

WEDNESDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2015

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

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs; 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 Tuesday, 22nd 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.

POINT OF ORDER

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, Standing Order 62 (2) – Prohibited References and I quote: “The President’s name may not be introduced to influence Parliament or any committee.”

Madam Speaker, I refer to page 70 of the *Daily Hansard* of Tuesday, 22nd September, 2015, with regards to the Honourable Minister for Labour’s comments yesterday. A word there, Madam Speaker, that I would like to highlight which the Honourable Minister stated, and I quote:

“Furthermore, His Excellency the President derided and condemned the actions of a small indigenous *iTaukei* minority group, who attempted to challenge and overturn the will of the people...”

That was alright, Madam Speaker, but continuing on from there, after the “comma”, I quote:

“...with the ultimate aim of overthrowing the current FijiFirst Bainimarama led-Government.”

I think that was not the intention of His Excellency the President in the first place.

If you look at the Presidential Address that was delivered on Monday, 14th September, 2015, I beg to seek an order from you, Madam Speaker, in regards to Standing Order 18(3) in order to uphold the dignity and honour of Parliament that that particular sentence be deleted from the *Daily Hansard* as the Honourable Minister cannot withdraw what he had already stated. That could also contradict or controverts the right of the accused persons who are charged because they have the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty by law. That affects trial and the position of the accused persons, and I would like an order from you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you for that Point of Order. We will relook at the *Daily Hansard* and look at it against the record, and we will consider the issue that you have just raised.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, can I refer to that?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Is that a Point of Order?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A Point of Order. On the same note, two paragraphs down, the Honourable Minister for Labour stated, "Such seditious actions...." That is wrong, that is for the courts to decide.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will look at it as well.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- If that could be looked at as well.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Point of Order. Madam Speaker, I refer to the Minutes of yesterday's sitting regarding the leakage of the examination papers and I am asking the Government, what are they doing, since the students would be sitting their Year 8 examinations today?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Can we have a comment from the Honourable Minister for Education on that issue?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, yesterday what the Honourable Member waved to Members in this House is a photo shot, a screenshot of two pages of one subject paper and one page of another paper which was uploaded on a social media.

(Inaudible interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Please, can we listen?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It was online. Why did you do that?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the intention there was to destabilise the initiative of the Ministry. We want to know, was it a full paper? Madam Speaker, to-date we have not seen the leakage of the full paper except the photo shot...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is not the issue. The issue is the security of the papers.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... of two pages. What we have decided is that, the questions from that page will not be marked, will not be utilised but the rest of the paper will go ahead.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The others that are online?

MADAM SPEAKER.- It is obvious that the Honourable Minister is very well aware of what you are showing, Honourable Nawaikula, and we will leave the decision and the action to the Honourable Minister to address it appropriately.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- He put it online, that is the problem.

MADAM SPEAKER.- He will make that decision, thank you.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Pathetic.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Point of Order. Madam Speaker, the Opposition Whip stated "pathetic" to your suggestions. I want him to withdraw that statement.

MADAM SPEAKER.- There are times when I do not hear correctly, but if a word has been mentioned in this House and heard by another Honourable Member and that other Member considers it disorderly, I would welcome that Member to raise a Point of Order and ask for withdrawal of that word

which is the case right now. I would like to thank Honourable Koroilavesau for bringing that up, because it is seen as offensive and disorderly in this House. I would like to ask Honourable Ratu Tikoca to withdraw that word.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, would I be given a chance to explain myself?

MADAM SPEAKER.- No.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- May I be given the chance?

MADAM SPEAKER.- No.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- In this august House?

MADAM SPEAKER.- I am sorry, I will not give you the chance but only to withdraw that word.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- What word should I withdraw, Madam?

MADAM SPEAKER.- The word that had been mentioned.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Which one is that?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Can you repeat that word?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, it is "pathetic".

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- What is wrong with that?

MADAM SPEAKER.- It has been found to be offensive in this House and I would like you to withdraw it.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- I withdraw if you want me to, but this is ridiculous.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

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

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

Year 8 Examination

I have been informed that 16,327 Year 8 students are sitting examinations today and tomorrow. On that note, I wish to convey my best wishes and that of this august House to all those students sitting examinations.

For the information of Honourable Members, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, in collaboration with Westpac Banking Corporation will be conducting two short five minutes presentations during morning tea break in the Big Committee Room. The presentations are on Healthy Lifestyle.

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

MADAM SPEAKER.- Before I give the floor to the Honourable Alvick Maharaj. 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 Alvick Maharaj to have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Members, Honourable Members of Parliament; I would like to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, for His Address delivered last week to open this session of Parliament. I also express my gratitude for his service, dedication, devotion to our nation and people over the last six years.

His Excellency's Address addressed a lot of key notes in building a better Fiji. Of these, I found a portion of His Address relating to youths to be of most interest and I wish to delve further into this issue. His Excellency, was very right in saying, and I quote from page 6 of the *Daily Hansard* of Monday 14th September, 2015:

“I can tell you that the younger generation has no interest in listening to the voices of division and fear mongering. They want stability and the opportunity to carve out worthwhile lives for themselves and each other. They want to build one Fiji, they do not want politicians of the old, they want politician and leaders who talk about issues and act upon them. They think and want the future, they want better services, amenities, access to technologies and career paths. And we must work together as leaders, as a nation to give them the future they deserve.”

Madam Speaker, I will deliver my points, not only from the perspective as a Member of Parliament, but also as a youth. Youths of today opt to be independent in terms of our lifestyle and decision-making. We would like to live our lives without hindrance from people who have their own political agendas, seeking to manipulate us.

We, the youths of today, are empowered and do not wish to have our decision made by others. What we need is economic, social and political stability in the country. What our Constitution and the FijiFirst Government, led by the Honourable Prime Minister, has done is to empower us to stand on our own and be independent.

Section 55 of the Constitution places the voting age at 18. This opens a democratic election system to a large segment of youths who were previously denied; youths who were old and mature enough to join the Military and Police; youths who had to pay taxes if they work or go to adult prisons and were allowed

to get married, yet did not have their say in the election of their representatives to Parliament. These injustices have been corrected, Madam Speaker, the deliberation comes from FijiFirst leadership.

Youths from the age of 18 now have a say in who leads us and who sits in the Parliament and as was apparent from the results in the last General Elections, the youths overwhelmingly voted for FijiFirst. We wish to thank them for their support and confidence, and they can be assured that we will continue to deliver.

Furthermore, as future leaders and to have an economically stable livelihood, we need a Government that can ensure progress and prosperity. We understand that no great nation was built overnight. Progress, development and economic stability are building portions and passed down from generation to generation. The substantial economic growth, progressively achieved over past few years, gives us hope that our future of the youths is secure.

Madam Speaker, the economic environment that this Government (FijiFirst Government) is creating and for the most part has created is unprecedented. The development in infrastructure and industries show us that our nation is constantly improving and constantly progressing.

The value of education has been made obvious by the fact that primary and secondary level education are now free. The Student Loans and Toppers Scheme ensure that everyone has a chance to pursue further education at tertiary level, regardless of their socio-economic status. These all contribute to an educated society. More and more youths are now choosing to achieve their higher education and remain within their country, Fiji.

A sense of patriotism is growing. Our youths see the prospect our nation is now making available and the potential of greatness that now beckons. We are motivated to build a better nation. We have had enough of dissent, fear mongering and division. We do not care for separation based on race, religion, gender and social status. The youths of this generation will no longer follow blindly the will of leaders, who only care about themselves and certain groups in the society. We are a sceptical age, we will ask questions, criticise and we will speak out. We may not all appear on mainstream social media but you can be rest assured, we are there. The Government has set a vision for Fiji, we want to achieve it and we will achieve it.

Madam Speaker, the Principles of the FijiFirst Government are Integrity, Diversity, Meritocracy and Self-reliance and these bold principles are:

- 1) Integrity, to live lives of honour;
- 2) Diversity, to challenge us all to accept things that make us different and the things that make us great together;
- 3) Meritocracy, to ensure that we all are rewarded based on merit and not irrelevant reasons such as social status; and
- 4) Self-reliance, pursuit of greatness on our own two feet.

Why are these principles bold? Because as much as some people preach about love and harmony, many people today do not welcome diversity, meritocracy and self-reliance and therefore, lack integrity. We hear the inconsistencies in the people who say they believe in inequality, but only champion their views on one ethnic or social group. We are not fools. We know the sound of inequality, we know the sound of prejudice.

Madam Speaker, as a Member of Parliament and representative of our people and on behalf of youths, I wish to conclude by reiterating the fact that we are done with division and instability. We embrace

future, set by the FijiFirst leadership and Government and urge Honourable Members on this side of the House to my right, to do so as well.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has been criticised to make laws to nowhere but Madam Speaker, FijiFirst is making roads and leading ways to a prosperous and a brighter future for Fiji.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; Good morning, *Ni sa bula vinaka*, *As-Salam-u-Alaikum* and *Namaste*.

Madam Speaker, I rise to join Honourable Members who have spoken before me in responding to His Excellency, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, and President of the Republic of Fiji's Address at the Opening of the Parliament Session for the period 2015 to 2016. I thank His Excellency for His Address. As President, he has a duty to outline Government's policies and programmes in the coming new year.

The Opening Address purported to inform the Members of this Honourable House the policies and programmes of Government. Alas, there was only a mention of a list of legislation to be introduced and one list of Acts to be reviewed in Parliament, but there was nothing further on the policies and programmes of the Government for the coming year. I find this, Madam Speaker, to be a major departure from the norm. I, for one wish to state my displeasure in the absence of policies and programmes of Government in His Excellency's Address. I hold the highest respect for His Excellency the President, His chiefly status, His in-depth experience in various Senior Government positions, including that of the Commander of the then Royal Fiji Military Forces, as a senior diplomat, as a Government Minister and Speaker of the House of Representatives. With utmost respect, I am of the view that our departing President has short-changed the people of Fiji in that final speech.

Madam Speaker, I am wondering as to whether the Government, in the new year, will continue as they have done in their first year, and I congratulate them of the purported democracy and continuing to announce major policy changes, without any consultation with stakeholders and the people of this nation. To continue to travel down this path is going to be disastrous for our nation.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to focus on the reference made by His Excellency the President to the youths of this country. He said, and I quote from page 7 of His Address:

“... and I can tell you that the younger generation has no interest in listening to the voices of division and fear mongering. They want stability and the opportunity to carve our worthwhile lives for themselves and each other. They want to build one Fiji. They do not want politicians of the old, they want politicians and leaders who talk about the issues and act upon them. They think and want the future. They want better services, amenities, access to technology and career paths. We must work together as leaders, as a nation to give them the future they want.”

Madam Speaker, as the Shadow Minister for Youth and Sports, I wish to highlight my concerns towards the unemployment of youths in Fiji. Madam Speaker, GDP for Fiji for year 2014 shows an increase of 5.3 per cent over 2013. The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) latest figure on youth unemployment in 2015, shows that worldwide unemployment rate among the 15 to 24 year olds was at 74 million and is set to rise.

In January 2013, it was announced that Fiji recorded 11,860 unemployed youths. Out of this, 5,309 were males and 6,551 were females. Most of these unemployed reside in the Central/Eastern Division, recording a total of 5,531 and is followed by the Western Division with 4,529 and with 1,799 in the Northern Division. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Youth and Sports was created in 2012 and is currently assisting youths who are unable to further their studies in tertiary institutions.

The Ministry conducts trainings to augment youths' potentials to be more productive in society and have a successful life. The Ministry, under the National Youth Policy, which came into effect in 2011 was to provide an enabling environment where youth development is mainstreamed into the various focal areas of the national development.

The National Employment Centre (NEC) under the Ministry of Labour was also established to assist the unemployed find employment by providing training on relevant employment skills that are demanded by the market. A way to combat urban migration drift is to concentrate on rural areas, particularly focusing on agriculture and other livelihood activities that will generate employment opportunities. This is acutely needed to retain them from migrating to the urban centres.

What unemployment does is that youth unemployment hinders economic development and economic growth. Most university graduates are unable to find jobs and their knowledge and capabilities into producing innovation leads to decreased productivity, gross domestic product and economic growth. Long-term unemployment for young people can also scar them for life; can be unemployed for life, lower earnings, social exclusion can cause skill erosion, which lead to increase in crime rate such as theft, burglaries, drug offences, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, the negative consequence of youth unemployment should be reduced as much as possible by properly integrating them into the labour market. Understanding the fact that having so many unemployed youths does not only bring personal struggles to them but impacts the society as a whole and poses a threat to the economic welfare of Fiji. Madam Speaker, the youths of Fiji are speaking out today on what they consider as important for the stability of this country. They are saying the same lines as the old politicians are saying.

Madam Speaker, I wish to highlight the concerns of the Bua Urban Youth Network. As I have strong connections in Bua, I will only talk about Bua. On 19th September, 2015, the Bua Urban Youth Network backed the calls for wider consultation in the district of Wainunu for the proposed Wainunu Bauxite Mining. The Network stressed the need for development that is focussed and driven by the people, where all members of the community are meaningfully involved in all stages - from consultation, negotiation to the monitoring stage. This is what is being done in Namosi at the moment, Madam Speaker.

The Network is calling on Government to abide by the principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) when approaching and negotiating with landowners for the use of their natural resources, for the large scale extraction such as bauxite mining. The Network is calling on the *iTaukei* Affairs Board which consistently advocated for FPIC in radio programmes and its public consultations since mid-2014, and the Network hopes that it does so to genuinely empower the landowners and not merely paying lip-service.

Madam Speaker, I endorse what the Bua Urban Youth Network is advocating for, to provide landowners with information to enable them to give FPIC, and that they are well prepared for the impacts of the proposed mining project in their communities.

