

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**THURSDAY, 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2017**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

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## **THURSDAY, 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2017**

The Parliament resumed at 9.36 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HON. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

### **PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs [Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts]; the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports; the Honourable Assistant Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment; the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture; and the Honourable Ratu S.V. Nanovo.

### **MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 13th September, 2017, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

#### Acknowledgement

HON. SPEAKER.- Today, we have with us law students from the University of Fiji, Suva Campus. Welcome to Parliament and I hope your visit will be a fruitful one.

I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting and I also welcome members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet, and listening to the radio. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

#### Interjections

For the information of Honourable Members that when interjections become too disruptive, the Honourable Members on the floor can stop, and may continue when the interjection stops. The Honourable Member will have extra time to make in his or her speech, and this I had also mentioned yesterday.

### **RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT**

HON. SPEAKER.- We will now resume debate on His Excellency's Speech and I give the floor to the Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, thank you very much. Madam Speaker, I would like to re-echo the sentiments of the Honourable Prime Minister, who as we know is currently in Montreal and will go on to New York in respect of not just the UN General Assembly, but also the Climate Change meetings that we are having.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President gave a wonderful Address to this Parliament and this morning as I was preparing to put together some thoughts as to what I should say this morning, I was somewhat stunned to put these words together because I was in fact quite jaundiced by the input by the Honourable Members of the Opposition because it is quite a sad day or sad few days of the past few days the quality and the level of contributions by the Honourable Members of the Opposition to a very profound speech made by His Excellency the President.

Madam Speaker, I feel compelled, I was in fact going to talk about what His Excellency the President talked about in respect of the economy. I was going to actually talk about how the economy has grown for the past 8 years, projected to grow for another 2 years; 10 years of unprecedented growth, Madam Speaker.

I was going to talk about the fact on how unemployment has actually dropped in Fiji to such low levels for the first time in the past 15 years, Madam Speaker. I was going to also talk about how inequality has actually dropped. All these figures, Madam Speaker, actually can be verified by independent third parties.

I was going to talk about the level of investment in Fiji that has exponentially grown in the past few years, fundamentally because of the fact that investors feel a huge level of confidence in the Government's policies and the consistency in policies.

In fact I was going to give some more figures, Madam Speaker, regarding, for example, our new levels of reserves. Our foreign reserves just yesterday went beyond \$2.4 billion; unprecedented, never happened in history before.

(Acclamations and chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, it is unprecedented.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President said that we should come together on these matters as a nation. What is really irksome, Madam Speaker, is that the Honourable Members of the Opposition cannot extricate themselves in matters of national importance from their political agenda. That, Madam Speaker, is a very sad situation.

HON. P. CHAND.- (inaudible)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The brain from Vanua Levu must stop, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The brain from Vanua Levu must stop.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Salote Radrodoro yesterday in her quest to demean our important efforts at the global level in COP23. She said, "Why has it taken 22 conferences and 22 COP presidents to address the issue of global warming and the whole international community is still a long way from concluding an international treaty or convention on climate change?"

What a preposterous statement? Paris Agreement, Kyoto Protocol; countries have ratified, these are enforceable by law. The Paris Agreement comes into effect in 2020. Why do you think we are working towards it?

Madam Speaker, this is a level of ignorance that has been demonstrated by the Opposition. It is actually a replete ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... all their statements are replete with inaccuracies, lack of understanding of the law, lack of understanding of the history, lack of understanding of what is happening globally and misrepresentation of facts.

The other Honourable Radrodro who confused Penang Mill with Rarawai Mill and in fact shut down the Rarawai Mill in his budget address talked about the ship in the pond. He does not even know that Fiji Ports Corporation is a legal entity that is supposed to be responsible for that. Again, he has got it wrong. Again, he does not know what the facts are. Again, he does not know about maritime insurance. Again he does not know how claims were made. Again, he does not know, Madam Speaker, not a clue at all, not a clue at all.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I am glad the law students are here actually, Madam Speaker. We can give them a history on our constitutional development in this country, which they selectively choose. Selectively choose!

HON. MEMBER.- Tell them!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They talk about the 1997 Constitution, let us talk about the history of 1997 Constitution. Let us in fact talk about the history of the 1970 Constitution. The history of the 1970 Constitution is this. A group of men decided at Marlborough House as to what Constitution we should have. We then had the 1970 Constitution.

A man by the name of Sitiveni Rabuka carried out the first *coup* on 4th May in this building, the bullet shot is still there. Unfortunately, the plaster-man covered it to make the building look good. He carried out the first *coup*. He carried out the second *coup* on 25th September in the same year, Madam Speaker.

The Constitution was abrogated then. We had 5 years of Decree-led governance. We then had the 1990 Constitution that did not get approved by any Parliament. A group of men went around Fiji calling themselves the Constitution Review Commission and they put in place the 1990 Constitution which entrenched ethnic voting. Skewered ethnic voting also, Madam Speaker, but let me get back to all of that too.

Madam Speaker, and then you see, these are the people who want to run a 21st century modern state of Fiji, these are the people.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, and then the 1990 Constitution, then they had a review of the 1990 Constitution. The Reeves Commission sat, which had Brij Lal, Sir Paul Reeves and Tomasi Vakatora, the three-member Commission. They went around Fiji. What was the

recommendation of Reeves Commission as far as the electoral seats were concerned? They said, "We need to move away from ethnically chosen representatives". In fact, Madam Speaker, they chose to read the Reeves Commission Report, they had more open seats than ethnic seats.

Then there was a Joint Parliamentary Select Committee (JPSC), which consisted of people from the Opposition and from the Government. A political compromise was reached. Honourable Chand was in Parliament then but he was not part of that Joint Parliamentary Select Committee, a gentleman sitting there was a member of the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee. This is how I know about the inner workings. There was huge political compromises made and the Reeves Commission Report was flipped. It was flipped. Reeves Commission said, "No ethnic voting" but let us have very few ethnic seats, more open seats. The JPSC then switched it around, they had more ethnic seats and less open seats, that is the history.

When they talk about Constitutional history, they actually do not mention that. Honourable Nawaikula talks about the so-called entrenched provisions in the 1997 Constitution.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Tell those people there.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will tell them now. Do not worry, I will tell them.

Madam Speaker, under the 1990 Constitution, so-called protection. Under the 1997 Constitution, which they actually hold it like some holy grail ...

(Honourable Member interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ...it was under those two Constitutions that this gentleman here, when he was the Minister for Lands converted *iTaukei* land to freehold land. The 1997 Constitution was there.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Within the law.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He says "within the law", this is beautiful. He says within the law, precisely, Madam Speaker, that is the point, the law was flawed. There was no Constitution provision. There was no Constitution provision.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, I wish to rise on a point of order, especially Standing Order 62. He is imputing improper motives by coming up with a decision that was made in Cabinet. That is highly confidential, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Especially in the Oath of Office.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. You are all aware that Parliament has the freedom of speech and they are protected with the freedom of speech, I will allow that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I did not impute nor did I even directly say that anyone broke the law. All I said "they acted within the law." But the law was profoundly flawed. The law that they say protected *iTaukei* land rights was flawed.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Notwithstanding the entrenched provision that Honourable Nawaikula keeps lauding about, it is still meant the Government of the day could convert *iTaukei* land to freehold land, permanently alienated from the Land Owning Unit - permanently. They did it in Denarau, they did it in Momi and it happened within the precepts of the law. The point being, Madam Speaker ....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- That is what the landowners want.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Oh, wow that is what the landowners want! Oh wow! Oh wow! This is wonderful.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- You listen to them now.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I really do not want to respond to this because I really have a lot of respect for Honourable Karavaki, he is a *talatala*, he is going to dig himself deeper into a hole.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- What hole is it?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What he is saying, Madam Speaker, let me take him into history. When Governor Sir Imthurn, ...

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Yes!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-... started converting and he said that the *iTaukei* landowners, the commoners, must have a right to choose ....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Shame on you! Shame on you!

HON. SPEAKER.- Are we ready to listen now? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- When Governor Sir Imthurn, Madam Speaker, said that there was a huge difference between the chiefs and the commoners (you can read the History books) and he said that "therefore we should allow the commoners to be able to choose what they should do with the land" and as a result of which, a lot of land was then subsequently alienated.



The first Governor of Fiji, who now became Lord Stanmore, was back in England quickly, then he had an Imthurn called back because he said, “no, this people at the moment we will have a permanent alienation of land which should be to the detriment of the future generation of the *iTaukei* people.” At that time, he said “Indigenous Fijians.”

And the Honourable Member is saying that if the *i-Taukei* landowners actually agree that it is in the interest to convert *i-Taukei* land to freehold land, guess what will happen? Guess what will happen? Already, Madam Speaker, we have people who will go and give a few thousand dollars to someone within the landowning unit and just start carving out a bit of the forest, just start carving a bit of the fish. This is precisely the reason why we need to have protection, precisely the reason why we need to protect communally-owned property rights.

Madam Speaker, for the first time in Fiji's history, we have a constitutional provision that guarantees that communal property rights.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And that is under the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. Under the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, it unequivocally states that no *iTaukei* land can be permanently alienated from them. Period! In fact, Madam Speaker, it also goes...

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- It was there before. It was there all the time.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- In fact, you turned all the State land.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Wait, I will come to you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, ....

HON. SPEAKER.- Oder! Can we listen now?

Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, there was no constitutional provision in the *1970 Constitution* in the *1990 Constitution* in the *1997 Constitution* that unequivocally stated that *i-Taukei* land cannot be alienated. There was no constitutional provision. They had entrenched provisions which meant these laws cannot be amended, Native Land Trust Act cannot be amended unless you have certain percentage of Senators agreeing to certain percentage of Parliament agreeing to it. But if the law is flawed in the first place that allowed for the permanent alienation of the land, then what use is that.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Useless.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What use is that, what use is that?

HON. P. SINGH.- You have your rights.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This is the problem with them you see, they are caught, they are caught with it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What His Excellency the President said, Madam Speaker, he reminded us in all of this, when we have all our discussions, we must speak the truth. We must speak the truth. They are hiding, Madam Speaker from the truth. They are giving us half-truths, Madam Speaker, that is one aspect of the constitution they talked about.

Madam Speaker, there are numerous other issues. I want to highlight another issue and again, going back to His Excellency the President, he talked about how we should rise above the political so-called differences on national matters.

Madam Speaker, after the *1970 Constitution* was decided in Malborough by a group of people, as you know the Fiji National Federation Party at that point in time wanted what they call common seats or open seats - no ethnic voting. Mr. A.D. Patel was fervent on that. Mr. A.D. Patel unfortunately died at the eleventh hour, then Mr. Siddiq Moidin Koya became the Leader of NFP. He put out an olive branch to Ratu Mara and said "All right. For us, the most important thing is to have independence."

They were pushing the ethnic voting and he said, "Alright, we will do that but let us have a review on that. After independent let us have a review of the electoral system and then whatever recommendations are there, we can adopt it." This is why, Madam Speaker, and your Library would have this.

There was a gentleman by the name of Sir. Lawrence Street. There was a Sir. Lawrence Street Commission that sat, took everyone's views and Sir. Lawrence Street again said, "We should move away from ethnic based-voting, we should have more open seats and progressively do away with this, you cannot run a modern nation on that basis."

Unfortunately, the then Prime Minister took Sir. Lawrence's Report and put it up on the shelf. The NFP was very angry, Mr. Siddiq Koya was very angry but, Madam Speaker, it did not stop him from participating in all the National Day Celebrations. He went to all the National Day Celebrations. He was the Leader of the Opposition, he was part of Parliament, so he went.

None of these people turned up at Constitution Day, except Honourable Prem Singh. How can they say they want to participate in the country, to move the country forward? This is the Constitution, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

Why can they not want to participate, Madam Speaker? It is beyond them because, Madam Speaker, I can tell you, most of these people, preferably those three are, but maybe in certain ways, they are extremely bigoted about the way they look at our country.

Most of them in all of their presentations have talked about the *iTaukei* people. They talked about how their rights are being infringed and there are implicit threats in that. They use religion, concoction of religion, concoction of ethnicity for their political supremacy.

You cannot run a modern nation State like that, Madam Speaker, people quote from the *Holy Bible* all the time, yet they do not see the contradiction. God, Jesus Christ did not say there should be discrimination on the basis of ethnicity.

They talked about my arrest in 1998. I went in 1998, Madam Speaker, they should look at the placards that were being held up. The placards said, "There is only one race and that is the human race". That was why I was there, Madam Speaker, because I believe in the equality of all human beings. All of us are God's children. They cannot move away from that way of thinking that they have. It is a very skewed way of thinking, Madam Speaker. Is that something peculiar to this Fiji? People abusing other countries with their concoction, ethnicity and religion and that ultimately led to the downfall of any country from being modern, from being inclusive.

Madam Speaker, they talked about the Elections. They run down Elections. Madam Speaker, I have a feeling that the reason why they do that is because probably they are anticipating a loss and they want to justify that.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, in the same way, in 2014 after the Elections, there were a number of calls. A man called Mick Beddoes ran around, claiming all sorts of things, like the misappropriation of ballot papers. Until today, not a single strand of evidence has been provided, but Madam Speaker, I think it would be very interesting to put into perspective what the EU Mission thought of the 2006 Elections.

Honourable Karavaki was then the Supervisor of Elections. Let me read out to you, "the development of a new register voters in late 2005 allowed a larger number of citizens to participate in this election than in 2001 poll". However, the new register suffered from several shortcomings, including the misspelling of names and incorrect allocation of constituencies.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- These flaws as well as the failure to register all eligible voters meant that a number of voters were disenfranchised in a fifth polling station, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The principle of equal suffrage, Madam Speaker, which dictates that no vote should carry proportionally more weight than another was compromised due to the uneven numerical distribution of voters in a 71 members single member constituencies.

The proportion of invalid votes remain high at 9 percent, in the last Elections. In 2014, it was 0.7 or 0.9 percent.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the voter education was not sufficiently effective. This included failures to reconcile postal ballots and acceptance of new ballot papers.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Cheap shot.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, it is not.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Cheap shot.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Very good shot.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Cheap shot.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Very good shot, Madam Speaker.

HON. S.D. KAVARAKI.- (Inaudible)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will tell some others. There were so many other things, replete with so many mistakes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the lack of institutional knowledge due to the downsizing of the Office of the Supervisor of Elections during the inter-elections period, as well as the overly autonomous position of the four Returning Officers, led to a partly incoherent and slow implementation of procedures.

Madam Speaker, listen to this; the absence of the Supervisor at the start of the electoral process, particularly during the organisation and registration of voters and the recruitment of the Enumerators was a shortcoming which weakened the entire election endeavour.

Madam Speaker, in breach of the 1998 Electoral Act, the Register of Voters was not updated annually for the past five years. Instead a new Register of Voters was compiled in the late 2005, Madam Speaker.

(Hon. Opposition Member interjects)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- You do not understand! You do not understand!

HON. SPEAKER.- Are we ready? Thank you. Please continue.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the ballot papers printed had several deficiencies. Firstly, the Office of the Supervisor of Elections contrary to the Constitutional requirements; Article 4, provided only ballot papers in English to the voters, thereby placing it a disadvantage to voters who are literate in Fijian or Hindustani.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, this is very interesting, the late and repeated discovery of mistakes on the postal ballot papers obliged the Office of the Supervisor of Elections to reprint a substantial amount, which led to the late delivery of papers to some postal polling stations.

Despite all the corrections, the name of Mr. Mick Beddoes, the late Leader of the United Peoples Party (UPP), remained misspelt on the final ballot paper. May be that is why he is still having an identity crisis, he does not know what party he belongs to.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, for 'above the line' section on the ballot paper, political parties are supposed to deliver their preference list for each constituency by 4.00 p.m. on 18th April. Due to the intervention of some major parties, among them the ruling SDL and their alliance party, the deadline

was postponed to the midnight of the same day. So rules were changed for some political parties, Madam Speaker.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- That was the rule!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In the final days of the campaign, the indigenous Fijians SDL Leader, Mr Qarase, publicly raised concerns that the election of an Indo-Fijian Prime Minister could lead to further civil unrest. Is that not similar thing?

(Hon. Opposition Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Chand, you know this! You know very much about this. I have a statutory declaration here about you my friend, which I will reveal later on.

Madam Speaker, there are numerous mistakes in respect of what had happened.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- You are a joke!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, my friend. Voting on the first day was delayed by up to four hours in half of the polling stations observed due to the late arrival of ballot papers. Voters in these stations queued for hours, often without any information on the cause of delays. However, the vast majority of polling stations opened on time on the following day.

Voters who discovered they were not listed in Register of Voters in the polling stations were not always treated according to the procedures. Unfortunately, the Office of the Supervisor of Elections only realised at the eleventh hour that its original plan practised as detailed in the Counting Manual was in breach of the law. A lawyer, discovering it at the eleventh hour that it is breach of the law.

This is very interesting, since some polling stations pre-stamped all the received ballot papers....

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- From whose report?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- European Union, get it from them, they will give it to you. Stamped all the received ballot papers, but initialled them only.

This is very interesting, remember how they had initialled ballot papers, which they want now again, Madam Speaker, but initialled them only once used two voters, the procedural reversal resulted in a high number of stamped unused ballot papers being placed in circulation, moving around without any accountability. As a result of this, Madam Speaker, one constituency had a voter turnout of 101 percent, Cakaudrove. Please, know what this means. It means there were more ballot papers in the box than the initial numbers of voters who casted their votes. So someone miscalculated, Madam Speaker.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- That was attended to.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Madam Speaker, voter education paid advertisements by the Office of the Supervisor of Elections on how to mark the ballot the papers ...

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- All these cheap shots ... (Inaudible)

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... were sent to the electronic media for broadcasting, but only three days before polling. They were broadcasted for 11 days. Unfortunately, the Hindustani version of the advertisement broadcasted on national TV contained wrong information; advising voters to tick either above or below the line. The advertisement aired a total of eight times on 3rd to 5th May by Fiji One TV, was withdrawn on 6th May upon the request of the Office of the Supervisor of Elections itself.

Furthermore, the wrong Hindustani specimen ballot papers were used throughout the training in voter education exercise.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, this is the kind of election that they want to run. The point is, continuously all of them have talked about the election process. The fact of the matter is that, Madam Speaker, the 2014 Election procedures were acclaimed internationally. The 2014 Pre-Election were held to be credible.

The Honourable Professor Prasad, I had received a copy of the letter from the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission, where he has threatened the Electoral Commission.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is false!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the point of the matter is, in the same vein.....

