



FACULTY OF ARTS,
LAW AND EDUCATION

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE, ARTS & MEDIA

Discipline of Journalism

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25 September 2012

Professor Subramani
Media Tribunal
Media Industry Development Authority
Suva, Fiji

BY EMAIL

Dear Professor Subramani,

I wish to make a complaint under the Media Industry Development Decree 2010 against Communications Fiji Limited, its reporter Dhanjay Deo, and its News Director Vijay Narayan. The Media Code of Ethics and Practice contained in Schedule 1 of the Decree sets out guidelines for interviewing and for what information journalists may and may not report.

Section 5, "Subterfuge" states:

Media must use straightforward means to obtain information. . . . Use of subterfuge, false identity, or covert recording to do so can be justified only in rare circumstances where the material sought ought to be published in the public interest and could not be obtained in any other way.

Section 23, "Interviews" states:

Interviews for print, electronic media, radio and television must be arranged, conducted, and edited fairly and honestly. Potential interviewees are entitled to know in advance the format, subject, and purpose of their interview. . . .

I wish to complain that Communications Fiji Limited and its reporter Dhanjay Deo used subterfuge in that he did not use straightforward means to obtain information. He also did not arrange an interview with me fairly and honestly, as he did not reveal the true purpose of the interview. In fact, he deceived me as to the true purpose of the interview. I also wish to complain that Communications Fiji Limited and Vijay Narayan published, by broadcasting it on CFL's radio stations including Legend FM and FM96, and by reporting it on its website Fijivillage.com, information that was obtained by means that were not straightforward, fair or honest. Specifically, they published comments that I made not in an interview but which I instead made in a complaint to Mr Narayan about my interview with Mr Deo. The facts are as follows.

I received a phone call on 11 September from Legend FM reporter Dhanjay Deo, who asked if I would grant him an interview about the symposium on Media and Democracy in the South Pacific we had held at USP the previous week. I thought that was a bit odd because the symposium had ended five days earlier, but I was happy to oblige. It didn't take long before I realized that Mr Deo was not interested in talking about our symposium at all, but instead was upset about an interview I had given to Radio Australia the day before. In it, I said that despite the lifting in January of censorship under the Public Emergency Regulation, it was apparent that journalists in Fiji are practicing self-censorship in advance of the first rulings from your Tribunal. Mr Deo thus used subterfuge to obtain an interview with me on a subject other than what he told me he would be interviewing me about.

Mr Deo complained during our interview that my comments had gone out internationally. Had I done any research to back up my claim of self-censorship? What proof did I have for this? No, I told him, I hadn't done a scientific study on this, but I hoped to do so soon because it seems to be a big problem here. I have spoken with a number of Fiji journalists, I assured him, and from what I could tell there is a climate of fear and uncertainty in the country's news media currently. Now that they are subject to possible fines and even prison sentences if they take a wrong step in their line of work, there seems to be a natural reluctance on the part of journalists to question authority. It's not what you see in the Fiji media, I told him, it's what you don't see. He kept browbeating me and interrupting me. Where was my proof? Where was my study? I asked him to let me answer his questions, but he kept interrupting me, so I ended the interview. He called me back. I told him I would not speak to him again until he apologized for his rude behavior. He called back again, and again. Each time I refused to talk to him. I then sent an email of complaint to CFL News Director Vijay Narayan.

I soon received a telephone call from Mr Narayan. I told him I have never been treated so rudely by an interviewer in decades of giving media interviews, but he seemed to have no problem with the way his reporter treated me. Where did they get their lessons in interviewing, I asked him, from watching BBC Hardtalk? Suffice it to say I didn't get very far in my complaint to Mr Narayan. I then noticed that CFL had posted a story on its website Fijivillage.com, headlined: "Claims made but no proper survey done." (Attached) It criticised me for having no evidence to back up my claim that self-censorship was widespread among Fiji journalists. The story also played on CFL radio stations, including FM 96 and Legend FM. I felt that this was unfair "gotcha" journalism, and that I had been lied to about the purpose of my interview with Mr Deo.

Mr Narayan then compounded the unethical behaviour by CFL. I noticed in looking at the story online later on 11 September that it had been updated at 5:15 that afternoon. It added this line:

He also said that we were rude and thinks that we are running a newsroom like BBC Hardtalk.

