

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 20TH NOVEMBER, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 20TH NOVEMBER, 2019

The Parliament resumed at 9.40 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the Honourable Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu, the Honourable M.R. Leawere, the Honourable A.M. Radrodro, the Honourable L.D. Tabuya, the Honourable Ro F. Tuisawau and the Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 19th November, 2019 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament.

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

World Children's Day - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

For your information, Honourable Members, today is World Children's Day, and it is the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund's (UNICEF) Annual Day of Action for Children, by Children. This year is extra special as it marks the 30th year of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 30 years of Child Rights that have helped transform children's lives around the world.

This is a time to celebrate and a time to demand action. Children are telling us, loud and clear: it is time for every child to have every right. Fijian children have taken to the world stage to raise awareness on climate change.

At this juncture, I would like to point out that for Fiji, the guidelines are aptly and clearly laid out in quote, "the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji - Chapter 2 under the Content heading "Bill of Rights", Section 41:

"Rights of Children:

(1) Every child has the right –

- (a) to be registered at or soon after birth, and to have a name and nationality;
 - (b) to basic nutrition, clothing, shelter, sanitation and health care;
 - (c) to family care, protection and guidance, which includes the equal responsibility of the child's parents to provide for the child –
 - (i) whether or not the parents are, or have ever been, married to each other; and
 - (ii) whether or not the parents are living together, have lived together, or are separated.
 - (d) to be protected from abuse, neglect, harmful cultural practices, any form of violence, inhumane treatment and punishment, and hazardous or exploitative labour,
 - (e) not to be detained, except as a measure of last resort, and when detained, to be held:
 - (i) only for such period of time as is necessary; and
 - (ii) separate from adults, and in conditions that take account of the child's sex and age.
- (2) The best interests of a child are the primary consideration in every matter concerning the child”.

Honourable Members, so for us in Fiji, the rights of children are already catered for but we have to all work together closely to ensure that these rights are fully realised.

Honourable Members, I thank you for showing your support for this event and “blue” is the colour for today.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the response to His Excellency's Address, and I now call upon the Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public in the gallery, and those watching this proceeding from the comfort of their homes: A very good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I take this opportunity to acknowledge all Fijian children today as we celebrate World Children's Day. I wish to thank the Members of Parliament who have taken the time to dress in “blue” today to signify this very important day in our calendar.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make my contribution to the motion by the Honourable Prime Minister, Voreqe Bainimarama before this House, that Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for his most gracious speech at the opening of the 2019-2020 Session of Parliament on Tuesday, 12th November, 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in His most gracious speech, His Excellency the President mentioned, and I quote,

“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”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the hashtag, our Constitution challenge this last September the response was overwhelming. His Excellency mentioned:

- Six-year old Shaveen Kumar who said how he loves our Constitution because it empowered him to unabashedly call himself a “Fijian”.
- The Nokilevu sisters, Siteri and Kelera of Rewa who spoke about how the right of information enhances civic engagement and lends transparency to our democracy.
- Josua from Moala in Lau shared 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 health facility, his community can count on healthcare officers to deliver lifesaving services directly where they reside.

Thanks to the Bainimarama Government for the foresight in purchasing a dedicated ship complete with dentistry and surgery equipment capable of carrying out emergency operations on board on the water.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Constitution Day reminds us, among other things, of a very important issue and that is today, every citizen of our beloved country can proudly call themselves “Fijians”. The name is universal like the Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, French, Germans, et cetera. Government’s move to have everyone being called “Fijian” is equal citizenry.

While delivering his Address at the 73rd United Nations General Assembly in New York in September, 2018, our Prime Minister, the Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama said he was proud of what was accomplished by Fijian democracy, and I quote,

“Where once we had only the shell of democracy, we have now pierced to that shell, and we have brought the Fijian people into a genuinely inclusive society in which minority rights are respected and all citizens are equal, not just in name, but in fact, that is the great promise of the 2013 Fijian Constitution which has been the beacon for our progress through its vast array of political and social economic protections for every Fijian”.

You only have to look around the world at rugby tournaments regardless of whether our Sevens Teams or the Flying Fijians or the Fiji Batis are playing, you will find Fijians of different ethnic background cheering together under the Fijian Banner blue. When the Fijian Sevens Team returned home from Rio with the Olympic Gold Medal, Fijians turned out in numbers and rejoiced the win.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when Government first proposed this change for everyone to be called “Fijian”, there was hue and cry from all sectors and sections of the country. In bringing about equal citizenry the Government has extended public utilities, infrastructure and services throughout the country to include the disadvantaged and those living in the rural areas and in the outer islands. Is this not what all our different religious teachings want us to do? To see our Prime Minister put smiles on the faces of Fijians living in some of the most rural and remotest areas in Fiji through development is indeed priceless.

Of course, the key to all of these is the foundation of the roadmap and that is the People’s Charter for Change, Peace and Progress which was compiled through an unprecedented nationwide consultation process and endorsed by His Excellency the President, in December 2008 for implementation. Like Saint

Paul on the road to Damascus, the Prime Minister saw the light of an enduring vision. The nation could not keep sustaining a culture of ethnic divisions coupled with upheavals.

A Constitution was required that will protect each *iTaukei* identity, cultural and land rights, nurtured multi-cultural rights and promoted prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2013 Constitution upholds the legal and moral basis of a common and equal citizenry without denying anyone's individuality or culture. It enshrines principles such as an independent judiciary, a secular State and a wide-range of civil, political and socio-economic rights. Citizens have guarantees of free education, adequate housing and healthcare, social security, clean water and protection of the environment. They also have a right to economic participation and reasonable minimum wages. For the first time, the Constitution protects the right of disabled Fijians. It recognises the *iTaukei*, Rotuman and Banaban peoples of Fiji and their customary practices and ensures protection of their:

- land rights;
- the rights of tenants;
- demands accountability and transparency from Government officials; and
- creates strong and independent institutions such as FICAC and replaces the old electoral system with one based on the principles of one person, one vote, one value.

As we enter the sixth year of its existence, let us all work together for the common good of the nation and contribute constructively to its ethos and prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I take this opportunity to reply to Honourable Salote Radrodro's revelations she made during her reply.

Firstly, may I acknowledge that His Excellency is the Lead Advocate for Fiji's fight against NCD in Fiji. Health and medical services delivery system comprise Primary Health Care and Universal Health Care services delivered by Community Health Workers, Nursing Stations, Health Centres, Sub-divisional Hospitals, Divisional Hospitals and Specialist Hospitals. All services, both NCD and CD are delivered at all these levels of the MoHMS health system.

HON. GOVT. MEMNER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- NCD prevention has a very well-established system of Public Health Care (PHC) and Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Community health workers promote healthy lifestyles. Nursing Stations and Health Centres are equipped and trained to do screening for high blood pressure, high blood sugars and do lifestyle interventions through SOPD clinics.

The cases that need specialist care are seen by specialist teams who visit these facilities. In some places like Moala, they are referred straight to Suva as in this case. Diabetes and Hypertension screening and medications are available at all health facilities. The system of repatriation of cases that needs specialist care is well-established where our staff are accessible to consult with specialists in the division.

The system for financial assistance is also well-established in relation to referral of cases from the periphery to the divisions as well as referral of cases for overseas treatment.

Our staff at all Nursing Stations and Health Centres are well-trained and equipped to deliver Primary Health Care in terms of NCD. In fact, they are more accessible to Universal Health Coverage

now than before in terms of availability of specialist outreach teams. The latest specialist outreach services, as we speak, have just been completed for Tailevu, Nadroga/Navosa and Kadavu Subdivisions.

Plans for future outreach programmes are already set for the maritime areas and people are encouraged to attend these outreaches coming their way. Our staff are trained, able and more than capable to deliver the services the Honourable Member is concerned about.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I plead with the Honourable Members on that side of the House to stop spreading false information as those members of the public that contributed to the recent Hashtag Challenge are some of our future generation who are vigilantly taking stock of what we, politicians, are displaying in this House, in particular the cursing of our children.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir ...

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! A Point of Order.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, I was not going to rise on a Point of Order but Honourable O'Connor has forced me to do so on Standing Order 62(4)(c). I have to say something on this, Honourable Speaker, if I may.

First of all, I need to correct the Honourable Member and Honourable Members on the other side.

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- Stop cursing the children.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Blood pressure.

Honourable Speaker, I did not curse all children, I need to correct myself.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I did not curse all children, Honourable Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! Honourable Member, if you have a Point of Order, make your point, do not converse with anyone else on this side.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Apologies, Mr. Speaker.

First of all:

1. I did not curse all children;

2. I wish to apologise for my *Facebook* post of 6th September, 2019 which was done in anger and disgust when all Honourable Government Members voted against an unjust ruling to send this innocent man home.

What I should have done, Mr. Speaker, is warn them of the sins of the father and of the mother visiting their children even to the third and fourth generations as foretold in the *Bible* in Numbers 14:18. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! You have the floor, Honourable Member.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I did not mention any name and my comment was "cursing of our children" not all children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before this august House and may God bless Fiji and its people. I thank you, Sir.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable O'Connor for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Jese Saukuru, I could not see you behind him.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- The Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister and Members of Cabinet, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen present in the gallery and those who are watching through TV and on livestream - *mu sa cola vina*.

First of all, congratulations and happy Children's Day to all our beloved children. Sir, as we celebrate Children's Day this year, it is my humble plea on behalf of the young toddlers of Dreke Village, to the Honourable Minister of Education, to officially register the Dreke Village Kindergarten in the Sigatoka Valley, that has been operating for the last six years with a school roll of about 15 children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to join the House to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji for his most gracious Address to this House.

Sir, I was preparing to debate on the one year record of this Government but I am glad and wish to thank His Excellency the President for extending the scope of the debate and giving us enough latitude to grill and probe the dismal record of this Government when he said, and I quote from Page 1, paragraph 3:

"Only six short years ago since the launch of our 2013 Constitution, we are undoubtedly still living some of the most consequential chapters of our history."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, everyone has made their own interpretation on this phrase of Address by His Excellency the President, and I seek your indulgence to make mine. If I were to put my thoughts in a chain I would sum up as follows:

Firstly, we are the products of our history. That being so, I think His Excellency the President knew the ground he treaded and what were the consequences of having the 1997 Constitution abrogated and how we came to that point.

Secondly, that profound statement by His Excellency the President calls for a national debate and referendum on the 2013 Constitution given how it was put into law and to ascertain the true level of its acceptability among the Fiji Islanders.

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin's response to Ms. Greta Thunberg's speech on climate change at the UN, he said and I quote:

"I may disappoint you, but I don't share the common excitement about the speech by Greta Thunberg. When someone is using children and teenagers in personal interests, it only deserves to be condemned. No one has explained to Greta that the modern world is complex and different. But adults must do everything not to bring teenagers and children into some extreme situations."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we respect the rights of our children, we must always be very cautious in using children testimony like the six-year old Shaveen Kumar on important and complex issues like the Constitution.

Thirdly, His Excellency the President was perhaps also aware of the consequences of what is the mood of the nation now where more than two-thirds of the voters of this country are living in a mood of resignation, having no sense of belonging and ownership of this Constitution, and I quote:

"... the quality of our leadership in these formative years will be defining for our political system."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the parliamentary events of recent had shown lack of credibility on the Honourable Prime Minister's quality of leadership. I said two-thirds because, given the results of the last General Elections, only one-third voted for them, one-third voted for us and one-third abstained. The two-thirds I am speaking here for are those who voted for us and those who abstained.

Let me move on to the second part of my speech now and borrow a quote from Page 3, paragraphs 5 and 7 from His Excellency the President's Address, and I quote:

"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 in 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."

A bold statement and inspiring challenge for all as leaders of this nation in our own right.

With the advent of the modern technology, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is gratifying to note that like the rest of Fiji, the eyes and ears of His Excellency the President are on the Parliament Television and he

witness it as the rest of Fiji does who is at theatrical play and cheap-point scoring in this House when it comes to debating; and who is using the rationale with the interests and aspirations of the people at heart?

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I congratulate your Office for the initiative to bring live-televised coverage of Committee meetings to every household in Fiji and on live-stream. This will encourage more public participation, awareness and greater scrutiny on the role of Parliament. I think not a single one of us can quarrel or hold qualms when we, the elected politicians and now Members of this House, find ourselves being rooted to our decades old political culture when His Excellency the President, reminds us that we are the servant of our people. In other words, we are here to serve and not to be served.

That being so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, then why do our leaders today walk in a security ring? Is it because they are under the belief themselves that they have done wrong or do they fear because they have given themselves a pay hike or simply that they do not trust the very people who had voted them into this House? Was the mandate they obtained from the people to divorce them from the people and were the people told that this kind of financial bill Fiji will have to pay for the security of its leaders.

Ridiculous as it is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government Members on the other side of the House went on a campaign spree last year harnessing the votes of the Fijian people on the security plank. The question that I would like to ask at this juncture is, how can you provide security to the Fijian people when you are walking in the security ring yourselves? I believe that is how His Excellency the President has unmasked the naked truth on the contradictory style of their leadership when he alluded to, and I quote from the same paragraph for the purpose of emphasis, "You are each here to serve as guardians of every Fijian's wellbeing".

Alluding to national interest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I warmly welcome the sentiments shared by His Excellency the President where attempts to induct a moral compass by asking and I re-quote again for the purpose of emphasis, "Are you speaking in the national interest, or are you speaking in the interest of self or party?"

Given the spirit of national unity, His Excellency has sought to promote in this House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I challenge the Government here and now to re-introduce the bi-partisan methodology of decision-making process in this House. To begin with, seek to reunite and rebuild this nation keeping our national interest intact and advancing it further. I sincerely believe if we are able to achieve that in the next one year, we can be looking for a better and brighter future for Fiji as a nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency, the President was pleading with us as the leaders, as the representatives of the people and agents of facilitating change in our country, not only to limit ourselves and our work to the confines of this House and its Committees but continue to make civic engagements.

We, on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, fully appreciate and welcome that statement coming from the throne which is a reassurance of a kind that yes indeed, politicians and political parties have a role to play and space to exist as much as the other side of the House may not like them. But in the same breath of optimism, my voice is choked by the antics and penalties that are contained in many of the regressive legislations put into effect from 2006 to 2014 which hinders that civic engagement of which His Excellency the President speaks about in his Address. That leads me to call for the review of the following legislations:

1. Media Industry Development Decree
2. Political Parties Registration and Disclosures Decree
3. Electoral Decree

4. National Essential Industries Decree
5. State Proceeds Decree
6. Public Order Regulations
7. Employment Relations Decree (just to name a few, and there are many others.)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly believe that we are the elected leaders of this country and now the need for the same kind of freedom that the elected leaders of Fiji had in the past to do our work effectively by way of civic engagement as desired by His Excellency the President in the profound speech he made only a week ago.

The fourth statement that I wish to make in my intervention in this debate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is about the continuous references being made in Government policies and programmes, pronouncements and publications making mention of women and youth. The speech that we are debating here this week is no exception where the mention of women and youth are there albeit much limited in comparison to the previous years.

Sir, while there is absolutely nothing on which we in the Opposition hold qualm about the sentiments shared by His Excellency the President on women and youth empowerment as important segments of our population, the manner in which this Government has invoked the word "Youth" in its Manifesto and policies are itself an insult to the youth of this nation because they are promised something and they receive something else in turn.

That leads me to borrow my next quote from an eminent British Statesman, Sir Winston Churchill who had this to say on youth being used as dices on political chess board by politicians, and I quote, "It is easy to deceive the youth because they believe in hope."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think and believe that it is time for this Government to either do what it has pledged to our youth or simply tell them no. I think our youth are getting fed up listening to all the fairy tales, watching the blame-game antics and drama by way of awareness programmes and roadshows which has not resolved any of the problems they are facing. It is time to call the shots - either you put up or shut up.

(Laughter)

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to come to the fifth limb of my statement which deals with the language of development being spoken by this Government. His Excellency the President had the following to say on this important subject, and I quote from Page 4, paragraphs 3 and 5:

"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 building roads and expanding telecommunications into rural and remote communities, granting them access to markets, goods and services, and eliminating location as a barrier to participation in our growing economy."

Noble thoughts indeed and makes a nice reading on the paper as usual but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us examine the tribute this Government has paid in respect of that language of development. Allow me to share a few examples on that language of development from my very own home Province of Ba.

While I wish to thank the Government for donating a school bus via the Office of the Prime Minister to the people of Yasawa-i-Rara, Sir, it is a pity that the road conditions on the island hinders the bus from serving the purpose for which it was donated. I think the Honourable Prime Minister, if he is aware of this, will agree with me that complaints about the road conditions on the island have been pending action since the early part of this year.

Yet another example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the language of the development that this Government has been harping about is the extension of the power grid to the rural areas. In the new Tukuraki Village in Yakete, Ba, the village has just been connected by line to the grid but todate, there is no power connection. Similarly, the road works connecting villages in the Nalotawa District in Ba remains incomplete.

Another example of the language of development that this Government is singing about is the contribution of two-third share by the people of Naibalebale on the island of Viwa in the Yasawas for a new boat and an inboard engine to the Office of the Prime Minister but until now, there has been no response or action on that project while the boat slowly rots away here at Walu Bay. Villagers of Vuaki in Nacula District are desperately waiting for piped freshwater to be extended from the island of Matakawalevu, again, to be supported by the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are just a few examples from one province as to how the development agenda of this Government is implemented and has gone. It leads me to raise the following questions in respect to this Government's development agenda:

- How many more villages and settlements have received donations in kind, whose operations for the public good are hindered by poor infrastructure development and maintenance?
- How many more villages and communities have paid their two-third share and are still waiting for their village or community projects to be completed?
- How many more months or years do villages and communities, like Yakete in the rural setup and those in the maritime areas, such as Yasawa will have to wait for the much-promised and looked forward development to realise or come to their home?
- What are the reasons that are hindering the completion of projects which are half done, which has become a staple trait of this Government and its former self in the last 13 years and what kind of expertise of resources does it need to see the successful completion of these nature of community projects?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency, the President then dwelled on to say the following, and I quote again from his Address with a sense of both optimism and regret:

“We are serving our landowners with real opportunities to put their land to productive use and take up larger roles in our national development.”

Big words indeed! But let us look at the plight of the landowners closely and find out for ourselves what is actually happening to the interests and aspirations, or the grudges and grievances of the landowners.

Firstly, land as a resource with its inherent ownership, was acknowledged in the Deed of Cession and its subsequent constitutional and legislative arrangements which led to the entrenchment of land

legislations from 1970 until the abrogation of the 1997 Constitution in April, 2009. We are landowners only on paper now, while the fate or decisions regarding our land lies with the iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTLTB) and the policies of Government without our free, prior and expressed consent or will.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while there has been some developments here and there, the benefits of them have failed to trickle down to the landowners, other than lease money. We desire developments that create jobs and add value to the national economy, laying down the impetus for growth and future prosperity of all stakeholders. That, as it appears now under the leadership of this Government, remains a distant dream.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government makes a lot of song and dance on land development. How has these land developments benefitted the landowners, apart from the incomplete infrastructure? They have destroyed our lush green forest, polluted our waterways and tampered with our rights to ownership and yet, they fail to compensate us for that or to provide the necessary assistance which is needed by the landowners as was spelled out in the Blueprint for 50/50 by 2020 under the Social Justice and Affirmative Action Programmes under the 1997 Constitution, and realised partially by the SDL Government.

The sixth issue that I intend to raise in this discussion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is related to climate change and its impact upon the lives of the people of Fiji and the Pacific. I do so by quoting from Page 6, Paragraph 4 of His Excellency's Address where he makes the following statement, and I quote:

“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 of the rest of the world.”

Commendable words, indeed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but we are still yet to see that a wider consultation on the Climate Change Act is duly carried out.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me give you a background in science. The former Vice President of the United States, Mr. Al Gore, in declaring the science, said that by 2015, the oceans would rise by three feet. There would be no summer ice in the Arctic and polar bears would be extinct.

