

THURSDAY, 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2015

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

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

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

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 23rd September, 2015 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

POINT OF ORDER

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, *cola vina*'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I refer to Standing Order 31 regarding the comments made by the honourable Minister for Education on page 3 of today's *Fiji Times*, where it stated that there is a serious offence levelled against me and they have reported the matter to the Police. Actually, what was uttered in this House is a matter of national importance and it is about the leakage of the exam paper, which became known to the public since last week. I did not reveal the confidentiality as uttered by the honourable Minister for Education.

I want a ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, regarding what was uttered by the honourable Minister for Education and published in the dailies today.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I thank you, honourable Member. I have not had a chance to read the paper and I will defer the ruling to a later date.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the paper says that he has been investigated but for matters that he uttered here in this august House.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you for the point of order. We will make a ruling at a later day.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order to seek clarification from you as to why party leaders, namely the honourable Leader of the Opposition and I, were not allowed to respond to a statement made by the Honourable Minister of Finance regarding the bond issue in Parliament yesterday.

I am aware that the Honourable Leader of Government in Parliament moved the suspension of Standing Order 11, according to yesterday's *Daily Hansard*, but Standing Order 11 relates to second and third days of new Parliament or first and second days of any subsequent sessions.

This Standing Order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is specifically related to the Address by His Excellency for a motion to be moved without notice for an address of thanks to His Excellency. Nowhere in the Standing Order allows the Minister to make a statement, verification or correct misrepresentation. The only thing a Minister may do is to give an hour's notice to make a ministerial statement for 20 minutes, following which five minutes is given to the Party leaders to respond, which in this case are the leaders of the two Opposition Parties.

The statement by the Honourable Minister of Finance was neither a personal explanation nor to correct misrepresentation of what happened in Parliament. In here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I refer you to the Speaker's Ruling of Monday 21st September, 2015, disallowing myself from correcting a newspaper report that had misrepresented what was actually said in Parliament on 27th August, 2015.

Even under Standing Order 131, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is on Government Guarantees and Loans, authorising the honourable Minister to present to Parliament information concerning particular loans or guarantees, is by way of a motion and is debatable unless Section 145 of the Constitution is fully complied with.

In this case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the details provided by the honourable Minister are actually not in full compliance of Section 145 of the Constitution, and if I may quote from this section:

“(1) The Government must not guarantee the financial ability of any person or body in respect of a loan or otherwise unless the giving of the guarantee is authorised by Parliament in accordance with conditions prescribed by law.

(2) Parliament, by resolution, may require the Minister responsible for finance to present to Parliament, within 7 days after the resolution, information concerning any particular loan or guarantee, including all information necessary to show —

- (a) the extent of the total indebtedness by way of principal and accumulated interest;
- (b) the use made or to be made of the proceeds of the loan or the purpose of the guarantee;
- (c) the provisions made for servicing or repayment of the loan; and
- (d) the progress made in the repayment of the loan.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this was not entirely complied with by the Honourable Minister, therefore the statement by the Honourable Minister of Finance violates the Standing Order. It was made without notice, there is no provision for it, it was not a ministerial statement because the Party leaders were not allowed to respond to it, and it did not fully comply with Section 145 of the Constitution, and was not a motion. The debate was not allowed. We therefore, seek your urgent ruling on this matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I thank you for your Point of Order, honourable Member. I will defer my ruling to allow for a considered decision.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIRWelcome

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to the continuation of the response to His Excellency the President's Address.

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

Year 8 Examination

Today is the second and final day of External Examination for Year 8 students, and I wish to echo Madam Speaker's sentiment in conveying my best wishes and that of this august House to all those students who are sitting for the Examination.

Ruling – Wednesday, 23rd September, 2015

Before we move on to the next item on the Agenda, yesterday, Honourable Bulitavu and Honourable Nawaikula raised a Point of Order in relation to the same issue, making reference to the speech delivered by the Honourable Minister for Employment Opportunities, Industrial Relations and Productivity. This Ruling will deal with both the Points of Order.

Having examined the relevant parts of the *Daily Hansard* in question, in my opinion, the honourable Madam Speaker has already ruled on the issue when a point of order was raised by Honourable Draunidalo, directly after the Honourable Minister's speech on 22nd September, 2015.

A Point of Order could have been raised at that time, asking for withdrawal of the alleged offending statement which the Presiding Officer would then rule upon. The *Daily Hansard* is near verbatim record of what was said, and has been established previously that one cannot correct another Member's contribution. Thank you, honourable Members.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order. Standing Order 18, with regards to the Ruling that you have just made, we seek clarification. Is it your Ruling that once words that are disallowed by the Standing Orders, words alluding to treason, words regarding matters that are before the courts, words that are not allowed here normally by the Standing Orders, once they are uttered and not withdrawn at the time, then they cannot be removed from the record?

Sir, I believe that one of the purposes of that Standing Order, and especially Standing Order 18, with your power, is to make sure that anything that is embarrassing to this House, including your governance of this House, does not remain in the record. If we could get a clarification on that later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Before I give the floor to Honourable Aseri Radrodoro, I wish to remind Honourable Members that you have up to 20 minutes each to speak. The warning bell will sound at 15 minutes, and again at 20 minutes for the end of your speech.

I now call on the Honourable Aseri Radrodro to take the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers and fellow Honourable Members of Parliament: before I start Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to commend our gallant Fiji Team for the outstanding performance against the *Wallabies* this morning, and I echo the words of the *Wallabies*' Captain when he was describing the Fiji Team as "a well-prepared, well-coached and a pride to their country"; *vinaka vakalevu, kemudou na cauravou*.

I rise to make my contribution to His Excellency the President's Opening Address, delivered last week in this august House. From the outset, I must state that I experience a mixture of feelings as I listened to His Excellency's Address, nevertheless, I now wish to speak briefly on the last part of it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all good things come to an end. His Excellency has acknowledged his term as President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands will end in November this year, six years after he took office. I take this time to just thank His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau for his leadership to Fiji.

The work could not have been easy. You would be aware, Deputy Speaker, of the great expectations the people of this nation had of his service and leadership. We, no doubt, would also be aware that at times he was questioned on some of the decisions he took or the silence he adopted during certain times when many expected him to take a position on matters that had a significant impact on people's lives.

I am a great believer in human spirit and acknowledging that as humans, we will not only always have the right answers to everything. I wish you well, Sir, and pray you enjoy your twilight years in whatever capacity you will play, God willing; *vinaka saka vakalevu*.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency took great pains to inform this House of our new-found democracy and what it means to be protected. On that, I will quote from Subha Wijesiriwardena. She is from Colombo, Sri Lanka, a recognised blogger and a regular contributor to on-line discourse about Sri Lankan politics. She made the following comments about democracy, the recent change of leadership in Sri Lanka in January of this year, after a decade of authoritarian leadership by former President Mahindra Rajapaksa, and I quote:

"Democracy is not just a system, a structure, it is also a feeling. It is a feeling within each one of us; a desire to be led by the things we believe in; and the people we see those things in. It is a desire to stand up, to feel powerful in our own way, to wield that power in the face of despair and frustration. It is a feeling that inspires other feelings; it gives us courage, it gives us hope.

It allows for army officials – men who have made their entire careers out of respecting rank and taking orders to say "no" when they are asked to deploy their troops to help a desperate and frightened man stay in power; best of all: that they say "no" with pride, that we all say "no" with pride".

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will now turn my attention to the issue of sedition on the setting up of an alternative State. I note His Excellency's Address spent a considerable time on this subject.

I am of the view that any right-minded Honourable Member of this House will not take for granted the firm denouncing of any seditious acts against the ruling of any elected government. Personally, I have denounced and will always denounce the illegal attempts by anyone, whether military or civilian, for the overthrow of an elected government, for whatever purpose or argument.

I hold the firm view that should we, the people, find discontent with any ruling government, we must exercise fairness in respect of the people's majority will, and await Elections to express our implicit desire for the Government we wish to have.

Recently, at an event in Naitasiri Provincial School, where I spoke to my fellow kinsmen to respect and abide by the rule of law and cautioned against negative political agitation as the mechanism of democracy has been undertaken; and that due recognition and respect is accorded to the Government, elected by the people.

It is the fair thing to do. Besides, when we, the Opposition, will become the government of the day; I would expect nothing less than the same respect and call to be made by our fellow Honourable Members on the other side of this august House. I reiterate that call today that we, the people of Naitasiri remember like yesterday, the experiences our people were made to go through at Kalabu and the *Tikina of Nabobuco* in 2000, as a result of the political manipulation of some people, who remain ambiguous to us to this day.

Some of our people served time for their part in those events, temporarily losing their freedom. Some nurture scars emanating from the beatings received at the hands of soldiers and the police, sent in to disperse the groupings and bring to judgment those that it needed to. I remain outraged with the treatment they received at the time; however, I also believe the actions of our people could have been better. *Sa rauta na vei vakayagataki.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the 2013 Constitution, I beg to differ with His Excellency that the document was the product of a national exercise. Whatever ideals any such document holds, one of the prerequisites for a Constitution to be deemed legally adoptable by the Judiciary demands that the process for its establishment must be owned by the people, and constructed with the participation of the people. That document, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was the Yash Ghai Constitution.

However, this Parliament went to Elections under the 2013 Constitution. We are all here as legislators by virtue of that process. The voices of our people are represented and heard through the Honourable Members now elected to represent them after eight long years.

This does not, however, give credence to the Constitution which was created without the will of the people. I mince no words when I say there remains a lot to be desired of this document. I call on us all, as Honourable Members of this august House, to collectively acknowledge the shortcomings in the consultation process of this Constitution, and allow this Parliament to engage meaningful discussions that will ensure that it becomes a document that espouses true justice, peace and prosperity, and freedom for our nation, and all our people.

Still on the Constitution, I have a question for the Honourable and learned Attorney-General, the chief initiator of this Constitution. I would like to refer to Chapter 2 on the Bill of Rights, Section 5(c), and it reads:

“The rights and freedoms set out in this Chapter apply according to their tenor and may be limited by –

limitations which are not expressly set out or authorised (whether by or under a written law) in relation to a particular right or freedom in this Chapter, but which are necessary and are prescribed by a law provided under a law, or authorised or permitted by a law, or by actions taken under the authority of a law.”

The questions that I would like to pose for explicit intent is:

- 1) What limitations in our Bill of Rights is this section of the Constitution alluding to; and
- 2) which authorising body or authority of law is able to provide this limitation, especially when there is a whole list of rights under this section on the Bill of Rights ?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency highlighted the FijiFirst Government was voted in with a margin of 60 per cent. According to the Fiji Elections Office official website, they registered only 59.2 per cent of the valid votes that were cast or 293,714 votes. Should we take the population figures of the last census of 2007 which stood at 837,271 people? These would only represent 35 per cent of that population voting for them.

In comparison, Madam Speaker, the total votes cast of the other six political parties that contested the Elections, along with the two independent candidates, amounted to 202,650 votes or 24 per cent of the 2007 population. Collectively, these represent 59 per cent of the total 2007 population. The total number of voters who are registered to vote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2014 was 591,101 voters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, reports have suggested that Fiji's population has increased to 903,207 in 2014. Taking the total votes polled by Fiji First, that would mean 608,493 or 67 per cent of our people to-date did not give Government the full mandate to rule, or enforce a Constitution or legislation on them without prior consultation.

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They won the Elections, Mr. Deputy Speaker, yes, and I congratulate them once again but I request them to be practical and accept that we all need to exercise maturity in thought and spirit to ensure true healing in our nation. I say this with the full conviction that they have the ability to make this work, should they become bigger people, allowing this exercise to be a partnership between this legislature and our people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the provision of infrastructure development is to ensure general improvement in investment opportunities, standard of living and accessibility to services.

In this year's budget, the Ministry of Infrastructure received a whopping \$1.13 billion in its 2015 budget allocation. Of this amount, \$105.8 million was estimated to be secured as overseas borrowings. This kind of massive budget and borrowings surely should have eased some of our more prominent and persistent infrastructure challenges. We heard in the last few days in this House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, examples of infrastructure development being implemented in Ba. It sounded like an impressive list of developments; however, if only these could be the same for the whole of Fiji.

If rural electrification for example, significant communities remain without electricity despite having paid their deposits as levied from the Department of Rural Electrification. Concerns now brought to attention, highlight that many of these customers are still waiting today for their electricity connections, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They paid their deposits for some years now. Some of these villages and communities include; Vorovoro and Mali Island in Macuata (and I think they are also requesting for a Health Centre), Matalevu in Tavua, Vatubalavu village in Nadroga, Tokaimalo in Rakiraki, Matamaivere Settlement in Tailevu, Nuku, Naitauvoli and Waisa in Naitasiri, to name a few.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is not the only villages or communities around the country in need of electricity. In Macuata, at the Vunimoli Education Centre, they have been waiting for the survey required by the Rural Electrification Programme for some time now. The deposits they were directed to prepare is available and ready, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for roads, the Fiji Roads Authority this year received a budget allocation of \$635.6 million. The question, Deputy Speaker, is, where are the roads and bridges that are supposed to have been constructed or rehabilitated? We note the major projects like the Sawani/Serea Roads, the Buca Bay Road recently opened by the Honourable Prime Minister and others, but we also note there were promises in the 2015 Budget for the construction of small rural roads. For the greater parts, the only evident road works are the maintenance and rehabilitation of roads confined to orange cones, causing road blocks everywhere, filling of potholes or resealing with little regard for road users.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the importance of infrastructure development has been reflected by the budget provision, but sadly this is not materialising still, for many. In the *Tikina of Noimalu* in Naitasi, villagers are still travelling by foot and by horseback as they have done for the past years to this day to reach the nearest access. Likewise, the village of Roma in the *Tikina of Nabobuco*, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are still waiting for this day, their request for road access.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, urbanisation is putting greater pressure on the infrastructure, especially on the Water Authority piped water system, whilst 80 per cent of Fiji's population has access to piped water with some form of treatment, and around 40 per cent has access to sewerage facilities, the age old pressing problem of intermittent water supply is still in existence despite the level of investment going into this sector.

According to Government official reports, this is related to high leakage in the systems and the inability of existing infrastructure to cope with the demand. This is made worse when there is favouritism practiced by the Authority, as in many instances, commercial demands from major tourist hotels for example have been known to be prioritised over demands from the local surrounding population. If these problems continue to persist, Mr. Deputy Speaker, maybe the Honourable Minister concerned needs to get better people to handle problems and overhaul the Board of WAF, just as he has done for LTA.

Overall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this debt alluded to for infrastructure development, we wonder if we will be able to make this repayment without going into further debts. How much will we and our future generations have to pay eventually towards these loans?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency stated; "prosperity and a brighter future for all Fijians."