Madam Speaker, in providing information, they will allow the landowners to have FIPC, the landowners and surrounding communities are able to negotiate for the best possible returns and one that will compensate for the loss of livelihood, environmental degradation and their inability to practice their culture during the development duration.

Madam Speaker, the Bua youths are calling on the Department of Environment to abide by their mission and work towards ensuring that the malpractices that plague the Nawailevu Mining Project are never repeated. They are also urging the Department of Environment to ensure that the landowners are briefed on the process of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) surveys and ensure that community monitoring teams are trained to monitor rehabilitation process.

Madam Speaker, the Bua youths are airing their views loudly, should these communities consent to the development proposal, they are urging the Department of Environment to ensure that these monitoring teams are allowed into the mining areas so as to effectively monitor the development activities. The Bua youths are calling on the Government to revise the Government Land Use System specifically the terms, types and condition of native land to inculcate provisions that provide room for negotiation and enforce responsible land use. I call on Government to answer the *kerekere* of the Bua youths.

Now, Madam Speaker, those are the concerns and the voice of our Bua youths. They are aware of the issues, they are aware of the rights of landowners, they are aware of the negative impacts on these mining operations, if the landowners are not given Free Prior Informed Consent.

Madam Speaker, our youths are talking of issues that have been ignored by the Government because they are seen as the concerns of the older politicians. All of us, including the Government and the Opposition, must listen to the youths of this nation. Government should not discard their issues simply because they are similar to the issues raised by the older politicians. Surely, the saying "the older the better," still rings true today.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to thank His Excellency the President for the excellent work that he has carried out during our most difficult and trying times. I wish His Excellency good health, long and prosperous life and every success in his future endeavours.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for your time and may God bless Fiji. *Vinaka*.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; last week, I had the privilege of listening to His Excellency the President's Address at the beginning of the session of Parliament. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for delivering a powerful and clear message to us all. We have built so much and we cannot allow our nation's progress to be curtailed. As His Excellency the President reminded us, it is a real blessing that the people of Fiji have now returned to parliamentary democracy for almost one year. Again, as His Excellency reminded us that we parliamentarians must lead by example, it is not just a matter of empty words.

Madam Speaker, I wish to reflect on the substance which must underpin that good example His Excellency spoke of. Fiji is already in a better place, having returned to Parliamentary democracy. The only threat to this hard won democracy is the members of society who wish to return us to a start of unrest, and I make no reference to anyone or any group in particular but rather to the barely contained chaos that brew dissatisfaction by certain persons – the law breakers of society, the keyboard warriors behind their laptop screens and the indignant elites.

Madam Speaker, I think it largely comes down to respect. Respect is something we learn. As children, we learn to respect our parents and at school, we learn to respect our teachers. If we do not learn to respect ourselves and our own rights, then it is all hard to learn to respect the rights of others. Respect is not the same as obedience.

As children, we were required to obey our parents and teachers, a task much easier if we had respected them. Compulsion does not teach respect. There is a difference between respect and a fear of punishment. We are required by compulsion of law to obey the laws of the land. It is easy to obey them if we respect our Parliament as an institution, which is the caretaker of our rights. It is easier to accept the work of the caretaker, if we respect them as individuals. That is why as a body, we must insist on the very highest standards of behaviour and integrity from our members.

We must take collective responsibility to ensure that each member of our society is focussed on doing what is right. We so often look the other way, we do not wish to get involved in dealing with wrong minded or difficult people. We lack courage to speak up for what is right. We so often wish to avoid ridicule or criticism. We seek popularity rather than speak up for the truth on what is right. All these must cease.

We must start today with our children and when I start with the children, what I really mean is that the parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties and the older siblings are people our children first come into contact with. As a national policy, we need to re-educate some of these people about the value of placing positive and wholesome values in the minds of our children about our way of life and why it must be protected. People with leadership roles in our communities and villages must stand up and be counted on this or be replaced by those who will. The Government and the media have a role here as well.

The next point in the educational process must be the schools. This is where my colleague, the Honourable Minister for Education, has an important leadership role. There are headteachers so there is simply no excuse why there should not be lessons explaining the operation of our parliamentary democracy or lessons on our Constitution and the roles played by the different organs of Government in every school. In other words, they must teach the principles of good citizenship and to encourage their applications.

The Ministry of Education must provide the curriculum and teaching materials as a matter of priority. This is the best opportunity for our people to understand our Constitution and what it means for every citizen. This is the very best opportunity to teach our young the protection it offers them and why these institutions must be protected at all costs. It will help arm them against the false information of the ignorant and the selfish. It will help them have a bigger picture from an early age and also teach others, perhaps even their parents and neighbours. Graduating from our schools is not just about learning the three Rs or becoming a good sportsman. Our young adults need to emerge from school as well-grounded citizens, astute to protect our collective constitutional rights and to pass on the message to our children.

I have previously spoken on the topic of the National Flag. Flags are important, as I have said before, however, a flag is nothing if it does not reflect sound national values and a collective desire to march down the same road. Yes, teach our children and adults to respect our flag as well but to do so with a sincere belief in our hearts, that our flag stands most importantly for the message "Fiji is a parliamentary democracy with a Constitution which I will honour and protect", along with, "Fiji is one people and I am proud to be a Fijian".

Madam Speaker, we can all sincerely say that we have come a long way. The primary message I have come with today is about parliamentary democracy. We must always remember that our Constitution provides a three legged stool - Parliament is one leg and the other two legs are the Judiciary and the Executive. Both legs must be strong and true to our Constitution.

Madam Speaker, there must be a strong and able Parliament, a place where the difficult challenges in our society are openly and robustly debated and acted upon. Our Parliament is the glue which binds us together as a nation and provides the legal framework to allow a smooth and proper operation of the other branches of Government. As His Excellency had indicated, this work requires honesty, integrity, hard work

and commitment to service. Parliament and parliamentarians must do their work as servants of the people and never ever out of self-interest.

A strong and respected Parliament must be backed by an able, independent and high quality Judiciary. They are the people who are needed to enforce our legal rights in a robust and independent way. They must be free of political interference and corruption and our Constitution guarantees that.

The rule of law and a strong, independent judicial system are priceless assets in attracting business in development countries such as our own. This is one of the most important factors in attracting large scale capital investments because it gives confidence to investors that their capital will be safe. The world has seen far too many examples of emerging nations collapsing because the judiciary has not had the means of authority or ability to uphold the law independently, without fear or favour.

It is just too bad if Honourable Members of Parliament or the Executive are displeased with or disagree with a judicial decision. That is a far smaller risk than the risk of someone being unjustly deprived of their legal rights. Section 105 of the Constitution requires that appointees be of the highest competence and integrity. Our Constitution guarantees that we will have a strong and independent judiciary and one that must get difficult decisions right. We should never forget that our judiciary is fundamental to the fair and proper applications of the law. It is there to protect us against injustice and to ensure that the constitutional rights and obligations of our citizens are upheld.

We have a new Constitution, so let us all move on. The Executive branch of Government is headed by the President and has the responsibility for ensuring that laws are properly applied and Government services are provided. The Ministers, from the Prime Minister down, are responsible to Parliament for the proper operation of the executive branch of Government. The Ministers are there to serve and to take responsibility of their ministries and I emphasise the word "serve".

The Civil Service is not a political body. It has an important role to play in fairly, properly and independently administering our laws and in the provision of Government services for the wider community. They are there to serve and not to rule.

The Disciplined Services likewise, is not a political body. They have a specific role to play in protecting our community. They are there to serve and protect and not there to rule. Neither the Civil Service nor the Disciplined Services are independent kingdoms, answerable to no one. If there are civil servants or members of the Disciplined Services who are not doing their work, then they should do the right thing and resign or be removed.

Madam Speaker, it is the duty of every Permanent Head of every Department in the Civil Service and the Disciplined Services to ensure that principles enshrined in our Constitution are clearly understood and put into action. Under our Constitution, this must be an inclusive society. As a starting point, all citizens are born equal and they must stay equal under the Constitution. There is no special class for those who are born to rule. Every citizen, when born, has the privilege of one day being able to be elected to Parliament by any Fijian. We should never permit a special or easy path based on wealth parentage, ethnic background or gender. That goes for election into this Parliament, just as much as it goes to appointments in the Civil Service, the Disciplined Services or educational opportunities.

Madam Speaker, as a unified body, we should be at pains to get this message across to the whole of our society. We, as parliamentarians, have a sacred duty to uphold the rights and advance the circumstances of our citizens. We must look to the common good while at the same time, do not forget the people who tend to be forgotten because they are not in the limelight or because they are poor or born into humble circumstances or live in a remote location. Madam Speaker, if we live up to this ideal, it will go a long way

in persuading our people to serve a common goal and not the selfish desires of those who would attack our precious democracy.

I am a farmer from Naitasiri. Let me take a moment to comment on what was raised yesterday by my fellow Opposition Member from Naitasiri, in regards to the river diversion in Serea, to prevent flooding. I can assure the Honourable Members of this House that the Government is currently working on that project. Furthermore, Wainawaqa villagers can be rest assured that plans for the diversion of the Waidina River is also underway. The survey has been completed and physical work is expected to begin soon. The same applies to my village in Nadakuni, Waidina, Naitasiri.

I shall now return to addressing certain issues, I believe, we need to work on and that I shall be committed to emphasising in the coming parliamentary year. There are very few paid jobs available in my area. The *iTaukei* villagers in my area are very traditional people, brought up to respect traditional Fijian ways and the chiefs. Farming in my area is on a small scale. In fact, most farms or gardens where work is mainly carried out by hand, the volume of crop is small. The range of crop is limited and not necessarily focussed on those crops with the best economic return. The economic return is small, for the most part, it is subsistence living. The pattern is repeated in some other rural parts in Fiji. Let this be the generation where that changes forever.

I am also a ginger farmer. I got into business by trial and error. I realised earlier on that ginger had a better potential for economic return than other crops such as *dalo*. I have gone through the whole process of growing and marketing the crop, along with other small ginger farmers in Naitasiri. Yes, we are lucky to have a great climate and good soil for growing ginger but we could do much better if we had better education, better equipment, better access to capital and security of tenure for our farms. Naitasiri has the best ginger growers in Fiji.

Fiji's exported ginger rarely comes from my area, yet that is where the real profits are to be made, not by selling to foreign middlemen but marketing direct to consumers and retailers in markets such as Australia and Canada at \$28 a kilogramme at the retail outlets. Small farmers are simply not in a position to do this alone.

There are number of things we can do about this. Let us start with education. Let us throw away the widely held belief that a young man intending to be a farmer needs no education. On the contrary, advancement in farming practice in Fiji is very much about improved growing techniques, improved varieties, improved plant and animal nutrition and health and above all, better management practices. Let us move from working harder to working smarter. The young men who would be farmers cannot do this by themselves. It is essential that they be kept at schools longer and be given effective and up to-date vocational training. The number of fully funded places available in agricultural training colleges must be expanded. They must receive training about modern farming techniques available in the developing world.

To move into agricultural best practices, we need people with first class professional training in agronomy, agriculture economics, horticulture, entomology and other disciplines. I encourage the Honourable Minister for Education and the Honourable Minister for Agriculture to bring forward discussions with universities to arrange Degree courses in these areas, with proper access for social and economically disadvantaged students.

It is essential that the entire economic organisational base for farming be reformed. We must reform the land holding system sufficiently to allow small-scale farmers to become large scale farmers, to afford the capital cost of modern techniques and equipment. Growing cash crops in garden size patches is subsistence agriculture. To improve productivity and improve economic return, we need bigger farms and better security of tenure. It is in the national interest to improve agriculture productivity right across Fiji.

There is a great deal which can be done to improve the marketing of agricultural products. Small scale production limits the range of crops which can be grown economically. Small scale production limits outlet to local markets and roadside stalls or deal with export middlemen, with whom farmers have a negotiating disadvantage. There is a very great need to move to co-operative marketing or marketing on an industry-wide basis. I have raised these issues previously with the Honourable Minister for Agriculture and look forward to carrying out a comprehensive study and assessment of these matters.

At the same time, it is important that environmentally sound agricultural practices are made mandatory so as to protect the environment for all and for future generations. That is just another reason why we need local technical expertise fully attuned to this issue. Side by side with agriculture, we must develop and protect eco-tourism. It also requires skills and improved knowledge. The development of those skills and knowledge is dependent on first receiving a good base education. Eco tourism and environmental protection also require capital. We must work together creatively to find those sources of capital.

The limited role of women in communities such as mine is also a matter of concern. Unfortunately, women are often perceived as having a secondary role and confined to domestic tasks and child raising. Because of those archaic views, paid employment for women in my area and many other rural areas is practically non-existent.

Encouragement for girls in rural Fiji to be educated also lags far behind than boys. There is a widespread perception that women do not need an education and it is all too easy to curtail the education of daughters at the earliest date possible. We do not wish to limit our women to a life of child rearing, cooking, washing and handicraft. Worthy though those pursuits may be, we need to give them real career choices, and we are doing these through the Ministry for Women and education policies.

We so easily forget that education begins at home. It is the mother who often runs the home and has the greatest interaction with the children. How can a mother assist her child to achieve the best education possible, if she does not understand the advantages it brings? How can she encourage and assist her children with homework, if she is poorly educated herself? How can she be the voice of moderation and reasoning in a political discussion, if she knows nothing of the outside world and the working of a modern government? Do we wish to restrict the majority of our rural girls to impoverished single income married life, or working as domestic servant?

Let us take effective steps to ensure our rural girls also receive a decent education. Let this be the generation where we make a real difference with the education of our girls. I do not mean the daughters of the rich and privileged because they already have those opportunities, I mean, daughters of poor villagers in the rural and maritime areas.

