

Let's Talk About Your Future

'From Home To Home' Tongan Princess Strengthens Ties with FNU

By SELITA BOLANAVANUA

Her Royal Highness Princess Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tuita says Fiji offers a safe and culturally familiar space for Tongan students — one that feels like moving “from home to home.” Speaking during her visit to the Fiji National University's (FNU) Nasese Campus last week, the Princess Royal of the Kingdom of Tonga said such an environment helps students feel secure and better able to concentrate on their academic pursuits. “When we send students from Tonga to Fiji, there's not so much of a cultural shock,” she said. “They feel secure, like they're just going from home to home, and that allows them to focus on their studies.”

Her Royal Highness emphasised the importance of cultural comfort when students study abroad, noting that long distances, unfamiliar climates, and even different food can pose challenges. “These things may seem small, but they matter,” she added. She said the newly established Tonga National University was still in its early development and expressed hopes for closer ties with FNU. “I'm looking forward to a strong and healthy relationship between our universities,” she said. The Princess also reflected on her personal connection to Fiji, having attended a training programme at the former Fiji Visitors

Continues on Page 2

WHAT'S INSIDE

Page 2

• 'From Home To Home' Tongan Princess Strengthens Ties with FNU - From Page 1.

Page 3

• Twin Sisters United by a Shared Dream to Study Medicine at FNU.
• 'School Visit Leaves Lasting Impact'

Page 4

• School Visit Pictorial, Reaching Out, Shcool by School.

Page 5

• No Road, No Problem, She Rides for Her Future
• Across the Waves, Toward a

Dream

• From Yasawa to the Classroom: Buli Aims to Give Back Through Education

Page 6

• Salu's Sweet Leap of Faith
• At 16, He's Feeding Dreams with Every Dish

Page 7

• Rugged, Cold, Dark Roads, Yet They Go
• Honour for a Pioneer in Critical Care

Page 8

• Tradition, Medicine, and a Legacy



From left: Her Royal Highness Princess Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tuita with her husband Honourable Siosa'ia Ma'ulupekotofa, Lord Tuita and the Fiji National University's Acting Vice Chancellor Professor Nii-K Plange at the Nasese Campus early this month. **Photo:** Mere Naleba



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Bureau more than 40 years ago while serving with the Tonga Visitors Bureau. That experience, she said, sparked her commitment to hospitality education.

“I arranged for three students from Tonga to come and study hospitality in Fiji. I did the interviews and raised the funds for their training. When they returned, they were quickly hired by government departments, that showed how valuable their training was.”

A long-time advocate for hospitality and tourism, the Princess described the sector as “her baby,” highlighting its lifelong value to Pacific people beyond just employment.

FNU Acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Nii-K Plange welcomed the Princess and described her visit as a proud moment for the University and the region.

“Her Royal Highness’s presence is an honour,” he said. “It reflects the deep ties between the Kingdom of Tonga and the Republic of Fiji and reminds us of the importance of regional unity and collaboration.”

He also thanked the Princess for her interest in FNU’s College of Business, Hospitality and Tourism Studies, particularly its Catering School.

“Our Catering School equips students with practical culinary and hospitality management skills, blending global standards with Pacific traditions,” Professor Plange said. “We celebrate local ingredients and indigenous knowledge while embracing innovation, a vision that aligns with the values shared by Her Royal Highness.”

The Princess concluded her visit by thanking FNU for its hospitality and said she looks forward to continuing the relationship.

“This visit is just the beginning. I hope to come back and keep building this partnership, not only between Tonga and Fiji, but across our Pacific family.”



Her Royal Highness Princess Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tuita receives a traditional welcome at Fiji National University's Nasese Campus. **Photo:** Aaron Fatiaki.



Her Royal Highness Princess Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tuita with her husband Honourable Siosa'ia Ma'ulupekotofa, Lord Tuita (back 4th from left) with FNU Senior Leadership Team at Nasese Campus. **Photo:** Mere Naleba.



