

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 12TH NOVEMBER, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	1-2
Communication from the Chair	2
Address by His Excellency the President	2-7
Adjournment	7

TUESDAY, 12TH NOVEMBER, 2019

The Parliament met at 10.09 a.m. pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Josai Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications
Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala, Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports
Hon. Mereseini Rakuita Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar, Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment
Hon. Osea Naiqamu, Minister for Forests
Hon. Jone Usamate, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services
Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar, Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources
Hon. Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Premila Devi Kumar, Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development
Hon. Alexander David O'Connor, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Veena Kumar Bhatnagar, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Vijay Nath, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj, Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports
Hon. Alipate Tuicolo Nagata, Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports
Hon. Jale Sigarara, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Development
Hon. Viam Pillay, Assistant Minister for Environment Rural Development
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand, Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts
Hon. George Vegnathan, Assistant Minister for Sugar Industry
Hon. Selai Adimaitoga, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs
Hon. Mitieli Bulanauca
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Dr. Salik Ram Govind
Hon. Anare Jale
Hon. Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal
Hon. Inosi Kuridrani
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu
Hon. Ratu Naiqama Tawake Lalabalavu
Hon. Mikaele Rokosova Leawere

Hon. Ratu Suliano Matanitobua
 Hon. Ratu Tevita Navurelevu
 Hon. Niko Nawaikula
 Hon. Professor Biman Chand Prasad
 Hon. Vijendra Prakash
 Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua
 Hon. Adi Litia Qionibaravi
 Hon. Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka
 Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro
 Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro
 Hon. Simione Rokomalo Rasova
 Hon. Jese Saukuru
 Hon. Rohit Ritesh Sharma
 Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya
 Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau
 Hon. Peceli Waqairatu Vosanibola

Absent

Hon. Cdr. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries
 Hon. Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members of Parliament and Honourable Judges, I shall now proceed to receive His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji.

(Honourable Speaker left the Chamber to meet His Excellency the President and escorted him into the Chamber where he addressed Parliament)

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) JIOJI KONOUSI KONROTE.- Your Excellency the Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Acting Chief Justice and Honourable Members of the Judiciary, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies High Commissioners, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corp, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, *ni sa bula vinaka, namaste, as-salamu alaykum, noa'ia e'mauri* and a very good morning to you all.

We are gathered together this morning, one year through this term of my Government to open the 2019-2020 Session of Parliament. Wherever and however Fijians are joining us this morning on television, streaming live on the Parliament website, *Facebook* or the *Walesi* app or listening over the radio, I would like to welcome you and thank you for your civic interest in these proceedings.

Only six short years since the launch of our 2013 Constitution, we are undoubtedly still living some of the most consequential chapters of our history. As the journeys of many of the world's great democracies and economically powerful nations have taught us, the quality of our leadership in these formative years will be defining for our political system.

I can recall the patriotic euphoria that gripped our nation following the successful conduct of our 2014 General Election. I have watched the growing pride as that excitement has produced higher

public expectations for the rights we enjoy, the opportunities at our disposal, the impact of our voices - at home and overseas and the conduct of our elected leaders.

Nowhere was Fiji's surging civil awareness displayed more passionately or more creatively than through the wonderful submissions we receive during the "Hashtag Our Constitution Challenge" this past September. To every Fijian who took part, thank you for making the challenge such an enormous success by sharing what you love about our Fijian Constitution.

Thank you to six-year old Shaveen Kumar who all while proudly thumping on his chest told us he loves our Constitution because it has empowered him to unabashedly call himself a Fijian.

Thank you to the Nokilevu sisters, Siteri and Kelera from Rewa who spoke to us about how the right of information enhances civic engagement and lends transparency to our democracy.

Thank you to Josua from Moala in Lau for sharing how our constitutional right to health and the regular visits of health officers to his island has dramatically changed life in his community for the better. Rather than selling coconuts to cover the boat fares to visit a hospital, his community can count on healthcare officers to deliver lifesaving services directly where they reside.

