

Chaudhry unlikely to be Fiji's leader of opposition

Suva (Fiji) - Fiji's President Ratu Josefa Iloilo is likely to declare the name of the leader of the opposition in the country's newly elected parliament Wednesday. And it is not likely to be former Indo-Fijian prime minister Mahendra Chaudhry.

The post had come under intense scrutiny after the two largest parties in the parliament, the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SDL) party led by Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase, and Fiji Labour Party (FLP) leader Chaudhry joined hands to form a coalition government. While SDL had won 36 seats in the 71-member House of Representatives, the FLP had won 31.

This had left Fiji with virtually no opposition. The United People's Party (UPP) had managed two seats while independents got two. The latter have since lent their support to the SDL-led government.

According to reports here, UPP leader Mick Beddoes is the likely nominee for the post. This comes in the face of reports that Chaudhry, whose party has been allotted nine berths in the new cabinet, was also keen for the opposition leader's post.

Though the UPP had a pre-poll alliance with the FLP, it broke it on May 21 soon after Chaudhry accepted Qarase's invitation to join the new government.

Fiji's Solicitor General Nainendra Nand was quoted by fiji-live.com as saying that Chaudhry was ineligible for the post as the latter had signed the Korolevu Declaration of 1999, which says that a party which has joined the government ranks cannot be in the opposition.

Meanwhile, an official of the president's office said the file was with the president and the announcement would be made Wednesday following legal advice.

Beddoes is likely to be named as the leader of the opposition only after the authorities are convinced that the UPP has completely unhinged itself from the agreement with FLP.

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