Sadly, none of this happened and Al Gore became a multi-millionaire, flying around the world in the name of climate change, leaving a carbon footprint bigger than 100 normal people. That is the science! Sounds familiar?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is the tribute then that this Government has paid to His Excellency, the President in respect of climate change?

1. They have used the Paris Agreement and COP 23 to further their own agenda.
2. They are using climate change as a means to raise funds to serve their own hidden agenda and serve the cause of populist politics.
3. Our rural and maritime communities affected by climate change continue to suffer from the effects of adverse weather.
4. Is there a strategic plan to relocate and resettle communities?
5. Let us look around our own communities from where we come from. How the effects of climate and related issues go unattended and unmitigated by this Government.

In that respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to raise the issue of flash flooding along the Drasa and Vitogo flats in Lautoka, which has had devastating effects on those living in Vitogo, Matawalu and Naviyago Villages, settlements and the cane farms along Lovu and Drasa Sectors. I humbly plead with the Honourable Minister responsible to stop lip-serving the people and mitigate the flash flooding issue by dredging the Vitogo River and other areas in Fiji.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few words, I do not support the motion before the House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Jese Saukuru for his contribution to His Excellency's Address.

Honourable Members, we have in the public gallery our distinguished visitor, His Excellency, Mr. Coly Seck of Senegal, who is the President of the Human Rights Council, Thirteen Cycle (2019).

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- He is here with his delegation from Geneva, as well as the staff members of the Human Rights in Fiji. Also here with us is our Permanent Representative in Geneva, Madam Ambassador Mrs. Nazhat Shameem Khan.

Sir, I welcome you to the House and welcome you as well to Fiji and I trust that your time in Fiji and in the House will be rewarding and productive. You are most welcome.

Honourable Members, I know you are eager to listen to the Honourable Assistant Minister but I think we will adjourn now for morning tea. The Secretary-General, as usual, will warn you when we will resume debate on His Excellency's Address. On that note, we adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.25 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.01 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I take this opportunity to welcome students and teachers from Tavua District School.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you for taking an interest in Parliament, and I hope that your visit will be rewarding, fruitful and educational. You are most welcome.

Honourable Members, at this occasion, we will suspend the Debate on His Excellency the President's Address and we will go on to the Agenda Item that we should have considered earlier on.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Attorney-General, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum to move his first motion. You have the floor, Sir.

REFERRAL OF TREATIES TO COMMITTEE

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Review of the Kigali Amendment - Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank you for your indulgence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Attorney-General has moved a motion to refer the Treaty to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the Treaty and a Written Analysis as required by Standing Order 130(2).

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), the Treaty and the Analysis stand referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review.

The Committee may table the report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today. Thank you, Honourable Members.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Attorney-General, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence -
Review of the 2011 Asia-Pacific Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education
Qualifications

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the 2011 Asia-Pacific Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Honourable Attorney-General has moved a motion to refer the Treaty to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the Treaty and written analysis as required by Standing Orders 130(2). Therefore pursuant to Standing Orders 130(3), the Treaty and the analysis stand referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review. The Committee may table the report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Attorney-General, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence -
Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competition

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competition.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Honourable Attorney-General has moved a motion to refer the Treaty to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with copies of the Treaty and written analysis as required by Standing Orders 130(2). Therefore pursuant to Standing Orders 130(3), the Treaty and the analysis stand referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review. The Committee may table the report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today. Thank you, Honourable Members.

Honourable Members, we will now continue with the agenda item we were considering before the tea adjournment and that is the motion: To thank His Excellency for his most gracious speech. I now give the floor to the next speaker on my list, the Assistant Minister for Environment and Rural Development, the Honourable Viam Pillay. You have the floor, Sir.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen and dear children: good morning and *bula vinaka*.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to wish all our children, a Happy Children's Day. I would also like to add that our children need to be protected, loved and cared and not to be cursed as earlier said in this House. Honourable Qereqeretabua, a child is a child, just because they are Government Members' children, Opposition do not get the right to curse them.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, asking for apology now will not help, they should think before they curse from their mouth. Honourable Speaker, Sir, just look at the number of Opposition Members present here. They are asking for more sitting and on the other hand, they opt to travel overseas.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V. PILLAY.- For them, it seems like overseas trips and per diem are more important compared to ordinary Fijians. Honourable Speaker, Sir, for them it seems like overseas trips and per diem are more important compared to ordinary Fijians.

They opt to travel overseas whereby our Honourable Members opt to stay behind because we care about Fiji.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear.

HON. V. PILLAY.- We are elected to be in Parliament and not to visit overseas, Honourable Members. Honourable Speaker, Sir, Honourable Saukuru mentioned something about the security of this nation, I just like to remind him that Fiji is in the safe hands of our Honourable Prime Minister ...

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear.

HON. V. PILLAY.- ... and also the Fijian people, and those who live overseas who also remember the security situation in 1987 under the leadership of your Honourable leader. We all know about the situation then and the situation today.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we are a nation and a small island State that has achieved great things, making and earning ourselves a notable space in the modern world and in the Pacific where we thrive and flourish.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, our nation Fiji is home to one of the most enterprising cultures on earth. We have been bestowed with an environment with pristine oceans, forests, waterways, pristine coastlines, rivers and unique landscapes that have been entrusted to our stewardship by the generations gone by. With the 10 year of uninterrupted economic growth, we have set ourselves

up on a demanding platform to sustain growth, sustain our environment and growth through responsible stewardship. Our economic strength has been won by the enterprising innovation and determination of hardworking people.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we are a small island developing State and like others, we have our own challenges. National disasters, including tropical cyclones, floods and droughts often have an enormous impact in our economy and the wellbeing of our people.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, amongst these water and water-related stream events are important elements to look into if we are to build resilience to climate change and related events. Honourable Speaker, Sir, waterways and environment are central to the economic and social development of the country. The Waterways and Environment sector build infrastructure that is central to supporting economic growth by sustaining crop production and productivity, tourism development and food security. It is evident that environmental management is critical to the support of sustainability of the benefits from nature supporting the Government's economic growth.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Waterways and Environment recognises that waterways and environment are intrinsically linked and it plays a critical part in our livelihoods. As such, it is very important that we understand the connection between waterways and environment to acknowledge development, social wellbeing and climate change.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the formulation of the Ministry of Waterways and Environment reflects the Government's vision to manage our water resources and safeguard our environment through an integrated pragmatic approach. To keep all Fijians safe from water-related disasters, the Ministry of Waterways and Environment implements multiple technical and giving measures addressing drainage and flood protection, smart agriculture, irrigation solutions, waterway drainage and river embankment and coastal management activities - all aimed at providing the enabling environment to stipulate further economic growth.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, these programmes are designed to support the Government in the implementation of the 5-year and 20-year National Development Plans (NDP), the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and the Green Growth Framework for Fiji through recognising the need to provide adequate drainage, irrigation and coastal protection services and doing so, reducing the vulnerability and the risk of climate change and related adversities.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Waterways and Environment are centrally contributing to the achievements of all the UNDP Goals. The Ministry will soon be launching its Strategic Plan 2019 to 2024 with a vision of clean, healthy environment and sustainable waterways management, for sustainable and resilient Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, our vision of clean, healthy environment and waterways management for a sustainable and resilient Fiji reflects the need to act now to ensure a flourishing, liveable and healthy environment, prosperous communities and protected waterways, ensuring economic prosperity through climate resilient interventions.

Our work will be shaped by the strategic objective in the plan that are geared towards building resilience to waterways-related hazards and ensuring our environment is managed sustainably for now and future generation. This effect we have carried out massive amount of work in recent years.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, to highlight a few, I would like to give an insight into the different works and projects we have undertaken in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 fiscal year. The works from the start of the last fiscal year 2018 and 2019 to date include:

Drainage:

- i. Central Division - 426.5 km;
 - ii. Western Division - 718.6 km; and
 - iii. Northern Division - 763.4 km.
1. Dredging/Creek, De-silting:
 - i. Sigatoka River (completed);
 - ii. Nakauvadra Creek (completed).
 2. Water Shed Management Namosi Dam:
 - i. 4 completed.
 3. Riverbank Protection:
 - i. Vunivau Village (completed);
 - ii. Nadakuni Village (work currently stopped, FRA Bridge weak to cart material)
 - iii. Wainawaqa Village (work currently stopped, FRA Bridge weak to cart material).
 - iv. Savu Village in Tailevu (work in progress);
 - v. Wanibuabua, Wainadoi (work is in progress).
 4. Coastal Protection Works:
 - i. Namoli Village, Lautoka (work is in progress);
 - ii. Lamini Village, Taveuni (work has completed);
 - iii. Nadrau Village, Tailevu (work has completed);
 - iv. Rukurukulevu, Nadroga (work is in progress);
 - v. Namuana Village and Tavuki District School, Kadavu (work is in progress); and
 - vi. Dravuni Village, Tailevu (work is in progress).

Honourable Speaker, Sir, apart from the above, the Ministry has been writing proposals to seek bilateral funding from development partners and to date, we have been successful with the following:

1. Korean Embassy - US\$200,000 for Vativa River Bank Stabilisation;
2. €500,000 (Euros) - Scaling-Up Drainage Infrastructure in Soaso Drainage area in Labasa (Agreement to be signed soon).

Ministry of Agriculture Backyard Gardening Initiative: Honourable Speaker, Sir, backyard gardening has a positive outcome in recognising the value and potential of home garden for enhancing food security and livelihoods and build local capacity to scale-up and provide fresh and nutritious food. Backyard or home gardens have been an integral component of family farming and local food systems. Backyard gardening is an ancient and widespread practice all over the world and is referred to as mixed kitchen farmyard and compound or home garden.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture has developed a programme to encourage urban and rural dwellers to undertake backyard gardening to meet their household

nutritional needs. This ensures that they cultivate food using safe practices such as organic farming systems. The emphasis of the programme will be on kitchen garden, including utilisation of small container system and fruit tree planting campaigns.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has distributed to 90 households in Tavua and Labasa backyard gardening package worth \$65 which includes a guide for gardeners, 14 bags of garden soil and seeds of four crops and fruit trees. Each recipient is required to fill a "Gardener Profile Form" to allow the Ministry of Agriculture staff to monitor the gardeners' activities and evaluate the impact of the programme.

I wish to further enlighten the House that the Backyard Gardening Initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture was launched earlier this year in Tavua by His Excellency our President, a platform that he is currently championing around the country.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, for this financial year, 2019/2020, the Ministry of Agriculture is allocated \$300,000 through its Extension and Research Division to fund this activity. This funding will enable training and awareness and distribution of backyard gardening packages to 300 households throughout on our four geographical divisions. The Backyard Gardening Initiative of the Ministry of Agriculture will not only enable us to curb non-communicable diseases in our local communities, but will more importantly, ensure that we continue to improve the livelihood and well-being of all Fijians.

Fruits Tree Orchards: Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture is implementing the Fruit Tree Orchard Programme which began last financial year. Orchards have played an important role in communities for many centuries, providing a focal point, a gathering place and a place where people and the rest of nature successfully work together to create abundant harvest, providing fresh fruits long before the time of global freight. Once a tree is established, it can provide a large yield of fruit year after year for decades, requiring little human input. As a deep-rooted, long-lived perennial, the tree has time to adapt to local conditions and be more resilient.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, as you all are aware that fruits are an important contributor to improving the nutritional status of the general population.

Fiji currently has one of the highest incidences of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in the world. As such, the inclusion of more local fruits in the daily diet of Fijians will help the health status of the general population.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, most of the local fruits consumed are harvested from the wild or backyards as there are only few established orchards of local fruits. Fiji annually imports a wide range of fresh fruits that include grapes, oranges, apples, pear, kiwi fruit amounting to an average of \$17.8 million as well as \$3.8 million for processed fruits. Some of these imported fruits can be substituted to locally-grown tropical fruits such as guava, mango, avocado, oranges, mandarins, pineapple and other indigenous fruits.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the climatic condition in Fiji provides for a conducive environment for tropical fruit cultivation for both indigenous and some of the exotic species, for example, dragon fruit, guava, mangosteen, et cetera. Currently Sigatoka, Legalega, Seaqaqa and Naduruloulou Research Stations have field germplasms of introduced exotic species as well as indigenous collections. Fruits are seasonal with few established orchards. Currently most of the

fruits available in the local markets are dominated by wild and backyard fruit trees. Over the years, the demand for fruit trees, seedlings have escalated as Fijians are becoming more health-conscious and regard fruits as important component of their diets.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the latest update on the programme are:

- 8 orchards for guava have been established comprising of 750 plants in an area of 1.2 hectare; Orchards are regularly monitored by Locality Extension Officers. One training on guava cultivation organised and attended by 10 Research and Extension staff on 19th September, 2019;
- 14 avocado orchards with 50 seedlings each have been established in the Western Division;
- 2 breadfruit orchards established with 50 seedlings in each orchard in Ba.
- 300 seedlings planted at a farm in Kulukulu, Sigatoka.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Plan for 2019 and 2020:

- 6 new guava orchards will be established before December 2019 and 10 more before July 2020
- 5 avocado orchards will be established before December 2019 and 10 new avocado orchards will be established before July 2020
- 5 new dragon fruit orchards will be established before March 2020
- 5 new breadfruit orchards will be established before July 2020
- 3 citrus orchards will be established before July 2020.
- 1 mango orchard will be established before July 2020.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I thank you and remain grateful for the support rendered by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji and this House. Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu*.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Assistant Minister for his contribution to His Excellency's Address. I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Members of the Government Cabinet, Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen: Happy World Children's Day!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to His Excellency's Address on 12th November, 2019. Mr. Speaker, Sir, before doing so, I would like to share with Members of this august House the message that I think is appropriate as we deliberate on the Address. Before walking through the door of this august House this morning, I looked up and saw our Coat of Arms. It states, and I quote "*Rerevaka na Kalou ka doka na Tui*", a motto on our national Coat of Arms is extracted from I Peter 2:17, "Respect everyone and love the family of believers. Fear God and honour the king."

For me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must take heed of this important message as we move forward. Our ancestors and founding fathers developed our Coat of Arms based on their commitment to their Christian faith, obedient to God Almighty who establishes all authority.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge my God, my Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ for His blessings and guidance, for without Him I would not be able to achieve what I have in the last 12 months as a first time Member of Parliament. I also thank my family and supporters for their support.

The people of Fiji always look forward with anticipation and hope to hear the message delivered by His Excellency. Our citizens are eager and determined to hear about our achievements thus far and what is in-store for the country as we move forward on Government's development agenda and the implementation of short and medium term programmes. The private sector investors both local and from abroad, and development partners will take a keen interest in His Excellency's message.

The Address should set a benchmark for the business community and our development partners to map out and consider how best to engage the country. At the same time, the Presidential Address gives them the opportunity to review and evaluate basic fundamentals such as good governance, particularly law and order situation, the independence of State institutions, human rights, economic growth prospects, ease of doing business, stability in the business environment and consistency of policy.

This Government has a plethora of plans and yet it has tabled this for deliberation in this House, as it should. As my learned colleague has said, Parliament is not just a rubber-stamp for the Executive.

The micro planning aspect is either part of the politics of diversion or intended to showcase purported achievements when in reality there is stagnancy, little or no progress and Government departments and agencies are failing miserably to achieve the benchmarks and goals in the plans launched in far-away Bonn.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of the above, the national planning process in all its aspects should be an all-inclusive process as it affects all. Therefore, all should take ownership in it. The sentiment was expressed by our Governor-General, Sir Robert Foster while opening the first session of Parliament on 27th November, 1970 following the grant of Instruments of Independence, and I quote:

“The Plan itself does not guarantee a prosperous future, that can only be achieved through imaginative and vigorous efforts by farmers, by workers, by businessmen, by government officials and by all of you now before me, devoted to the common goal of developing of our society and the economy on which it is founded.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Alliance Government worked systematically through its five-year development plans, the SVT Government through its annual corporate plans and the SDL Government secured Parliamentary approval for its 50/50 by 2020 initiative in accordance with Chapter 5 of the 1997 Constitution authorising social justice and affirmative action programmes.

To fully appreciate His Excellency's message, it is necessary to compare his current Address with that delivered a year ago when he opened the 2018/2019 Session of Parliament. The Government has again prepared a bipartisan and political address for His Excellency. It

demonstrates a clear lack of vision, mouthing platitudes of modernisation and progress when majority of our people are facing hardship on a daily basis.

The Address is littered with cliches that mean little and demonstrate a refusal to acknowledge that the FijiFirst model or recipe does not work. As the Honourable Leader of the Opposition quoted, “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”. Six years after the 2013 Constitution Decree was imposed on the people, only 50.02 percent supported it.

Our society is more polarised than ever. The solution is not more partisan political platitudes but real efforts to forge unity for a Government that truly unites the people, restores confidence and brings hope for the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what has become of our so-called green economy whose failure is reflected in our increasing food bills, import trade and consumption-driven economy and the changing demographic dynamics where now the majority of the population is urbanised. The farmers of this country have become totally-demoralised when this Government dismantled democratic institutions and structures which catered for the concerns and voice of the farmers and the day the Ministry of Agriculture to update and upgrade the productive agricultural sectors to be more competitive and securing lucrative markets for our produce.

The situation for Fiji's workers is bleak. Workers are oppressed with increasing cost of living, low wages and suppression of their rights to -

1. Freedom of Association;
2. Right to Collective Bargaining;
3. Freedom of Assembly; and
4. Freedom of Expression.

In June, Fiji was given an International Labour Organisation ultimatum which expires this month to undertake necessary labour reforms or face trade sanctions and being re-listed on ILO governing body agenda.

Addressing the concerns of the business community, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ease of doing business in Fiji rating has plummeted under this Government primarily because of good governance and transparency concerns. Investors will not gain confidence when there is little consultation or warning and laws and regulations change abruptly - these are basic good governance concerns because the Government is too secretive.

On civil reforms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, FijiFirst tried its best to break the public service trade unions and indeed is in breach of collective bargaining convention of the ILO in imposing individual contracts. The reforms have demoralised our civil servants and further compromised delivery of public services, now gasping for breath under draconian laws and legislations, political influence and paucity of supplies from improper budgeting process.

On the Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the majority of the people were not consulted before it was promulgated. So, there is no ownership and its undemocratic provisions bring its legitimacy into question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some Decrees promulgated are entrenched in the Constitution. These include the Media Decree, Public Order Amendment Decree, iTaukei Land Decree, iTaukei Affairs

Decree and Regulations, iTaukei Land Trust Board Decree and Regulations, Surfing Decree, Land Use Decree, to name a few.

With regards to the rule of law, the independence of State institutions is questionable. The increasing interference of Government in these institutions has undermined their independence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President also touched on the Standing Committee and I wish to elaborate on that. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am proud to be a Member of a Standing Committee where Members of both sides of the House are working in co-operation. We are able to rise above the party political lines and work in the national interest. That is a good beginning and sets the pace and mood for reconciliation towards genuine Parliamentary democracy. I thank our Chairman, Honourable Viam Pillay, for his able leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will now speak on the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. Firstly, I thank the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services and his Assistant Minister for his usually prompt response to issues raised and clarification sought. As usual, there are some grey and grim areas and I seek your indulgence to draw these to the attention of the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the first point I want to make is the reduction in the Capital Budget of the Ministry which will compromise delivery of quality health care and medical services to the people of Fiji. This reduction will slow down or prevent the construction of numerous health centres, hospitals and implementation of necessary infrastructure for improved services to the people.

Already, the poor conditions of our health infrastructure is a clear indication of that. But I thank the Honourable Minister for allowing generous community support, business houses and the various organisations to help out in any way they can to the respective hospitals, health centres in however they can. But the question is, how can quality health services be delivered with these band-aid solutions?