Madam Speaker, those are the issues that I thought relevant, based on the general themes of His Excellency's Address. We impoverish ourselves as a nation if we do not encourage every child to do the very best he or she can achieve in life, irrespective of gender or background, not only encourage, but create real opportunities. In that way, we have hope for a better life under our present system of Government; in that way we reduce the risk of disaffection and involvement in attempts to destroy our system of government; that is what leadership is all about; and that is what will create true respect for our system of government.

Finally, Madam Speaker, may I say, long live democracy in Fiji and may I encourage all my parliamentary colleagues to make this a useful and effective parliamentary session. May God bless us all and bless Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ruveni Nadalo.

HON. R.N. NADALO.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; I wish to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji for his Address on Monday 14th September, 2015. His Excellency, in his Presidential Address said, and I quote:

“Those of us in public life must lead by example and especially when you are elected to Parliament. The people have put their trust in you to represent their interests. And while you have the responsibility to your political goal, you have a greater responsibility to the nation as a whole. 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 struck a chord with me and so I wish to address this House in regards to the ideals of leadership. We are all leaders here. Our people look to us for guidance and direction. Thus, it is of utmost importance that we consider the significance of our roles.

My speech today is more thematic than argumentative. It is my attempt to provide a general reminder to us all for the purpose we serve here and a plea that every one of us never lose focus or allow personal agendas to overshadow our noble role.

Madam Speaker, leadership is a process by which individuals influence the behaviour, attitudes and thoughts of others. In our case, the people of Fiji have shown their trust in us, in having elected us to be their leaders. We set direction by helping others, pre-empting the challenges that may lie ahead and working to prepare our people to meet them.

Leading by example is a trait of a true leader. As reminded by His Excellency the President, the leaders of Fijian Parliament, whether it be Government or Opposition, must lead with their actions as well as their words. I strongly believe leadership is about actively demonstrating our beliefs, not just talking about it.

Madam Speaker, our Parliament sessions often generate heated discussions. This is because people often see things differently and naturally lean towards different solutions. However, our differences in beliefs and opinions can never be justification for immature responses and petty remarks. Look at the gallery, look at the cameras near you, our people are watching. They need to know that the Members of Parliament they have elected are representing them with maturity and dignity.

Madam Speaker, we leaders can guide our beloved Fiji in either a positive or a negative direction. Adolf Hitler was a strong leader. He applied his ability in the most misguided of ways. What he illustrated, however, is that people can be made to believe or do almost anything, if the individuals they hold in high esteem persuade them to.

Our people are, in many ways, vulnerable. The ordinary man or woman does not understand the intricacies of complex concepts like national debt management, separation of powers, constitutional interpretations, et cetera. The ordinary person waits and watches, and often the truth he accepts is simply the argument of the most convincing speaker. His Excellency touched on this when he spoke about intellectual honesty. He said, and I quote from page 5 of the *Daily Hansard* of Monday 14th September, 2015:

“To know that an idea is better than yours, to know that an action or policy is going to be for the benefit of the country in the long term and to still debunk them, is also intellectual dishonesty. Without honesty and humility on all fronts we will never progress as a nation, as leaders and as individuals.”

Do we recognise the truth in those words? How often do we concede the validity of a fellow member's position, when it is indeed valid? Conversely, how often do we debunk a very good idea just because it is coming from the Government? This is something that we must consider at great length.

Before we speak, whether it is here in Parliament or direct to the media, we must first ask ourselves, at least, two pertinent questions. Is there a chance that I may be wrong? Have I truly and fairly weighed all the relevant factors? If we do not take the time to consider those questions, we run the risk of spreading panic and instability which may quickly spiral out of control. What for? A cheap victory at the expenses of the people's security and peace of minds? For the sake of our nation, we must all endeavour to rise above this.

Madam Speaker, over the last few days, we have heard certain concerns expressed. To those Honourable Members who have raised those issues, I firmly state; "We hear you, we will do whatever within our power to address your valid concerns. We do not promote a community of silence. We understand that for our Government to serve its people properly, there must be communication." I also assure this august House and the people that we are always ready to listen and more importantly, to act.

Madam Speaker, for a country like ours to grow, the people within it must grow. The way for us to raise our country to a high standard is by committing to a greater challenge ourselves. The abilities, talents and characteristics of a nation's leader provide the foundation on which the nation may grow. Therefore, Madam Speaker, it is critical that leaders do not stereotype. Just because, for example, we come from one district or *vanua* or province and have one traditional tie does not mean that all within that grouping think alike, we have our own minds, our experiences and indeed, we have our values. This depends on our individual characteristics, our individual sense of what is right and wrong and what we want from our lives, what our immediate family priorities are, what denominations we may belong to or how we have seen the past and how we see the future. In that respect, I urge Honourable Members from the other side of the House to think and understand that even within the so-called traditional allegiance, there are different modes of thinking and to stop stereotyping because your own detriment of not realising the reality on the ground, is stopping you from ascertaining the truth and ascertaining what our people really want.

Madam Speaker, let us work towards the stability and the opportunity to come out worthy of a life for our people. Let us build a one Fiji. Let us talk about the issues our people face and act upon them. Let us walk the talk and build a fruitful Fiji. Let us give our people better services, amenities, access to technology and career paths. Let us continue to pursue the vision outlined by His Excellency the President for the development of Fiji as a modern nation State, taking a preeminent role in our own region and strengthening our voice in the global community at large.

Thank you, *shukriya*, *dhanyavaad* and *vinaka vakalevu*.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I will now give the floor to the Honourable Osea Naiqamu.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, it is my privilege to respond to His Excellency the President's Opening Address of this session of Parliament and provide a summary of the progress made by the Ministry of Fisheries and Forests since the beginning of this year.

His Excellency the President made many references to the growth of our economy, a key priority and achievement of the FijiFirst Government but what resonated most deeply for me was his call to grow our economy in a responsible and sustainable manner. It is not enough to simply focus on our short-term successes, we also must consider the long term implications of our actions. His Excellency acknowledged this, as our natural resources in Fiji are not endless, they are delicate and require protection.

As Minister, I have even gained a deeper respect for the importance of fisheries and forests as vital natural resources for Fiji. The bounty these sectors hold allows many Fijians to make a living for themselves, making these sectors a critical component of our economy. Yet, we must always remain diligent in protecting these natural resources because as His Excellency stated, our economic growth has to be sustainable.

Madam Speaker, before I proceed, I would like to highlight some of the major milestones secured by the FijiFirst Government during my visit to Vienna on 14th September, 2015, to attend the 59th General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). I led the Fijian delegation to the Conference and signed Fiji's first Country Programme Framework with the IAEA. The Country Programme Framework provides a framework for technical co-operation programmes between Fiji and the Agency for the peaceful use of atomic energy from 2016 to 2021.

At the Conference, I highlighted the prevalence of cancer mortalities in Fiji and the region, and that majority of those cancer victims were women. As a result, we are now working closely with the IAEA to establish a cancer radio therapy centre in Suva. Other collaborative projects under the IAEA Country Programme Framework, include:

- improved pest control of international trade;
- marine biodiversity;
- crop resilience and food security; and
- the creation of a water sampling laboratory, among others.

I also wish to highlight the opening of the 5th Pacific Tuna Forum held in Nadi this week. The Forum boosted regional ownership of the event, increasing the likelihood that it can be incorporated into the formal work programme of a larger regional organisation such as the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). Fiji will benefit from the Forum as it will bring in potential investors, as well as visitors to our shores.

Public sector investment programmes support Fiji's social and economic transformation, such as the Green Growth Framework. They comprehensively focus on all elements of sustainable development with the principal goal of ensuring positive impacts on national development. The methodology is continuously applied and refined to maximise the impact by creating infrastructure, systems and capital to foster long term development; a key national priority for the FijiFirst Government.

Madam Speaker, seven of the nine Forestry capital projects provide direct and indirect assistance. These include: REDD+, Sandalwood Development; Research and Development of Wood and Non-Wood Species; Reforestation of Degraded Forests; Establishment of Permanent Sample Plots; Utilisation of Wood; and Maritime Pine Woodlot Logging Package.

Madam Speaker, I will now provide some highlights on the Fisheries Sector, particularly the new initiative on Marine Protected Areas and Aquaculture Development. Madam Speaker, my Ministry is doing its best to promote the conservation and sustainable use of Fiji's coastal and oceanic fisheries resources. While our ocean may seem vast and its resources endless, less than one per cent is actually protected. Our coastal fishing resources are facing depletion in regions where human dependence on the sea is highest.

Conservation efforts are desperately needed as over-fishing is threatening our fragile and easily degraded habitat. In order for fisheries and marine ecosystems to recover, it is essential that Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) be expanded and improved. With effective enforcement, monitoring and management, MPAs can provide sanctuary to fisheries and associated marine living resources. This will allow fisheries stock to reproduce, replenish, and even 'spill-over' into the surrounding areas. In some well managed MPAs across Fiji, reef fish populations have stabilised and local communities are able to maintain sustainable livelihoods.

Madam Speaker, recent MPAs have been established in Fiji, for example, the Shark Reef Marine Reserves in Galoa, Serua and Wakaya Island. A marine reserve is an ocean area or portion of coastal island offshore area and reef system that has legal protection against fishing or other coastal development. The Marine Protected Area in Wakaya is administered by the Fisheries Department but could be managed on a day to day basis by the Island Resort Management. This is an example of a Public Private Partnership arrangement that reduces the cost of operating marine reserves. This also ensures that the protected area has an active monitoring, compliance and surveillance network on the ground.

The Fijian Government has recognised the importance of looking after our ocean by making an international commitment to protect 30 per cent of our waters by 2020 at the United Nations Small Island Development States Conference in Mauritius in 2005. Identified marine areas that will fall under this protection include; the Vatu-i-Ra Seascape, the Great Sea Reef (Cakaulevu) and the Southern Lau Seascape. Fiji does not yet have any offshore MPA, however, through the joint efforts of local communities and the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area Network (FLAMMA), we now have 78 per cent of our inshore coastal areas under some type of management. On this note, Madam Speaker, I am calling on all sectors of the civil society to support and endorse the establishment of more MPAs, as they are critical to the protection of our ocean resources.

Madam Speaker, coastal fisheries provide 50 per cent to 90 per cent of protein intake for coastal communities in the region. Moreover, per capita fish consumption in coastal communities in Fiji can be as high as 113 kilogrammes per person per year for some island communities, much higher than the 35 kilogrammes to 40 kilogrammes per person per year recommended for good nutrition. This unquestionably puts immense harvest pressure on our declining fisheries resources. Only through sustainable aquaculture can this growing demand be met and the pressure on declining stocks be reduced.

Fiji has the foresight and the political will to drive aquaculture in a more productive and sustainable manner through its Aquaculture Programme. To support aquaculture development in our country, my Ministry has allocated a budget of \$300,000 for 2015 to implement activities under the Aquaculture Food Security Programme. The assistance provided includes seedlings from hatcheries; technical support and advisory services. Under this new Programme, the Department has identified 24 farmers who will receive assistance with the construction of ponds, liming fertilizer, piping of ponds, supply of feed and post-larvae.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, through those initiatives, my Ministry is supporting the Green Growth Framework by undertaking programmes that contribute towards building environment resilience, social improvements, economic growth and poverty reduction. We are helping Fiji preserve its valuable natural resources. The Ministry is working together with other line Ministries and agencies in a more integrated and inclusive way to improve the delivery of our services and empower our communities for the sustainable development of our fisheries and forests resources.

As we bid farewell to His Excellency the President, I am confident that the FijiFirst Government will continue to grow our economy in a sustainable manner through these policies. Our natural resources can be a competitive advantage for Fiji, but only if we utilise them responsibly.

Vinaka Vakalevu, Shukria, Dhanyavaad and thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much. Since we are nearing 11 o'clock, we will now break for refreshments and resume at 11.20 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.52 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.30 a.m.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now continue where we left off and I invite the Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo to take the floor.

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Madam Speaker, good morning and *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Madam Speaker, I rise to make my contribution towards the His Excellency the President's Address at the Opening of the New Session of Parliament delivered in this august House on 14th September, 2015.

Madam Speaker, when the hard copy of His Excellency's Address finally reached us, I was appalled to note the lack of respect shown when addressing the President's name in his Address. Madam Speaker, the use of the title 'Sir' in his Address in front of His Excellency's name brings about so many unanswered questions.

Madam Speaker, the error shown, as mentioned above, cannot go unchallenged because it has portrayed the following images towards our highest officer of the land:

- 1) Disrespect of the highest order and the lack of maturity amongst the staff in the Government ministry who prepared His Address.
- 2) It lowers the dignity that should always be accorded to the Office of the President, which is our highest office of the land.
- 3) It belittles and make His Excellency's Address very cold because the error appears at the very front page of His Address which is also His last Address to the nation, whilst opening another New Session of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, the above actions are totally uncalled for, which shows the lack of preparation put into the formulation of the Address and to make matters worse, the Address was only delivered to the President's Office at 7.30 a.m. in the morning of the Opening of the New Session of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, the overall action shown in the preparation of this Address is very unsatisfactory, to say the least, on the first aspect of His Excellency's Address, for us to commemorate the momentous occasion of the coming of age of our new democracy. The use of the word "new democracy" seems to puzzle me for a while because democracy, whether it is new or old, still has the same meaning and that is, the rule by the people and for the people.

Madam Speaker, we thank the Government for coming up with the term "new democracy" and on that note, I will highlight some of their notable achievements during their reign in the year that we have gone past which can also be termed as the main characteristics of the new democracy. The results of the last General Elections is credible and free as advised by the Multinational Observer Group and, therefore, it cannot be questioned.

