

**TUESDAY, 22<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2015**

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

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs; the Honourable Minister for Fisheries and Forests; the Honourable S. Patel; and the Honourable Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 21st September, 2015 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome

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

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

Reminder on Speaking Time

Before I give the floor to the Honourable Prime Minister, I wish to remind Honourable Members, that you have up to 20 minutes each to speak. The warning bell will sound at 15 minutes and again at 20 minutes for the end of your speech. Thank you and I now call on the Honourable Prime Minister to have the floor.

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

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Good morning, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Good morning, Sir.

HON. REAR ADMIRAL (RET'D) J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Madam Speaker, I join all the Honourable Members of this Parliament in thanking His Excellency the President. We thank him for his

inspiring and challenging words which remind us of our duty to the people of Fiji and to our democratic way of life.

We thank him for his strong leadership as President of our newly created true democracy. We thank His Excellency for being a steadfast moral exemplar, who has stood for principle and integrity while remaining above politics and self-interest. And we thank him for His lifetime of extraordinary service to this nation as Military leader, diplomat, Minister, Statesman, President and humanitarian.

It has been my honour and personal pleasure, Madam Speaker, to know His Excellency for a large part of my life. I can tell you Honourable colleagues that it was clear early-on that he was destined to achieve great things and that his calling is to serve the people of Fiji, . Fiji is fortunate indeed that His Excellency is the national leader to guide us in this time of critical transition, when others may not be brave enough to do so because it was not politically correct to do so at that time.

There are times when a person's temperament, values and preparation combine to call that person to high service because he is the obvious choice to lead. This was the case when His Excellency was called to serve the position that he will soon leave. Our nation has been most fortunate and is most grateful. Very simply, His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau was the right man, in the right place, at the right time.

As Prime Minister, I have been very grateful for his energy and commitment in his work, being one of Government's direct link to the people. He is a man of great heart and compassion, who has endeavoured to eliminate the gap between the most chiefly and the most humble Fijians. I have also been grateful to have his non-political voice as a guide, even when he reminded me of things I preferred not to remember. Every Prime Minister needs to hear an authoritative voice or wisdom that remains above the fray. I have heard His Excellency's voice and I have listened.

Madam Speaker, as Head of State, His Excellency has asserted Fiji's leadership role in the Pacific region. He is the first Fijian Head of State and perhaps, the first Head of State in the entire region to have visited His counterparts in neighbouring countries. He visited 11 Pacific island countries in 2013 and 2014, in many cases, reassuring them of Fiji's support for their development or our assistance in recovery from disaster. Through Him, Fiji became the first country in the world, to offer support to the low lying Pacific island countries that are beginning to confront the destructive effects of climate change and the resulting rise in sea levels.

A major foundation of who he was to become is rooted in his Military service. He enlisted in the RFMF as a young man of 21 years. Six years later, he was aide-de-camp to the Governor of Fiji, Sir Derek Jakeway, and following that to Sir Robert Foster. He served in Borneo, attended diplomatic training at Oxford and was given the honour of serving as Fiji equerry to His Royal Highness Prince Charles at the Fiji Independence celebrations. He rose to the rank of Brigadier-General and eventually the Commander of the RFMF.

Madam Speaker, I saw firsthand the extraordinary leadership ability, sharp intelligence and innate sense of fairness of our leader. The Military is a place where merit is rewarded. Chiefly lineage, personal wealth or political connections are irrelevant to whether you can lead others. You are judged continually by fellow soldiers who know that their lives may depend on you one day. They count on you to do your duty, even at the risk of your own life. They trust you to give well considered orders. They depend on you to be fair-minded and honest; a person of good character. They expect you to be prepared mentally and physically for your duties. His Excellency embodies all these qualities. His men believed in His leadership, trusted him to always do the right thing and he earned their admiration and loyalty. The qualities that made him a most honourable Military leader have served him well throughout his life. Since the beginning of

my Military career to this very day, His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau has set an example. He has been a mentor to many and I am indebted, personally to him, for helping me to navigate through our most difficult times.

As the United Nations Special Ambassador for the Pacific on HIV/AIDS prevention, His Excellency's work has earned him and Fiji the status as the respected voice for compassion, rational policy and energetic action in the fight against this horrible disease. He has travelled the world over, to encourage other nations to be proactive and he has exchanged views with political and health leaders. And importantly, His Excellency has matched his strong message abroad with action here in Fiji, reminding us that we cannot shirk from our responsibility to strive to solve one of the most difficult issues of our time.