The second issue I wish to highlight is the ongoing shortage of medications and supplies. I ask the Honourable Minister to spell out to this House the plans in place to address this issue given the increase in Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) cases and communicable diseases.

In some localities in the rural and maritime zones, they are just receiving their second quarter supply, last month and some this month and yet we are in the fourth quarter. Among those medicines in short supply are dengue and leptospirosis kits, antifungal and antibacterial medications, HIV and VDRL testing was put on hold for pregnant mums going for their ante-natal clinics for the last two to three months. Still on HIV, recent scarcity of Anti-Retroviral (ARV) drugs where the current limited stock will expire next month and I urge the Honourable Minister to, please, look into this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight that contrary to what the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services said earlier in Parliament that graduates from the Year 2017 to-date will be automatically absorbed into the Ministry, not all 32 graduates from 2017 with Bachelors in Environmental Health have been engaged. Some are still volunteering and at times with no allowance while some have been successful in finding employment at NGOs and local Town Councils, others are still waiting at home.

Fourthly, Sir, I wish to commend the work of the village health workers, their dedication and perseverance as part of the Primary Health Care teams. I also commend the Primary Health

Care team and Public Health team, school team for their work of awareness, screening of NCDs and cancer for referral for secondary care. However, I am concerned that some or most of village health workers' allowance are mostly delayed, and at times delayed for months.

The last issue that I intend to speak on concerning Health and Medical Services is the need for deployment of adequate funding and resources for Public Health given the threats of communicable diseases lingering and Fiji's vulnerability in the Pacific Region to contagious health and medical issues. More resources, time and money should be allocated to primary and preventative health care which is an effective stage to combat and control communicable diseases need to be addressed. I fully concur with Honourable Dr. Salik Govind on this matter, Sir. Only then can we achieve the targets set by the Honourable Minister and his predecessors in this House and elsewhere.

Before concluding, Mr. Speaker, I wish to highlight some pressing issues faced by the people of Taveuni and Cakaudrove East Constituency. The first one is that, Government projects, especially in rural water and rural electrification in some villages and settlements are still pending. This is after ongoing requests by Turaga ni Koro in the Tikina meetings and the usual response is, "*sa kau cake.*"

Secondly, four years later after *TC Winston*, school rehabilitation is still ongoing. Students of Kocoma Village and recently I have just been informed that Holy Cross Primary School classrooms are still awaiting rebuilding or repairs respectively for their classrooms.

The 2017 Tropical Depression (TD04) Landslide in Dreketi, Qamea damaged the school, health centre and destroyed part of the Village. Todate, students are still learning in makeshift classrooms, and teachers using villagers' unoccupied houses as quarters.

Thirdly, Sir, I wish to commend our local initiative to action against climate change, such as Keep Taveuni Clean Group, planting trees with the kind of assistance of Wakatu. In our community, the Keep Taveuni Clean Group comprising parents, friends and children, and this was made possible with the donation from business houses and it takes once a month to try and clean up parts of Taveuni and raise awareness as we believe that to address climate change and pollution, we need to think globally and act locally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the seawall are an ongoing recurrent request from the constituency and the *Tikina* meetings, and the delay is common. While I commend the Government for the Lamini Village seawall completion as alluded to by the Honourable Viam Pillay, the village of Kanakana in Tunuloa has been waiting for a seawall for some time now and their shoreline is receding very quickly.

Sir, upgrading and maintenance of rural and maritime roads is always an ongoing issue and in that respect, I wish to draw attention to the following roads and infrastructure development:

- Napuka and Wailevu Roads
- Taveuni Roads to the North, and
- Waibula Irish Crossing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Waibula Irish Crossing is the only access after you leave Qeleni to go up to the North. Without the Waibula Irish Crossing, tourists cannot reach their destination, such as the Qoma Waterfall and the Lavena Coastal Walk.

As it is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I went there last month, people have told me that the digger has been sitting there for the last four months, doing nothing. When it rains

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Where?

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Waibula Irish Crossing

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Where?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Waibula. Usually after a heavy rain, it is flooded.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Like I said, this is the only access going up to the Vunivasa Estate and to the villages up North.

These development issues are dear to the heart and it is essential for the well-being of the people of Taveuni and Cakaudrove East, and I urge the responsible Ministry to look into these requests.

In conclusion, Honourable Speaker, I reiterate the call by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and request the Government to resign and advise His Excellency the President to call for fresh Elections so that the people of Fiji can give a fresh mandate to a government that can redirect the course of our nation from the political and economic doldrums we are currently in.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I regret I cannot support the motion before the House. Thank you for your indulgence, and may God bless us all. *Vinaka*.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Vijendra Prakash. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public in the gallery, our listeners locally and abroad via various media outlets; *bula vinaka* to you all.

I rise this morning to make a response to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious speech. His deliberation includes the sentiments expressed as a statement for nation-building towards inclusiveness, security and prosperity for all in this modern, democratic Fiji, as stipulated in the 2013 Constitution of Fiji.

I must reiterate and say this again, just in case the other side of the House has forgotten, or is good at forgetting that this Government exists to serve the best interest of the people of Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we are now in a path where youths of today have challenges and issues that need to be looked at from very different perspectives than how we were brought up during those bygone days.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, as the population grows so does the nation, as it evolves with its own challenges and demands. Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is the 21st Century, so we should think like we are in the 21st Century. There are new emerging markets and products reaching our shores, without even us noticing it or have known its existence.

We might be thousands of miles away from our global market, but we are also just a few hours away. This shows, Honourable Speaker, Sir, that advancement in technology has impacted our way of doing business and the way we live our lives.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, an issue that is in my heart is our Constitution. This is the only Constitution that has united all ethnic background and has given equal opportunities to everyone, regardless of their socio-economic background. This is the Constitution that does not discriminate anyone and by far, secures the rights for all people.

The Constitution has the rights of the indigenous of the land secured. Honourable Speaker, Sir, our Constitution is considered to be comprehensive and it accommodates our needs and priorities, and we all should respect it in every possible manner.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Constitution of Fiji is more than a set of articles and schedules. It does more than merely establish and empower the institutions of governance in this country. It is also embedded with a vision and reflection of the future. Its provisions are not just concerned with our country as it is, but with fulfilment of social and economic justice for all Fijians.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Constitution is the ultimate law of our nation. It provides the framework and guidelines for the political procedures, principles and the powers of the Government. This is exactly what the Government is and has been conducting its business.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the problem is that, the Opposition Members who have called for the abolishment of the very Constitution that safeguards all Fijians, is also the same Constitution they swore under oath to God and country that they will abide by. This leaves me confused every time they mention the abolishment of this Constitution.

I really do not get it, they call for the abolishment of the Constitution. They call for the resignation of the Honourable Prime Minister. They call for the resignation of the Government, and they will keep calling come 2022. I must say this because their Party is a calling Party.

They even call each other in the newspaper and now they are calling each other in the High Courts. All I can say, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is that they will keep calling until they become deaf to their own calling.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Fiji has moved on, we have moved on making better roads, connecting communities with water and electricity and connecting unreachable islands and

communities through new means of transforming digital telecommunication. Yet, their approach to address issues of today is somehow out-dated.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Opposition keeps venting that this Government has lost its viability, lost its standing and lost its trust. Now, I am wondering how they figure things out when their own side of the House has the very characteristics of what they are talking about in Parliament. I think, Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is out of frustration on their own leadership and hierarchical structure that they now have come out to say exactly how they feel about their own House.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I must also add that their call on the bipartisanship, they call for Government and Opposition to work together, yet they show no goodwill to their words. I think, Honourable Speaker, Sir, that the other side of the House thinks and feels entitled.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the people of Fiji are so blessed indeed, that the God Almighty has allowed the Honourable Voreqe Bainimarama to lead Fiji to a new era, ...

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V. PRAKASH.- ... an era of equality, inclusiveness and leaving no one behind.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the speech given by His Excellency ...

HON. MEMBER.- Who wrote it?

HON. V. PRAKASH.- I can write one for you, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, if you need it.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the speech given by His Excellency is a reminder of what has been done in regards to development and, yes, part of what Government is doing and plans to do and, yes, this is the very Government that will stand up against elite thinkers, and do something for the people.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, yesterday I heard the Honourable Bulanauca speaking on the topic of being children of God (he is not here today). He is correct in stating that we are all created in the image of God, yet has stated that not all are children of God.

If that is the case and they consider themselves the children of God, I must say that I will never believe in that. Their words and actions, and how they conduct their business in public is very ungodly, chaotic and confusing. I hope they do understand where these confusion come from and who creates all those confusion.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President has also set out what we should work towards in building a good nation. It is about the future, a future that we all should build for our future generation. This all comes back to our children, the youth, who will carry on the banner of equality and inclusiveness throughout the country.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, it would be best to disengage the old way of thinking and look into creative and innovative ways to secure a sustainable and successful Fiji. And this is the very reason this Government has engaged with international partners in enabling a digital society for the whole country.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the new digital platform opens up new challenges and opportunities for the youth. This digital transformation will enable young men and women in isolated islands to connect with the world throughout countless applications.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, youth of today have a total different way in viewing the world and this will push and open up new boundaries, new markets and new ideas. Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is a challenge for leaders like us to change our mindset towards growing, evolving market. It can be a challenge in trying to understand new system and fit in with the demands of all the younger generation, and create various opportunities and platform for development, growth of our economy and opening up new potential market, and we need to take this challenge of change for our own good.

We, the members from the Government side, are very well vested with accommodating a secure future for the youth and hope that the other side of the House will also take a similar approach. Honourable Speaker, Sir, my experience within the past one year as a parliamentarian, has been full of interesting interaction at multiple levels. Inside Parliament, I have seen dedicated and courageous leaders who are fully committed to pushing and enabling the growth of the economy to benefit all.

However, it is also sad to note that we still have Members from the other side of the House who continue to burn their negative energy which is destructive to peaceful co-existence, undermining valuable members and damaging to national-building processes and the progress for all. Honourable Speaker, Sir, as Members of this noble and august House, we all have a duty to assist our citizens towards growing our economy, improve on the standard of living of all and help prepare our children to be best citizens who are honest and have integrity to move the country into a new era.

However, today too, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we celebrate the Universal Children's Day to promote international togetherness and awareness among children worldwide. Universal Children's Day promotes the welfare of all and understanding between the children.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, children are gifts from God into our lives, into our families and communities. We are to nurture and care for them, educate them in ways that are Godly, and not curse them on their generations.

I will also request the Members of this House to never ever curse our children who are our own. I want to also send out a message to parents, grandparents, aunties and uncles, never ever curse your children. This is the lowest form of being I can imagine. The future depends on the words you speak to them. Some are affected all throughout their lives mentally and emotionally.

Some end up on the streets and some have ended up in mental hospitals. It is about the way that you speak from your mouth that affect their being.

Today should be a day for thanksgiving and being grateful to God that He has blessed your family and our family with children, nephews, nieces and grandchildren, and we thank God Almighty for blessing us with this beautiful country to live in and enjoy.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, outside Parliament, I have experienced various demands and complaints from our people who are looking forward for answers. However, everyone needs to be fairly treated by our civil servants, law enforcement officers, business organisations and those in charge to assist them. Honourable Speaker, Sir, during my observation, it is noted with sadness that those responsible in providing honest service delivery, are unable to meet the expectation of our people. It is my humble plea to those responsible officers, members of the organisations to kindly change their attitude and rise up to serve the people who rely on you for assistance.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, a number of good citizens of Fiji go on to say that there is nothing wrong with the Government of the day and its policies, but those that are responsible in implementing it are somehow politically activated, causing frustrations from the public. How long can we accommodate such dishonesty amongst those whom trust has been bestowed? Modern Fiji needs dedicated people in the workforce who can perform, provide service beyond expectations and give results.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to speak of our dairy industry and crop farming which my family and I are part of. For the past decade, the dairy industry had challenging times. Tuberculosis and brucellosis affected the dairy farmers which brought them down to their knees. However, the resilient farmers, our previous and current Minister for Agriculture, staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, *Fiji* Co-operative Dairy Company Limited (FCDCL) Board, management and staff, farm advisory dairy officers and *Fiji* Dairy Limited (FDL), with their combined effort, help fight all the odds to bring the dairy industry back to where it is today.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, dairy farmers are now taking on new initiatives to turn it into a productive and healthy industry. I must remind Parliament that youth and women are part of this industry and are contributing tremendously to its growth.

Honourable Speaker, the crop farmers are an asset to the nation in providing food for local consumption and for export. The quality of crop produced has improved vastly and as a result the rural farmers are also providing employment opportunities to their farm. The assistance from Government is very much appreciated. With the demands from our local markets, farmers are now looking at expanding their farms and this is the only Government that has been assisting our farmers in obtaining soft loans and long-term assistance from the *Fiji* Development Bank for purchase of farm capital. With the help of Government, banks can now facilitate our needs for new farms, extension of our farms and we are forever grateful.

Farmers also want to thank the support of Government Ministries and the Ministry of *iTaukei* Land Trust Board, landowners for the renewal of leases and hope that they will work hand-in-hand in building the growth of our dairy industry.

The assistance from Government in finding new innovative ways for value-adding and market facilitation is very much appreciated. Farmers now receive expert advisory officers from

the Ministry of Agriculture and we hope this will continue for the betterment of all farmers around the country.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the new Session of Parliament will be historic to the nation as we will be celebrating Golden Jubilee for our Independence. While the entire nation will be celebrating their achievements in their own way, the entire Sanatan families are also preparing for celebrating the occasion throughout the nation.

During the past 50 years, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have had many challenges, our journey has been memorable with many celebrations and some very painful periods. However, Mr. Speaker, the success and failures we have gone through has indeed prepared us to be stronger, to make each day for the next 50 years a progressive and happier one.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, allow me to congratulate and thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his courage and conviction in leading our nation from 2006 to date. His clear-cut vision to transform the nation for all to live peacefully, to participate in economic growth and to be counted as common citizen is only achieved by him and no other leader before him.

Honourable Speaker, let us also recognise the hard work of Cabinet Ministers, Assistant Ministers and their great commitment to serve our nation and its leadership.

Honourable Speaker, in conclusion, let me extend my heartfelt thanks to three people who have contributed in shaping my life, whom I did not mention in my maiden speech last year: My cousin and dear friend and classmate, Satya Nand of Waibilauci, Naluwai, for being a part of my life, a valuable companion in supporting me.

To my master, Jack Prasad Khelawan, our head teacher from 1967 to 1970 at Vunidawa Indian School and Mrs. Khelawan for helping us mould into better students and teaching us the value of hard work. They both now enjoy retirement life in Canada. To my first principal as a teacher, Mitieli Vodonaivalu of Nayavu in Lomaivuna High School for being very kind in helping me to be a good teacher and teaching *iTaukei* culture and tradition. *Vinaka Vakalevu, Boso.*

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to congratulate all my former students in Fiji and abroad for providing service with distinction to whichever country they live in. I thank His Excellency and pay my continued respect for being our Head of State. I fully support his gracious speech delivered during the opening of the Parliament on 12th November, 2019 and fully support the motion by the Honourable Prime Minister.

With these few words, I thank you, Honourable Speaker, and pray to the Almighty God to continue to strengthen you and keep you energetic for more further service to this nation. I also thank the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers, Leader of the Opposition, all Members of Parliament and all the Parliament staff. I wish everyone in this august House and everyone watching and listening, a very Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year and God bless them all. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Vijendra Prakash for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the next speaker on my list, the Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen: *Ni Sa Bula Vinaka, Namaste* and a very good day to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 20th November, 2019, marks the 1st anniversary of my maiden speech for the current term as an elected Member of this august House. It is an honour to stand before my colleagues today in this august House and deliver my response to a statement delivered by His Excellency the President of Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konusi Konrote while addressing the opening of 2019/2020 Parliament Session on the 12th of November, 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank our President, His Excellency Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote for his most gracious speech during the opening of the 2019/2020 Parliament Session.

From the outset, I would like to applaud His Excellency for the Address, its noticeable clarity of purpose, the re-emphasis on the importance of our Constitution, calling out actions from the Members of this august House and the nation of Fiji to translate it to good and quality practices. His Excellency has most rightly set a righteous platform for us to deliberate on issues important to all Fijians for the 2019/2020 Parliament Session.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President has so eloquently laid the expectations for the next parliamentary year. His Excellency the President has spoken with great warmth and great generosity about Fiji, its prospects, the Fijian people about the links that bind us, the values and traditions that we share, the history we have experienced together. Mr. Speaker, Sir, but more than that, he spoke to us not just about the relationships of the past but the relationships of the future and I think that was what made His Excellency the President's Address so inspirational.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this prosaic world, where there are as many threats as opportunities, the eloquence of His Excellency the President's Address has reminded us of the importance of being one together to face economic, climate or any challenge out there with common principles and with a shared purpose.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all of us in this august House are the hope of our people. This week, while we mark the occasion of the official opening of the Parliament for 2019/2020 Session, we must all note the presumption that there is so much to be done, so much to be accomplished, and yet little time to waste.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to congratulate each Member of this august House on a job well done during the 2018/2019 Parliament Session. I would like to reiterate the call made by His Excellency the President, as Members of Parliament, whatever our stripes and allegiance may be, the bottom line is that we need to be accessible, relevant and real. We need to continue presenting the voices and needs of all Fijians, we need to stand for a united Fiji, in this fissiparous world we need to speak out with one voice. There should be no doubt that our goal in these sittings in this august House must be to advance the interests of all Fijians, ahead of any self-interest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to further reiterate His Excellency's Address that no matter where one sits in this august House, your presence is a sign of strength and positive step towards productive contestation of ideas and policies - such policies that have the prosperity of all Fijians at its core.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be effective, we need to ensure that we uphold the values of this august House and debate in a manner that provides hope and clarity to all Fijians. We need to speak in the national interest than in the interest of self or party. We need to be a beacon from where all Fijians can take reference with confidence when addressing and understanding issues that will matter greatly for our collective wellbeing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for maintaining decorum in this House. During debates we may be carried away, you have always maintained the integrity of the House. I thank you for helping us uphold the honour and dignity of this House in the way we conduct our proceedings. I thank you for facilitating good, free-flowing debates where the desired outcome are better policies and laws.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, your humbleness does not allow you to understand that you are indeed a role model for many of our youths in the country. I want to thank you for being impartial, fair and firm.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I agree with His Excellency the President that in these six short years since the launch of our 2013 Constitution, we have undoubtedly have done well socio-economically; we have enjoyed a decade of economic growth; our social policies have helped many Fijians better their lives. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the prosperity of a society cannot be measured only in monetary terms. It is first and foremost measured by the citizen's safety, inclusiveness and equal opportunities. I am proud to say we are on the right course to achieve this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thanks to our Constitution that we are no longer strangers in our own country; we are no longer victims of discriminatory notions of national identity; we have equal access to education and economic prospects. Our success is not determined by race, religion, ethnicity or colour of skin, not by wealth, privilege or status but by the content of one's character, one's ability and merit. Mr. Speaker, our Constitution is a beacon light, hope for many Fijians who had been parched in the flames of withering injustice in the past.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in today's modern states, citizenship indicates a symbolic reality of the equality of its members, it connotes rights and duties, it signifies a sense of identity and implies a variety of civic virtues that are necessary for social cohesion. At the same time, equal citizenry stands as the most important determining element of membership in a political community. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Constitution provides for all of these and we should be proud of our Constitution and proud to be Fijian.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite this, a dangerous cocktail of wilful ignorance, racism and bigotry is spewed day in day out by losers who have nothing else better to do than brewing hatred amongst Fijians. Just on Monday, Honourable Kuridrani said Honourable Prime Minister is getting \$3,000 as daily allowances. No one is getting that kind of daily allowance; that is an utter lie. All this is a sad reminder that hatred and animosity still fester and there are some elements in our society who are willing to consciously impact the tenuous and fragile nature of racial harmony in pursuit of self-betterment, consciously using their stature and position to poison the minds of our youth, risking incitement of most serious kinds of hatred and intolerance amongst us Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, often shielded by patriotic rhetoric, they try to divide us; their views are fundamentally anti-democratic. True patriots embrace fairness, equality, liberty and respect fellow citizens. One such true patriot is our Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a valiant leader as our Honourable Prime Minister. He has a vision for a climate-resilient, socially inclusive and economically prosperous Fiji. He has over the years embarked on citizen-building, that is clarifying and protecting the rights and obligations of all Fijians as the base of social capital for wider agendas of nation-building.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Honourable Prime Minister is an example to those leaders whose deeds frequently fail to match the high tone of their words. Those who fall short of leadership are too indulged with the routines of party politics and petty politics than listening to the voices of people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Honourable Prime Minister for his pragmatic and unwavering global leadership on climate action. While our emissions are negligible and despite being at the forefront of climate change, we already have the most ambitious targets when compared to developed and industrialised nations when it comes to climate change. Through his leadership we are planning to put in a binding legal framework such as the Climate Change Act that will deliver our current and future commitments. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are on our way to be the most competitive and socially inclusive low-carbon economy in the region, and I commend our Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Climate Change, Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum for leading us into this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since Independence we have come a long way. In the last decade, we have opened the vault of opportunities for our nation, opportunities that each Fijian will benefit from. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy. We have risen from the dark and bleak valley of seclusion to inclusive and equal societies. Now is the time to move as a nation and etch our name as one of greatest democratic societies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge those who are still drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred to put away self and party interest and serve all Fijians with dignity, discipline, and respect. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in recent months we have had our share of “fake news”, the social media post warning the *iTaukei* community to stay at home on 23rd September is an example. Certain elements with political affiliations made these lewd threats with an intention to instigate fear amongst us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these toxic elements of society think they can hide behind the keyboards and sell their oxymoronic fake news with the intention to cause chaos. Little do they know that putting on a sheep's coat does not make these lecherous falsehoods true?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with current digital transformation in our nation, many people have got access to social media platforms. Whilst social media platforms have become an increasingly ubiquitous presence in people's lives across the globe, hate speech, racism, fake news and varied forms of bigotry have risen through the unpatriotic activities of some keyboard warriors, some of them we know and present here today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these individuals use social media to spew hate speech, racial tensions, discrimination, and racial profiling and “sell” intolerance and bigotry covered with a fabric of patriotism. I ask these agents to stop and rather use social media to spread the news on the opportunities available for Fijians to better their lives through multiple government assistance programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all learn from our neighboring countries in the Pacific as well as the small states of the African region on how leaders who have placed their self-interest first have

