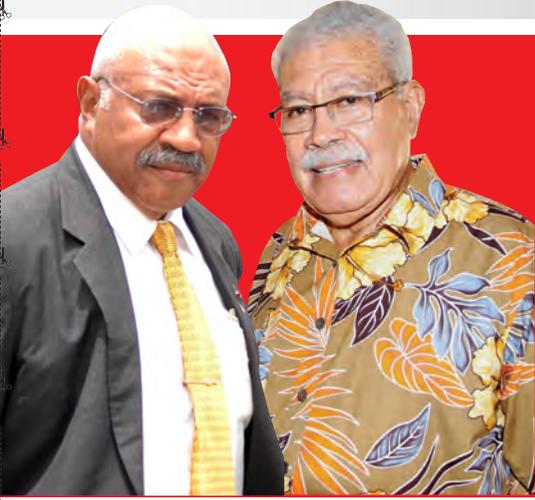


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PARTY LEADER BATTLE

RABUKA: QARASE OKAY TO CONTEST

But the former PM would need time and energy to take the party into the election, says the Opposition Leader

NEELAM PRASAD
SUVU

Speaking for the first time on the issue, the Opposition Leader said in Suva yesterday that Mr Qarase would have to have the time and energy to take the party to the 2022 General Election.

“The party leader has to be prepared to run for the following elections. We do not know whether he will want to do that,” Mr Rabuka said.

“It will be a personal choice, whether he has the time or whether he wishes to be embroiled in all these issues or he wishes to retain his freedom and be a statesman who can advise any political party on any topic. No harm in him being nominated.”

Although he did not elaborate, it is understood that he was referring to

Mr Qarase’s age.

Mr Qarase turned 78 on February 4, this year. Mr Rabuka is 71.

If he becomes party leader and successfully leads SODELPA in the 2022 elections, Mr Qarase would become Fiji’s oldest Prime Minister at 81 years.

Mr Qarase was non-committal when he was asked about his political future last week. It is understood that he had replied in the affirmative when he was sounded out recently. He appears to be in good health

Meanwhile, on whether he will contest the party leader post, Mr Rabuka said he would only be a candidate if people nominated him.

He said at the moment, he was no longer the party leader because he had resigned as required by the SODELPA constitution.

“My position is up for grabs now,” he said.

“That part is constitutional and my resignation has already been received by the party office.”

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An aerial shot of the distressed MV Liahona II taken by Salanieta Nalatu from a Kokomo Private Island Resort plane. Report on page 4-5



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