He has tirelessly spread the message that HIV can be prevented, if we speak frankly about it and educate people about how to avoid it, beginning with our young people. He has also advanced the message of acceptance and empathy that sufferers of HIV/AIDS should not be cast out but should be treated with the same compassion as any other afflicted person.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency has excelled in this diplomatic role in part because of his long experience, representing Fiji before other nations and in multinational settings as Minister for Foreign Affairs, our High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and diplomatic assignments in Canberra and the United Nations.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President has not taken a single day of leave since he committed himself to his work as Head of State; such is His extraordinary devotion to duty and I would like to call the nation's attention to another fact about our President that may have gone unnoticed. Although he is a very warm and sociable man, he simply does not seek personal attention. He puts principles ahead of personality.

Madam Speaker, we, Fijians, are a family and like all families, we have our differences but also like all families, we unite permanently and unquestioningly around certain things; things that are part of our identity that transcend politics, religion, geography, ethnicity, class or education. One of those transcendent institutions is very much on the minds of all Fijians now. I am speaking of course about Fiji Rugby.

So, I want to say right now that there are still plenty of rugby to be played in the UK, You can be sure that none of the other teams in our grouping have stopped worrying about us after one defeat. They know that rugby is in our blood, that we are a nation with more than 80,000 registered rugby players and we have gone to England to win.

We, Fijians, are not only tenacious, we also learn and adapt quickly. While the first game jitters and the electrifying Twickenham Stadium with 80,000 yelling English supporters may have caused mistakes, too many referee interruptions and lack of concentration for the full 80 minutes, I know our Flying Fijians have learned a great deal in this first match. We will improve in our game against Australia, indeed we must.

Madam Speaker, as His Excellency the President reminded us, we are the representatives of the people and we are honour-bound to work in their interests. Elections are about differences but legislating is about finding solutions. The unfortunate truth about democracy is that it drives us to sharpen our differences, to draw distinctions between parties and candidates at Election time. But in doing so, it gives us the means to understand what the people want and to go forward with the legislative programme. Sometimes, we will simply have to disagree and go to a vote but there are many things on which we can agree or find ways to agree if we put the needs of our people first. We must always put Fiji and Fijians first.

Madam Speaker, after one full year in my office, my Government's philosophy and priorities are well-known. The Ministers speaking before this august body are outlining some details of their plans and we will reveal many more details in the 2016 Budget. The budget is the means by which we put our philosophy and promises into action, and that is what we intend to do.

We will adhere to the philosophy and priorities that are the bedrock of this Government, - creating equal opportunity for all Fijians and equal access to Government services and the modern marketplace. Doing all we can to lift up the poorest and most isolated Fijians, so that they can enjoy the blessings of modern society. Managing the economy prudently and staying on course with the process of reform that has brought unprecedented growth in investment and employment to Fijians continuing to improve our infrastructure, which is critical to the support of the first three objectives; ensuring the continued protection and advancement of all rights provided under our Constitution and asserting Fiji's interest in the international arena, creating a more hospitable climate for Fijian exports and overseas investments in Fiji and continuing to play a leadership role in areas of vital importance to us, such as international peace and climate change.

Madam Speaker, my Government has taken the view that our nation cannot continue to mature as long as large numbers of Fijians are marginalised. That is not just a matter of policy, it is a matter of principle. As our economy grows, two things will happen. We will have a greater ability to directly improve the living conditions of the poor and the number of people living in poverty will shrink. A strong economy -an economy that creates jobs and small business opportunities - is the only effective long-term cure for poverty. We have set our priorities to deliver more resources for education, health, transportation and basic community services, and we have adjusted programmes to ensure that those in need receive the most attention.

We must go beyond, stop gap solutions. Our goal must be to eradicate poverty. The Poverty Alleviation Programmes combined with a robust economy. A commitment to equality and intelligent infrastructure development can do that. They raise people up over the long-term. It starts with education, as you know distinguished colleagues, I consider it a great achievement of my Government to establish free education in Fiji. This reform was long overdue and my pride in having accomplished it is mixed with some shame that we, as a nation, took so long to wake up to the fact that we simply cannot afford to waste the potential that resides in our people.

