

Live with 'Radio Tevita'

Election fever and new ways of campaigning were a colourful part of the 2001 Fiji elections. With the elections came innovative ways from the media industry in educating people and making them aware of issues.

By NOORA ALI

TEVITA MOMOEDONU, host of the new and popular Bula100 talkback show, takes a pause: it's quarter to eleven and the show is about to start. A first election talkback show held in Fiji where politicians and experts on various subjects are invited to share their views, agendas, aspirations and mingle with the real people over the phone for one hour daily.

It's all about the elections, any questions on the related subject from anyone is answered by the chosen guest of the day.

Well yes! It's a talkback show and Tevita is the host. He gets a bit — not much — just a bit worried that the guest for the day, Dr Nur Bano Ali wouldn't turn up. After all, two more personalities who were invited to be on air for the day had cancelled for various reasons.

In the meantime Momoedonu talks about himself and the show. He answers questions sitting in the large studio waiting for eleven o'clock — for the show to start. Tevita doesn't feel that this is the first show of its kind.

He says, "I think this has been done previously," and adds that "there is a lot of interest in politics this time around". He's eager to tell us about the programme, being a journalist himself and working for Pacnews regional news cooperative and doing part time work with the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation.

Momoedonu seems to really enjoy and love his work. Sitting very comfortable, he starts to relate how he got into journalism, but it had to be interrupted as the guest for the show arrives just on time.



Spreading awareness: Radio Fiji's Bula FM100 elections host Tevita Momoedonu goes live on talkback. Photo: WANSOLWARA ONLINE

The show gets underway and Momoedonu steps into his professional shoes as the host for the much talked about Bula100 talkback show.

Dr Nur Bano Ali had a little something to say before the show got underway: "Journalists should get more experience in the business field to cover business stories more efficiently" Don't we all agree?

After small technical problems and a little delay the show starts: "Today we have here with us Dr Nur Bano Ali, a well respected accountant and business adviser ..." and the show takes off. The topic for the day "Economics of the various political parties."

Micro finance: Economics, micro finance, foreign investment, VAT, untapped resources, mismanagement, private sector and public sector talk goes on.

With everyone understanding everything, how much we understood is much too, you get enlightened on the real aspects of the talk and how it actually affects the normal people.

You want to sit and listen because it is insightful, educational and spreads awareness. The atmosphere is not a totally serious one; there is a level of

entertainment involved too. When calls start to come in from the public one after the other it gives an idea of just how many people must be listening to Bula 100 from 11 to 12 noon daily.

It is intense and on the spot. With just an hour for the nation to question the experts. Call after call and calls even after the show ended, people are interested to know.

Momoedonu puts on his serious face and carries off his work. He uses the research he had done for the show to pose his own questions whenever there is a disconnected call which can be about half the calls that you get.

The real conversation started when the show ended and off air. It cannot last long because busy people have jobs and other important things to do.

It was time for Momoedonu to do the final preparations for the next show. This was the last leg of the month-long election talk back show which would go off air the day before voting starts. The guests for the tomorrow's show are to be editors from the Fiji media industry and Momoedonu suggests they get the editor of the journalism student newspaper *Wansolwara* on the panel.

While talking, Momoedonu reflects on the show and shares his views about it with us.

"I think this particular programme is good because it examines the manifestos, it gives the members of the public an opportunity to question leaders as well as party policies.

"I think the response has been very good because we have got calls from as far as Lautoka and Labasa, and I have received feedback from the general public, from the people that I have talked to and the people that I know. People are keenly following the programme because of the questions that are being posed to the guests and their reply, whether it makes sense or no sense. I think in a way it is entertainment in itself in addition to being informative."

Talking more on the show he tells us how much preparation is needed. Like in today's show the topic of economics. "I don't know very much about economics, so I have to do research on such topics because you don't want to sound stupid on air, you have to know something, not everything."

From an Australian-educated geologist to a journalist, Tevita is very aware of what is going on and is passionate about his present job. "From one extreme to the other." He talks about his present profession, saying that he had some reservations coming to journalism, because some people tend to have a low perception of journalists, thinking they're just busybodies.

But he adds, "it is for the benefit of the whole country. I see journalism now

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from a new angle. You get to talk to everyone ... from street kids to ministers and presidents.”

An environmental journalist is where he would like to see himself in the future, but he also mentions that he would like to keep his options open, with geology still very much in his mind. He talks on about the lack of incentives to continue in the field of journalism, pointing out low wages for a profession of very hard work.

Finally, Tevita tells us that he is a believer in playing the game by the rules. In the game of journalism, the rules are a lot. It would be safe to say that the talkback show has kept people tuning in. It's fun, it's informative and it adds to the ongoing election fever in Fiji.

□ Noora Ali is from the Republic of the Maldives and a third-year BA in journalism student at the University of the South Pacific.

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