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School Visit – Pictorial

Reaching Out, School by School



Students of Thomas Baker Memorial Secondary School discussing their dreams and aspirations during a visit from the FNU outreach team **Photo:** Vetaia Natoga



The FNU team met this young boy on his way to the farm near Nasesevia Secondary School. Many students from the area leave school early to support their families through farming. **Photo:** Vetaia Natoga



The outreach team prepares to cross the Sigatoka River on their way to Saint Therese of Lisieux School in Bemana, Nadroga-Navosa. **Photo:** Vetaia Natoga.



Magadro Secondary School students in Bukuya explore career pathways with FNU. **Photo:** Vetaia Natoga.



Students of Nasikawa Vision College engage with FNU to learn about study and career pathways. **Photo:** Vetaia Natoga.

Twin Sisters United by a Shared *Dream* to Study *Medicine* at FNU

By NICOLETTE CHAMBERS

For 18-year-old twin sisters, Maansi and Maanvi Mani of Sabeto, Nadi, doing things together has always come naturally.

Whether it’s wearing matching outfits, enjoying meals side by side, or sitting together in class, the pair have been inseparable since childhood.

Currently Year 13 students at Sabeto College, Maansi serves as the Head Girl, while Maanvi holds the position of Senior Prefect. Their bond goes beyond daily routines; they are each other’s greatest academic motivators and friendly rivals, consistently striving for the top spot in class.

Last year, the pair sat for the Fiji Year 12 Certificate Examination (FY12CE), excelling with high results.

Maansi scored 378 out of 400, while Maanvi followed closely with 374. Impressively, they both achieved 100 marks in Mathematics.

Their dedication to academic excellence is inspired by their supportive family. Their father, a Police Officer, and their mother, who manages their home with care and love. As the only siblings in their family, the twins have always been encouraged to chase their goals and make their parents proud.

“Whatever we have done, we’ve done together. From group projects to academic achievements,” they shared.

“We’re always competing, but in the most positive way. One of us comes first, the other second, that’s normal for us.”

Maanvi, the younger twin, was the first to express an interest in pursuing a career in medicine back in Year 9. Her passion soon influenced Maansi, who discovered a similar desire to work in the medical field.

“It started with Maanvi, but the more I learned about it, the more I wanted to be a part of it too,” said Maansi.

“We later found out that our mother had always dreamed of seeing us both in the medical field, it feels like everything is aligning now.”

After attending the Fiji National University’s (FNU) Student Liaison Outreach Programme this month at their school, the twins are more determined than ever to pursue their shared passion. They plan to enrol at FNU’s College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences next year.

“We believe FNU is the ideal institution to help us achieve our dreams. Studying medicine has always been our shared goal, and we’re excited to take that next step together,” they said.



Twin sisters of Sabeto College in Nadi, Maansi Mani (left) and Maanvi Mani. **Photo:** Nicolette Chambers.

‘School visit Leaves *Lasting* Impact’



FNU’s Manager Outreach, Ella Bennion speaking with students of Lautoka Muslim College. **Photo:** Nicolette Chambers.

By NICOLETTE CHAMBERS

Selecting the Fiji National University (FNU) as a tertiary institution to pursue further studies after completing secondary level will leave a lasting impact on students.

These were the sentiments expressed by the Head Girl of Lautoka Muslim College Sabihah Nadira, following the FNU team’s visit to the school earlier this month while on its annual Student Liaison Outreach Programme.

Teams from the FNU’s Division of Marketing and Communications were journeying through various secondary

schools in Viti Levu educating all senior students on the various programmes offered by institution.

Nadira highlighted that the FNU provided a deeper and more precise understanding of all programmes.

“This initiative has been incredibly helpful, especially for our Year 12 and Year 13 students, as it guides us in choosing the right career path. It helps us understand which subjects or courses we need to focus on to better prepare for our future,” she said.

“The programme has expanded our knowledge and given us the confidence

to make informed decisions about our career goals.”

Jasper Williams High School Vice-Principal, Ranjit Prasad, commended the FNU for its proactive efforts in engaging with secondary schools through its Programme.

“I believe that what the FNU is doing, in going out to all the schools and reaching out to students, is a very good initiative because the FNU is our own university,” said Prasad.

“They are offering a number of courses that are essential to our needs, our people, and the industry in Fiji.”

Meanwhile, FNU alumni Krishant Swamy is a dedicated educator who has four years of teaching experience, currently serving at Saint Thomas High School in Lautoka.