Free quality education has been the key to every successful country's development and we will harness it for Fiji's future.

Our economy is growing and becoming more sophisticated. We are creating more jobs that require skills and education and we must produce Fijians who can fill them.

A future leader of Fiji could come from anywhere in our country and we need to educate that boy or girl. That is why we have, amongst other initiatives, given particular attention to residential schools for children from remote areas. It is not only fair; it is better for the country.

Free education only works if children have access to it. That means we cannot overlook these children who live in the isolated parts of the country. Our geography has very particular challenges and we shall always be mindful of our citizens who live in remote rural communities and outer islands.

Madam Speaker, we are also deeply concerned about the health of our people, in particular the alarming incidents of Non Communicable Diseases such as Diabetes and Hypertension. These health tragedies are preventable and we must prevent what we can.

Diabetes Fiji reports that one Fijian experiences a diabetes-related amputation every 12 hours and that one third of these people do not even know they have the disease until they go to the hospital and face the loss of a limb. This is an unacceptable situation.

Diabetes is only one health challenge among many facing our medical system. This state of affairs indicates that people are not well enough informed and are not seeing doctors often enough so that disease can be discovered and treated before it is too late. Within this situation is also an indicator of inequality that must be set straight because it is the poor, under-educated and isolated Fijians who are more likely to undergo a preventable amputation.

We are investing to improve our hospitals and to improve public education about important health issues, including diabetes and we are recruiting more doctors and nurses to deliver more and better care to rural areas. It is not only about bricks and mortar and machinery, it is also about basic awareness, values and health education.

Recently, we have been confronted with the tragedy of childhood and adolescent suicide. Fiji does not have a high suicide rate compared with other countries, but until three primary school children killed themselves, suicide was a subject we did not discuss very much. It seemed to happen on the margins of our national life and families and friends were left to grieve privately for their loved ones. Suicide is a terrible thing and it lives much pain in its wake.

There have been 89 suicides in Fiji so far this year, and 30 were younger than 25, including 10 children under the age of 16. Another 80 people attempted suicide and thankfully, they failed. Seven of them were younger than 16 and 35 and were between 17 and 25. This is a crisis for the nation, and my Government is already taking decisive action to raise awareness for the causes of suicide and develop the means and the resources to prevent it.

Some family members and communities blame themselves and ask: "what could have I done to prevent it? Why did not I see this coming? How could I have not known how troubled my friend was?" One solution is to talk about it openly and take it seriously. Child suicide descends to a level of tragedy that is almost unthinkable. No child should feel so bereft of hope that suicide becomes the answer to his or her problems.

Madam Speaker, the economy has been steadily and strongly growing under my Government and so far, 2015 looks to be again a good year. We often speak about the economy in numbers, but those numbers tell a story. A story of households with more stability, of children who are being prepared in school for the future, of business that are growing, of new graduates who can find jobs, of cities that are more orderly, and of a country that is more prepared for the future. I am proud of the new strength and vigor of our economy but my Government can only take credit for having the good sense to put policies in place that encourage and allow people to do business - business small, medium and large. The rest is up to the Fijian people to take advantage of these policies.

Government's job is to create a level playing field, to encourage investments and to establish sensible regulations to protect workers, investors and the environment - and then get out of the way and let the people get to work. Well, the people have gotten to work and the results are excellent.

Madam Speaker, this year will be our third consecutive year with investments above 25 per cent of GDP, and significantly most of that is domestic and private investments. There has been a remarkable surge in bank lending for investment purposes, 76 per cent so far, this year alone. Construction is up and job offerings are up by nearly 20 per cent, according to the RBF survey. These show that the reforms are working as intended and that people are confident about the future. And that confidence is certainly at an all-time high. It is a good time to be in business in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, economics is very much a matter of both logic and perception. People make rational decisions based on the factors they see before them. If they believe the economic system will reward them for hard work, they will work hard; if they believe the future is strong and secure, they will plan and invest for the long-term; and if they believe that Fiji is a safe place to invest their money, they will keep their money in Fiji or bring their money to Fiji from abroad.