plunged the country in poverty, hardship, and chaos. History has shown us what has happened in Rwanda in 1994 and the riots of Charlottesville, Virginia when racism and bigotry are allowed to linger in the society. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we as a nation cannot afford anything like that, as such, I humbly request the self-proclaimed “agents of chaos” to put the future of the country above their political aspirations and serve on uniting this country, than dividing it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have come a long way to let such ungodly thoughts undermine our dream for our nation's future and peace, prosperity, stability and equality. We must heal the divisions caused by intolerance and bigotry. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I still believe the best days are ahead and that our commonalities will prevail over our differences.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now turn to the agriculture sector and I would like to share some of the sentiments shared by His Excellency as he very ably pointed out that the agriculture sector will remain an important and significant player in our national development and in Government's effort to strengthen economic growth. The agriculture sector has put forward interventions on a holistic approach for management of food security and resilient food system as this will be supported through an integrated framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for far too long we have treated agriculture from the welfare perspective. Whenever we argue for support for agriculture, we state that it is important for the livelihood of our rural and maritime households. But I argue that we support agriculture in national interest. We support agriculture because it is a strategic and economic sector of the economy which has enormous potential and is one which is within our control. I argue that we must support agriculture because for other sectors to grow, agriculture must grow because of its backward and forward linkages.

In this process, we, Government, must ensure that maximum people, stakeholders and institutions are involved in the process of agriculture growth. In this way, the surplus created by the agriculture sector will be evenly shared across the country amongst these participants. Mr. Speaker, Sir, then the livelihood issue will be taken care of in this process as long as the household sector participates, either by provision of land, they will get rent, by provision of labour, they will get wages, by provision of capital, they will get returns, by provision of inputs or services, they will be paid a fair price from the surpluses.

This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, explains how even distribution of surplus created will take place if we allow greater and wider participation of all stakeholders in the agricultural growth process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the above framework, the strategy then is to push for a national wave of commercial agriculture. The previous model of family farm led by family farmer is no longer relevant now. Mr. Speaker, Sir, you may then ask me, why is the previous model of family farms which did so well then is no longer relevant now? Mr. Speaker, Sir, back then:

- a) Farm sizes were large for semi subsistence or commercial farming and surplus creation.
- b) Farm household sizes were large and they had enough family free labour and additional labour required during peak times such as planting and harvesting were met by labour pooling amongst neighbouring farm households thus saving the entire labour cost;
- c) Farmers were full time farmer given that farm was the only source of income for the farm household, thus surplus was created.

Things are different now, Mr. Speaker, Sir:

- a) Farm sizes have reduced over the years due to transfer to children across generations;
- b) Family labour are no longer available as family sizes are small and children are taking advantage of free education opting for formal sector employment, thus making small holder farming unit cost very high; and
- c) Aged farmers no longer see farm as their only source of income but are supported by children working outside in the formal sector, thus agriculture is now led by a lot of part time, past time and leisure farmers. They cannot be champions of modern agriculture system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we at the Ministry of Agriculture are committed to delivering on the collective aspirations of our people through a demand-driven market signal-led and resilient agriculture sector which provides for economic opportunities, environmental sustainability and food and nutritional security for all Fijians. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this will be achieved through the following five key strategic priority support:

- 1) Nutrition;
- 2) Sustainable livelihoods;
- 3) Climate resilience;
- 4) Commercial agriculture; and
- 5) Strengthen service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have started to implement several new initiatives to further our agriculture sector and this includes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, first and foremost, that we are expanding the production base of our agriculture sector. Mr. Speaker, what do I mean by “expanding the production base”? Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you want to achieve plethora with respect to growth of the agriculture sector, you have to first expand the base of the agriculture sector, and following are the explanations in detail:

- a) We are increasing the number of medium and large livestock farms by providing fencing materials and breeding stock and establishing high protein content and drought resistance pasture on these farms. Over the last 12 months, we have established this high protein drought-tolerant pasture on 193 farms throughout Fiji. Over the next three weeks, planting for one-quarter acre will delivered for another 220 farms in Fiji;
- b) Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Yaqara Pastoral Farm under the Ministry of Public Enterprises has been turned around. It produced 96,000 kilogrammes of beef meat in 2015 and this year, over the nine-month period, they have produced 156,000 kilogrammes of beef meat and they are looking at surpassing 200,000 kilogrammes of beef meat in this 12-month period. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the entire Yaqara Pastoral Farm has been turned around. They have established the largest cut and carry pasture of 25 acres and the recent drought had no impact on them;
- c) We are bringing new land to expand the base of the agriculture sector. We are bringing in new land under agriculture production, via one of the new incentive packages where major announcements will be made soon;

- d) We are making farm roads to access new land, we will be making a major announcement soon on that;
- e) We are providing new in-field drainage system to open up new land for agriculture which was previously not seen as arable land and this is done in collaboration with the Ministry of Waterways;
- f) We are loaning planting material with agreement for return supply equivalent amount of planting material within five years which will be provided to new farmers thus further expanding the production of base agriculture;
- g) We are providing machinery as subsidised cost for land preparation; and
- h) We are taking market to the farmer via Agro Marketing Authority and other players in the market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to deal with the aging farmer problem, we are injecting young trained commercial farmers into the sector. Just yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we held a half day workshop for the first lot of 23 young commercial farmers who completed their two-year training at Navuso Agricultural College and whom we have now taken over and training them. They already have land available to them from their *mataqali* leased via iTLTB. The Ministry has got a YCF LCPRM package for them which includes:

- Land clearing and preparation at our cost;
- Provision of planting materials at our cost;
- Provision of farm road at our cost; and
- Provision of market to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, every year these students from Navuso and another 20 from the Fiji National University Certificate III in Commercial Agriculture programme will be adopted by us and we will be training them and they will become our ambassadors of young commercial agriculture farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also working hard to attract the corporate sector to enter into the agriculture sector. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I met the Buderim Ginger Company operating out of Brisbane who uses ginger to make ginger-based snacks, drinks and exports worldwide. They have established a factory in Fiji and have contract with growers who supply ginger to them and they import ginger in brine from Fiji to their Brisbane factory where it is further processed to develop snacks and drinks.

At the moment, they alone import \$10 million worth of ginger in brine per year from Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have discussed with them a strategy to double this amount. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is one of the models that we are exploring where we have more of those where the original company is based in Australia, New Zealand and the USA. They established a plant here and then they contract out with growers to supply them with the basic primary products.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this evening, I will be meeting another importer from Australia, the SSM International Pty. Limited, who is importing frozen cassava from Fiji worth of \$0.5 million per month at the moment. Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has asked for Beqa yellow cassava which we are now expanding, and he is willing to double the imports going forward.

However, because we could not supply large volume of cassava processed as fries, he is sourcing that from Costa Rica, worth US\$0.5 million per month. Mr. Speaker, Sir, why can we not do that here - set up a plant to make cassava fries and export it to Australia and New Zealand?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this particular company has got contracts with Coles and Woolworths, therefore, accessing the entire Australian consumers rather than just the former Fiji residents, and that is what we want to do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are looking at a third corporate model that was proposed by the Honourable Minister for Economy to attract external corporate firms to establish their own farms to address here. For example, we have got this Ever Green Ginger PTE Limited, who has established a plant in Vatuwaqa to process Noni tea and Noni juice and are exporting \$3 million per year worth of Noni tea and Noni juice to China, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Now, we are looking at expanding that so that in five years' time, that company is looking at exporting \$10 million worth of Noni tea and Noni juice and imagine, Mr. Speaker, Sir, getting the Chinese Market, the world's most populous country, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of my tasks over the next 12 months will be to attract these kinds of investors to Fiji. By doing so, we will be outsourcing this basic liabilities of, you know, establishing plant, you know our own farmers and all those, Mr. Speaker, Sir, et cetera. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is the future agriculture model that we are looking forward to, and that is the future, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The future of Fiji's agriculture sector lies in corporate model.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to better inform our investors,

HON. MEMBERS.- Time is up.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank you and I thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment for his contribution to the debate on His Excellency's Address. Honourable Members, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and the Honourable Anare Jale had given me notice this morning that they will be attending a funeral service.

The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, together with the Honourable Assistant Minister are at a function regarding Children's Day today. That is why their absence might appear very prominent to some people, but that is the explanation.

Honourable Members, on that note, we will adjourn for lunch and we will resume debate after lunch at 2.30 p.m. We adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.24 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.36 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on His Excellency the President's Address. I now call on the Honourable Simione Rasova. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Ni sa bula vinaka.* Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of the House, and people at the gallery; *bula vinaka.*

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to associate myself with all the Honourable Members of this House to thank His Excellency the President of Fiji for his Address from the throne marking the end of the first year and the beginning of the second year of this Parliament.

Before I continue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I may as well wish and thank the people of Kadavu, especially the Village of Lomati, Tawava and Nabukelevu-i-Ra, Qalira in the *Tikina* of Nabukelevu who were badly traumatised and evacuated for weeks, and wish to recognise their bravery and survival against the earthquake which shook the whole Island of Kadavu on Sunday, 20th October, 2019.

The Disaster Management Department, please, your quickest response to guide and direct the traumatised victims, Kadavu hates your 'better late than never' attitude, work on the climate change or climate chaos indicator. The Kadavu Church in Suva and its Church Choir for achieving its 48 years - good celebrations this Saturday, everyone is welcomed to the John Wesley Primary School this Saturday.

Recognising, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and respecting the Presidency as the symbol of national unity which is immune and above from politics and even sanctioned in this House, except by way of motion. We, the Opposition, take an exception on some of the issues raised in His Excellency's Address, given our past experience and feel of the present geo-political and socio-economic pulse of the nation.

At the outset of my response on His Excellency's Address, from the throne of His Excellency, if it was anything, then a reassurance of this Government wants to continue to move in that direction of dictatorship as is the legislation agenda, policies, programmes and intents of the Government is spelt out in his speech.

According to the Constitution and is as the tradition, His Excellency is perceived to be the Head of the State and is seen as a symbol of national unity. It is not His Excellency's Address but the Government's agenda that is usually pronounced on the occasion of the opening of each Session of Parliament.

If that is so true about the matter, then I must add that the Address made today on 12th November as was the one made last year, compromises the independence and significance of the Presidency, symbolising the unity of the nation.

In a nutshell, before I dissect some important parts of the Presidential Address, which are very few anyway, it is reflective of the narcissistic attitude that this Government has unashamedly adopted in recent times.

Needless to say, it needs to be reminded that Narcissus's love affair with his own image, shadow and reflection was both, the cause of celebration as well as its termination of life when Narcissus's beauty faded away. That is what I see happening by each passing and more so confirmed by the results of the last General Elections.

The area that almost everyone who has the interest of the nation at heart wanted to hear was on the compliance by Fiji on its international commitments, particularly with regard to the following matters:

- Miserably failing to adhere to early warning signs and signals issued on the current Fiji economy by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- Making a joke by defending, instead of admitting its vulnerability of the blacklisting by the European Union (EU).
- Unashamedly seeking to defend and counter the observations made by the UNERP Report and still wasting taxpayers' money by sending a large delegation to Geneva, Switzerland, for that purpose.
- Not gathering the necessary courage and will to face up to the ultimatum issued by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which expires this month.
- Still no word in the pronouncement by His Excellency the President on the negotiation of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus status on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or expression of any intent as how Fiji is going to comply and when it is going to ratify the reminder of the United Nations Conventions and Treaties pertaining to basic human rights.

The lack of mention and, again, absence of the courage and will of the Government of the day on the above international commitments, shows that we are slowly but gradually becoming an isolated State, whose international stature is questionable insofar as our commitment to global, regional and local peace and development is concerned. That reflects very poorly on the already dismal record of this Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a mouthful to say and I seek the forbearance of this House for that matter. I note with appreciation the remark made by His Excellency the President on the 2013 Constitution and more so, the Bill of Rights contained therein.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the spirit of those rights enshrined in the Constitution are brutally wounded by a string of draconian decrees cemented by the same Constitution. In this respect, I am alluding to the Freedom of Association and the right to employment, eclipsed by a string of draconian legislations.

Those strings of super decrees have crippled the voice of the workers, made the trade union movement powerless and emboldened unscrupulous elite interests from Fiji and overseas, to exploit and enslave our workers as and when they wish.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Fiji's own context, what would those ILO Standards mean? Let me summarize as follows:

- Decent and meaningful employment.
- Respect and recognition of worker rights.
- Right to collective bargaining and respect for trade unions.
- Right to Freedom of Expression of workers and trade unions.
- Autonomous powers of trade unions to organise and conduct their own elections.
- Immediately stop all surveillance, acts of intimidation, threatening and harassments of all trade union members and collective worker initiatives or activities, either by security forces, intelligence bureau personnel or undercover agents.
- Right to strike, having exhausted all the avenues of negotiations.
- A consultative review of the Civil Service Reforms.
- Trade union executives shall enjoy the right to have a personal political affiliation.
- Take steps to ensure, maintain and enhance the independence of the Employment Tribunal and empower the Tribunal with adequate service and supplies to conduct its work.
- Amend and where necessary, repeal the various draconian legislation that hinders or criminalises trade union activities, while allowing workers and trade unions with immediate effect to assemble and march the streets.

The list sounds impressive as it is to those who respect the rule of law, human rights, good governance and democracy, but to those who have developed a trait of governing by use of excessive authority, that appears to be a case for nightmare. It is a nightmare for them because they have not been able to transform themselves. They have failed to adapt themselves to a free, just and democratic culture.

That brings me to conclude on Labour Relations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that these excesses by the Bainimarama leadership and the FijiFirst Government now justify and bring out in the open the reasons for over-regulating and over-taxing the lives of the Fijian people. They are not treating people like human beings but machines that this has worsened the situation further, forcing our own people to live and work as slaves in their homeland. The intent is to keep enough people criminalised and living in Fiji to continue to fund for their self-enrichment and political extravaganza.

On equal citizenry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government has been blowing its trumpet on the notion of equal citizenry because as they say it was introduced to Fiji for the first time ever by the 2013 Constitution. Since then, the FijiFirst Government has continuously used this as its rallying

cry, exploiting the maxim that we are all Fijians which according to them is something they introduced.

Sir, two days ago in this Parliament during the Prime Minister's address, it was clear that they hang all their achievements on this. We are all Fijians with equal citizenry for the first time in our history. What does that mean? Once and for all, we should at least consider that equal citizenry means if we were to decipher why the Government continues to shout this from the rooftops at every opportunity, to begin with, equal citizenry, as they say, it is not a privilege but a right. Why?

At the time of the French Revolution, equal citizenship was premised on the assumption that all human beings are inherently equal, it was prominent. The struggle against the feudal hierarchy and the push to overcome relegation as the King's subject.

Accordingly, equal citizenship was designed to achieve and promote two kinds of equality: equality as opposed to (feudal) status and equality in terms of the citizen's right to self-government (as opposed to a subject's duty to submit to the will of the monarch). Thus equality of status and equality in the right to self-government provide a baseline for and minimum concrete content to equal citizenship.

The point to note is that, it is safe to assume the original meaning of "equal citizenship" from the French Revolution is also applicable in Fiji. That is equality of status (we are equal under the law) and the right to self-government through elected representatives. Clearly, this has always been the meaning given to citizenship in previous constitutions, however, what is new is that all citizens will now become known as Fijians. However, does that make any difference? Different ethnic groups in Fiji given that we are all Fijians - does that mean that there are no ethnic differences?

We continue to discourage talking about ethnicity but it is rather amusing to find ethnicity being mentioned in the preamble of our Constitution. That skins the cat to the bone.

On the Fisheries sector, Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of points to make as Shadow Minister for Fisheries. Allow me to begin on a positive note by commending and thanking all those that participated and ensured a successful year of the FJ Movement fishing ban which is in line with:

- 1) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 - No poverty; and
- 2) Sustainable Development Goal 7 - Partnership to achieve the SDGs.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, fish, as a staple diet in Fiji and the Pacific, is now endangered by the number of factors which I sum up as follows:

- Over-harvesting of marine resources;
- Damages caused on the marine food chain by the release of toxic waste and toxic materials;
- Dumping of foreign articles and objects, threatening marine life and local environment;
- Seabed mining; and
- Damages and exploitation of fishing areas caused during exploration on the seabed and beneath seabed minerals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge that the survival and development of Fiji as a tropical and Small Island Developing State is dependent heavily upon the ridge-to-reef agro biodiversity bequeath to us by our Creator and sustained by our successive generations through their traditional knowledge and wisdom as much as their compassion for nature and for future generations.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition is further aggrieved at the grant of foreshore leases or what is being referred to as “wet leases”. I think we should be kidding ourselves if we are not honest enough to look around as we tour the country on numerous examples of how the grant of these wet leases have damaged our environment and affecting the marine areas and threatening marine life.

The following are two fundamental points that I wish to raise in this regard:

1. The respect, recognition and enhancement of rights of the resource owners as was the intent of the *iQoliqoli* Bill and now compromised by the removal of the entrenched legislation under our previous Constitution.
2. The dreaded prospect of environmental exploitation and avenue for the loot of marine resources which is and may be caused under the guise of research and explorations or economic development and investment.