I would like to bring to the attention of this House, the recent sale of a publicly listed company; Sky Pacific operation, a part of Fiji TV to Digicel. This subsidiary company is owned by Fijian Holdings Limited as a majority shareholding. The Fijian Holdings CEO last week declared the sale of Sky TV to Digicel for \$5.75 million. How did this come about and why did it not follow the principles of a sale of publicly listed company? There are lots of questions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, especially when the initial set up cost for Sky Pacific in 2004 was \$6.5 million and three years ago, Fiji TV spent a further \$6 million in upgrade, including change of satellite. This would resonate to bad business decisions when the sale price is \$5.75 million and the cost is around \$12.5 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a breach of duty of care on the Fiji TV Directors and FHL and I call upon the Honourable Prime Minister, also Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs, to initiate a Parliamentary Special Committee, according to Standing Order 129. This Special Committee should be tasked to investigate and review this sale transaction.

The Honourable Prime Minister must ensure that Fiji TV and FHL Directors be suspended whilst Reserve Bank of Fiji investigate why South Pacific Stock Exchange did not look into this matter. This must be done in light of ethics and transparent leadership and to avoid misinterpretation as one of the Directors of Fiji TV, Mr. Nouzab Fareed, also the CEO of Fijian Holdings Limited is also a Board of the South Pacific Stock Exchange.

We recommend that whilst the Parliamentary enquiry is ongoing, South Pacific Stock Exchange suspend trading in FHL and Fiji TV shares, until the findings of the independent enquiry have been publicly released. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are more pressing questions and answers in that sale process.

On the subject of brighter future for all Fijians, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will conclude by saying that these sentiments by His Excellency seem like a distant dream at this stage. Times are hard, cost of living has risen many times over. Addressing the minimum wage levels is a drop in the ocean. It means very little to our people who are struggling to put food on the table. According to global statistics, cost of food in Fiji, Mr. Deputy Speaker, increased to 4.7 per cent in August this year over the same month last year and food inflation in Fiji averaged 5.22 per cent from 2004 until 2015, reaching an all-time high of 16.5 per cent in June 2007.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that Cabinet has given itself salary increases. Compared to the Prime Minister's salary of \$115,000 with benefits in 2006 and an average of \$96,000 for Ministers, the declarations of salary that were made by the Honourable Prime Minister, the Attorney General and one of the Ministers in 2014 according to the Fiji Broadcasting Commission article published on Friday 4 July, 2014, it reads and I quote:

“The declaration, published in today's *Fiji Sun* newspaper shows that Bainimarama had a total income of \$278,750. From that money, \$230,000 is what he receives as annual salary for being Prime Minister, \$20,000 for entertainment allowance and other allowances, \$28,750. Meanwhile, Party General Secretary, Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum receives an annual salary of \$185,000 as Attorney General. Party President receives \$135,000 as annual salary for being Minister for Women.”

These salaries, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were increased when there was no Parliament so the people at that time had not given them the right to award themselves these salary levels. They awarded it to themselves. Further, since the declaration of these assets to the Elections Office, I know that the salary of Cabinet have further increased through Decree No. 29 of 2014, gazetted on 3 October, 2014. This is unjustifiable, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what about our civil servants who do all the hard work? What about our everyday citizens? How do we survive? How does Government propose that we survive? “*So ga e gava, so e maqa?*”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask that the Government, in line of this inflation rate, consider the plight of our ordinary people. They need to give attention equally to the salary levels of civil servants and not just the Defence Force, for example. They need to give priority consideration to the high cost of food people have to now pay. More is demanded of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Lastly, on the review of the existing legislation and the subsidiary legislation 2016, this side of the House is optimistic that reviews will be positive for our people. Perhaps the Government could also review some of its Decrees created since 2009, like the FNP Decree of 2011, which disallows the right of any member to seek legal redress on an issue they are aggrieved with. I make no apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on this issue I have raised today in this august House.

On that note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I conclude by relaying the famous word of Martin Niemoller, a prominent protestant pastor who emerged as an outspoken public foe of Adolf Hitler and spent the last

seven years of Nazi rule in concentration camps. He uttered these words as a result of the lack of resistance to the Nazi ordeal, which the world ignored for some considerable time before it finally acted, and I quote:

“Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out - because I was not a trade unionist. They came for the Jews and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak out for me.”

The question for us will then be; in our democracy, what are we willing to sacrifice in order to achieve development? I look forward to this question being answered as we approach the announcement of the 2016 Budget.

Vinaka vakalevu and thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER. - Thank you Honourable Radrodro for your contribution. I now call upon the Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members: I am indeed proud to be given this opportunity, to respond to His Excellency the President's Address that was given on Monday, 14th September, 2015 and which also marked the opening of the 2016 Parliament session.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, noting that His Excellency the President is also completing his term of office, may I take this opportunity to acknowledge his sterling service to our beloved Fiji. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was indeed privileged to have served under his leadership in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in his former capacities as the High Commissioner in London, as the Permanent Secretary and as the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to share the following holy words from the *Bible* in my attempt to best summarise his exemplary leadership. In the *Book of Proverbs* chapter 31, verses 8 to 9, and I quote:

“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously and defend the rights of the poor and the needy.”

In the Book of *Matthew* chapter 20, verse 8:

“...even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, service to the people and service to Fiji is the legacy that His Excellency the President has left for us all to learn from and aspire to emulate in our capacity as Honourable Members of this House. I also take this opportunity to wish His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau; the First Lady, Adi Koila Mara Nailatikau and the family a blessed, peaceful and prosperous future undertaking. *Sa malo sa'ka vakalevu na veiqaravi.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in his Address, His Excellency the President laid out his vision and that of the Government for the year to come and even if we may not always agree, it is important to hear the different views and we appreciate His Excellency the President sharing that of the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, unfortunately His Excellency's Address fell terribly short of the requirements under Section 81(4) of the Constitution, which stipulates that the Address outlines the

policies and programmes of the Government, and in this regards, the Government must be taken to task in breaching the Constitution and bringing disrepute to the Office of the President.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, from a former career civil servant perspective, His Excellency's Address is actually the prelude to the Budget, but unfortunately the expected policies and programmes and corresponding monetary narration were not forthcoming. Therefore, there was no clear specific indication of the Government's priorities and mandates.

In this regards, Mr. Deputy Speaker, considering the high absence of specific policies and programmes in His Excellency's Address and hearing the speakers on the Government side of the House talk on policies and programmes under their portfolios sounds like a joke. And I say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this for real? Are they dreaming? Why are they making it up?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is alright to dream but it is not alright to try and mislead the people with your dream. Once again, we are reminded on the gap of the Government's rhetoric promises and actions as weakness in the Government Members' responses and also in the 2015 Supplementary Budget Address Booklet called "*Turning Promises into Deeds*" or as I call it "Turning promises into Debts".

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is game over and the other side must get ready to change sides in 2018.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, in conjunction with the recent closed Parliament sitting on our economy and financial situation, one can say that the omission in His Excellency's Address is indeed intentional. For maybe the Government, at the time of writing His Excellency's Address, could not ascertain or confirm its financial projection to fund the various programmes in the 2016 Budget. That is why I am wondering, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if those Honourable Members on the other side should withdraw their statements because they spoke on their own make-believe policies and programmes that were not stated in His Excellency's Address.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, bearing in mind that budget is the politics of numbers and with the absence of policies and programmes in His Excellency's Address, I can only say that the 2016 Budget is anyone's guess. Also, may I mention here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that according to the Finance Act, Section 12, and I quote:

"A report of the Auditor General should report to the Parliament about an audit must be submitted to the Speaker of the House of Representatives within nine months after the year to which the audit relates and within a longer period, appointed by the resolution of the House."

On that note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am asking where is the Auditor General's Report for 2014 or when will it be tabled?

(Chorus of Interjections)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a nutshell, I would say that about 80 per cent of His Excellency's Address was calling for political stability and rightly so because we all know that political instability, as a result of military *coups*, has brought about trade bans, high rate of unemployment, high crime rates, high rate

of violence against women and children, nepotism like it is no one's business, fast erosion of our social values and culture and hardship in everyday family lives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also heard His Excellency the President's call for this Honourable House and all Fijians to defend our democracy, which is the outcome of the electoral provisions of the new Constitution decreed by the military regime in 2013, after burning the Ghai Commission Draft Constitution, which in my view was also a new and more inclusive one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, people are asking, "Why was the Ghai Commission Draft Constitution burnt and the whole process aborted? What was wrong with that Constitution? Who, when, and will those responsible be made uncountable for the subsequent loss of taxpayers money used in that expensive exercise?"

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while the people are still waiting for answers to help them to get to know the 2013 Constitution, the Government is at the same time calling for a Constitution Day to celebrate the 2013 Constitution. How can we expect the people to celebrate the 2013 Constitution while the people are still waiting for answers to help them to get to know the 2013 Constitution. The Government is at the same time calling for a Constitutions Day to celebrate the 2013 Constitution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, how can we expect the people to celebrate the 2013 Constitutions and make meaning out of it when they were never part of its conception process and its birth? Is this the new democracy that this Government is promoting by subtly imposing the 2013 Constitution through a national public holiday, in the hope that it will be accepted by the people? Mr. Deputy Speaker, this side of the House have, on few occasions, raised our genuine interest and plea that certain parts of the Constitution be revisited so to make it more democratic, but then it was rejected by the Government side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the military has continued to play a major role in our democracy since the military *coup* in 1987 and until today. This role is further strengthened through their constitutionalised guardian role as the ultimate guarantor of the security of the nation under the 2013 Constitution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this good for our country? In most democracies around the world that responsibility rests with Parliament, not with the military because among the oldest problems of governance, it has been that of securing subordination of the military forces to political authority. Honourable Deputy Speaker, may I ask, what balancing mechanism does the Government have in place to keep the military under control so it remains neutral politically?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Fiji, the military has usurped and destroyed our democracy through the last *coups* and yet the leadership continues to give military that responsibility to protect our democracy as enshrined in the 2013 Constitution and alluded to in His Excellency's Address. It is like telling a cat to look after a mouse when knowing fully well that the cat will attack and eat the mouse.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, their role in governing and their participation in politics undermine their military profession. I ask the question, will the military's constitutionalised role in place give them the authority and mandate to continue to lead us in a military democracy? Then indeed that saying is true and I quote:

"... that although Military leaders frequently presented themselves as intervening temporarily but once out of the barracks they were seldom in a hurry to return."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency the President also called on all Honourable Members of this House and all Fijians to accept the outcome of the Elections as validated by the Multinational Observers Group that it is credible, but we must note that a credible election and a free and fair Elections mean quite different things. We ask the question; was the Elections truly free and fair in terms of media coverage, ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Yes

HON. S.V. RADRODRO :-... in terms of participation of Civil Society Organisations and NGOs,

HON GOVERNMENT MEMBERS: Yes

HON. S.V. RADRODRO:- ... in terms of candidate nomination, and did political parties compete on as level a playing field as the system can enforce?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Elections is viewed as the first positive step in the democratic process, but there is more to democracy than just elections.

We also heard His Excellency the President call on this House and all Fijians to support our new found democracy. Some academics argue that democracy in Fiji is very fragile, that it is like a foreign flower that is struggling to adapt and take root in the Fiji soil. Therefore, our version of democracy may be entirely different from those other big democracies like India and Singapore, which the other side of the House often make references to. I believe we all want to progress, we all want to build our democracy to one that is stable and sustainable so that we all enjoy democratic freedom for now and for the future generation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order for us to do that, may I request and urge Government to create an enabling environment and demonstrate commitment to the other elements of democracy, and in doing so, may we ask the following questions, especially to the Government side, and to those who are watching television:

- Do we really have clear separation of powers, keeping the three main pillars of democracy, that is, Parliament, Judiciary and the Executive independent?

(Chorus of Interjections)

- Is our judicial system unfettered and unbiased, where the rule of law is without prejudice?
- Do we have freedom of political expression, freedom of speech, is our human rights restored and protected?

(Chorus of Interjections)

- Do we have a free media?
- Is media free of restriction or biased to print, broadcast and televise the truth, to keep our citizens informed and to inform us the duly elected representatives of our citizens' views and concerns?
- Are civil societies and NGOs really free to do their work?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish we could hear the other side, what are the viewer's reaction to this.

(Chorus of Interjections)

Mr Deputy Speaker, may I also request and urge Government to play its role and ensure:

- i) The review of legislation, especially those Decrees that cannot be challenged in any Court of Law;

- ii) That the Military is given lesser role in the running of the Government and to also reduce its size?
- iii) That the Military's role in the 2013 Constitution, be reviewed in conjunction with other parts of the Constitution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, subsequent to the effects of the *coup* on the general population and human beings as we are, negative emotions have been harboured by innocent people who have been hurt and are still hurting, and this will take a long time to heal. In this regards, may I request and urge Government that it would be worth our while to seriously consider the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission or any other mechanism that the Government sees fit so as to promote dialogue, forgiveness towards peace building and sustainable democracy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I believe, the practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to healing. Peace is, I think, the manifestation of human compassion and as Martin Luther King once said, and I quote:

“Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night that is already devoid of stars... Hate cannot drive out hate ... only love and forgiveness can do that.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there can never be no peace if a very large section of the community feels disaffected and alienated from the body of politics. Our democracy is still very fragile, very delicate, therefore, we need to make concerted effort and make sure that appropriate legislations, institution, policies, programmes and resources are in place, then only we can hope that road back to sustainable democracy and accountable governance will not be too long or too difficult.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us not just talk about democracy, let us stat in this Honourable House and I request and urge Government to use their parliament majority rule, for a common good of the people, not just to score political mileage. In this regards, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I give examples like I had tabled a motion on NCDs - that all related medicines to NCDs be included in the Free Medicine List, the Honourable Roko T.T.S. Draunidalo's motion to engage a neutral parliamentary counsel and Honourable V.R. Gavoka's motion to initiate a retirement home industry which could create thousands of jobs. These were good motions for the benefit of the people, but it was rejected by the Government side, the onus is on all of us to heed to the President's call. I implore upon the Government to please make the necessary adjustments in areas highlighted above, so we can all work together in transforming our present fragile democracy into a much more sustainable one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency the President's Address also included a very brief and broad economic directions for Fiji which unfortunately lacked the required specific policies and programmes to support political stabilities, social and economic growth.

However, an infrastructure based development strategy was highlighted, and I quote from page 5 of the *Uncorrected Copy of the Daily Hansard of 14th September, 2015* :

“Proper infrastructure capacity leads to economic opportunities and economic success. This is what my Government is doing - building infrastructure to invest in our future.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that means a substantial amount of Fiji's resources must be systematically directed towards long-term assets, but unfortunately His Excellency's Address did not identify what type of resources or where these resources are coming from. For example, if it is a Government loan, where is that loan coming from? How much is the loan and what are the loan conditions?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me just backtrack a bit, in the beginning of my response, I had mentioned that His Excellency's Address did not comply with the Constitutional requirement under Section 81(4) and, therefore, did not include policies and programmes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the absence of policies and programmes is clearly reflected in this infrastructure driven development strategy which does not clearly specify the type of development, and we can only guess if it is transportation, if it is airport, if it is energy, or if it is social infrastructure, that is, schools, universities, hospitals or if it is on telecommunications.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact that the Government has not specified the type of infrastructure development that Fiji will be investing on for the long-term economic efficiency and social equity, anyone reading His Excellency's Address can say that the Government is not serious, is not committed and is just big on words. So maybe it is just another deliberate ploy to pull wool over people's eyes to gain political mileage.