He is a graduate of the then FNU’s College of Humanities and Education, where he earned a Bachelor of Education, majoring in English and Geography.

“I believe FNU equips its students well, especially future teachers, by preparing them thoroughly for the field. We leave as professionals ready to make a difference, and I’m proud of who I am today,” Swamy said.

No Road, No Problem, She *RIDES* for Her Future

By **CHRISTAL KAPOOR**

She may only be a teenager, but Laniana Natuka Tuitogalevu is a force to be reckoned with!

Every day, Laniana mounts her horse and rides alone across the rugged highlands of Navosa to reach Saint Therese of Lisieux College in Bemana. The journey takes nearly an hour each way. It’s a path of steep hills, muddy tracks, and unpredictable weather, yet she does it without complaint, driven by a dream that burns brighter than any obstacle in her way.

Laniana wants to become a nurse. But more than that, she wants to return to her community and serve the very people who helped raise her when life broke her heart too soon.

“I must be up as early as 4am to do my chores and travel to school from Nukuciri Settlement so I don’t miss my first class,” she shared. Her voice is calm, but her story is anything but ordinary.

The Year 13 student lost her father when she was just seven years old. She was taken in by her aunt and the loving people of her late father’s village, Tuvu. Life has never been easy, but she never allowed hardship to define her.

“At Saint Therese, we have students who walk for kilometres, cross the Sigatoka River on foot after finishing their chores just to attend class,” she said.

“When it rains heavily, the river floods, and the boat we use becomes useless. On those days, we can’t even get to school.”

“Even though our school doesn’t have all the facilities urban schools do, our daily struggles of just making it to school have taught us how to fight and to never give up.”

“Many of us ride on horseback in this part of the country. Our animals are not just animals to us. They are lifelines. They help us fight for education – for a better life not just for me



Laniana Natuka Tuitogalevu. *Photo: Vetaia Natoga*

but for everyone that battles rugged terrain and bad weather just to study,” she added.

Tears welled up in her eyes as she made a promise, not just to herself, but to her late father, to her village, and to every child who wakes up before dawn with a dream in their heart and no road ahead of them, only mountains.

“I’ll keep riding, no matter how hard it gets. I’ll keep fighting not just for me, but for all of us. This is the least I can do to make my father and my people proud.”

From Yasawa to the Classroom: Buli Aims to Give Back Through Education

By **NICOLETTE CHAMBERS**

Like many young Fijians with big dreams, Salanieta Buli is driven by a deep sense of purpose, which is to give back to her family and become a Geography teacher in future.

Buli was inspired to learn more of the programme offered at the Fiji National University (FNU) under the College of Humanities and Education during the FNU team’s visit to DAV College in Ba for its Student Liaison Outreach Programme carried out this month.

From Marou Village in Naviti, Yasawa, Salanieta draws inspiration from her hardworking parents, her father, a diver, and her mother, who lovingly manages their home and cares for the family.

The Year 13 student says she feels even more motivated and hopeful about crafting her future with the FNU.

“The session with us students was a very informative one and it is where I have decided to become a Geography teacher and I believe FNU will help me achieve my dream,” said Buli.

“Because of my parents’ struggles and hard work, I want to make a difference in my community, the lives of my parents and also myself.”

Meanwhile, A.D. Patel College Senior Deputy Head Girl, Virisila Musu, acknowledged the FNU’s Student Liaison Outreach Programme, highlighting the positive



Salanieta Buli. *Photo: Nicolette Chambers.*

impact it has had on her future planning.

“The programme has provided me with valuable insights into the wide range of programmes and courses available at FNU, allowing me to make more informed decisions about my future,” she shared.

The FNU team visited a total of nine schools in the Ba area during its Student Liaison Outreach Programme.



Leanaitasi Taratara. *Photo: Romeka Kumari*

Across the Waves, Toward a Dream

By **ROMEKA KUMARI**

Leanaitasi Taratara is a shining example of determination and hope.

Every day, he embarks on a challenging journey from Malake Island to Penang Sangam High School, where he is a Year 11 student, showing great dedication to his dreams.

“My day begins at 6am, when I leave home and reach Malake landing by boat in 30 minutes,” Taratara revealed.