That makes sanitization by the relevant authorities and implementation of various laws and regulations important to an Act and measures of enforcement rather than just lip-service by way of rosy speeches in the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with that short and succinct response, I hope that the message from this side of the House is clear to the Government side which needs to do which it is not doing, to protect our marine areas and marine life compromising Sustainable Development Goal 1 - No Poverty.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I now intend to speak on the Kava Industry given the importance of the industry to my Province of Kadavu and several other provinces of Fiji. The first issue that I wish to raise in this debate is that of the proposed Kava Council in the Kava Industry Bill which I see as a duplication of the role as well as the powers and functions of the Kava Dealers Association.

The questions in that regard are whether the proposed Council will replace the Association, whether it is designed to weaken the Association to play a totally new role altogether than what the Association is doing right now?

My understanding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from our recent past experience with this Government has been the change of names of institutions and structures which does not make much difference to what the status of that industry is. If that is the same ploy the Government is seeking to deploy with the kava industry then I must say without hesitation that it is ridiculous and deplored by all the stakeholders in the kava industry.

Secondly, Sir, let me question the rationale and wisdom behind the move to regulate the kava industry. Is this move to empower the kava growers and dealers or is it another trap to extract the much-needed funds by way of taxes and levies to continue the fundraising for this cash-strapped dictatorship?

Thirdly, as the indicators show that the GDP component of the kava industry is on the rise which is a positive sign for the future of this ago-based industry, that being so, the Opposition wishes to question the Government as to what kind of assistance has been rendered to the kava growers and dealers to expand the scope of activities or what are the plans in place to do so in the near future?

I am more than excited and pleased to note that the announcement by His Excellency the President about the planning and build up towards the Fiji Day Golden Jubilee Celebrations next year expressing the hope that the Government will be inclusive in its approach and planning for the events to enable every Fijian to have the ownership of the celebrations.

Whilst on public holidays, I am extremely grateful to the past and present governments for having retained Diwali and Prophet Mohammed Birthdays as public holidays in Fiji. It is time that Government (Ministry of iTaukei Affairs) and the Honourable Assistant Minister reinstate Ratu Sukuna Day instead of the Constitution Day, also consider national scale of celebrations on the occasion of Annual Indigenous Day for the natives of Fiji and Rotuma which is in line with the spirit of the Deed of Cessions of both Fiji in 1874 and Rotuma in 1879.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the short Address from the throne depicts a few things:

- i) Firstly, playing double role, excelling in politics of diversion, using taxpayers funds to unashamedly run propaganda to hoodwink the same taxpayers and continue its systematic implementation of cultural autonomy;
- ii) Secondly, the promises made to the voters of this country to obtain the not-so-handsome mandate last year by this Government as it was in 2014 remains unfulfilled and not reflected on the agenda spelled out in the speech by His Excellency the President. That is not only masquerading with the mandate of the people but a sheer act of betrayal of the faith and trust of all those who voted this Government into office.
- iii) Thirdly, the Government has lost the plot and is looking for answers for its exit strategy. It is caught up in the web of its own conundrums.

That sums up the cause of widespread disenchantment and growing Opposition to this Government by its passing day. As the loyal Opposition of the people of Fiji, we have a sacred duty to our country and its people, and we will not shy away from being their voices and true representatives here in this House.

Therefore with these few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year to all the Honourable Members and their families. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have reservations, until then, I cannot support the motion. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Simione Rasova for his contribution to the debate on the President's Address. I now give the floor to the Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Inia Seruiratu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to join my government colleagues in expressing my support for His Excellency the President's clarity of vision as articulated in his speech that opened Parliament last week. I believe His Excellency's speech captures the compelling national vision that Parliament needs to have. It is certainly the pillar of the Honourable Prime Minister's work and outlook and the bedrock of our foreign and domestic policies.

His Excellency, very rightly, mentioned the importance of our Constitution. We are all in this august House because of it and our services are defined by its parameters.

His Excellency was most gracious and patriotic in his Address at the opening session of Parliament. It reflects his love for our beloved nation and are the words of a true patriot. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst government is duty-bound as true patriots to enhance the lives for all Fijians which we have done over the recent years and we will continue to do so, but the Opposition is more interested in distorting facts and truths, instilling fear, stirring trouble without recognising that there is a reason why the people of Fiji put them on that side of the House and the FijiFirst Government on this side of the House.

His Excellency's speech should not be a political football for the Opposition. It is very disrespectful by the Opposition to use such negative tones and inappropriate language to respond to His Excellency and for the Leader of the Opposition to say that it is the most ungracious that he has heard in the Parliament of Fiji. To me, it is unbecoming, arrogant, shameful and disrespectful. Let me say this to the Opposition now, the Honourable Prime Minister will not step down, nor this government, not now and not even in the next Election when we will prove ourselves again to the people of Fiji come 2022.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- But on the other hand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will ask the SODELPA Members of the Opposition to do the honourable thing as well - ask your Leader to step down.

(Acclamation)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- It will be good for your Party and it will be good for the country. You are the Social Democratic Liberal Party but you have a staunch nationalist as your leader. That is why you will always have this strategic paralysis, the inconsistency that I have always talked about in this Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a lot of apprehension in the country leading up to the Elections and even now after Elections because of the Leader of the Opposition back in politics in Fiji. I say this because I love this country, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There is a lot of discussion about the economy. I have been doing my analysis before Elections and post Elections, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is a lot of apprehension, fear in our communities and in the business communities as well as, Mr. Speaker, because of Mr. Rabuka's return to Parliament.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- And that is why I am asking the SODELPA Members of the Opposition, do the honourable thing, ask your leader to step down.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition has run out of ideas, this is not the place to be calling for the Government to stand down which reflects their shallow thinking and lack of vision. I would have thought, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that with some experience and wisdom on their side, they would have been a bit more thoughtful in their responses to His Excellency's Address.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Tell them.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- They cannot run Government on their trump cards of ethnicity, race-based politics and land rights alone.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not hear any compelling national vision from the other side. They are only good at running down Government. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Honourable Prime Minister is a man of integrity and vision. He wants to ensure that every child has access to free education, ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- ... women and children to feel safe in their communities and every Fijian to make a decent living and be treated with dignity and respect. In order to do this, the Government is working tirelessly to:

- build infrastructure;
- boost agricultural sector;
- attract foreign investors;
- increasing access to quality education; and
- making efforts to enhancing national security.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- These are the very things mandated for us by our Constitution. Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency rightly pointed out the importance our Constitution has in the setting of the direction for a prosperous and peaceful Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is for Fijians like Shaveen Kumar, Siteri and Kelera Nokilevu, Josua from Moala in Lau, Joselyn Mani, Nix Cagilaba and his dive crew from Beqa and others that the Honourable Prime Minister has worked tirelessly to ensure that their fundamental rights are guaranteed under the Constitution.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we celebrate World Children's Day and we also celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the

Child, and it is great to see the Honourable Members of the House wearing blue to support this day. As we celebrate this day, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister has just signed a pledge to reaffirm Fiji's commitment towards this very important Convention.

And I fully support your statement that our children are telling us loud and clear that it is time for every child to have a right. Our children's message to us is clear and we have heard from His Excellency and this is incumbent upon us therefore to do our part and help transform our children's lives and protect their rights. To disregard our children's voice, as suggested by the Opposition, is not only against the Constitution, it is ridiculous to say the least.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I applaud His Excellency for highlighting the names and contributions of our young Fijians and in the same breath emphasizing the importance of leadership.

The people of Fiji have entrusted this Government with this mandate in recognition of this and our peers on the global stage have also given us a platform like no government before. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are well on our way to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals that shape our 2030 and 2050 development priorities. The Honourable Attorney-General presented Fiji's Voluntary National Review of Progress on the SDGs last year to the UN.

We showed to the world that we are making consistent, sustained progress. The United Nations has declared 2020-2030 as the Decade of Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. At the moment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working with all ministries and stakeholders in the monitoring of all arrangements that Government has signed with partners to ensure that we maximise and fully realise the potential these arrangements offer for the benefit of our people.

In our missions abroad, our multilateral approach seeks strategic leadership on issues such as human rights, climate change and oceans while bilaterally, we seek to enhance economic diplomacy and defence and security cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through our effort to increase trade, tourism and investment into Fiji, we are working with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism in supporting their strategic direction, including the establishment of a new office in India.

We continue to look to our diaspora communities in the provision of our consular services and encourage them to reinvest into Fiji and support our communities as we have benefited greatly from these engagements. Our missions abroad are working tirelessly in reaching out to governments, non-State actors and the public in their areas of responsibilities to promote Fiji. This is the Blueprint that we work on. I thank His Excellency for highlighting the benefits attained by Fijians because of this steadfast approach.

Part of achieving our national vision is also submitting to international benchmarks for human rights implementation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we take these international benchmarks very seriously.

The Fijian Government is also firmly committed to advancing and protecting the fundamental principles and values of universal human rights enunciated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights while cultivating an ethos of a responsible human rights culture.

I am proud to inform that the Fijian Government, through the leadership of our Prime Minister, the Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, has implemented the majority of the recommendations from the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). More importantly, Fiji has not just worked to implement the recommendations. Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were a total of 242 recommendations and we had accepted 187 of those recommendations. Therefore we have embraced change and shown leadership on global human rights issues.

The UN Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres congratulated Fiji in this very august House earlier this year, for its strong, persistent leadership on climate and oceans diplomacy. We will not rest on our laurels. These are crucial priorities that we will continue to emphasise in our foreign policy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are building for the future. We are setting in place foundation stones that will enable our children to live in a better Fiji. To this effect, we have not just become members of the Human Rights Council, the first Pacific Small Island Developing State (PSIDS) to do so but we are also a Vice President of the Human Rights Council. We have not just ratified the UN Convention on Transnational Crime and its three Protocols, we chair the UN Office on Drugs and Crime Working Group on Trafficking in Persons. Aligning ourselves to these international frameworks ensures that we meet our challenges head on.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency noted that there was no more work to be done and that we needed to turn our attention to the mountain of progress left to ascend. At the regional level, Mr. Speaker, Sir, work continues as the Honourable Prime Minister attended the PIF Leaders Meeting in Tuvalu in August where he reaffirmed Fiji's commitment to safeguarding and protecting the interest of Pacific Island countries.

In 2021, Fiji will host the Forum Leaders Meeting to mark the 50th Anniversary of the establishment of the organisation.

In July this year, Fiji chaired the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) and have agreed for a number of reforms and review to ensure that the organisation remains relevant and is able to meet the needs and priorities of Pacific Small Island Developing States. I am pleased to also say before this august House that the leaders have also appointed a Fijian in the like of Ambassador Solo Mara to be at the helm of the organisation.

Managing the geo-political tensions of the various state and institutional actors in our region is ongoing. We are well aware of what is at stake and continue to steer our ship in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is keen to provide leadership for small island States. As such, Fiji is currently the Chair of the Pacific Small Island Developing States and is providing leadership in the UN to advance the interest of the Pacific island countries globally. Likewise, we are the Chair of the Forum of Small States of the World Bank.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we celebrate our country's 50th Anniversary of Fiji's Independence from Great Britain in 2020, we want to be proud of our collective global achievements as Fijians. I hope the Opposition will attend this celebration because none of them attended the last Independence Day celebration expect the Honourable Rasova.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of our continuous contribution to global peace, our Forces continue to receive high accolades for their outstanding service in war-torn regions such as Yemen, Sinai, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, South Sudan and Israel, to name a few. We, as a nation can be proud of our long contribution in bringing peace to these regions.

Fiji continues to serve the international community with great pride through its peacekeeping operations. We are stably deployed in United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and in Iraq and on levels that we can support well and maintain. We have worked very closely with Australia and New Zealand in preparing our troops to the high standards required by the United Nations in its Action for Peace (A4P) agenda.

As the Minister responsible for both Defence and Foreign Affairs, I cannot stress how important UN peacekeeping is for our foreign policy priorities. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to peacekeeping is the continued efforts to integrate more women into our Forces. I am proud to report that our contribution of servicewomen is the highest ever employed and this is directly in line with United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace and Security and, of course, the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5. Our effort will not stop there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our endeavour now is to enhance our recruitment of servicewomen for both local and overseas deployment, hence surpassing the required threshold of women in our Forces.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Police Force is well on par with the advancement of women within its rank. A testament of this is the current appointment of Fiji's first ever female Police Commissioner on a UN mission. Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry has constitutional obligations to provide for a safe and secure environment for all Fijians.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that our strategic defence partnerships with Australia, New Zealand, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea and USA and others have enhanced our capabilities in peacekeeping, hydrography, disarmament, search and rescue operations, counter-terrorism, Force development in personnel, infrastructure and legislation review respectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with sentiments expressed by His Excellency with regards to the review of the Republic Fiji Military Forces Act 1949, I am pleased to inform this august House that this is currently being undertaken with the assistance of the New Zealand Defence Force Legal Team. In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is working in close collaboration with the Australian Government on a proposal for the development of a Pacific Security College which will be a milestone for Fiji and the region.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry in collaboration with Leadership Fiji conducted a national dialogue on substance abuse with the theme "Let us talk about it, finding a Fijian solution." This event brought together experts, professionals and survivors who gave the drug situation a human face as they talked about the work that they are doing in combating Fiji's drug problem. More importantly, it showcased Government's inclusivity of CSOs, NGOs and academics in policy formulation that is tailor-made for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to complement this, my Ministry is working with the University of the South Pacific in the development of a Narcotics Mobile App that will enhance the co-operation and coordination of combating illicit drug in the country. This App is in line with Government's overall initiative of "Digital Transformation." This initiative is also in line with our national strategy and our overall national security apparatus.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another key aspect of this strategy is the adverse effects of climate change and our response efforts. I will work closely with the Commander of the RFMF in developing strategies and actions on how we can best assist in responding to security threats brought about by climate change and I would recommend to the Honourable Saukuru not to rely on Al Gore because he is not a scientist. But the best scientific report is the IPCC 1.5 Report which is available, if he wants to know more about what the science is saying.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a matter of fact, the RFMF will participate in a number of planned multi-national exercises with our Defence partners in the upcoming year. This includes Exercise Southern Cross with New Caledonia, Exercise Kakadu in Australia, to name a few, and this is mainly in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) and, of course, the aim of enhancing the capability readiness of the RFMF to respond to disasters within Fiji and the immediate region.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have already addressed this august House that the Fiji Police Force is in a transformation phase. This is aligned with advancing technologies to combat sophisticated crime syndicates and networks that have infiltrated all facets of society. This extends to the ever-increasing cyber security threats and cyber-crime. One only has to log onto social media and witness the multitude of various fake and hate pages to warrant the need to strengthen our cybercrime laws to protect our society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Minister for Defence and National Security, I applaud this move particularly as it will directly empower the Fiji Police Force. They will continue to pursue avenues to strengthen its cybercrime capabilities through the assistance of foreign law enforcement agencies, considering the impact social media has on overall security and the increasing concerns of its abuse. With the backing of this legislation, we are optimistic of seeing a change in the way social media is being used by certain elements of society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recent attacks on police is a grave concern, following the death of the brave Constable Siuta Niumataiwalu. This unfortunate incident displayed the great risks borne by Police Officers on a daily basis and further attests the need to better equip our law enforcement officers with protective equipment, as used by police officers around the world. Moreover, it reinforces our civic responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, again, need to highlight that Government will have some special announcements to make as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of our Independence.

I wish to conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in reiterating His Excellency's call to the Honourable Members of this House to take interest and speak on matters of national interest. That path must begin here in Parliament where we must show that we are true role models to the public, that we serve in our quest to make our nation greater, and I fully support the motion before the House. Thank you.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Minister, Lt. Col. Inia Seruiratu for his contribution to the debate, and I now give the floor to the Honourable Peceli Vosanibola. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; Sir, I join all the Honourable Members in this august House to have my say in this debate on the Address by His Excellency the President, on Tuesday, 12th November, 2019.

It was a great pleasure and privilege indeed, sitting here in this Chamber for the last two days, observing the Honourable Members from this side of the House, laying their case before the highest court of this land and via the media and social media platforms to the people of Fiji.

I have exercised much restraint in the last two days to hold the fire in me, not disrupting anyone holding the floor and it is my fervent hope that the same courtesy would be shown to me, although some of the Honourable Members from the other side of the House may beg to differ.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Address from the Head of the State should signify a few things which I want to share:

1. It gives an account of what the Government in office has achieved out of the mandate that was bequeathed to it by the people.
2. It gives an outline of the future policy and legislative agenda and direction of the Government in office;
3. It evaluates the work of the Government being accountable to Parliament and at the same time the tribute it has paid to His Excellency the President on the pronouncements being made from the high office of the land.
4. It gives a respectful opportunity to the Opposition to present an alternative set of ideas and probe the government on its conduct of public affairs and policy.
5. It gives a sense of direction to the people where the Government in office is leading the country to and how it intends to govern and manage the State.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is rather sad and unfortunate that the Address we are debating now lacks basically all these important attributes, which makes a mockery of the parliamentary process and renders this Government ideologically bankrupt.

On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the address prepared for His Excellency this year is in contrast to all the speeches delivered from the throne so far since the inception of this parliamentary practice in the history of Fiji, was full of praise, aimed at creating a feel-good image against the backdrop widespread public anger, best at story-telling style and devoid of any hope for a better future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot has been said on the response towards the motion before the House for the last two days. The responses from this side of the House revealed the reality and the truth in regard to the performances of the Government through bad governance and poor leadership. As stated in the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 25, Verse 11, and I quote: "The right word at the right time is like precious gold set in silver."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it simply means that there is nothing more to conceal or hide in this august House or even on this land. Regrettably, our nation is likened to a lost soul and the secular belief that God has no business to interfere with the affairs of the State.

It promotes man as God and may I remind the ruling Government that there is a time for everything and the biblical story in the book of Daniel, Chapter 5 which unfolds the ruling of the Almighty God to King Belshazzar due to poor leadership, bad governance and secularism whereby during the height of festivities, mysterious words were written on the wall, which I quote: "*Mene, Mene Tekel Upharsin.*"

Daniel interprets the words to King Belshazzar that God has numbered the days of his Kingdom and has brought it to an end. He has weighed him on his balance scale and he fell short of what it takes to be King.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of nation-building and development is leadership and good governance. Allow me to deliberate some quotes on leadership such as:

1. The true test of leadership is how well you function in a crisis;
2. The most powerful leadership tool is your own personal example;
3. A real leader faces the music even when he does not like the tune; lastly
4. (By Martin Luther King Junior) We need leaders not in love with money but in love with justice, not in love with publicity, but in love with humanity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few quotes, the Government and its leadership can be easily reflected upon and no one is above the law as fittingly written in the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 25, Verse 2, and I quote: "When justice rules a nation, everyone is glad; when injustice rules, everyone groans."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the mention of school children who were definitely taught by their teachers what to say on the Constitution rather than the words they used coming out of volition or from their own hearts and minds is a glaring example of the melodrama in which this Government has excelled at altering opinions in its favour. That trick worked well in the past but the numbers of those being tricked by such tactics is depleting faster than the ozone layer.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot always build a future for our children but we can build and nurture our children for the future through inclusive, equitable and strong leadership that listens. It appears that political change is taking the better of the language of climate change espoused by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we on this side of the House wish to place on record that this Constitution:

1. Is crowned as the supreme law of this land on the carnage of democracy that unseated the democratically elected SDL-Labour Multi-Party Government in 2006.
2. Was made over the dead body of the 1997 Constitution, pending the implementation of the ruling of the Fiji Court of Appeal in April 2009.
3. Was devised upon the pile of ashes of the burnt Ghai Commission Report, which reflected the wishes of the people of Fiji on what type of Constitution we desired.