I never said that to Mr Deo in my interview with him. I said that to Mr Narayan in complaining about his reporter's rudeness. Can a news director add to a reporter's story something said to him by an interview subject in a complaint about the interviewer? Not under my reading of the Media Code of Ethics and Practice contained in Schedule 1 of the Media Decree. I asked Mr Narayan to preserve the audio of my interview with Mr Deo, as it would prove that a published comment was made not in an interview with his reporter but instead in a telephone call of complaint to him. Mr Narayan informed me that the audio had been erased. He admitted what he did, however, in an email to me of 12 September, a copy of which is attached.

After addressing your complaint about Dhanjay, I resumed the original line of questions that Dhanjay had been unable to complete in his interview with you.

The problem with that explanation is that he did not inform me he was interviewing me. I was obviously, from what Mr Narayan quoted me as saying, not addressing the subject of the original interview. Instead I was complaining about his reporter's conduct. I would never have agreed to another interview due to the agitated state I was in as a result of what I had just been through. Mr

Narayan is thus guilty of unethical behavior for not arranging and conducting an interview openly and fairly and/or for failing to inform me in advance of the format, subject, and purpose of their interview, or even that I was being interviewed for publication and/or broadcast.

As if to confirm that they were conducting a vendetta against me, Communications Fiji Limited, Mr Deo, and Mr Narayan published another story the following day, a copy of which is also attached. It purported to show that self-censorship was not being practiced by journalists in Fiji by interviewing several journalists who denied the practice. It again named me and reported that the managers of several media outlets denied that I had ever spoken to any of their journalists. This subsequent story arguably amounts to deceiving the public in an attempt to further smear me. Journalists could hardly be expected to admit to such a shameful practice self-censorship. Their denying it hardly disproves its existence. Self-censorship among Fiji journalists has been loudly complained of by numerous stakeholders recently. For CFL and its staff to attack me on this issue is cowardly in the extreme.

I believe that what Mr Deo did on 11 September contravened Section 5, "Subterfuge" and/or Section 23, "Interviews" of the Media Code of Ethics and Practice contained in Schedule 1 of the Media Industry Development Decree 2010. I believe that what Mr Narayan did on 11 September also contravened Section 5 and/or Section 23 of the Media Code of Ethics and Practice. I trust that you will impose appropriate penalties on them and on their employer, Communications Fiji Limited. I hope that this would include the broadcast and publishing online of a sincere apology to myself for the unethical treatment to which I have been subject. The broadcast should be given the same prominence and frequency that the original story was given across all of CFL's stations on which it was broadcast.

The standards of journalism in Fiji badly need improving. My understanding is that this is the intent of the statutory regulations enshrined in the Media Code of Ethics and Practice contained in Schedule 1 of the Media Industry Development Decree 2010. People need to be protected from the type of unethical and now illegal "gutter" journalism practiced by Communications Fiji Limited and at least some of its staff.

I would ask you to require your deputy, Matai Akauola, to recuse himself from dealing with this complaint in any way due to the enmity he has displayed to me in the past.

I look forward to receiving from you a confirmation that this complaint has been received and that it will be given due consideration.

Sincerely,



Marc Edge, PhD
Discipline Co-ordinator

cc: Professor Sudesh Mishra
William Parkinson, CFL

Attachments: Vijay Narayan email of 12 September
Fijivillage.com article of 11 September
Fijivillage.com article of 12 September

From: [vijay](#)
To: [Marc Edge](#)
Cc: "ian"
Subject: RE: As requested
Date: Wednesday, September 12, 2012 5:27:59 PM

Hi Marc,

The news story to which you refer, remains on fijiivillage.com in its original form, including the audio clips which were sent to you upon your request.

This story was not "removed at 8:07 this morning" as claimed.

After addressing your complaint about Dhanjay, I resumed the original line of questions that Dhanjay had been unable to complete in his interview with you.

The content of our story, which we reiterate remains in its original form on fijiivillage.com, accurately reflects your response to our questions on the issue at hand.

Due to storage/space constraints in our system, unedited material is automatically deleted after stories are completed. Unfortunately we are therefore unable to provide the unedited material requested.

We hope this helps clarify the situation.

Kind regards.