Thank you to Joselyn Mani from Labasa for telling us about the value she sees in equal protection, treatment and benefit under the law, regardless of socio-economic status, regardless of ethnicity or religion, all in the interest of building an inclusive Fijian society. Of course, a big *vinaka vakalevu* to Nix Cagilaba and his scuba team for bringing us their Constitution Day message from the shark-infested waters of Beqa.

What was clear from these and hundreds of other testimonies is that democratic ideals are taking hold as societal norms in the hearts and minds of our people. Respect and understanding the role and independence of our institutions are growing in strength and high civic values are fast becoming the new benchmark of dutiful Fijian citizenship. I am proudest to see that wave of change has been driven most powerfully by the young people of this country.

As I speak to you now, students are learning in Fijian schools who have only ever known a secure, stable and truly democratic country along with a vast array of constitutional rights and protections. In their eyes, their fellow students are nothing less than their fellow Fijians with whom they share the nation and a destiny, and in their minds, their dreams run unchecked by fears of an uncertain future or by politically-motivated prescriptions on their opportunities.

In past decades, there were entire generations of Fijian children who were denied the priceless assurance of security, who were constantly told they were different from one another and who never knew the optimism that equal opportunity engenders. Some were made to feel like strangers in their own country, victims of discriminatory notions of national identity. Others were robbed of education, economic prospects by an unjust system that constrained success to those with wealth, privilege and status.

How could anyone especially young Fijians think seriously about the future when living through the communally-charged upheavals of our past? What hope could be found in the divisive and despondent political rhetoric that characterised those periods? And what opportunities could be salvaged from the chaos of that mad scramble for power and for what little prosperity existed?

We have freed the minds of new Fijian generations from the weight of those concerns by bestowing upon them an equal and inclusive society, one increasingly brimming with new opportunities.

We have forged national identity by establishing our common equal citizenship. We have made education free. We are, on a daily basis creating transparency across the business of Government. We are rewarding merit across our society. We are shielding and empowering those who are vulnerable. We are dismantling a culture of violence against women and girls. We have ratified all nine of the core human rights conventions. We are assuming world leadership to confront unprecedented global challenges and we are investing historic sums to expand the services and infrastructure that lead our people to higher standards of living.

But in acknowledging these successes, we must turn our focus to the mountain of progress left to ascend. We are still a developing nation. We still face great challenges of geography, the worsening fury of a changing climate and the uncertainty of changing markets and there are still elements within our society which seek to sow politics of fear rather than preach the proven power of unity and who choose to undermine our prosperity rather than support Fiji's long-term economic growth and sustainability.

In this Chamber you will deliver the solutions to those great challenges. You are not here to guard your political fortunes or make theatre out of political discourse. You are each here to serve as guardians of every Fijian's well-being. No matter which side of the Chamber you sit, you must keep the following questions on your minds;

- Are you speaking in the national interest or are you speaking in the interest of self or party?
- Are you advocating to advance our people's collective good or for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many?
- Are you speaking the truth or are you bending the truth to serve a political end?

There is no doubt that scrutinising Government is an important function of this Parliament but let me remind you that the business of this Chamber is not only relegated to Question time. As parliamentarians, you must also serve as conduits to community engagement and it is through the work of the various Committees that engagements takes form.

By stepping up work of the Committees, we can lend far greater efficiency and inclusivity to the law- making process as it is through our Committees that we bring the ideas and opinions of the public to bear in crafting and delivering legislations that achieves the greatest national good. But in my opinion, our Committees run as if we are still living in the 20th Century. In our present era of rapidly evolving technology, it is your duty as Committee members to not only bring energy and commitment to your Committee roles, but to consider new ways to conduct the affairs that drives greater parliamentary efficiency as well new tools to enhance public engagement. For example, have any Committee members considered making digital platforms available to take online submissions from the members of the public? I certainly hope someone spearheads such an effort soon.