(Chorus of Interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were a lot of interjections, can I just ask for two more minutes?

(Chorus of Interjections)

Please, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, thank you for your contribution, your time is up.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I will now call upon Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Members of Parliament:Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to join my fellow Honourable colleagues in this House to congratulate the Flying Fijians Team for a sterling performance early this morning. With the meagre resources that we have, they took on one of the top seeded teams in the world and I think it is an excellent performance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to join my fellow Honourable colleagues in Parliament, in congratulating the President, His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau for his excellent Address to open the second session of Parliament. His Excellency the President is the model son of Fiji, a person who walks the talk. His leadership has been exemplary and he has steered the country through difficult and trying times. His Excellency the President alluded to a number of issues in his Address which my fellow colleagues in Parliament have and will continue to deliberate on this week.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank His Excellency for reiterating his call for a One Fiji. What is "One Fiji" and how do we get there? One Fiji is an ideology established by our Honourable Prime Minister. It stands for a Fiji where we all are Fijians, where we all share a common identity, a destiny and a sense of belonging.

Mr Deputy Speaker, never before has any leader risen above the ethnic divisiveness of past governments to champion and embrace this inclusive ideology. Our Honourable Prime Minister realised that without One Fiji, instability would persist unchecked and leaders would continue to resort ...

(Chorus of interjections)

This is my time, this is my time.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you are speaking to me.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... to ethnic block votes, to further their own selfish agendas.

(Chorus of Interjections)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is also quite rare to find a leader who is willing to embark on such a revolutionary campaign to inspire ideological change on the eve of an Elections. Often times, leaders will compromise or give in to pressure for short-term gains to win an Election. But, our Honourable Prime Minister would not settle for anything less than One Fiji. He took a risk and we are grateful that he stood by his principles.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr Deputy Speaker, he and the FijiFirst Government went into the Elections with this ideology bundled into our 2013 Constitution and presented it to the people of Fiji. Thousands of copies of the Constitution were distributed to the people, translated into *iTaukei* and Hindi, as well as a version in Braille, to ensure that everyone could understand this One Fiji ideology.

The FijiFirst Government won overwhelming public support in a vote of confidence for the One Fiji ideology and their faith was well placed, as Government has lived up to the promises it made.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this leads me to common destiny that we now all share as Fijians. That destiny is one in which we all grow and live happily together, regardless of our ethnicity, religion or location.

I have no doubt that all Members of Parliament agree with His Excellency the President that we need to rally behind this Constitution. Our Constitution gives us equal citizenry and provides us with a range of socio economic rights that are unprecedented in Fiji's history. It also recognises unique aspects of the culture, customs and traditions of the *iTaukei* and Rotuman people. The FijiFirst Party has taken the necessary steps to ensure that we move together towards our common destiny of one nation, one people, One Fiji.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, this journey is only possible when we prioritise education. Education is one of the most important investments Government can make because it is the basis for providing opportunity.; opportunity for economic participation, opportunity for self-respect, dignity and recognition. Opportunity to realise our dreams.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, education unlocks the hidden, unrealised potential of an individual. It is a tool for people to use to realize their capabilities, create and access opportunities, live productive lives and contribute to our national prosperity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, educating women and girls is particularly transformative for small developing societies because it also empowers them, it grants them dignity, respect and earning potential. Education also allows them to make better decisions for themselves and for their families. Education combats poverty by providing skill-sets that can generate income. If girl's education are not valued, chronic poverty will perpetuate across generations. Thus, Deputy Speaker it has positive implications in the long term as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when helping all Fijians realise their dreams and improve their lives, we need to be mindful that the circumstance should not dictate one's place in life. Past governments implemented policies that only realised the dreams of a selected few - those born into privilege, those with the right connections and those whose families could afford to support their future, while those from the rank and file have to struggle to fight for few limited opportunities available to them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the FijiFirst Government does not endorse any policy that gives the elite any advantage over their fellow countrymen. Our policies are for the benefit of all our children. We believe everyone's dreams deserve to be fulfilled and that success in life should be determined on the basis of merit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to deliver on everyone's dream, the Toppers and TELS was introduced in 2014, to unlock the potential of those who had no way forward.

(Chorus of interjections)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2013, based on the previous Financial Scheme, we had a total of 5,434 students studying at various tertiary institutions in Fiji (under the old scheme - *iTaukei* Affairs Scholarship, Multi Ethnic and PSC Scholarship, et cetera.)

In 2014, on the new Financial Scheme, a total of 12,943 were studying at various tertiary institutions of a total budget of \$83.5 million.

(Applause)

This figure, Sir, represents a substantial increase by 7,509 additional students studying at various tertiary institutions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also keep our ear to ground by listening to the people, to ensure that no students are left behind. On this note, our Minister of Finance, Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum requested that we assist another group of children who have been forgotten by past governments. He has also agreed to provide substantial assistance to this group and this will be announced in the upcoming Budget Address.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this journey to provide quality education, we must be cognizant of the new features of contemporary in Fiji. Mr. Deputy Speaker, four decades ago, employment opportunities were relatively high, Government was the major employer, IT development and social media were virtually absent, and we relied heavily on parental education to teach virtues and values.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, things have vastly changed over the last four decades; it is more difficult than ever to keep students in classrooms.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while some on the other side want to live in the past, use out-dated models and maintain status quo, I am afraid that is not an option for the FijiFirst Government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to deliver education and current learning using a new updated model of child development that reflects the changing times. We need to:

- 1) Ensure that upon completion of level of study, the children are strongly grounded in the equivalent subject matter.
- 2) Ensure that those with an aptitude for skilled training are then able to obtain skills training.
- 3) Challenge children to think critically and to develop entrepreneurial minds.
- 4) Teach students the value of civic education.
- 5) Ensure students are developed holistically, become responsible citizens of the country and take pride in national activities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, furthermore, the purpose of education must be revisited in light of hardships and equity issues facing many students. This process must take into consideration special features of Fiji such as our heritage, diversity and the impact of climate change on our environment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, an empowering education is one that builds our human resources, resources that promote a productive society. We need to continue to learn, solve problems, be creative and live together with nature in peace and harmony. When nations ensure that such an education is accessible to all, a quiet revolution is set in motion, and education becomes the engine of sustainable development, the key to a better world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this quiet revolution is already underway in our country, new Fiji.

- 1) We want our teachers to play their part, not only in teaching, but in ensuring that learning actually takes place. Our detractors will not understand the difference between teaching and learning because they are stubbornly holding on to the input based model of the past. Hence, we now have Pillar 1 on Educational Reforms, dealing with staff quality and delivery.
- 2) We want the right content to be delivered to our schools and to have accurate measures of our students' knowledge. We need to keep our students, parents and labour markets up to speed on the progress which our students are making. This is the basis of Pillar 2 of our Reforms in Education.
- 3) Our schools, no matter where they are located should have equal quality of infrastructures. We will ensure that they have quality classrooms, ablution blocks, libraries and adequate number of teachers. In public, these glaring deficiencies are not addressed but in private, many Fijians keep coming, thanking us for how we have started to improve the infrastructure in these islands and also in the interior, including Members on the other side, who also have come with their own notes, thanking us for what we are doing. This is the basis of Pillar 2 of the Reforms that we had.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are thousands of students out there in the squatter settlements, in the interior and also in maritime islands who have dropped out because they have lost hope of acquiring any skill that would have earned them a decent living. The FijiFirst Government has established Technical Colleges, Campuses - three this year and seven more next year, to teach crucial skills to these students, as well as to provide training opportunities for those bright students who qualify for trade qualifications.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, apart from one-year long trade qualifications, in which we have currently put 1,230 students who have enrolled, we also offer short courses. Mr. Deputy Speaker, so far, this year we have awarded 1,301 Certificates of Attainment to students who probably would never have dreamt of acquiring any formal skills training. These students do not have to pay a single cent to acquire Certificates

of Attainment because Government has allocated a surplus tranche of funding for short courses. They too have dreams to have a decent living and just because they have dropped out does not mean they do not have aspirations. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are making those aspirations come a reality.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, unfortunately, while some on the other side congratulated us privately in public, they are picking on mundane issues and use incorrect information to attack our initiatives. They have gone so far as to quote a 1981 Report by Dr. Esther Williams on current Education Reforms.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was 34 years ago. It is evident that the Opposition continues to live in the past - 34 years, that is where they live. However, 34 years is too late, we have moved way ahead. Those arguments do not hold ground anymore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they continue to talk about the past and live in the past but we talk about the future.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- 300 to 400 years.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- That is where you live.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have received support from a very wide cross section of the stakeholders, the unions and faith based educational bodies. They all participated in educational forums that were held in Suva, Lautoka and throughout Fiji, and they gave us their full support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, even the Fijian Teachers Association, led by the Honourable Mikaele Lewere himself supported us, and he apologised to us saying, "we are sorry for our condemnation". The Honourable Leawere is sitting here, head down.

(Chorus of interjections)

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the same note, another union leader, the General Secretary of the Fiji Teachers Union went to an international forum in Canada a month ago. He said "Our Education Minister is a bully." but what he wrote to me is quite the opposite. I have a letter from the Union, commending the work that we have done.

(Chorus of interjections)

Oilei, double phrase. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can see the true colours of these so-called leaders, who are now back-tracking on their previous statements of support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while we are embarking on these reforms, we cannot be oblivious to the fact that our children are being put under increased stress, they need parental support and guidance. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no substitute for parental love and care. While we promise to create a school environment that will also take care for our children, we want our parents to spend quality time with our children at home. Mr. Deputy Speaker, spending as little as 30 minutes daily with a child can do wonders. Every child deserve at least that much affection from their parents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we recently organised a very successful national discourse against suicide. We educated children on how to prevent them from getting and doing things which are wrong and encouraged them to speak up for each other. We have made suicide prevention a key component of our education and prioritised mental health of our students like never before.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on Monday, we also launched a song using our own Fijian artists, home-grown talents, to motivate our children to remain focussed on studies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, those who are stuck in the past will always take issues with new, improved policies designed for the present day. They will try their best to sabotage the reforms that we are doing, like what we saw yesterday when they showed their disappointment for not being able to stop the examination process, sorry for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they went to the extent of parading in public pages of confidential exam papers before students could sit for their exams.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are playing with the future of innocent children for short-term political gains.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order! Oder!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not let them sabotage and succeed. It will not happen.

(Chorus of interjections)

They are using children, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the FijiFirst Government is focussed on the future and is focussed on delivering a product that is tailored for the contemporary Fiji and Fijians.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, once again, I wish to thank His Excellency the President for an excellent Address, and I join my colleagues in wishing him and his family the very best in the years ahead. *Vinaka*, Thank you and *Dhanyavaad*.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I thank you for your contribution Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy. I will now give the floor to Honourable Netani Rika.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, I echo the sentiments made by earlier speakers who spoke this morning in congratulating our Flying Fijians for their gallant performance this morning. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a great privilege to have this opportunity to respond to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji's Address in opening the new session of Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today, first, not only to thank His Excellency the President for his thought provoking and inspirational Address, but also to thank him for his great service to the people of Fiji in the many and varied capacities that he has served in, the culmination of which is being the Head of State.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, listening and reflecting on His Excellency's Address, one could almost feel that he has given us his all in one Address. I cannot help but think of it as his last brief to the people of this nation, both within and outside Parliament, to which we all must rise and measure up to. In so doing, we will not only be good and responsible citizens, but we will also be able to serve the people and the nation, and more importantly, to work together to ensure that we, despite our differences and against all odds, be able to carve out a future for our young generation that is not only promising but also one that is safe, secure,

fulfilling, joyable and happy. The journey although will not be easy, as His Excellency so rightly stated and to which we agree, but one that must be travelled, and travelled with perseverance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency the President, being the individual he is, together with his wide experience and knowledge has tried to put to rest anxieties, anger, frustrations that some citizens might have by looking back at such things as the birth of our new democracy, the election process and its outcome and the Constitution. The people of this nation have spoken through the ballot, and they have chosen the 50 Members of Parliament to serve and to represent them until the next General Elections in 2018, which is three years away. Wisdom, faith, intellect, culture and the likes all tell us responsible citizens that everything should wait until the next Elections, there is no other way.

Finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency the President is a real man of the people, and his service in different capacities speak volumes. A man of royal birth in the *iTaukei* traditional context with blood ties and connections in Fiji and the Pacific Islands, with whom he relates, mingles and identifies well and also with the ordinary citizens of this nation. He is a true statesman, who was instrumental in major societal changes, including the birth of our new democracy and through it all, he remains a dynamic leader and a friend to many. This is our current President, who commands the respect of our entire nation.

Secondly, in His Excellency's Address, he also highlighted with great passion other areas such as the Constitution Day, Women, Youths of Fiji, Leadership, Spiritual Authority and Relationship with God.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, many countries the world over celebrate Constitution Day, and I see no reason why we should not do the same. Life's milestones and achievements are usually celebrated in our families, communities and national life, and this is no different. In fact, celebrations, big or small, are part of Fiji's culture. The Constitution Day is usually a day set aside to honour and celebrate the Constitution of a country.

His Excellency the President is urging the nation to celebrate Constitution Day, to which we agree for these reasons:

- (i) The Constitution is the foundation of our new democracy; and
- (ii) The Constitution guarantees equality of every Fijian.

These are well captured in the words of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji who said at page 4 of the *Uncorrected Copy of the Daily Hansard* of Monday, 14th September, 2015, and I quote:

“Our new democracy was built on the most solid foundations, a Constitution that for the first time, guarantees equality for every Fijian.”

Most scholars view our Constitution as one of the best in the world. Its principles are unassailable and is formed with the foundation set by the world's great democracies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to take us to the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. The Preamble begins with, “WE THE PEOPLE OF FIJI” followed by RECOGNISING the indigenous people or the *iTaukei* and Rotumans and their ownership of lands and their unique culture, customs, traditions and language.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, being human, let us remind ourselves once again that irrespective of colour, creed, faith or ethnicity, we have needs and wants; we are relational; we have dreams and aspirations; we have our roles and responsibilities; we have strengths and weaknesses; we want to be safe and secure, as well as to be wanted and included. All human beings in Fiji are recognised and being included in the new

Constitution. The onus therefore, is on each of us, to act on the intention and the spirit of the Constitution. Let us face it, yes; we need one another to build a strong and prosperous nation, but one that is based on truth, trust and respect. We will need to continue to learn and re-learn how to live and work together in our multi-cultural nation. A united Fiji, is what we want and need, where each and every member of society has a sense of belonging and be included.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Preamble continues to direct us Fijians also to recognise the Constitution as the supreme law of the country that provides the framework for the conduct of Government and people of Fiji. All Fijians must learn to accept and recognise the Constitution as the supreme law of the land. As responsible citizens, we need to first read and understand the document as well as to act within the perimeters outlined in it.