Vijay Narayan
News Director
Communications Fiji Limited
Ph: 3314766 | | Fax: 3303748

COMMUNICATIONS FIJI LIMITED - RADIO NETWORK FREQUENCIES					
AREA/STATION					
Suva, Nausori, Central Division Nadi, Lautoka, Labasa	96.2	98.6	92.2	101	103.4
Sigatoka, Coral Coast, Ba, Vatukoula, Tavua, Savusavu	96	98.4	92	100.8	103.2
Rakiraki	96.6	99	92.6	101.4	103.8

From: Marc Edge [mailto:marc.edge@usp.ac.fj]
Sent: Wednesday, September 12, 2012 11:06 AM
To: vijay
Cc: 'ian'; Richard Naidu; Semi Francis
Subject: RE: As requested

Dear Vijay,

These are the clips from your radio story. I don't know if that story also included the sentence "He also said that we were rude and thinks that we are running a newsroom like BBC Hardtalk," which was on your website but was removed at 8:07 this morning. I am fairly certain that this was something I told you in a telephone conversation dealing with a complaint I had filed with you. If so, I believe you have contravened provisions of Sec. 5 Subterfuge and Sec. 23 Interviews of the Code of Ethics contained in the Media Decree. Absent any evidence from you that this is something I told your reporter, ie. the raw (unedited) audio of my interview with Mr Deo, I intend to proceed with a complaint to the Media Authority.

Sincerely,

Marc Edge, Ph.D.
Discipline Co-ordinator, Journalism
School of Language, Arts and Media
The University of the South Pacific
Suva, Fiji

From: vijay [<mailto:vijaynarayan@fm96.com.fj>]
Sent: Wednesday, September 12, 2012 10:31 AM
To: Marc Edge
Cc: 'ian'
Subject: As requested

Hi Marc,

The audio is attached as requested.

Kind regards.

Vijay Narayan
News Director
Communications Fiji Limited
Ph: 3314766 || Fax: 3303748

COMMUNICATIONS FIJI LIMITED - RADIO NETWORK FREQUENCIES					
AREA/STATION					
Suva, Nausori, Central Division Nadi, Lautoka, Labasa	96.2	98.6	92.2	101	103.4
Sigatoka, Coral Coast, Ba, Vatukoula, Tavua, Savusavu	96	98.4	92	100.8	103.2
Rakiraki	96.6	99	92.6	101.4	103.8

From: Marc Edge [<mailto:marc.edge@usp.ac.fj>]
Sent: Wednesday, September 12, 2012 8:31 AM
To: vijay
Cc: Semi Francis; richard.naidu@munroleyslaw.com.fj
Subject: RE: addition

Dear Vijay,

I am not going to pay \$70 to register on your site so I can listen to the audio. I ask you as a courtesy to provide it to me. Otherwise I will file a complaint with the Media Authority and they can compel you to provide it.

Also, I hereby give you notice to not erase or otherwise destroy either your broadcast reports on this story or the raw interview tape.

Sincerely,

Marc Edge

From: vijay [vijaynarayan@fm96.com.fj]
Sent: Wednesday, September 12, 2012 8:12 AM
To: Marc Edge
Cc: Semi Francis
Subject: RE: addition

Hi Marc/Semi

The audio is on fijivillage.com

For the record Marc, you did make those comments.

Kind regards.

Vijay

From: Marc Edge [<mailto:marc.edge@usp.ac.fj>]
Sent: Tuesday, September 11, 2012 9:40 PM
To: vijaynarayan@fm96.com.fj
Cc: Semi Francis
Subject: addition

Dear Vijay,

I notice you added late today the following paragraph to your web report on your reporter's interview with me.

"He also said that we were rude and thinks that we are running a newsroom like BBC Hardtalk."

<http://www.fijivillage.com/?mod=story&id=1109123e683c890d3ecf2dd64c0256>

That was not part of the interview but instead something I told you in a complaint. I consider this the lowest form of journalism. I intend to explore whether a complaint to the Media Authority is in order.

I request that you send me an audio version of your story as broadcast.

Sincerely,
Marc Edge

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Senior Lecturer Marc Edge

Claims made but no proper survey done

Publish date/time: 11/09/2012 [17:15]

Over the past few weeks, comments have been made by some individuals that the Fiji media is practicing self censorship and everything is not being covered although there is no proper survey done on this huge claim.

