

# Pacific business gets a boost in the boardroom

by Sudesh Kissun

Pacific Islanders are being groomed to duplicate their success in sport and music in New Zealand boardrooms.

A charitable trust organisation is working hard to make Pacific Islanders better business people.

Pacific Business Trust chief executive Jim Mather says for the year ending 30 June 2004, the trust helped establish 54 new Pacific businesses.

Mather says the trust was helping another 400 Pacific Islanders either develop or remain in business.

He says while the numbers were modest, the trust was proud of the ventures.

"Our mantra of 'never setting anyone up to fail' has meant that a greater emphasis is always placed on quality as opposed to quantity," he says.

"In the long-run we believe that this approach provides the best opportunity for members of

our community to convert their business.

Mather says the Pacific business community lagged well behind the wider mainstream workforce in New Zealand.

He says just over 6% of the total Pacific workforce was self-employed compared to 18 per cent self-employment within the mainstream workforce.

"Although we have produced some excellent business leaders, the Pacific community has further potential to duplicate its wonderful sporting and artistic successes in to the boardrooms of New Zealand," he says.

The trust staged a one-day event *Thrive! Pasifika* at the Auckland Town Hall in July this year.

"It was all about inspiration, information and entertainment," Mather says.

"It was a distinctly Pacific business conference with our business leaders, entertainers and inspirational personalities sharing centre stage."



PACIFIC BUSINESS TRUST: Alfred Schuster of AUT, Jim Mather, Professor Alfred Oehlers and AUT research students of 2003.

Mather says the trust was also placing great importance in developing future business leaders.

With the AUT Office of Pasifika Advancement, the trust has sponsored a research programme.

The trust covers course fees and research costs for AUT students undertaking undergraduate level research of relevance either to specific Pacific businesses, or the wider Pacific communities or the trust.

The trust also circulates 33,000 copies of *Achievers* publication throughout most secondary and tertiary institutions in New Zealand.

The publication lists Pacific scholarships on offer and carries success stories of Pacific students.

The trust also sponsors five Pacific secondary students each year to undertake a 12-month American Field Scholarship exchange programme.

Mather says the trust

remains committed to seeing more Pacific students translate their academic, creative and leadership talents into success in the business arena.

"This gives us confidence that our ultimate goal of contributing to the development of a strong and successful Pacific business community is achievable," he says.

The trust was established in 1985 and has offices in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

# Book highlights struggle, history of Indo-Fijians

by Sudesh Kissun

A new book on the history of Indians in Fiji has slated the British and Australian governments for ill-treating them.

The book, *Tears in Paradise*, was launched in Auckland last month by Rajendra Prasad, a former municipal council executive.

The book is a heart-wrenching story of the first Indo-Fijians being tricked into accepting torrid journeys in overloaded ships.

It also describes the violence, discrimination and oppression at the hands of white *kulambars* (overseers) and finally their efforts to settle down and make Fiji home.

Under the indenture system,

the British Government recruited Indian nationals for its colonial outposts. Between 1834 and 1916, 60,553 Indians were recruited to work in the sugarcane farms of Fiji.

Prasad, 57, was born and raised in Ba, a town about 60 km north of Nadi Airport.

After serving as Ba's town clerk for 17 years, he migrated to New Zealand shortly after the 1987 coup.

While in India for a course, Prasad discovered his family roots and found out that his grandfather and his grandmother secretly left for Fiji to escape poverty.

The book quotes excerpts from manuals kept on board the ships.

Indian migrants who caused friction and questioned authorities were punished in full view of others. Anyone caught stealing and committing other offences were frog-marched with faces painted black.

A recruit used abusive language and who was forced to stand in front of the ship dispensary holding his tongue out.

The trip from India to Fiji took about 73 days for a sailing ship and 33 days by steamship. Barracks, known as coolie lines, comprising 3m by 2m rooms were used as accommodation.

Prasad says violence against the workers knew no bounds. Workers were killed or maimed by white overseers, employed by the Colonial Sugar Refinery Company which operated sugar mills in Fiji.

The British Government is also blamed for inciting racial hatred between the two main groups — Indians and indigenous Fijians.

Prasad spent seven years from 1997 putting his book together. Half of the text deals with the latest calamity to hit Indo-Fijians — the May 2000 coup by George Speight.

The failed businessman Speight and a group of gunmen seized former Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry, his Cabinet and MPs and held them hostage for 56 days in Parliament House.

The book is blunt about racism in Fiji. Racism is used by leaders as a political tool to secure their power and position.

Prasad says not all Indo-Fijians are wealthy as perceived by the Fijians.

Poverty is also rife among Indo-Fijians and many have been forced off their farms by Fijian landowners in recent

years. Since 1987, 4000 land leases have expired.

Prasad says he hopes the book will reawaken Indo-Fijians' memories about their spectacular past, hidden from the eyes of many.

He says the book was not a commercial project for him.

"I have been driven very strongly by a grave sense of injustice meted out to our pio-

neer generation," he says.

"We are innocent of many things, yet we are accused of causing all the problems in Fiji."

Prasad says the book is a tribute to the early Indian settlers. It acknowledges their struggles to lay the foundation of success for future generations.

The book will be available at Moshim Discount House stores from September 12.



RAJENDRA PRASAD: Blunt about racism in Fiji.

