

FRIDAY, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 2015

The Parliament resumed at 9.35 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs; the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs; the Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forests; the Honourable S. Patel and the Honourable Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 24th September, 2015 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed. .

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

MADAM SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to the final day of the responses to His Excellency the President's Address.

I also warmly welcome members of the public joining us in the public gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet, as well as listening on the radio. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

I extend a very special welcome to students and teachers from Ram Lakhan Primary School in Nasinu. I trust that you will find today's sitting educational.

Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

External Examinations – Year 6

Year 8 Students have completed their second and final day of External Examination yesterday. I have been informed that today will be External Examinations for Year 6 students. I wish to reiterate my best wishes and that of this august House, to all the Year 6 students sitting their examination.

Budget Awareness Session

I wish to inform all Honourable Members that the Ministry of Finance is organising a Budget Awareness Session for all Members of Parliament. The session will be held on Monday, 28th September 2015 at Level 9 of Suvavou House, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. I encourage all Members to attend.

Rulings – Point of Order

Before we move on to the next item on the *Order Paper*, yesterday, Honourable Mikaele Leawere and Honourable Dr. Biman Prasad raised points of order and the Deputy Speaker referred both, for my consideration and ruling. I have examined the relevant parts of the *Daily Hansard* in question, and rule as follows:

In relation to the Point of Order by Honourable Mikaele Leawere, it has already been explained that the Minutes and *Hansard* are not the way to raise such issues. The Member could seek leave to make a personal explanation under Standing Order 80.

I will quote from my ruling on Monday, 21st September 2015:

“This process is used to explain to Parliament, matters of a personal nature that reflect on the honour or integrity of a Member. It can be used to correct an earlier answer, example, by a Minister or by a Member to correct an earlier statement or explain something that has occurred outside the Parliament, but it is not another channel for taking issue with or debating a statement made in debate or outside the Parliament on the grounds that it is mistaken or wrong.”

I would also like to point out that neither is this a misrepresentation. Again, I will quote from my ruling on Monday 21st September, and I quote:

“Misrepresentation arises solely out of a debate in the Parliament and has no application to any statements made outside of the Parliament. It is, in a sense, an exception to the rule that no one can speak twice in the same debate. So its application is confined to the debate in the Parliament.”

I trust that the matter is now clear to all Honourable Members.

In relation to the Point of Order by the Honourable Dr. Biman Prasad, at the outset, I will state that I have reviewed the *Hansard* and upon advice, also been informed that the *Hansard* only captured the Suspension of Standing Order 11 but the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament had also moved that Standing Order 34 clause (2) be suspended. This has been verified with the digital recording and the *Daily Hansard* will be amended accordingly.

The Member is correct that the Standing Orders make no specific provision for the making of such a statement, however I am guided by Standing Order 2 clause (1) which allows the presiding officer to decide not only on interpretation of the Standing Orders but deciding cases not otherwise provided for.

Closed Parliamentary Session

I refer Honourable Members to the second part of the Resolution passed by Parliament during the Closed Session on 27th August 2015, and I quote:

“b) the details of this motion be kept confidential until the raising of funds by the Government is announced to the market.”

I received communication on 23rd September 2015 from the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister of Finance, Public Enterprises, Public Service and Communications that the bond deal has been concluded.

Therefore, due to the public interest element in the reasons for the closed session, I felt that there should be no delay in making the announcement to the public and indeed that this be done in Parliament as this was the institution empowered to grant such approvals pursuant to the Constitution.

I thank the Honourable Member for raising the point and note his concern that the Opposition Members did not have an opportunity to respond. It should be noted however, that a closed session is an exceptional circumstance. Thank you.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

MADAM SPEAKER.- Before I give the floor to the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu, I wish to remind Honourable Members that you have up to 20 minutes each to speak. The warning bell will sound at 15 minutes and again at 20 minutes for the end of your speech. Thank you, and I now call on the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu to take the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Standing Order 33 on the *Order Paper* in terms of the Batting Order, Madam Speaker, or before I do so, can I welcome you back this morning, and...

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- ... also to tell you that the Deputy Speaker did a good job while you were away. I would like to congratulate him, since he comes from my mother's side of the country, Madam Speaker, and I am very proud of how he conducted himself.

And also, this morning, I would like to welcome the students from Ram Lakhan Primary School who have just completed their exams. I wish you well in your exams and I hope that you will go to a very good school next year. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In terms of the Batting Order, since the Batting Order did not go through the Business Committee, can I request in terms of the next Parliament Sitting, that is the Budget response, can we follow strictly the alphabetical order because yesterday we had on the Batting Order Honourable Anare Vadei whom we know, his surname begins with a 'V' so he should deliver his response today. We ask that the Secretariat look at that, in terms of the Budget response, and follow strictly that Batting Order, especially towards the end where our speakers are supposed to be on the floor. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much. The Point of Order is noted, and I apologise to the Honourable Vadei for getting him to make his presentation yesterday.

HON. MEMBER – (inaudible interjection)

MADAM SPEAKER.- No, I am not giving him another chance, so now the Honourable Vunivalu, please take the floor.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, *malo a bula*. Before I start my speech this morning, I would like to read a verse from the *Holy Bible*, in the Book of Mathew, Chapter 5 verse 9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of the Parliament: I would like to begin by thanking His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau for His Address at the opening of the new session of Parliament last week.

There is much wisdom to be gleaned from his words and I, as well as my fellow Members, am sure have been left with a certainty that is indeed much to be grateful for, much to be honoured for, yet also much to consider and do if one is to continue on the path of progress where everyone of us here have committed ourselves to when we took up our roles.

Madam Speaker, in particular I wish to address the House on an issue that resonated the most with me from His Excellency's Address. That issue is most clearly captured by these words, and I quote from page 3 of the *Daily Hansard* of 14th September, 2015:

“... I call on every Fijian to rally to the defence of the democratic process and the right of every Fijian to practice their rights. And as Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Military Forces, I believe the RFMF must whenever and wherever required, support the police in bringing to justice those who want to destroy democracy and impose their will on others. It is your constitutional duty to do so as the ultimate guarantors of the security of the Fijian nation.”

Madam Speaker, I have spent a large portion of my life both as a police officer as well as a military officer. I know quite well the roles of the military and police in our society. When His Excellency spoke those words, calling us to action and emphasizing the noble and esteemed duty of the military and the police, I felt the stirring of the long held conviction and I know now that I must speak and give voice to this belief.

Madam Speaker, recently I have begun to notice a certain trend amongst some groups, especially the Members of the Opposition. This trend is the painting of the RFMF and the Police in a negative light. This is an issue which must be addressed. It is true that our nation has endured much in the past. Our people have seen great adversity in the fight to build a land free of intolerance, corruption and racial division, but we have come out of this stronger and stand united, despite our many differences and the fact of the matter is, we would have no security, no order and no peace without the tireless work of these institutions. Some may disagree but do me the honour of allowing me to proceed.

Madam Speaker, for every person who join the military or the police force, such a decision is not one I believe is ever taken lightly. It is never simply an occupation but rather a role that once taken place, the pursuit of justice and the needs of the country above takes precedence the simple needs of our own. Think about it, a few other roles carry such high levels of risk to life.

Madam Speaker, these men and women are willing to put their lives at risk, to ensure that you and I rest every night in secure and crime free homes. Yes, they are not perfect, some of them have been known to lose sight of the ideals they once swore to uphold, but recently the lens of society seem only to focus on the failures. I ask that we all focus those lens, I ask that we see the officer who walks the streets when we are asleep, I ask that we see the officer who crouches in the dusty wilderness thousands of miles away from home, fighting for a better world and waving the Fiji Flag of our nation wherever they go. These selfless men and women here what you said in this House.