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General is misleading Parliament. I have received the letter from the Chairman of the Electoral Commission where he has put me on notice about a conversation I had in a meeting with him and other Political Parties, where he suggests that I might have threatened the electoral Commission. I obviously do not agree with that and we will be responding to that letter. So it is wrong for the Honourable Attorney-General to come into Parliament, as a recipient of the copy of the letter, to come in the Parliament and suggest that I have threatened the Electoral Commission. I think he should withdraw that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- No, Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I will not.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I am not misleading anyone. I have just said in this Parliament that I have received a letter which I have the electronic copy with me which I can read it out.

In the last paragraph, the Electoral Commission says, and is addressed to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad:

“The Electoral Commission puts you on notice, that we will not hesitate to take necessary action, including the legal and penal actions should it find or feel that Dr. Prasad or the National Federation Party resort to direct and indirect attempts and the intimidation of the Electoral Commission or its members.”

Prior to that, Madam Speaker, it also sets out verbatim on what Honourable Professor Prasad said. What I did say was that, today I received a letter where the Electoral Commission is saying this. That was all I said. I have not talked about veracity, all I had said was that I had received a letter.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as I had mentioned, if there is any statement that is misleading, that should be corrected there and then, and it has been corrected. Thank you.

You may carry on, please.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM, - Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Again, in the same way, I think the Honourable Nawaikula, one of the gang of six sitting on the other side, said; “The Auditor-General is doing all these corrections, they are controlling all those”, Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, they (the Honourable gang of six) do not hesitate to condemn anyone or any institution, as long as that institution is not doing something that they like. Fundamentally, that is the issue.

Madam Speaker, they will attack the Auditor-General's Office, they will attack the Electoral Commission or any other body for that matter, question their independence because they do not like what that independent body does. We cannot run a government like that. We cannot do that. You hang on to a couple of things. The Honourable Nawaikula and Honourable Salote Radrodoro talked about some \$70,000 worth of medicine was at the harbour and, therefore, it is wrong. Therefore, the whole medical system is falling out, like Honourable Prasad said.

Madam Speaker, they do not know the facts. They are just grabbing on to few things. You should have seen the state of the Operating Theatre at CWM Hospital. You should have seen the state of the Operating Theatre in Lautoka. They should hear about what we have announced in the budget about the renovations that we are going to do at Labasa Hospital. Honourable Chand talks about, “Oh, there is no free medicine available.” When we asked him to provide the facts, he said, “I do not have to provide the facts, you have to provide the facts.”

(Laughter)

What kind of brain is that? What is this? This is not a joke, this is Parliament! We are here to discuss on an intellectual basis, as His Excellency the President said, on a truthful basis about the future of our country.

We need to be able to, Madam Speaker, ensure that what His Excellency said, we need to be focussed on the economic aspects of our country. They have this view, in the same way about rights about the economy. They have this view, they do not believe in growing the pie, they believe that they should only work for sectional interests and we take it from the others. That is the whole philosophical idea that has unfortunately, been the bane of our country. Rather than saying, growing the pie, let us grow it all together.

The silence from the NFP has been very deafening in that respect. Whilst they profoundly talk about matters that are bordering on bigotry, matters of prejudice, so profoundly, Madam Speaker,

we cannot run a modern nation State on that basis and, I therefore, Madam Speaker, commend the Speech by His Excellency the President. Thank you.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- A point of clarification, Madam Speaker, I think it is wrong for the Attorney-General to mislead Parliament. He is misleading Parliament by saying ...

HON. SPEAKER.- I will hear out the misleading.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ....that we are seating here and supporting bigotry and other issues.

In my speech yesterday, Madam Speaker, I made it very clear that NFP's long and tested history has always been that we have never condone racism, we have never condoned fighting an election on race and religion. I have said that yesterday, and for the Attorney-General to keep talking about NFP supporting this or remaining silent, is wrong and he should not use that. He should not be saying that, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you for that issue.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the fact is, when racist comments are made, they do remain silent and that what I have said. There is no point in him.....

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, let me.....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Let me finish!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is this, I read a poem out about Nazi Germany when these kinds of comments were made previously. Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, there is no point saying in a vacuum, "Yes, we do not support racism, we do not agree with that." But when people are actually making bigoted comments, that is the time to stand up and say, "No, that is wrong to say." So if they want to actually isolate themselves from those kind of thinking from SODELPA, they need to do it then. That is precisely my point, Madam Speaker, and they are failed to do that, given in particular the bravery, the bravado, shown by the leaders in the past.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. A point of misleading Parliament was asked and it has been corrected and that rests the issue.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I need to, because the Attorney-General is again, misleading the people of this country.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He is misleading the people of this country.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You should go out!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are not, Madam Speaker. You keep quite! You go out, I am talking to Madam Speaker.



HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You go out!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, Order!

Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Inia Seruiratu.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Members, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of the House: I would be presumptuous to present myself against the Distinguished Members, who had spoken before me. In fact, I stand in support of their sentiments of appreciations extended to His Excellency the President, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konousi Konrote, for his gracious and most forthright Address at the opening of the current Session of Parliament on 4th September, 2017.

Madam Speaker, we are at the home-stretch in the current race which will culminate in our General Elections next year and as alluded to by the Honourable Rika yesterday, some are already puffing out, some are already losing their breath, but on the other hand some are energised and are ready to go.

But we have done well as a House, Madam Speaker, in the last three years since the last Election. There were highs and lows but you were able to guide the proceedings of this House with tact and wisdom which brought to the fore your mettle as a leader, and for that you ought to be congratulated.

The last three years had been remarkable, Madam Speaker, and the unprecedented growth in our economy, the calibration of governance structures through reforms, to improve the delivery of public services, our manifested national and community resilience in the wake of *TC Winston*, our achievement in the sporting arena and, indeed, the leadership that we had displayed in the international stage, have demonstrated our growth to maturity as a nation, which in turn have afforded Fijians with a renewed sense of hope and optimism for our future.

Madam Speaker, whilst our accolades in Rio in 2016 appeared to have overshadowed all other sporting achievements, perhaps it is worthy to also note the achievement of our national rugby team for the series of wins they were able to attain this year, with the wins against Italy, Scotland, Tonga and Samoa. That too was memorable and I wish to congratulate our national Coach, Mr. John McKee and the Team for their gallantry. And you will note, Madam Speaker, I also have the RKS tie on this morning, just to remind the Honourable Attorney-General and the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism that there will be a big celebration at RKS this weekend.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the first ever deployment of a Disaster Response Team outside of Fiji, with the deployment of our Team made up of Military Engineers, Foreign Affairs Officials, Health personnel and Disaster Management Officers to Vanuatu in 2015 in the wake of *TC Pam*, is one that we should be proud of as a nation. This, too, was unprecedented and reasserted to our neighbouring island States our central leadership role within the Pacific Islands.

Allow me, Madam Speaker, at this juncture, to offer my condolences to the 17 families of loved ones who lost their lives in the wake of the recent *TC Irma*, a Category 5 tropical cyclone which ravaged parts of the Caribbean and South America in the last week, the worst cyclone to have affected that part of our universe.

Madam Speaker, our leadership role in rural development in the Asia Pacific Region is worthy of note with the appointment in 2016 of a Fijian to the post of Director General for the Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) and today, Fiji also holds the Chairmanship of both, the Governing Council and the Executive Committee of this regional body. This, too, can count as amongst our milestone achievements in the last three years.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's Address is one of notable clarity of purpose, re-emphasising the importance of our Constitution as our ultimate law, and calling on all actions from Honourable Members of this House to translate its essences into policies, laws and most importantly, practices.

This, Madam Speaker, implies we that we still have ground to cover, particularly as custodians of our Constitution, to ensure that its principles are respected and espoused in its entirety by all Honourable Members of this august House and indeed, by all citizens of our beloved nation. It calls for renewed commitment and a heightened level of urgency to bring about equality amongst all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency, in his Address, emphasised the Bill of Rights provision of our Constitution which is the basis for the rights of Fijians. In this context, therefore, we must all seek to better understand our responsibilities as elected representatives of the people, so that we can aspire to afford those rights fairly and stand firm as bulwarks against encroachments by those who may knowingly attempt to diminish or alienate those rights.

Madam Speaker, the Bill of Rights is the sum of all propositions to safeguard the individual liberties of all citizens. Simply put, that the rights of those who live in the remotest of our rural areas are just as equal to the rights of citizens who dwell in one of our thriving townships, even though they may be small in number and their contribution to our national economy is insignificant. Herein, lies our duty to defend those rights, to promote understanding and knowledge of individual rights by Fijians, to assist them in supporting the defence of their rights.

Madam Speaker, in this light, therefore, Honourable Members of this noble House are called by the voice of our nation to identify the ills that plague our societies and the hurdles that hinder our development, and seek for solutions in remembrances of past instances to educate and edify citizens, especially those marginalised to a level where they feel valued as Fijians. Thus, encouraging them to become better citizens and strive to partake in our national development.

Madam Speaker, the challenge with emerging democracies like ours is that, we make way too many assumptions. It is our assumption that because a community has been living without good source of water from time immemorial, that the current generations remain content with the matter with which their ancestors had lived, similarly with roads and other basic necessities of life. This is misguided and utterly wrong, and this exactly is the injudicious ideology that the Bill of Rights provision of our Constitution seeks to correct.

In similar fashion, Madam Speaker, we assume that because we have no conflict, we are at peace. This, again, is a misguided perception. The quote by Albert Einstein that, "Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order ...", at all levels of society rings true. This is the peace that Honourable Members of this august House should aspire to promote, that which the Bill of Rights embraces. This is the peace that Government had worked so hard in the last many years to achieve.

There has been progress but there is much work that still needs to be done. That, Government acknowledges, and her desire to bring about that peace will remain paramount, and Government will work within all its capabilities to realise that peace, albeit gradually.

Madam Speaker, it is the pursuit of this peace in the support of our Bill of Rights that had compelled Government to allocate over \$60 million in the last four years through the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management, for the implementation of social intervention and income generating programmes and projects within our rural areas to empower our rural communities and assist them in their areas of need. It must be noted that rural development is a cross-sectoral issue, and there are other programmes that are funded and implemented by other Government agencies, meaning, therefore, that the cost allocated to rural development is way above the figure of over \$60 million administered by my Ministry.

Madam Speaker, about 40 percent of our total population live within our rural communities. The challenge for all of us is to retain this figure, better still, to raise it. The solution lies within addressing the rights of our rural dwellers. This is the solemn duty of every Honourable Member of this noble House.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Madam Speaker, in reference to the rural/urban drift in India, Mahatma Ghandi said, and I quote: "Today we are standing on a dwindling cliff, where the soul of our country is in distress and losing the significance of its existence." Madam Speaker, he was referring to Indian villages which were becoming dilapidated as a result of migration of the masses from the rural to urban centres, migration in search of a better education, better healthcare facilities, in the hope of securing employment, and the reasons continue.

Madam Speaker, just as with our Fijian villages and communities, village life has lost its appeal because of the absence of that current generation rightfully perceives as the basic necessities of life, such as good education, well-resourced health facilities, good roads, availability of good water, good communication networks, and the list goes on.

Madam Speaker, the social implications are many, but the challenges are not insurmountable. With our common resolve, we can reverse the trend. We can make our villages rediscover its charm, and we can make the migrants yearn to return to their villagers. The fight will be tough but we will get there eventually.

Madam Speaker, it is critical that there is a great value to be gained, by coordinating rural development initiatives that contribute to sustainable livelihoods through efforts at the national and local levels. This will necessitate the review and strengthening of our Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF) which was endorsed by Cabinet and has been in place since 2009. Plans are already in place to start the ball rolling with this process which will include the development of strategies for rural development that considers the remoteness and potential in rural areas, and provide targeted differentiated approaches to realise those potentials.

Madam Speaker, the issues of disaster risk management and climate change adaptation will remain dominant, especially in view of our experiences, especially with *TC Winston*, and the need for the relocation of some villages as a result of global warming and the obvious rise in sea level. We are not oblivious to these matters and the Chairmanship of COP23 by our good Prime Minister and the related appointment, validates our commitment to addressing these issues.

Madam Speaker, our Build Back Better Initiative being part of the *TC Winston* Rehabilitation Programme are evidences of our commitment to safeguarding the viability of rural village life and maintaining its appeal.

Madam Speaker, by far and large, we are an agrarian society in which agriculture remains the backbone of the country's economy and it has potential for growth. It remains the livelihood of the majority of our rural communities.

Fiji depends on agriculture for food and nutrition security, employment, poverty reduction and to mitigate the effect of climate change. Let me state that Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, remains committed to the people of Fiji in terms of carrying out those mandates, while at the same time remain committed to the global agenda, especially the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Madam Speaker, I share the same sentiment made by His Excellency, in regards to modernising the economy. The Ministry of Agriculture under its 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda, together with the current "Green Growth Framework", will continue to bring about this change in the sector. As stated earlier, agriculture has the potential to grow through modernisation initiatives which create economic opportunity that encourages development. To bring this modernisation about, we have to review existing agricultural policies and formulate new policies and strategies that are relevant to current needs and economic situations.

Therefore, the Ministry of Agriculture has developed its Livestock Strategy and the Crop Strategy and is in its final stages of developing the Strategic Development Plan. With the assistance of our development partners, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), we are also developing our Food and Nutrition Policy and working on our Beef and Dairy Sector Strategy.

We have also launched our Kava Standards and manuals and these documents will complement the Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda and a major part of the currently developed Agriculture Sector Five-Years Strategic Plan that will be aligned to the new National Development Plan that will be launched soon by our Honourable Prime Minister.

Moreover, the Ministry of Agriculture is also working on reviewing our legislation to update and realign overlapping mandates to meet the current situation; and to be in compliance with international standards.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture remains committed to increased level of engagements with the farming communities and the private sector while at the same time accelerating agricultural production through sustainable methods to meet domestic demands such as hotels and agro-processing and the export markets.

The Ministry continues to have consultations with the private sectors, especially local agro-processors in efforts to link production of root crops, vegetables, fruits and other exotic produces to the demands of the market.

I wish to acknowledge the Australian Government, Madam Speaker. We are currently engaging with the Market Development Facility which is funded by the Australian Aid for us to do a joint market survey within our major markets and that will probably be launched around late September, together with the Ministry for Commerce, Industry and Trade. The local private sector and the agro-processors have made commitment of supporting the Government through modernisation of the agriculture sector.

Madam Speaker, let me just again clarify some of the issues raised by Members from the Opposition. One is on the Committee for Better Utilisation of Lands (CBUL) as raised by the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu. I wish to assure the Honourable Member and all the Honourable Members of this House that CBUL has not extended to non-agricultural leases. CBUL remains as mandated, it only covers agricultural leases, but perhaps the confusion (and this is where some questions may arise) is because when CBUL was established in 2008, the focus was initially on the sugarcane fields.

But now, Madam Speaker, most of the leases in the sugarcane belt areas have been renewed, the focus is now shifting to other agricultural leases apart from sugar, so we are now looking at those leases in the dairy sector, leases for rice, a good example is Korokadi in Bua. If you go now to Korokadi, Madam Speaker, the farmers there are so thankful that through CBUL, majority of the leases again have been renewed. And again to bring assurance to the Honourable Member and to the Honourable Members of the House, the contribution in CBUL remains consistent. It is about six to seven million every year, so if you see a significant increase in CBUL then that will mean that we have gone outside of the agricultural leases because the lease is sort of stable, Madam Speaker, so we remain with agricultural land.

On the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council, we value the work of the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council, Madam Speaker, but the Honourable Member does not know that when Cabinet endorsed the formation of the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council, it was the directors, trustees who opted to go and look for funding from outside and there was no arrangement with the Government then.

We still have that table, Madam Speaker, now when they have run out of funding from other organisations, they have run back to Government. We have made it clear to them, we will still retain the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council but there has to be some structural arrangements, rearrangements made so that the work of the Fiji Crop and Livestock Council can continue.

On the comments on our importation, yes, Honourable Chand but it was part of that whole launching where we are bringing in the eight new tomato varieties from India. This is where we are targeting the imports so that we cannot only go into tomatoes but other products.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, we are on a journey.

HON. MEMBER.- No return.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, let me tell you this: the Honourable Salote Radrodro talked about COP23 and their understanding of COP23 is about the *bilibili* race. Madam Speaker, the *bilibili* of course is known as "HMS, no come back", so SODELPA will ride onto the *bilibili* and will say goodbye, "Bye Adi, *Moce* Ratu, *Moce* Mo, HMS no come-back".

(Laughter)

We are on a new journey, Madam Speaker, and in this journey, we need the captain who is visionary and who charts the course. There is only one captain, there is only one XO, there is only one chief mate, there is only one bosun, and on top of that we need the chief cook on this journey, Madam Speaker, and the rest are the crew; not rejects, not rejects. We are a team, Madam Speaker.

Let me come back to the *Talatala*. When the Lord Jesus Christ looked for disciples, He did not go to the universities. He was looking for rejects, He brought in fishermen, Madam Speaker, because this is why in 1st Samuel 16: 7 "... Men looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at what's inside the heart."

And this is what we have on this side of the House. *Moce mada*, HMS no come back, Madam Speaker. I thank you for your indulgence.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Balmindar Singh.

HON. MEMBER.- In the *bilibili* too?

(Laughter)

HON. B. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, George Bernard Shaw said:

“Progress is impossible without change and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of the Cabinet and Honourable Members, development partners, media, friends, citizens watching livestream from the comfort of their homes, ladies and gentlemen: A good day to you all from this august House.

Madam Speaker, I stand to congratulate His Excellency for his most gracious Speech on the opening of 2017/2018 Parliament Session and my response is tailored on public sector modernisation, innovation, reforms and transparency being the heart of public administration.

Madam Speaker, allow me to quote what an academic said on modernisation of Government. Professor Allen Schick said, and I quote:

“Modernising Government is an immense value to practitioners who want to know what countries are doing to upgrade public management, as well as to scholars who want a conceptual understanding of contemporary reform. It is a highly useful reference for countries that have embraced new public management and countries that have traditional forms of public administration.”

Madam Speaker, public sector modernisation is no longer an option but a necessity. It will help governments respond to changing societal needs and maintain competitiveness in an uncertain local and international environment, and the FijiFirst Government has confidence, trust and faith in all civil servants committing on the principles of integrity, impartiality and accountability which is the backbone of democratic governance. It is the civil servants who will provide the continuity, institutional memory, the subject-matter expertise that enables steering the ship of the State to maintain a steady course.

We have in the past few years witnessed inflow of new ideas and initiatives by the Bainimarama-led Government.

Madam Speaker, modernisation and innovation use new approaches to create public value and cutting-edge services delivery for individuals and for society. The FijiFirst Government's initiatives in transforming the public sector have changed, how the public sector operates to deliver better outcomes within the limited resources without disparities.