Our Constitution, amongst other things, describe the organisation and operation of our national Government; it protects our rights as citizens and with careful thought and great care places limits on the power that we, the people, through our Government may exercise upon one another.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Preamble then directs us Fijians, through the Constitution to declare that we are Fijians united by common and equal citizenry; and we as Fijians must declare our commitment to justice, national sovereignty and security, social and economic wellbeing, and safeguarding our environment. We are Fijians, united by common and equal citizenry. We need to come together in unity and as one with a sense of working together in order to chart our beloved nation towards the challenging times ahead of us.

As Fijians, we must also declare our commitment to justice and being law abiding citizens to national sovereignty as an independent nation, and to the security and safety of all our citizens. We are given social and economic rights under the Bill of Rights to provide for the wellbeing of our citizens, and safeguard our environment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, finally the Preamble directs us the Fijians to commit, which stipulates our commitment as Fijians in the recognition of human rights, and respect for human dignity. We are part of the international global community and we need to recognise, commit and uphold the principles of human rights and respect for human dignity. This is the very reason why we are committed to have a Constitution Day, to acknowledge our return to democracy. Our celebration must include educational programmes for all Fijians. It would demand a well-thought out and planned celebration, which could bring about positive impacts to our nation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me quote from two famous past Presidents of the United State of America on the Constitution.

The President George Washington once said, and I quote:

“Every men is a consumer and ought to be a producer. He is by Constitution expensive and need to be rich”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to know and understand what our Constitution entails. We should not be sitting on our laurels, but be an effective consumer and producer in order to bring about prosperity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this brings me to the second quote by President Benjamin Franklin who said and I quote:

“The Constitution only gives people the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself”.

The Constitution is designed for the worthy purpose of ensuring that all the people of this beloved nation have been given the right to pursue happiness. A change of mindset is vital and with the right attitude in place then only we can all pursue our dreams successfully.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me elaborate on Women. We must continue to give women the recognition and support for the very important roles that they play in families, communities, workplace and the nation as a whole. Over time women in Fiji have emerged as a force to reckon with, and I say this with great sincerity, for instance in the last USP graduation, six women altogether graduated with PHD, a first for Fiji and congratulations to these women.

In addition, women have also made a breakthrough in Fiji's aviation as we now see an increasing number of women either taking charge of flights or assisting.

The broad spectrum of women contributions include women in development, women in leadership, women in business, women in education, women in tourism, women in religion, women in security forces, women in sports, women in Parliament, women in politics, women in justice, women in aviation and women in the medical field. With the enabling environment, women will continue to show us their abilities and capabilities now and in the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these women have raised the bar and they have set a new benchmark for the younger generation to take it further to another level in years to come. We acknowledge the Government's initiative in providing empowering programmes for women to enhance their abilities which in many ways have enabled them to engage in many income-generating projects around Fiji. We also acknowledge individuals and organisations that have supported these women and all other women in achieving their dreams.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, however, there are still areas that are lurking in the dark, and if not addressed urgently and appropriately will continue to pose great threats and challengers to our women here in Fiji and around the world. These would include such things as violence, gender inequality as well as traditional cultural issues. Usually two vulnerable groups, namely women and children, are often targets of violence and sexual abuse in homes, communities and workplaces, and in schools. Such things are a hindrance to women's wellbeing or wellness, as well as their capacity to develop themselves and be catalysts of change and development, beginning with themselves and their respective families and the world beyond.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our women need to be safe and secure at all times and at all places to be able to carry out their different and varied roles.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other side of the coin is us, the menfolk. Seeing the achievements and contributions of women to nation-building we are challenged in every way to provide them with all the needed help, including their safety and security. More is needed from us, whenever and wherever we may be in our Fiji society.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will elaborate on the young people. We would not do justice to ourselves and to the nation without discussing our future and hope for the young people of Fiji.

Our young people are well defined and described in this quote by Kofi Annan, I quote:

“Young people with their dynamism, their energy and their inherent understanding of our interconnected world have much to teach us. Increase in educational attainments, advances in technologies and the spread of information have made this generation the best educated and most informed in history”.

Given this illustration, any society that does not acknowledge and successfully tap into the energy and creativity of its youth will surely be left behind in this fast changing world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government of the day, through all its acts, have demonstrated its commitment to the recognition and empowering of this segment of the population, our youths.

This is demonstrated by the different initiatives carried out by the different ministries, including the Ministry of Youth. The youths are now more visible and are beginning to find their voices, however more work is needed and welcomed. Provided with this scaffolding, the youths would believe in themselves, have a sense of direction and hope and will automatically strive to excel in all they do, including being patriotic in a positive way. In essence, these youths would later grow up to be good and responsible citizens of this nation.

Let me elaborate on leadership. I am reminded of this Chinese proverb and I quote, "the people follow the example of the people above".

Leadership at all levels are important, including leadership in our families. The family is usually referred to as the smallest form of government. In light of this proverb, we could see the importance of the role of leaders. Rightly or wrongly, the people will follow their leader, therefore the onus is on the leader and he or she should be doing the right thing at all times, to lead the people and not to lead the people astray. This message rings true for all Honourable Members of this august House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must understand that leadership is a relationship. It is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. The dynamics of this relationship should be well understood and followed by leaders and those who are being lead.

His Excellency the President and the Prime Minister of our nation are good testimonies of this. In order for any relationship to thrive, communication is crucial.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, spiritual authority and relationship with God: Interestingly, we have also been reminded that we need to acknowledge the existence of the power which is more than us human beings, the divine power that we need to constantly draw from. As a Christian, I am reminded of the God factor in all that we do and all the blessings and benefits that follow when we, as individuals maintain a right relationship with God.

We do our part and God will do his. The *Bible* is full of this type of account which we have to read and believe. In the book of *Ecclesiastes*, it says, "there is a season for everything in this world". I wonder if we, as Christians, know our duty, which is to uphold the leaders of our nation in prayers and faith always. If you have not done so for some reason only known to you, please start remembering them in your prayers, with your heart correctly placed. I believe that God has put our leaders in the seat of leadership and it is they and not us who are accountable to God for our nation.

Therefore, instead of wasting our time and resources on negative things why do we not start praying, speaking words of blessings upon the Government, the people and the nation, believing in the sovereignty of God, who does things in His own time and way That in itself is reassuring.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to extend to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau and the First Lady, Adi Koila Nailatikau our most gracious gratitude for the two terms as being our President, serving the nation selflessly. *Vinaka saka vakalevu*. It is our prayers that God will continue to protect and bless his family.

May God Bless Fiji and May God bless us all.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Rika. We are now due for morning tea break and I, therefore, suspend the House and we will resume at 11.35 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.05 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.39 a.m.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue where we left off from this morning and before I invite the Honourable Lt. Col. I.B. Seruiratu, I have been informed that today is the honourable and learned Attorney-General's birthday.

(Applause)

We wish you a very happy birthday and many happy returns of the day.

On the same token, I would like to extend the same compliment to the honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki.

I will now give the floor to the Honourable Lt. Col. I.B. Seruiratu.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Sir, I rise to complement the voice of Honourable Members of Parliament who have acknowledged His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, for his eloquent and inspiring Address at the opening of the new session of Parliament on 14th September, 2015.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is His Excellency's last engagement in Parliament before his term as our President expires in November, drawing the curtains on a career of service and commitment to our nation that we all aspire to emulate.

From his humble beginning as a student in Bau Primary School, His Excellency rose through the ranks, walking the high roads of excellence to where he is today. He courageously chaperoned our nation through some of our challenging phases in history, and has helped us become the modern day democracy we now enjoy. That is remarkable leadership from our President of the People and for which His Excellency must be highly commended.

His engagement with our young people by visiting almost every secondary schools in Fiji demonstrates His Excellency's genuine concern and determination in building a nation that guarantees the safety of its people, promotes stability and provides the freedom and opportunity to choose and carve out for themselves the future they deserve.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to congratulate you on the achievements of Parliament during the year, and the task of guiding and maintaining the orderly flow of business in this Parliament is no easy feat.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency's Address must be applauded. We all heard his call to respect the voice of the people, for the Honourable Members of this House and to respect democracy. This requires renewed efforts from Members of Parliament to work co-operatively to advance national interests by improving the lives of ordinary Fijians.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this regards, I call on all Honourable Members of Parliament to recommit to the aspirations of our Constitution, which we all pledged to uphold when we were sworn in as Members of Parliament. If we all make an effort to educate our people on the scope and spirit of our Constitution, our nation will operate more effectively. The promulgation of the value of this most important document in our homes, in our schools, in our villages, in our workplaces and especially during informal *talanoa* sessions, is essential to better understanding and building a nation of well-informed patriotic citizens.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, almost a year ago, we all witnessed the election of this Government. Reiterating His Excellency's words on page 3 of the *Daily Hansard* of Monday, 14th September, 2014, he said, and I quote:

“This Government will serve its term and then subject itself to the will of the people, as our Constitution provides some time in 2018”.

It is, therefore, our sworn duty to support, uphold and protect our democratic processes for the security of our beloved Fiji and her beautiful people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency also reminded us of how extensive the Parliamentary legislative programmes are, with the introduction of new laws and reviews of existing laws. In a bid to promote good governance in all facets of life, these new laws are inclusive, and allow for freedom to be exercised more responsibly. It allows opportunities for better managing our resources, enacting prudent financial management, promoting better care, ensuring justice for our children, recognising the elderlies who have helped shape the lives we have today, and becoming good stewards of the public offices that we hold.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to comment on the issues raised by His Excellency during His Address and I wish to start with the role of the Military in ensuring security and stability. I wish to pledge to the Honourable Members of the House to be fair and, of course, to be kind to the Military as an institution.

The Military, if I may say, is a professional and is a proud institution. It has its own professional egos and Military efficiencies, and of course, its standards of discipline. It has Military virtues or obedience, loyalty, honour and self-sacrifice. Let us not look at the negative side of the Military but the positive contributions that it has made over the years as well. Therefore, I pledge that let us be considerate and fair when we talk about the institution.

The Military has an extension of our arm on foreign relations and diplomacy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remember when World War I started and Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna wanted to join the British Forces and he was unable to do so. He joined the French Foreign Legion. In his wisdom and vision, he stated these words, and I quote: “Fijians will never be recognised until their blood is first shed”. I will say that again; “Fijians will never be recognised until their blood is first shed”. We are punching above our own weights in terms of international relations and foreign diplomacy because of the involvement of our Military in various areas: World War I, World War II, the insurgency campaign or the counter insurgency in the Malayan Campaign, peacekeeping duties, and the list goes on, Deputy Speaker. So, let us be positive about the Military.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, contributions to nation building: The Right Honourable Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in 1973, in his wisdom during the Alliance Government formed a Rural Development Unit within the Engineers Regiment of the RFMF. We have former Commanding Officers of the Engineer Regiment on both sides of the House.

In any conventional engineers set up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they do not have rural development units but only in Fiji. If you go to rural Fiji, you will see schools, roads, community halls, churches built by the Engineers Regiment through the Rural Development Unit. That was established by the Right Honourable Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in 1973 and that is why I am pleading to Honourable Members of the House; let us be fair to the Military when we talk about issues in this House.

As I have said, it is a proud institution, it is a professional institution until politicians politicise the Military. We cannot look at the Military in isolation when it comes to the politics of this country because the Military was politicised, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me talk about non-conventional wars. It comes in many forms - insurgencies, terrorism and revolutions. In any revolution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are only two key elements that you will see in every revolution whenever it takes place, the Military is the means. That is why the Military was involved within the politics of Fiji because the Military is the means but politics, politics, politics is always the objective. Let us be fair, if we are to discuss the Military in this august House, let us bring the politicians into the picture as well because it is the politicians who are dragging the Military into this sad situation.

Military has professional egos. This is what most people do not know, the politics in revolutions. Look at what is happening in Fiji today. Again, Military is the means, politics is the objective. Let us be fair to the institution.

We have proud men and women in the ranks of the Military, who are serving proudly, meeting the expectations of the people in this country, contributing positively to nation-building and of course, character and leadership development as well. Let us be fair to the military institute, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Politics is always the objective, that is why some people are silent on the issues that we are currently facing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are all aware that this is more than just absence of war. Peace means being able to provide food and shelter for our families, but the problem is whenever we come out with good initiatives, the other side sees it as freebees. We want to help the poor of this country. This is at the heart of every human experience and these two are the vulnerabilities that are preyed upon by those who aim to destabilise our nation, especially with our rural communities and condemns citizens to the dark ages of poverty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer to our long-term stability does not lie in the reduction of our military, lest we forget the good deeds that the military has done as well to this country. It is providing employment, it is contributing significantly to our national economy and those who risk their lives to bring stability to the lives of the people of the world who are less fortunate, and in most democracies, the role of the military is ever relevant and is crucial for a number of underlying factors. I will not go into the details, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me talk on rural development. The establishment of rural development, as I have said, in the Royal Engineers Regiment in 1973 was the brainchild of the late Ratu Sir. Kamisese Mara as leader of the Alliance Government. This unit is still operational as we speak and today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are in Rabi doing the reconstruction work for *Cyclone Thomas* and *Cyclone Evan*. They are in Kioa and Rotuma, and they are about to move into Ucunivatu to set up of the Trade Training School.

Let me talk on socio economic support, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Government will continue in its efforts to empower our citizens through enhancing the capacities of our communities, one such example are our mothers and grandmothers who are now building solar systems to light up entire villages.

The Virgin Coconut Oil programme is growing, providing sources of income for our citizens, who previously had very little to live with. There are also intervention programmes, aimed at improving and providing an economic base for citizens by improving their livelihoods.

In this year's budget, the allocation for the provision of houses for our rural communities was doubled from \$0.7 million to \$1.4 million. For next year, every new home Government provides through this programme (this is the Rural Housing Programme) will be fitted with a water tank, to allow home-owners to harvest rain water which they can use for their domestic purposes and more importantly, this is intended to guard against the prolonged dry seasons that we are currently experiencing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, we need to recognise the efforts of micro-finance institutions in bringing basic financial services within the reach of rural communities. This is a form of empowerment that allows

communities to obtain small loans and save funds, accessing small amounts of credit at reasonable interest rates, gives people the opportunity to set-up a small business, properly harnessed where these small businesses can grow and the ripple effects on the business owners and the community can be massive.

On regional best practices in rural development, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are taking advantage of the new bilateral relations that we have with our neighbouring countries, and particularly the Asia-Pacific region, and we are drawing from the best practices of these developing countries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in August this year, we hosted the International Rural Development in the Asia-Pacific region, the organisation that was established to assist national action and promote regional co-operation to accelerate development within the rural communities. The good news is that, during the meeting, we saw the election of Fiji to head both policy bodies of the organisation, that is the Governing Council and the Executive Committee, and Fiji has also been nominated for the Director-General's post, commencing from July 2016.

On women and youths, Mr. Deputy Speaker, any empowerment programmes would involve the mobilisation of our youths. Our youths of today will one day hold the reins of government as the decision we make today shapes of the calibre of the leaders of tomorrow. We need to actively engage with our youths and allow them the liberty to exercise their rights in expressing their views on issues while also teaching them their important values.