Madam Speaker, even my father, a retired military officer like myself, and other retired military officers and former servicemen are saddened and disappointed by these attempts to tear down the institution through which they boldly and bravely represented their nation. They remembered the pride they had served in the Malayan campaign and elsewhere, knowing that their people believe in them and their concerns for men and women currently serving their nation.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of this august House, before we speak, before we seek to tear down institutions such as the military, let us stop for a moment and consider the brave men and women here in Fiji, struggling to maintain peace and those doing the same high risk condition such as in Sinai, the Golan, in Iraq, in Lebanon or elsewhere in the world under any capacity who may hear our words in one form or another.

Madam Speaker, to disdain does them no good, to belittle does them no good. What they need is encouragement and hope, they need to know that their leaders are behind them, not tearing them down like bickering children.

Madam Speaker, to the rest of the people, I say resist the temptation to believe the words of fear and hatemongers of society. Resist the temptation to focus only on the times when people fail, see the good that has been achieved and the good that these men and women continue to strive to accomplish.

Madam Speaker, allow me to mention a brief piece of history; the RFMF that we know today traces its origin to the Armed Native Constabulary (ANC) that was established in 1870 by Ratu Seru Cakobau. When World War 1 broke out, decades later, the Colonial Empire for whatever reason, instructed the local office not to send any native Fijian to partake in the fray. One ambitious young man refused to accept this decision and even after being denied enlistment in the British Army, joined the French Foreign Legion. He believed that the Colonial Empire would never respect Fijian unless they prove their worth and he sought to do so upon the battlefield in a time of war. He returned home a war hero, recognised for his bravery and valour and laid the foundation for Fiji to become independent.

Madam Speaker, this was Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna. He has been followed by other great names that have been moulded by these institution and whose drive, discipline and determination has steered this country through its most difficult hours. If you disagree with me, look around you, right here in this Honourable House on both sides of the room, there are products of these institutions. You may argue about some of their actions, but that is alright to do so and I would be honest enough to admit that few other institutions have produced people with such strength of character, namely in the likes of Ratu Penaia Ganilau; Ratu Epeli Ganilau; our very own President, His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau; and our Prime Minister, Honourable Josaia Bainimarama and 14 Honourable Members sitting here today- 10 from the Government and 4 from the Opposition side who have all been shaped and moulded by the Military.

This is a legacy that passes to some of their children as well, who have been known to rise today in esteemed and highly respected positions in society. Just one example is the honourable Member sitting right in front of me, the Honourable Roko Tupou Draunidalo, daughter of a former military man. Yet, there are those who criticise and also other opposition planning on hiring 1000 men and women who would be jobless if we are to lose our Military.

Madam Speaker, to what I had said earlier about the need for us to refocus the lens through which we see the police and the military, I would like to draw the attention of this Honourable House to positive examples of the work of this institution. Firstly, the work done in the community. The cadet programmes that instil discipline to youths and students in secondary schools all over the country is a perfect demonstration of this. We live in what is often termed as the "information age." Our young people are constantly subjected to a variety of ideas which forced them to grow up too quickly. Their values are quickly challenged, their belief systems constantly under attack, their environments often changing and what these programmes seek to create is a sense of commitment. When you move in precise harmony with a peer, a sense of commitment and belonging is created - a commitment to your fellow citizen and a commitment to your nation. These institutions are also instrumental in relief efforts before and after natural disasters.

I have seen that most of our engineer officers direct people to evacuation centres, maintain orders in times of great anxiety and near panic, and even aid in the clean-up efforts afterwards. This is the effect of institutions trained, built and maintained as a single force intent of keeping the peace.

I know that today is Sapper's Day and Happy Sapper's Day to all the engineers in Fiji, including all the former Engineer Commanders; the Honourable Lieutenant Colonel Rika, the Honourable Lieutenant Colonel Tuitubou and the Honourable Colonel Ratu Isoa Tikoca who are in the House today, and others planning on moving throughout the country to keeping the peace and aiding in relief efforts during natural disasters.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to thank one of my friends, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Baker who is here in the country, together with Colonel Peter Connolly, the Director International Engagement who are leading the planning team for Australian Defence Force (ADF) conducting reconnaissance for exercises conducted in Fiji, based in the Government Operational Plan for Humanitarian Aid (GOPH) and Disaster Relief. It will involve the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and the Police. The benefit of this exercise is to provide lessons where the RFMF assists Vanuatu this year and also prepare for any cyclone et cetera.

Madam Speaker, is the opposition planning on hiring 1000 of men and women who will be jobless if we were to lose our military? Madam Speaker, returning to what I had said earlier about the need for us to refocus the lens through which we see the police and the military, I would like to draw the attention of this Honourable House to positive examples of the work of these tireless institutions. Firstly, the work done with the community, the cadet programmes for young people in secondary schools all over the country.

Madam Speaker, there have been discussions this week on the Constitution and its worth. Attempts have been made to undermine this document from different angles. One of these was in relation to Section 131 and how it seems to vest undue power in the Military. This is a notion I reject completely.

Section 131 (2) states, and I quote:

“It shall be the overall responsibility of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to ensure at all times the security, defence and well-being of Fiji and all Fijians”.

This is not a provision that should make us doubt the Constitution. It should assure us that the drafters of this Constitution sought to ensure that our people were to remain at all times to secure and defended by an institution committed to their well-being, that the military has been given necessary principles and vital functions - the security of our citizens, peace and security, amongst the most cherished values rights amongst civilised people. Also, in our beloved Fiji, where we stood on the principle of disasters, too often we see in the international news dreadful human toll in the Middle-East conflicts. We pray that our RFMF brothers and sisters in the region be kept safe but, Madam Speaker, can you imagine the disaster if something like that were to ever happen here, if anyone of us thinks otherwise, as a Member of Parliament, to resign immediately.

Madam Speaker, peace and security means every citizens being able to go about their daily lives in a lawful manner and without interference from those who undermine the rule of law and the most fundamental law - the Constitution. This is not a provision which should make us doubt the Constitution. It should ensure us that the drafters of this document sought to remain at all times secure.

Madam Speaker, I am not an eloquent speaker. I have devoted most years of my life to the service of my country, the military and the police and truly, I say, that these institutions of peace, order, justice and security, do not focus only on times that you think they have failed. Focus on the memorable times that

they have succeed and if we are to criticise, let us not do so for no reason other than to tear down. Make our criticisms positive. If people cannot improve the role of these noble institutions then perhaps they should reserve their position for other pursuits.

Madam Speaker, as a former rugby player who has also played in the World Cup, in 1987, where we reached the Quarter Final, I wish to convey to the Flying Fijians "all the best, never to lose hope." There is still hope, you still can win two games and reach the Quarter Final. May God bless the Flying Fijians.

Madam Speaker, allow me to conclude by thanking His Excellency once more for his Address and for guiding our nation through two terms of his Presidency. I wish His Excellency the President, the First Lady, Adi Koila Mara Nailatikau and his family, nothing but the best in the future.

I would also like to take this moment to thank my late manager, Maikeli Namua, Emele Namua and family their constant support for me and to the Police and the Military for their fine support and their work. We are the representative of the people; that is true and that is also why I try to remember to say "thank you" and be thankful to the people who play a role in helping us achieve things we were once afraid of and to even dream about.

Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu* and *shukriya dhanyavaad*. May God bless Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now invite Honourable Jone Usamate to take the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members; I rise this morning to address the statement delivered by His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, and also I would like to say hello to all the students that are here with us this morning.

The Address by His Excellency the President was both timely and admirable. His Excellency the President has been a true servant of this nation, a Soldier, a Civil Servant, a Diplomat, Army Commander, Minister, Speaker of the House and a true people's President. He assumed the important role of President at the critical time in our nation's history, and has been, without doubt, the right person for the job.