Madam Speaker, it is the very effective collaborations with other actors to target public resources where they are needed. For example, people living in rural areas do not need to travel long distance to get public services and can get social transfer, government services such as legal aid and other payment services to their nearest centre and reaching out to the communities. It is helping to build more inclusive, open and caring societies and enhancing trust amongst citizens.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has created an enabling environment for new spaces to challenge the architecture of problems, overcome old administrative legacies and channel

public resources to where they are most needed. Recent participatory budgeting scheme embarked by the Honourable Minister for Economy and his team, regarded as a powerful innovation, distributing opportunity more equally across society per se generating public value through innovation is complex and challenging for governments. Innovation runs contrary to the perceived role of bureaucratic institutions. Innovation is new, unknown and risky whilst Government have a statutory duty, democratic responsibility and political mandate to deliver public services in consistent and equal ways which the Bainimarama Government has been unwavering and persistent in transforming the public service that enables pinnacle to service delivery.

Madam Speaker, managing tensions can be complicated for governments, where the risk of innovating appears far greater than risk of maintaining the status quo. Nor does innovation sits well with the control function of hierarchies which while they ensure stewardship and accountability over the use of resources, they tend to discourage risk-taking.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has embraced a mechanism that enables to generate new solutions underpinned by new principles, rather than on improving and refining existing ones. While innovation has always played a part in the development of the public sector, this is arguably the first time that the sector has been under such radical pressure to fundamentally transform the focus of innovation itself thereby creating new opportunities to embed innovative processes.

Madam Speaker, furthermore the very core of the engine and improving service delivery to the citizen is fundamental for the FijiFirst Government. The importance of putting in place mechanisms to openness and respond to people's demand for accountability and participation is now being recognised by the Bainimarama-led Government. To put it differently, transparency is about nurturing inclusive institutions, institutions which allows citizens' voice to be heard, whether that is in policy-making, budgeting or service delivery to the citizens at large. The public accountability and political credibility are the cornerstone principles.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government believes it has a fundamental responsibility to ensure the provision of high quality, accessible public services at the point of use. There is excellence in all our public services but many people do not have access to this excellence, which has been the challenge for this Government. The lapse in prudent financial management and sound decision-making process has deprived our citizens the quality and accessibility of the best public service but which the FijiFirst Government have changed and would bring changes. Whatever the circumstance, this Government would be modernising the public service in this way.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government commits to a programme of modernising public service based on the key principles of increasing choice, decentralising services, opening services to a range of providers, ensuring fair access and accountability to users and taxpayers. However, the Government does not have all the answers and it cannot open public service alone. In fact that is the reason that opening public service is so important to allow people and communities the opportunity to shape services that best meet their own needs.

Madam Speaker, weak governance impedes development and compromises the delivery of public goods and services to all citizens particularly to the poor and the vulnerable. Hence it undermines meritocracy in the public sector as well as Government's ability to allocate resources efficiently to achieve its desired ends.

Madam Speaker, as we on this path, we are united behind our collective goal to establish a civil service of which our civil servants and all our people are truly proud. William James observed "Because each member proceeds to his own duty with the trust that the other members will simultaneously do theirs."

Madam Speaker, before I conclude I have to share the three C's. What the three C's says:

1. Choice;
2. Chance; and
3. Changes.

You must make a choice to take a chance or your life will never change.

With those words, Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to thank His Excellency for his most gracious Speech being his last for this term of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, allow me to thank the Honourable Attorney-General for acknowledging that one of our former leaders, the late Siddiq Moidin Koya who achieved a political compromise with the then Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara that resulted in the 1970 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, that political compromise was the beginning of many compromises that resolved political conflicts in the national interest and resulted in monumental achievements through negotiated settlements.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, resulted in the 1987 *coup*.

HON. P. SINGH.- Indeed the 1997 Constitution that he is now critical of and supported its abrogation was a product of such political compromise.

(Hon. Opposition Member interjects)

HON. P. SINGH.- If I remember correctly, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General was highlighting its salient provisions on Fiji Broadcasting Commission in a weekly programme in the years before the 2006 *coup*. Madam Speaker, I wonder who was the legal advisor of the Alliance Party or the National Alliance Party of Fiji that the Honourable Attorney-General referred to while talking about the 2006 Elections. One should not criticise political compromises achieved through legal and legislative framework.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I did not compromise.

HON. P. SINGH.- The 2013 Constitution like the 1990 Constitution are not products of political compromises but were born out of a *coup* and imposed documents.

Madam Speaker, I refer to His Excellency the President's Address. He made some very noble suggestions to the political parties not in this House but for political parties outside of Parliament and to the general electorate as a whole. One of the salient features was that he asked us all to be honest in our campaigns and in our general conduct of elections.

Madam Speaker, however I am disappointed but not surprised that the message of unity, togetherness and inclusivity has been ignored by the ruling party. The message I get from them is loud and clear. It is "My Way or the Highway" – they are the patriots and only they have the ability and the right to govern after the 2018 General Elections and that the Opposition is incapable of



governing our nation. Most importantly I feel that the other side is not a team but a collection of individuals who are vociferously campaigning ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-Talk about yourself.

HON. P. SINGH.- ... for votes individually because they know that their leader will be promoted as a single candidate during the elections. I do not blame them, Madam Speaker, because the electoral system is such. If the system was to elect the top 50 vote getters in Parliament, then the FijiFirst would not have been in Government. So the tone of their speeches is unsurprising. And no prizes for guessing their praise of the Constitution and their leader. They are trying to make an impression in order to be once again endorsed as candidates. Essentially their political future hangs in the balance because for many of them life after politics will be extremely difficult.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. SINGH.- Also, Madam Speaker, Government thinks it has a monopoly on ideas that it thinks are the best for Fiji. No one political party, a leader, person or organisation has a monopoly on policies. In a democracy, no one single point of view must prevail.

Madam Speaker, for this week, we have heard time and again from the Government Members that the Opposition which is critical of the Constitution are hypocrites and should not contest the elections under this Constitution.

Madam Speaker, it will be interesting if the same analogy is applied to the Honourable Prime Minister's right-hand man who will be by his side for his elections. The Honourable Attorney-General himself clarified in Parliament yesterday in response to my colleague Honourable Chand that he protested against the 1987 *coup* and the then Interim Government.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I did not say that, I just clarified it, get your facts right.

HON. P. SINGH.- You clarified?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I clarified it.

HON. P. SINGH.- Yes, that is what I said.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I clarified this morning.

HON. P. SINGH.- We know that he was one of the group of 18 activists who was arrested and charged by the Police for holding a meeting without a permit. We know that this charge was wrong against you, Honourable Attorney-General together with the 18 activists, he was exercising his right to protest. This is a very important conduct in our elections.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. SINGH.- But to my wonderment, the Attorney-General having protested against a *coup* and an interim government, became an integral member of the regime after the 2006 *coup* and was reappointed to the regime's Cabinet that governed after the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, as the Attorney-General he was the Chief Legal Officer under whose watch the Public Emergency Regulations were imposed making it illegal for more than three people to gather in a public place, ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P. SINGH.- ... thereby effectively prohibiting political parties and NGOs from protesting.

As for opposing a constitution and fighting elections under its provisions, this is not a crime, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. SINGH.- The National Federation Party (NFP) of which the good father of the Honourable Attorney-General who is present in this House was integral member, who won two general elections under the imposed 1990 Constitution; in 1992 and 1994.

He was one of the most respected ....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Why is he bringing my family into this, and in particular when my father is sitting in the Chamber?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He just stood there for the past five minutes essentially having a go at me - that is fine, not a problem. But do not try and justify his claim by bringing my family members into it, in particular, my family members sitting in the gallery. Try and justify it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, that is not freedom of speech.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is not freedom of speech. You heard, read the bloody Standing Orders.

HON. SPEAKER.- In the Standing Orders you should not be mentioning a person that does not have the authority to defend himself here and therefore, you should not have brought in that name. Please withdraw.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Would you withdraw?

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I am just being respectful.

HON. SPEAKER.- I am telling you to withdraw.

Mention of the Honourable Attorney-General's father sitting there.

HON. P. SINGH.- But was also a member of NFP.

HON. SPEAKER.- He is not here to defend himself. What you are saying is either right or wrong, I do not know. He is not here.

HON. P. SINGH.- Well, you will only know after you have heard me.

HON. SPEAKER.- I am telling you to withdraw.

HON. P. SINGH.- Alright, I withdraw it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

(Honourable Member humming whoo, whoo, whoo)

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, I do not want a "whoop whoop". This seems to be the practice when I do exercise my authority of the Chair. In any Parliament, when the Speaker makes a ruling, no one speaks against that ruling, and I cannot take lightly all this groaning when I do make a ruling like that.

Honourable Prem Singh, you may continue.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I withdraw references to the Honourable senior Sayed-Khaiyum.

Madam Speaker, much has been said about the Constitution and how it has supposedly ended all evil that has beset our nation since Independence. Madam Speaker, nothing can be further from the truth. The Bill of Rights in the Constitution have severe limitations, not seen in the 1997 Constitution, or even the Ghai Draft Constitution that was destined for the dustbin.

The independence of the Constitutional Offices Commission is highly questionable and its membership is political. It is chaired by the Prime Minister and its membership also includes the Honourable Attorney-General, Leader of the Opposition and nominees of the office holders. Out of a total of six members, including the Chair, four are from Government.

This Constitution also empowers a Permanent Secretary and a Minister to recruit and terminate staff in their respective Ministries. Ideally, this should be the job of the Public Service Commission.

Madam Speaker, two years ago during my address on the motion to thank His Excellency the then President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, I said and I quote:

“Economic growth to generate employment; meritocracy in the Civil Service and appointments being made at least in proportionate to the population of our ethnic groups; As a start having a quota for recruitment of personnel from other ethnic groups in the military, again on meritocracy to give it a semblance of multiracialism; Having bi-partisan committees to collectively look at serious challenges facing sectors like the sugar industry, health and medical services.

My point here is that it is all very well to finger-wag on what should be acceptable Parliamentary conduct and what is not, but reciprocity, humanity and national interest should be our guiding values if we are to succeed at bipartisanship, and not arrogance and condescension. We on this side of Parliament continue to offer our hands for bipartisanship. It is now up to the other side to reciprocate with sincerity and respect in the national interest.”

Madam Speaker, unfortunately my hope has been in vain.

The Open Merit Recruitment System, as alluded to by our Party Leader is a farce. This has been proven recently during the roadshows and our citation of contracts of civil servants and teachers.

Madam Speaker, just last week, we were informed of a case where Open Merit Recruitment System was abused. An Acting Principal in a prominent Lautoka school was told that she would be shifted elsewhere because another Principal was coming to replace her. The person replacing her was not the Principal but an officer of the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) or an Education Officer. The directive that the person be posted as Principal to the school was obvious as the person went directly to the Minister to intervene and get him the position in order to enjoy increased salaries of principals.

Again this is a case of flouting authority and taking advantage of the constitution that gives Ministers and Permanent Secretaries the powers to hire, terminate and replace staff in the Civil Service. The Minister for Civil Service who vociferously promotes and defends the Open Merit Recruitment System should immediately look into this issue. I can provide him the details of this case or put him in touch with the aggrieved qualified Acting Principal.

Madam Speaker, the contracts render meaningless the teachers employments security and make them totally subservient to the Government. Some of the regressive provisions are:

1. Renewal of the contract is at the absolute discretion of the Government.
2. The Civil Servant irrevocably agrees that non-renewal of the contract will not give right to any course of action whatsoever against the Government.
3. The duration of the contract expires immediately upon a civil servant reaching retirement age of 55.
4. Renewal of the contract is subject to Government requiring the services of the civil servant and that too if he or she agrees to enter into another contract on a mutually agreed term.
5. The decision of Government to transfer a civil servant on the existing terms of the contract to anywhere in Fiji is final.
6. Government has the right to change or vary the contract anytime.

This discriminatory and exploitative contractual employment that is being forced upon our teachers will not result in a harmonious, unified and productive civil service. Such draconian contracts are subjugating our teachers and have no place in a genuine democracy.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Speak the truth.

HON. P. SINGH.- During the roadshow we were surprised that the Director of Reform Unit made a racist comment against a staff of the Ministry of Education, obviously blaming them for her own failures and of course, in the presence of the Honourable Attorney-General.

*Fiji One News* on 23rd August carried this comment from the Reform Director and I quote, "It was a bit of I thought I was speaking English but I wasn't evidently. When I asked the question on their defence, they thought they were answering my question..."

The comment basically meant that the Ministry of Education staff were inferior in intellect. What an insult, Madam Speaker, and what nonsense? People are condoning this.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, we seek clarification from the Government as to the role of the Current Civil Service Reform Director played in the Fijian Elections Office before her present role.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P. SINGH.- According to the Joint Electoral Commission/Fijian Elections Office Report of 2014, she was a technical advisor. The question that arises is, did her previous role have any influence in her recent appointment?

Madam Speaker, the 2013 Constitution and its provisions like common and equal citizenry and policies formulated by Government are supposed to have eradicated or reduced racism, removed discrimination and upheld meritocracy.

Here we point out that in December last year a UN Special Rapporteur came to Fiji on a fact-finding mission on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. His Report to the 35th Session of the Human Rights Council in June this year has received little or no publicity at all. Again, no prizes for guessing why this discriminatory treatment to the Report by the local media that operates under the restrictive Media Industry Development Authority Decree.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, the UN Special Rapporteur's Report pointed out the lack of Desegregated Data. I repeat, he pointed out the lack of desegregated data. This is something we have been asking for and you will recall, Madam Speaker, that in early 2015, my question seeking similar data on recruitment and appointments in the Civil Service was disallowed on the grounds that it would create racial ill-will and hostility.

However, the Report quite clearly states that the data is necessary to determine whether or not Government's so-called non-discriminatory policies are working. This is very important and the Report on this issue is self-explanatory. The Report states, and I quote:

"In order to measure progress made on the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the policies of inclusiveness set up by the current Government, there needs to be an objective evaluation which can only be undertaken if statistics and in particular desegregated data are collected and made available."

This does not mean only data on race and ethnicity, but a whole range of different factors such as gender, age, sexual orientation, geography, income, access to social and economic services and rights.

Without desegregated data, Madam Speaker, it will be difficult to assess the effectiveness of the merit-based measures that the Government has adopted in recruitment and in awarding scholarships as well as in the other areas.

HON. MEMBER – (inaudible)

HON. P. SINGH.- This is the Rapporteur's Report.

“Such data is also valuable as it provides the baselines upon which new policies and programmes can be designed.”

Madam Speaker, the Special Rapporteur recalled that the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination or the CERD Committee highlighted in its recommendations to Fiji in 2012, that if progress is to be monitored, such desegregated data is needed to measure whether the policies are effective and are reaching the most in need.

Madam Speaker, both CERD and the Special Rapporteur noted Government's directive that the collection of data that typifies ethnicity is no longer to be conducted. However, CERD noted that while this directive was aimed at eliminating racial profiling, the CERD Committee regretted “the lack of desegregated data on the socioeconomic situation of members of ethnic groups as well as the lack of gender analysis of data provided.”

This concern was based on the premise that “if progress in eliminating discrimination based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin is to be monitored, some indication of the number of persons who might be treated less favourably on the basis of these characteristics.”

Madam Speaker, in the absence of this critically important information, Government's claim that this Constitution ended racism and discrimination is hollow. So is the claim that every single appointment to our Civil Service and other Government controlled organisations is done on meritocracy.

The UN Rapporteur has also recommended that the Government should promptly sign and ratify key international instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, you may continue.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, these are important international instruments. How Government is going to get itself to signing, for example the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is another matter, given that the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures) Decree is now an Act, disallows trade unionists and trade union staff from becoming members of political parties, compelling them to resign their positions if they do join the political party or contest the General Elections.

Madam Speaker, as we enter the final phase of the first term of Parliament since the resumption of parliamentary democracy after seven and a half years of military rule, it is time to seriously consider the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to permanently seal the chapter of our past 30 years since 1987.

Such a Commission, Madam Speaker, will allow perpetrators and victims of the four *coups* that have plagued our nation for the last 30 years since May 14, 1987, to openly and freely engage in truth telling and confront their fears in view of conflicting statements and utterances regarding motives behind the *coups*, so that closure and healing for Fiji is achieved permanently put to rest this unfortunate and turbulent chapter of our independent history.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P. SINGH.- This is where you do not understand where we are coming from. Now, Madam Speaker, the blame game, name calling and accusations have become the hallmark of our nation in the last 30 years. This Parliament has been no exception.

Truth telling and openly confronting one's fears has worked elsewhere, Madam Speaker, most notably in South Africa under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

We should not be fearful and hesitant to embrace this noble objective as we are all honourable men and women of integrity. No General Elections, no government and no constitution will cure our nation from this traumatic past.

This is the only way forward, Madam Speaker. We, in the NFP, who have never supported and participated in a *coup*, having been toppled after only five years in a coalition government of the late Dr Timoci Bavadra, stand ready to work with all Honourable Members to facilitate this Commission.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we have nothing to fear. We only fear the Lord Almighty.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P. SINGH.- The NFP has survived four military *coups* without succumbing to the trappings of power obtained illegally, and we will march forward in unison, guided by our unshakable principles and our fearless and selfless service to the nation for the last 54 years. Madam Speaker, God bless Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members we will now suspend Parliament, we will break for morning tea break and resume at 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.06 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.35 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Acting Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji: I rise this morning to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji for his most gracious Speech.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency in his words of wisdom has challenged us to look at various positive aspects of our Constitution and the policies of the FijiFirst Government, which is ushering in a modern Fiji, a progressive Fiji and a Fiji for all Fijians. When these instructions come from such a high profile office it becomes incumbent upon us to adhere to such instructions wholeheartedly.

His Excellency has pointed out many aspects of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, which include mandating equality between all Fijians and a common identity and its comprehensive Bill of Rights, which affords all Fijians civil, political and socio economic rights.

The Constitution does not just suggest actions or express ideas. It directs Government to take action to turn those ideas into policies. That is something which the FijiFirst Government is following to the letter and something which the Opposition parties should also try to emulate. But the most important part of His Excellency's Speech, which captured my interest was, and I quote:

“The Constitution gives us a way to live together, to govern and to make decisions. It expects us to make informed decisions and settle disputes in a respectful way. In some parts of the world, civilized disagreements is a luxury and political differences are played out in street violence and civil wars.”

The memories of 1987 and 2000 are not far when we think of street violence. However, the Opposition seems to conveniently ignore that. It then brings me a thought. How fortunate we all are to be living in the modern Fiji under the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, under the majestic leadership of the Prime Minister, Voreqe Bainimarama and in the rule of the FijiFirst Government.