4. Was designed to grant immunity to the *coup* makers and save them from the long arm of the law.
5. Belittles, dilutes, makes a joke, shows gross contempt and has trampled upon the ideals and principles of the Deed of Cession, group rights, rights of the indigenous people, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and every fabric of justice and good governance;
6. Encourages secularism, violation of human rights, inhumane and degrading treatment as was proven recently when the Commissioner of Police, who justified the arrest of a 16-year old student by persons purporting to be military officers and beaten up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a few words on the national economy. In February this year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) issued a damning Report on the Fiji economy and warned the Government of the implications of its socialist, slanted, populist policies and programmes.

Then in June 2019, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji was blacklisted by the European Union (EU) and followed the issuance of an ultimatum by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to Fiji to review our labour laws or face consequences for the same.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now let us look at remedial actions being taken by this Government in respect of these important stately matters:

1. They rejected the recommendations made by the IMF and instead, chose to play the ostrich game; and
2. They continue to fiddle with the EU Blacklisting;

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the implication of these doldrums are already being felt by the ordinary people, and let me cite some examples of their pains and sufferings in this House:

1. Lack of funds for capital developments compromising the delivery of better State services;
2. Stagnant performance of resource-based sectors and loss of jobs;
3. Weakening Fiji dollars and liquidity turning in gas and fading away like zoom, instead of boom;
4. Limited availability of credit facilities and discrimination against locals to enter business;
5. Plummeted rating for 'ease to do business in Fiji' in comparison to the past;
6. High inflation with a sky-rocketing cost of living unprecedented in the history of Fiji;
7. Lack of investor-confidence and failure to create meaningful jobs;

8. Breakdown in law and order situation, substance abuse and increase in crimes against morality;
9. Poor network services, water cuts and power blackouts which are becoming a regular feature of life in Fiji now; and
10. Public infrastructure, despite millions of dollars of investment adorned by rotten jetties and roads decorated by all-time world famous potholes, even on the newly-built roads.

These issues of fact of the ordinary Fijians, Mr. Speaker, Sir, draw home a few valid points which are:

1. Poor or egocentric leadership and unsound policy-making;
2. Wastage of public funds and no compliance to required standards;
3. Incompetent management of public utilities;
4. Lack of strategy to bail out the Fiji economy from its state of decline; and
5. Government priorities and programmes having gone wrong and proving counter-productive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a loyal, caring and responsible Opposition of the people of Fiji, SODELPA's policy on the resource-based sectors, specifically forestry and fisheries, are guided by twin-pronged approach:

1. Sustainable development of these natural resources; and
2. Creating meaningful jobs and adding value to the national economy.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Shadow Minister for Forestry, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Honourable Minister for Forests, staff and relevant partners for achieving the target in the planting of one million trees.

That being so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to address some of the pressing issues pertaining to the forestry sector specifically as follows:

1. To consider the repeal of Mahogany Industry Restructure Decree.
2. Return of pine and mahogany ownership to the resources owners.
3. Implementation of REDD+ Project of 4 million trees in four years in partnership with the landowners and with a view of food security.
4. Resolve the deadlock between the Ministry of Forestry and sawmillers with regard to the size of logs to be harvested;
5. Review of terms and conditions of grant of licences to logs which is discriminatory and reduces resource owners to mere spectators in the forestry sector;
6. Low investment in the forestry as a resource-based sector thus compromising productivity, balance of trade, prospect for further earning of foreign exchange and job losses or creation of no new jobs in this sector;
7. Encourage the food basket concept to enable resource owners and those engaged and dependent on subsistence livelihood to grow and nurture more fruit or food-oriented trees as well as those nurturing our bees for the purpose of pollination to ensure food security.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thanking and endorsing the comments made by my colleague, the Honourable Simione Rasova on the fisheries sector, I wish to add a few words on the same, beginning with a call for the restoration and enhancement of the rights of the owners of the *i qoliqoli* as the inherent and rightful owners of the fishing rights which has been grossly compromised by the successive legislations since 2006.

Secondly, let me draw the attention of this House and also to my *Naita*, the Honourable Minister of Fisheries to the issue of port charges which embattles the fisheries sector further. Let me cite some examples of what I am talking about, and that is the increase in Port charges as follows:

1. Levuka Wharf - by 130 percent;
2. Levuka (Pilot charges) - by 335 percent;
3. Suva Wharf - by 9 percent; and
4. Suva (Pilot charges) - by 302 percent.

Sir, I am quoting from page B8 of the *Fiji Sun* of Saturday, 2nd November, 2019 because if I quote the same thing from the *Fiji Times*, the other side of the House would not trust it, so it is coming from their own mouthpiece.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the next page of the same publication, there is a bold headline, and I quote, "Ministry of Fisheries to attract more vessels as numbers drop". That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is an evidence of how the increase in port charges have hit our ports and the fishing industry. The failure of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Fisheries to tap on the potential we have so far is developing a vibrant aqua-cultural industry that has left those farmers engaged in this activity of their own stranded and without the resources they need for developing and expanding the scope of aqua-cultural activities. This is a lucrative area for resource owners which can allow them the opportunity to blend their traditional skills and modern knowledge to help in the growth of this industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must also point out the ongoing problems and the incomplete programme for the people and Province of Lomaiviti which have been highlighted in this House:

1. There are ongoing issues at PAFCO which need mitigation;
2. Workers at the PAFCO are granted only four working days per week;
3. Pacific Fishing Company Limited (PAFCO) closes on public holidays;
4. We are aggrieved by the port charges which discourage vessels to board at Levuka;
5. The heritage sites damaged by *TC Winston*, which are in fact world heritage sites, remain to be repaired and restored its glamour;
6. The copra industry in the Province needs revitalisation given the damages caused by *TC Winston*;
7. The rehabilitation works in respect of several villages on Koro, Ovalau and Batiki islands that were devastated by *TC Winston* and the storms that followed in its aftermath, remains incomplete.

I hope the Government takes note of these matters and takes appropriate action to remedy the situation and ease the plight of the people of Lomaiviti.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President made mention about Fiji planning to commemorate its Golden Jubilee Independence in 2020. Therefore due to the leadership crisis, financial crisis, drug crisis, non-communicable disease crisis, pains, suffering in silence and stress on the Fijian population, I recommend that we celebrate our 50th Year of Independence with ethnic, physical and spiritual cleansing and healing process, as stated in the *Holy Bible*, II Chronicles, Chapter 7, Verse 14, when God Almighty appeared to King Solomon in a dream and said, and I quote:

“then if my people who are called by My Name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from Heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I hope the Government shuns its confrontational style of functioning and becomes inclusive so that not only some of those chosen few but all the Fijian people have a sense of belonging and ownership of those events being planned for next year. That inclusivity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, must begin with the Opposition Members, community and religious leaders being invited to be part of the Committee planning for the Golden Jubilee Celebration next year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the ruling FijiFirst Party’s poor leadership and bad governance during the first year after the 2018 Elections, I therefore join the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and all my colleagues in the Opposition to demand the resignation of this Government and request His Excellency the President to call for fresh Elections to pave the way to salvage and secure our nation.

With these words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish each and everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Sir, I cannot support the motion as it is before the House.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Peceli Vosanibola for his contribution to the debate on His Excellency the President’s Address.

Honourable Members, for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to Sitting times, I am allowing the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move a procedural suspension. I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament, the Honourable Inia Seruiratu, to move his motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23 be suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items on today’s Order Paper.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament, to speak on this motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Again, we still have a few speakers in today's batting order and, of course, we also have two Bills to be tabled, and thus we request for the extension of the Sitting of Parliament beyond 4.30 p.m. today. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Government. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion. Honourable Bulitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are in agreement with the motion, just a concern from this side of the House given that there are only about four more speakers to speak and also two Bills to be tabled, we agree with the suspension, but just to continue and not to have afternoon tea, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I did not hear the last part of that.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Like yesterday, Sir, you allowed the motion then we went for afternoon tea. Because of some commitments on this side, if we can just complete the batting order and also the Bills and have no afternoon tea.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of Government in Parliament, you have the floor on a right of reply.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I have nothing further to add there, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion. The question is,

That under Standing 6 that so much of Standing Order 23 be suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. to complete the remaining items on today's Order Paper.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we still have four speakers and we have two Bills. I have taken into account what the Honourable Bulitavu has said but at times, I suffer from TB and therefore we need to take an adjournment for refreshments at this time.

We will suspend proceedings for refreshments in the Big Committee Room, and we will resume in half an hour's time. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.41 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.14 p.m.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on His Excellency the President's Address, and I now call on the Honourable Rohit Sharma. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: Good afternoon and *Namaste* to you all.

I rise this afternoon to contribute towards my support to His Excellency the President's gracious speech for the Opening of 2019 to 2020 Session of the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I proceed further, as a former school teacher taught for 24 years and taught thousands of children and made differences in their lives, I would like to wish our lovely children of our beloved country a Happy World Children's Day, especially to my two lovely children back at home, namely Sukritah Sharma and Ribhav Sharma of Bhawani Dayal Memorial Primary School.

Children are considered as the building blocks of the strong nation. Children are very small but have the capability to change the nation positively. They are the responsible citizens of tomorrow as development of the country lies in their hands. Children are leaders of tomorrow so they need to get respect, special care and protection from their parents, teachers and other members of the family, and not to be cursed.

We all are God's children then who is Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua to curse us, or specially our children? Justifying that, it was done out of anger in this august House is just not acceptable. She should do the honourable thing that is to resign from Parliament ...

(Desk Thumping by Honourable Government Members)

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- ... Rather than trying to be the role model for our children. I challenge her if she really means that she is sorry then just resign from the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Children's Day celebration reminds us remind about the importance of the children in the family, society and country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the following are the common rights of the children which the Bainimarama Government has taken well care of, and that they should:

- get proper care and love by the parents, family and especially leaders of this country;
- get healthy food, clean clothes and security;
- get healthy living environment where they can feel safe at home, school or other place;
- get proper and good level of education;
- be provided with special care if they are disabled or sick

Let us join our hands together and take a pledge to secure the present and future of the country's leaders to make a beautiful nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned by His Excellency, we are all looking forward to our 50th Anniversary of our Independence. As rightly pointed out, it will give us a great chance to ponder on our journey as a nation and the lessons learnt. At the same time, it will give us a great opportunity to celebrate our success stories. I am glad that the 50th Anniversary would be celebrated under the 2013 Constitution. The Constitution which is true sign of independence, true democracy and equality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no better time to make good use of the opportunity provided by the Government in educating our children than now. The Bainimarama-led Government has invested a lot in our education system with the objectives to advance Fiji to a level that is at par with the developed world. We want Fiji to be an educated country with high literacy rate, to be in the forefront in research and development, to be the centre for businesses and finance and to be a leader, especially in the Pacific region and in the world. That vision can only be achieved if we invest our resources, time and efforts towards the education of our children. Their education should be our priority, therefore, I urge you all in this august House for your continuous support. Let us give them the best we can as they will replace us and will continue our legacy to their children and to their children's children for future generation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government believes in true democracy, transparency, equality without any form of discrimination such as gender, race, colour and ethnicity, and it is this faith held by every Fijian provided through vast array of political, civil and socio-economic rights enshrined in our Constitution and the Government's commitment towards a bright and secured future for all.

I believe there have been prudent and disciplined financial decisions made to ensure that we achieve a balance in terms of expenditure and revenue and investment with strong relationship with development partners along with the extreme climate vulnerabilities we face. The FijiFirst Government has always invested in our people by caring for those who are vulnerable, building resilience to worsening climate impacts, empowering the disadvantaged to lift themselves out of poverty and giving all our people a fair shot at success in our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, tremendous efforts are being made by the FijiFirst Government in looking after our oceans and the protection of our marine resources. We would like to have our oceans free from plastic, fair share of royalty is given to the landlords, over-fishing and industrial dumping.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our nation has a strong economic policy and planning that we wish to see our economy prosper in the near future. Our Honourable Prime Minister is strengthening our relationships with the emerging powers of Asia such as India. Honourable Prime Minister ensured that we take an active stance on climate change and do our best to ensure the health of this planet for generations to come.

He also ensured that we continue to create opportunities for all Fijians by investing wisely in education, training and infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, Sir, our 2013 Constitution is a landmark achievement for a great nation that has ensured we all are equal and at the same time guaranteeing opportunities for all. It has also laid a solid foundation for the future growth and progress of our nation. It has also given great hope to our younger generation to forge ahead with much vigour and enthusiasm as this great Constitution supports them in every way.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as His Excellency has stated in his Address that Parliament Standing Committees play a pivotal role in ensuring that opinions and ideas are brought to light and auctioning, thus paving way for greater participation and inclusiveness of our citizens. As His Excellency has stated that we, Committee Members, must engage with the public to ensure greater achievement. As a result, our Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, on a number of occasions have done public consultations and reported back to this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as rightly pointed out by His Excellency that our rural development programmes are on the forefront of the Government agenda, more roads, bridges and roadside stalls have been built to ensure our citizens get better access to our towns and cities for the purpose of business and also doing business in the locality. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in an unprecedented scale, our landowners have been engaged to ensure that their land is used productively, thus, benefiting their own communities and households. It has also given them the opportunity to actively participate in the nation's economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our leap towards technological advancement to digitise Fiji has been embraced with open arms by our responsible citizens. It has provided a great platform for our young entrepreneurs to do business in a smart way. Our relatively though small economy, has maintained a steady growth. Our role as Honourable Members of this august House is to give positive feedbacks to the members of the public who are curious to know the developments in our economy and impact of measures taken. As rightly pointed out by His Excellency that we must not politicise our economy.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Hear, hear!

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is noteworthy to say that our younger generation has seized the opportunity to start new businesses, taking advantage of the many tailor-made initiatives, policies and programmes that have enabled, propelled to contribute to our nation's economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we have played a pivotal role in climate change issues and our Honourable Prime Minister has gained respect and adoration not only in the Pacific region but on a global scale as well. With the support and cooperation from our Pacific neighbours, we have played a leading role in enacting the climate change law. Also, our beloved citizens have played an important role in giving valuable ideas in the national consultations on the Climate Change Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a Member of this august Parliament, I therefore, appeal to all Members to join hands together by disseminating our President's message honestly and truthfully to our people, if we are genuine in taking our nation forward. Gone are the days when we lie to people about the truth and let us work responsibly as Members of Parliament for the betterment of our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, finally I believe we can take our nation to new heights if we are united and work together. Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu, dhanyavaad, namaste.*

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Rohit Sharma for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the motion by the Honourable Prime Minister and that is, this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address. Before I speak on the substantive motion, Mr. Speaker, may I refer the House to I John 3:18, "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth." Our love should be just, not just words or talk, but actions.

Before I move into my contribution proper, Sir, I will respond to the Honourable Minister for Defence calling the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to resign. Given that the Honourable Minister had joined the Royal Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) after the Leader of the Opposition's 1987 *coup*, which he had embraced the ideals of the Leader of the Opposition, he had supported the cause of the 1987 *coup*.

Also, Honourable Speaker, Sir, in 1987, the Honourable Prime Minister was the Navy Commander, he was called by the Commander and was asked and offered, whether he could resign or not, but he had accepted the cause of the 1987 *coup*.

The Honourable Prime Minister too who was in charge of the RFMF in 2000 when the political instability took place. He was in charge of the camp in 2000 and for 19 years, he has held this country into instability and we have reached a deteriorating state in our economy because of him. Why could he not restore the Labour Government in the Year 2000?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Do not point!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Why could he not restore the Labour Government in the Year 2000? All that, Honourable Speaker, points to a leader, a Prime Minister that needs to resign.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency, as an honourable man, tried his very best to put to the nation the sunny side of our national condition, but he knew in his heart that it is not true.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- How do you know?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a villager in Macuata labelled His Excellency's Address as "a speech to praise Bainimarama's leadership". Section 81(2) of the Constitution stipulates that, I quote: "The President is the Head of State, and the executive authority of the State is vested in the President." However, Section 127(2) and (7) of the Constitution which subject the Office of the President to the Permanent Secretary responsible for the Office of the Prime Minister. These two provisions to me summarise the position of the President and not much more to be said.

The people have woken up, Honourable Minister, from the euphoria of freebies given out before the 2018 Elections and feel acutely the following realities:

- A crushing national debt burden;
- Potholes in our roads more than ever before;

- Increase in birth certificate costs;
- Minister after Minister publicly declaring no money for capital works, including dredging works;
- Water cuts;
- Power cuts;
- Citizens are no longer safe in downtown Suva due to inconsistency of Police operations;
- Drug seizures;
- Murders, increasing sex offenders and thefts;
- Road accidents;
- Police brutality and;
- Citizens and soldiers assaulting our Police.

What have we become? Have we arrived to the new Fiji that the Honourable Prime Minister had promised when he took over the Government in 2006? Have you arrived at that?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, hearing the Government's contribution so far, it is evident that they are desperately defending themselves. They blame the people for making wrong choices. They claim that Opposition are spreading lies and they try to talk about achievements to praise themselves which the people know are not true.

The Honourable Prime Minister himself said on Monday that, I quote, "Mr. Speaker, in the week since His Excellency opened this Parliamentary Session, the pride I felt hearing him speak to the generational good of our young democracy has hardly faded." There appears to be an echo chamber of mutual admiration and self-congratulation across the aisle.

The Prime Minister in moving his motion told the nation on Monday, 18th November, 2019 and I quote:

"It is a blessing that so many of our children and grandchildren have only ever known a true democracy. It is a blessing that they are embracing their wide array of constitutional rights."

Unfortunately, those rights were denied to a 16-yearold boy unlawfully denied and assaulted on 23rd September because elements of the Security Forces felt his social media post was a threat to the Prime Minister and therefore a matter of national security.

Once we scratch the paper-thin surface of true democracy and unprecedented civic transformation imposed since the 2006 *coup*, the reality is that the poor have become poorer and the rich have become richer and only they can access the rights that the Honourable Prime Minister boasts about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yet the Prime Minister says and I quote: "We improved our economy with innovative thinking and forward-looking policies and we levelled the playing field across our society."

Who is the Honourable Prime Minister fooling? The short-sighted reckless spending before the 2014 and 2018 Elections have directly caused the hard times we are facing now. So much so that Fiji qualified for the IMF, IDA loan recently acquired after slashing \$809 million from its

2019/2020 Budget. A truly visionary and responsible Government would have cautioned our people to tighten its belt and prepare for the rainy days during summer when the harvest is plentiful.

The Government's misinformation and lies on the economy have been blatant because they have the oversight and control of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is unfortunate and unprecedented, never before has any Government misled a nation into believing that all is well.

The Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) has continually cautioned our Attorney-General and Minister for Economy on his bullish projections and expenditure. Given that Fiji's economy is a small and vulnerable one, the Government should ensure that there is fiscal space to make adjustments in times of natural disaster and crisis caused by international and domestic events. Instead, the Honourable Minister for Economy has been irresponsible with the economy.

The National Budget since 2015 have been driven by political ego and self-preservation, giving out freebies and making unplanned and unsustainable expenditure. It is clear that the Bainimarama Government has run out of fiscal space. The reduction of the \$809 million in the 2019/2020 Budget will further contract the economy by \$1.4 billion which is around 10 percent of the GDP. It is time the Minister for Economy admits his failures and resigns in shame. He is a shame, Sir, given the condition of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I now wish to pick up on a theme constantly echoed by the FijiFirst Party Members from the other side of the Chamber.

The Honourable Prime Minister said on Monday, 18th November, 2019, and I quote: "Our common identity is not an affront to anyone; it is our people's greatest strength."

While we acknowledge the contribution of all communities who call Fiji "home" and have made the nation enforcing a stolen identity by decree is not a sustainable solution. There can be no justice when over half of the population are aggrieved. As the saying goes, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". This unpopular truth is unpalatable in FijiFirst's echo chamber of Level Nine of Suvavou House, low-hanging fruit meeting and that is the truth nonetheless. Yes, Fiji needs unity and reconciliation, Honourable Speaker, Sir, but inflicting more wounds is not the solution. As the saying goes: "An eye for an eye means the whole world will go blind."