“From there, I travel by bus for another 40 minutes to reach my school.”

Despite the demanding routine, Taratara remains eager to learn and grow.

“It’s not easy to travel by boat every day because sometimes the sea is very rough, and I leave home with faith in God that I will return to my family after school,” he shared.

“I am doing this for my family because life on the island is not easy. We have to fetch our own food and survive on the vegetables and root crops we plant.”

He aspires to become an IT Officer, and his interest was sparked by FNU’s visit to his school on Wednesday, 15 July 2025.

FNU officials spoke about the opportunities available through the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme.

“I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do in life,” an emotional Taratara said.

“But FNU’s visit gave me hope that I can achieve a university qualification.”

As the eldest of four siblings, Taratara’s ambitions are deeply rooted in his family’s struggles.

“My father is a fisherman, and my family relies heavily on his catch for food and clothing,” he said.

“When I see my father’s hardships and the programmes offered at FNU, I am willing to travel by boat every day.”

“This is no longer just my dream to achieve; it’s now my family’s dream as well.”

Taratara’s journey reminds us that with determination, even the biggest obstacles can be overcome.

Rugged, Cold, Dark Roads, Yet They Go



From left: Selevasio Ligairi, Paula Navukula, Vilomena Ranadi, Unaisi Adivulase and Josefa Nainima students of Saint Francis College in Rakiraki. **Photo:** Romeka Kumari.

By **ROMEKA KUMARI**

Many people don't realise that for some students, the journey to education begins long before the first school bell rings. At Saint Francis College in Navunibitu, Rakiraki, students from deep in the interior rise before dawn, battling cold weather and long travel times, all for the chance to learn and build a better future.

Last week, the Fiji National University (FNU) visited the school as part of its student liaison programme. The school, which has 196 students, was full of energy and excitement, but behind the cheerful faces are stories of daily struggle and strong de-

termination. Some students travel by carrier from as early as 4am just to reach school on time. Selevasio Ligairi and Vilomena Ranadi travel from Nararavou, while Josefa Nainima and Unaisi Adivulase make their way from Naelecibi and Veidrala. These villages are located deep in the rugged interior of Rakiraki, and the journey to school is long and difficult.

Day Starts at 5

Their day starts as early as 5am. Wrapped in warm clothes, they travel for nearly three hours, arriving at school by 7:30am. The cold mornings and rough terrain do not stop them. They keep going, driven by

their dreams and the support of their families.

"FNU has given us hope to gain a qualification," said Selevasio, who is also a school prefect. "Many of us in Year 13 were uncertain about our future, but with FNU's programmes and guidance, we now know what to pursue after high school."

For Vilomena, the motivation comes from home. "Our parents are farmers, and we've seen them struggle to meet our daily needs," she said. "Even though we leave for school early and face the cold, we keep in mind that if we fail, our parents are also failing. We study hard so one day; we can get a good job and support them."

Return home in the Dark

Their evenings are no easier. After a full day of school, they return home in the dark. Once home, they take part in family prayers, complete their homework, and get ready to do it all again the next day.

Supporting them every step of the way is Mereisi Vakayanu, a Computer Studies teacher at Saint Francis College since 2018. She travels with the students and witnesses their strength every day.

"These children come from the interior of Ra, and it's always very cold at 4am," she said. "They struggle against the cold, but their desire to be educated and succeed keeps them going. I believe in their potential; I know they will succeed in life."

Honour for a Pioneer in Critical Care

By **WATI TALEBULA**

The College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand (CICM) has awarded its top honour, the 2025 CICM Medal, to Dr Elizabeth (Lisa) Bennett for her long-term work to improve intensive care in the Pacific.

Dr Bennett is the Postgraduate Coordinator, Anaesthesia and Intensive Care Training at the Fiji National University's (FNU), College of Medicine, Nursing and

Health Sciences' (CMNHS).

For more than 20 years, Dr Bennett has worked hard to build a proper training programme in intensive care medicine, something that did not exist in many Pacific countries before.

Her work began in 2003, when there was no formal training or official recognition for intensive care in the region. Back then, intensive care units were often under-equipped and seen as part of anaesthesia departments. Many patients had poor outcomes, and survival was not

expected for the most seriously ill.