Madam Speaker, there are places on this earth which are not as fortunate as Fiji. There are places like Malta, where there is not a single river or fresh water source. The people there have to desalinate sea water for drinking. There are places like Namibia where you will find river channels and riverbeds but there is no water running in those rivers. There are countries in Africa and some States in the United States which are thousands of kilometres away from the sea and some people do not get a chance to touch sea water in their entire lifetimes.

Therefore, it is important for us to accord all support to our Honourable Prime Minister when he has taken a leadership role in the global effort to save our climate, environment and the oceans. Otherwise, he might not have anything to leave behind for our future generations.

Madam Speaker, there are people on this earth who see atrocities and violence of unimaginable proportions on a daily basis. There are countries like Myanmar, where thousands of people of the Rohingya community are murdered every day in the name of politics. There are places like West Papua, where humanitarian issues are horrifying. Here, entire villages and populations are wiped out overnight by armed forces.

There are countries where protestors are shot and journalists are murdered in broad daylight, in the middle of the street. There are other places in the world where thousands are evicted or killed



in the name of race, religion and politics every day. For these people civil, political, economic and human rights are just a dream.

When you travel to these countries we cannot help but count our lucky stars that we live in Fiji and that we have a supreme law that guarantees we do not go down the path that some other countries have gone before us.

The Opposition might like to ridicule the Constitution and the Laws of Fiji but let me remind them and their legal advisers from Butt Street, Suva (very suitable street name when I say for a street), how remarkable are our laws here. We have laws in Fiji, which not only ensure that some of the atrocities we witness in some other countries do not happen here, but also laws that guarantee some of the very basic rights are delivered to the people's doorsteps. For instance, the Crimes Decree, Crimes Act 2009, if one reads Part 12 of our Crimes Act, we have made crimes against humanity as serious offence and have made mandatory life sentences for these offences.

Sections 77 to 97 of the Crimes Act provides stiff sentences for crimes such as genocide, enslavement, forced transfer of population, torture, persecution and apartheid.

Apart from the many other rights granted in our Constitution, we have a Bill of Rights which provides:

- Section 22 - Freedom of religion, conscience and belief;
- Section 23 - Political rights;
- Section 26 - Right to equality and freedom from discrimination;
- Section 28 - Rights of ownership and protection of *iTaukei*, Rotuman and Banaban lands; and
- Section 30 - Rights of landowners to fair share of royalties for extraction of minerals.

Our Constitution does not stop just at that. We have gone to the extent of providing some very basic rights, not previously thought of by any Constitution:

- Section 31 - Right to education;
- Section 32 - Right to economic participation;
- Section 33 - Right to work and a just minimum wage;
- Section 34 - Right to reasonable access to transportation;
- Section 35 - Right to housing and sanitation;
- Section 36 - Right to adequate food and water;
- Section 37 - Right to social security schemes; and
- Section 38 - Right to health

Even before His Excellency challenged the Government to recognise that it is mandatory for the Government to provide those rights to the people, the FijiFirst Government was well on its way in delivering those.

Some of the examples are as follows:

1. We used to hear stories before 2014 Elections that if FijiFirst comes to power, no one will be able to worship in the public because the Constitution provided for a secular state. That has not happened. I see more makeshift churches and temples around the country now than ever before and people are singing hymns in public parks every Sunday.

2. People are allowed to form political parties and participate in Elections freely and without fear. Government policies are framed on merit and equality and not on racial or religious discrimination as was the practice in past governments.
3. There are entrenched protection for *iTaukei* lands and a land grab like what happened in Momi and Denarau under the SDL-Government has been made impossible. Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu knows all about that.
4. Indigenous landowners, despite owning 91 percent of the land in Fiji were cash poor. Today, under this Constitution, they have a mandatory fair share of royalties for mineral extraction.
5. The Government, as mandated by the Constitution, has made the right to education mandatory. Education is free for Year 1 to Year 13. Thereafter, there are scholarships and TELS for tertiary education. That is not based on discriminatory policies of the past governments.
6. The micro enterprise grants is just one step in providing people their right to economic participation. The Personal Property Securities Bill, which will be debated tomorrow, is another step to ease economic participation by making access to finance easier.
7. For the first time, any government in Fiji has implemented a minimum wage. The previous governments and some of the Members sitting on the other side, who were part of those governments, never thought of that but suddenly come up with a magical figure of \$5 per hour to gain political mileage.
8. The Government has taken the right to transportation very seriously and has invested heavily in roads, bridges and general infrastructure.
9. For housing and sanitation, the Government is providing grants for first home-buyers and relief to those who have lost their houses in disasters or fires.
10. When it comes to the right to food and water, the Government has provided water to areas where there was no water reticulation before. It has provided water tanks to areas where there is no piped water and invested in agriculture for food production locally.
11. It is only under this Government that we have social security schemes, such as elderly pensions and increased allowance and food vouchers for the disabled and the poor.
12. When it comes to right to health, it is this Government that has built more hospitals and health centres than any other previous government.

Those are just some of the areas of the Constitution which I have touched to illustrate the remarkable nature of our Constitution and our Government's political will to adhering to those enshrined principles.

I wondered then, why are the Honourable Members of the Opposition so adamant that a document, which grants so many rights to all Fijians, be thrown away? The only reason which comes to my mind is selfishness. Wake up people, your so-called leaders from the Opposition side do not want you to have any of these rights. They just care about themselves.

I am appalled when the Opposition criticizes our laws and the Constitution, and tries to paint a very bad picture of Fiji and makes it look like all of us here in Fiji are doomed.. Madam Speaker, we are not doing that bad. In fact we are doing quite well.

It is more serious when the Opposition just speaks about race and religion instead of policies, but it comes as a little surprise because they cannot match FijiFirst's policies and ideas on meritorious grounds. Therefore, they have no choice but to resort to the aged old divide and rule method. It just shows a diminishing stock of ideas.

SODELPA never fails to amaze me. On the one hand, we have Honourable Karavaki who calls climate change a hoax. Then we have Honourable Gavoka and the Leader of Opposition who say that climate change is real and we must act.

We have Honourable Lalabalavu who says politics in Fiji will continue to be race-based, while Honourable Radrodo agrees that politics should be based on policies and not race and religion.

And then along comes Honourable Nawaikula, who confuses everyone by first referencing the long dead and buried 1997 Constitution and then talks about the rights of only one community, something which even the 1997 Constitution was against.

Then we have the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, who on the one hand says that the indigenous population is poor and needs support, but on the other is against equal distribution of lease money. She does not want to share her wealth. You are robbing the very people you profess to protect.

You want to bring back the Great Council of Chiefs, but what about the rights of the common *iTaukei* brothers and sisters who cannot even sit in the GCC? You do not want equal distribution of lease money, but still talk about poverty and equal rights of the *iTaukei*. Among all the nonsensical ideas I have heard from SODELPA, this ranks somewhere in the middle.

I remember some of the policies made by the previous governments, which were in guise of indigenous rights but ended up filling the pockets of the few elites such as the 2001 Affirmative Action Programme (some people are still in prison for that) and turned out to be one of the biggest scams under the Qarase Government and the National Bank of Fiji saga under the Rabuka Government.

SODELPA is just like a bad soccer team. There is no coordination, there is no structure and there is no game plan. It is like a team without a coach, or in the case of SODELPA, a team with too many coaches; one inside Parliament, one outside Parliament and one somewhere in Mavana Village, not to mention the three non-travelling reserves in the form of NFP, but at the height of absurdity has to come from the *talatala* himself.

Honourable Karavaki suggests that climate change is not real and we amend the Constitution to include the word "God" in it and then we should be spared from the effects of climate change such as hurricanes. If putting the word "God" in the Constitution will stop natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes or droughts, we just might consider it. However, that is not right.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Among all the ludicrous ideas we have heard from the Opposition, this one ranks in top 10.

Let me remind the Honourable Member that the 1970 Constitution had the word "God" in it and guess what? We had *Hurricane Bebe* in 1972. The 1990 Constitution had the word "God" written in it and in 1992 we had *Cyclone Kina*. The 1997 Constitution had God written in it and we had *Cyclone Gavin* in 1997 itself and *Cyclone Ami* in 2003. So please, leave God alone for God's sake!

Honourable Lalabalavu's comments that politics will be raced-based deserve criticism. When will we learn to move away from politics of race and religion? Have you not had enough suffering in the past from such politics?

We have SODELPA and NFP supporters engaging in racial and religious vilification on social media every day. They attack the Attorney-General based on his religion. What is wrong with the people?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- We are waiting.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- I will repeat that part.

We have SODELPA and NFP supporters engaging in racial and religious vilifications on social media every day. They attack the Attorney-General based on his religion. What is wrong with the people? Even the newly appointed General Secretary of NFP is a regular contributor to social media sites, which spins racial and religious vilification.

The Opposition seems to be in regressive mode all the time. Madam Speaker, a normal motor vehicle comes with five forward gears and 1 reverse gear, but in the case of the Opposition, I think they come with all six reverse gears.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Only that explains why they are just going back, back and back in history. The day is not far when they will disappear back in history.

When will some people who are sitting here learn from our history? I am thinking of asking the Honourable Prime Minister to extend the Free Milk and Weet-Bix Programme to the Parliament itself as well so some people here can nourish their brains.

To the People of Fiji, beware of these false prophets. The FijiFirst Government believes in keeping the State and religion separate, and that is what we are doing.

The FijiFirst does not worry about the next Elections, Honourable Radrodro. If we did, we would have easily fallen for what is the fashionable on *Facebook*, type of policies, increasing the minimum wage to \$5 or making ridiculous promises of minimum guaranteed price of sugarcane at \$100 per tonne, or reducing the price of lamb chops to \$1 a kg for argument's sake.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Yes, we have had the misfortune of hearing the entire NFP Manifesto in the response of Honourable Prasad yesterday, and again lamb chops featured prominently in that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Lamb chops is actually bad for health, Honourable Prasad, you should stop consuming it.

(Laughter)

It causes NCDs, it causes heart problems because you need a strong heart when you hear the results of the 2018 General Elections when FijiFirst wins it. If you stop consuming lamb chops, it will prevent the heart attack in 2018.

FijiFirst is making policies, thinking about the next generation and many generations thereafter and that is why we are making principled decisions. We are making principled decisions not because someone posted something on *Facebook* and the NFP has a knee jerk reaction, and includes that in their manifesto.

(Laughter and chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Parmod Chand made a comment yesterday, this is the most divisive constitution - a whole lot of, I do not know. Honourable Chand, I do not see any Dove or Flower faction in this Constitution. This is the only Constitution which does not classify people of Fiji on race or religion, so how can it be divisive?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- We have a party here named FijiFirst, which advocates for all races and religions to be equal. Then we have another party here which wants to take us back to the age-old politics of one race is supreme, or one religion is better than the others, or one philosophy is better than the other.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- FijiFirst has an all-inclusive policy. We do not discriminate on race, religion or gender. We are preventing Fiji from going down the road of destruction, which some other countries have taken. Be with us if your love Fiji.

Make your choice wisely in 2018 or you might fall in the trap of these racial and religious fanatics. When we were fighting on race and religion, you know what the rest of the world was doing? They were building bridges, highways, skyscrapers, landing on the moon when we were fighting about religion here.

In New York City, they had underground tunnels for horse carriages and trains since 1901. In Germany, they had super highways and a train system since 1940s. In England, they introduced e-ticketing in 1950s. Needless to say United States and Russia went into space, even before we came out of colonialism.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- This is how far the world has come when we were fighting over which God is greater than the other.

Madam Speaker, today is 14<sup>th</sup> September 2017. Three years ago, on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2014, the people of Fiji made a choice. They chose this Constitution and the FijiFirst Government because they were fed up of the age old politics of race and religion.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- And guess what? They made the right choice. They made a deal with destiny and we have delivered. And today, more than ever before, I am confident that come 2018, they will make that wise choice again because today, in the red corner of the ring, we have a party, which is resorting to age-old politics of race and religion and in the noble banner blue corner of the ring, we have the FijiFirst Party, which promotes equality, reasonable policies, inclusiveness and social justice.

We are putting Fijians First. Make your pick now and choose FijiFirst and make the right bet.

Since this is the last sitting of the year, Madam Speaker, Happy *Diwali* and a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all, and await more firecrackers and fireworks in 2018. Thank you.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order. Standing Order 81 says: "A Member who has spoken to a question may speak again to offer an explanation of some material part of his speech that has been misrepresented, misquoted or misunderstood. The member must do so immediately at the end of the speech." So I am doing that now. And the point that I was misquoted or misrepresented by the Honourable speaker that has just spoken, he said that I spoke only about the rise of one community. I did not do that.

The correct thing was that, I asked the indigenous Members on that side whether they considered their rights were better protected by our Constitution that took away prior informed consent and the GCC. That is what I did.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Would you like to comment to that? Would you like to stand up and make a comment?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Sorry, Madam Speaker, I did not hear that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Would you like to respond to that?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member, in fact does not even qualify in that point of order but he has said that he did not ask for the rights of only one community, but he called the Members on our side, he was only talking about indigenous community and I am right in my speech by saying that he had never ever in his speech spoke about the Indo-Fijians or any other community. He only spoke about the indigenous rights and that is what I pointed out that the Honourable Member has only spoken about one race.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I asked a simple question.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- He questioned our own Members, Madam Speaker, whether we were indigenous or not. It is really insulting.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It does not affect you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The answer has been given. I now give the floor to the Honourable Jone Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, The Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and people of Fiji. I rise to thank His Excellency for his most gracious, well-articulated thought-promoting and visionary Speech for this new Session of Parliament. It is timely as Elections are just around the corner.

He has reminded us of the important things that we in this House must always keep in mind. He has reminded us that our Constitution directs Government to take action, to turn the aspirations of ordinary Fijians into reality. His Excellency has called for transformation of legislation to enable every Fijian to realise their dreams, so Fijians can fully realise their socio-economic rights as stated under the Constitution. This is what this Government is doing, Madam Speaker.

Huge progress has been made under socio-economic rights. It is encouraging to see the smiles on the faces of ordinary Fijians through the provision of better roads, bridges, electricity, water, housing blocks and land titles, free tuition for primary and secondary education, easy access to tertiary education, better communication through IT, TV and radio coverage, more jobs, foreign seasonal employment opportunities to New Zealand and Australia, increase in minimum wages and the increase in the income tax threshold to \$30,000 and the list goes on. It is an endless list, Madam Speaker. No amount of "tackle" from the Opposition bench can hide the fact that the people of Fiji appreciate what this Government has been doing for them, they know the truth ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, there are many effective hardworking civil servants in Government, there are also those who are not performing. The new Merit Based Recruitment System is revolutionising the Civil Service to make sure that we have the right people in the right jobs to implement what Government wants to achieve.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- As I said, Government is trying to ensure that we have the right people in the right jobs to implement what Government wants to achieve.

Government's agenda will not be side-tracked by inefficiencies in the Civil Service. Right people on the bus, wrong people off the bus, and that also counts for Parliament also.

Our people deserve the best and this FijiFirst Government is going to do everything in its power to make this happen. In his Address, His Excellency has named some key areas and sectors that require immediate legislative intervention and consideration by this House.

Government will continue to make to make use of its mandate given to it by the people of this country, to ensure that we create the right environment for Fijian growth and for a better Fiji, getting rid of outdated legislation and introducing appropriate new legislation.

Last night, Madam Speaker, I was addressing the participants at the Fiji Principals Association Conference. I told them that great leaders have a number of qualities, they have energy, they are energisers, they have the urge to make the tough decisions and they execute, they deliver.

That is precisely what the leader of this Government is all about, and that is precisely what this Government is all about. We will execute and create the right environment to deliver on those socio-economic rights by reviewing our legislations. We are focused to give all Fijians the right environment and social protection for them to prosper in whatever field they choose.

His Excellency referred to our record of eight consecutive years of economic growth, which is the longest period of growth in Fiji's history. This growth period included the year we were struck by *TC Winston*, the most devastating cyclone ever seen. The resilience of our people and the good relationship established with our neighbours in the world saw the influx of assistance and we appreciate this, to target the most affected to rebuild their lives, homes and communities.

These past few days, Honourable Members of the Opposition have been telling us about what they say are delays in rehabilitation. This is my question, have they not heard about build back better? Do they understand what that means? Do they not realise that one of the major reasons we had so much destructions is that, many of these buildings were not built right in the first place? We intend to make sure that this rehabilitation is done properly, and we will not do a shoddy job, just for political gain. We will do what is best for Fiji because that is what this Government is here for - we will build back better.

Madam Speaker, our recovery and positive turnaround is an indication of the overall confidence in our country and the prudent economic management and financial reforms that exist in our country.

Madam Speaker, the recent release by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics has stated that the decline in unemployment rate moved from 7.1 percent to 5.5 percent. This is a clear indication of the development and the growth, and investor confidence that is happening in our country.

Through Government's investment in infrastructure has enhanced investment and access of the labour force to places where they can work. Our dynamic policies and actions to grow small and micro enterprises are working, SMEs are growing, work opportunities have been created and business opportunities in farming, fisheries, animal husbandry, seed capital, machinery and equipment, with the expansion of tax free zones, all have significant contributions towards more economic activities and employment growth.

Madam Speaker, ordinary Fijians today are able to create small business initiatives for self-sustaining income-generating activities for their daily livelihood, and to make use of the opportunities provided by the various Government initiatives to increase their participation to another level.

We are formulating Fiji's first National Employment Policy that we intend to take the public for consultation in November, and to the stakeholders to get their contribution and input, and to feel a sense of ownership in policy formulation. With this decline in the unemployment rate, this means more Fijians are earning wages and income, resulting in the ability of families to better their livelihoods through the provision of their basic needs, financial stability and prosperity.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President reminded us about the reality of climate change and the proactive approach of this Government towards this global issue. I was appalled, appalled to hear the Honourable Karavaki say that climate change is a hoax. He called it a hoax! Does he mean that I should tell all the villagers in Lakeba - Vakano my village, and neighbouring Nasaqalau,



Yadrana, and especially Waciwaci, that the rising sea level is a figment of their imagination? Is that what we should tell them, that it is a figment of their imagination when it is impacting on their livelihoods right now?

It is not a hoax! The way you are thinking is a hoax! That is the problem that you have. Climate change is real, it is happening now, and we will not stand by and be fatalistic about it – twiddling our thumbs while things are going wrong. We are not going to do that, we are not some twiddlers, we are people who do something about it.

The Honourable Prime Minister is leading Fiji's stand towards climate change. He has called for all Fijians for a weekend of prayer later on this month. Our Honourable Prime Minister leads the nation.

(Hon. Opposition Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE. - You cannot separate the two!