The Prime Minister said on Monday, 18th November, 2019 and I quote:

"Fifty years from now, in 2070, the citizens of a modern, dynamic and vibrant Fiji will look back to this period with gratitude on the long-term investments we are making in their wellbeing and the vision we have set for their success."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the unjust policies, decrees and laws of the FijiFirst Government are in fact landmines that the Prime Minister and his FijiFirst Government have laid and which make any progress that he claims or envisions unsustainable. These are what his Svengali and Rasputin-like advisors and strategists are wrongly advising the Honourable Prime Minister about.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Honourable Prime Minister, the buck stops with him and that is why I join my fellow loyal Members of the Opposition in calling for his resignation. He has lost the plot; he has failed the people and he has not resolved the problems of this nation since he came into power.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned in the echo chamber of Level 9 of Suvavou House, the kool-aid flows freely. Honourable Selai Adimaitoga in her speech said, and I quote:

“In 2014, the FijiFirst Party won a landslide victory in the National Elections The second victory in 2018...showed that a majority of Fijians still support our policies and our Prime Minister's vision for the future.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the majority of 0.5 percent is a bare majority...

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- It is the truth!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.-.. and the FFP echo-chamber is still smarting from it, one year later. That close call led to 52 hours of marathon sleepover at Level 9 to catch the “low-hanging fruit”, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The FFP is still trying to convince the nation that it did win the 2018 Elections. One year later, they appear to be suffering from imposter syndrome, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I perhaps paraphrase the song, ‘Great Pretender’ for the other side of the House, and I quote: “Oh yes, you are a great pretender, pretending that you are doing well.” Is the other side trying to convene itself or the nation that it has the mandate to govern?

In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a crisis of legitimacy in the Government benches. This crisis is underlined by the subverting of justice in the assault of the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua. It does not matter how many political platitudes and self-congratulatory statements are drafted by Qorvis, the people of Fiji are not blind and they have had enough.

It is no accident that political spin is associated or linked to Svengali and Rasputin - those manipulators of the truth. For that reason, we see Qorvis paid millions from Fiji's taxpayers over the last nine years. Qorvis have profited handsomely from the climate change gravy train since COP 23. As we know the Honourable Attorney-General himself engaged Qorvis without tender being called in breach of financial regulations, to undertake media and consultative services for COP 23, and it continues today.

The engagement of Qorvis is an unjust expense, unprecedented and outsize, just like the FijiFirst promises and claims of success.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a rude awakening for FijiFirst supporters who wanted to believe in the promise of true democracy. But that democracy does not exist within FijiFirst Cabinet or the Party which has not held any Annual General Meeting since its inception in 2013.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just as a young couple will find out that the family cannot live on ‘love and fresh air’, reality intrudes when children must be fed and sent to school, and rent and bills must be paid.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- The assault on Honourable Tikoduadua was one such wake-up call. The second is the economic hardship of rising high cost of living and stagnant wages. This reality cannot be spun away by Qorvis any more. *Vesu mona* cannot quiet or satisfy a hungry belly.

Government cannot continue to put its head in the sand blindly and slavishly praise the Honourable Prime Minister. The nation and the FijiFirst must wake up and stop living in dreamland or other land. Fiji urgently needs a solution today. That is why the loyal Opposition is saying, resign today, in the national interest.

At this juncture, Sir, let me express my concern on what is happening in the Corrections Institutions where basic human rights of a Corrections staff are abused.

Correction Wardens are subject to a duty roster where they rest only for eight hours between rolling 12 hours shifts. This is inhumane. Many are forced to sleep overnight at the Corrections institutions because their homes are too far for them to travel to, and they do not have time to sleep at home and spend with their family.

This is a breach of their right of decent working conditions. There must be parity and relevance in decision-making. Unjust decisions to demote, deduct up to 21 days of wages for minor offences, disproportionately punish Warden families. In comparison, the Naval Commander and crew responsible for sinking the *RFNS Kiro* received minor punishment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency expressed recommendations to the Parliamentary Committee on government's legislative agenda. As a Member of the Standing Committee of Justice, Law and Human Rights, I confirm that the Committee has received online submissions and face-to-face submissions, in contrary to what our Honourable Chairperson had said yesterday. We have already received soft copies of online submissions. They even posted their comments on the Parliament *Facebook* page to give their views on the Bills, Petitions or Reports to be examined by the Committee.

Our public consultations all over Fiji give the people a taste of democracy at their doorstep. Mr. Speaker, Sir, members of the community often raise other difficulties and development challenges affecting them that we, Members of Parliament, can direct them to relevant authorities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the biggest barrier to public participation in the lawmaking process is the frequent abuse of Standing Order 51 by the Honourable Attorney-General where Bills are fast-tracked and passed in as little as 15 minutes, and there is no public input or public being asked their views.

The other challenge, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the lack of legislative drafters in Government and the dire need for an independent parliamentary counsel. As it is, the Office of the Attorney-General is the default drafter and we see no experienced legislative drafters there, or a whole lot of taxpayers' funds is spent on foreign consultants without Parliamentary Counsel. Again, we are subject to the Office of the Attorney-General. This also infringes the constitutional independence of Parliament and Committees because we are subject to the Office of the Attorney-General again for interpretation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we seek clarification on a clause, the Solicitor-General's Office is very slow in responding. The usual response is that, they are not available due to prior commitments or they have opposing opinion with the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important that Bills are translated in the *iTaukei language* and *Hindi* and that is one of the things that the people have asked for, after we moved around the country, given that our official mother tongue is not allowed in this Parliament. At least, the Honourable Attorney-General should translate those Bills in *Hindi and in the iTaukei* language for people to understand and then to make contributions. Those are things that you can learn.

Civic society can play a more active role in the lawmaking process. We call on the Parliament Secretariat to set up networking arrangements with CSOs to create awareness on a Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in a bigger national public forum first before the Committee comes around to collect submissions. We call on the Government to allow Divisional Officers, Commissioners, Provincial Administrators (PAs), Roko Tuis, to facilitate public awareness on a new Bill before the Committee comes in to conduct public hearings. From experience, Government officials at divisional and district levels do distance themselves from Parliament Committees because they are afraid that they might be 55 years early.

I welcome live broadcast for Committee deliberations and the people will see for themselves how Chief Executive Officers and Permanent Secretaries who do not honour the invitations from the Committee. We hope it will increase public engagement and also as a Committee to be a watchdog for Government Departments and statutory organisations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been moving around Vanua Levu and observing the *Bose ni Tikina* and *Bose ni Yasana*. The people are frustrated with the service delivery of the Government. Lack of Government response has frustrated our people. They are told, 'it has been taken up', we do not know whether their proposals are taken up to heaven or wherever, but they have not received any response from Government. Those are things that Government should improve on.

People do not know which allocations have been appropriated or approved and they continually bring in their issues to these various councils but Government officials at the divisional level do not have the answers. Some of them said that they have given their proposal during Budget submissions but had been set aside by the Honourable Minister for Economy.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to read back to the Prime Minister what he said on Monday, 18th November, 2019 in this august House, and I quote from page 11 of the *Uncorrected Daily Hansard*:

“Young Fijians do not have time to waste listening to petty spats in this Chamber. They are looking forward. They want jobs. They want to purchase homes of their own. They want stability. They want consistency. They want a government that cares and listens, and most importantly, a government that does not mislead them.”

Very quickly, Sir, it is hollow when a Government is allowing tile-layers from other countries rather than training our own people. This is why so many graduates are looking for work, Honourable Prime Minister. Our education system is not meeting the needs of our labour market. It is also disheartening for our people to see expatriate after expatriate appointed through contracts and our locals are left behind.

To conclude, Sir, as a Member of the loyal Opposition, I call on the Government to resign and fresh Elections to be held and a fresh mandate to be given to a responsible Government that should lead this nation to a new direction ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- ... where it will bring real prosperity to this nation because the Honourable Prime Minister has failed us, has failed the people and has not conducted himself in the way a Honourable Prime Minister should conduct himself. He does not have any reason.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, I do not support the motion before the House.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Politicians can be cheered for the promises they make, our country will be judged by the promises we keep.

Thank you for your indulgence and may God bless Fiji. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Development, the Honourable Jale Sigarara. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; *Bula re* and a very good afternoon.

I am honoured again to address this august House and wish to thank His Excellency the President for his gracious Address in opening this Session of Parliament. Before I continue, I wish to also congratulate the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister for the past decade of visionary progress in policies and programmes for a better Fiji for all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that our Honourable Prime Minister has been acknowledged and rated highly in the region as well as internationally. This is a leader who makes sure that his Government is serving every community, family, Fijian, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, religion or physical ability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is those with better plans and better vision for the country that are successful and will be successful, and good vision can only be attained through good leadership. A good leader, as we have all witnessed today as shown by our Honourable Prime Minister, is a leader with a very clear vision and has the passion to serve and drive to achieve results for our citizens.

The FijiFirst Government has not only seen the potential of this country, it has already mapped out the realisation of Fiji's full potential through our 20-Year National Development Plan. More importantly, we are already realising the benefits and the results of the vision, despite the ongoing regional, global, social and economic challenges.

What the Government has achieved so far are clear milestones in Fiji's history through establishing common and equal citizenry, providing free education; better health services; superior welfare support for our senior citizens; single mothers and infants; access to quality and modern infrastructure such as roads and airports, better support for climate resilient initiatives, and more importantly a decade of continuous economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President in his Address to Parliament on Tuesday, 12th November, 2019, highlighted the contribution of our growing economy to funding. I quote: "life-changing development across the country."

As the Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development, I agree wholeheartedly with this statement by His Excellency the President because this Government has proven records of life-changing development and will continue to do more.

Mr Speaker, Sir, in the past three years alone, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development has spent \$11 million in capital funding, allowing the implementation of close to 400 self-help projects and 140 Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges (CARFF).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are committed to the Government's vision of leaving no one behind and are determined to become more effective in our service delivery. Our programmes are also aimed in empowering rural citizens to go beyond self-sufficiency and to actively participate in economic and commercial activities.

In this financial year, the Ministry of Rural Development has identified and is focusing its resources towards the following three main priority areas as outlined in its Annual Costed Operational Plan:

1. Raising living standards and growing the rural and maritime economy;
2. Coordination and facilitation of Natural Disaster Operations; and
3. Organisational effectiveness, workforce development and good governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in line with the Ministry's Priority Area No. 1, the provision of basic infrastructure such as proper drinking water, good sanitation, access to proper roads and telecommunication networks, are crucial to ensuring that every citizen equally enjoys all Government services, irrespective of where they are in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the National Disaster Management Act 1998, the Ministry is mandated at the divisional level to coordinate and facilitate Disaster Management Operations. This is highlighted through our Priority Area No. 2, through our partnership with the National Disaster Management Office. Our Divisional and District Emergency Operation Centres are gradually being upgraded and periodically tested to help us to better prepare for disasters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the greatest assets of any organisation is its staff, planning and welfare. Our Priority Area No. 3 reflects our need in developing a client-focused culture as a platform for excellence in service delivery and creating an agile workforce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, allow me to elaborate on some of the development projects conducted by the Ministry. We all know that access to water remains a fundamental human right reflected in our 2013 Constitution Bill of Rights and Goal No. 6 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

As part of the Self-Help Programme's effort to provide basic infrastructure to meet social needs of rural communities, we are investing more resources to accessibility to water and good sanitation. There are 44 planned such projects for the current quarter, with a total funding of \$629,000. We are targeting communities that continuously face water problems during periods of dry spell and drought and these are located in the Provinces of Ba, Ra, Kadavu, Lomaiviti, Bua, Macuata and Lau.

In Serua, Government is assisting with the upgrade of the Korovisilou Dam that will provide and improve water supply to the 86 households in the area. The project will also benefit the students and teachers of Ratu Latianara Secondary School.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the goals of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development is to assist in improving livelihoods for the people and raising their living standards. There are 34 planned projects being implemented in this quarter and investment of \$275,000. Included in these projects are assistance towards procurement of solar-powered freezers to five communities in the Yasawa Group to help them with their fishing business. This shows our commitment in facilitating the use of renewable energy and modern technology in rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, access to basic services, quality infrastructure and quality dwelling is a catalyst for raising economic well-being. The Ministry is allocated \$2 million for the Community Access Roads, Footpaths and Footbridges (CARFF) Programme. This means that more children and women will enjoy easier movement within their own villages or communities. For the current quarter, we are planning to implement 75 projects under the CARFF Programme which is 20 more projects and the number implemented the same period last year.

Through partnership with other Ministries, we are hoping to achieve more with the same budget by sharing resources such as machines and human capital. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in support of making communities more accessible, the Ministry will be funding a number of projects such as procurement of boats and engines. In Tailevu, we are delighted to support 40 women who are part of the Dravuni Women's Group, embarking on a sea transport business incentive. In Kadavu, Government is doing similar projects for families in Muani and Talaulia Villages.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has earmarked some interior remote communities such as the Village of Nasukamai in Ra and Nakoroboya in Ba for the construction of footpaths and footbridges. Government has allocated \$3.5 million for the construction of five new District Administration Offices and six quarters.

At the beginning of this month, we witnessed the ground-breaking of the new Wainikoro Government Station which would bring public service closer to 23,000 people in the Districts of Nadogo, Dogotuki, Udu and Namuka in Macuata.

I am also pleased to note that tenders have already been awarded for another two projects, namely for Kavala in Kadavu and Kubulau in Bua. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this programme will also encourage co-location and co-sharing of service under the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural and

Maritime Development and Waterways and Environment. We are not only bringing services closer to the doorsteps of our rural communities, but we are also trying to ensure that we are efficient and smart in having an integrated approach.

The various ancillary services we provide allow people to access multiple services from one location. These services include issuance and processing business licences, fishing permits, registration of births, deaths, marriages and liquor licences, to name a few. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue with the Government Services Expo and are planning to have two events as such for the current financial year targeting the Central and Eastern Division's rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to working smarter and expanding outreach to the people, one of the areas that we are targeting is in relation to the work of the District Advisory Councils. There are 16 Councils throughout the country: four in the Central; one in the Eastern; five for Northern; and six for the Western Division. In total, there are 323 members of these Councils. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have completed the appointment of Councillors to serve for two years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Advisory Councils who work for the Office of the Divisional Commissioners, play a crucial role in assuring that the needs of Fijians living outside traditional village boundaries are identified, prioritised and fulfilled through Government development programmes. The District Advisory Councils also provide a crucial link between Government and the communities they serve by promoting and creating awareness of Government policies at the community level.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, District Advisory Council and Provincial Development Boards are existing machineries that the Ministry will capitalise to pursue integrated rural planning and development. Mr. Speaker, Sir, after serving the Ministry for Rural and Maritime Development for more than a year now, I have seen the importance of collaboration and partnership, not only within Government but also with the private sector, civil societies and other development partners. I urge us all to work together to help build the nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President, in his Opening Address of this Parliamentary Session, last week asked thought-provoking questions to us for which I would like to echo, and I quote:

“... 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?”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not know how Members of the opposing side may answer these questions, but for us on this side of the House, I can boldly say, we put the national interest before ourselves. This Government puts people first. We put the Fijian people first, we put Fiji first.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to address Parliament and to thank His Excellency the President, for his most gracious Address to the House. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Maritime Development for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the last speaker for the day, the Honourable Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, to our guests in the gallery, and to the people of Fiji: A very good afternoon to you all.

Honourable Speaker, I rise in support of the motion by the Honourable Prime Minister that this Parliament thanks His Excellency the President, for His most gracious speech. First of all, I would like to join my colleagues in wishing everyone, especially our children, a very happy World Children's Day. It is very encouraging to see everyone wearing "blue" (with the usual exception of Honourable Nawaikula, of course,) as requested by the Honourable Speaker yesterday, to show support for this important day for the future leaders of this world and our country; our children. Honourable Bulitavu as well.

Honourable Speaker, as I stand to speak, having heard the Opposition Members speak for the last two days, I wonder if the Opposition Members are really awake and seeing the things happening around them or they are fast asleep as they have been since 2014.

Honourable Speaker, they do not see the things that we see, they do not see the things that we on this side of the House and the people of Fiji see. They do not realize what is happening around them. We see economic activity, we see buildings coming up, we see roads and bridges. We see happy children, progressive people and a prosperous country.

Honourable Speaker, what they see is potholes and debts. They forget that there were no roads before in places where they are counting potholes today. What they see is fiction, what they do not see is that the debts we take, are to build assets for this nation.

Honourable Speaker, they talk about our 1 percent projected economic growth and try to undermine it. What they forget is that, in the face of global economic slowdown because of the US-China Trade war, Brexit and many other uncertainties, where even large economies like India have negative economic projections, Fiji is still able to keep its head high with a ten-year unbroken streak of economic growth and still has a positive outlook.

The Opposition, instead of recognising the fact are busy nit-picking, how unpatriotic, Honourable Speaker. The Opposition has failed to adhere to His Excellency's words that no one should politicise the economy. In doing so, you are only hurting the prospects of the people who voted you in.

Honourable Speaker, the Opposition's glass is always half empty. Let me assure them and the people, that when we leave, if we ever do, we are not going to take away the buildings and the bridges with us. That is the investment we have made for the people of Fiji and we will leave behind with the people together with our legacy.

Honourable Speaker, it is a shame that the Members of the Opposition have the audacity to talk about the economy when they themselves have done everything to damage it. From damaging the agriculture industry to intermeddling with the renewal of the sugarcane leases and to spreading of fake news, you name it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, the Opposition is continuously harping about the number of votes FijiFirst received in the last Elections. What they conveniently forget is that we still won and that is why we are sitting on this side of the House.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- The Opposition forgets that the people still voted for us and chose us over them to lead the nation because they have the confidence in our governance. Please, accept the fact and live in peace.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, His Excellency highlighted the importance of the 2013 Constitution and its path-breaking characteristics in ensuring that Fiji practices a just and fair political system, addressing equal opportunities and enjoyment for all the rights and protections.

Honourable Speaker, the implementation of the 2013 Constitution has brought a sense of pride by giving us all a common identity to be known as Fijians. Its constitutional rights and protections have ensured security, economic stability, peace and prosperity. Now than ever before, the people of Fiji have easy access to information and recognise their rights to be informed. We now have equal opportunities to essential amenities, agricultural assistance, technological and infrastructure development, financial assistance and employment, to name a few.

As I complete my one year of service to the people in my Office as the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources, I wish to thank my staff at the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources for their unwavering support and dedication to service delivery.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry for Lands and Mineral Resources, in its pursuit to safeguard the spirit of the 2013 Constitution, is currently engaged in various internal and external consultations in reviewing and modifying its relevant legislation and policies. The review of the Mining Act and Mineral Policy, making amendments to the Surveyors Regulation and the continuous evaluation of the business process, re-engineering of the Ministry's internal system operations and the SOPs are some strategies that the Ministry is taking so that the administration and management of State land and mineral resources are made relevant and applicable to the 2013 Constitution and environmental sustainability.

Honourable Speaker, our aim is to keep abreast with technological advancement and digital platforms. The Ministry, following Cabinet's approval, is now able to provide through Vanuaview Online data such as cadastral, tenure, village/settlement, infrastructure and transport and elevation data to commercial users.

Honourable Speaker, as a result our society will now be more knowledge-based and able to make sound decisions given that the Vanuaview Online allows users to overlay property data with other information (as mentioned above), make analysis and query property data. Furthermore, property data enquirers such as land surveyors, real estate agents, non-government agencies and statutory authorities are able to access relevant data at the press of a button. This contributes to national economic growth and therefore impacts capital investment involving education, health, natural resources and infrastructure sectors, to name a few.