Madam Speaker, the statement means that whatever the Multinational Observer Group says, it goes, even though they have very limited knowledge on how things operate locally. This is a clear violation of our individual rights, if we are not able to pose this type of question to a government claiming to be fully practising the rule of democracy. Madam Speaker, this again limits our rights to question the validity of the General Elections being undertaken which was undemocratic but it is a characteristic of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, at the moment, there is no clear demarcation of the separation of powers within the three arms of government namely; the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. Currently, the powers tend to overlap to the other arms of Government and a good example to quote in here is the Legislature which comes under the portfolio of the Attorney-General as per Legal Notice No. 45 and also under Section 32(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. In a normal democratic government, this cannot be the case but this is acceptable under this Government which has created a lot of frustration amongst the general public and more especially, the civil servants. Madam Speaker, this is again another characteristic of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, under this new democracy, civil servants are no longer career civil servants but are now contracted civil servants. This means that their career within the Civil Service cannot be guaranteed until they reach the age of 55. Their jobs are insecure because they are now mostly employed under a three year contract and they can be terminated any time once their contract is completed.

Madam Speaker, basic necessities such as houses, cars, education for their children, et cetera, which were readily available to them being career civil servants are hard for them to enjoy because they are now contracted civil servants. Therefore, no financial institution now will be comfortable enough to provide those facilities to them because their employment terms cannot be really guaranteed.

Madam Speaker, this has created an environment of fear in the workplace and therefore, they cannot really perform to their full potential. An example of this, Madam Speaker, has been highlighted this morning on how the Presidential Address was being compiled. Madam Speaker, this is again another characteristic of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, the media are still very much censored which really limits the freedom of expression in a normal democracy. The public are still being restricted of what they can say because many of their media releases had to be censored again before it can be finally published. This should not be the case in a government where democracy is seen to be alive but it is happening right here in Fiji. Madam Speaker, this is again another characteristics of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, the indigenous group rights which are enshrined in the UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples) of the ILO Convention of 169 is no longer recognised by this Government and this, coupled with the imposition of the 17 Decrees targeting to weaken the rights of the indigenous people in their own land, have led my *tauvus* from Nadroga, Navosa and Ra to react by setting up the so-called Christian State. My plea to the Government is to try and reassess their current plight and find corrective solutions to their impasse rather than just charging them with sedition. Madam Speaker, if there is a group that is to be charged with sedition, it should be the group that carried out the *coup* in 2006 and not my *tauvus* from Nadroga, Navosa and Ra. Madam Speaker, this is again another characteristic of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, on the current Constitution, we have been requested to celebrate it on the Constitution Day which is a new public holiday that will come into effect next year. This Constitution has been forced on to the people. We all understand that the Draft Constitution that we all participated in was the Yash Ghai's version, which was later burnt down by the regime that was in place at that time. Madam Speaker, this forced Constitution does not recognise the indigenous group rights which are the rights of over 50 per cent of the population of this country and with that in mind, how can this Government expect us to celebrate this day with them when all our rights have now been taken away from us? Madam Speaker, this is again another characteristic of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, ethnicity is a fact of life because each individual race/ethnicity has its own unique culture, tradition and language, so therefore, one cannot just combine two races together, broadly call them

as one and expect them to live happily side by side together. Differences will always crop up amongst these groupings and if not adequately addressed, it can erupt into something very revolting in our midst.

Madam Speaker, this is not an easy issue to be put under the carpet. It needs proper and wider consultations to our various groupings here in Fiji, and Parliament must be seen to be playing an active role towards this in the months ahead of us. With only four weeks of Parliament sitting next year, I doubt it very much that this issue can be further discussed in our next Parliamentary session, which is really a very sad state of affairs. Madam Speaker, again, this is yet another characteristic of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, as for our economy, it has been highlighted in His Excellency the President's Address that the economy has recorded a 5.3 per cent increase in growth in 2014, and consecutive growth rates in excess of four per cent for over three years. Madam Speaker, we do really appreciate the Government for those achievements in those years, but have the growth rates in those years created the required employment, decent wages, proper housing, affordable food prices and good health care?

Madam Speaker, the answer to the above question would be an emphatic 'no' because the growth achieved is not reaching down to the people in terms of employment and adequate wages. Once permanent employment and adequate wages are enjoyed by the majority of our people, proper housing, affordable food prices and good health care will automatically fall into place.

Madam Speaker, the unemployment figures in 2014 was 30,000, out of which 12,000 were university graduates, and for this year that is up to the end of June 2015 the number has gradually increased to 46,277 people registered at the National Employment Centre. Madam Speaker, out of the 46,277 quoted above, only 5,600 were able to be provided with permanent employment.

Madam Speaker, at the above rate, growth will not be sustainable, and coupled with the income not being fairly distributed across the board because income taxes have fallen in favour of the rich people and VAT has increased, it will have serious implications on the poor population. The rich will become richer and the poor will become poorer, a demarcation already clearly visible in Fiji. Madam Speaker, this is again another characteristics of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, as for the youths of today, majority of them were brought up during the *coup* years of 1987, 2000 and the latest was in 2006. Madam Speaker, for their 28 years of existence, they have experienced what these *coups* have brought about and many of them will tend to consider that as being normal. Madam Speaker, no wonder they cannot assess for themselves how one was brought up in a normal government environment, as compared to the Government that cropped up during the *coup* of those years.

Madam Speaker, all these *coup* governments in the years mentioned above were responsible very heavily for the delay in us reaching an acceptable level of growth for our economy, which should bring about the acceptable living standards for all of us who at this stage are aspiring to achieve at this moment. Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate that this has happened but again this is another characteristics of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, as for the Government's legislative programme for the coming session, His Excellency has stated that it will be even more extensive than the previous year because of the introduction of new laws, as well as the review of a number of existing laws.

Madam Speaker, for the above to be achieved, the Government has to allow proper debates to be undertaken when deliberating on a Bill and not to allow section 51 of our Standing Order to take charge, whereby a Bill has to be considered without delay, meaning that the discussion on the Bill and its transformation into law will just happen in one day. Madam Speaker, if the above is allowed to happen in the coming sessions of Parliament, it will create a mockery of the whole parliamentary process. Judging

by the look of things at this stage, the Government will be mostly using these clauses again in the upcoming session because Parliament will only sit for four weeks next year.

Madam Speaker, by conforming to the above arrangement, it will deny Parliament and the general public to closely debate these Bills in order to fully scrutinise them further, to ensure that these Bills serve the purpose that they intended to achieve or serve.

Madam Speaker, as the Parliament programme for next year had been confirmed, it is therefore, assumed that your intended outcome cannot be achieved and all that we are trying to put forward to the Government at this stage regarding this will be futile. What else can we say, Madam Speaker, because this is again another characteristics of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, as for His Excellency's term in office, I see this last part of his Address very disturbing, especially to come from the President himself through His Address which was prepared by the Government. Madam Speaker, this is an act of disrespect of the highest order and to the highest post holder of our highest office in the land. His Excellency the President has been used by this Government during its good and bad times and everyone in this country was very accommodative, knowing the calibre and the chiefly background of where the President is from, otherwise, it will be a different ball game altogether. It is really unfortunate that this Government sees it fit to farewell our President in its disgraceful manner as outlined above and again, this is another characteristics of their new democracy.

Madam Speaker, despite the above, I take this opportunity to wish our outgoing President and His family happy retiring days and may the blessings of our Lord remain with him and his family always in the years ahead of us.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, after assessing the achievements recorded by this Government in their first year of service to the public and judging by what they have proposed to do in the next session of Parliament, the recipe that His Excellency stated had already been implemented and the ones mapped out for the months ahead of us, depicts the way their new democracy has and will operate and it is nothing less than a dictatorship government, acting amongst our midst.

Madam Speaker, it will be a sad day for us, if we the Parliament of Fiji, are succumbing to the path of this Government's new democracy now proposed by this Government because it will push Fiji forward to attain what it wants to achieve through dictatorship means rather than through proper and transparent democratic principles.

Madam Speaker, with those words, I do thank you once again for the opportunity given to me, to respond to His Excellency the President's Address in the Opening of our New Session of Parliament.

Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu*.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I will now give the floor to the Honourable Vijay Nath.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, Good Morning, *Bula Vinaka* and *Namaskar*.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured to stand in this august Parliament today to deliberate on the development and progress of Fiji's infrastructure sector. The standard of infrastructure sector anywhere in the world is the measure of a nation's economic progress and development. I truly support the statement echoed by His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, during his Address at the Opening of the New Session of Parliament on 14th September this year where he said, and I quote from page 5 of the *Daily Hansard* of Monday, 15th September, 2015:

“Proper infrastructure capacity leads to economic opportunities and economic success”.

Madam Speaker, since our inception, the Government has invested substantively in infrastructure in the belief that economic growth is the fruit of good infrastructure development. This belief was the backbone of the reorganisation of the Department of Water Supply into the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) and later the Department of National Roads into the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), to enhance and effectively manage the utilities that affect the daily lives of all Fijians.

I am proud to announce in this august House that the WAF was awarded the most improved water utility for 2015 in the Pacific at the 8th Pacific Water Conference in Port Moresby, which I had the pleasure of attending. I must congratulate the CEO and Team WAF for a job well done, even though there is still room for improvement and they will definitely improve. Likewise, the FRA has, over a very short span since its establishment, lifted the standard of our roads across the country and has shortened our travel times. In fact, all Fijians and Honourable Members on both sides of the House can testify to that.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport has remained focussed on supporting and implementing the relevant provisions of the 2013 Constitution for the benefit of all Fijians. The 2013 Constitution is a new leaf in Fiji's short history, rooted in inclusiveness and contrast to our divisive early beginnings as an independent nation in 1970. Madam Speaker, it is a Constitution for all Fijians, a Constitution for a modern Fiji, a Constitution that promises our future generations' prosperity and a Constitution which is recognised and respected internationally.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President's approval of the 2013 Constitution is an indication of the new, inclusive Fiji. This call from the highest Office on the land to celebrate Constitution Day must be supported.

Madam Speaker, the vision and plans for all the statutory authorities and departments under the portfolio of the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport was directly derived from the 2013 Constitution, to ensure that the following rights of all ordinary Fijians are safeguarded within the ambit of this Ministry:

- the right to economic participation;
- the right to reasonable access to transportation;
- the right to housing and sanitation; and
- the right to adequate food and water.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, my deliberation will focus specifically on the infrastructure development, as the honourable Minister for Local Government, Infrastructure and Transport has already addressed this august Parliament on the transportation sector. I will not touch on the education sector, as the honourable Minister for Education will touch on that.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Infrastructure stands to ensure that all Fijians have the basic right of access to safe and clean water. Water is a vital component of life, the health of all Fijians and our environment and ecosystems. Government's persistence in ensuring that these provisions are made available to all Fijians comes with its own substantial challenges, challenges that are also faced by every country in the region namely, the threat of *El Nino* in changing weather patterns, Fiji's vulnerability to natural disasters and the remoteness of some rural and maritime communities.

In 2015, Government provided a \$239 million budget allocation for WAF to address and mitigate some of those outstanding problems, including the upgrading of its entire water and waste water reticulation system in the rural and urban areas. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport together with WAF addressed those problems which were caused by years of neglect by past governments, which sadly some

Members of the Opposition were a part of, and the backlog of the deteriorating state of our water and sewerage infrastructure system.

Madam Speaker, the WAF has developed a 20year Master Plan from 2014 to 2033 which takes into account the projected increase in the demand for water by broadening the area of water reticulation coverage in both the urban and rural communities.

The WAF, in its quest to fulfil the provisions of the 2013 Constitution on the rights of access to safe and clean water, has made strategic improvements to its facilities nationwide. Currently, the Water Authority of Fiji has ably provided access to over 144,000 residential and non-residential metered customers residing largely in the urban areas; a set of water supply system in the rural scheme reaching over 700,000 people nationwide and improved more than 4,200 kilometres of piped waste water network.

Madam Speaker, Government's focus on ecological conservation and environmental protection will also benefit future generations and as such, we must remain aware of the difficulties in controlling the pollution to our groundwater reserves; a necessity to securing water sources for the future.

Government, through the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, has been looking at implementing cost effective and environmentally friendly water purification systems, especially in rural communities, in consultation with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) who will be providing the much needed technical assistance. The WAF has made significant progress in improving rural water accessibility, including the construction of 30 ecological purification water systems in selected villages around the country. These rural water projects, together with the continued works for improving our urban and peri-urban water and sewerage infrastructure, will continue into 2016 and beyond, in line with our vision of Safe Clean Water for All.

Madam Speaker, the Statement by His Excellency the President that growing the economy and embedding investors' confidence in the economy must be every leader's objective, in line with the direction taken by this Government in providing sustainable infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, we have previously heard in this august House the adage, "If you want to get rich, you must build roads". The FRA is committed to implementing a seven to ten year programme to address the deteriorating state of our road facilities, including bridges and jetties, to an acceptable standard that will provide a safe, sustainable and cost effective land transport network that meets the standards of international best practices. Government had substantially invested in this initiative with a \$304 million budget in 2013, \$474 million in 2014 and \$653 million in 2015.

Madam Speaker, the Government's "Look North Policy" is more than words, it is also deeds, as we on this side of the House always deliver. A total of \$78 million has been dedicated for the completion of the Nabouwalu to Dreketi Highway and similarly, \$13 million for the now completed Buca Bay or Hibiscus Highway. In addition, activities have increased on the construction of jetties, including refurbishment of some older jetties. This is to support the increased movement of goods and services on our two main islands and to our maritime communities. The provision of safe berthing facilities are of paramount importance to Government, to ensure market access for all Fijians and networks for our operators to give confidence to the maritime transport sector.

Since the start of 2013, the FRA has resealed or re-constructed over 260 kilometres of road network, nearly 20 per cent of the sealed road network in Fiji. A further 140 kilometres is planned to be resealed or re-constructed in 2015. There are 9,000 kilometres of rural unsealed roads in Fiji. Prior to the FRA's establishment, these roads received minimal or no attention at all. Many of these roads are little more than dirt tracks and have not been properly formed.