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One of the people who has made these claims is University of the South Pacific's Discipline Coordinator of Journalism, Senior Lecturer Marc Edge.

He has made comments here and abroad that Fijian journalists are afraid, uncertain and reluctant after the lifting of the Public Emergency Regulation.

He also said that they are not asking probing questions and may not know what to do after the lifting of the PER.

Fijivillage has questioned Edge what is the basis of his claim.

There is an audio file attached to this story. Please login

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We also questioned Edge whether he has evidence to prove his claim based on a survey and assessing coverage on a daily basis.

There is an audio file attached to this story. Please [login](#) to listen.

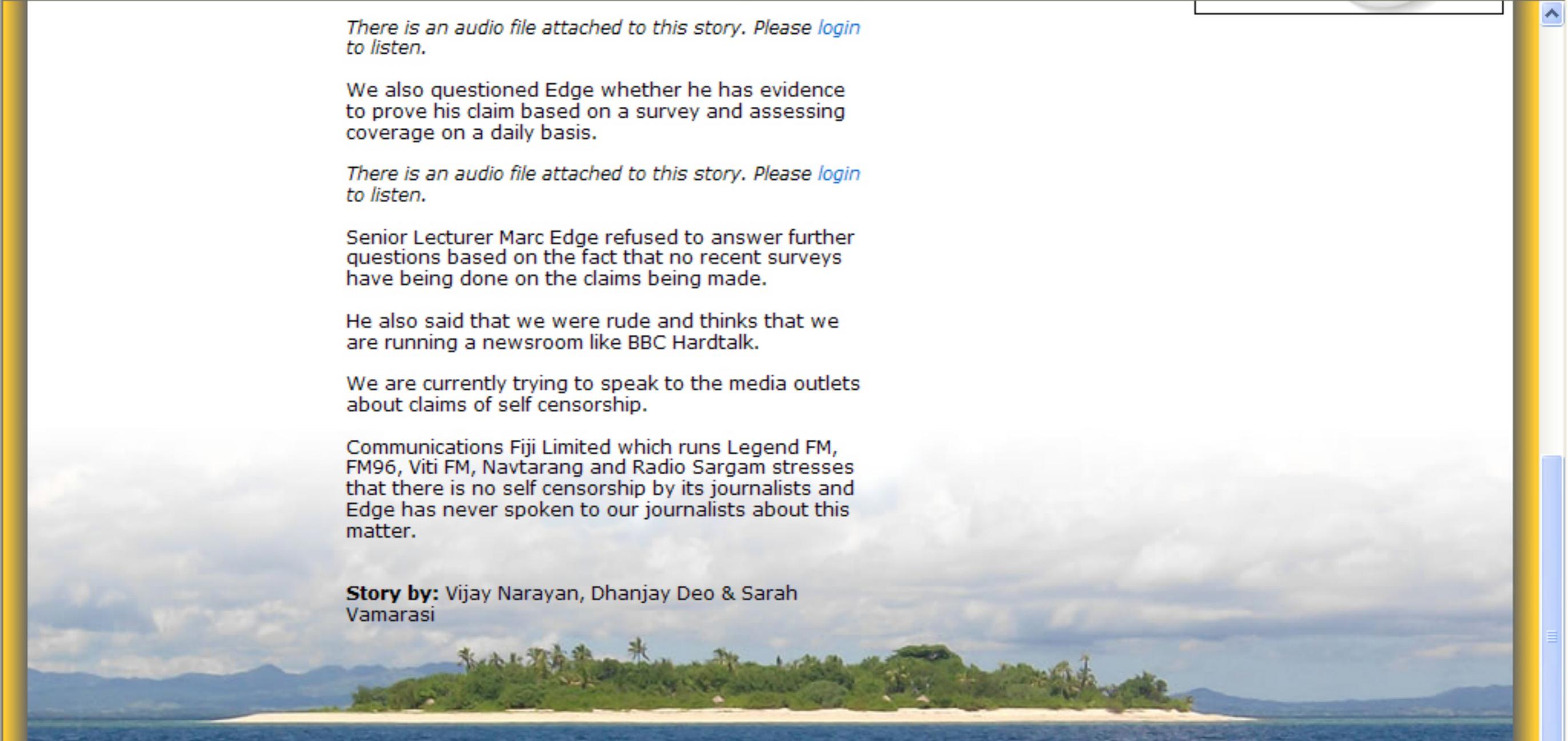
Senior Lecturer Marc Edge refused to answer further questions based on the fact that no recent surveys have being done on the claims being made.