Agriculture is an empowerment tool. We talked about unemployment. I always advocate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there is a lot of employment in the agriculture sector. It is obvious that agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for our marginalised communities. The potential of our agriculture sector still remains strong and the right support mechanisms has much to offer, and I am committed to ensuring that maximum yields are gained from the proper and efficient utilisation of our agricultural resources.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are doing well in rice, we are improving on ginger production and we are also improving on cocoa revitalisation, to name a few of the programmes, but I wish to conclude particularly on agriculture investment, investment in agriculture is so important.

We have plans that are currently in the woods, to increase production and productivity and to ensure sustainable investment in the agriculture sector. With the growing food prices in many developing countries due to increase dependence on imported products, accelerated agriculture growth is not needed to meet demands, but is also a pathway to eliminate hunger and poverty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, investing in agriculture is one of the most effective ways to promote agricultural productivity and enhance sustainability and if I may need to summarise our investment in agriculture, for so long we have been focusing only on production, but we need to develop production simultaneously with the very change, and this will be one of the main focus for the Agricultural Ministry in the next calendar year.

This value change include thumb processing, storing and distributing capabilities along the inputs, exporting farm products and investments in agriculture come in many forms that includes financial capital, productive capital, working capital and human capital. These investments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, complement each other and exercise varying degrees of control and ownership.

On rural development, we need a modernised framework that better co-ordinates between the line ministries. It requires a shift to mark the sectoral approach and we are currently working on the Integrated Rural Development Policy Framework of 2009.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in conclusion, my Ministry was called for by His Excellency, He is committed to supporting national economic growth and will continue to defend the aspirations and democratic rights of all Fijians, especially those who rely on agriculture and Government's rural development. We also will constantly improve our national disaster management programmes for their livelihood and security.

Lastly, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me the opportunity to again thank His Excellency for His motivating opening Address and for his ardent service to the people of Fiji, and to wish him and his family good health and the very best for the future, as he ventures into retirement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members of the House, I thank you for your indulgence.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I will now call on Honourable Balmindar Singh.

HON. B. SINGH.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament, development partners, friends, ladies and gentlemen in the gallery – *bula si'a!*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank His Excellency the President for sharing his wisdom by way of an inspiring Address at the opening of the 2015/2016 Parliament session. His Excellency has paved the pathway for true democracy and also endorsed the FijiFirst Government's vision for peace, stability and prosperity. The mandate required the Government to ensure true democratic, non-communalism and equal citizenry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency the President is a true leader and statesman and we as members of this august Parliament must ensure to embrace the pinnacles of good qualities as a benchmark in serving our people and the nation. Martin Luther King once said and I quote, "An individual has not started living until he or she can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." His Excellency the President is a leader who cares for all humanity regardless of one's beliefs. His gracious acceptance of diversity assures me that he truly has lived.

I would also like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his vision on socio-economic growth and his commitment to improving the lives of all Fijians. The Honourable Prime Minister has been very patriotic and has served the present and future generations of our land with willingness. This has been clearly demonstrated time and time again by the changes and improvements that are visible to our nation. Our Honourable Prime Minister's strong vision and leadership at the political level, backed by a high quality Public Service contributing to the design and execution of policies, has transformed Fiji into the modern entrepreneurial nation we know it as today. In that process, Fiji has shown an ability to reinvent itself continually to meet new challenges. The capacity to keep doing has been critical to the country's ongoing success.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has a vision to make Fiji realise its true potential through building a strong nation State by:

- empowering all our citizens;
- fixing up decades of neglected infrastructure;
- providing actual adherence to the principles of the rule of law;
- putting in place sustainable institutions and laws that will improve accountability, transparency, justice, fair play and modernity;
- improving living standards and alleviating poverty; and
- putting in place a liberalised and an economic level playing field.

We, as leaders, need to stand up and support these initiatives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Fiji's own experience shows how visionary and development-oriented leadership under the Bainimarama-led Government and then the FijiFirst Government drives sustainable development results. A nation committed to a vision of equitable and sustainable development, to a clean and effective government, to engaging citizens in dialogue about the way ahead, and to build the capacities required to drive the vision forward. But for these policies to work, good governance is important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, good governance, both political and economic, is a prime theme for Fijians, without it, it would be difficult for the economy to take off. These are important factors for preconditions of development. FijiFirst believes in active governance, which anticipates and responds to the needs of its citizens and evolving development challenges, with deliberate, targeted and pro-active planning and delivery. Active and effective governance enables institutions to deliver reliable and quality services where and when they are needed.

Sir, as we know the Bainimarama-led Government made history through active and effective governance that has made a substantial contribution to the country's development success. That, in turn, has spurred national development, which has given Fiji one of the longest sustained periods of economic growth since Independence. A pro-active government acts in the interest of its people fearlessly and without hesitation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, yesterday this House was addressed by the Honourable and learned Attorney-General in regards to our nation's bond repayment and the reasons for the private session of Parliament, namely to take advantage of market value. Presently, we are all aware of the benefits this has brought to the lowering of our national debt. However, prior to this announcement, Honourable Members of the Opposition had already taken to the media to criticise.

The Honourable Ratu Tikoca made statements to the *Fiji Times* on 29th August, 2015, declaring the events to be "dramatic theatrics" then proceeded to dramatise the woes of our nation and state that our youths would bear this burden.

We have the Honourable Dr. Biman Prasad giving wrong information on the bond interest rate and when it was pointed out to him he flippantly scoffed at it. Political grandstanding, Sir, which is what we all have come to expect from the Opposition.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Point of Order.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- His is casting aspersions and imputing things to the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party. I ask you to ask him to withdraw.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, the honourable Singh, what he referred to is about a bond is actually correct. There are no aspersions *per se*, it is factually correct.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- The floor is yours, honourable Singh.

HON. B. SINGH.- An opposition that cannot wait and will jump at the smallest chance to make the biggest deal about anything or give wrong and misleading information. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Government has not been fazed and will not be fazed. We will act for the benefit of the nation, promptly and without hesitation, for we do not fear the cries of an opposition that appears to have lost its way. We will act and we believe that the people, like they did in September last year, will respond to actions and not empty words.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, effective governance is a prerequisite under the FijiFirst Government and one of the ways we are working to achieve this is by putting into place the principles of integrated policy making which is needed to drive a sustainable development of the Fijian economy. Sustainable development demands policy making which views economic growth, poverty reduction, social development, equity and sustainability, not as competing goals to be traded off against each other, but as interconnected objectives which are most effectively pursued together by the current Government.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Where are they?

HON. B. SINGH.- It is visible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the FijiFirst Government believes in and embraces fair governance matters for sustainable development because it holds the key to building stable and secure societies and to driving inclusive growth within finite boundaries. Fair, reliable and accountable governing institutions build trust between people and their government. Such institutions need to be free of corruption.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, good governance is also about nurturing inclusive institutions: institutions which allow citizens' voices to be heard, whether that is in the service delivery, policy making or budgeting.

The honourable Prime Minister has noted that last year's Election campaign results show that Fijians want their politics to evolve, to become more consultative and inclusive. Fijians want to be engaged in shaping their future, and want the Government to be more responsive to their immediate needs.

As Fiji's market evolves, I believe it is likely to address decisively the challenges to its current development model and move to greater engagement of its people in pursuing equitable and sustainable development.

Meaningful engagement and participation of citizens in shaping decisions which impact on them is important, as is the existence of the independent institutions which can hold public servants to account. Our efforts have been tailored to individual contexts and responses to their requests, for example, by helping to strengthen legislative, justice and anti-corruption systems and enhance public administration and service delivery, including to reach those most in need.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, public accountability and political credibility are some of our cornerstone principles. Our behaviours and ethical standards are an essential element to secure public trust in the efficacy, transparency and equity of democratic systems, as well as to foster a culture of public service that favours public interest over private gains.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, according to the United Nations, good governance is the process whereby public institutions conduct affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realisation of human rights in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we operate under the 2013 Constitution within a democratic political system in which there is ultimate accountability to the Fijian people. The importance of putting in place mechanisms to hear and respond to people's demands for accountability and participation is recognised by the FijiFirst Government.

Our operational and legal framework of accountability and external review, such as the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC), the Accountability and Transparency Commission operates as checks and balances within the system. We, as the elected representatives of the Fijian people, determine and define the public interest and are accountable for the governance of limited resources.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the FijiFirst Government share an objective of achieving better outcomes for the Fijian community. We also have been expanding our efforts to ensure the highest standards of financial probity. Our Government has extensively worked on institutional development to improve the quality of service delivery and reduce opportunities for corrupt or illicit behaviour.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has been, and shall continue to be an agent of change for the betterment of all Fijians and does not shy away from making tough decisions. That is why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our citizens, investors and business houses have not been hesitant to think outside the box. They have seen their government make challenging paradigm shifts while demonstrating well established principles of governance. This is a government of action. We do not waste much time on rhetoric.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I conclude with another quote from Martin Luther King Junior, who said, and I quote:

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenges and controversy.”

Therefore, let me state that governance is an issue of our top priority. We can learn from past experiences and face any challenges if we uphold the principles of good governance, namely: action, effectiveness, fairness, inclusiveness, accountability and transparency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond to His Excellency Address. May the Almighty shower His wealth of blessings and wisdom upon all Fijians in this august Parliament. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you honourable Singh. I will now call upon Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion before Parliament, but before that, I wish to say Bravo Fiji for your scintillating performance of both, running and power rugby against the number 2 ranked side in the world, Australia, at Cardiff this morning. We lost by 15 points, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but ran the Wallabies ragged in the second half.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I too join other honourable Members in thanking our President for His service to our nation over many years and in several capacities.

I developed a close relationship with His Excellency during my tenure as Leader of the Opposition back in 2001 and 2002 when Ratu Epeli Nailatikau was the Speaker of the House of Representatives. He was an extremely fair and impartial Speaker, always facilitating the requests of the Opposition within the ambit of the Standing Orders.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Hear! Hear!

HON. P. SINGH.- Might I add, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we had many informal *talanoa* sessions over a *tanoo*, as camaraderie was developed not only with myself but other honourable Members as well. I wish him, the First Lady, Adi Koila, and the family prosperous health.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been told that the state of the nation is healthy and prosperous, and the economic growth of 5.3 per cent, increasing reserves, infrastructure development, et cetera, are being given as reasons for our economic advancements. However, it seems to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we now have a consumption-driven economy and growth is based on this factor. It is clear that such an economy is not creating jobs. A 5.3 per cent growth in 2014 should have created thousands of jobs. Instead, people are looking for work, 80 per cent of whom are youths.

Furthermore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations confirmed in June 2015 that the number of job seekers registered with the National Employment Centre (NEC) was 46,277. This increased by more than 13,000 from July 2014, and we have had a 5.3 per cent growth.

The *Fiji Times* of 1st June, 2015 reported the Honourable Minister as saying, and I quote:

“My advice to the students to work hard and make the right choices because it is not easy to find jobs. I've got thousands of people lining up here looking for jobs and employment. I have a mandate to look for jobs for everybody. My advice to the unemployed youth here in the urban centres is to go back to the villages and plant some more *tavioka*.”

If the current trend continues, then close to 60,000 job seekers will be registered with NEC by July next year, unless, of course, if the honourable Minister has concrete plans to generate employment, apart from telling our youth to plant cassava.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, 2015 has been a year of confusion, as far as education is concerned. We have heard delays in distribution of textbooks, milk and cramming of curriculum into two terms. This forced teachers to take extra classes after normal school hours, including weekends. We have had re-introduction of examinations and lowering of entry marks for tertiary institutions from 250 to 200, on the basis that it will be based on raw marks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, yesterday, following concerns raised by the Honourable Mikaele Leawere, the Honourable Minister for Education confirmed leak of examination papers of Year 8, who are already sitting for exams. How were the papers leaked in the first place? What measures are in place to ensure that papers for examinations for Years 10, 12 and 13 are not leaked?

Having raised the expectations of the students and parents, the Ministry has now decided to restrict the free bus fare scheme to students falling within Stage 1 or nearest school, and that too to students whose parents have a combined maximum income of \$16,500.

This is just a mere \$500 above the tax threshold and if a couple individually earning income below the tax threshold but collectively their income is above the \$16,500 set by the Minister, then their children are disqualified from the free bus fare scheme. This, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a betrayal of trust of voters by the FijiFirst Government. God forbid but maybe in the next announcement, possibly during the 2016 Budget will be the qualification for Tertiary Education Loans Scholarship Scheme (TELS) based on the same threshold.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been told by the Minister for Education through the media that this is being done to prevent abuse of free bus fare vouchers by students, schools and bus operators, but until now, the Honourable Minister has not produced any evidence of vouchers being abused by them. On the contrary, an Education Ministry official was charged in 2013, together with the worker from a corporate company for fraud relating to payment of vouchers.

The question that arises, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this; if this economy is growing, collection by Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority is increasing, then why benefits offered to the people of Fiji as promised in the FijiFirst Election manifesto last year are being diluted? What has happened to the mother of all budgets that we had in December last year, what has happened to the slogan of “turning promises into deeds.”

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- You walked out!

HON. P. SINGH.- But that does not change the mother of all budgets. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I expected the Government, through His Excellency, to lay out comprehensive plans on rehabilitation programmes in our cane belts and agricultural sectors, following the prolonged drought, which is still ravaging the Western and Northern Divisions. This is despite some rain which has provided some respite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in some areas, tanks have been provided and residents are required to travel to these locations to fetch their emergency supply. These tanks quickly run out of water. This is a departure from the past practice of trucks carrying water carts to settlements and homes, and we all know the natural phenomenon that after a drought, there is always a major flood. The two recent devastating floods of 2009 and 2012 are a testimony of this fact.

Furthermore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a survey has to be done to assess the impact of the drought on agricultural crops, livestock and sugar. Only a comprehensive survey will be able to determine the kind and amount of assistance and crop rehabilitation packages needed for the recovery of these industrial sectors. With intermittent rain being experienced in the drought affected areas, the time is right to rehabilitate the crops but this can only be done through proper management and utilisation of funds in the relevant areas. This needs a comprehensive CRP and Government must immediately move in this direction, apart from supplying and improving the distribution of emergency water supplies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, also our dairy farmers have serious concerns about the dairy industry, which is impacting their livelihood. In their representations to us, these farmers have stated that they are still being charged Value Added Tax (VAT) for the supply of milk per litre. When Fiji Dairy Cooperative Limited (FDCL) pays them for the supply of milk, they deduct 15 per cent VAT from the proceeds.

Early last month, the Permanent Secretary for Industry, Trade and Tourism said large-scale farmers are being refunded and that was deducted but small scale farmers are exempted from paying VAT. However in their representations, the small-scale farmers have claimed that they are subjected to VAT deductions by FDCL. We ask the Ministry of Public Enterprise to clarify this matter because this is reducing their income.

Furthermore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the outbreak of tuberculosis is having a serious effect on the industry. Large herds of dairy cows are being lost to tuberculosis and there are no replacement cows or calves given to them. The Ministry of Agriculture must urgently look into these issues because these have the potential to cripple the industry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the neglect and management of the public health sector have led to frightening deterioration of our health services. Our crippling poor health service is blight to our nation. There is no other way to put it; you go to any hospital in the country and you will see the conditions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have visited a number of hospitals and health centres in the past six months. I visited them before the Elections as well. My latest visits have shown no improvement to service delivery. Patients, especially women and children, are waiting for more than five hours to see a doctor. The physical

conditions of many hospitals need upgrade. Our hospitals should never run out of essential medicines for diabetes, high blood pressure or basic equipment such as syringes for blood tests.