Through years of clinical work, teaching, and strong advocacy, Dr Bennett changed this. She helped set up a post-graduate training programme in intensive care, now offered at FNU.

Over time, many graduates from the anaesthesia and intensive care programmes have taken up important medical roles across the Pacific, from Suva and Lautoka in Fiji to Dili in Timor-Leste, and in places like Rarotonga, Apia, Funafuti, and Honiara.

A major step forward has been the launch of the Master in Intensive Care Medicine. Dr Bennett helped create this from the ground up, writing the course materials, preparing lessons, setting exams, and teaching, often with no extra pay or formal reward.

The 2025 CICM Medal is a well-deserved recognition of her years of effort and care. It honours her role in changing how intensive care is taught and delivered across the Pacific.



Dr Elizabeth Bennett.



By **CHRIATAL KAPOOR**

You couldn’t help but pause and admire her masterpiece as she stepped forward to present her dish.

A delicate chocolate cone covering a rich, velvety blueberry cheesecake filling, paired with a fragrant raspberry compote, it was a showstopper. The artistry, the flavour, and the presentation reflected a quiet determination, the kind found in someone who dared to dream differently.

That someone is Radinikaba Kayaga Salu, a proud Namalata, Kadavu native and current Diploma in Culinary Arts student at Fiji National University’s Nasese Campus.

“My fascination with food began in childhood. The colours, the flavours, the textures, everything about it captured me,” she recalled



Radinikaba Kayaga Salu, a Diploma in Culinary Arts student at the 2025 Hospitality Art Fair. Pictured left is her masterpiece, chocolate cone cheesecake. Photo: Christal Kapoor..

Salu’s Sweet Leap of Faith

with a smile. Initially set on becoming a nurse, Salu chose to study Food Science while at Dudley High School. But when nursing didn’t pan out, she knew in her heart exactly where to go next.

“I never stopped loving food. When nursing didn’t work out, I turned to culinary arts, and I’ve never regretted it.”

While cookery is her forte, Salu took a bold

step by entering the baking competition at the 2025 Hospitality Art Fair, pushing herself beyond her comfort zone.

“I’m not much of a baker like my mum, but I wanted to challenge myself. I was nervous at first, but this competition has revealed a whole new world for me. It’s helped shape me into a more well-rounded chef.”

“To be a great chef, I believe I must be

skilled in both the hotline and the pastry kitchen. This competition was an important step for me in that journey,” she added.

Having completed her Certificate in Cookery (Level 4) prior to her Diploma, Salu also gained valuable industry experience during her attachment with Air Terminal Services Ltd (ATS) from 2023 to 2024.

Passion to thrive

“Working in a professional kitchen made me realise how male-dominated the field still is. It can be tough as a young woman, but I’ve seen how our presence can challenge the status quo. I want to show other women that this is a profession where we can truly thrive.”

As she faced the heat of competition, Salu leaned on her faith, her training, and the unwavering support of her loved ones and lecturers.

“I’m so grateful to Mr Sanjay for his patience and guidance throughout the trials. All the practice sessions were worth it. The judges gave me great feedback, and I’m more inspired than ever to keep learning when the new semester begins.”

To others who dream of making magic in the kitchen but hesitate to take the leap, Salu has a heartfelt message:

“Come join FNU. Turn your passion into a career. Whether it’s to start your own business, work in a resort, or create something new, this path can lead to financial independence and joy. My faith in God and in my talent brought me here, and it can do the same for you.”

At 16, He’s Feeding Dreams with Every Dish

By **CHRISTAL KAPOOR**

At just 16 years old, Shivnesh Pratap is already shouldering responsibilities beyond his years and chasing a dream that began in a small home kitchen in Momi.

The youngest in a humble family, Shivnesh is currently studying towards a Certificate of Attainment in Cookery at Fiji National University’s (FNU) National Training and Productivity Centre (NTPC) at the Namaka Campus. His father works as a welder, his mother stays home, and his older brother, a former FNU (TPAF) student, now works alongside their father. For Shivnesh, choosing FNU felt like the right step, not just to follow in his brother’s footsteps, but to carve out his own future doing something he truly loves.