He has been a friend to the downtrodden, a champion for the underdog. He has shown us what it means to champion a cause and to pursue it with genuine passion. He was equally comfortable at home having tea with Heads of States, as he was walking the streets of *Suva* joking with market vendors. This ability to engage with all levels of society shows his true quality as a leader. That is why, Madam Speaker, I cannot understand some comments made in this Parliament about His Excellency's Address.

I am appalled that some have seen fit to denigrate the words of this great man. It reflects how worse on themselves, than it ever could on His Excellency the President.

(Chorus of Interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- It has been stated in this august Parliament by some that the Address given by our President was not gracious and that it did not set out Government priorities, I beg to differ, Madam Speaker. The Speech by His Excellency the President has highlighted the items most critical for Fiji's future; the priorities for Fiji in the long term and the priorities for making Fiji a successful, sustainable country.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Yes.

He has highlighted the importance of stability, of democracy, of unity and patriotism. Without these things, there is no possibility of long term success for Fiji as a nation. When you build the stability, when you build the unity, when you build the democracy and patriotism, you build a better Fiji.

(Chorus of Interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Order! We need to hear the Honourable Member, please.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is his message. It is a profound message, and it is a message that we must turn into action. That is the focus of this Government, and has been the focus since 2006.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister be asked to address the Chair, instead of looking at us.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I was doing that until he started shouting, and we have shown that it works.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, do not look anywhere else but speak to me.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Let me repeat, , we have shown that it works, these values, with this Government's focus and delivery, we have been able to generate new confidence in the Fijian economy, despite the stagnation of the global economy. We have unprecedented levels of investment. Three consecutive years of growth, all in excess of four per cent, and we have growth of more than five per cent in 2014. These achievements are not accidents. They are not accidental, they are the direct result of developing consistent economic policy, focusing on the right things and delivering on our promises. They are the direct result of our Government actually doing what we say that we will do.

In His Address, His Excellency touched upon the need for patriotism and on putting the needs of this country first. Our country has had many dark periods since our Independence. These periods were caused by those who are not true patriots, those who did not have the best interests of Fiji in mind. Their actions were divisive and detrimental to Fiji's progress as a nation.

I have been appalled to see the same unproductive rhetoric in the august Parliament used by Members of the Opposition. These kinds of statements take Fiji backwards, into the past and do not foster the unity and togetherness that the FijiFirst Government seeks to create.

In contrast to this, Madam Speaker, our Prime Minister has always stood for an inclusive Fiji where everyone has equal rights and access to prosperity. He has identified the problems of the past, the intolerance, the discrimination and the small segments of the population who wreak havoc on the country as a whole, and he has said that enough is enough.

(Chorus of Interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- He has united us as a country because he recognised that unity is our strength, and that the brightest future is the future we fight for together. He worked hard to build the new set of values that are embodied in our Constitution, values that will make all of us stronger, you and I, and everyone else. That, Madam Speaker, is true patriotism.

(Chorus of Interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

I think some Honourable Members who are saying those interjections, you need to have respect for His Excellency the President and also to the Honourable Member who is one the floor delivering his speech. Please hear him out.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, the answer to Fiji's success can be found in the pages of our Constitution.

GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Yes. (Applaud)

This Constitution underwent national consultation and the people were invited to contribute on an unprecedented scale.

FijiFirst went into Elections with the platform based on our Constitution and won 32 of the 50 seats in Parliament, a resounding reflection of the people's affirmation. The people's will of the FijiFirst Government and for the new Constitution. This is a Constitution that everyone in this Parliament has sworn to uphold in an oath to God. It would show a clear lack of integrity if someone swore to protect this Constitution, and in the very next breath attempted to disown the Constitution. That kind of unprincipled behaviour has no place in this Parliament.

There is another falsity being propagated by the Opposition, that the rights of the *iTaukei* have not been respected. This notion is detached from reality. Madam Speaker, our Constitution explicitly spells out the protection of *iTaukei* culture, language and land. The Preamble of the Constitution says, and I quote:

“WE, THE PEOPLE OF FIJI,

RECOGNISING the indigenous people or the *iTaukei*, their ownership of *iTaukei* lands, their unique culture, customs, traditions and language;”

Section 28 of the Constitution has the rights of ownership and protection of *iTaukei*, Rotuman and Banaban land. Section 30 talks about a fair share of royalties.

Fiji has specific laws, to ensure that these rights are safe at all times and will always be an important part of our national life. There are institutions in place to ensure the protection of every aspect of the *iTaukei* land. There are programmes underway, as I speak, these institutions include:

- 1) the Ministry of *iTaukei* affairs;
- 2) *ITaukei* Affairs Board;
- 3) *iTaukei* Lands and Fisheries Commission;

- 4) the Institute of Language and Culture with its Cultural Mapping Programme and identification of living treasures;
- 5) the National *iTaukei* Resource Owners Conference;
- 6) the development of villages bylaws;
- 7) the computerisation of VKB and the *Tukutuku Raraba*; and
- 8) the development of an Access Benefit Sharing Framework to provide guidance of *iTaukei* institutions on issues regarding genetic resources' access.

These institutions are carrying out their roles and these programmes are ongoing to guarantee that no aspect of *iTaukei* life or culture will be forgotten. At no point in our history has there been a stronger effort underway to address those concerns. I, as an *iTaukei* am happy to see that these protections are in place, to preserve our culture and our way of life, and I am confident that real action is being taken.

Madam Speaker, culture is dynamic, it is not static. As time moves on, culture changes and progresses. All cultures in the world transform in this way, our *iTaukei* culture is no different and has and will continue to evolve. Over our long history, many of our old customs have become irrelevant and have been done away with, within the name of progress and we are better off for it. That is because the only constant in life is to change itself. Over time, our culture and way of life is bound to change, but we will always keep what is most important, what truly makes us *iTaukei*.

Personally, I know that there are new values that I must incorporate in my own life, if I want to succeed in this modern fast pace world. Some of these values differ from the values we held 100 years ago but no matter what happens, I will always be proud to be an *iTaukei* and a Fijian, and I stand here confident that our Constitution protects the things that are important for me, as a Fijian

Madam Speaker, I now wish to discuss the right to health for all Fijians and the work my ministry is doing to further this goal. In his Address, His Excellency the President mentioned the importance of the Constitution and the many new rights, the right to health is one such example.

The right to health is a major Pillar of this Government and we have enacted a variety of programmes and policies to address this. Over the past few years, there has been a focus on improving leadership and governance in the sector, new legislation have been put in place, covering areas such Ambulance Services, Allied Health Practitioners, HIV/AIDS Treatment and Prevention, Medical and Dental Practitioners, Medicinal Products, Mental Health, Nurses, Pharmaceuticals, Optometrists, Tobacco Control Decree and NCDs is reflected in all of these legislations.

(Honourable Nawaikula interjects)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

Honourable Nawaikula, the constant frivolous interjections is lacking the respect of the House. Please, refrain from doing that. Honourable Minister, you may continue.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, these laws have provided the Ministry with the direction and foundation for improving health services nationally. There will be a focus on making these legislation work more efficiently to consolidate and strengthen them over the coming year. There will also be a focus on looking at amendments to existing legislation, key of which is the Public Health legislation.

At the same time, we are striving to improve the performance of all our leaders in the health sector at all levels by encouraging our leaders to lead with energy, to energise others, to execute and deliver results, to empathise and work with passion. Good execution comes from strong management and leadership at all levels.

The Government will continue to treat health as a major financing priority. The Ministry will improve budget utilisation and ensure that every dollar is used to make a positive impact on our nation's health. We will continue to explore other financial avenues from our development partners and encourage public private partnerships and outsource non-core roles of the Ministry, such as security, cleaning services and morgue services, and look at other services to be outsourced, such as laundry and kitchen.