Our Prime Minister needs the nation to support him in this upcoming Conference. He will be negotiating global actions towards climate change. We need to act now, all of us, we need to start acting on this.

Madam Speaker, we need every household in Fiji to be responsible in energy consumption, disposal of rubbish and all of those things that help us to get a grip on climate change.

Madam Speaker, in my Ministry our planned Labour Reforms is coming towards completion. We have been moving constantly towards providing the right legislative environment that promotes a workplace culture of social justice, non-discrimination, good faith employment relations and safe and productivity-driven workplaces.

For this new financial year, my Ministry has adopted a new Vision, Mission and Corporate Values that will result in decent work and employment growth for our people. Our new Vision is, "Decent Work and Employment Growth."

Under the new recruitment system in Government, we will look out for competent and qualified leaders, that have the energy, who can energise, have the urge, who can execute and who are passionate in their work. That is the calibre of individuals we want to build up in our Ministry.

We believe that our people, the public, need leaders in the Civil Service who have these qualities to be able to transform our service delivery and bring about win-win outcomes. Our people need the best public service to transform our nation.

To conclude our labour reforms, my Ministry will address, review and formulate a new Work Care Bill. This Bill will provide for the reform of the Workers' Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety.

Madam Speaker, the Workers' Compensation Act is the only remaining labour legislation that is yet to be overhauled or modernised to complete the labour reforms. Five separate amendments have been made to the Act in 1994, 1996, 1999, 2015 and in 2017.

The recent amendment in 2015, resulted in the increase in the quantum of compensation from \$24,000 to \$50,000 for injury and work-related cases. Another amendment in February 2017, empowered Workers Compensation Officers to issue Demand Notice to employers to obtain

documents and information. It also requires that the final medical assessments must be carried out by a medical practitioner who has completed the Impairment Assessment Training.

Work is continuing to review our existing legislations, to ensure conformance with the ILO Conventions.

Our Mediation Services constantly achieve more than 80 percent settlement rate in resolving employment grievances since 2012. We are promoting the successful Mediation Model locally, globally and among regional countries, not only in workplaces but also in families, communities, judiciary, commercial, trade, consumer and international areas. Mediation Service empowers ordinary workers to engage in meaningful dialogue with their employers to find solutions to employment grievances and restore estranged relationships.

Looking after the interests of the most marginalised in our society is something that Government prioritises. The Bainimarama-led Government introduced the first ever National Minimum Wage for Fiji in 2014. The FijiFirst Government has subsequently revised this to \$2.32 in 2015 and again, revised it this year to \$2.68.

A new National Minimum Wage of \$2.68 per hour, together with the 10 sectorial-based minimum wages will come into effect at the end of this month, 30th September, 2017. They will have a significant impact on a large proportion of our population.

A number of comments have been made in this House about the National Minimum Wage and the Wage Regulation Order. Let us get the facts right.

There was an assertion that there was no consultation on the development of these things. Absolutely rubbish! Absolute hogwash! Consultations were held with stakeholders all across Fiji. Consultations were also held with the Employment Relations Advisory Board and separately with unions and employers.

There have been statements made in this House that the Minimum Wage for unskilled labour should be \$4 or \$5. The Honourable Member who made this suggestion could not even decide what figure to go for. What are the implications of this? Will the Micro and Small Enterprises be able to pay such wages when they are struggling? Will a person earning \$24,000 as a civil servant be able to afford \$200 per week for a nanny \$5 per hour and 40 hours a week? Will it leave them enough money to deal with the things that they need to buy for their families? Will the small canteen that has a turnover of around \$1,000 per week with the 20 percent profit margin of \$200 per week, be able to pay for a part-time shopkeeper working 25 hours at \$4 a week which is \$100? What will happen to that particular business? All these issues need to be taken into account in formulating this thing. National Minimum Wage rate is for unskilled workers, it is for the person that looks after the baby, that trims your *tavioka* patch, that is what it is for.

There are blue collar workers today in Fiji as I speak, who are getting up to \$70 a day for skills that they have that are in demand, but this is for unskilled workers. There are carpenters getting up to \$10 to \$12 an hour all over Fiji. This is happening. These wages are pushed up by scarce supply.

When you increase the labour cost, this will be added to the selling price of the product that is being sold, which in turn impacts on inflation. That is something that we have to take into account. Wage increase has been set at a level that has minimal impact on inflation and the increases are also designed to minimise the flow-on effects to other categories of workers. The rates have not been

drawn out of a hat, they have been set after careful, careful, careful analysis and deep thinking, to ensure a sustainable, growing dynamic Fiji.

The National Minimum Wage has increased by 15 percent, seven percent of this increase amongst the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the other eight percent is increase in real wage. Do not forget, Government has got other packages which we call the Social Wage to look after the most marginalised. Free healthcare, free education, free medicine, bus fare assistance, tuition free education, subsidy on electricity, subsidy on water, increase in the tax threshold, reduction in duty on some things that we buy, all these assist people to be able to deal with life that they face every day.

Do you know what our independent consultant found when he asked more than 4,000 people who were surveyed for the establishment of the National Minimum Wage? He found that the effect of social wages was to reduce poverty by 70 percent. All of these programmes that Government has put in place reduces that working poverty by 70 percent.

Honourable Professor Biman Prasad talked about the fact that some Textile Clothing and Footwear (TCF) workers were paid less than the Wage Regulation Order (WRO). Yes, there are lower rates for those that are under training. Under the new WRO, these have now been standardised to three months of traineeship before they are entitled to that WRO mandated wage.

With the new National Minimum Wage and the Wage Regulation Orders, the only wages that will be lower than the National Minimum Wage or the designated Wage Regulation Orders rate, will be the learner rates that can only be paid for three months before the full rate has to be paid.

My Ministry has a robust plan in place to ensure that we take this wage increase right to the grassroots level and ensure that the increase hits the pockets of every worker.

We are increasing the number of officers looking at our compliance where we will be going out on a massive awareness campaign and we are looking at other policies to assist in compliance. I hope all employers in Fiji will ensure that workers are paid what is due to them.

There are number of other issues that have been made in this House that I need to address. First, there has been an assertion in this House that this Constitution and this Government is anti-*iTaukei*. My answer to this assertion is very simple, read the Preamble of the Constitution. What does it say? It is very clear on the importance attached to all Fijians and in particular, the *iTaukei* and Rotumans.

This is what the Constitution says, I quote: "...their unique culture..." It recognises the unique culture; "*iTaukei* institutions are solid", we have the:

- *iTaukei* Affairs Board;
- Provincial Councils;
- Tikina Councils;
- Native Land Commission;
- *iTaukei* Trust Fund;
- Cultural mapping exercise is almost complete, it is just the province of Ba that is being completed now.
- *iTaukei* Land is now, only now, protected by the 2013 Constitution. We will never ever repeat the shenanigans of past Governments as seen in Denarau and Momi.

The Honourable Nawaikula talked about the need for free and prior informed consent, I want the people of Fiji and those in this House to know that this principle is being practised effectively right now. Discussions take place with landowners on all development issues at provincial, *tikina* and even village levels. Free and prior informed consent is now a compulsory exercise by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. The *iTaukei* are being consulted, they are being informed, and their prior consent sought.

Since the 2013 Constitution, we have seen the:

- FPIC and Access Benefit Sharing Workshops;
- Establishment of iTLTB Land Affairs Unit;
- Computerisation of VKB records;
- Appointment of Conservation Officers;
- Existing Conservation Officers becoming Environmental Inspectors;
- Provincial Cultural Festival held in conjunction with the Provincial Day;
- Equal Lease Distribution of Moneys to Landowning Units, et cetera.

Government is now allowing options for resource owners on utilisation of land, whether it is iTLTB, Land Reform or Land Bank.

With or without the GCC, our chiefs are respected. When I am in a traditional community setting, I know where to sit and I know what to do, I know when to speak and when not to speak. I am now in Parliament, so I can say what I want to say. We teach our communities to abide by this. Remember that the GCC was a creation of the Colonial Masters to keep the indigenous population in control. That is our history and that is our past, that is what happened, and we need to move forward.

We still speak our language in this country, we worship in our language and we still do what we normally do. The *iTaukei* are still the majority in Fiji. But remember this ....

(Hon. Opposition Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I want to say something for all of us to remember, the *iTaukei* are the majority in this country. But I want everyone to remember this, everyone in this country is a migrant. The *iTaukei* are migrants. We were not created here, we all came from somewhere else.

What we need to be able to realise is that, we need to see all of ourselves as migrants that you know, that this country will only become strong when we can all see ourselves as part of one country.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- (Inaudible)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think the Honorable Member is a bit hard of hearing, he did not hear what I was talking about.

HON. J. USAMATE.- In closing, Madam Speaker, there has been talk in this House about who will win the next Election. I will not going to make any predictions because I know the truth, and I know what I believe.

Madam Speaker, the people of Fiji will not be fooled. They know who is looking after their interest. They see, they hear, they watch the leaders of the different parties or those pretending to be leaders. They watch the squabbles on the one side and on the solid team work on a common vision

to build Fiji on the other hand. They see the unprecedented developments, the passion for people on the one hand and the disarray on the other side.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- They see for instance that seat number 3 on the front seat says that climate change is a hoax, whilst seat No.1 says it is true.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- The people see the disarray, they know.

The Honourable Parmod Chand, said that change is coming. He missed the bus, change is already here.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.-

- It is happening now. That change has led to Eight years of consecutive economic growth;
- A Constitution that guarantees equal rights and citizenry and preserves the things that are important to us;
- Drop in unemployment rate from 7.1 percent to 5.5 percent;
- Unprecedented focus on education and health; and
- Higher levels of confidence in the economy reflected in investment at more than 25 percent of GDP.

Change is here. A better Fiji is being built today by FijiFirst! Long live FijiFirst!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, let us keep the bus running.

I now invite the Honourable Anare Vadei to take the floor.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. For the change, only two can make the change.

Madam Speaker, I wish to associate myself with the Honourable Members of this august House to thank His Excellency the President of Fiji for his most gracious Speech on the occasion of the opening of this new Session of Parliament. It is good to see him in good health and I pray for his continued good health and long life, along with that of our First Lady.

Madam Speaker, I join my colleagues to remember and pay tribute to all former Members of Parliament and Senators, who have set high standards and all they did to make Fiji a better, stronger and vibrant nation. Their efforts have not gone in vain, as the events in the 11 years may have eliminated them from the political scene, but the great ideas that they have shared will continue to inspire the generations to follow, to reclaim and rebuild the nation their ancestors once led.

Madam Speaker, Fiji is not about FijiFirst Party, its leaders or Government. Fiji is about its peoples, its sights and sounds and its diversity in which we discover hope and history, rhyme together. It is based on the tunes of values that have been bequeathed to us by our customs and traditions,

language and literature, history and politics, institutions and structures and above the Church, we follow the *vanua* we respect, and the land that we own.

It does not end there but goes beyond that to encompass a larger life we live today, than our ancestors in a multicultural society where there are people living and working with us who have their own similar values and heritage which we fully acknowledge, respect and appreciate because it defines them what and who they are. This is the beauty of diversity that has endured us for more than a century and holds the key to future peace, progress and prosperity of the Fiji Islands.

Our success as a nation, Madam Speaker, does not lie in false promises, freebees, political point-scoring, stuntmanship, draconian laws and life in utopia which are the hallmarks and legacy of the FijiFirst Government. Our success as a nation is based on the goodness, honesty, hard work, sacrifice, values, innovation and self-respect of the people of Fiji. It is a timely reminder and truth that needs to be told because the manner and tone of the speeches we have heard from the Government benches in the last three years is something that they want to tell us, they own Fiji. No, Madam Speaker, we refute that, and here I am putting you in your proper place.

Constitution, Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President spoke about the Constitution which we oppose and about the Elections which we will contest under protest, given the lack of transparency in the processes involved. He went on to talk about uniting, after the Elections, which is important but given the distasteful experience of the last three years, I express grave doubt about the same. There is little doubt that there is gross absence of a bipartisan approach and all attempts to shut out our people from our Parliament. This is generating into loss of sense of belongingness and ownership, and resulting into a mood of resignation among the Fijian people. No wonder, the cry to make Fiji free is getting louder by each passing day.

Madam Speaker, with regard to elections, SODELPA continues to express its grave concerns about how our elections are organised and conducted. To this effect, we have made submissions to the Fiji Electoral Commission and a petition call for free and fair elections. It is our humble request that the electoral laws be revised as soon as practicable to bring out a degree of wider acceptance of the election results, as we have witnessed a turn of tables in Kenya. Fiji cannot remain in isolation as the world is watching us being the champion of climate change and COP23 Presidency.

Madam Speaker, let me now speak on health services in Fiji which is one of the worst in our history. I make this statement with some merits and let me outline the reasons for the same.

Before I go to some sticky areas, Madam Speaker, let me thank the Government of the day for having developed a kitchen in the new Navua Hospital, and coming up with plans to improve facilities and develop new facilities in other centres around Fiji which are warmly welcomed, appreciated and badly needed. Let me outline some of those sticky areas, as follows:

1. Despite millions of dollars of allocation for the development and upgrading of our health facilities and equipment, the status quo remains;
2. our average life expectancy rate is all time low at 67 years old;
3. the NCD cases are on the rise; and
4. there is acute shortage of medicine, personnel and basic facilities or supplies in our health facilities, not to mention death by negligence and the recent string of infant deaths in our hospitals for a variety of reasons on which we are still awaiting the truth and apology from the Honourable Minister for Health - this is disaster in the making.

As it appears, Madam Speaker, there is a conspiracy involved here whereby this Government is making money from the diseased, sick, disabled and those on the verge of dying. The Health Sector is cunningly infected with the conspiracy theory, making us vulnerable to exploitation by the elite interests at the cost of life, health and wealth of the Fijian people. This is totally unacceptable and highly deplorable.

The paucity of Health Services, Madam Speaker, has not improved under this Government. While there are cases of backlog in the densely populated urban centres, the maritime provinces continue to suffer from lack of personnel, space and supplements. Had it not been the case, five people would not have died in Gau, Lomaiviti, from fish poisoning. If this is not the case, more lives would have been saved in the rural and maritime areas and if this is not the case, there would be less rural to urban drift.

Madam Speaker, when the modern day health services were introduced part of the goodness that came along with the British rule, the health centres were referred to in those days as the "*Vale ni Mate*", but as our people began to regain health, it was renamed as "*Vale ni Bula*". More than a century down the lane, given the current state of our health services, people have gone back to refer to our health facilities as "*Vale ni Mate*" in this age which is a gross failure on the part of the FijiFirst Government insofar as its services to our people are concerned.

On Nausori Hospital, Madam Speaker, sometime ago, it was announced on the floor of this House that a new hospital will be rebuilt in Nausori to care for the province of Tailevu, Rewa and Naitasiri. Uptil today, they are still waiting as to when this will materialise. The Honourable Minister has not confirmed when and where the hospital will be rebuilt.

Madam Speaker, this area has the largest population in our country. Delays in the construction of the hospital will create further problems in Health Centres and Nursing Stations around that area.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, services rendered now in Nausori Hospital are being adversely highlighted in the media, resulting in deaths or delays due to conditions beyond the medical personnel capabilities. It is a hot spot as far as health services are concerned, needing urgent Government action to ease the plight of the people in that region.

On medical personnel, Madam Speaker, we have heard during the Budget announcement that the 2017-2018 Budget has provided for salary increment up to 74 percent for specialised nurses for their performance in the care of our citizens in the rural and remote areas. We were further told that some 800 nurses would be recruited, Madam Speaker, and we were also told by the Honourable Minister for Health that doctors would be recruited from India, et cetera. She went on a recruiting trip. However, our health services continue to suffer because of lack of medical personnel and other additional supplies.

The absence of adequate number of doctors and nurses have resulted in chaos at various centres around Fiji. People have collapsed, got more sick, some died waiting for doctors or women rushed to the Emergency Unit and gave birth while waiting. It is either the failure in recruitment or medical personnel not performing, or is it that medical personnel do not approve their salary and employment contracts that are offered to them and chose to stay out of the public sector. There must be something gravely wrong or policies not conducive to the human resources work environment resulting in this situation.

One other reason explains this which is related to finance. Year in and year out, huge allocations are announced for the health sector. Little do people know how much is under Requisition which is saved by the Government and shown as surplus in the next financial year. This is simply done to create a good image of the Government which is in fact an act of self-deception and hoodwinking the Fijian people. But let me tell them, Madam Speaker, the cat is now out of the bag and they are exposed.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, this issue also gives rise to the question about the criteria being used to recruit, train and induct our medic personnel. This is because of the shortage of specialists and general practitioners.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Tell them.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Medicine Supply, Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President spoke about the Free Medicine Scheme which we welcome and support. A SODELPA Government will continue to maintain and advance this service to the Fijian people. However, Madam Speaker, the Opposition is concerned at the fact exposed by none other than the Honourable Minister for Health herself in the Fiji Focus publication on March 2017 wherein she stated that only 24,456 people benefitted from this scheme More than 13,000 of them are from the Western Division, a little over 7,000 from the Central Division and 3,400 from the Northern Division. The statistics for the Eastern Division is not given and we are not sure whether this fact extends to outer islands and remote areas where people continue to suffer from poverty of access or not? I want the Honourable Minister to clarify this in some detail in this House and via this House to the people of Fiji.

This scheme, Madam Speaker, though noble and timely has one other downfall which we must seek to address which is the regular supply of basic medicines that are needed throughout Fiji. They are Amoxicillin, Panadol, MMT, plasters, oxygen gas, disinfectants, injections and syringes and others.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A.T. VADEI.- In case in patients and those attending clinics are told to bring in their basic items like plasters, bandages, et cetera. It leaves us to wonder whether this new move is to offset the pay rise of the medic personnel. If that is so, then I must say that the pay rise should not be the cause to deny the people of Fiji the basic medical and health services. In saying this, there are some issues raised by people since the Honourable Minister for Health spoke on Monday, 11th September, 2017.

When a Government fails to provide these basics, Madam Speaker, it spells out a few things which I want to remind them:

1. The Government is breaching the Bill of Rights under the Constitution;
2. Facing financial problems;
3. Lost the will to govern;
4. Is careless about serving the people; and
5. Total failure to fulfil the electoral promise to free medicine to the Fijian people.

On National Health Insurance Scheme, Madam Speaker, before I speak on this issue, allow me to lay down a case for a National Health Insurance Scheme in Fiji. The Opposition has several good reasons to argue for the establishment of a National Health Insurance Scheme.