“I struggled in school. Maths and English weren’t easy for me,” he admitted with quiet honesty. “But I always enjoyed agriculture and hands-on subjects. So, I left school during Term 2 in Year 11 and joined FNU.”

It wasn’t a decision made lightly, but rather one made from a deep sense of self-awareness and purpose. Shivnesh knew what he loved, cooking — and he knew why it mattered.

“I started fishing to help my family. I would sell the fish or cook it for them,” he shared. “That’s when I realised, I didn’t just enjoy cooking, I had a gift for it, especially when it came to preparing fish.”

Recalling the times how a simple fish helped him, and his family survive, Shivnesh stepped into the 2025 Hospitality Art Fair with a baked fish dish that earned him a place in the finals.

“I was nervous,” he recalled. “It was my first competition, but I saw it as a chance to learn, to grow and to honour the 6 months of training I’ve undergone.”



Inspired by Chef brother

Inspired by his older brother and a cousin who is now a chef in Australia, Shivnesh carries the hopes of his family in every dish he prepares. He also works a part-time job to support himself while studying, a balancing act he performs with resilience far beyond his years.

“Sometimes, it gets really tough,” he admitted. “But when I think about how much my family believes in me, it gives me strength. I feel like I can take on the world.”

His goal is simple yet deeply profound, to one day work as a Commis II Chef at the Marriot Resort in Momi, close to home, where he can care for his parents and give back to the family that has given him everything.

Through FNU’s TVET programmes, Shivnesh has found not only a pathway to employment, but also a sense of purpose, dignity, and pride.

His story is a reminder that sometimes, the most beautiful dreams are born not in luxury, but in love and that with a little courage, and a whole lot of heart, even a young boy from Momi can cook his way into a future filled with promise.



A focussed Pratap during the heats. Pictured left is Pratap’s baked fish with cassava. Photo: Christal Kapoor.

Health & Hustle

Tradition, Medicine, and a Legacy

By **WATI TALEBULA**

It was a proud moment when Associate Professor Ratu Jioji Malani, dressed in the traditional attire of the Vuakaloa of Nakorotubu, Ra, stood proudly at the front of his delegation. He carried traditional gifts for the Turaga na Tui Nayau, Tui Lau, and Sau ni Vanua o Lau, Ratu Tevita Uluilakeba Mara

In this powerful cultural act, he brought together the old and the new, respecting tradition while moving forward with modern progress and healing.

Associate Professor Malani is a senior academic at the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), under the School of Medical Sciences at Fiji National University.

Recently, Associate Professor Malani was honoured, this time far from home, at the University of Otago in New Zealand. He was named one of the university’s most distinguished medical alumni.

This recognition comes after years of service and dedication.

A Pioneer in Pacific Health

Associate Professor Malani has spent his career in internal medicine, focusing mainly on kidney disease in the Pacific. He has played a major role in improving healthcare across the region, helping save lives and inspire future doctors.

One of his most important achievements was setting up Fiji’s first kidney dialysis unit. Before this, patients with serious kidney problems had little hope. Today,

because of his work, many lives have been saved.

He also helped develop a world-class programme for treating stomach and bowel diseases, improving not just the equipment used, but also the training and skills of doctors throughout the Pacific.

A Legacy in Medical Education

Along with treating patients, Associate Professor Malani is passionate about teaching.