We will also continue to focus on providing relevant, reliable and timely health information, so that we can make decisions based on accurate data. In addition, we have established a Policy and Planning Unit which will work closely with our Health Information Unit for planning in the ministry. Information systems are vital, and will continue to be a major focus.

Having and retaining an adequate number of quality skilled workers has been a major challenge for my Ministry. The Government has, therefore, approved 200 extra positions for nurses and 100 for doctors annually since 2015. In addition, Government had also approved extra position for our Allied Health Workers in 2014.

Our target is to meet the World Health Organisation Standards on doctor to population and nurse to population ratios by 2017 and on that note, I wish to express my appreciation to all health staff, who worked long hours, 24 hours at times, 36 hours at other times and go through extreme difficulties in trying to provide the service that the public needs. I meet such people all the time and I salute their dedication. There will, however, be a continued focus on service delivery and customer service, and we will look to the Civil Service Reform to strengthen our managerial and leadership systems.

The Ministry continues to respond to the clinical demands from nursing stations, health centres, sub-divisional and divisional hospitals. Yesterday, we heard a comment from Honourable Prem Singh, relating to an issue that has been brought up in Parliament in the past in which an inquiry was undertaken and this is a sad fact of life in health. We try to help as many people as possible but sometimes unfortunately, we cannot. I can inform this House that the inquiry has been completed, the report is about to be given to me, I have seen the recommendations, those recommendations are already being implemented so we can improve the service that we provide.

The other issue that was brought to me was the issue of overtime, yes, the allotment of overtime had been overspent, had been completed but nevertheless, we have made instructions and we are looking within the Ministry to see how we can address these overtime pay and pay it. But, at the same time, Madam Speaker, we are also looking at strengthening the management of overtime because we must make sure that the money that is given to the Ministry is used in the best possible way.

There will continue to be an emphasis on expanding services, quality, improvement and assurance, improving risk management and enhancing resilience to natural disasters by strengthening disaster response, preparedness and recovery.

Madam Speaker, we had decentralised services, such as our General Outpatient in the Central Division, and we will roll out to the Western and Northern Divisions after infrastructural changes are completed.

We have also decentralised Mental Health Services through the establishment of stress wards in the Divisional Hospitals and Satellite Clinics in the Subdivisional and Health Centres. In Divisional Hospitals,

we have embarked on specialisation and sub-specialisation services such as Urology services, Cath Lab Services, Neurology and Plastic Services after the attainment of relevant Post-Graduate qualification of our officers.

We continue to do outreach services from the Divisional and Sub-divisional level in order to increase accessibility of health services by our people, therefore, reducing out-of-pocket expenses for health. We have also noted a continuous increase in visiting teams, who have offered services to Fiji, such as open heart surgeries in CWM and Lautoka. A major drive has now commenced in the Ministry to improve the processes that we have identified as priority within the Ministry. As I speak, we are putting in measures to continue to reduce waste in medicine, and to build up upon our prior improvements over these past few years.

We have constructed new nursing stations, health centres and refurbished Subdivisional and Divisional Hospitals in order to meet the demands of the community and also to improve accessibility of health services. Recently, we have seen the new Navua Hospital, new Cuvu Health Centre, Vatukarasa, new maternity wing in Sigatoka, Saint Giles Refurbishment, Nagatagata Nursing Station, CWM - additional operating theatre in Intensive Care Unit, refurbishing the CWM Emergency Department and many others. Work continues on Makoi Maternity, the new Naulu Health Centre, the new Ba Hospital, Rotuma Hospital, among other projects.

In addition, new hi-tech equipment has been procured to improve patient care. All of the above achievements mark substantial progress and have contributed to our significant success over this past period, as indicated by increases in life expectancy, improved health outcomes from mothers and children and reduction in communicable diseases, mortality and mobility. There is always room for improvement and we will focus on doing that, to ensure that every Fijian has access to quality health care.

Madam Speaker, we have set ourselves a plan for the upcoming period of 2016 to 2020 and our focus will be on the two pillars of preventive, curative and rehabilitative health services and on strengthening the health system itself. In enacting this plan, our priority areas will be NCDs because this now accounts for 40 per cent of health care. This is an urgent issue and we will focus on a comprehensive approach, to reduce the risk factor by working with people to alter their lifestyle. On that note, I invite all Members of Parliament to participate in the Westpac Walk for Life that will be taking place tomorrow at 6.30 a.m. from My Suva Park.

The other priority will be on Maternal Infant and Adolescent Health and we will look to strengthen our antenatal care.

The third priority will be on communicable diseases, environmental health and Health Emergency Preparedness Response and Resilience. We will work to improve surveillance and develop a stronger multi-sectoral approach to risk management, and a reminder to everyone listening in, this is also the season where we will launch a clean-up campaign against mosquitoes. We invite everyone to go out there and seek and destroy places where mosquitoes are breeding.

The expansion of primary health care is going to be another focus for us. We, in this House, we have had requests for additional services around Fiji, and I can advise Members and members of the public that when requests do come, we assess them and where we feel that it is the best way to use the money that is available to us, we will make your services available.

Developing and retaining a productive and motivated Health Force is a priority, having a right structure, having the right people in place and retaining them. Engagement with evidence-based policy planning, implementation and assessment will raise the standards of policy planning, implementation and monitoring, ensuring and strengthening the availability and quality of medicinal products, equipment and

infrastructure. We will work to understand the needs of our communities and begin projects tailored to their necessities.

Sustainable financing of health: We will explore long term financing to assist in Government funding, and we will also in the Ministry, commit to other things that we have committed to, such as the Healthy Islands Commitment of the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting where we will work towards a Pacific and a Fiji, where children are nurtured in body and mind; where environments invite learning and leisure; where people work and age with dignity; where ecological balance is a source of pride, and where the ocean which sustains us is protected. We also pay a special attention to World Health Assembly Resolutions, and we continue to work towards universal health coverage.

Madam Speaker, the major issue that impacts the world today, especially in the Pacific, an issue which threatens the very existence of life itself and human life is the issue of climate change. Climate change also has major challenges for health because it has an impact on health, in terms of coastal erosion, supply of drinking water and the increases in temperature. This will also be a major concern to the Ministry. I can assure this august House and the people of Fiji that the Ministry of Health is focused on delivering all the priorities of the FijiFirst Government, all the priorities related to health and health care and every day, we are building a better and healthier Fiji. Today, I would like to wish all the pharmacists around Fiji, a happy Pharmacists Day in the world here in Fiji.

In closing, Madam Speaker, once again, I would like thank His Excellency, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau and the First Lady, Adi Koila Nailatikau, for the work that they have done for this country and I wish them well in the years that are ahead.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and may God bless us all. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa to take the floor.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; first, a big *Bula* to the students at the gallery, ladies and gentlemen.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to thank His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, for his most gracious Address and for his invaluable service to this nation. His Excellency stated the need to develop and maintain a safe and prosperous Fiji, the need to embrace true democratic principles and to work together regardless of ethnicity, religion or social economic status. He also urged us to place our country before our personal or political interests. His Excellency encouraged a debate among Members of Parliament with national unity, national interest and the common good, always at the forefront of our minds, and to do so with intellectual honesty. His Excellency asked that all 50 elected Members of Parliament in this august Parliament, put the honour back into Honourable when carrying out our duties, he summed it up by saying and I quote from page 5 of the *Daily Hansard* of 14 September, 2015:

“Without honesty and humility on all fronts, we will never progress as a nation, as leaders and as individuals.”

I could not agree any more.