Madam Speaker, the people who live in these areas have the right to reasonable access of transportation and the FRA, in consultation with the Commissioners, are effectively working together to bring these roads and networks to an acceptable standard. There will continue to be a surge in the improvement of our rural and maritime road networks. This will support the new and improved access from the significant investment in our major road networks in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Significant funding has also been redirected to support the improvements of our rural and maritime roads to provide reasonable access of transportation to all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, funding to the FRA shall continue to address the backlog in the maintenance of our current road networks and jetties, a neglect and failure by past Governments which Honourable Members on the other side of the House continue to defend. The environment created by our road infrastructure network has been and will always be a stimulus for economic activity, as was reflected by the recent economic growth of 5.3 per cent for 2014.

Madam Speaker, Fiji, like any other country in the Pacific, is highly dependent on imported fossil fuels. Those imported petroleum products are a source of energy for our industrial, commercial and transportation sectors, as well as supplement electricity generation for domestic consumption. Around 60 per cent of the country's electricity requirements are met from renewable energy sources, which includes 65 per cent hydro and one per cent wind and other renewable sources. Imported petroleum for diesel backup generators meets the remaining 34 per cent.

The growth of our economy brings with it an increased demand for energy. Government's focus on providing access to electricity for all Fijians is an important tool for increasing opportunity for economic activity as enshrined in our 2013 Constitution. The nation's increased energy coverage has been significant and will continue. Discussions to increase efficiency in the implementation of our rural electricity projects through grid extensions and solar home systems are ongoing. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, Department of Energy, together with the Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA) will be working together to bring about a surge in the implementation of these projects from 2016 onwards. As part of this re-focus on operational effectiveness, the Ministry, together with the Fiji Electricity Authority, will ensure increased participation of stakeholders from the electrical private sector to implement these projects.

Madam Speaker, the need for more renewable sources looks larger now with the onset of *El Nino* and the unpredictable nature of disrupted climate patterns in the country that it brings. Our reliance on fossil fuels to energise the nation must be reduced. This is well in line with Theme 7, Energy Security of the National Green Growth Framework. The current work on encouraging Independent Power Producers (IPPs) is commendable, however, we must encourage the use of renewable sources in addition to hydro. The increase in tariff rates payable to IPPs is one such initiative by the FijiFirst Government to entice IPPs into the country.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, together with the FEA is working towards improving our policy on power purchase agreements. We believe this will encourage genuine investor participation to bring about improved performance in this operational area.

Madam Speaker, the infrastructure development in this country is unprecedented. I salute the decisiveness and boldness of the FijiFirst Government. It is common knowledge that potential investors look at the state of infrastructure and security of any country, and Fiji is no exception. The call for the RFMF to support the Fiji Police Force in upholding domestic law must be supported to uphold our young democracy.

Madam Speaker, the Bureau of Statistics' recent announcement on our economic performance bodes well for our future. We must guarantee a secure environment for this economy to continue to grow and flourish. We must stand united as Fijians to support and promote this economic growth.

Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu* and *bahut dhanyavaad*.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Timoci Natuva.

HON. CAPT. T.L. NATUVA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to respond and wish to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau for his most gracious Address in this august House on Monday, 14th September, 2015. I thank His Excellency for his consistent unwavering faith that this nation of ours can offer the best that it can to her citizens and other nationalities that call Fiji home. I wish to respectfully applaud His Excellency the President for being instrumental in advocating on realistic and issues affecting our youth and the nation as a whole.

Madam Speaker, when His Excellency was the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), I was indeed privileged to have served under his headship as a young naval officer. His Excellency held the respect of the institution for his leadership ethics and commanded the reverence of his soldiers. That quality, I believe most, if not all, in this august Parliament agreed has developed and evidently spread, winning the loyal admiration and respect of the Fijian people and also by our regional and international partners.

Madam Speaker, I am deeply appalled by recent reports in newspapers and social media of degrading comments by an Honourable Member from the other side of the House, criticising the constitutional provision of the RFMF, comparing it to, and I quote: "Entrusting Count Dracula with the security of the blood bank". This is in response to the prestigious address of the most prominent office of His Excellency the President.

How can one tolerate such degrading comments? I believe the Honourable Member responsible was part of the group who drafted the Deed of Sovereignty which was aimed at consolidating the removal of the elected Chaudhry Government and forming an alternative Government, other than the one under the then 1997 Constitution. This demonstrates hypocrisy and selective adherence to the principles of democracy, for some democracy is only good if they win Government but if they do not, then they are quite willing to disregard the will of the Fijian people. I respectfully call on the Honourable Member to formally apologise to both the Office of the President and to the Commander of RFMF for such blatant open mockery and his show of total disrespect.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President's Address while opening this session of Parliament expressed his adamant disdain on the attempts by a small minority to set up an alternative State, the so-called Christian State. Such an attempt by anyone, I reiterate, must not be tolerated and must not be condoned under any circumstances.

Madam Speaker, I respectfully concur with His Excellency in calling on all Fijians to rally for the defence of the democratic process and the right of every Fijian to practice their rights. As the Minister assigned the responsibility of the Fiji Police Force (FPF) and the RFMF, I assure this august House of the interoperation and support of both Forces, to ensuring that those who want to destroy democracy and impose them on others will be brought to justice.

Madam Speaker, as I recently stated in my ministerial speech on national security agenda, the Ministry remains ardently focussed on upholding the rule of law, ensuring that Fiji has a stable national security growth and stance. I stand in unison when His Excellency stated that as the Commander-in-Chief of the RFMF, he believes that the RFMF must, wherever and whenever required, support the Police and bring justice to those who want to destroy democracy and impose their will on others.

Madam Speaker, I respectfully acknowledge the Honourable Prime Minister and Chairman of the National Security and Defence Council's reliance on me to carry out my assigned responsibilities as the Minister for Defence, National Security and Immigration. The Honourable Prime Minister's trust has guided the Ministry to where it is today, throughout the many security and defence challenges faced since my appointment.

Madam Speaker, I wish to refer to the Honourable Leader of Opposition's speech yesterday when she attempted to critique the "one person, one vote, one value" concept. The Honourable Leader of Opposition obviously misinterpreted that "one person, one vote, one value" was primarily for the party. The Members who then represent the party in Parliament are selected by starting from the Member who has won the most votes in that party. So, for example, if the Leader of Opposition resigns from SODELPA, it will not mean that she takes her vote with her but the vote stays with SODELPA. The next person on the list will take her seat and the percentage of votes that SODELPA receives and the resultant percentage of seats it hold in Parliament will remain the same.

Madam Speaker, I wish to also congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister's steer ship and the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Finance's management of the active state of the nation's economy and consistent positive growth. This achievement was not through magic but through a comprehensive platform and sheer hard work that has driven our unflinching progress since 2007. Fiji's solid and sound internal security environment is a noticeable contributing factor in luring investment financiers and providing a dependable economy exchange location.

Madam Speaker, the national security landscape and the global security environment are dynamic and constantly changing. We have seen dynamic changes and developments in the past years overseas, in the region and locally. With a diverse range of threats, I reiterate as I did during my maiden Parliamentary speech, that our national security sector needs to be agile, flexible and adoptable to confront and overcome whatever threats, internal or external may come our way.

Madam Speaker, this is validation to this august Parliament that the concern expressed by another honourable Member regarding civilian leadership in Government in her speech yesterday are unfounded. The Government has ensured that civilian leadership in Government is respected and the RFMF's role is clear as a non-political institute, as provided for under Section 131 of the 2013 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, security is the platform of development. Therefore, the maintaining of internal stability and meeting our international security and defence obligations will be the overarching requirements for the provision of safety and security moving forward. It is uplifting to note that our Security Forces' efforts have relatively controlled transnational crime in the nation and the region. This is evident by the numerous successful joint operations on drug trafficking and money laundering related attempts and/or undertakings with foreign international and regional security partners. I state this in response to Honourable Bulitavu's speech on page 28 of the *Daily Hansard* of Monday 21st September, 2015, and I quote, "Government does not have any proper measures to prevent or cure this problem". He seems to be on the negativity all the time. Yet, the Honourable Member has failed to provide a shred of evidence to back his allegation. Madam Speaker, the successful joint operation conducted demonstrates that Government does indeed have control measures in place to deal with such problems.

Madam Speaker, in the past year, there have been numerous incidents that shocked the nation and raised new security concerns. The surge in suicide may not seem to be a security issue but it affects the people's sense of wellbeing. Fiji does not have a high suicide rate, compared to other nations but as Fijians, we understand that every suicide is a tragedy for family, community and for the nation where alienation, isolation, social pressure or mental disorder lead to suicide. We must act to try to close those pathways. This is particularly true for our young ones, who sometimes because of social media and the internet

romanticise suicide and lack the perspective on the seriousness of a problem or disappointments that comes with years of living and learning.

Neglect or abuse in the home can be a factor in suicide. They scan indifference and they all make the sense of security that our young people feel a factor in our overall security and sense of wellbeing. There are many other things that make people feel vulnerable and hopeless and we, Fijians, must join together to help our neighbours. We can begin as Parliamentarian taking leadership role in confronting a difficult and frightening phenomenon with honesty and courage to find a remedy on the social ill. Madam Speaker, we like to repeat the saying "our youths are our leaders of tomorrow", so how can we not also protect our children and youth? The most vulnerable and impressionable Fijians against exploitation and vices that confront them in modern society.

We witnessed numerous examples, overseas and even locally, of transnational crimes like human trafficking and drug trafficking through our borders. Those crimes often involve people under the age of 30, including Fijians. We must be vigilant to prevent the recruitment of impressionable and naïve youth to fight for extreme ideologies. This is all work for Government, community, family and faith-based institutions to work together. Madam Speaker, those are unique security related issues that change the paradigm of how we defend our nation and the Fijian people, and there are more.

The internet is a double-edged sword that provides effortless access to valuable information but also can be manipulated to lure the unwary towards pornography as sexual exploitation intimidate and malign innocent people through anonymous attacks on social media and, of course, young people are especially vulnerable. This is why, Madam Speaker, we must all, including political parties and your supporters, use social media including blogs responsibly.

Unfortunately, we find so much abuse of it; misinformation, defamation, slander and vilification peddled by these bloggers and *Facebook* users about individuals, our economy, our national security situation, about different ethnic and religious groups, such a great tool of communication and dissemination of information is being abused, and I must say this to those who are against the Government and are unpatriotic Fijians or former Fijians.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency made a point of visiting almost every school in Fiji and he heard the voices of our future leaders wanting a united Fiji to focus on establishing opportunities for their future; the deserved hope for our children and our Fiji. Madam Speaker, the Ministry for Defence, National Security and Immigration aims to campaign for this hope by broadening the recruitment for the Fiji Police Force and the RFMF, to provide attractive careers in military and law enforcement, to ensure that our instruments of national security reflect the character of our nation and its people. Both Forces have recently seen an increase in the recruitment of both young men and women, which shows their growing ability of the institutions to build young, vibrant and representative forces.

Madam Speaker, a major factor in relation to youth nurturing is good parenting and the encouragement of positive civic values in our youth. This cannot be dismissed as unimportant because good parenting leads to healthy societal attitudes, less alienation and greater security.

Madam Speaker, the role our women play in society is a vital component, not only to ensure the proper nurturing of our younger generation but also to build the foundation of our security. It has been encouraging to see a number of accomplished and dynamic Fijian women who have taken leadership roles, from the honourable Speaker of this august Parliament, to Honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, the Secretary-General to Parliament, the Secretary to Cabinet and the Deputy Secretary General to Parliament, Ambassadors and Heads of Missions to women in business and in the profession and other roles all over Fiji.

Madam Speaker, as I have said earlier, women play a prominent role in the security of this nation but unfortunately, progress in recognising this fact has been somewhat gradual. In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. As a UN-Member State, Fiji is proudly participating in this historic effort to accelerate the UN's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women, as spearheaded by our Honourable Minister for Women.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry, along with the assigned departmental institutes of the Police, RFMF and Immigration, currently see the role of women as increasing further to positions of leadership and decision-making. For example, for the first time, there has been a mass recruitment of over 200 young women into the male-dominated RFMF. This recruitment drive has been the RFMF's part of Fiji's commitment to the UN step and standard of enhancing women's role in national security. Furthermore, the RFMF's deployment to UN Missions provide for specialist roles that require women to serve exclusively, and this raises the important point that we need women in the RFMF and law enforcement, not just to tick some box for the United Nations but because military institutions and police forces are more diverse and more effective. They serve their citizens better, they are more flexible in responding to different kinds of challenges and they benefit from the perspectives and experiences that gender brings to the work.

Madam Speaker, I would like to express Government's and my personal appreciation to the serving members of the Police and RFMF on overseas deployment. The various Heads of Missions and Force Commanders have had nothing but praise towards the professional service of our Commanding Officers and personnel and I am deeply proud and thankful for their performance.

Madam Speaker, during my recent visit to the troops and police officers serving in the Middle-East and North-East Africa, I witnessed firsthand the welfare status and, of course, the deteriorating security situation that our men and women face. Madam Speaker, the most recent reports of our soldiers in the MFO, indirectly injured by combative explosive devices and bullets be it stray or otherwise are evidences of the dangers that our deployed nationals face in our quest in contributing to world peace. While their service is upheld as unceasing and morale apparently remaining high despite the incidents, I urge all Fijians in unity of prayers towards our deployed soldiers and police officers and their loved ones at home, especially the three injured, whom we have received confirmed reports of their comforting and steady recovery.

I believe the rest of our term in Parliament will be challenging, yet rewarding due to the great things we can achieve together. Madam Speaker, it is my earnest request that we, as Honourable Members of this august Parliament, deliberate more prudently and seriously on issues in an objective and selfless manner. I believe that we must heed His Excellency the President's call to the Honourable Members of this House to rise above party politics, rise above petty personal issues and make our terms count.

