inviting him to become the leader of the opposition.

In this year's general election, the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) led by Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase won 36 seats in the 71-member House of Representatives while the FLP won 31 seats. The United People's Party (UPP) won two seats while independents bagged two.

The two independents had since lent support to the SDL-led government. The FLP also accepted an invitation by the SDL to join the new government and nine of its MPs have been included in the cabinet under Qarase.

This led to a piquant situation where Fiji had a new government with virtually no opposition. Only the UPP, with its two MPs, can be called an opposition.

What has surprised observers here is the fact that Chaudhry's new wish has come in the face of his signing the Korolevu Declaration in 1999, which agreed that any political party in a multiparty cabinet could not be part of the opposition.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Qarase was quoted as saying that he was advised by state and private lawyers that only the UPP, led by Mick Beddoes, could be recognised as the opposition in the current scheme of things.

According to a fijilive.com report, Qarase was also quoted as saying that he was determined to make the multiparty cabinet work.

Meanwhile, Fiji's solicitor general Nainendra Nand has reportedly recommended the setting up of a separate constitutional court to quickly deal with constitutional and public law matters.

He was quoted as saying that this was important in view of the potential constitutional litigations expected after the multiparty cabinet arrangement.

(© IANS / India eNews)