Firstly, Madam Speaker, Fiji has a narrow economic base and we cannot afford to create a welfare state or we may become another Greece in the Pacific. No, Government can afford to provide free health care specifically in terms of expensive surgery and related works thus the need for a scheme to fund for the same.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Contradictory.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Secondly, Madam Speaker, NCD cases in Fiji are mostly resultant from hypertension and diabetes. The next things that follows are kidney diseases, heart diseases and others. Kidney treatment or transplant and open heart surgeries are two of the most common and expensive medical assistance that are needed right now. They require a fund of this nature to save lives.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, saving lives of our people is very important as many of those affected by the NCDs are the bread winners of the family, who if sick and diseased or if the case of death leave behind their families to fend for themselves. On top of that they carry the debt burden left behind by the bread winner in the case where properties are involved.

The other reason I say this, Madam Speaker, is when you look at the home take pay at the end of the week set against the high cost of living of our people, they are not in a position to save for a medical treatment of expensive nature.

Based on these grounds and several other interrelated issues, I humbly submit to this House that the time has come for us to discuss this matter and draw up a national framework to establish a National Health Insurance Scheme to save lives and allow our people to enjoy good health, making meaningful contribution to Fiji and its national life.

Other issues in regards to *TC Winston* which struck Fiji in 2016, still vividly remembered by the villages in the islands of Koro, Ovalau and Batiki in the Lomaiviti Group. The rehabilitation process is taking a longer time than expected to rebuild the lives of the victims. Though the hardware companies have swiped the cards of the victims, the building materials need to be transported to the islands fully. This has not happened and people are still waiting for those materials to be supplied to begin rebuilding schools and other important facilities.

Madam Speaker, witnessing the rehabilitation exercise which involved procurement of supplies, implementation and monitoring, it has been noted with grave concern that there has been lack of proper management and supervision and quality standards to be followed. To make matters worse, this disaster and its aftermath has demonstrated to us the lack of good workmanship that Fiji lacks and needs to develop to avert such situation in future given the alteration of the climate patterns due to global warming and other related causes.

The next issue that I wish to highlight, Madam Speaker, is the road conditions that have gone from bad to worse in the maritime region, for example, in the cases of islands in the Lomaiviti Group. The road conditions are so bad that drivers and owners of RSL vehicles find it difficult to serve the people in those areas.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Jilila Kumar alluded to a point on Tuesday, 12th September, 2017 which cannot go unchallenged about the dream her party shares for Fiji. In response to that, may I say that your Honourable Prime Minister had 11 years to fulfil that dream and this Government had three years to realise that dream. Given their track record, it is an unfulfilled dream or as they call it in Hindustani a case of *Adhura Sapna*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise with due respect to respond to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, the Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konousi Konrote's most gracious Speech on 4th September, 2017 in this august House.

Madam Speaker, allow me to also quote from the *Bible*. In the book of Jeremiah 1:5 - "Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you. Before you came out of the womb, I sanctified you. I have appointed you a prophet unto the nations."

HON. MEMBERS.- Amen!

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, it is important for me to share this gospel from the Bible because it reflects where you are.

Madam Speaker, before this Constitution was written, the Almighty God already ordained and sanctified those who compiled and worked tirelessly in the charter for peace, progress and prosperity in all villages, settlements and towns for consultations.

Madam Speaker, one day we will die and that is the truth. The truth is that people are playing around with God's Word in this Honourable House. Madam Speaker, God is so great. In Psalm 24:1, it states and I quote: "The world belongs to me and those who live therein."

He is so great that we are not able to know our date of death, that is why Madam Speaker, I quoted Jeremiah 1:5 because God knows your time, your time to sit in this august House and whether you will lose in the next General Elections; only God knows.

Madam Speaker, before I continue with my speech which is on the Constitution, I would like to mention that people still talking about doctors in our hospitals. Before one dies, one would be taken to a hospital and seen by the same doctor which you said was not doing their part in either in Labasa or Suva or anywhere else in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, as mentioned by the President, and I quote; "Our Constitution has been acclaimed internationally." It shows that this Constitution has been praised enthusiastically and publicly, not only in Fiji but also abroad. We have celebrated three years and I would like to commend and salute those who worked tirelessly in binding this 2013 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, this is the only Constitution that and I quote:

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

RECOGNISING the indigenous people or the Rotuman from the island of Rotuma, their ownership of Rotuman lands, their unique culture, customs, traditions and language;

RECOGNISING the descendants of the indentured labourers from British India and the Pacific Islands, their culture, customs, traditions and language; and

RECOGNISING the descendants of the settlers and immigrants to Fiji, their culture, customs, traditions and language,

DECLARE that we are all Fijians united by common and equal citizenry;

RECOGNISE the Constitution as the supreme law of our country that provides the framework for the conduct of Government and all Fijians; ...”

Madam Speaker, our Prime Minister and the Government has achieved more for all Fijians than any other Leader of the Government under this Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the mission of the FijiFirst Party is to build a just and fair society where the benefits of progress includes everyone in this country. FijiFirst's core values will remain constant under this Constitution. Madam Speaker, since Constitution came into effect in 2013, all the *iTaukei* land will be protected as in Sections 28 and 29 where the ownership of *iTaukei* land shall remain with the customary owners of the land and *iTaukei* land shall not be permanently alienated whether by sale, grant, transfer or exchange.

Madam Speaker, there is no use to pinpoint this Constitution, it will not help. What the Opposition should do is to take the Budget Bill and teach the people what to do and it will open doors for them to start their business.

Madam Speaker, as mentioned by Honourable Gavoka, as for the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC), it is always embarrassing for me to note that not all the chiefs in Fiji belong to the GCC. All the chiefs in Fiji, once they are ordained by the *vanua*, blessed by the church and registered under *iTaukei* Land and Fisheries Commission (TLFC), they all come under one banner. They are all chiefs, and to bring only some of the chiefs to join the GCC is unfair.

I can take you back to the Colonial Days when the Great Council of Chiefs was known as the “Council of Chiefs” and they used to work together with the British as it made it easier for them to work in our country, and later on they changed the name to “Great Council of Chiefs”.

Madam Speaker, to amend or revoke the Constitution by any authority or party will need power. In the next General Elections, there will be extra seats in the Government, so how can the Opposition amend the Constitution when they do not have the voters and three-quarter of the seats in Parliament belong to the Government.

Madam Speaker, let me go back to the 1970 Constitution. In 1970, Her Majesty the Queen exercising her power enabled her with the advice of the Privy Council to order the citation and commencement of Fiji's Independent Order 1970. That Order was gazetted and came into operation on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1970. On that same day, the Order of the Fiji Constitution was set out and became the Constitution of the day and the law of the land.

Madam Speaker, the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji is the voice of the people. There was a Charter for Peace, Progress and Prosperity formulated with 11 Pillars where NGOs and volunteers moved through villages, towns and settlements to bring out the voices of the people, and the Chairman was the late Archbishop Petero Mataka and 35 members. This Constitution is the voice of the people. A former US President, Abraham Lincoln said and I quote: “... (This is the voice) of the people, to the people, for the people...”

Madam Speaker, we hardly read the Constitution and people never knew what was the Constitution before. But now, since 2013, this Constitution has been translated into Hindi, *iTaukei* and English, and you can even carry it in your bag or your pocket. You can read it and know what it is all about. Ten years ago we did not know about our Constitution, this is what we call transparency.

His Excellency Major-General (Retired) Jioji Konousi Konrote mentioned in his opening Address, and I quote;

“It is my honour to open this Session of Parliament as we anticipate Constitution Day, which is coming in just three days’ time. We are assembled here today, thanks to our Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land.”

But Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate to say that in all our responses, we kept on saying that we thank His Excellency for his most gracious Speech but the Opposition are saying otherwise, they are against this Constitution. I want to remind those who are against this Constitution, remember it is the supreme law of the land.

Madam Speaker, there will be winners and losers in the next General Elections. It is unfortunate that some of the Honourable Members will lose their seats and regret why they are against His Excellency’s most gracious Speech, but for the FijiFirst Government we will always open the door for anyone who needs help and if you do lose your seat in the next General Elections, we will always open our door for whatever issues that may arise from your village or community.

Madam Speaker, there is a tendency for Members of Parliament in previous General Elections we came across, that is to go to villages and settlements saying what is good for their Party. My question, Madam Speaker, to the SODELPA and NFP what have they done in the last three years? Maybe the answer is “No” or “Nothing” which is very poor.

What the nation has been asking, Madam Speaker, is why the Opposition are being suspended? Again my answer to them, Madam Speaker, make your decision, during the next General Elections in 2018 think about your question. If you do not respect the Standing Orders, how can you respect this Constitution?

Madam Speaker, on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of September, 1970 Her Majesty the Queen established the 1970 Constitution but in 1987 the abrogation of the 1970 Constitution was carried out because of the 1987 *coup*. Fiji was declared a Republic on the 7th Day of October, 1987 and the first President of the Republic of Fiji was appointed, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. The 1970 Constitution was inadequate to give protection to the interest of the indigenous people, their values, tradition, customs, way of life and economic well-being.

Madam Speaker, it was decided that Fiji should return to Parliament democracy and to formulate the Constitution sufficient to protect the interest of all the Fijians. A Constitution was prepared by the Interim Government and scrutinised, in particular, to the failure of the 1970 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the Fiji Constitution Inquiry and Advisory Committee conducted 32 public hearings in 14 urban and rural centres in Fiji, receiving 175 oral submissions from individuals and 174 oral submissions from groups representing the various political and religious groups.

Madam Speaker, the 1997 Constitution was the supreme law of the State but there is a big difference with the 2013 Constitution. There is no section in the 1997 Constitution where it safeguards *iTaukei* land whereas Section 28 of this new Constitution, ownership of *iTaukei* land shall remain with the customary of owners of land in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, let me go back to the history of the Constitution. The Deed of Cession was on 10th October, 1874 when Ratu Seru Epenisa Cakobau, *Tui Viti* together with high chiefs of Fiji signified their loyalty to her Majesty Queen Victoria.

Secondly, in 1970 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II promulgated Fiji's Independence Order with the 1970 Constitution coming into being.

Thirdly, the abrogation of the Constitution in 1987.

Fourthly, after three years, the giving of Fiji to the 1990 Constitution by His Excellency the President, Ratu Penaia Ganilau and *Tui Cakau* and blessings of the Great Council of Chiefs.

Madam Speaker, the same Great Council of Chiefs never thought of our land. In the 2013 Constitution the *iTaukei* land is now safe.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- How safe?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- In 1997, the then President Ratu Mara nominated the late Mr. Tomasi Vakatora, Mr. Brij Lal, Sir Paul Reeves to review the Constitution. Constitutional hearings was carried out with 687 recommendations and was presented on 6th September, 1996. It was tabled in Parliament on 11th September and the Constitution (Amendment) Bill was passed again and the Great Council of Chiefs endorsed the report in June. The then President Ratu Mara signed it into law on 25th July, 1997.

Madam Speaker, in the Constitution there was nothing in any of the chapters to safeguard our land. There was never any section in the 1997 Constitution from Chapter 1 to Chapter 10 or Section 1 to Section 195 to mention something similar to Section 28 of the 2013 Constitution, which is the right of ownership and protection of the *iTaukei*, Rotumans and Banabans. This is the only Constitution. Why did the Great Council of Chiefs not think of Fiji? This is the only Constitution that changed, because of the land in Fiji. The land is like gold to us but they never thought of us.

Madam Speaker, my question is, why did the Great Council of Chiefs never think of our land? No wonder the land in Momi and Denarau were converted to freehold within one day. Last week I met the people of Narewa, they are still crying over their land because of the Great Council of Chiefs, that is why the Great Council of Chiefs are not to come back to this House because of our land.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, no Constitution will safeguard our land and I request the Opposition to think twice about the 2013 Constitution. We are not doing anything for the party but for the whole of Fiji. To conclude it is an honour for me on behalf of the Government to thank you, Madam Speaker, for your tireless work for the last three years. Sometimes we see you as our mother in controlling us.

HON. SPEAKER.- Grandmother

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, it is the fourth year now, we hope for the best for you and your family in your future endeavour - Colonel Luveni and your grandchildren. May God bless Fiji.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu K. Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Honourable Madam Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Honourable Members of Parliament, people of Fiji and those abroad. It is an honour for me to speak today from this side of the House in this debate on His Excellency the President's most gracious Speech in the opening of this 2017/2018 Parliament.

We have always been confident, Madam Speaker, that all our contributions will be historically recorded in the *Daily Hansard* as the last reply to His Excellency in opening the final session. Each one of us had made their last reply as Members of the Opposition. It will also be historical because FijiFirst will be sitting on this side with much lesser numbers as Opposition after the 2018 Elections.

This is evident, Madam Speaker, in the statement that the Honourable Prime Minister made in his motion to debate His Excellency's most gracious Speech. He made it clear that as captain and his right hand man as Chief Mate but no cook of the "HMS No Comeback *Bilibili*" will take the FijiFirst Party downstream to the next General Elections into the ocean of oblivion.

The *bilibili* does not need an engineer, Madam Speaker, because it is COP23 compliant. One would have thought that that he would have given the assurance of the other 30 crew members who have sailed the boat with him for the last three years. Madam Speaker, politics is a game. There is no respect where it is due and good deeds are quickly forgotten. Toe the line and be a 'yes man' when it is required of you. Any opposition of any sign of resistance is a threat and will be eliminated without redress. Your past good deeds and service does not count and that is what politics is about with FijiFirst because in spite of all your sacrifices, allegiance, support and commitment, it comes to naught when crunch time comes.

Names like Dr Sharma, Pio Tikoduadua, Timoci Lesi, the Military Council, the Colonels, the Permanent Secretaries, the civil servants and teachers who work in difficult conditions of uncertainty and fear, not knowing what their future holds as the sun rises to begin a new day of work. A culture of fear is the strategy of this Government as means to aspire demigod status, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, we learn and study and take ownership of our history, lest we forget. We must not forget but be reminded of our history, our roots, our *yavutu*, those who had sacrificed their lives for our nation, the missionaries who Christianised the country especially mentioning the late Rev. Thomas Baker, the European settlers, our chiefs who ceded Fiji to Queen Victoria of Great Britain in 1874, the formation of the *Bose ni Turaga* in 1876, our leaders that had brought us to pre and post-independence like Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Ratu Sir Edward Cakobau, Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, Mr. A.D Patel, Mr. Siddiq Koya, Mr. Ramrakha and their generations of leaders.

We should also remember our forefathers who sacrificed their lives in World War I and World War II, the Malayan Campaign, Christmas Island and UN Peacekeeping duties in the Middle-East.

We must acknowledge the contributions of NGOs, civil societies and groups and neighbouring countries who stood by us through thick and thin. We must acknowledge also all our efforts and contributions in the development of our nation, every family, men and women, youths and children.

We acknowledge our sports gladiators who have represented us in the world arena, showcasing Fiji.

We cannot rewrite history to begin in 2014. That is naïve and forgetful of FijiFirst because there are stories to tell of hidden agendas that slowly has been revealed in this House. The Honourable Prime Minister's role in 2000 as Commander in the 2006 *coup*, which seemed to be deliberately put out of the radar of public scrutiny.

So, Madam Speaker, that is history. Our history decides our future.

In the *Book of Jeremiah*, Chapter 6 verse 16: "The Lord said to his people, stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths and where the best road is. Follow it and you will live in peace."

We must hold dear our ethnicity, our tradition and culture and should not deny nor be ashamed of who we are. Our origin and identity for this God given blessings. We are blessed and enriched by knowing and speaking our own language. It is amazing that one person with his sociologically fashionable theory in assuming that indigenous Fijians could be changed by imposition from the State without consultation and their support.

However, Madam Speaker, in his opening Address, His Excellency the President started by praising the decreed *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* as a Constitution that has been acclaimed internationally. The *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji*, Madam Speaker, His Excellency's Address has not provided any evidence in support of the Government's claim of international acclamation for the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji*.

All we know is that some countries welcomed the announcement by the interim Government after almost 8 years of diplomatic lobbying, calls in various international forums including the United Nation Human Rights Council by the New Zealand Government in 2010, for Fiji to return as soon as possible to constitutional Government.

Eight years, the *coup* regime stayed in power in defiance of international and domestic opinion. Later, there was international financial assistance for the *coup* regime to have a public consultation, based on the view of the 1997 Constitution.

After 8 years of frustrations and rejections, the internationally then supported the Yash Ghai Constitution Review Commission of 2013. The *coup* regime then rejected the Commission's Draft Constitution, imposed its *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* and at last announced that it would have Elections, but there was no particular commendation from the UN Human Rights Council for the decreed Constitution.

All that we heard and read was self-praise by the Attorney-General, Honourable Aiyaz Khaiyum at the meeting of the UN Human Rights Council in 2015. Some members of UN Human Rights Council, out of relief than enthusiasm, made encouraging statements towards the comprehensive review of the decreed Constitution.

Honourable Khaiyum's delegation was compelled to promise some actions that are so far from complete. Many members of the UN Human Rights Council called for ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and comprehensive review of the decreed Constitution. These are pointing out the deficiencies in the 2013 Constitution, in the protection of human rights and the need for real democracy. They meant regressive and self-serving decrees have

to be removed. There were questions at the Human Rights Council about why the amendments procedures had been made so difficult under the decreed Constitution.

Madam Speaker, and Honourable Members, His Excellency's Address refers to a comprehensive Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights is script with the Yash Ghai Draft but modified in ways that would enable Government to justify dictatorial and punitive Decrees that restricted media freedom and the running of genuinely free and fair Elections.

Madam Speaker, the decreed 2013 Bill of Rights, unlike the 1997 Bill of Rights, make no references to the need for law to be reasonably justifiable in a free and democratic society.

There are no such words in the decreed Bill of Rights under the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji*. Under it, any law including repressive Decrees, such as the Media Industry Development Decree, the Registration of Political Parties Decree and the extremely punitive provision of the Electoral Decree are justified as necessary. Madam Speaker, in summary, Fiji does not have a genuine democracy because of these restrictive Decrees.

So the Honourable Attorney-General had praised himself in the media and now in Parliament for the Bill of Rights. Further, it was a betrayal of the 1997 Constitution Bill of Rights and the Yash Ghai Commission Draft Bill of Rights.

Madam Speaker, another claim often made by the Attorney-General is that his Constitution is the first to introduce equality for all citizens in Fiji. Madam Speaker, this claim is laughable and untrue. All earlier Constitutions, in the 1970 Constitution, guaranteed legal equality for all citizens of Fiji, including foreigners living in the country. The principle of human and legal equality is not something new that was decreed by the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji*. That is a lie, Madam Speaker.

The Government also claimed that it introduced the common name "Fijian" for all citizens but this was not this Government's idea. It was the recommendations of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji. In fact, the National Federation Party had first advocated this in 1966, about 50 years ago, and this has been NFP policy advocacy for all that time.