Madam Speaker, I wish to conclude to pay enormous and heartfelt tribute to His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji for his selfless, exemplary service to the country and his steadfastness throughout the many security challenges and sensitivities that our beloved nation encountered during His tenure as our Head of State. His Excellency's wise advice and knowledgeable counsel have guided not only our Head of Government, but have been heeded and respected by the Fijian people and by international leaders, both in our neighbourhood and far away.

His Excellency's record of service as a former Commander of the RFMF, Ambassador and seasoned diplomat, Permanent Secretary, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Honourable Minister speaks volumes of his governance patriotism and how greatly prosperous and blessed Fiji has been to have His Excellency as our Head of State. His Excellency possesses an elevated status traditionally and through his civilian appointments, but exerts this in a modest and human manner, that is all the more worthy of respect from all Fijians.

I humbly convey my personal and enormous gratitude, prayers and best wishes to His Excellency, the Madam First Lady and the First family. May God bless His Excellency, may God bless us all, and may God bless Fiji. *Vinaka vakalevu, shukria, dhanyavaad*, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have three more speakers. Hon. Sanjit Patel is apparently not in the House, and I would like to seek the leave of Parliament to accommodate the three speakers now so that we can complete today's sitting after lunch. Does anyone oppose?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I will now give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, to clarify the point raised by the honourable Minister for Defence, for those of you who did not know, the statement that I made and mind you, I made it in social media, the Facebook, expressing the freedom of speech, empowering the security of the nation to the FMF is like entrusting the security of our blood bank to Count Dracula, knowing fully-well that he has dipped his hands into it four times. Four times being the reference that they have committed the *coup*, raped our Constitution, raped democracy, that is a statement of fact - understand that.

The reason why they are concerned is because they cannot handle the truth. You must face up to the truth, you must face up to the damage of yourselves before you can learn.

I leave it at that, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

For the information of Honourable Members, that little speech is being included in his 20 minutes speech. You may carry on, Honourable Member.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, that was an answer to that.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Yes, but still within the 20 minutes.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to His Excellency's Address and that was made under Section 81, which says and I quote:

“The President shall open its annual session of Parliament with an address outlining the policy and process of Government”

I agree with those Honourable Members in this Parliament who are entirely disappointed with the content of His Excellency's Address and entirely disappointed with the Government. What effort did you do to prepare that speech as it was seriously lacking in content? It is shameful, therefore, for the Government to demean the high Office of the President with a speech that is lacking in content and depth, which we felt is well below the requirement of Section 81.

Madam Speaker, I did a research. I hold here a copy of the speech made by the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in a similar situation, 23 pages compared to 11 pages but with bigger fonts, so imagine if they are of the same fonts, this will be reduced to only six pages. It is very bad.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- So?.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You listen!

The speech by the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara covered every aspect of Government as it should. That is an Address to the nation. We want to know what the state of the nation is; from priority challenges, creating job opportunities for the people, economic growth, investment, job creation, improvement of the management of Government, public sector, law and order, legislation to be passed, et cetera.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Please, minimise interjections.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- After that, His Excellency Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara addressed each and every single Ministry.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I was talking, Honourable Member. Can you allow me time to get the House in order?

Honourable Members, please reduce interjections as we would all like to hear his response.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- When you compare...

MADAM SPEAKER.- I have not finished, Honourable Member.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... this to this one...

MADAM SPEAKER.- I have not finished.....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The time is going....

MADAM SPEAKER.- No, no, this time will not be included in your time. I would like to cut down on any interjections because everyone would like to listen.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... One cannot help but feel sorry for His Excellency for the lack of material and information provided to him by the Government, to properly describe to us voters the state of the nation. So, what did you do? What did you do?

I listened to His Excellency's Address and here it is, at the most, His Excellency covered only seven basic areas, and that was all. His Excellency spent pages 1 to 4 defending the so-called new democracy under the 2013 Constitution, then on page 5, he justifies the need for a Constitution holiday. On page 6 is on the role of the Members of Parliaments, page 7 is directed to the economy and only two things were stated, the 5.3 per cent growth and justification on the need to get more loans from overseas.

To know that, Madam Speaker, yesterday, the Honourable Member on this side raised the fact that there are 40,000 people who are unemployed, 3,000 qualified tertiary students that should have been there but why is it not there? If the Government is thinking that that will come during the budget, they are wrong because this lays the platform for the budget. The budget is for the people and should arise out of the state of the nation from the speech that is prepared for His Excellency. So, there you have it; page 8 is on youth; page 9 on the new legislation and that was all because the last two pages was on His Excellency saying goodbye. That was all.

Madam Speaker, I will go to the content now. You are asking for the content, I will give you the content now. On pages 1 to 4 of His Excellency's Address, he spoke about parliamentary democracy that is created under the 2013 Constitution; of how this Constitution and not the others, is true and genuine; of how it should be protected at all costs; how seditious attempt must be condemned, of how the Military Forces is now elevated as ultimate guarantor of the 2013 Constitution, et cetera. If you allow me, Madam Speaker, to quote from paragraph 3 on page 1 where he said, "44 years after independence, Fiji finally held a General Election based on genuine principles of equal vote for equal value."

Madam Speaker, I think this is very, very sad. Such a statement is wrong and must not be made because it implies that the efforts of our forefathers, great statesmen like Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, A.D Patel, Siddiq Koya and others, were unworthy and irrelevant.

Madam Speaker, it is common knowledge that there is no perfect democratic system. You do not have to come here, every school boy knows that, and neither is the principle of equal value, ideal or perfect. The only true and perfect democratic system is one that is based on a Constitution that properly reflects the common will of the people. I will repeat that, the common will of the people. The 1970 Constitution was such a Constitution as well as the 1997 Constitution but the 2013 Constitution is not.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- It was.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is not because it is imposed, it does not reflect the common will of the people.

Madam Speaker, who are we to say that one vote, one value is genuine and perfect when it denies the representation of the ethnic groups and minority groups. Our forefathers saw that the communal voting system was perfect, to enable us to celebrate a unity in diversity as opposed to the melting pot of individuals here, the void of cultural identity, the one vote and one value is standard to bring. Let me illustrate that here. We are here, who do we represent? Individuals? What about the Indo-Fijian community who will be here to fight for their values, their beliefs and their religion?

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- We are here.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is the reason why our forefathers saw it good that you have representatives of individual ethnic groups. Fijians are not the only ones, what about the Rotumans, Rabians and the Kioans? They need their seats to be here. Could I have the benefit of the others as well, Madam Speaker, or could my time be extended?

(Laughter)

The reason is that they were practical, they look at the needs practically, not like you people - idealists.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Oooo!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Idealist. They were practical, they saw those needs - practicality.

Madam Speaker, many people are saying that the Opposition voting and accepting to be here mainly because we accept the 2013 Constitution. I want to put the record straight.

Madam Speaker, in a joint statement issued by the honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, dated 18th August 2015, the following was clarified for SODELPA and I quote: "Our decision to contest the 2014 General Election under the imposed 2013 Constitution was never an endorsement of it...."

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What is the point of order?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Standing Order 62, Madam Speaker, which says, “When speaking, a member must not input improper motives to any other member.” You said “you people”.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Please do not use the word “you”, it is in the Standing Orders.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Then let me quote again:

“We decided that contesting the Elections was an important first step away from military dictatorship, which had prevailed for eight years, and that would help us begin our return to accountable and transparent governance.

There is still a long way to go. Democratic freedom does not come easily. Many of us have paid and are still paying a very high price for the journeys we have embarked on. There will be many more hurdles to overcome before we can achieve true democracy. We in SODELPA are committed to achieving this.”

Madam Speaker, the reason behind this statement is clear. It is because the 2013 Constitution is an imperfect one, firstly because as I have said, it does not reflect the people's will but moreso because there are two big caveats that cast long shadows away. Firstly, the decision of our Courts in the *Chandrika Prasad* and *Jokapeci Koroi* Case that said that the 1997 Constitution is the only Constitution and it can only be changed by its own procedures and secondly, the Court of Appeal Decision of 2009 in the *Qarase* Case that directed our Honourable Prime Minister and Commander to return the soldiers to the barracks but to which decision was held in contempt by this very Government, opting instead to abrogate the 1997 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, what then is the view of this side of the House on those who committed treason under the 1997 Constitution and related crimes? Our view is that, the 2013 Constitution does not exonerate them because immunity provisions like the very Constitution is subject in the end to the will of the people so justice must come but there is good news here. There is a way to resolve the injustice and imperfection. There is a way to do it and we can do it. It is through the Constitutional Review and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Constitutional Review Commission will restore the people's will, so this one has an absence of the people's will that can be restored by having a Constitutional Review Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will bring about justice, in a way that may not result in incarceration but justice nonetheless.

Madam Speaker, we must review the Constitution and we must establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. If not, I am here to say that the people's will, will restore itself and justice will come in their own time and manner but come they will. If the Honourable Members of this House think I am wrong in this advice, then you may wish to ask Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi, who are learning the hard way or you may want to ask South Africa, a country that is rejoicing in its success.

Madam Speaker, in paragraph 5 on page 2 of His Excellency's Address, he said and I quote:

“The current attempts by a small minority to set up an alternative state, a so called Christian State or to overthrow the current Government are unlawfully and contrary to the national interest. They are an assault on democracy, attempts to overturn the will of the people freely express almost a year ago and are disruptive economic stability. They cannot be condoned under any circumstances.”

Madam Speaker, the irony here is that, the very thing that His Excellency is warning against was carried out by this very Government. This Government and its leaders overthrew the Constitutional Government of 2006, and that action was clearly unlawful and contrary to the national interest. It was an assault on our democracy and they had acted against the will of the people that were freely expressed in the 2006 Elections. The only difference is that, this Government did one better by committing treason and abrogating the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, I make no mistake, we do not condone seditious acts against a lawful Government but my point is this, the Government that we have here in this House is no different from those who are being charged for sedition in the previous one, it is the same thing. The only difference is that, those people are being charged, you are not being charged. Why? Because you have the immunity provisions.

Madam Speaker, allow me to comment on paragraph 1, page 4 of His Excellency's Address that says, and I quote:

“To those Fijians outside this Parliament, who are being swayed by 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 religion, identity or culture or your rights. Your rights are protected in our Constitution for all times. Have you lost your culture, your identity, your religion, your land since the promulgation of our Constitution? The answer is an emphatic no. The Constitution is your safeguard...”

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Read the Constitution.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, this is a serious misrepresentation of facts because the sad truth is that, rights to our culture, identity and land or what we call our “group rights” are being breached directly or are suppressed. The problem arises here, Madam Speaker, because the Government is confused on what group rights are for indigenous Fijians and how that should be protected. This is the reason for the misrepresentation. So what in fact are these group rights and how has this Government breached or suppressed them?

Indigenous group rights refer to the manifestation of a culture of the people that defines them as a group. They are always based on customary ownership of native land that give it meaning. Those rights are now elevated to the Status of Human Rights by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) or ILOC169. In Fiji, we refer to our group as the *vanua*, so they refer to amongst others, the right to:

- speak a native language;
- maintain our cultural institution;
- our name;
- own, manage and control our native land; and
- independently run our social and financial institutions; et cetera.

However, the most fundamental in all of these is the right to be consulted and give our prior consent before the Government changes any policy or legislation that affects indigenous peoples for indigenous people in Fiji to refer to those legislation, you will be talking about such legislation as the *iTaukei* Affairs

Act; *iTaukei* Land Trust Act and the *iTaukei* Lands Act. But this important fundamental right to consult and obtain prior consent, that is, the necessarily fortification of our cultural group identity was unceremoniously removed, I say, with a very clear motive by this Government under the 2013 Constitution. What was there previously under Section 185 is now being taken away and I am saying, purposely.

Madam Speaker, in addition to that, a total of about 17 Decrees, including that which:

- terminated the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC);
- removed our name;
- nationalised the administration of native land;
- nationalised the Provincial Councils;
- nationalises the Fijian Affairs Act;
- would forbid us from exercising our right of our fishing areas under the Surfing Decree; and
- created another form of Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) under the Mahogany Decree, and the one that created the Land Bank.

Now, all those 17 Decrees (I understand) were passed unilaterally without prior consultation or the consent of the indigenous Fijians, that is a fact. So, taken together with the removal of the entrenched provisions that were previously there in Section 185 of the 1997 Constitution, then you have a very, very clear breach of this important group rights that fortifies the protection of our cultural identity that we call the *vanua*.

Madam Speaker, it is worrying for me, therefore, as a native Fijian to hear His Excellency the President saying that my cultural identity is guaranteed by this Constitution, when in practice the Government has removed the entrenched provision that requires prior consultation and consent, and unilaterally passed all those 17 Decrees without consent or consulting us.

Madam Speaker, in August 2012, at the 81st Session of the Human Rights Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Committee observed that Fiji has breached a group right by exactly that; by its failure to consult, its failure to obtain our consent. It cautioned Fiji to go back to the indigenous people and do the consultation. That was made in 2012. But sadly, Madam Speaker, the Government did not do that but only a year later (2013), it totally removed what was there previously in Section 185 that required that prior consent and consultation. So that is no longer there, and that is why I am saying that it has been made with a very, very clear motive.

Madam Speaker, the confusion by the Government on our group right becomes clear when at the 81st Session, the Fiji representative told the Human Rights Committee that Fiji does not endorse UNDRIP. Why? Because indigenous people are a majority, but it was cautioned. What the Committee told them, "that is wrong; you should recognise indigenous right, you should recognise the rights of the other communities, you should recognise fundamental rights and your challenge is to balance, that none topples over the other, but to take it away, to terminate it is wrong". That was what was said there, that this Government does not endorse UNDRIP.