The question we must now ask ourselves is, how have we fared on that scale of honesty and humility in this august Parliament over the past year? How have we fared on that scale through our debates and our interjections? It is obvious that each of us in this august Parliament, knows that every statement we utter in this House, is heard by hundreds of thousands of Fijians in Fiji and all around the world. Do we care about the accuracy of the words that we say or do we intentionally misrepresent facts for political

expediency? Sadly, the latter is true for many of the Opposition. Allow me to give a few examples of how, in this august Parliament this very week, the Opposition has misled the very people they were elected to serve.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER: Shame

HON. M. VUNIWAQA: - On Monday this week, an Honourable Member of the Opposition, while talking about the Nawailevu landowners, referred to a \$600,000 fair share of royalty for the future generation. Where did they get that fact from? I ask the Nawailevu people and other landowners, whose land currently or may potentially be used for mining, to please contact me directly for facts relating to issues you might be grappling with. The \$600,000 for Nawailevu is not a fair share of royalty, promised under Section 30 of the Constitution, as the Opposition wrongly stated here on Monday this week.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER: Shame

HON. M. VUNIWAQA : - The \$600,000 is a fund given by the company to assist with the welfare of Nawailevu's future generation.

HON GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Ohh..

HON. M. VUNIWAQA : - The Nawailevu people have yet to get their fair share of royalty, as the formula to determine that fair share will be part of the review of the Mining Act, as stated by His Excellency in his Address. Until that happens and until a fair share of royalty formula is set, royalties will be held in trust by Government. So, to the Nawailevu people, your royalties will be shared once the formula is set.

The same Opposition Member when comparing PNG landowners to Fijian landowners and their abilities to make investments in Fiji on tourism developments, attributed the difference in the respective positions to, and I quote: "Because they are selling minerals they own through their investment company."

Minerals in PNG, like in Fiji, are owned by the State.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Very poor.

Section 5 of the PNG Mining Act, 1992 states this.

HON. A SAYED-KHAIYUM: - Get your facts
(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order!

(Chorus of interjections)

(Madam Speaker stood up)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! I would like to hear the Honourable Minister's statements. Members of Parliament, members of the public at the gallery and those who are watching television would also like to hear the Honourable Minister's statements. So, please, allow her to make her statements without constant, frivolous interventions that is affecting the honourable Minister to be heard. Please, bring back respect to this House. Thank you.

Honourable Minister, you may continue.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, landowners in PNG like Fijian landowners now under the 2013 Constitution, get a share of royalties. The big difference between the levels of benefits received has to do with the relatively minute volume of minerals extracted in Fiji compared to what is extracted in PNG. Royalties as we know, are based on the volume of minerals extracted. So, in essence, the promise of a fair share of royalties to landowners under Section 30 of the Constitution, is a new benefit, one which relevant landowners will receive for the first time next year.

Madam Speaker, if we are able to lie about these things in this august Parliament or if we adopt a lackadaisical attitude...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order. The Honourable Minister uttered the word "lie", which is not Parliamentary. Can she be asked to withdraw what she said?

HON. P. KUMAR.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I have not finished yet.

I was told by you, Madam Speaker, to retract that very word, so could I ask for consistency, please?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I think the standards point out that you cannot call an Honourable Member a liar. You can say something is a lie but you cannot say "you are a liar" or "you are a crook", or "you are a thief."

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is the same thing!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You cannot. No, Madam Speaker, it is a very different thing. We can say that the other side, for example, is not telling the truth.

HON. NIKO NAWAIKULA.- That is what I said.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- But you do not actually singularly point out and say that Honourable Niko Nawaikula is a liar, you cannot do that.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I think what the Honourable and Learned Attorney General said about the use of the word "lie", you cannot use it to another Member of Parliament in this august House but you can refer it to something that has been said outside of Parliament.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What's the difference!

MADAM SPEAKER.- There is a big difference, I am sure you know, Honourable Member..

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- I rise on a Point of Order, Madam Speaker., just a clarification. I think what Honourable Nawaikula said was that, the Government was lying and if I recall correctly, you had ruled that out. This is exactly what the Honourable Minister is saying that the Opposition is lying. I mean, if that is allowed, then that is fine. We can all say, "the Government is lying" or "the Opposition is lying". I think you ruled yesterday that Honourable Nawaikula could not say that...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Exactly!

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- ...because in the past, we have heard a lot of statements from the Government side, including the Prime Minister, who said, "the Opposition lied before the Election, they are lying now" and it was never ruled out. So, I think we need to be consistent, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, if I take your words correctly, she was referring to the information that was a lie and not to a Member, please have that clear.

You may continue, Honourable Minister.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, if we are able to lie about these things in this august Parliament, we

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Who is we?

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Members of Parliament. It is Members of Parliament, if we are able to lie...

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order, please.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- ... about these things in this august House or if we adopt a lackadaisical attitude about the accuracy of the statements we make, we risk destroying our own credibility with the Fijian people. Where is the honour in that?

Another general sweeping statement by the Opposition this week generates a lot of questions in my mind. I quote:

“A lot of indigenous people are still fearful and resentful of the power of the elites over economic and commercial influences and resources, there is a popular thought that *iTaukei* land is not safe”.

The question we need to ask ourselves as Honourable Members of Parliament is, are we fuelling the fires of fear and resentment amongst our own people? Have we pointed out the protection under Section 28 of the Constitution to allay these fears of the safety of indigenous land? Have we told those who are fearful of losing their lands that the permanent ownership of all indigenous lands shall remain with indigenous owners for all time? Have we told indigenous landowners that where Government compulsorily acquires land for a public purpose, it has a constitutional duty to return those lands when they are no longer being used for that purpose, if the acquisition was made from the commencement of our Constitution? Have we even bothered to tell our people that a Constitution which provides for this protection is the supreme law of the land and that no other law can be made to contradict the intention of the Constitution in this regards?

I hear a resounding silence, a no from the other side. Why not? Because those Honourable Members have allowed their own personal opinions and positions on the Constitution to cloud their duty to tell the Fijian people the truth, that the Constitution protects indigenous lands from permanent alienation. This is despite the fact that those very same Members swore and I quote, “... to obey, observe, uphold and maintain the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.”

If we do not agree with Constitutional provisions, that does not mean we can abstain from our duty to tell the Fijian people the protection that it offers. In this case, the protections and recognitions guaranteed for the land, cultures, customs, tradition and languages of the *iTaukei* and Rotuman people. The failure to highlight the positive attributes of the Constitution is a tell-tale sign of prioritising political gain above our duties as Honourable Members of Parliament, a tell-tale sign of the intellectual dishonesty His Excellency warned of in his speech.

We also have heard and witnessed intentional exaggeration of facts to mislead the Fijian people and incite them to potentially break the law. Earlier this week we heard of and I quote, " ... a discovery of huge sources of minerals in the Western Division, huge deposits of gold, silver, copper", along with the possibility of seven or eight more Vatukoula. We also heard about Wayasewa, supposedly having a volume of gold similar to that being mined on Lihir Island in Papua New Guinea. The fact is, the Vatukoula Gold Mine is the top producer for gold in Fiji. It is the biggest gold deposit in Fiji and there has been no other major gold discovery in Fiji the size of Vatukoula to-date.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, Point of Order 62. She is implying that the information I brought to this House is not accurate. I did not and I am quoting from a reputable geologist and it was only two weeks ago when this information was given to us in a forum made up of responsible people, Madam Speaker. I take issues and I resent the fact that I am being blamed for bringing wrong information to the House. Madam Speaker, I have the facts, if need be I have the facts.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, you can bring that issue up in another debate, but the clarification made by the Honourable Minister is based on the information that is available from her Ministry and we appreciate that. Thank you, you may continue.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, as Minister for Mineral Resources, all explorations in Fiji to-date, the data for that is with the Mineral Resources Department. I base my statement on those data.

(Applause)

HON. M. VUNIWAQA:- Vatukoula is the biggest gold deposit in Fiji and there has been no other major gold discovery in Fiji the size of Vatukoula to-date. The only other significant gold deposit in the Western Division is the Tuvatu deposit, which is not as large as Vatukoula. It is impossible to have another seven or eight Vatukoula in the West as determined by the results of current mineral explorations.