Until last week, the blood testing facility at Lautoka Hospital, the country's second largest hospital was not working. Patients travelling as far as Ra and the Valley Road in Nadroga arrived at their hospitals after referrals from respective health facilities, only to find that the facility has been out of order for five weeks. This is unacceptable, even that expectation of clean and hygienic conditions at our hospitals is just too high an expectation from this Government.

Further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, last December, the Minister for Health promised a full inquiry into the death of a new-born baby at Lautoka Hospital, following my urgent motion on the matter. He also assured Parliament that measures will be implemented to ensure such tragedies are not repeated in our hospitals.

I am deeply saddened to say that I have once again received a complaint from a member of the public on the loss of her baby, Shahzaib Shuyab Dean, and was apparently transferred from Nadi to Navua, and Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, I offer my sincere and respectful condolences to baby Shuyab's family. I will furnish details of this complaint to the Honourable Minister for Health.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, until recently, the issue of payment of overtime to health personnel was unresolved. A circular issued on 29th June by the Health Ministry Deputy Secretary Finance and Administration in respect of overtime work by Government Wage Earners and Established Staff. Amongst other things, the circular states, and I quote:

“The 2015 Budget has been exhausted, therefore all overtime payments will cease, accumulated hours for all staff shall be taken as time-off in lieu of payment on hour to hour basis.”

The Minister of Health needs to clarify this issue because an overworked and underpaid workforce is the last thing we need, especially the health and medical care facilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, healthcare, despite major reforms, has not improved. This is a painful reality. That is why we need a bi-partisan approach for an inquiry into all aspects of healthcare and medical services. There is little use building new hospitals when our existing ones lack facilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the role of the Fiji Military Forces has been the subject of much scrutiny. On Tuesday, the Honourable Minister for Employment himself, a former senior Military Officer praised the role of the RFMF and its then Commander, the current Prime Minister, in restoring law and order, following the *coup* of May, 19, 2000, saying that the *coup* was an action by extremists who had racist and selfish ambitions to run the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question is: who carried out the *coup*? It was not the ordinary citizens. It was the people trained to be soldiers and who belong to an institution that is revered worldwide because of its reputation in peacekeeping, but this has also been tarnished with these *coups*.

I fully concur with the Honourable Minister for Agriculture when he said, “It is politics which drags it.” Military, being a professional institution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why should it subject itself to the politicians?”

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Exactly, hear, hear, that's my point!

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the results often advance after the takeover because politicians have failed them, that is why the Military took over in 1987, 2000 and 2006.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1987, the NFP/Labour Coalition Government, headed by the late Dr. Timoci Bavadra, was only 5 weeks old when it was overthrown. How could they have failed in five weeks? They were not even given a chance. This is the answer that needs to be provided, amongst other things, before we are told to extol the virtues of democracy and constitutional rule - something that we have always upheld and will continue to do so.

His Excellency emulated the virtues of the 2013 Constitution. The words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, "Constitution and Constitutionalism" originates from ancient Greece, especially in the normative, creative, distribute writings of Aristotle who used these words. Aristotle, in his many works use the word "policia" in several different senses and one of the simplest of them all that he used attributed to at arrangement of officers, so no matter how badly or unethically a country is governed, it has a Constitution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, true nationhood, common and equal citizenry can only be achieved if we collectively start doing some of the following:

- 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 semblance of multiracialism; having bipartisan committees to collectively look at challenges facing sectors like the sugar industry, health and medical services.

My point here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that it is 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 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.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have in this House over the last couple of days talked about challenges that they face, challenges with education, health, infrastructure development and on many more issues, and the question that arises is, how do we overcome it? In the words of the current President of the United States of America, President Barack Obama "yes we can" and that is the bottom line. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Prem Singh. Honourable Members we are now due for a lunch break, however we have four more speakers on today's listing. I put it to the floor if all wish to complete the speakers on the list before we adjourn for the day.

HON. MEMBERS.- Yes

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, we on this side of the House would plead if we can break for lunch, we have a small engagement.. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, is there any Member who opposes?

HON. MEMBERS.- No

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I thank you very much Honourable Members and I will now adjourn the House for lunch and we will be back here at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.34 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.35 p.m.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, let us continue with where we left off before lunch. We will now call upon Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament: I rise today to join my colleagues in paying tribute to the service to the nation of a great leader, a great personality and Statesman, the President of the Republic of Fiji, His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau and to respond to his Address to us, Members of this House at the opening of the new session of Parliament.

His Excellency, Mr. Deputy Speaker, truly is the people's President who does not mind standing in queue, as he did with me and some others some years ago to pay his pay television bill, or sitting alongside his people in a sports stadium to watch a particular match. He does not discriminate between ethnic groups and religion, as shown by his public engagements with all the presence at various religious functions and loves the youth and children of the nation, a commitment that he demonstrated by visiting many primary and secondary schools around the country.

His Excellency has participated and lived through many periods of history in Fiji, some good and some bad. He has been with us through the turbulent times of 1987, through to the glorious era of the present day where the nation has seen an unprecedented phase of economic growth, development, peace and stability.

He joined the army before Independence and rose through the ranks to become Army Commander by 1987 and held the rank of Brigadier General. Sadly, however, he was later unceremoniously succeeded by a third-ranked officer whose name I do not wish to mention. He is a former diplomat and Government Minister and from 2001 to 2006, he served as the Speaker of Parliament. In 2009, he was sworn in as the President of Fiji, a position he holds till today. To many of us, he is the father of the new Fiji.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when a person of such high calibre, stature, knowledge and one who holds such a high office speaks to us and tells us to value the nation and its Constitution, it becomes incumbent upon us as leaders to take heed of his words and apply the same.

His Excellency has in very clear terms stated to all Fijians, "The enemies of democracy who are using communal divisions, in other words, ethnicity, race and religion to gain political power, let me say this to them, there is no threat to your religion, identity or culture or your rights. Your rights are protected in our Constitution for all time."

Therefore, I am appalled by some people sitting in this very House who are calling for the Constitution to be amended or thrown away entirely, the same Constitution which our President feels privileged to have been instrumental in bringing to fruition and regarded as one of the best in the world. My question to them is, why? Why condemn a document that makes everyone equal for the first time in Fiji's history. This Constitution is a document which should be revered and protected. If the Government has decided to allocate a special public holiday as 'Constitution Day' to celebrate this pious document, then we should all be proud to participate in it.

It is this Constitution that has restored the confidence in our people and our economy because it does not in any way discriminate. If we throw away this document, we will go back to the same old Fiji, riddled with racial and religious turmoil. That certainly cannot be God's will. Some Honourable Members of the Opposition have stated that the Constitution contains unjust principles. Some Honourable Members said that they are entirely disappointed with His Excellency the President's Address. To me, these people are

like those children who when they do not get their favourite toy, suddenly start believing that the whole world is their enemy.

I wonder how many of those who are criticising the Constitution have actually read and understood it. His Excellency the President stated that this is a Constitution, that for the first time, guarantees equality for every Fijian. The Constitution provides for a range of social and economic rights and are unprecedented in our history. It contains the Bill of Rights which guarantees a range of rights including the right to education, economic participation, transport, housing, food and water, health and social security for all Fijians. It recognises and protects the unique culture, customs, traditions and language of the *iTaukei* and Rotuman people. It recognises common and equal citizenry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to elaborate further on a very special aspect of our Constitution which is Chapter 2 – the Bills of Rights. For those who advocate the 1997 Constitution and compare it with our current Constitution, let this be a lesson on the supreme law of the land, air and sea of Fiji. For the beginners, the Bill of Rights in the 1997 Constitution was 23 Chapters long. The Bill of Rights of 2013 Constitution is 40 Chapters long. The number is almost double, the fact alone shows that we are much better off in terms of our rights than we were ever in the history of Fiji.

To illustrate this point, it is for the first time in history that Fijians have enshrined in the Bill of Rights the following:

- 1) Section 16 - Right to Executive and Administrative Justice;
- 2) Section 25 – Right to Access to Information;
- 3) Section 28 – Right of ownership and protection of *iTaukei*, Rotuman and Banaban lands;
- 4) Section 29 – Protection of ownership and interest in land;
- 5) Section 30 – Rights of landowners to fair share of royalties for extraction of minerals;
- 6) Section 32 – Right to economic participation;
- 7) Section 33 – Right to work and a just minimum wage;
- 8) Section 34 – Right to reasonable access to transportation;
- 9) Section 35 – Right to housing and sanitation;
- 10) Section 36 – Right to adequate food and water;
- 11) Section 37 – Right to social security schemes;
- 12) Section 38 – Right to health;
- 13) Section 39 - Freedom from arbitrary evictions;
- 14) Section 40 - Environment rights;
- 15) Section 41 – Rights of children; and
- 16) Section 42 – Rights of persons with disabilities

By denouncing a document which provides for so many rights, are the Honourable Members of the Opposition telling the Fijians that we do not deserve to have such rights? Some say that this Constitution is forced on the people. Are we trying to tell the Fijians that their freedoms, rights and liberties are forced upon them? Who are we trying to fool here? Let me make it simpler for the people, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Section 16 provides that every person has a right to any executive or administrative action that is lawful, rational, proportionate, procedurally fair and reasonably prompt and every person adversely affected by such action has the right to be given written reasons for the action.

So, a person who applies for a land lease now can require that his application be dealt with quickly and fairly by the Department of Lands and if his application has been refused, he is now entitled to written reasons from the Lands Department. Is the Opposition trying to tell a poor farmer from Rakiraki, who is waiting for his lease renewal that he is not entitled to a quick resolution, or that he does not deserve a written explanation?

Section 25 provides that every person has the right of access to information held by any public office. So, now any person who applies for a water meter connection and his application is pending, can go to Water Authority Office and ask to see the progress of his application. Is the Opposition trying to tell the people of Toko, Tavua that they are not entitled to that information?

Section 28 of the Constitution should be of particular interest to the critics of the Constitution. This section provides that the ownership of all the *iTaukei* land shall remain with the customary owners of that land and *iTaukei* land shall not be permanently alienated, whether by sale, grant, transfer or exchange except to the State and even if the State acquires any such land for public purposes, the State must return the land to the *iTaukei* landowners when it is no longer required. This simply means that the *iTaukei* land cannot be permanently given away full stop. If it is given to the State then it will be returned upon its use. A Momi Bay type of land grab can never happen again under this Constitution. Those *tikina*, *mataqali* and *yavusas* can now sleep in peace because their land is protected till eternity. Such protection of the *iTaukei*, Rotuman and Babaan lands have been provided for the first time in the Bill of Rights of any Constitution, which is certainly the 2013 Constitution.

Does the main Opposition Party which professes to be the champion of indigenous and *iTaukei* rights want to tell the *mataqali* in Ba, the *yavusa* in Nadi and the *tikina* of Rewa, that you do not deserve such protection? I now doubt the real reasons for the dissent shown to the Constitution by some people in this very House.

Section 30, again, for the first time provides that landowners are now entitled to a fair share of royalties or other money paid to the State from minerals extracted from their lands or for fishing rights given. This will give a better life to a Manasa, a Timoci and a Semesa who has always been resource rich but cash poor because he never had the protection under any Constitution. And here the Opposition is saying, "no Manasa, no Timoci, no Semesa, you are not entitled to receive a fair share of money made from your land because we want to throw away the very document which provides that right to you."

The Opposition has time and again stated that the *iTaukei* rights have been eroded. However, reading this section from the Bill of Rights one can be sure that the Opposition is misrepresenting the facts of the *iTaukei* people or the Opposition has simply lost the plot.

Section 31 of the Constitution provides that every person has the right to early childhood, primary, secondary and even further education. The Bainimarama-led Government's assistance provided to needy students in terms of free education, free bus fare, Topper's Scholarship and Tertiary Student Loan Scheme (TSLS) are steps taken to achieve the objectives of Section 31 of the Constitution.

Section 32 provides that every Fijian has the right to economic participation. The Bainimarama Government's assistance provided in forms of small business grants and lowering the income tax, increasing the income tax threshold, micro-finance grant, provision of new jobs and provision of infrastructure are steps to promote that purpose. The people opposed to the Constitution seems to be telling the thousands of parents and students of Fiji and the budding small businesses that you are not entitle to those rights provided under Sections 31 and 32 of the Constitution. There has always been a lot of hue and cry over the implementation of minimum wage in Fiji.

Section 33 provides just that but again there are some people sitting in this very room who are not happy with that provision and want to throw that section together with the Constitution away. Let me ask them, Are we trying to throw the baby out with the bathwater for some political gain?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, who among us sitting here and the Fijian people does not want reasonable access to transportation, right to good housing and sanitation and access to adequate food water? Who does not

want the right to social security scheme, health and the right to freedom from arbitrary evictions? Sections 34 to 39 of the Constitution, for the first time, provides those rights. The Bainimarama Government's policy in giving a \$10,000 grant to qualifying first home buyers is a right step in that direction.

I am sure the Honourable Members of the Opposition would not want those rights taken away from them. However, they have the audacity to challenge a document which seeks to guarantee those rights to the common Fijians. The environment has always been a challenging issue for us. Our Prime Minister has championed actions against global warming and rising sea levels.

Section 40 of the Constitution now provides that every person has the right to a clean and healthy environment which includes the right to have natural world protected for the benefit of the present and future generations. The Opposition does not seem to be happy about such a protection afforded to us by the Constitution which is at the core of our survival in these small islands. Are the people who are saying that the Constitution has been forced upon them ready are to tell the people of the small maritime islands that we are ready to let you drown beneath the waves because we are busy scoring political points in Suva? I think not.

Our children are our future. The Constitution at Section 41 makes special provisions for the rights of the children. It states, among other things, that our children are protected from abuse, neglect, harmful cultural practices, any form of violence, inhumane treatment and punishment and exploitative labour. Who in their right mind would not want our children to be protected? Few months ago, a nine year old girl was raped in Nakasi. After that, two innocent children were victims of a supposedly murder, suicide case in Kinoya. Just a few weeks ago, Simran Singh of Penang Sangam High School was hacked to death in her own compound. These incidents are heart wrenching and painful. When our laws makes provisions to protect children from violence, some people are not happy with that, what are we trying to tell our children, that we do not care about them?

This brings me to another important aspect of His Excellency's Address where he mentioned that the RFMF must whenever and wherever required, support the Police in bringing to justice those who destroy democracy and impose their wills on others. I was told by the father of the late Simran Singh when I visited him during the funeral that when the Military was present in the Western Division, the person accused for a murder was hiding in his village, he came out only when the Military left. How I wish that the Military was present in Tavua and Rakiraki for a longer period of time, an innocent life would have been saved.