Honourable Speaker, in alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2013 Constitution and the 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan (NDP), the Ministry will continue to contribute and vigorously work towards reducing the poverty level of our country. As of date, approximately 2,600 Fijians in 22 informal settlements have benefitted from this Government's ongoing initiative. I say "ongoing" because this Government is committed to looking after the citizens of this nation.

Honourable Speaker, giving people hope, safety, a sense of security and belonging through the issuance of proper leases to those who reside in informal settlements (Approval Notices) cannot be ignored nor overlooked. Putting a smile on the Fijian people where they are able to say, "This property is mine" makes this Government "Men and Women of their Word".

Honourable Speaker, no country can prosper unless it utilises its land and resources in a sustainable manner. His Excellency raised a very pertinent point when he stated that we are drilling boreholes that provide clean water. The importance of water for any human being cannot be overstated. The right of every Fijian to an adequate supply of clean water under Section 36 of the Constitution is led by the Mineral Resources Department to identify and conduct water sources assessments for those in need of water supply. The Ministry will continue to ensure the provision of safe and clean water in the years to come. With this year's theme of "World Water Day", the Ministry, through its project activities, strongly support that "No one is to be Left Behind" and be deprived from accessing one of life's basic need.

Honourable Speaker, for the past two financial years, the Ministry for Lands has successfully drilled 28 boreholes of which six schools and 22 communities (villages and settlements) have benefitted.

Additionally, there were a total of 25 boreholes reticulated with a total of six schools, two Government stations and 17 communities (villages/settlements) as far as Cikobia Village in Vanuabalavu in Lau have had groundwater distributed to their doorsteps through our Groundwater Development project and assistance or involvement from other agencies.

In all, a total of 528 households with a population of 3,107 in the maritime islands and villages, settlements and schools have benefitted so far from groundwater sources, some of whom have experienced critical water shortages, especially during the dry seasons.

Honourable Speaker, groundwater has the potential to provide alternative water source supply to rural communities, schools, as well as commercially-related ventures where they are present. Therefore, there is an urgent need to establish a framework and policy to protect Fiji's water resources from over-exploitation, contamination and pollution.

The Ministry, in collaboration with other stakeholders like Agriculture, Environment and Waterways, Infrastructure and Rural and Maritime Development, has formed a taskforce to try and improve water supply to identified drought-prone areas, especially in the sugarcane belt of the nation. Executing these activities using existing expertise within these Ministries fosters a system that will ensure better livelihoods for farmers in the country.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry for Lands and Mineral Resources is proud to be able to contribute towards the country's growth through the tourism industry, mining and quarry

industries. The Ministry has undoubtedly contributed towards economic development and economic growth through the:

- a) Issuance of Foreshore Development Leases;
- b) Issuance of Mining Licences;
- c) Issuance of Gravel Licences; and
- d) Issuance of Commercial, Agricultural and Industrial Leases.

These leases and licences boost economic activity, foreign investment, infrastructure development, create employment opportunities and bring revenue into our country.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry, in accordance with Section 30 of the 2013 Constitution has successfully implemented the “right of landowners to fair share of royalties for extraction of minerals”. As per Section 5 of the Fair Share of Minerals Royalties Act 2018, the total royalty funds that have been distributed to-date amounts to \$4,382,533.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- *Vinaka.*

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, out of this, a total of \$1,114,095 was paid out to three *iTaukei* landowning units namely:

- a) *Mataqali* Serau - Nabiti Macutata
- b) *Mataqali* Naita - Lekutu, Bua
- c) *Mataqali* Naicobo - Nawailevu, Bua

Further, a sum of \$3,268,437 was paid out to two freehold landowning units, namely:

- a) Vatukoula Gold Mine Limited; and
- b) Nasomo Landowners Trust.

Honourable Speaker, more mineral royalty pay-out is due in the coming months and years for which the Ministry will gladly facilitate.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- *Vinaka.*

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, speaking on the relationship between land and agriculture, Honourable Kuridrani, in his statement spoke about the decline in the sugar industry and blames the Government for it.

The Honourable Kuridrani stated that during the reign of the FijiFirst Government, sugar production has decreased. The sugar production did not just fall on one fine day, it has been caused by bad decisions and neglect of past governments.

Honourable Speaker, let me enlighten Honourable Kuridrani on where the problem is. Recently, I visited Wainikoro in Nadogo which was once a flourishing cane farm area. After the 1987 *coup* happened, the farmers were chased overnight even with years remaining on their lease term. Today, when we go there, we see house structures, foundations still visible through the bushes. It has been 32 years and the lands are still uncultivated.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- This is the story in other places around the country as well, Honourable Speaker, where the house foundations are there but no one is cultivating them because the farmers have been chased out overnight. How does the sugar industry progress with this kind of irresponsible behaviour? We cannot plant cane on water or in the air. We need land to plant cane on and the irresponsible leadership have driven the farmers away from that land. Under the leadership of our current Prime Minister, landowners are freely making land available for cultivation, not only for sugar but for rice as well.

Honourable Speaker, on 14th November, I had the honour to officiate the first ever Rice Development Project by Fiji Rice Limited in Labasa. This is a classic example of idle land being utilized for a much greater purpose. A total of approximately 15 acres of land from Qawa-i-ra and Vunivutu *Mataqali* are being utilized for this project and the landowners are to receive the proceeds based on the weight of paddy after the cost is deducted and at the same time learn rice farming. This is basically a better lease arrangement initiative whereby the developer and the landowning unit work in partnership to obtain the highest and best value return of the land.

Honourable Speaker, just opposite that road, the Qawa landowners have engaged with the Fiji Sugar Corporation under similar arrangements where once barren land cane crop is now growing. These types of initiatives are helping the nation grow and also helping the landowners earn some money. This is a positive outcome of our leadership.

His Excellency has encouraged us to engage in nation-building but how do we do that when we have some Members of the Opposition looking at everything through the race-coloured spectacles. Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Nawaikula recently posted about the United Nations Meeting on his *Facebook* page a message under the head "Native Fijian Majority Wait Passively Home as HR Delegation Cover Up Indigenous Rights Abuse in Geneva". He deliberately edited a photograph to show only pictures of non-*iTaukei* members of the delegation when the entire delegation in fact had people of all ethnic backgrounds. This man is a threat to national security.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Anare Jale said in his statement that he has tried to approach Ministers but they do not respond. He should ask his fellow Members, the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, Honourable Nawaikula, Honourable Lynda Tabuya, Honourable Matanitobua, Honourable Leawere, Honourable Saukuru and many others whom I have accommodated in my Office just by a simple phone call.

I do not know where the Honourable Jese Saukuru is getting his information from. Ask your colleagues.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- That is your job.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Exactly, he is making allegations.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Why lie about it?

Honourable Speaker, how can we build a stronger nation when we have Honourable Lalabalavu calling a certain section of the population “*vulagi*”? How can we respect each other when Honourable Qereqeretabua curses not only us but our descendants as well? My children who are not even born yet have been cursed, Honourable Speaker. How can we talk about reducing crime rate and violence when Honourable Bilitavu seems to be justifying violence by saying *iTaukei* men are bigger and can beat up their partners but the Indo-Fijian men take the *chhuri* out? How can we stop violence and aggression when we have Honourable Members like these promoting violence?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Shame, shame!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Honourable Speaker, the Opposition is calling on our Prime Minister to resign. They are asking us to resign. But then they have no confidence in their own motion of “No Confidence”. They file it one day and withdraw it the next to save the embarrassment. All I can say is that the Opposition is devoid of ideas. The Opposition must accept the fact that despite all the fake news about the sale of Kadavu, about a Chinese takeover, the circulation of that fake DVD by Honourable Bilitavu and all the fear-mongering, the FijiFirst Party still won the Elections, live with it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- We do not stoop down to their mudslinging and the people know that. We here on the FijiFirst Party side, we do not stoop down to their level of mudslinging and that is why we win.

Honourable Speaker, as I speak on nation-building, let me give an example of my recent trip to Serbia which used to be part of former Yugoslavia. The Honourable Salote Radrodro was there with me, including yourself, Honourable Speaker. This country has been invaded and destroyed 47 times in history from the Roman and Ottoman invasions to the First and Second World Wars to the most recent NATO bombings.

Honourable Speaker, every time this country was damaged, the people got together and built it up again. After the Second World War, only sand and swamp was left of its Capital, Belgrade. The people did not wait for help. The volunteers got together by the call of their then President Tito and built the country up. There are hardly any memories of those days left. Today, when you visit that nation, you will see a prosperous nation because its people had the collective will to build the nation.

Honourable Speaker, that is the type of attitude we need from the Opposition Members. Please, help us build the nation, do not destroy the nation with your fake news, do not destroy the nation by hurting the economy. Please, help us build the nation, your generations will remember you.

Honourable Speaker, as we look forward to celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Fiji's Independence next year, we are to be reminded that Fiji, although being a small island State, is a much larger country at heart and in spirit. Fiji and our Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Bainimarama, are making waves around the world by making significant contribution to the global setting.

My plea to everyone listening to me is to unite, come forward, rise above petty politics and help us build Fiji. I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a very prosperous New Year, Honourable Speaker. Thank you very much.

(Acclamation)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- You may have your Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Standing Order 81 allows me to correct a misrepresentation made by the last speaker.

The last speaker said that I said in a *Facebook* post that majority of the native population were here, while that delegation went and I purposely put up a picture on our indigenous, he said that. Now let me clarify what I said in that post.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- You edited a photograph.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is a misunderstanding.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I raised there the concern that this delegation went to Geneva and did not tell the Human Rights Commission there the abuse - the State-given abuse of the rights of the indigenous people in this country.

I said that there were 23 posts, and that was all sponsored by the State, and that amounted to racial discrimination against the indigenous people, and let me ask you the natives on that side, do you know this is happening to you?

HON. MEMBER.- Yes.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Maybe not! Do you know you are doing that to your own people?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Are you aware of that? That is the content of what I said.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You went there to hide the truth of what is happening here with the indigenous people of this country by those laws.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. SPEAKER.- You have made your Point of Order, you have made your explanations and we will leave it at that.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I can stand up again.

HON. SPEAKER.- No, you can take your seat. All I was going to do was to thank you for your contribution to His Excellency's Address to the House because I was not given the opportunity to do that because of the Point of Order. So I have done that, we will go on to the next stage and I hope the other players are ready.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Attorney-General, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

CORRECTIONS SERVICE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- a) Corrections Service (Amendment) Bill 2019 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 22nd November 2019, and that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak to the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will not give a very long introduction in respect of this particular motion, but just to clarify to Parliament that the reason for this amendment and the speed with which it is required is because of a recent Supreme Court Ruling:

- that seeks to change the convention and the practice regarding non-parole prisoners
- on the calculation of the remission period, and more importantly
- as to when the remission period will actually commence.

And there has been a long established interpretation of the law, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that when, for example, a Judge gives a ruling and sentences, say somebody violently raped somebody and gets a 10-year sentence of which, let us say, eight years are of non-parole period, the remission then starts from after the non-parole period. In other words, the parole period” - the two years, you take off the one-third from the two years. What this Supreme Court Ruling has, in fact, done is that it is saying that the non-parole period will no longer apply and that the remission actually is calculated from the time the sentence is given, which will actually completely obfuscate and interfere, one can argue with the independence of the Judiciary itself, because when judges set a non-parole period, they are actually highlighting the severity and the seriousness of the crime that has been committed.

So this amendment seeks to rectify that particular position, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is in brief and we can, of course, talk about it. You have a couple of days to do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, pending any questions on this, I am quite happy that we refer this to Parliament for Friday. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion.

Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I just wish to raise a concern that this is going to be a short-cut. It addresses the parole, it might be good, it might be bad, but there is a need to hear the community outside. There is a need, especially to hear the views of those who were affected.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, let me just remind you what His Excellency the President said, and I quote:

“But let me remind you: The business of this Chamber is not only relegated to “question” time. As parliamentarians, you must also serve as conduits to community engagement.”

So what is happening here? It may be good, it may be bad, I am not sure. But the community input is important, especially those who were affected. They might be happy. I thank you for this - it is a good law, but it is not a business for us here only, according to His Excellency the President. We must hear the views of the community.

That is the comment that I want to make. I am not sure whether this side of the House will support this or not, but I just wish to say that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Sir, consultations have taken place with the Fiji Corrections Services, the Office of the DPP and the Office of the Solicitor-General. What the Honourable Nawaikula is saying whilst he wants to go off and consult people whether this is a good amendment or not, we will have to release approximately 143 prisoners.

Most of them are rapists, most of them have carried out sexual assaults, most of them have carried out grievous bodily harm, beaten up people in a very bad manner, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that as Honourable Naiwakula would know, the Honourable Bulitavu would know, the Honourable Qionibaravi would know and Honourable Tabuya who is not here would know, that as practising lawyers that this has been the established law in Fiji.

The established law in Fiji has been that the judges have the ability to apply a non-parole period as part of a sentence. During that period, the prisoner cannot be released. It is only after serving the non-parole period, can the prisoner be released and then you calculate the remission from the non-parole period.

If we do not approve this by Friday afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will have to release about 143 people out in the streets of Suva where the judges have actually decided on each case, on each merit, that these people should actually serve a non-parole period.

We are all standing here and talking about the need to protect the society from people who are sexual perpetrators and how we need to discourage domestic violence and rape, et cetera, this is going to be a very wrong message. We will be releasing these people out into the community, when the judges have already decided that they should not be.

The Supreme Court has made the decision and turning on a few words. What we are trying to do is to correct that anomaly so that these people actually serve their non-parole period. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

Pursuant to Standing Order 51:

That the -

- a) Corrections Service (Amendment) Bill 2019 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 22nd November, 2019, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- We will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	:	26
Noes	:	18
Not Voted	:	7

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the motion is therefore agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on. I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

LAND TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- a) Land Transport (Amendment) Bill 2019 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 22nd November, 2019, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This particular amendment to the Land Transport Act is based on two amendments that are sought; one of them is to do with Section 66 Approvals. For those Members who do know about the Land Transport Authority Act, Honourable Karavaki, who we dearly miss whenever we talk about LTA. Section 66 provides for what we call the "temporary licence" that can be granted by LTA, whenever there is a need or, for example, a company folds up and can no longer provide a service, or should there be a need to provide service on a route that actually has not been licensed as yet.

This is within the Act itself which is highly prescriptive and, in fact, it has been abused in the past. What this amendment seeks to do is to move the provisions to the regulations themselves,

so the Honourable Minister has the level of flexibility to be able to cater for the needs, not just now but in the future, that are required for this particular temporary provision.

The other one, of course, which is also of utmost importance is to do with the bus fare increases and, indeed, review or decreases. For a long period of time bus fares increase or decrease has been highly politicised, it has always vested with the Minister. For the past number of years, even previously since the Land Transport Authority (LTA) has been instituted, the responsibility was passed on to the LTA itself, which does not have the capacity to be able to assess that, and indeed that is the very reason why the Minister and also the various arms of Government have referred the matter to the Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) which has the capacity to independently assess whether bus fares should be increased or decreased, et cetera.

The idea, of course, now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an assessment has been done, consultations have been held with all the bus operators, some of them want an increase. I am sure the Honourable Prasad and his colleagues will know about that. They want an increase because of fuel price changes, et cetera. Now FCCC has been dealing with it. Legally speaking for FCCC, to be able to give its determination and indeed for the determination to be applicable, we need to have an amendment to the actual Act itself so we give the responsibility to FCCC.

FCCC like its equivalent in many jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the independent body, devoid of politics, devoid of influence by corporations, et cetera, where they make assessments on where you have monopolistic positions in society, whether it is Electricity Fiji Limited (EFL), whether it is the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, whether it is Airports Fiji Limited (AFL) or any other operations - whether it is water, steel, et cetera, they make independent assessments. Similarly, in this particular case, the public transportation system in Fiji actually is somewhat paradoxically run by the private sector. So, they can independently make the assessment, that capacity to do these assessments from the economic perspective, financial management perspective, financial assessment perspective does not reside within LTA, and indeed does not reside with the Ministry. In this particular way, we can get the submissions now to be brought forward to members of the public and also it creates the level of independence, it increases the ease of doing businesses in Fiji, and that is the amendment that is actually being sought, Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. The floor is now open to debate on the motion. Honourable Biman Prasad, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I have no issues with the Commerce Commission fixing the fares. But I think the part on issuing a temporary permit, I mean the Honourable Attorney-General has said that there has been some discussions with the bus operators.

My concern really, Honourable Speaker, is that we should not take it through Standing Order 51. We should give it some time, we can bring it back in February. I am not sure what sort of consultation has been done but I think what can happen as part of the powers that will be given to the Minister to make regulations, that itself could be politicised in the future. I mean, if it is not being done now, it could happen in the future as well. So, I think we need a bit more consultation on this, and I would like to hear the views of the stakeholders because I have not seen any views arising out of the consultation that has been done. So, I would urge the Government to delay this and bring it back in February and we can still take it through Standing Order 51 but this will at least

go out in the public and people will have to look at this and we will have some indication as to what they feel, and we could have a better discussion in February. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Anyone else wishing to take the floor? Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to say that we are opposing it for the same reason. With this, the amendment will not go to the Committee and therefore it will not go out to the people.

Let me read it again, “As Parliamentarians, you must also serve as conduits to community engagement, and it is through the work of the various Committees that engagement takes form”, and we are stopping that here. So, we oppose it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to clarify what Honourable Prasad had raised. If you look at the amendment, essentially the amendment says that the provisions pertaining to Section 66 will now be done by way of regulations, it is to allow flexibility. It is currently within the Act itself, so obviously the Honourable Minister for Transport will have to have new regulations in place. Before the Honourable Minister does put the new regulations in place, he obviously will consult the bus operators but mind you, there have already been a lot of consultations taken place, numerous issues have been dealt with between the Land Transport Authority (LTA) and the bus operators themselves.

So, Honourable Minister, you do not have to be consulted, the bus operators have to be consulted. The bus operators are the ones who get affected by this and the Honourable Minister for Transport, before drafting the regulations, will actually put in place a consultation programme or process in itself.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, also people need to understand that in this sort of modern day economy, not one size fits all. You cannot be highly prescriptive. So, for example, in ordering Section 66 licence, the Honourable Minister, through the consultation, may find and we already know this, that the way that Section 66 licence maybe offered on the Island of Taveuni will be very different to the Section 66 licence being offered inside the Suva-Nausori corridor. How do you offer the Section 66 licence, for example, in Monasavu? It will be very different to how you offer it in Nadi, so that level of flexibility needs to be there. This is why just to change every time, we cannot come back to Parliament for that, but the Honourable Minister will be empowered and this is what he is going to do - he will do the consultations with the bus operators and, of course, LTA.

Also, it is very important to look at demographic changes. Demographic changes take place very quickly so, for example, you may have certain new suburbs that are suddenly developing in Nadi, like at the back, behind Matavolivoli and all those places, there may be lots of roads that are currently not actually being serviced by a person holding a Rural Service Licence (RSL). If they do not have an RSL then obviously the people where a new suburb has developed or new streets have developed, they do not get the service.

If you follow Honourable Nawaikula's process, then what will happen is that, those people will be living there for months, their committee may go for the next six months to nine months to their merriment and then in the meantime you have literally thousands or hundreds of people who will not have access to public transportation, so the Minister for Transport, whose prime responsibility is to provide the transport network or road network for public service will be able to respond immediately to the needs of ordinary citizens, and that is what the ordinary citizens want. They want the service to be provided. This is what gives them the enabling power. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Anyone else wishing to take the floor. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor on your right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think I have said enough, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is, pursuant to Standing Order 51:

That the -

- (a) Land Transport (Amendment) Bill 2019 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 22nd November, 2019 but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	:	26
Noes	:	17
Not voted	:	8

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the motion is therefore agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the items that need to be considered in today's Order Paper, and I thank you all for your contributions.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 5.45 p.m.