However, only this year in New York, the Fiji Representative confessed at the UN Public Forum that Fiji's policies are consistent with UNDRIP, but then you have this at home. What do you have at home? You have all those 17 Decrees still hanging there. We have the need for prior consultation removed. So with the greatest of respect to His Excellency the President, I say, His Address is a misrepresentation of facts because what is happening on the ground by those 17 Decrees and by the removal of the entrenched provision, is totally different from what His Excellency is saying.

Madam Speaker, this is not surprising, given that the central policy of this Government is the sunset clause that calls for the removal of all manifestation of our group rights to bring about equal citizenry. It is apparent and clear now that the Government will even lie to the people to achieve it.

Madam Speaker, when you have a policy....

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, please withdraw those words, "that the Government will even lie to the people".

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That the Government will make misrepresentations to achieve that.

MADAM SPEAKER.- What is the difference?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I withdraw that and I am replacing it.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, when you have a policy that forbids me to speak in my native tongue in this House, in the land of my ancestors; when you have a Decree that has removed the apex of my cultural institution; when you have a Decree that has taken away my name; when you have a Decree that has taken away the management and administration of my native land; when you have a Decree that has nationalised all social and financial native institutions; how do you then expect me to believe that my land rights, cultural rights and identity are guaranteed by the Constitution? Madam Speaker, I hope we are not the only one on this side of the House that are seeing this. I, therefore, plead to the indigenous Members all around here, as well as to you my Indo-Fijian brothers and sisters and our beloved *vasu*, to help us fight this evil. Our group right is objective and legal, it is not racist. We really need your support in this hour of our need.

Madam Speaker, I wish to remind this august House, especially the indigenous people who are here, that this challenge was also there before Fiji was ceded. When the white settlers were overtaking Fiji, the chiefs had a meeting and amongst them, Ratu Cakobau said, "If we leave things as they are, we will be like flotsam, to be picked up by the next passer-by, to take it anywhere. We must take our land and give it to a higher authority," and that is the reason why they went to the Queen and the Queen agreed, and they wrote a Deed of Cession. Within that clause 4, the Queen promised to protect their land and in clause 7, the Queen promised to protect their cultural institutions. That is why we are able to still speak our native tongue today and that is why we still have our customs today because of what they did then. So, we ask ourselves, what are we doing now?

Madam Speaker, I wish to end my contribution by raising some issues that Honourable Member on both sides, my friends from that side and this side have approached and asked me to raise this issue directly in this House. Firstly, on Savusavu to the Honourable Minister for Transport and Civil Aviation; the business community as well as the public of Savusavu have been promised many times that the Government will assist in the extension of the Savusavu Airport runway. The facts and figures support that. Even if you look at the figures of travellers to Labasa, 50 per cent of that are going to Savusavu and Taveuni. So, please, help us in Savusavu. Give us something to be happy about in Christmas.

To the Honourable and learned Attorney-General, my fellow legal practitioners are asking if you can consider them with equal regards on appointments to the Bench as the expatriates because they feel that we are being biased to the expatriates.

The Honourable Minister for Home Affairs, a huge number of Police constables have been complaining that their overtime due and unpaid have been held up for many years. They have not been paid, please pay them.

(Laughter)

To the Honourable Minister for Housing and Rural Development, in my constituency, those who live in remote areas are asking where their entitlements for first home owners are. They still have not received it in their villages.

To the Honourable Minister for Lands, the native owners are asking for the \$10,000 promised for land development. They have been sent from pillar to post, running around, to help assist them in the development of their land. Where is it? Where is this money?

(Laughter)

To the Honourable Minister for Education, the public are asking, why is it that you still gave the authority for the exam to continue, given what has happened? Why did you not give your directive in writing? Why it is only verbal, is it to protect you or what?

So in conclusion, Madam Speaker, there are three things that I wish this House to take seriously and look at it with the maturity of purpose:

- 1) The need for a Constitutional Review Commission;
- 2) The need for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and
- 3) The need to protect and recognise indigenous rights in accordance with UNDRIP and ILOC within our Constitution.

I believe the best way to address these is through dialogue and the establishment of a Joint Committee to start the process. We must talk, we must talk sometimes.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Viam Pillay to have the floor.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; to begin, I would like to extend my warm appreciation to His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau for his Address on Monday, 14th September, 2015 at the Opening Session of Parliament. This is the third day of sitting and many Honourable Members have thanked His Excellency for his gracious Address to the nation and its people. They have all been accurate. His Excellency truly is the people's President. He is loved and admired by Fijians all over the world for his gentle personality, gracious presence, wisdom and keen compassion. His legacy as President will be that of a man who believed in a united Fiji and worked to achieve it.

Madam Speaker, I shall now address the House on an element of His Excellency's Address from a particular perspective, the element of stability and its effect on society, particularly from the perspective of our citizens living in rural areas who do not have the same level of access to Government services as their urban counterparts.

In the last few years, our nation has steadily risen back to stand on its feet, despite hasty and doomsday predictions from overseas, local persons and entities. We have done more than simply survive. We have experienced substantial economic growth that cannot be denied. Nationwide, infrastructural

developments and empowerment of ordinary Fijians are constantly and consistently happening; that also cannot be denied. Those developments and empowerment given are happening to all and is not restricted to a particular district, province or socio-economic class, it is for every Fijian. These are all the results of the stability that we have attained and maintained for the last few years.

We cannot allow this stability to fall. We cannot have instability. To have instability will deny every Fijian that opportunity. I know that there are some Honourable Members of this Parliament who believe that if instability occurs, it will only affect one group. No, Madam Speaker, that is not and will not be that case. It will affect us all. It will be an economic and financial catastrophe. It is, therefore, put simply, imperative that we work to continue on the path of progress we are on.

On a personal note; I hail from Ba in the Western Division. I work closely with the rural communities and I would like to bring to the attention of this House the recent developments in this area:

- 1) The construction of a new hospital currently underway;
- 2) The new completed Moto Bridge;
- 3) The new tarsealed Moto Road;
- 4) Access of treated water to Naruku, Kumkum, Vatusui, Nacaci, Toge, Balevuto, Nukulua, Tabataba and Moto communities;
- 5) A new bridge under construction in Vutuni, Ba;
- 6) A completed water project in Bulabula, Busabusa and a similar project that is soon to be completed in Solosolo; and
- 7) Improvements to Koronubu Road to Navala Village.

There has also been assistance provided because of the dry weather to help people cope with water cuts. Finally, the Government has issued grants to rural primary and secondary schools to improve building structures.

Madam Speaker, there have been attempts to paint our nation as drowning in debt, hardship and despair. When I look around me that is not what I see. I see progress, I see growth and I see an era of prosperity. I see Fijians eager and enthusiastic about the future. Numbers do not lie. The recent figure of 5.3 per cent growth in GDP demonstrates the empowerment and prosperity I was referring to.

Madam Speaker, actions do not lie. We continue to develop our nation's infrastructure, industries and institutions. We now offer:

- 1) free education for primary and secondary school students and subsidised bus fare to enable our students to have access to education;
- 2) free water arrangements for up to 90,000 litres annually for households earnings below \$30,000;
- 3) free access to medicine for people earning less than \$20,000; and
- 4) subsidised electricity of up to 85 kilowatts.

The people see results, they see progress and they see that those below a particular income level are being helped by Government. I know the Honourable Members to my right, run down these forms of assistance but let me tell them, the people who receive them, deserve and appreciate it. The FijiFirst Government is here to look after the marginalised.

Madam Speaker, that is all I wish to state before this august Parliament. I am an optimist by nature so I do not fully understand the apparent desire of the Honourable Members to my right paints such a bleak picture of our nation. I believe that doing so will only cause harm and instability. That is not what our nation needs. That is not what ordinary Fijians like me need.

Madam Speaker, let us encourage the men and women in this Parliament who are working to develop our nation and maintain peace, order and stability. As His Excellency said, "let us recognise the good that is being done and offer positive suggestions for improvement where such is possible."

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and God Bless Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now invite Honourable Dr. Biman Prasad to have the floor.

HON. DR. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on the motion before Parliament. In His Excellency's Address, the President spoke about democracy, rule of law and legislation that Government intends to enact in the coming year. I sincerely wish His Excellency and his family continued good health as he exits the High Office.

Madam Speaker, I also join the honourable Leader of the Opposition in welcoming the honourable Prime Minister back from London, and I also wish him well for his next trip to the United Nations General Assembly.

Madam Speaker, traditionally the Head of State comprehensively outlines Government's plans for the ensuing year. This is the norm in every democracy and we are no exception because the Address is largely the handiwork of Government. Indeed last year, the President, when opening Parliament outlined Government's initiatives such as free water, electricity subsidy, minimum wages, et cetera. However, it is clear that freebies have a life of their own.

Madam Speaker, now we are being told that debt is not a negative thing. Indeed, the Honourable Minister of Finance went to great lengths to sugar coat the reality. I will leave the economy, debt management and GDP for the 2016 Budget debate. In the meantime, Madam Speaker, I invite the Honourable Members on the other side of the House, including the Honourable Prime Minister to read my article of 12th September, 2015 in the *Fiji Times*. I can assure them that that will be a sobering reading.

Madam Speaker, for the past two days, Honourable Members from Government have commented on stability and democracy. Allow me, Madam Speaker to repeat what I said in Parliament during my maiden speech on 15th October, 2014, and I quote:

"We have two obligations at the core of our role as MPs. First, we have to make our democracy work; and second, we have to make our democracy work for our people.

To make our democracy work; we need to ensure that our citizens and their organisations are able to freely comment, support and when needed criticise policies and programmes being debated by this House. They need to know that our media will amplify their voices and ensure that we directly hear their voices. This way, we will know how citizens feel about and experience government policies and programmes. Our democracy will grow from this new openness.

Second, we need to make our democracy work for our people."

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, this Parliament has not made giant strides towards making democracy work for our people.

Madam Speaker, as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition pointed out yesterday, Parliament will have to debate possibly 24 different legislative Bills over four weeks. This is four days in a week for a total of a mere 16 days. As the Standing Orders state, "Fridays are for Members' Business" therefore, four

days are out. This, Madam Speaker, is yet another indication that Government is likely to railroad legislation using Standing Order 51.

Madam Speaker, Government used His Excellency's Address to define democracy and stability. Democracy is a prerequisite to stability. Democracy is not about being elected to govern in a general election alone, democracy, Madam Speaker, is not about flexing mandate to ride roughshod over people but democracy is about listening to the people, agreeing to disagree, consultation, upholding and promoting fundamental rights and freedoms and above all, finding solutions through consensus building, dialogue and negotiation.

Madam Speaker, the total lack of dialogue both within and outside Parliament between three political party leaders in the past year has stood out like a sore thumb. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and I have not had even an informal conversation, let alone a cup of tea together, apart from sometimes "hi" and "hello" during parliamentary breaks. This is a far cry from the past when leaders from across the political divide mingled together and discussed issues informally out of which arose policies that were beneficial to the people and supported by all sides.

Madam Speaker, history has shown that imposition hardens attitudes, leads to disenchantment and disquiet. Therefore, dialogue is necessary for national unity, inclusiveness, consensus and bi-partisanship. History has shown around the world that civil strife and unrest happens largely because leaders fail to talk, leaders fail to dialogue and I think dialogue is very, very important for us.

On the Constitution, Madam Speaker, it is a living document. The 2013 Constitution has been touted as the panacea for all ills. In reality, Madam Speaker, if one looks at some of the Sections of the Constitution, they are actually catalysts for uncertainty through erosion and restrictions of fundamental rights and freedoms. Worse off, the Constitution is subservient to Decrees and Promulgations which override fundamental rights provided for in Chapter 2 of the Constitution, and these restrictions are further enforced through limitations of most rights. I can give some examples, Madam Speaker.

Section 17 – Freedom of Speech, Expression and Publication. Amongst many limitations, this freedom is not preventing making provisions for the enforcement of media standards, providing for regulation, registration and conduct of media organisations. In fact, this limitation has been enforced by the Media Industry Development Authority Decree. Only some amendments were made which was removing fines against individual journalists for breaches and that was welcomed but heavy fines, imprisonment terms, both remain against Editors, Publishers and media organisations themselves.

Madam Speaker, Section 19 - Freedom of Association is limited quite severely. This again is taken away for the purpose of regulating essential services as well as collective bargaining.

The same, Madam Speaker applies to Employment Relations - Section 21. Apart from limiting this right for the purposes of regulating essential services and collective bargaining, this right is also limited for the purpose of regulating trade unions.

Madam Speaker, Section 23 - Political Rights, has limitations for trade unionists or anyone employed by a trade union. They cannot become members or hold public office in political parties because they are defined as public officers. This is also enforced by the political party's Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures Decree and the Electoral Decree.

Madam Speaker, there are other examples that Honourable Members have pointed out with respect to the sections in the Constitution which may breach some of these fundamental freedoms and free speech. These examples necessitate the establishment of a Constitutional Review Commission to look at the deficiencies and find common ground in a bipartisan manner. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the

Government has flatly rejected our calls for bipartisanship for the last one year. This has been witnessed through the enactment of legislation which will be harmful, in my view, to the long term future of our democracy and stability.

In his maiden address to Parliament in last October, the Honourable Prime Minister offered to work together to overcome our challenges. This did not happen, apart from the legislation promulgated in this Parliament. The contributions by Government Members of Parliament as contained in the *Daily Hansard* of Parliamentary sittings, confirmed what I am saying.

Madam Speaker, let me reiterate that we still have time before the 2018 Election to deal with some of the contentious issues before us. It would serve our people well, if Government changes its course and tune in dealing with the promises it made to the people before the General Election. Madam Speaker, sometimes when I look at the direction in which the Government is going and the direction in which some of the Honourable Ministers are going and the statements they are making, it actually reminds me of the late President Ronald Regan who once said, "that there are nine most terrifying words in the English dictionary and they are "I am from government and I am here to help you".