The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Members of Parliament, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, so much of Fiji's progress over the past decade is owed to our 10- year unbroken streak of economic growth. That steady increase in the value of our Gross Domestic Product is represented by more than numbers on spreadsheets in the offices of the financial institutions; it is represented by the improvements we have delivered in the Fijian lives.

Our growing economy has given Fijian businesses the chance to expand and diversify, earn and invest profits, create and sustain higher-paying jobs and reward greater specialisation across various professions, and it has enabled my Government to fund life changing development across the country. We are drilling boreholes that provide clean water, street lights to illuminate our roadways, underground power lines that electrify communities and we are building back stronger school facilities

that house our students and teachers. And we have taken on the hard lessons of *Cyclones Winston, Keni, Josie* and *Gita* by building resilience across that network of national infrastructure.

We are building roads and expanding telecommunications into rural and remote communities, granting them access to markets, goods and services, eliminating location as a barrier to participation in our growing economy. We are serving our landowners with real opportunities to put their land to productive use and take up larger roles in our national development. We are backing innovative, game-changing ideas from our entrepreneurs particularly young Fijians with seed capital to turn their ideas into engines of economic growth.

We are leveraging digital technology as an equaliser in society, wielding new technological tools to make services more affordable and efficient. We are blazing a path towards digital identification to make cashless transactions easier and open new opportunities for Fijian businesses. The new bizFIJI portal has already brought unprecedented transparency to the processes of starting a business and obtaining a construction permit.

My Government is showing the agility to step into new sectors, the vision to make long-term investments in our competitiveness and the discipline to remain true to prudent and proven economic fundamentals.

I urge the Members of this Chamber to respect what economic growth means for the families of this country by bringing a patriotic level of responsibility to conversations surrounding our economy. We need to deal only in reliable facts and in thoughtful intellectual honesty, especially given the fog of uncertainty hanging over the global economy.

Last week, the international rating agency, Moody's, downgraded the outlook of the Indian economy, recently one of the world's fastest-growing, to negative due to expectations for slowing economic growth. The US trade war with China shows no sign of relenting. Brexit is no closer to a conclusion and manufacturing is sputtering across Europe and the United States.

Our growth this year is muted, but still positive, and global financial institutions and our development partners all hold promising projections for economic expansion in the years ahead, and for good reason.

Our economy, while relatively small, is also relatively isolated from the supply value chains of the global market. We can generate activity by looking inwards, by tapping new industries and opportunities in our own economy.

The most recent reforms and incentives announced in our latest National Budget are already spurring greater domestic investment. If we play our cards intelligently, there are opportunities to accelerate the pace of foreign direct investment as well.

But there is one threat to our economic prospects that could prove far more damaging than any global headwinds on the horizon - the politicisation of our economy. If we treat our economy like a political football and choose to play fast and loose with the truth, we can very well talk ourselves into panic and crumble economic confidence from within.

I assure you, the Fijian people, particularly our young people, will not look kindly on any who seeks to undermine the economy, their jobs, their investments or their financial security. Whether you are an elected leader on either side of this political divide, a business owner, a member of civil society or our various professions, or a breadwinner in your household, it is on all of us to be focussed, positive and prudent about our future.

Never has our nation been better equipped to seize new opportunities, harness our ingenuity and propel our economy forward to new records of growth and new achievements. It can be done. It will be done, so long as we stay true to the proven management that has carried our economy to historic strength.

The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, when we open next year's parliamentary session, Fiji will have welcomed the defining day in our history - the 50th Anniversary of our Independence.

Our plans for 10th October, 2020 are already underway, and we will have some very special announcements to make about how we plan to instil that occasion with its deserved significance. But given the great expectations every Fijian holds for that moment, it would be a shame to only limit our celebrations to a single day, a single week or even a single month. We must see everyday of the year ahead as an opportunity to appreciate the first 50 years of our nation's journey, the crowning moments of achievement, as well as the mistakes which do not bear repeating.