Mr. Deputy SpeakerThe same sentiments were expressed by the cane farmers of Ba that when the Military was assisting the Police in patrolling the cane farms, cane fires were reduced to almost nil, saving thousands of dollars for farmers. Such has been the achievements of the RFMF which matters so much to the law abiding citizens like us, an institution which has been much maligned by the Opposition.

Section 11(2) of the Constitution provides that every person has the right to security of the person which includes the right to be free from any form of violence and any source at home, school or any workplace. If the RFMF is assisting the Police in providing that security to the ordinary law abiding citizens, then I do not see anything wrong with the call of His Excellency the President.

Section 26 of the Constitution places more emphasis on the freedom from discrimination than the 1997 Constitution ever did. This is to be expected of a document that, for the first time in Fijian history, creates a unified national identity. Our Constitution stamps out the desire of the few who wish to separate us. We are one people, we do not discriminate.

This means that if a student is not awarded a scholarship because of reasons other than merit, he or she can challenge that decision. If a female is paid lower than a male just because she is a woman, she now has the right to challenge that decision under the Bill of Rights. Is the Opposition trying to tell thousands

of students who are enjoying Toppers Scholarships or TELS Loans Scheme that if they are refused because of the discriminatory grounds that they should not have a recourse? Are they telling thousands of Fijian women working together with men that if they are paid lesser than their male counterparts based on their gender or pregnancy, then they should not have a right to open their mouths in protest?

Our young people who I have met and interacted with either personally or through the media have no interest whatsoever in a divisive society. They have no interest in racial overtones, name calling, quarrels and the use of swear words against women including some swear words against the, Madam Speaker of this House some months ago. They do not want politics of the old. They want politicians and leaders who talk about issues and act upon them. They think and want the future. They want better services, amenities, excessive technology and career paths. And as His Excellency the President has said, we must work together as leaders, as a nation, to give them the future that they deserve.

A lot of these people have told me after seeing all the drama in Parliament that they are grateful to God that they did not vote for SODELPA and prevented them from forming government or else all we would have is fights, quarrels and swear words with little constructive debates every day.

The people who are being led to believe that their rights have been eroded by the Constitution of the FijiFirst Government or who were being told before the Elections that Fiji will be sold to China, my message to them is, have you lost your culture, your identity, your religion, your land since the promulgation of the Constitution or since the FijiFirst Government was elected? Has Fiji been sold to China? The answer is an emphatic no.

Our Constitution is a blessing to our people. It is a reflection of how far we have come as a nation. It is a symbol of progress and unity. Why would we not want to celebrate it? To those who are constantly making baseless claims against our Constitution, I would like to share an old proverb and I quote: "Never tear a fence down if you do not know what it was put up for."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with these words, I conclude by wishing His Excellency a very happy retirement and many happy long years of life so that he can see this Government take Fiji to greater heights as envisioned by this true statesman. Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker and before I sit down I would like to wish Honourable and learned Attorney General a very happy birthday.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Member for your contribution. I will now call upon the Honourable Ratu Isoa Tikoca, the floor is yours, Sir.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, I rise this afternoon to present my few thoughts in response to the Address by His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau on the opening of the new Session 2015/2016 of Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I do, allow me to also commend your high office and thus Fiji's representation at the Fourth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in New York. More importantly, I congratulate her contribution in the forward looking Declaration made on 2nd September, 2015. That Declaration provides some bold, forward-looking and most relevant actions that Speakers of Parliament from IPU members have agreed to uphold.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency the President urged this House to put honour back into the Honourable House, in the context of our conduct in the august House. I can only respectfully suggest that the Declaration made by Speakers of Parliament, particularly in paragraph 14, provides us all with some valuable guidance and I quote:

“In all of this, we need to rededicate ourselves to the rule of law. Our parliaments should assist in ensuring that the rule of law is upheld and all have equal access to justice. We call for greater commitment to international law and propose to pay particular attention to respect for human rights and international humanitarian law while supporting international justice mechanisms and efforts to end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency the President also asserted, as he did in his Opening Address of the inaugural session of Parliament last year that the will of the people has been heard through the ballot box. In that regard, I cannot help but draw more guidance from the IPU Speakers of Parliament Declaration in paragraph 15 which states, and I quote:

“We reaffirm the principles of the Universal Declaration on Democracy. In this sense, our parliaments are sovereign and independent national institutions. They are marked by the history and cultural heritage of our countries and each one is different. Yet, they share the same ambition to ensure that the will of the people forms the basis of government. Participation in political life and public decision making is an entitlement and is crucial to development. When people are left voiceless or excluded, their well-being is undermined and democracy is left wanting.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government, through the President's Address at paragraph 3 on page 4 claims that our democracy was built on the most solid of foundations, that is a Constitution, that for the first time guarantees equality for every Fijian. The statement begs clarification because the only equality that seems to be provided in our Constitution is our right to equality - Section 26. So what guaranteed equality for every Fijian is being claimed here in His Excellency's Address? Can we say that the poor and the rich are equal, or can we say that the Ministers and Backbenches on that side are equal? Absolutely not! Mr. Deputy Speaker, because inequality is a fact of life as Max Erham said, and I quote:

“Do not compare yourself, there are persons who are greater and lesser than you and in the face of aridity you are as perennial as the grass...”

It is said that Fiji's Constitution acclaims solid foundation, is a figment of imagination built on sand and I beg to disagree with the Government that unassailable principles are the foundation of all great democracies (paragraph one on page five) but the supremacy of the legal spirit.

Unfortunately, this Government is lacking in many things. A good Government is a Government of the people. Likewise, a good constitution is a constitution of the people. That is why public consultation was and is necessary when making Fiji's Constitution. Because what makes a constitution great is the fact that it grants civil liberties to all. A constitution whose purpose is to protect the right of individuals and to limit Government's power. Unfortunately, our liberties in Fiji are very restricted, even Honourable Members of Parliaments are restricted in conducting constituency visits and meetings.

The American people are a great people. What makes them great is their Constitution, what makes the American Constitution so great is the fact that it grants civil liberties to all Americans, and gives all Americans whether now or 300 years from now. They have a Constitution or standards on which to base their moral, judicial and legal systems. All of these is contained in a Constitution that contains a Preamble, seven Articles and 27 Amendments.

I would like to share a few thoughts on much discussed issues on military. A famous saying in the military goes, “there are no bad soldiers, only bad officers.” Both officers rhetorics on using this military to protect its political will is recorded and you will be fully accountable to when democracy settles in.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please allow me to correct a misconception that is popular with the other side of the House. The other side believes that they have a monopoly over stability and security of the nation

by patronising the Military Forces and treating them like political footballs or pet dogs. We on this side do not disrespect them, like that to patronise men and women of the Military Forces. I talk straight to them because they are adults, professionals, parents and citizens who I am sure are also concerned about the future of our country. We do not patronise them by giving them disproportionate public funded pay and perks to keep them silent and in line with the ruling political party. We treat them like adult men and women that they are, professional soldiers and citizens who are also willing to do their part in national building.

That is given greater impetus by Section 131 of your Constitution which has given them very wide powers, the kind that is not given to Military Forces in the strong democracies of the world, which have not had military *coups* since the glorious Revolution in England and the French Revolution. Both revolutions came from the people who toppled the tyranny of the elites in this country in the last 30 years - the military is the elite because they have ultimately determined which elected government remains in power. And this role has now been given in writing by Section 131 of the Constitution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency the President also cited the notion that the election results were credible and free. Furthermore, His Excellency has prioritised and led by example to engage with our young people. I am reminded by paragraph 17 of the IPU Speakers of the Parliament Declaration, I quote:

“There is an apparent disconnect between the way we do politics and the way people live today. The connectivity and immediacy that characterize their lives seem far removed from national political processes. Young people in particular calling for greater engagement, openness, transparency, accountability and effectiveness in politics. We must be ambitious and halt the tide of young people opting out of civil society and democratic institutions; we must better harness their energy and creativity in the service of communities and societies as a whole. We have seen how young people have been at the forefront of many pro-democracy movements.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, recalling that the Office of the Supervisor of Elections has already begun to register young voters for the 2018 Elections, and also noting the worryingly high trend of military cadet training from secondary school upwards, this august House must heed the call of IPU Speaker of Parliament to entice our youths back into the civil society and democratic institutions as our next generation of leaders, and additionally harness their energy and creativity in the service of communities and societies in Fiji. On this note, may I commend all youth groups who are actively campaigning on issues that they deem of critical importance to them such as climate change, suicide prevention, the national flag, gender violence, et cetera. May we be inspired by their passion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency the President also highlighted “current attempts by a small minority to set up an alternative government.”

Cautioning as we must, that the Courts must be left free to progress the legal proceedings without any influence. I can only, once again, share guidance from paragraph 19 of the IPU Speakers of Parliament declaration:

“Minorities and indigenous peoples are the most vulnerable members of many of our societies and remain excluded from making decisions that affect their lives and the future of our countries. We affirm that they have an inalienable right to full and equal membership of each of our nations which has to be translated into public policies that are sensitive to their situation, needs and aspirations and accompanied by sufficient resources. We call for measures to be taken to endure their effective participation of all levels of public life.”

This is the outcome of the International Parliamentary Union.

To all the *vanua* chiefs in the three confederacies, to all the chiefs and members of the Rotuman Council, to the leaders of the Hindu communities, to the leaders of the Muslim communities and all other councils representing groups and individuals and people of Fiji, it is important to understand that whilst your council continues to be respected and observed, the Great Council of Chiefs that belonged to the indigenous people has been removed out of the Constitution but not out of existence.

To indigenous people, our Great Council of Chiefs is still in existence like all other councils but equally now, as per your 2013 Constitution, cannot appoint a President.

That was the only role it was given in the 1997 Constitution and that was to appoint or cancel that appointment, otherwise it lives and breathes. All other councils are left to run their own, why not the indigenous people? Why now when they want to be like others, they are taken to prison and are treated criminals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Great Council of Chiefs is still alive. Its status is better now as it no longer comes under the leadership of a political government. It is now equal to the Rotuman Council, the Muslim League, the India Arya Samaj and likewise other races living here and having councils of their own. Their status is apolitical. They run their own projects and businesses to serve their own affairs. Arya Samaj, they run their own university and other entities, the Muslim League runs their own big businesses and trades, et cetera.

Likewise, we the *iTaukei* people and our Great Council of Chiefs deserve to be in the same level playing field. We should be allowed to run our own businesses and manage our own resources and build ourselves up. We should not have a political government arm, Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs and *iTaukei* Trust looking after our affairs, as other Councils and Leagues do not have this. Our other brothers and sisters from other communities own freeholds, they have their businesses both as individuals and communally owned and all their businesses ventures are left free and undisturbed by this Government.

The FijiFirst Government removed \$20 million from our Fijian Holdings Limited. Your Government removed our majority share with TV One, your Government especially, your role as custodian of the assets of *iTaukei* people set up a rival FBC TV by loaning from Fiji Development Bank to cut out *iTaukei* people from a commanding position in the economic participation of our country. Fijian Holdings founded by the Great Council of Chiefs to elevate the *iTaukei* people to be useful and competitive in the economic growth and participation in our blood beloved Fiji.

You have almost successfully shut the eyes, ears and mouths of many *iTaukei* people through your freebies. You are on the path to dividing and relegating *iTaukei* people to become peasants and totally relying to a political will by the new master race called Fijian under the total control of FijiFirst and it is extremely oversized army. Where is the equal level playing field? Who is not telling the truth here?

The Fijian Holdings Limited should be released from the Government shackles and be the funding arm of *iTaukei* and other business communities who believes in helping their own country man who are not accustomed to the etiquette of running profitable business.

Fijian Holdings founded by the Great Council of Chiefs is multi-racial. It is designed to engage other business communities to be members and joint partners to help indigenous people become industrious and responsible to participate in the economic growth of our nation. Now, this Government has tainted the honourable vision of the Great Council of Chiefs by removing most of the business arms of the Fijian Holdings under its control to weaken the *iTaukei* people and relegating them to permanent recipients of handouts. This is a total shame, especially when the Government of FijiFirst is talking about the level playing field.

Now, the people have regained their sights and have now seen that this Government is truly reserved in terms of keeping the poor as peasants and the elites richer and richer and this continued to flourish by keeping the Army growing and well paid and conducting Military Cadet Training, so that the new generation of Fijians are totally polluted with this atrocious Fiji Government propaganda.

I beg my innocent friends on the other side to please wake up, the author of this terrible agenda is sitting amongst you. The whole of Fiji is going to celebrate his so-called achievement through a guise called Constitution Day. Fiji please wake up! Our current leadership is materialistic, it is attracting a lot of people but this country must again be founded on true values that does not depreciate. Its value must rise every day, unlike materialistic substances, it depreciates and no matter how much dressing you add to it, it will continue to depreciate. I invite you all our Fijians to make the right choice now, centre your life and your families on true values. That is the binding power of our nation, regardless of class, colour or creed.

Yesterday again, we were surprised by another drama. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there has been a persistent attempt by Government, especially the Ministry of Finance and the Prime Minister's Office to withhold information being asked of them regarding the Ministers' salaries and other unaccounted for expenditures like the \$100 million. The over reaction by the honourable Minister of Finance to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's comments was telling, "the Government calls on all citizens to operate with transparency and accountability" but failed to do so themselves. So I asked, just one question; why have you not tabled copies of the contract between the Ministry of Finance or the Prime Minister's Office and the company of Nur Bano Ali for the payment of Ministers' salaries from 2009? Where is the accountability and transparency? Is this an important matter, involving millions of taxpayers' dollars?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order.

The Honourable Speaker has already made rulings on these issue. It is before the Auditor General's Committee and we need to respect that decision. Thank you.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- If our democracy is to mean anything, we need to demonstrate accountability and transparency through action, not just hot air.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, His Excellency reminded us that patriotism is a requirement for public life. All of us here today as representatives of the will of the people are patriotic, indeed everyone in this nation loves Fiji. We may have divergent views which is healthy and democratic, on how best will of the people should be manifested in policy regulatory oversight, accountability and legislation, but our beloved island home is our common rallying point. If that is the case, then accelerating honour in this House must be a common purpose and to that end, may I once again share the IPU Speakers of Parliament Declaration at paragraph 20, and I quote:

"We recognise the multiple challenges facing many of our Parliaments today. We are concerned by public scepticism and a disconnect with politics, an unequal power relationship with the executive, difficulties in influencing decisions that are increasingly taken in international forums or outside Government and limited means at our disposal to increase institutional capacity in Parliament. Supporting the rights of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, we commit to working to tackle these challenges, respecting the role of traditional media, making greater use of social media and modern information and communication technologies and rendering our Parliaments fit for purpose of the 21st century."

For the *iTaukei* people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the ownership of their ancestry land is always cherished because it is all that they have. Land is sacred, it belonged to our forefathers, it is not ours but it is only ours to pass on to our children. Whatever piece of land we have, is our vineyard, given to us by our fathers.

Our vineyard is what our fathers have passed on to us, we, in turn pass it on to our children and our children to their grandchildren and so forth. Unfortunately, our Honourable Members on the other side will not know the sanctity or ultimate importance or inviolability, meaning it should be free from violation of our ancestry land.