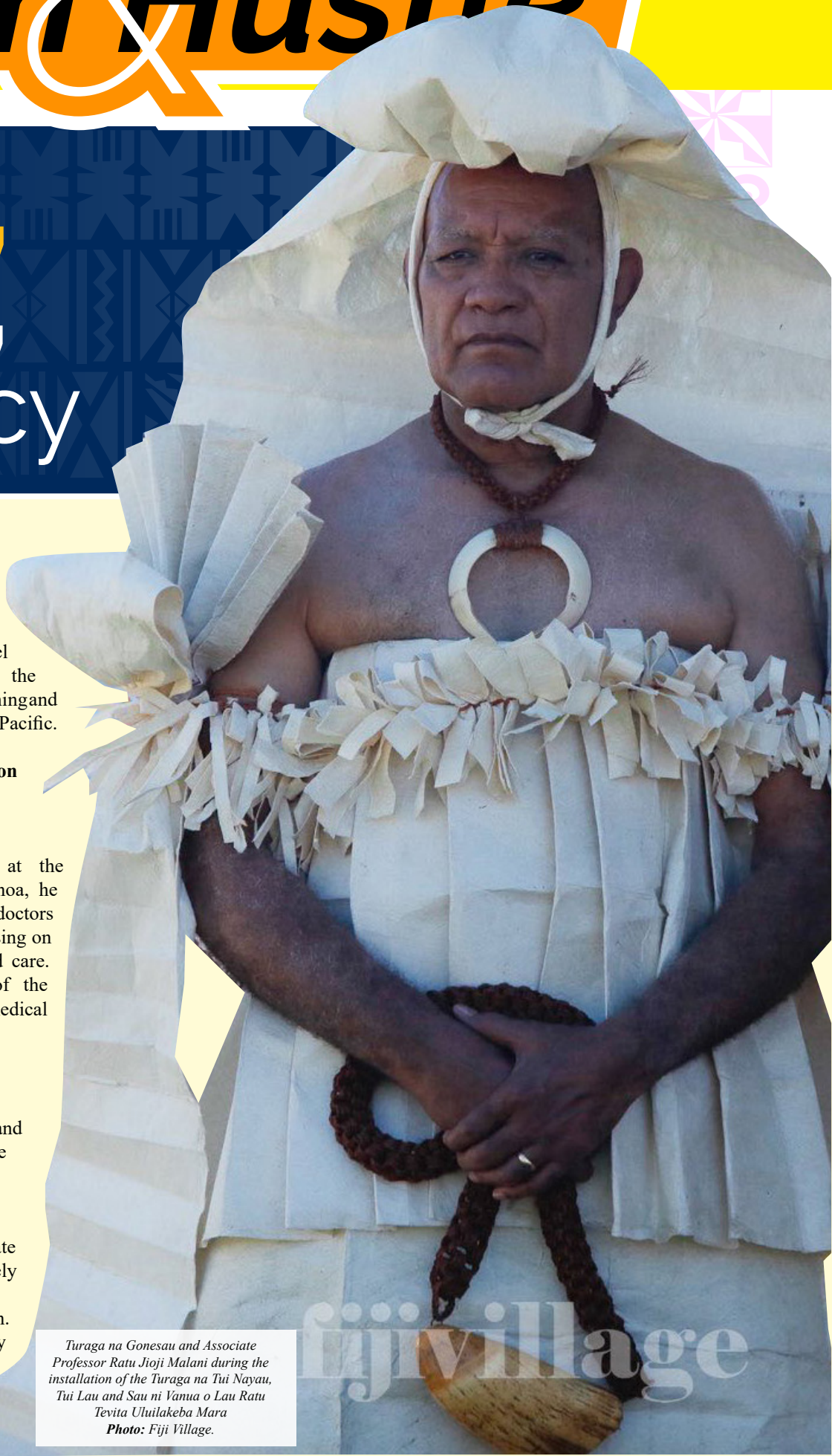
As a Clinical Professor at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, he has trained more than 70 doctors from the Northern Pacific, passing on his values of kind and skilled care. He also helped start one of the Pacific’s first postgraduate medical training programmes.

This allowed local doctors to specialise without leaving their home countries—helping to strengthen healthcare systems and keep skilled professionals in the region.

Rooted in Otago

Despite all his success, Associate Professor Malani remains closely connected to the University of Otago, where his journey began.

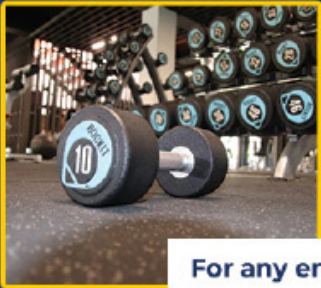
“My journey at the University of Otago as a medical student has been nothing short of transformative,” he said.



Turaga na Gonesau and Associate Professor Ratu Jioji Malani during the installation of the Turaga na Tui Nayau, Tui Lau and Sau ni Vanua o Lau Ratu Tevita Uluilakeba Mara
Photo: Fiji Village.



FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY



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