Madam Speaker, the Government had also betrayed the NCBBF, which had recommended that the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga's* permission should have been sought for the adoption of "Fijian" as the national name. This name was given as the legally recognised identity of the indigenous people under the Deed of Cession, signed by the paramount chiefs on 10th October 1874. When the opposition parties form the Government after the 2018 Elections, we will do the right thing and seek the approval of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* for Fijians as the national name.

Madam Speaker, we are also supporting the *vakatokayaca* ceremony of the people of *Burebasaga*, who have included the descendants of the *Girmitya*, as having a status in the narrative of the *Vanua of Burebasaga*. The initiative by the Honourable Leader of Opposition, the Honourable *Marama Na Roko Tui Dreketi* is the right way of building a nation through symbolical cultural recognition of the people ....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Are we ready now? Thank you. Honourable Ratu Kiliraki, you may continue.

HON. RATU K.KILIRAKI.- Cultural inclusivity and not imposition on the *iTaukei* is the way forward for Fiji.



Madam Speaker, Honourable Khaiyum and the Honourable Prime Minister also betrayed the United Nations, the National Council for Building a Better Fiji, ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- ... the common ....

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, notwithstanding the myths in the content of it, I would like to ask the Honourable Member to at least get my name right. How would you like it if I call him Honourable Vaki. My surname is Sayed-Khaiyum - get it right. You have got everything else wrong, at least get my name right.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, please complete the name when referring to the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. RATU K.KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and my apologies to the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. RATU K.KILIRAKI.- Honourable Aiyaz Khaiyum and the Honourable Prime Minister also betrayed the United Nations, the National ....

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of order, Madam Speaker. Surname is Sayed-Khaiyum.

HON. RATU K.KILIRAKI.- My apology again.

Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum and the Honourable Prime Minister also betrayed the United Nations, the National Council for Building a Better Fiji, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Leaders' meetings, the South Pacific Forum Leaders, the European Union and the people of Fiji in April 1999 by abrogating the 1997 Constitution in response to the Court of Appeal Judgement that upheld it.

The 1997 Constitution was unanimously passed by both Houses of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, we need to learn from events and process that led to the 1997 Constitution.

Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members, when our side forms the Government after the 2018 Elections, we will heed the call of the international community and the people of Fiji for a bipartisan and comprehensive review of the Constitution.

In this regard, we have noted the statement of the Commander of the Fiji Military Forces, Rear Admiral Viliame Naupoto and Chief of Staff, Colonel Jone Kalouniwai, who have stated publicly that the RFMF is politically independent and will accept the result of the 2018 Elections, whichever side wins. This is a commendable statement from the RFMF and we look forward to their

active participation in the review of the 2013 Constitution. This review should include looking at the 1997 Constitution and the draft of the Yash Ghai Constitution Commission.

The RFMF and the people of Fiji have nothing to fear from the review and necessary changes to the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji*. The SODELPA and our allies in the Opposition parties in this Parliament and outside, when we form the Government after the 2018 Elections, we will also expect the active co-operation of the FijiFirst Party in the Opposition in the review of the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* because it is a matter of national interest.

Madam Speaker, we on the opposition side have always been in favour of bipartisan approach to issues of national interest. We had proposed to review the Parliamentary Committee on Sugar. This was rejected by the Government.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- You give me one minute, Honourable Speaker.

(Laughter)

This bipartisan tradition goes way back to political independence and constitutional talks before 1970. Then nationalisation of the sugar industry, the Fiji National Provident Fund, the FEA, the Tripartite Forum of the 1970s and 80s, and many other public institutions were examples of bipartisan co-operation.

This Government is different in that it believes it has all the answers to Fiji's problems. It rejects bipartisan work.

This morning, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General tried to justify the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* by referring to the 1970 and 1990 Constitutions. He also tried to defend his unreviewed *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* by his own interpretation of the Reeves Commission Report on the 1997 Constitution,

It makes me wonder as to why he now attacks the 1997 Constitution, when the 1997 Constitution was the legal basis on which the People's Charter was formed. Only when the 2009 Appeal Court's ruling held that the 2006 *coup* was unlawful that they abrogated the 1997 Constitution.

The last legal and authoritative judgement on the Constitution and *coups*, the 2009 court of appeal ruling, the judges carefully traversed all previous governments established since the military *coups* of 1987, 2000 and 2006 and made a very clear judgement and why the Attorney General cannot adhere to the rulings and orders, and one to promote a constitution that the Court has not decided its lawfulness.

Indigenous rights, Madam Speaker: The 17 decrees which compartmentalised and controlled the native indigenous Fijians is so discriminatory, evil and full of hate. Its evil intentions is to destroy the very existence of the indigenous natives customary and traditional structure of the *vanua*, the church and the family by decisive Decrees and legally steal ownership of tangible and intangible property of rights of indigenous people by removing the GCC, the role of the GCC as custodian and protector of indigenous people, their rights and ownership of resources and to safeguard and protect their land from unscrupulous exploitation has been removed.

The ambition has always been there to annihilate and take control on the institution of the indigenous people by imposing these Decrees.

Removing the GCC and every other institutions crumble as the result of these Decrees and therefore, to control the institutions of indigenous people, including of course the village by-laws, which is before the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

This has been highlighted by the Honourable Leader of Opposition, *na Marama na Roko-Tui-Dreketi*, Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, *na Tui Cakau*, Honourable Nawaikula, Honourable Bulitavu, and Honourable Karavaki and references by members of the Opposition. These are very important issues close to our hearts, very damaging and we will continue to raise it in this august House. SODELPA will revoke all these discriminatory Decrees.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, Fiji will need a political leader who can bring all people together in a spirit of national reconciliation and national unity.

(Honourable Member interjects)

We need a leader who has a record of willingness to review our own decreed Constitution by a bipartisan agreement in terms of reference.

We need a leader who with humility to accept defeat in Elections.

(Honourable Member interjects)

We need a leader who is willing to reconcile.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor ...

HON. RATU K.KILIRAKI.- Honourable Members, I give you Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka, thank you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER, - Order! Can we continue? Time is going? Thank you very much. Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament. I rise in this august House to acknowledge and thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech in opening this Parliament Session.

His Excellency navigated with precision on what has been achieved, what needs to be done, what we must strive for, what we must prioritise and where we should go from here. We must not lose sight about our pledge to our people and place upfront the heartbeat of the Fijian Government. That is to serve all Fijians, irrespective of gender, faith, ethnicity, socio-economic status or geography. The net result, Madam Speaker, while reaching the furthest is that we do not leave any Fijian behind in the spirit of true Fijian democracy.

Madam Speaker, our assembly in this august House was the direct result of our Constitution was well stated by His Excellency. Critics of the supreme law of the land, Madam Speaker, who are Members of Parliament makes us on this side of the House question the integrity of those Members.

I say that, Madam Speaker, because those same Members are here on the strength, validity and the legality of that Constitution.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA. - Not only that, Madam Speaker, they, like us, have taken an oath....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER. - Order! Listen to the Honourable Vuniwaqa, please. Allow her to speak.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA,- Not only that, Madam Speaker, they like us have taken an oath as Members of this House that they will obey, observe, uphold and maintain the same Constitution which they now so strongly question the validity of.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER. - Order! Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, you have been disrupting too much and it is getting disorderly in this House. Please, allow the Honourable Member to speak and be heard. Honourable Vuniwaqa, please continue.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA. - Madam Speaker, I see a pattern when it comes to the Opposition and the Constitution. They prefer to live in the past. Advocating for the supremacy of the 1997 Constitution and at the same time, sitting comfortably inside this House on the legality and the validity of the *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji*.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA. - There is a word for such people, Madam Speaker, "hypocrites".

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Our Constitution mandates equality for all Fijians and the common identity and citizenry. Better still a Constitution that directs the Fijian Government to be vigilant and it is very clear that this Government has a proven track record of turning ideas into policies, laws and action, the demonstrable track records visible at grassroots and inclusive for ordinary Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the trust of the Fijian Government to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for an allocation of a \$113.4 million is a clear signal to deserving Fijians on the Social Protection programmes that their livelihoods do matter.

The increase of \$46.9 million from the 2016-2017 Budget brought smiles of relief to these Fijian households as they have received an increase in their welfare payments.

Contributing to this is the positive economic growth for Fiji and the visionary leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, the Fijian households that will benefit in the current fiscal year will be at the better advantage, compared to those who were assisted in the past years. That is good news for them, as their voices to increase their allowances have been heard. The new budget is an increase of over 70.3 percent from the existing allocations and we remain committed to meeting the promise, to reach disadvantaged Fijians all over our country.

Madam Speaker, it brings us comfort to know that the increase in Social Protection Programme will benefit 25,259 families already on the Poverty Benefit Scheme; 4,152 households on the Care and Protection Programme; 25,998 senior citizens on Social Pension Scheme; and 2,249 expectant mothers under the Extended Food Voucher Programme.

Madam Speaker, 90 percent of the increase in the Ministry's Budget allocation is for its Social Protection Programmes. The Social Protection Programmes, Madam Speaker, comprises 85 percent of our total budget. This speaks volumes of Government's efforts to bring every Fijian to the fold and not leave any Fijian behind.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA. - Madam Speaker, the Social Protection Scheme is not a freebie. It is an empowerment tool to assist deserving Fijians to get on the path to development, assisting deserving Fijians to get on the bus that the FijiFirst Party is on. The same bus they missed on the other side.

Madam Speaker, we heard from His Excellency about this Government's permanent and binding commitment to gender equality and its promotion with changes in the law and through a never ending battle to end sexual and domestic violence against women, children and the weak. Violence against women is a symptom of gender inequality and calls for united stand from this august House.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry in the lead agency for gender has progressed the implementation for the National Gender Policy. A lot has been done and more still needs to be done to progress gender equality across faith-based organisations and the private sector. In continuing our national efforts towards awareness of and eradication of gender-based violence, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation will in the next few weeks ramp up our campaign in partnership with the private sector to target male advocates and to highlight the male voice as a critical component of the fight against domestic violence.

Madam Speaker, our Ministry is truly excited by the encouragement of entrepreneurship at all levels in Fiji through the Micro and Small Business Grants, which is indeed an investment in our people. It is pleasing to note that 40 percent of the recipients of these grants are women.

Few weeks ago, Madam Speaker, I had the pleasure of opening a Women's Resource Centre for the women of Yadrana Village in Lakeba Lau, which was built by the Ministry of Agriculture. So you see, Madam Speaker, gender mainstreaming as envisaged under our National Gender Policy is alive and well. Gender mainstreaming continues at Government level. It is time that we also focus on that, outside of Government, not just through words of advocacy but through action.

Madam Speaker, and as we move towards Elections, let us encourage more women to put their hands up and stand in the upcoming Elections. As a Fijian woman, I cannot support the suggestion for temporary special measures being mooted by the Opposition. TSM are a hand-out, Madam Speaker. They are a hand out.

Madam Speaker, in my humble view, temporary special measures fail to recognise the merit, the resilience, the ability and the capacity of the Fijian women.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA. - Fijian women do not need preferential treatment to claim a seat in this august House. We know that the last Elections saw the election of the highest number of females into the Fijian Parliament. We have you, Madam Speaker, as our first female Speaker. The Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General are both females.

Gender equality enlightenment in Fiji has been boosted by empowering laws, policies and practices of Government and also the great work of our Non-Government partners and civil society. Empowering laws, policies and practices in Government, Madam Speaker, do not happen accidentally. They are a show of an enlightened leadership, a Prime Minister who is a champion of gender equality and empowerment.

Madam Speaker, this Government believes in empowering women to attain the seemingly unattainable. This Government believes in tearing down laws and policies that discriminate against women. This Government believes in putting in place laws and policies that empower women and we believe that Fijian women can and we utilise these empowerment strategies to contribute positively to nation building. Empowerment through access to education and Government services, through domestic violence laws, through equal opportunities for employment in Government and through the vast array of services and benefits available across Government. The private sector itself has done and continues to do its fair share in empowering Fijian women to access to finance, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, this Government believes that if we put in place the right environment, women can and will continue to attain the seemingly attainable.

Madam Speaker, for older persons, it is not enough to just assist the elderly but we must end their isolation from society and give them a place at the table WAS what His Excellency had said in his Address.

Madam Speaker, it was the Bainimarama-led Government that actually sets a place at a table for elderly persons and made them a critical component of national development through the National Council of Older Persons Act in 2012, a forward-thinking law that provides for formal mechanism for hearing the voices of the elderly in society, making us a nation prepared for the inevitable changes of ageing as we head towards the next few decades.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency aptly stated that Fiji, like the 197 countries of COP23, must unite to minimise the carbon emissions to less than two percent, and that it is no cause for joy that others in the world share our risks. We are heartened and proud to know that Fiji will be the first Small Island Developing State to bear Presidency of COP and this calls for all of us to support our Honourable Prime Minister in this grand undertaking.

Madam Speaker, climate change and ocean warming represent a real threat to our livelihood. As a Small Island Developing State, this threat is even more visible and current. The devastating effect of climate change on our nation knows no barriers, and certainly does not care about politics, so let us not introduce politics into it but instead, show our support to our Honourable Prime Minister and his team, who will be in Bonn for COP23 later this year.

To the Honourable Members on the other side, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition has openly stated her support for the Honourable Prime Minister's Presidency role at the upcoming COP23. Please, follow your leader and, I mean, the Honourable Leader in the House.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency also spoke about doing what is best for our country, and that we think beyond ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status and that if we respected each other, then everyone's interests will be respected.

In the past few days, Madam Speaker, we have sat here and heard the usual tirade of ethnically divisive slurs and race baiting from the Honourable Members of the Opposition. Yesterday, we the indigenous Members on this side of the House, were even told that we are not indigenous or that we did not care about the welfare of indigenous people in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, do I lose my identity as an indigenous person because I believe in equal citizenry? Do I lose my identity as an indigenous person because I believe that the governance of my country must be by people who have been voted in by Fijians, exercising their right to choose their leaders in an electoral system that did not give me preferential treatment just because of my ethnicity or government system that gave me preferential treatment because of my social status? Have I forsaken my right to be called an indigenous person or an *iTaukei* because I want my children to grow in a Fiji that does not discriminate against them or their friends, just because they come from different ethnic backgrounds? The answer, Madam Speaker, is an emphatic 'no', 'no', 'no' and a 'no'.

Madam Speaker, I want my children to grow up as self-reliant human beings, who know that the product of hard work is not determined by their ethnic background but by the effort they put into their work. I want them to be eligible for a scholarship, not because of their ethnicity but because they have applied themselves academically to a set standard.

Madam Speaker, as an indigenous person, I am blessed because my identity, culture and traditions are recognised by the Constitution. I am blessed because my ownership of *iTaukei* land as an *iTaukei* is protected under the Constitution for the first time. I am blessed because I am free to worship this God that I serve. I am blessed because my rights as a human being are protected by the Supreme law of this land and I am truly blessed because I know that the rights of my brothers and sisters, who do not come from the same ethnic background as I do are also protected by the same Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the 50 of us who have been privileged to sit in this House for the past three years have an uncanny privilege, the privilege to shape and influence the opinions and the minds of the entire Fijian population living in Fiji or overseas through the words that we speak in this august House. The destiny of our country is in our hands, not only through the Government policies and programmes geared towards development, but also through the words that we speak in this House on the issues that matter to our people.

With that privilege Madam Speaker, comes to huge responsibility, a responsibility to ensure that we by our words do not inculcate feelings of ill-will and distrust between ethnicities or communities, a responsibility to do away with racist divisiveness that led us to some of our darkest days in the life of our nation and our responsibility to advocate for unity in the phase of our diverse ethnicities, cultures and traditions.

Madam Speaker, as a Fijian with an indigenous heritage, I believe in the principles and values:

- espoused by the FijiFirst Government;

- of integrity, diversity, meritocracy and self-reliance;
- that are part and parcel of my upbringing and that I strive to impart to my three children in everything I do and every word I speak inside of this Parliament and outside of it, words and actions that do not give false perception that I am ethnically superior to those who belong to a different ethnic group.

Those values, Madam Speaker, and the dreams and aspirations of the Fijian people that espouse from the Constitution, and the laws, policies and programmes of this Government, are what will keep my bet on the Honourable Prime Minister and his team, whichever Government he leads election after election.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now call upon the Honourable Acting Prime Minister to give the Right of Reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will not be very long.

Madam Speaker, again, I would like to recognise the fact that the Honourable Prime Minister is away overseas and that is why he is not able to give his Right of Reply. He, as we know, is carrying out the efforts that Fiji has been given the responsibility of. To those people who had made incorrect statements, we were, in fact, asked by the United States of America, led by other countries, to take up the Presidency, for the record. Honourable Salote Radrodro does not know what she is talking about.

Madam Speaker, this essentially signifies the great level of confidence that the international community has in countries like USA actually had in Fiji, to actually put up our name for the Presidency. Again, we implore the Opposition and they talk about bipartisanship, please, look at this matter at a national and international level do not do political points scoring which they have been doing.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, I want to actually link this to the economy. Apart from the fact that climate change has an enormous impact on the economy, our ability to grow as an economy, economic developments, agriculture, the negative impacts of that, but there is also economic opportunities within that.

However, Madam Speaker, as the Honourable Members from this side have very eloquently stated, some of them as you can see, have really come out quite emphatically talking with a lot of passion about how the Opposition has reacted to His Excellency's Speech, and that is the focus on ethnicity.

Madam Speaker, I need to address this because it has an enormous negative impact on economic growth. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad will know this, he has written articles on this. How the impact of having a country, a society is beholden to a non-economic issue, can actually have a negative impact on the economic growth of a country, how we are actually able to discard the opportunities that may exist.

Madam Speaker, we cannot be beholden to every thinking, it is absolutely disastrous for us, and I will give you some examples. In Fiji, before the appointment of the Bainimarama-led Government, when you arrived into Fiji or when you left Fiji, the Departure Card said, "If Fiji citizen,



fill out this.” We have removed that. It should not have been asking question, “If Fiji citizen, fill out your profession - doctor, engineer, nurse.” Where is the brain drain?

They talk about lack of specialists, why? Because there was no investment in our human capital. You do not turn out a heart surgeon overnight. When you do your MBBS, it takes 10 to 15 years to become a cardiac surgeon. Where was the investment in that? We have just had Dr. Biribo now, who had just come in to do neurological surgeries in Fiji that was never done before because he has been trained in New Zealand, we have invested in him.

There are a lot more other doctors that we are investing in. We have increased their salaries up to 80 percent, we are doing another review, but if we ethnically think about it, Madam Speaker, we will always be saying, “How many people of this ethnic group?”