Madam Speaker, Honourable Ministers are still trying to be everything to everyone in the process, and in the process have ended up disappointing a lot of people. Just last night, Madam Speaker, I met with a group of dairy farmers in Wainibokasi and they related to me a number of promises that senior civil servants and some Honourable Ministers made with respect to their problems. They are very, very disappointed, Madam Speaker, that those things have not been followed through for a number of years. Also, some Honourable Ministers announced policies and changes as they travel around, and have been reactive to issues raised by people.

Government's role should be to strengthen institutions and organisations, and empower people running those organisations to deliver the services to the people. What people need from Government, Madam Speaker, is a very systematic approach to dealing with problems faced by the people through appropriate institutions and the people who run those organisations. However, in some cases, Madam Speaker, this is not happening.

Another example, Madam Speaker, is the enactment of the Employment Relations Promulgation Act, despite Government signing an agreement to make necessary changes to the now repealed ENI Decree in conformity to ILO Conventions. The sad reality now is that, we might have a commission of inquiry and this will not be in the interest of Fiji. The Government, especially the Honourable and Learned Attorney General needs to work on convincing the International Labour Organisation (ILO) now that Fiji does not need an inquiry.

Two months ago, we heard the Honourable Prime Minister say that the Opposition and trade unionists do not know how a modern economy works and referred to the amended ERP as a necessity for a modern economy. The question is, will the ILO accept the erosion of trade unions and workers' rights and freedoms, as necessary in a modern economy, Madam Speaker? Surely not because it is suppressing workers' rights and freedoms, in gross violation of the ILO Convention, in the name of economic progress.

Madam Speaker, let me say this, it is still not too late to change course and possibly avert the inquiry because it will have devastating impact on the economy and the livelihood of workers. Government, as a tripartite partner, signed an agreement in March, delaying the decision to have an inquiry in November and basically it bought time. However, Madam Speaker, it seems that the so-called modern economy is more important to Government than full compliance to ILO Conventions 87 and 98, namely the Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining. We need to avert the inquiry and the only way is through compliance and adherence to the agreement signed in March.

Madam Speaker, Government, through His Excellency, reminded us about the conduct and results of the 2014 General Elections. There have been references to the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) which found that the people of Fiji had expressed their will in a credible Election. However, Madam Speaker, the MOG at the same time made several pertinent recommendations. The Fijian Elections Office and the Electoral Commission must implement the Recommendations of the MOG as contained in the 2014 General Elections Final Report.

We believe the Report and its Recommendations should be incorporated in any strategic planning exercise undertaken by the Elections Office as part of preparations for the next General Elections scheduled in 2018. However, Madam Speaker, this can only happen after Government brings before Parliament the Media Industry Development Decree, Political Parties Registration, Conduct, Funding and Disclosures Decree and the Electoral Decree to make the necessary changes as recommended by the MOG, to make the next elections not only credible but totally free and fair. The Recommendations contained in the 53 page Report are credible and highlights the difficulties and frustrations faced by political parties, candidates, the media and non-governmental organisations.

The contents of the Report, Madam Speaker, on Media Environment, Media Industry Development Decree and the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA), actually show the ineffectiveness of MIDA. The MOG rightly recommended the need for regulation as well as an independent institution to prevent and adjudicate media bias, thus ensuring a high level playing field amongst Election participants, as well as the review of penalties in the Media Decree.

Madam Speaker, the fact that the MOG has recommended for an independent institution proves MIDA's lack of neutrality because it is a body appointed by Government. A free, fair, credible and unfettered media industry is rendered meaningless, if MIDA continues to exist. In fact, sometimes I feel that the Government has a problem with free speech when listening to some of the Honourable Members from the other side. In fact, the cliché, Madam Speaker, that dissent is the highest form of patriotism. When they talk about free speech as not being pro-Fiji and not being patriotic, they do not understand that dissent is actually the highest form of patriotism.

Madam Speaker, the MOG Report also highlighted the need for amendment to the Political Parties Registration, Conduct and Funding Disclosures Decree. It rightly pointed out that the broad definition of a public office holder excludes a large number of citizens from freely participating in the political process. Furthermore, the Report notes that the prohibition on trade union officials being members of political parties is a limitation on political freedom.

The MOG has also recommended for requirements to be reduced for political party registration, as well as allow public office holders and trade union officials to be political party members. This has been the case throughout our independent history and it is ludicrous to disallow trade unionists from becoming members of political parties.

The MOG has recommended changes to the Electoral Decree, Madam Speaker, most importantly the MOG noted that the absence of political party identification on the ballot paper and national candidates list was unusual, the lack of any names, symbols and photographs on the ballot paper. The MOG observed that voters were prohibited from bringing 'How to Vote' pamphlets into polling stations and anyone caught breaching this provision faced a hefty fine of \$50,000 or imprisonment of a term of up to 10 years or both. So, there are a number of very useful and pertinent Recommendations, Madam Speaker, made by the MOG and I hope that Government will take those on board and make those changes to the various Decrees so that when we go to the 2018 Election, we are going into a very free and fair environment

The other point, Madam Speaker, that the Government has talked about quite often is common and equal citizenry. In a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious nation like Fiji, it is important that common and equal citizenry extend beyond equal vote for equal value and common name. It necessitates the creation and promotion, and offer the equal opportunity in all sectors based on meritocracy (not nepotism), cronyism and reward for loyalists.

Madam Speaker, some of the things that I have outlined in terms of the Recommendations of MOG, in terms of how we can dialogue and work towards unity in terms of changing some of the provisions in the Constitution, and I support the call for the formation of a Constitutional Review Commission in accordance with the recommendations of the Electoral Commission and the Working Committee of the United Nations Human Rights Council are achievable but they firstly need the political will and capacity to dialogue with the ultimate aim of finding solutions through consensus. These are the virtues that we, Madam Speaker, as a political party, have demonstrated for the 52 years. We preached and practiced the virtue of talk not force, of national interest before self-interest and above all, equality, dignity and justice for all our citizens. We intend to just do that in the remaining three years of Parliament.

Before I resume my seat, Madam Speaker, allow us to convey our best wishes to our national rugby side, the Flying Fijians, who will take on the might of the Australian Wallabies at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, Wales, at 3.45 tomorrow morning. Madam Speaker, this is a battle of David versus Goliath. Australia has won the World Cup twice and its last victory in 1999 was at the very same stadium. Indeed, in this Pool of Death, Fiji will have three monumental battles - England which was last Saturday, Wallabies early tomorrow morning and then Wales. Nevertheless, we are confident that with the "Never Say Die" spirit of our Team, we will once again do the nation proud. Japan's cherry blossoms showed us last Sunday that impossible is nothing, therefore let us light up Fiji at 3.45 tomorrow morning and cheer on our Team.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I call on the Honourable Leader of Government in Parliament to have the floor.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That so much of Standing Orders 11 and 34(2) be suspended so as to allow the Honourable and Learned Attorney General to make a statement regarding the Closed Session of Parliament on Thursday 27th August, 2015.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable and Learned Attorney General.

CLOSED SESSION OF PARLIAMENT

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, indeed I thank Parliament for the Closed Parliament Session that we had in August. As highlighted then, Madam Speaker, the rationale for the Closed Session is purely done so that Fiji could get better pricing for the Bond Buy-Back and Issue. There was, of course, no sinister move nor anything to hide. Indeed, in our submission, we had said that as soon as the bond was issued, we would give all details of the Bond Issue to Parliament and that the *Hansard* recording of the day would be made available to the public. Madam Speaker, the bond has been issued, and this is why we have sought your indulgence to speak on it this morning.

Madam Speaker, despite these undertakings and the fact that it was done solely for the purposes of getting better credit terms for our country. Unfortunately, on the very next day in this Parliament, the

Opposition tried to bring the matter up. Indeed, Madam Speaker, I am told that there are blogs carrying recordings of the Closed Session and it had appeared on *Facebook* and various internet sites, which the Opposition and their supporters as well as other commentators commented on. Thankfully, they obviously do not have much of a reach because it did not hit the mainstream media.

Madam Speaker, we had the Honourable leader of NFP stating in the *Fiji Times* article on 12th September, 2015 about the 2006 Bond which I referred to where he said, and I quote:

“Under the SDL Government, the global bond of US\$150 million (FJ\$328 million) was a standby facility at a 6 per cent interest.”

Madam Speaker, anyone who knows about finance and the bond market knows there is no such facility as a standby facility in the bond market. He is wrong to say that there was a bond standby facility because I have here with me, Madam Speaker, the Closing Certificate of the Issuer, signed by the then Minister for Finance, signed as Jone Y. Kubuabola which certifies an issue of US\$150 million Bond and with a coupon rate or interest rate of not six per cent, but 6.875 per cent. Madam Speaker, he did not say “about”, he said “six”. Madam Speaker, he has misled the readers of *Fiji Times*. Madam Speaker, let me now brief Parliament on the great results of the bond that was issued earlier this morning.

Madam Speaker, I had highlighted to Parliament in the Closed Parliament Session in August that the Government intended to repay early the US\$250 million bond that will mature in March, 2016. This bond had a higher coupon rate of nine per cent, a reflection of the turbulent and volatile market conditions when Fiji refinanced the US\$150 million bond in 2011. This was a time when we had the global financial crisis and the global market was faced with a drawing debt crisis in most of the advanced countries such as Greece, Ireland, Spain and others. As a result, the IMF and the European Central Bank had to intervene and bail these countries out.

In order to reduce the interest rate costs to Government, this month, the Government offered to buy back the bonds from the existing bond holders. Instead of going in March next year, buy it now! In this regard, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that US\$243.15 million out of the US\$250 million of the current bond holders have agreed to sell their 2011 Notes back to Fiji. Buying back meant and means that we could not alert the market, otherwise we will be subject to market speculation and therefore, higher pricing and we would have been a price-taker, if we went to the market late. Therefore, the reason again for the Closed Session.

This outstanding tender result of 97.25 per cent success rate is one of the highest success rates achieved for sovereign bond in the past few years for similar tender offers of buy-back in the market. What this means for Fiji, Madam Speaker, is that we do not have to pay the nine per cent coupon rate any more on this amount which results in the approximate savings of just below FJ\$9 million. You may recall, Madam Speaker, that I had said that we could save a minimum of approximately FJ\$5 million but, Madam Speaker, we have saved FJ\$9 million.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear! Hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, what this means also is that, our debt falls by US\$43.15 million of FJ\$93 million now, instead of March, 2016. The way this happens, Madam Speaker, is that we are raising only US\$200 million instead of US\$250 million which was the amount of debt through the bonds before this new issue of bonds. This reduction in debt, Madam Speaker, means that our debt to GDP ratio will be lower by approximately another one per cent at the end of 2015.

Madam Speaker, we had announced to Parliament that we will repay the existing US\$250 million with a new bond issue of a lower amount of US\$200 million, with a balance of US\$50 million to be funded

through funds saved in the US Sinking Fund that Government had established. We had established a Sinking Fund as Prudent Financial Managers of Government Finances. There is no requirement for us to do this but we have done so. I am, therefore, very pleased to announce, Madam Speaker, that we have now executed a new bond (as stated earlier) of US\$200 million and achieved a lowest ever coupon on interest rates payable (coupon means interest) on a bond for Fiji in the international bond market, Madam Speaker.

The coupon rate, Madam Speaker, of 6.625 per cent is even lower than the SDL first bond issue which was 6.875 per cent, even then when Fiji had a slightly supposedly higher credit rating. This means that there is significant additional cost-savings of refinancing the current bond with the coupon rate of nine per cent to the new bond with the coupon rate of 6.625 per cent. This is why we went into the market earlier, to get a better coupon rate, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in value terms, this would mean that the interest cost on the new bond would be approximately FJ\$100 million lower in total over the next five years than the last bond, given the bond value and interest rates.

Madam Speaker, we have the pleasure of being on the roadshow and the feedback from the investors was very promising. In fact, many suggested that given that we have a very, very good story to tell in Fiji, that we should go for the industry benchmark which was US\$500 million, which will always attract much cheaper interest rates. However, we obviously held on to that because our commitment was to raise only US\$200 million.

We met, Madam Speaker, with over 50-plus global fund managers and 20-plus new investors. In this regard, we are pleased to inform that 20 new investors participated in the new bond issue, including some of the biggest global institutional investors such as the Bank of New York Mellon, Allianz Global, Newton IM., Pictet IM. and Eaton Vance.

We are also pleased to announce, Madam Speaker, that the commission rate paid to ANZ as the lead manager and book runner was also lower than the commission paid by the SDL Government when it raised the bond by using JP Morgan. Let me give you a contrast, Madam Speaker. In 2006, JP Morgan charged 0.85 per cent which was US\$1.274 million for a US\$150 million issue and ANZ charges 0.55 per cent which is US\$1.1 million for a higher amount of US\$200 million issue.

Madam Speaker, without taking much time, I would like to thank you for your understanding and indulgence in allowing the Closed Session because that understanding helped us to get better rates for our country. It enabled us to go to the market early, and take advantage of the prevailing market conditions.

Fiji, Madam Speaker, has benefited greatly from this bond issue through notable cost-savings by paying the current bond, early. Refinancing the current bond with the lowest ever coupon rate on Fijian Government US International Bond will result in significant interest rate savings over the next five years.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank ANZ, the Ministry of Finance and the RBF Team that went on the roadshow. I would also like to inform Parliament that we will be holding a press conference later today, to inform the public and further educate the public, who unfortunately, Madam Speaker, have been misled by the likes of the Honourable Members of the other side.

Madam Speaker, I once again thank you for your wisdom and understanding, and I also request to now have the *Hansard* account of the Closed Session made available to the public.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable and learned Attorney-General and Minister for Finance for that announcement. That brings us to the end of our sitting today. I thank you all for your contributions to the debate.

At this juncture, I take this opportunity to wish the Fijian Rugby Team the very best in their match against Australia tomorrow morning.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 1.34 p.m.