He also said that we were rude and thinks that we are running a newsroom like BBC Hardtalk.

We are currently trying to speak to the media outlets about claims of self censorship.

Communications Fiji Limited which runs Legend FM, FM96, Viti FM, Navtarang and Radio Sargam stresses that there is no self censorship by its journalists and Edge has never spoken to our journalists about this matter.

Story by: Vijay Narayan, Dhanjay Deo & Sarah Vamarasi

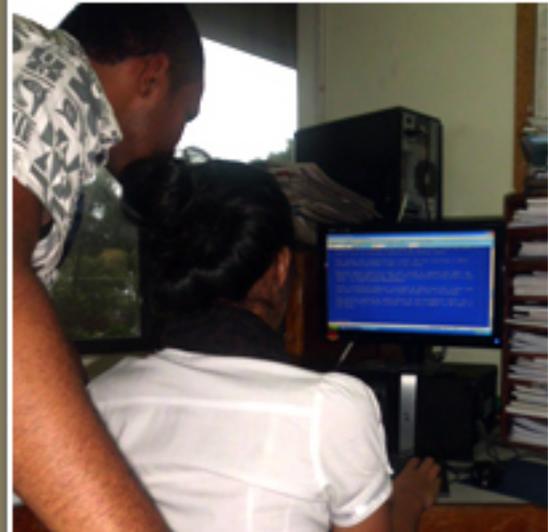


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Four media outlets confirm no self censorship

Four media organizations have so far confirmed that there is no self censorship in their newsrooms despite claims made by certain individuals in interviews and forums.

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We contacted the Fiji Times today and Editor Fred Wesley said they are not self censoring.



When questioned by Fijivillage, Wesley said journalists are not afraid or reluctant as claimed by people from outside the newsroom.

Fiji Broadcasting Corporation's Manager News Indra Singh also said there is no self censorship.



Communications Fiji Limited which runs Legend FM, FM96, Viti FM, Navtarang, Radio Sargam and fijivillage.com stresses that there is no self censorship by its journalists and no one including USP's Journalism Head Marc Edge has ever spoken to our journalists about this matter.

Edge has claimed in media interviews and forums that there is self censorship in the Fiji media.

When asked, he confirmed that he has not conducted any surveys in relation to this.

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AVIC

Fiji Broadcasting Corporation's Manager News Indra Singh also said there is no self censorship.



Communications Fiji Limited which runs Legend FM, FM96, Viti FM, Navtarang, Radio Sargam and fijivillage.com stresses that there is no self censorship by its journalists and no one including USP's Journalism Head Marc Edge has ever spoken to our journalists about this matter.

Edge has claimed in media interviews and forums that there is self censorship in the Fiji media.

When asked, he confirmed that he has not conducted any surveys in relation to this.

Fiji Sun Publisher Peter Lomas said there is no self censorship in Fiji Sun and anyone who reads the newspaper will know this.

Lomas said the journalists are not afraid.

He said no one from the Fiji Sun newsroom has heard from Marc Edge.

Lomas said Edge seems to be rather remote from the daily news media.

He also said Edge never spoke to one of the Sun's Deputy Editors who was part of a panel in the recent Media Symposium at USP.

We have contacted Fiji TV Editor Geoffrey Smith and he has referred all queries to Fiji TV CEO Tarun Patel.

Fiji TV has just said that it will not comment.

Meanwhile, Permanent Secretary for Information Sharon Smith-Johns said the government is not aware of self censorship in Fiji newsrooms.

Smith-Johns said all she has said is that if there is self censorship, then it should not happen and journalists should report without any fear or favour.

Story by: Vijay Narayan, Dhanjay Deo & Sarah Vamarasi

Advertisement for M-PAISA mobile payments, featuring a map of Australia and New Zealand and a photo of a man and a woman. Text: 'Now you can receive money from Australia & New Zealand directly on your mobile phone! M-PAISA'

Advertisement for AVIS car rental, featuring the AVIS logo and the slogan 'We try harder.' in a speech bubble.