Our independent nation's 50th birthday will signal a new era of nationhood. If we look beyond our shores and throughout the course of history, we can see well-trodden pathways other nations have taken to greatness. The countries that have grown strongest are those whose people have joined together in common cause and purpose. That is how strong economies are built, that is how deep prosperity is achieved and that is how great democracies have endured. And only by choosing to walk hand-in-hand down that same path, can Fiji and the Fijian people make our next 50 years the greatest years our nation has ever known.

The promise and potential of that next half-century should lend new weight to your contributions throughout this session. As we look to the Fiji of 2070, it is incumbent on each of you to give serious thought to the long-term challenges that will define Fijian wellbeing one, two or even three generations from now.

One year ago, I outlined my Government's future-focussed legislative agenda. It aspires to deliver continuing prosperity for our people today and establish a robust, long-term foundation on which the coming generations can build upon.

We will continue forward with the reforms we promised. We will pursue the passage of new Bills, such as the Climate Change Act. This historic piece of legislation builds on Fiji's global climate leadership by building our resilience to climate impacts at home, preserving the health of our oceans and marine resources and reducing our own emissions and in line with what we are asking the rest of the world.

Yes, our own emissions may be negligible, but this legislation is bigger than Fiji alone. It is about setting the bar for other nations to meet in addressing the indisputable warming of our world. I would like to personally congratulate our friends from the New Zealand Government for the solidarity they have shown their Pacific Island neighbours through the recent passage of a climate change law, as well as thank the many Fijians who have taken part in our national consultations on the Climate Change Act.

We will pursue the passage of the Cyber Crime Bill to align our national legislation with the Budapest Convention, the first international treaty seeking to address internet and computer crime.

We will review the National Disaster Management Act 1998, the Excise Act 1986, the Customs Act, the VAT Act and the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces Act 1949, and our agricultural laws to ensure their effectiveness in a rapidly modernising world and avoid hiccups in service delivery.

The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Chief Justice, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, before I formally open this new session of Parliament, I wanted to share one last contribution made during on Constitution Day celebrations that I feel speaks to the greatest purpose of our work in the coming year. A simple, yet profound message from five-year old Pamela, six-year old Jemima and seven-year old Seruwaia from the Turagaiviu family which reads, and I quote:

“Our favourite part of our Constitution is on the Rights of Children because we are protected, cared for and empowered to become good Fiji citizens.”

Our children, our grandchildren, and their children who will come after them, those are the Fijians we are all ultimately meant to serve. Let us serve them well by building a future worthy of their greatest dreams and aspirations.

It is now my honour to declare the 2019-2020 Parliament Session officially open. May the Almighty God bless you all and may God bless Fiji. *Vinaka vakalevu, shukriya, bahut dhanyavaad, faiaksia* and thank you.

(Acclamation)

(His Excellency the President is escorted out of the Chamber)

(The Honourable Acting Chief Justice and Honourable Justices retire from the Chamber)

SECRETARY-GENERAL TO PARLIAMENT.- Honourable Members of Parliament, you may now be seated.

ADJOURNMENT

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I take this opportunity to thank invited guests who are present in the gallery and in the Committee Rooms, and members of the public who are watching the live broadcast of the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for taking interest in one of the most significant events in the Parliamentary Calendar, that is, the Opening of a new Session of Parliament.

I wish to remind Honourable Members that when Parliament meets next, we will proceed with the Motion to thank His Excellency for his most gracious Address. All Honourable Members will be invited to speak in accordance with the Batting Order provided.

I now take this opportunity to invite Honourable Members and invited guests for refreshments provided at the marquee in the car park.

Honourable Members, Parliament now stands adjourned until Monday, 18th November, 2019 at 9.30 a.m. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.55 a.m.