The Waya prospect on Wayasewa Island is just a mineral prospect at the moment. It is under application for a prospective licence by a company and the licence has not even been granted as yet. It has potential, but all speculation remains unproven at the moment.

We have heard a comparison between Wayasewa and Lihir gold deposit in PNG. Waya and Lihir are both small islands, but that is where the comparison ends. Lihir is a proven gold mine whereas Waya only shows potential. Just to put things further into perspective, Lihir Gold Mine production averages at about 800,000 ounces per year, compared to Vatukoula's average annual production of 84,571.31 ounces per year, and yet we have heard gross exaggerations as to the scale of the discovery on Wayasewa.

Misleading the Fijian people has become a favourite tactic of some on the other side. They give speeches which are designed to play on the vulnerabilities of some sections of the Fijian community. However, these speeches are rarely rooted in facts.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to turn to the work of my Ministry. In my maiden speech a year ago, I undertook to build on a solid platform that was laid by our Honourable Prime Minister to grow the Ministry for Lands and Mineral Resources. I promise that through this, I will transform our Ministry into one of the most efficient, compassionate and transparent ministries in Government.

I remain committed to that goal today. Apart from some key initial internal initiatives carried out by the Ministry this year to elevate our level of service delivery, the Ministry also commenced some life changing reforms which stems from the promise which the FijiFirst Party made to the Fijian people during its campaign last year.

From early this year, the Ministry has started issuing 99-year State land leases to farmers seeking a renewal of their agricultural leases for that term. The long term leases now give these farmers impetus to invest more into their farms and gives them stronger collateral for loans down the road.

In recognising the importance of sugar to our economy, a special initiative is currently underway in the Ministry to renew approximately 200 expired sugarcane leases in the Western and Northern Divisions to assist these farmers in taking advantage of the current amnesty period for payment of interest on lease arrears. This will give them certainty on land tenure ahead of a new sugarcane planting season.

The Ministry has also opened up the uptake of agricultural leases by those farmers who already own an agricultural lease and who have proven themselves as capable farmers. The past restriction of one agricultural lease per applicant has now been removed and instead committed farmers can now expand their farming capacities beyond the one lease.

Another promise by the FijiFirst Party was made to those living in informal settlements on State land to whom we promise regularisation of their occupancy. This entails the issuance of approval notices in the first instance and leases thereafter, when such settlements are fully developed to meet subdivision standards. We must understand that the development of such settlements may take years depending on the availability of funds, but settlers must rest assured that this Government is committed to this initiative and its aim to empower all Fijians, no matter their circumstances.

The Ministry of Lands was allocated a budget of \$800,000 for 2015 to begin this important work for those settlements on State land. For this year, our target was 9 informal settlements with 170 lots to be regularised. So far, several scheme plans have been completed and approved creating 342 lots with security of tenure to at least 122 families within the next month or so. Most of these families have lived in these settlements for decades and have taken their situations as informal settlers or squatters as the norm. The initiative by Government to actively seek out such settlements and regularise them is a life changing event for these settlers.

The regularisation of such settlements may take more than four years, it might even take more than a decade, but this is a start which the FijiFirst Government has no intention of stalling. These initiatives and others will continue into 2016, along with our continuing commitment to elevate service delivery to meet customer expectations.

One of the key projects which the Ministry will be undertaking in the upcoming year will be the updating of Fiji's geodetic datum, in accordance with international standards. To us lay people, this is the updating and correction of data relevant to coordinates and geographical positions in Fiji, to account for the shifting of the earth's axis every year. This will lend more accuracy to applications such as the global positioning systems or GPS, when used in Fiji.

In His Address, His Excellency the President spoke about Government's legislative programme for this session of Parliament, the review of the Mining Act is one such law. My Ministry is committed to ensure that the mining sector is poised for long term growth and sustainability in alignment with the Constitution. The Act will need to address the fair share of royalty formula envisaged by Section 30 of the Constitution. Work on this has already started with preliminary meetings being held between the Department of Mineral Resources, the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board and the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs to map out a way forward for the formula through public consultations.

The review will need to address the crucial elements of environmental protection and sustainability in alignment with the green growth framework and Fiji's other national and international obligations on environmental sustainability. It will also need to address the social implications of mining, that so far had been dealt with as a collateral issue rather than as a central issue for mining in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, as we venture into a new year of service in this august Parliament, I echo His Excellency's Address and request that we raise the tone of the forth coming session and lead the nation by example, and that we talk about our country and our economy in a responsible manner by debating with civility, humility and with national unity, national interest and the common good always at the forefront of our minds and to do so with intellectual honesty. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order to correct a misrepresentation made by the Honourable Minister, and I do so under Standing Orders 81. The misrepresentation is that, she said that this side of the House or in particular, I, because I referred to it, misled the public on the group rights of indigenous people to land, to their culture and to their identity by saying that it is not protected. To correct that misrepresentation, Madam Speaker, I quoted from the Human Rights Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) which says that Fiji is in breach of the group rights of indigenous people in relation to the land, to their culture by the Government's failure...

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Point of Order.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... to get prior and informed consent.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Can we just hear him out?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.-to consult with us and to obtain our prior and informed consent in relation to the 17 Decrees, which touch on our land, our culture and our identity; that is the correction.

HON. M. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, that Point of Order is really premature. He should wait for the *Hansard* Report and see what I said. I never referred to group rights in my speech and he can confirm that tomorrow.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Acting Prime Minister for his Right of Reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise again, as I am the final speaker to essentially summarise, if you like, again to thank His Excellency our President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau for His most gracious Address. I think this House has, notwithstanding some of the disagreements some of the Honourable Members on the other side may have had with the content of his Address, but they all have acknowledged the fact that His Excellency our President was indeed and is indeed a great Statesperson and indeed served us well as our President.

Madam Speaker, generally the closing up speech tries to encapsulate what was the motion about, but I think given the fact that a number of comments had been made by the contents of the Address, I would like to perhaps summarise that and perhaps remove some of the misapprehension and perhaps lack of comprehension of the Address of His Excellency the President.

Madam Speaker, the contributions from this side of the House and also the other side of the House was very interesting to say the least. I can summarise the debate in such a manner, there was generally negativity from the other side, there was positivity from this side of the House including that half of the other side (referring to Government members).

Madam Speaker, this side of the House focussed on the future, the other side of the House dwelt in the past, they tried to rewrite the past and indeed perhaps far renew from the reality of the past.

Madam Speaker, this side of the House accepted and recognised that there is still work to be done. This side of the House recognised that there were flaws and that we must all work together for the better.

The other side of the House did not recognise any improvements as has been made to-date, at least of all, under this Government. They failed to recognise that, they do not want to recognise that.

The other side of the House, Madam Speaker, was steeped in what I would call “a gloom and doom picture”, hypocrisy and not accepting the facts. They were economical with the truth. This side of the House, Madam Speaker, told the truth. This side of the House does not live in “Alice in Wonderland” stuff.

Madam Speaker, the other side of the House, apart from intellectual honesty did not have the intellectual rigour. We need to be intellectually rigorous in this House to make any positive contribution. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, from this side of the House, we were intellectually rigorous.

(Applaud)

Madam Speaker, last but not least of all, I have to say that the other side of the House provided a lot of entertainment. Sometimes, it felt like we were in a bit of a circus, that we were before court justice, but I can tell you from this side of the House and that side of the House (referring to Government members), we also had very wise counsel, wisdom and respect, and respect for the essence of what His Excellency our President had said to us.