The Honourable Prem Singh wants an ethnic breakdown of the Civil Service when we have had a history, and when coups have been justified on ethnicity, so why does he want to perpetuate that issue? That is the problem, Madam Speaker, and this is why we refuse to do it.

The other issue also is the inability to stand up to the rhetoric of ethnicity, in particular when it boils down to demagoguery, and we have seen the current demagoguery that comes from the other side, Madam Speaker, because whilst they may sit here and think that they are just talking here in Parliament, there are people listening. People are also listening, who actually clutch on to this kind of ideas and I do not like to say this publicly, Madam Speaker, but it is a fact.

Madam Speaker, a lot of people have done this in our history because they want to preserve their socio-economic status, their elite privileges, but look what happened in 2000? Again, I am saying and I am cautioning everyone, I am going to say this because it is a fact, it did happen and people do not talk about it. When the Government was held captive for 56 or 54 days, whatever it was in Veitovo, people in Muaniweni were attacked, people in Vanua Levu were attacked, women were raped and they had cassava shoved up their vaginas. That is the kind of issue that was taking place.

We had women in Vanua Levu and you know what ethnic group they were, they were asked to strip naked and parade in front of people and go and cook over the fire. That is what happened, Madam Speaker. People's homes were robbed because they were told that it is alright because those people are all rich and they can take that.

This, Madam Speaker, is what this kind of racist agenda, rhetoric and demagoguery leads to, because it homogenises people. When you homogenise people, you will say, “All of these people in this ethnic group think like this.” But what it also does, it actually fails to address intra-group injustices.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Then show respect, that is all we want.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I will give an example. When you homogenise people, you will say that all those people in that ethnic group think alike, but there are also within that group people who are rich, there are people who are poor, there are those who are women, the gay, the disabled, but you cloud over all of that. You assume only one or two people who speak for that group. That is what homogenisation does, Madam Speaker, and it is detrimental, not just to the social fabric but also the economic fabric.

The 1997 Constitution we talked about, homogenisation led to this. Out of the 23 *iTaukei* seats that were reserved for the *iTaukei* people, only six went to urban *iTaukei* people. At that time,

we used to call them “Fijians” – six urban Fijian seats, when nearly 50 percent of the *iTaukei* voters were living in urban areas. That is what you call gerrymandering.

The Province of Namosi that had a seat, had voters of about 3,300 people and they voted for one person. The Province of Nadroga had 19,000 voters, they voted for one person. Is that equal suffrage, universal suffrage? It is really called gerrymandering. Some countries say it is actually illegal to do that. That is what homogenisation does. Madam Speaker, the reality is that, we need to get away from this way of thinking.

On scholarships, Madam Speaker, when they had scholarships based on ethnicity, I know personally people who are related to me, the *iTaukei* Scholarship, it used to be called the Fijian Affairs Board. We had certain children of chiefs who kept on failing but kept on getting the scholarships, some of them took 10 years to do a degree, but the ordinary common *iTaukei* person who got a very high mark did not even get a peek of the scholarship. That is what happened, Madam Speaker, when you homogenise, when you do not have open merit systems of selection of people.

Madam Speaker, the reality is, it leads to preposterous views because people just cannot get out of that way of thinking. When we appointed the last Electoral Commission, not this one, the previous one, someone came to me and said, “Hey, just because you went to Marist does not mean you go and appoint all Catholics to the Electoral Commission.” I did not even realise that apparently, five out of the seven Commissioners were Catholics. But you see, the way of thinking that perpetuates, people start breaking it down along religious and ethnic lines. So how can we progress?

We recently had a letter from a trade unionist. Trade Unionists, Madam Speaker, are supposed to look at the socio-economic issues. They wrote a letter, complaining and saying, “Oh, FEA hired the last batch of apprentices and all of them were Indo-Fijians.” They go through a merit selection, they applied like everyone else. Maybe the next batch will be all *iTaukei*, maybe the next batch will be all Eskimos, the next may be all Chinese or the next will be all from Rewa or wherever else, but they got there on merit. What does that mean? That FEA's output will be a lot better. The reality of the country is that, people will always get jobs on merit. Honourable Vunivalu has very eloquently stated that. That, Madam Speaker, is what we need to understand because it has a huge impact on our economy.

Today again, the Honourable Prem Singh accused Jane Curr (who has been helping us prior to the Elections) of being a racist because she used a few phrases that even I use with my staff, not because we are of the same ethnic group or different ethnic group. When you say something to anyone, it is a colloquial speech. When you say to someone to do something and they do not know, you will say, “You do not understand the language I am speaking”. It does not mean English, the only reason he is doing that is because she is white. The only reason he is doing that is because she is white. This is how preposterous it is, Madam Speaker.

Then in one case, they say, “OMRS has not worked.” Madam Speaker, if it has not worked, there is something wrong with it, there is a procedure about the appeals process, they can go through that process. No system is perfect, Madam Speaker, this is why we have an appeals process. The same as in the court, when it gives a decision and you do not like the decision, you appeal - Magistrates Court, High Court, Court of Appeal, Supreme Court, he knows that. He has been a court clerk nearly all his life and he should know that.

Madam Speaker, the reality is, we need to be able to break out of the shackles, and the Constitution has actually provided the legal redress for many of the issues that have become political hot-beds, political stones, we put that to rest.

Our focus, Madam Speaker, is on delivery. Yes, they always go on saying, "Previous Governments had built roads and bridges." Yes, they have, no one has never denied that, but at a very slow rate. That is the point. If you look at the breakdown of Budgets in previous governments, if you look at the budget breakdown, 87 percent of that budget went to Operational Expenditure, only 13/14 percent went to Capital Expenditure. But if you look at our breakdown, 40 percent of the total Budget goes into Capital Expenditure, which means we are building more.

Madam Speaker, the reality is, there are still people, about five or ten years ago, who were drinking from creeks, drinking from wells with tadpoles in it and some of them are still doing that, but far lesser of them are doing that because we have put in all those projects.

If you look at the rate of rural electrification, Madam Speaker, the rate of connections to water reticulation systems, it has been the highest it has ever been. People were languishing, they have to pay a deposit - 10 percent, five percent and some of them did not pay, others paid, then it did not get done. Today, you do not have to pay a deposit. We have a whole list of people who are getting connected. Look at the all the details in the Budget Supplement, Madam Speaker, this is what we are focussed on.

Madam Speaker, there is a huge level of investment. The reason why there is a huge level of investment is because of the stability in policies, because people actually see that there is a lot of commercial sense, it gives them the level of confidence. As the Honourable Usamate was talking about, there are a lot of people now who are getting paid rates or salaries they have never had. A welder in Suva gets paid \$15 or \$16 an hour; brick layers are getting \$8 or \$9 an hour; electricians are getting \$12 an hour and we need more of them. This is why we set up these Technical Colleges.

The economy is growing, let us all capture that. Let us all work together, stop politicising. The Honourable Prime Minister said this, "Let us not politicise the economy." Let us work together because all of us from both sides, want jobs, we both want the economy to grow, both sides want people's livelihoods to increase both sides to get rid of absolute poverty, we all want that, so let us work together to facilitate that.

Madam Speaker, today, of course, I want to get back into the homogenisation issue, how we have homogenised, you have all the elitism, et cetera. Look what happened a few years ago when all those homogenistic policies, treating everyone you know, one group things like that? Who got the Class A shares in Fijian Holdings? The elites got the Class A shares. Who got Class B shares? The Provinces got the Class B shares.

Under this Government, now the dividend payment is equal. Before the dividend payment was not equal. Class A shares people got more dividend than the Class B shares when the Fijian Holdings was actually setup to benefit the people who got the Class B shares. That was what happened, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I had worked as a Prosecutor for a while and we had people trying to use traditional methods of settling rape matters. "Let us do the *bulubulu*." A lot of these issues were swept under the carpet, Madam Speaker. So in order to provide justice in the public space, we need to have these legal precepts to ensure that everyone feels comfortable, not just us, but people who come to invest in our country too. They need to be able to feel that level of confidence in a modern nation State.

Madam Speaker, our services are increasing, for example, we have BDM offices in every major town and city. We have Legal Aid Offices. These helps people at the lower end of the socio-economic background, they also need access to justice. All these work are being done.

Last night, Madam Speaker, I was with the Honourable Minister for Lands, the team from the Ministry of Local Government was there also, these people who are living in Omkar Settlement were saying, "All the Governments have done things." People have been there for 45 years, 40 years, 30 years, 25 years, the entire generation has passed through there. No Government has given them a lease, it was Crown land.

The Honourable Minister for Local Government carried out the sub-division, issued the titles and yesterday, 63 people received an asset that they did not have for the past 40 years.

Madam Speaker, this is the point, the previous Governments did not do that. So, Madam Speaker, what we are saying is that, we need to be able to focus on that. Of course, as we said, we are playing catch-up.

Honourable Gavoka talked about Monasavu, he mentioned Vaturu Dam, but who was the Government in place when Vaturu Dam was commissioned? It was not this Government. Who did the deal then?

When the Honourable Prime Minister went up to Monasavu, the people from Monasavu who gave the land, they saw the electrical cables going over their villages, they did not get the electricity themselves, this Government gave them the electricity. Unfortunately for them they had to get legal recourse, went outside and fight in the court of law. If we had been around during that time, Madam Speaker, things would be different. I mean, even if you look at the rent that people at Nausori Airport, how they gave away their land? The SVT Government, Alliance Government and SDL Government, they were all there. No one changed the rent payment for that. We are doing the review of that.

Madam Speaker, there is a lot of talk going around, telling these people, "You should be getting extra number of billion dollars for this particular deal." No, it is incorrect.

The Fisheries Act 1941 or 1942, all other Government have used it to calculate the *qoliqoli* issue. Madam Speaker, we have actually changed the policy where they are getting more consultations in respect of that. But what they do not go and tell those people is that, if they actually able to do a proper assessment here, if a development does take place, what does it do to the rest of the land that the *itaukei* landowners own? It increases the value. So if they are going to put a few water bungalows, maybe they will get more businesses opportunities in another ancillary business. They can actually have partnerships with them. These are the kind of things that they do not go and talk about.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, when we talk about economic development, we need to take a holistic approach. We need to be able to understand the commercial issues that does exist. I urge the Honourable Gavoka go and talked to Tony Whitton and see how much he is paying in Likuliku. They are actually getting a gross percentage of their gross turnover.

There are other issues, Madam Speaker, that they think they contribute. He talks about Tavarua. He said that millions of dollars have been lost because of the Surfing Act. No! They did not get millions of dollars before that. If they had received millions of dollars, they would be living in palaces by now.

Madam Speaker, what actually happens was, one of the....

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Clarification, Madam Speaker, they were getting about \$700,000 a year around that, so over the last 10 years or whatever they have been stopped from doing it, it could have gone into millions. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, if I can continue, the payments that were being given, one or two chiefs, got a larger lump sum, that is what he is not saying. After the Surfing Act was put in place, I had one of those chief calling us saying, "Hey, what about my payment?" That was used to happen, Madam Speaker. Even if \$700,000 was equally being given to everyone, they would have a different economic situation

But what they are not saying, Madam Speaker, is today, they actually have business opportunities because before what happened was that, Tavarua had exclusive right over the reef. So even if I am living in the village and a surfer comes to me and says, "Can you take me in my punt to the cloud break?" He cannot do that. They can only go one Saturday in a month, that was what used to happen.

Today, Madam Speaker, anyone can go. A lot of those people who actually have their punts, these people hire their punts and they are making money from that. And this brings me to the other issue which is the equal distribution of land lease monies.

Madam Speaker, so many commoner *itaukei* people are very happy with the equal distributions of land lease monies. They are being economically empowered, they are improving their lives. They said, "The iTaukei Land Trust Board has been politicised because the Honourable Prime Minister is the Chairman. He is the Prime Minister, he should not sit there." I pulled out the list for all the people who were the Chairman of iTLTB, Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu, I have seen your name there too. You were there exactly, you were on political appointment. So your people are saying that just because the Honourable Prime Minister, Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, is the Chairman, because of his appointment as Chairman, therefore, iTLTB has been politicised. But Chairman of iTLTB have always been political appointments, so what is the difference? I have got the whole list I can give it to you here, even your leader outside this Parliament was the Chairman for so many years. Was it not politicised then?

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Just a clarification as well, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Attorney-General and Acting Prime Minister needs to check his facts right. He is mentioning my name by saying that I brought that up, that the Chairmanship should not include the Prime Minister. I am sorry, Madam Speaker, that is completely false.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I did not say that Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu said it, I said that the other side said it. I said, they are politicising it. I did not say it was you, Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu.

The list is here, Madam Speaker. This goes to show that this ingenuity on the other side is political point-scoring. The Honourable Ratu Kiliraki, I do not even want to start over the things he said. Madam Speaker, the reality is that we need to be able to focus on the economic development,

and be able to ensure that whether it is the landowner, whether it is the squatter, anyone, Madam Speaker, irrespective of ethnicity as long as they are Fijian, that we are able to help them. And that is exactly what His Excellency our President was saying. That is exactly what our Honourable Prime Minister is doing. Many of the things they say, they are saying, "Make Fiji free." Fiji has never been free than before.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will tell you why?

Today, we are discussing issues and topics that were before taboo. You could not talk about it, and that as a result, Madam Speaker, was holding our country back. We are able to now air out issues freely and openly into the public space. They said, "The media is restricted." How is the media restricted? There is absolutely no restriction on the media to report on anything they do or say and neither on us.

The fact of the matter is, many things have progressed very, very quickly from 2013 and 2014 in Fiji. This side of the House, the Honourable Prime Minister and his team, have moved along really quickly too. We have made changes, we have done a lot of things. They are caught in a time warp, they are not able to reconfigure themselves.

Please, I am appealing to them, and I am not saying this with any kind of malice. Please, reconfigure yourselves for the sake of our country. Madam Speaker, 69.4 percent of the entire population of Fiji is, at least, below the age of 40. They want to hear and see much better things in particular, coming from the Opposition. This is your cue for your campaigning material, I am giving you now.

Madam Speaker, the reality is that, today we have an economic situation where we have high levels of investments, we have eight years of growth projected for another two years, inequality has dropped, as I had mentioned, and let me highlight it again.

What is really interesting, Madam Speaker, before I highlight that, the recent survey by the Bureau of Statistics shows that the number of school dropouts has dropped from 31.9 percent in 2011-2012 to 4.8 percent in 2015-2016. Huge amount, and Madam Speaker, 31.9 percent of the people who dropped out of school in 2010-2011 said that they are dropping out because of costs of going to school. Only 4.8 percent who dropped out of school in 2015-2016 said: "I am not going to school anymore because of costs."

So, Madam Speaker, what it goes to show is that Government's policies to make education more inclusive is actually working really well. A lot more people today are attending school because they do not feel the cost burden. In the same way, Madam Speaker, many households in Fiji stopped their women or the girls from going to school because they had to make a choice. Five brothers, two sisters, they could only afford to only send three or four or five, they will send the boys because the girls will get married in any case. That is what used to happen, that is a fact. Today, all of them are going to school because they do not have to pay for the school fees.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Leader of Opposition said "Oh, it's not free because we do not give them lunch and uniform." Madam Speaker, come on, the reality is that these people are now going to school because we are paying for them.

But inequality, Madam Speaker, again independent third parties, the Gini Coefficient shows that from 2008-2009 - 0.43; 2013-2014 - 0.36, so inequality has dropped, Madam Speaker. Yes, we

accept the fact, in some countries, when you have economic growth, it does not always mean that the growth is at least shared equally.

In Fiji's case, because of the policies that we have put in, inequality has actually dropped, Madam Speaker, which is something that we need to be proud of. Madam Speaker, we are looking at other things, behind the scenes, you know they talk about Value Added Tax (VAT), reducing VAT, et cetera. We need to be able to look at how those costs here are incurred in the first place, as announced in the Budget, Madam Speaker.

And you can only see one supermarket chain has already reacted to this, it is called Max-Val-u. We can see how costs have dropped because they know the threat of investigation on anti-competitive behaviour that is taking place.

So it was announced in the budget, we are working with the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission to look at the monopolistic positions of those people who are the sole suppliers of food products - not the retailers. Retailers are simply buying from them, but we are working with these people.

So, Madam Speaker, it is the political will, administrative will to look behind the scenes, to be able to ensure that we are able to bring down the cost of living for all of these people.

Taxi owners, bus operators, all of them, from 1<sup>st</sup> October, they will get a 15 year licence and taxi owners will get a 10 year licence. Why? We want to be able to improve the quality of public service transportation, but certainly these people are now being given an asset. They can look after and continue to build up the infrastructure - e-ticketing, all of these things, Madam Speaker, is happening.

We talk about the sugarcane industry, \$100 a tonne, they do not talk about the cost input, they do not talk about international economics or the world market price of sugar, Madam Speaker. Again, a lot of what they are doing is appealing to the very basic quick wind fixes.

Madam Speaker, what we say is this. Poverty does not recognise ethnicity, poverty does not recognise religion, poverty does recognise where you live, Madam Speaker. It does not recognise whether you are a man or a woman. In the same way, a woman who is raped is a woman who is raped. Are we going to then do ethnic profiling of that Honourable Prem Singh? A child who is molested, are you going to do ethnic profiling on that?

Just let me finish by saying this short story. I remember a few years ago, and I am going back about 12, 15 years ago, I was near Caines Jannif, near one of the buildings when a car came around the corner and the door opened. A baby fell out, a very young baby and this lady who was standing next to me turned around and said; "Indian Baby or Fijian baby?"

You see Madam Speaker, we should be concerned that it is a baby. When we ingrain stereotyping, ethnic profiling, ethnic thinking, we will not progress, not just at the social level but at an economic level.

If we start profiling business people who come in through door, if we start profiling doctors who apply for jobs, civil servants who apply for jobs, Madam Speaker, we will not progress. So this is why, Madam Speaker, it is very critically important for all of us in this Parliament, please, let us go to the Elections and talk about policies. You have a right to win, we have a right to win, you have a right to campaign, we have a right to campaign, but as His Excellency the President said, please do so with dignity, please do so by telling the truth. Please do not focus on ethnicity, that is being the

bane of our past. Let us not delve into that and if anyone, whoever wins, we must win it because you know you won it fair and square, and straight, not by duping the people of Fiji.

So, Honourable Members and Madam Speaker, with those few words, I would like to once again thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech, and we look forward to working together with all of you in this Parliament. *Vinaka Vakalevu*. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

The questions is:

That this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is therefore agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of our sitting day today, thank you for your contributions to the debate. It has been robust and healthy, and I thank you for that.

Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 2.06 p.m.