The former Governor of Fiji who became Lord Stanmore, at the House of Lords said, "Those who knew the Fijian people (*iTaukei*) understand that if you separate them from their land, the race will die". Those words will always be true then, now and generation to come. Land will never grow but people will, it is our duty as a custodian to administer the land as best as we can. That means, any *iTaukei* land acquired by the State for public purpose should be returned to customary owners, if the land is no longer required by the State or the customary owners be relocated back to these lands due to climate change effect, natural disaster and unforeseen circumstances.

We the customary owners seek Government to consider removing the phrase "After the commencement of this Constitution" from Section 28 (2) of the 2013 Constitution. We are sure as our Honourable Prime Minister champions Climate Change in our Region as well as to the world at large, that he would consider the above change be reviewed in our Constitution. Failing this, would resonate negative vibes to the people of the Pacific Region, Leaders of the world and the Pacific.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member, your time is up. Thank you for your contribution, Sir.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I will now call upon the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports, Honourable Tuitubou.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen and a special greeting to Mr Saulo from Nakida Village.

At the onset, I wish to pass on my congratulatory message to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Fiji on his outstanding Address at the opening of the new session of Parliament. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must say that I am truly blessed and honoured to be here today. A year ago, I came to Parliament with a willing heart to serve all Fijians, particularly the youths, after being given the portfolio for Youth and Sports by the Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the experience has been one of the best learning opportunities for me, particularly visiting youths around Fiji and hearing about the challenges they encounter daily. My Assistant Minister and I have collectively visited close to 500 youth clubs, out of the 2,542 registered youth clubs in the country, latest of which was my recent visit, through an invitation by the youths of Nakida, Dreketi and Wairuarua in the District of Nagonenicolo in the interior of Naitasiri. We will continue until we visited all registered clubs under Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, although inaccessible to basic infrastructure such as road and electricity, the youth of Nakida are actively engaged in agriculture and are full of enthusiasm for further development of their village. It was to show, that although they are in the interior, they have received Government assistance from the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and they invited us to monitor and visit what they have achieved. Enthusiasm, as Henry Chester rightly said, and I quote: "Enthusiasm is the greatest assets in the world today".

It is the money, power and influence and I am convinced that the youths have valued enthusiasm as our greatest investment and I am heartened by the level of enthusiasm and dedication shown by these youths in Nakida, Dreketi and Wairuarua. This is one of the Government policies that is to reach the unreached and develop the underprivileged and the under developed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this juncture, I would like to make reference to the speech delivered by His Excellency, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, in his Opening Address. He mentioned of the young people wanting a list of basic necessities that must be seriously considered and these are:

- stability;
- to have the opportunity to create a livelihood for themselves
- to build one Fiji for the future;
- to access better services including technology;
- and to have clear career paths for professional development.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the past years, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, in partnership with our stakeholders like UNDP, have been conducting Leadership and Civic Education Training, incorporated Peace Building Skills in youth training at community level. These, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to equip youths with civic pride, leadership and peacebuilding knowledge and skills towards building a better and united Fiji.

In addition, the Ministry has been actively engaged in programmes that empower youths to create better livelihoods for themselves. This is through our Youth Grants Programmes that provide assistance to youths operating in income generating projects. I wish to highlight one shining example of a vibrant youth club that has greatly utilised the Ministry's assistance, the Youth Club of Makolei Village, in Solevu, Bua. These are *iTaukei* youths, who are successful in income generating projects. There are clubs, majority of the *iTaukeis*, who share their successful stories during the Youth and Sports Conference held at the National Gymnasium two days ago, and will be closing today.

Sir, the *iTaukei* youth club from Makolei Village generated a combined revenue of more than \$60,000 from the assistance rendered to them by our Divisional Office in the Northern Division, and these youth have gone further to bigger and brighter things. This is just one example of countless success stories garnered through a committed front by our Ministry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Fijian youths now more than ever play an important role in Fiji's development. Fiji's population between the ages of 15 to 35 years make up 38 per cent of the total numbers. Fiji's Constitution lowered the voting age to 18 years, and this gives more young people in Fiji the opportunity to choose their leaders, and in particular, directly in the democratic decision-making process.

I am also very proud of the fact that the Constitution provides a range of rights and freedoms that enable young people to participate in Fiji's socio-economic development process, including the Right to Free Speech and Publication, the Freedom of Assembly and Association, education and economic participation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in exercising these rights, young people need to have a clear understanding of policies, laws and regulations that facilitate the delivery of these rights and freedoms. To aid in the delivery of these rights, and freedoms in the National Youth Policy and the Policy is in current form has taken on board the interests of all stakeholders and sectors, including Government Strategic Direction for 2015-2018, as well as relevant regional and international youth declaration and the commitments that come with it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ensure that youth policies are heard, the policy mandates the setup of District Councils, Provincial Councils and the higher forum, the National Youth Council of Fiji, which was set up

in 2012. The National Youth Council of Fiji is the umbrella body for youth and the platform to voice their concerns. Our National Youth Policy is a recognised document, and is mentioned in the latest developed Green Growth Framework of the Fijian Government, as it recognises that Fijian youths are vital components of our national development, amidst the many challenges they constantly encounter.

I am also pleased to mention in this august House that at the recently held Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Apia, Samoa, we received grants, a great amount of positive feedbacks from our Pacific Island neighbours with regards to how well our National Youth Policy is being implemented.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also wish to focus your attention on the inroads being accomplished by the Ministry, to ensure equal participation of young women in all developed aspects of youth and sports alike. Since taking up office, one of the most daunting task that I saw needed most attention was the luring of and attracting young women in youth clubs. Youth clubs were mainly male dominated, with little or no female representation, and this was a major concern which needed urgent addressing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to say, however, that this has seen major improvements during recent visits to youth clubs around the country. I have noticed the steady increase in the participation of young women in youth clubs.

On the Island of Rabi, for example, there are clubs solely for young mothers who have seen it fit to group together for their collective benefits, while still maintaining their ties to the larger youth groups. It is undoubtedly clear that women play a pivotal role in our day to day living, an instrumental part of the family unit. It is for this reason the Ministry of Youth and Sports will continue to empower young women across the country, and course programmes which will in turn ensure that our future generation are brought up in a sound and nurturing environment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I address this august House, the National Youth and Sports Conference is currently being held at the FMF Gymnasium, and sees the representation of youths from a wide array of ethnic, social, religious and cultural backgrounds. It provides a platform for youths, especially young women, to voice their thoughts on national fronts, as well as provide an ideal means for them to showcase their brilliant and innovation mindset to their male counterparts.

Yesterday, these youths formulated a declaration that they call the "Laucala Declaration." This Declaration were formulated by the youths, for the youths and handed over to me last night to be presented to Cabinet.

His Excellency the President rightly mentioned, and I quote:

"We need to take a united approach to the development of our nation and to ensure that the best interests of the nation are at the forefront of public actions and decisions."

This united approach, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be embodied as we head into the future, without any form of discrimination, be it gender, sexual ethnic, religious, cultural or political. I have high hopes that our future is steady, and unshakeable because I have seen the strides taken by our young leaders of today, especially the *iTaukei*, and there is no doubt that the future is in good hands.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I conclude, please allow me, as the Minister responsible for Sports, to wish our gladiators the very best of the remainder of their pool games at the 2015 Rugby World Cup in England. They played with determination and bravery against the England Team, and they did that again this morning against Australia. And, may I remind them, that win or lose, they remain our champions.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear! *Vinaka!*

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- The Ministry, through the National Sports Commission, will continue with its Sports Outreach Programmes, sports equipment distributions, Train the Trainers Programmes, Educate the Educated Programmes and Wellness Community Tournaments. It will support the Sports Grants given to teams on overseas tours, hosting of international teams locally, sports scholarships, sports teams of experts and international coaches.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to conclude, I wish to once again thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji for his challenging and reaffirming Opening Address, and the Government of the day for the trust placed in the Ministry to ensure the empowerment of our young Fijian youths. Again, I affirm my unwavering commitment to this duty, to realise the full potential of young people for the benefit of our country and its future.

May God Bless His Excellency and the First Lady, and continue to bless Fiji. *Vinaka vakalevu!*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, thank you for your contribution. I will now call upon the Honourable Anare Vadei, the last speaker for the afternoon.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, visitors in the gallery and the officials, viewers watching and listening to this Parliamentary session locally, regionally and internationally. In sincerity, I join my colleagues in this august House in congratulating His Excellency the President for his courage, dedication and commitment shown in the various engagements entrusted upon him as the Commander of the then Fiji Military Forces, as a Senior Diplomat, Government Minister, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and President of the Fiji Islands. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I personally and wholeheartedly thank His Excellency the President for his illustrious and unwavering service to every Fijian locally and abroad, during his term.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I continue an Honourable Member blamed the politicians for making the Military conduct *coups*. If the Military is blaming the politicians for making them do the *coups*, name them so we can shame them. You have two on that side.

My initial response, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Section 81 (4) of our Constitution states, and I quote:

“The President shall open each annual session of Parliament with an address outlining the policies and programmes of the Government”.

However, the Presidential Address fell short because it is not what it is purported to be. This deviation from the norm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has shown disrespect to the highest office of the land by the Government.

On the Elections, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I refer to His Excellency the President on his Address on the Elections which was declared credible and free. However, the truth is a lot of people in Fiji still have doubts as to the processes and technological procedures used which produced some major anomalies in the end results.

On the economic growth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if there is a real economic growth in 2014, the people of Fiji will not have encountered high costs of living, high costs of affordable housing, increase in unemployment, increase in poverty, meeting salaries and overtime payment of officers, pending payment to police officers, filling of vacancies that still exists in Government ministries and departments, to name a few. It is my hope that the Government will re-visit these issues urgently in this coming year.

The role of Co-operatives in Fiji. His Excellency the President, in his Address mentioned that Fiji has recorded unprecedented economic growth over the past three years, claiming 5.3 per cent growth in 2014. While this figure may look encouraging and impressive however, what the nation wishes to know is whether the benefits of this growth has had a positive impact on the lives of the poor and marginalised. We are talking here about the distribution of wealth amongst the citizens of this nation. What is the income gap between the rich and the poor over the past three years? Has it narrowed, or has it increased?

It is the general feeling by co-operatives in this country that several clauses in the current Co-operatives Act are restrictive and it dampens the efforts of certain types of co-operatives to realise their true potential as viable economic and social enterprises. An overall review of the Co-operatives Act, to take into account the changing socio-economic environment in Fiji is necessary to enable co-operatives to release their true potential as shown by other emerging economies. It is strongly recommended that this exercise be included as part of the legislative programme for the new session of Parliament.

As I speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Department of Co-operatives are moving their offices to Draunibota. Can the Honourable Minister responsible justify?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the irony behind this moving of offices is that the current office is paid until December. Why is the Department wasting money when the Government has no money, but is borrowing money (*dinau*)? Why is Government isolating the co-operatives, is it because it is helping our poor rural dwellers? Visibility and accessibility is necessary for co-operatives to realise their true potential.

I will touch on education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a number of freebies offered by this Government does not fully attract children, parents, guardians and stakeholders which is a grave matter of concern to taxpayers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are free tuition, free textbooks or schools print their own, free milk and weet bix, to name a few. In my observation, in the Suva-Nausori corridor, most children are found roaming in the suburb during school hours. It is sad, Deputy Speaker, to note whether the monitoring system used by the Ministry of Education to curb absenteeism is effective enough. This absenteeism will greatly impact on teachers' performance in their assessment by the Ministry from the student's academic results, whether it is successful or not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, still on education, I would like to comment on textbooks. They were not properly vetted and discussed widely, as a result a lot of errors were found and terms used like "orgasm" are alien to the young school children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition the 60/20/20 assessment module initiated by the Honourable Minister has now changed, thus giving rise to the fact that teachers were overworked and underpaid. This will lead to some illegal means through the leakages of examination papers as highlighted in this House these last two days.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, under Section 125 of the Constitution, it is clear about appointments and promotions. Though there is a section which looks after this, it is the Honourable Minister who decides who to promote and not the Permanent Secretary. Someone in the Exams Office was promoted in this manner through the Honourable Minister's advice. This is only my great plea to the Ministry or Government to consider a pay increase to teachers or civil servants of this country.

Transport sector: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a sad fact there is a dramatic increase on death toll on our roads nowadays. These are caused by speeding, drunk driving, defective in motor vehicles, et cetera, which cannot be managed by the Authority. Considering the large amount of loans to build roads or recreate better roads, purchase of equipment to monitor our roads and new vehicles for the respective authorities,

still the situation is not being looked into. I request that the Honourable Minister responsible review penalties and the enforcement provisions to impose heavy penalties to curb this matter in future.

Aquaculture: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Fiji is surrounded by ocean, and we need to further capitalise on these resources further. It is indeed proper, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to fully develop Wakaya Fisheries Station for our maritime resource owners to be a training station. Cultivation of new marine products, protection of marine resources and proper managing of the resources for economic growth, with the support of technical and financial assistance, will be of a great benefit to our maritime islands resource owners.

Health: The right to health is a major priority to developing countries like Fiji. Sadly to note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the number of vacancies for doctors and nurses in our hospitals and health centres have yet to be filled to date is pathetic or a constraint situation. The dilemma has resulted in a lot of anomalies such as:

- 1) patients not getting proper or rather professional consultation regarding the status of their health;
- 2) improper diagnostic analysis;
- 3) compound health status of patients;
- 4) shortage in supply of medicine;
- 5) long queues for general outpatients and dental clinics; and
- 6) increase in deaths in the Emergency Unit, waiting to be seen by doctors and many others.

Additionally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the high NCD death ratio is an epidemic in Fiji. The Ministry needs to visit some of the areas in Fiji where there is a greater need of service, especially in remote areas and still there is lack of service by this Ministry to the people living in these remote areas. For example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no dental service in the Saqani area which consists of 11 villages, 3 secondary and primary schools in that area.

Students and villagers who need dental services from the Saqani area have to travel all the way to Savusavu or Labasa very early in the morning to have their dental checked and due to the distance travelled, it may cause the individual to spend a night nearby a dental clinic, as the transport times for the Saqani area is fixed. It takes approximately half-a-day to travel to each of these towns, to be able to get a dental clinic and by the time one has reached the town to get access to such service, they would have already missed the transport that is available. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if this Government is serious enough with serving the people of this country, then there is a major review needed to be done with prioritising their services in the rural or remote areas by the Ministry of Health.

Safe Drinking Water: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is hard to believe that provision of safe drinking water to some villages and islands from the maritime areas, as promised by the Government are still waiting for a response. This matter has been raised with the authorities on numerous occasions but to no avail. They are Niubasaga and Naseriva villages in Moturiki, villages in Nairai Island and villages in Batiki Island in the Lomaiviti Group.

In conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I convey my best wishes to His Excellency the President and His family in their future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker and thank you for listening. *Vinaka Vakalevu.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- I thank you for your contribution, Honourable Vadei. That brings us to the end of our sitting today. Thank you all for your contributions to the debate.

The Parliament is now adjourned until 9.30 a.m. on Friday, 25th September, 2015.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.43 p.m.