Madam Speaker, a number of issues were raised and I could probably summarise into about six or seven thematic areas. One of them was what I call the topic of “democracy and hypocrisy”. When the other side of the House talks about democracy, many of them actually forget how some of them directly benefitted and indeed were part of the 1987 two *coups* and they were also supportive of the events of 2000. They failed to ignore that and they failed to acknowledge that. They failed to say that some of them were involved and part of the Deed of Sovereignty, as was highlighted by the Honourable Natuva

Madam Speaker, they failed to also acknowledge that some of their relatives (families and spouses) benefited from it, but they are only focus is on the events of 5th December, 2006. They quote that USA is a great democracy but they fail to mention the flaws within that democracy; the treatment of the indigenous people in USA, the treatment of the people who are downtrodden in USA. It is one of the most unequal societies in the world today. Look at those social rankings of them, solving America's inequality puzzle.

The Fijian Constitution, Madam Speaker, this is why it has socio-economic rights, as many of the Members of this House have elucidated because we want to be able to address, not just the civil and political rights but also socio-economic rights. That is very, very critical, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, they also of course forget about slavery under the Constitution of the United States of America. They also talked about and focussed on Multinational Observer Group (MOG) Report. They tried to undermine the electoral system. Unfortunately, for the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, who is not here this morning, she drew a completely false analysis. She said “You could not compare the voter turnout of 2014 with the voter turnout of 2006 because in 2006, the people who were below the age of 21 did not vote”.

Madam Speaker, how flawed is that? Voter turnout is based on the percentage of registered voters who actually turn up to vote. So you can have 10 registered voters, nine of them turned up, you have 90 per cent turnout. You can have one million people and you get 100,000 people who turned up - you have 10 per cent of the people who voted. That is how flawed their analysis was, Madam Speaker.

We have heard and I understand one other speaker had talked about how the Honourable Prime Minister's vote was only about a third because it was 200,000-odd, because of the 900,000 people in Fiji, but 900,000 people in Fiji are not registered to vote, it is only the registered voters who actually voted. You do not have two 2 year olds voting, you do not 10 year olds voting.

Madam Speaker, I also want to point out the hypocrisy in the democracy argument is none of them referred to the *EU Elections Report post 2006*. When we had a high of turnout of invalid votes of 9.4 (I stand to be corrected, it was in the 9s), when the EU Report also highlighted that there were people, in particular Indo-Fijians who were not registered properly. Their anecdotal evidence of the fact that where Indo-Fijian population resided, polling stations were not put close to it. Those were all the types of anecdotal evidence and also the EU Report had referred to that, but none of them highlighted that. The National Federation Party did not highlight that, Madam Speaker, we thought that they would. This time around, Madam Speaker, it was such a high voter turnout, the percentage of invalid votes was 0.7 per cent.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

Under Section 48(c), I think the Honourable and learned Attorney-General might be imputing improper motives when he talks about intellectual rigour, when he talks about what NFP did not say. The only thing I said about the Elections was the recommendations of the Multinational Observer Group (MOG). So there was a very clear expression of what I was trying to say that the Government and the Parliament needs to pay attention to the MOG recommendations. I think what he is implying is that, we are deliberately ignoring facts but the focus of my presentation, Madam Speaker, was on MOG.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much. Actually the Point of Order process is really on the rules and procedures of the House, but not on content. We have other opportunities to address the contents within the Parliamentary process and that can be addressed accordingly.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, in fact, they forgot to also highlight that the current electoral system allows for small minority parties to even have representation.

A case in point, NFP: 5.4 per cent of the votes they received, they are here today with 3 people. Previously, they received much higher votes. This is the lowest percentage of votes they have ever received. They have received much higher votes, Madam Speaker, from 1999 until 2006, but they were absent, except for Honourable Prem Singh, who came as one person, even though they received more than 20 per cent of the votes.

Madam Speaker, the other notion that I would like to talk about

(Honourable Member interjects)

Welcome, welcome because of this Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the other issue that obviously people did refer to was the economy. Honourable Prem Singh yesterday said that the economy is being driven by consumption-led growth. The Honourable Prem Singh is incorrect to say that the current economic growth is by consumption-led growth, it was. We accept that - it was. The latest figure shows since last year, it is investment-led growth. Unprecedented percentage of our GDP, being driven by private sector investments, and State-owned investments and State investments too. Madam Speaker, 19 per cent (over nearly two-thirds) of the 25 per cent is driven by private sector growth, so it is investment-led growth.

The Honourable Leader of the NFP mentioned about the bond, when I talked about the bond. He flippantly sort of rejected what he said about 6 per cent not being that much different to 6.875 per cent.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- The difference - 6.8 and 9.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, 0.1, 0.2., and 0.8 per cent is critical. Splitting hairs is intellectual rigour.

Madam Speaker, the overall point is this, that when we talk about the economy, as His Excellency our President said, we need to talk responsibly. If hypothetically you have an Opposition, that is for 4 years whacking the economy, running it down for only political interest, if they win Office the next time, what do you think would be the state of the economy regarding confidence?

Madam Speaker, confidence building in the economy also rests a lot on the type of dialogue that we have in the national space. It is very, very critical, Madam Speaker. The point is, as His Excellency our President said, when we talk about the Government, national unity, our nation and our economy we need to be responsible about it. That is the point I am trying to make, Madam Speaker.

Responsibility lies with everyone in this House. Of course, the economy can do better, can do a lot better. Of course, the economy is far better than what it was than previous times. Yes, we have very good policies in place, Madam Speaker. All multilateral agencies and the investor community is saying "The Fijian economy is poised to do well." In the same way, they talked about unemployment. Madam Speaker, it will be very hard to find an economy anywhere in the world that has full employment – very hard. They talk as if unemployment is only the curse of this Government. What was the track record of the previous governments?

We accept - the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations said and accepted - that there was unemployment. Of course, there is unemployment and we must remedy it. That is what we are here for, that is what we want to fix but let us accept the facts. Do not just simply say "Oh, there is unemployment." We are trying to find the solution, work together to find the solution.

We had appealed in the opening address that I gave, Madam Speaker, to the other side, in fact, a number of Honourable Ministers had appealed to the other side to let us work together on these matters of national interest, and that is what we are saying again today - let us work together to fix up all these matters of national importance. The economy is very critical, getting jobs for our youths is very, very critical and that is what we are focussed on.

Madam Speaker, the issue of indigenous rights has been raised a number of times. It is an issue that has been flaunted politically. The ILO Convention has been cited; 20 countries in the world have ratified the ILO Convention – 20 countries only, UNDRIP is cited - the Declaration. I have a paper here with me, Madam Speaker, that does a comparison of international law and indigenous rights in Fiji. We have not seen any ideas emanate from the other side, in particular from Honourable Niko Nawaikula, who simply just says, "ILO Convention", "indigenous rights." What does it actually mean? What is our experience by the Colonial powers on the treatment of the indigenous people in Fiji? We get told in this House that, "Oh, our rights are being defrayed because we cannot speak in the *iTaukei* language."

Madam Speaker, the Constitution says that the unique language of the indigenous people is recognised. It does not mean that by not speaking in this House that their rights are being defrayed. When they go to court, they do not speak in the *iTaukei* language, they do not speak in Hindi, they do not speak in Gujarati, they do not speak in Tamil, they do not. Witnesses who appear and cannot speak the English language, what they say is translated. Lawyers do not speak, lawyers speak in the English language because that is the *lingua franca* of this country.

We get taught in the English language. We read in the English language, we are assessed in the English language but they fail to tell you, they fail to tell this Honourable House, they fail to tell the people of this country that under this Constitution, and it is the only Constitution that makes teaching of the *iTaukei* language compulsory in all primary schools; they forget to mention that. They forget to mention that.

They are citing experts who are saying languages and dialects are dying out. Madam Speaker, if you read any book on linguistics today, any contemporary book on linguistics, it will tell you that many languages or dialects in many countries are slowly fading away. It is not the result or the fault of this Constitution, of the Bainimarama Government or the FijiFirst Government, it is what we call the effects of globalisation of social values in place. There are many people in Fiji who lament the fact that not many people in Fiji speak Fiji-Hindi anymore, they say it is a dying language. It depends on the family. It depends on the values in place. It depends on what language we speak in the House, Madam Speaker, but under this Government, we have translated climate change documentation in the *iTaukei* language. No other government has done that.

The Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services talked about all the various institutions that exist to promote *iTaukei* culture and promote *iTaukei* language. They do not acknowledge that at all, Madam Speaker. They do not acknowledge the fact that now when we have all these foreign dignitaries coming to Fiji, we have different parts, different provinces of Fiji performing the *veiqaravi* and the traditional ceremonies. We only had one group of people performing before, only probably from one province. Now we have people from Ra, Ba, Nadroga and Vanua Levu. We had a fantastic *meke* ceremony of close to 100 people I understand in the opening of the Nausori Market, people from Nakelo. This is all being promoted, Madam Speaker. They fail to acknowledge that. The reality is the practicality of speaking in a language that many people may not understand because we are speaking here now, we want everyone in Fiji to understand what is happening. If we allow the vernacular language to be spoken in this House and we say that this Parliament is for everyone, the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure will start belting it in Tamil, who is going to translate it?

(Chorus of interjections)

If Honourable Viam Pillay starts speaking in Tamil and if Honourable Singh starts speaking in Punjabi, who is going to understand that? He is not trying to say good. Are there any translators in this Honourable Parliament? Madam Speaker, I am trying to give an example to show the frivolity of their argument, to see how they are twisting and turning these arguments. That is really a fact, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the other thing is that, I understand one of the Honourable speakers yesterday talked about the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC). The reality is, Madam Speaker, the GCC did not exist until it was created by the British. It is a fact, Madam Speaker.

Also, the Honourable Member spoke about, "you have the Sangam, you have the Muslim League, you have the Arya Pratindhi Sabha and therefore we must have the GCC." Madam Speaker, these organisations are educational and religious-based organisations. They are not a political representative body, they are not a hereditary body. If you want to do comparisons with Sangam and Arya Pratindhi Sabha, Arya Samaj and Muslim League, you compare it to the Methodist Church, the Catholic Church, the New Methodist and the Seventh Day Adventist Church. That is comparing apples with apples. That is the point of fact that needs to be acknowledged.

Madam Speaker, as the Honourable Minister for Lands pointed out that we need to ensure that when we are arguing, when we are presenting our views, it is not simply just to stir people up and give them misinformation. We must talk about facts, we must contextualise it, we must talk about what is good for Fiji.

Madam Speaker, a couple of points before I finish off, a lot of mockery has been made by the initiative that the FijiFirst Government has put in place to help those people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. They say, "oh, you are giving freebies?"

Madam Speaker, I want them to go and talk to the people who are the beneficiaries of free medicine. I want them to go and talk to the people who are the beneficiaries of free water and who earn less than \$30,000 in a household. I want them to talk to the people who receive subsidies for 85 kilowatts users of electricity and below. I want them to talk to parents whose kids are now in universities, who otherwise would not have been able to attend if it was not for TELS, if it was not for the scholarship programme, or are able to get to the school because of bus fare subsidies.

Madam Speaker, the whole idea of it is to create a level playing field. It is not restricted to any ethnic group, any province, any social strata, any district and it is done with caution. It is done with standards. It is done with transparency, it is done with sustainability in mind, Madam Speaker. That is the point. And that is why, Madam Speaker, these initiatives are good. We are also working to try and fix up the very regressive taxation system. We need to think of a very intellectual way around of how we can fix up the taxation system. The Bainimarama-led Government lifted the income tax threshold from \$8,600 to \$16,000. In other words, those people who now earn less than \$16,000 do not pay any tax, before they used to pay tax.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Indirect tax.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- If they paid tax, Madam Speaker, they paid 15 per cent. Now they pay above \$16,000 at seven per cent. Yet at the same time, we have an anomaly - stop pulling or point scoring (to interjections from Opposition).

We have an anomaly where we have VAT-exempt items but the rich are also benefitting from it. If we want to give assistance and this is what you see, these people call it the "freebies", it is targeted. You say, "you earn below this amount, you get this. You earn less than this, you get it. If you cannot pay your university fees, you will get it."

So it is targeted and that is what we are focussed on, Madam Speaker, and I think it is an insult to those people who are receiving it to say that they are getting freebies. It is an insult to say to them, "you are getting handouts." As our honourable Prime Minister has said, "it is a hand up". It is a hand up, we are lifting them.

(Applause)

The micro-finance, the thousand dollar grant is to help those people, Madam Speaker, who may have their pigsties that they need to get fixed up, so they can get another three more pigsties or get three or four pigs. Maybe for them a thousand dollars is not much, but, Madam Speaker, that is what it does. The lady who is selling handicraft, she cannot move along because she spends all her money, she cannot buy more raw materials, by giving her a thousand dollars, we are helping her, we are giving her the leg up.

(Applause)

Madam Speaker, the other point that I want to make, very quickly, they talk about indigenous rights. I want to give this paper to the Honourable Nawaikula because the African Commission on Human Rights actually dealt with a notion of indigenous rights and how they dealt with it, and how critically important it is. We love to share this information with them. We want to share that information with them so we can educate them about it too, and they can get exposed to more ideas.

(Laughter)

Similarly, with the ILO Convention, a lot of comments were made about that and we love to educate them about it.

Madam Speaker, one last point before I summarise is that, a couple of Honourable Members from the other side have accused the Honourable Prime Minister of not talking to the leaders of SODELPA and NFP. I spoke to the Honourable Prime Minister last night and he said to me, "How can we talk to them when they do not even believe in common and equal citizenry? How can we talk to them when they do not believe that everyone should be called a Fijian? How can we talk to them when they debunk this Constitution all the time? The reality is, some of those leaders think we are still in Marlborough House days; closed room, you represent this ethnic group, I represent that ethnic group, let us talk and let us get the deal done. This party believes in listening to the ordinary people of Fiji; the ordinary people, the ordinary people, not the elites. The ordinary people of Fiji have voted for these people. They want to hear our voice and that is what is happening.

(Applause)

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, again, they are misquoting. They want to do closed room stuff, we said, "let us do open room stuff". The future is very bright, we believe the future is bright, we believe, of course, it can be brighter and we are working towards that. Come join our hands, you want to hold my hand, you truly can, and we will work together; not closed room talks.

(Inaudible Interjection)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Don't play cheap politics!

Madam Speaker, Fiji Airways is going to fly to Singapore by March or April next year. We are getting our airport to have a \$105 million facelift. We have four lanes coming out of our airport.

Unemployment, Madam Speaker, is being reduced, the economy is growing. Honourable Salote Radrodro's concerns will also be addressed and that is why we are being prudent. We always address your concerns, Honourable Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the projections are very good, the economy is doing well. Of course, there are many areas, as highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Health, Minister for Agriculture, and everyone in this room, there is always room for improvement.

Let us work together, Madam Speaker. Let us live and talk and breathe the essence of what His Excellency our President said to us in the Opening of this session of Parliament.

I once again, thank Him for His gracious Speech, and move that His Address be accepted by this House. *Vinaka vakalevu* and thank you.

Question put.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	28
Noes	-	8
Not voted	-	14

Motion agreed to.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of our sitting today and this week. I take this opportunity to thank Honourable Members for your contributions to the debate on His Excellency the President's most gracious Address.

Again, I would like to remind Honourable Members that the Budget Awareness Session will be held on Monday 28th September, 2015 at Level 9, Suvavou House from 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.

The Parliament is now adjourned until Monday 12th October, 2015 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.19 a.m.