Our economy is receiving the faith and trust of Fijians at all levels of society - from the investor to the wage earner and from those Fijians living and working outside Fiji. They all have a stake in a robust economy and in an economy that welcomes and rewards their energy, their ideas and their commitments. It is our duty to make that trust and confidence permanent. So we will hold fast to our reforms and we will devise new reforms to eliminate waste and unnecessary obstacles to growth and development, wherever we find them. Most importantly, the Fijian people can count on us to invest in education health and infrastructure. We have borrowed wisely and the results of our borrowings have been strong growth. We will continue to use the prudent management of debt to modernise Fiji to be more competitive and to give the Fijian people the means to produce.

Madam Speaker, the world continues to be a dangerous place and Fiji is at the forefront of the two great crises. Fiji has gained a well-deserved reputation for professionalism, integrity and courage in trouble spots around the world for our long service of United Nations peacekeeping duties. Today, our troops are carrying out critical peacekeeping missions in Syria and Sinai. Fiji's role as peacekeepers is a responsibility we fulfil as our contribution to building a better world. We will all be grateful when our troops come home from Syria, where they have faced very tough situations. But we know we will be called on again and that we will answer the call.

The second great crisis is Global Climate Change and its disastrous consequences, sea levels rising and warming oceans. Fiji has been outspoken in insisting that every nation in the world do its part to combat this phenomenon. Fiji is doing as much as we can, as we develop the greenest economy possible but the major changes must come from the large industrialised nations of Europe, America and Asia. They must make commitments now to roll back the emission of greenhouse gases.

Yes, it is costly and difficult but the nations that are the biggest contributors to the cause of global warming can no longer wallow in denial. The time for sterile arguments about the causes of climate change is over. The verdict is here and there is no doubt in the scientific community that human activity causes global warming. For us, proof does not come from laboratory, the real life effects of global warming are happening to our own nations, we can see it with our own eyes.

Fiji is taking the lead in advocating for the protection of small island States, some of which risk being wiped from the face of the earth as the seas continue to rise. I will spearhead the argument to the United Nation Climate Change Conference in Paris later this year and in every other international forum in which we participate. It is high on the agenda in my meetings with leaders of industrialised nations that they must do more. Nearly all are friends of Fiji but we do not and we will not hold back in the name of friendship. This is a matter of fundamental national interest to Fiji and for all the nations affected immediately and directly by rising sea levels and climate change. This will remain a cornerstone of our foreign policy.

Madam Speaker, we have just entered the second year of our Parliamentary democracy and we have had some intense political arguments. Unfortunately, sometimes the debate has descended into personal attacks, but I believe that as an Honourable Parliament, this august Parliament can learn from these events and commit not to repeat them.

The work of democracy is never finished. The beauty of democracy is that the people define it and reshape it, in accord with their experience and their changing times. The one thing that remains unchanged

is the absolute requirement that democracy must produce benefits for all the people and it must ensure fairness and equality, and that it must produce good and transparent government.

All of these things, Madam Speaker, I am committed to do and I appeal to the other side of Parliament to do the same. May God bless us all, may God bless Fiji, *vinaka vakalevu*, and I thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament: I rise to thank His Excellency the President for His Address He made here last week to open Parliament for the new year.

I also wish to pay tribute to this true son of Fiji, Ratu Epeli, for his long service in the public for the people of Fiji. I just wish that our young people of today can look up to him and see what He has accomplished and do likewise. I say this, Madam Speaker, because there is a lot of confusion in our land today, the values need to be streamlined to mirror what has been accomplished in the past by our leaders, the likes of which is His Excellency the President. Having said that, Madam Speaker, I must admit though the Address lacks in content, in the way that we are accustomed to.

In Section 81(4) of the 2013 Constitution, His Excellency the President must lay out the policies and programmes of Government over the next 12 months. This did not happen, Madam Speaker, I do not know why, but I would say that it is incumbent upon Government to provide His Excellency with the materials on which He would address Parliament and the narrative for the coming year. That is sad Madam Speaker, because it was to be his swan song but unfortunately a lot of our people have seen the Address as threatening and intimidating. I just wish going forward, that we pay due respect to this part of Parliament and that in future, the President is provided with specifics on what the Government will do over the next 12 months, as opposed to what we heard last week.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President spoke about the Christian State in the West and as my colleague, the Honourable Dulakiverata said yesterday, it is before the courts but it has been brought up and I will also comment on it.

Madam Speaker, we are talking about the Western Division, we are talking about Nadroga/Navosa, Ba and Ra. This region, Madam Speaker, is known for its resources which have benefitted Fiji - tourism, sugar, gold, forest products, et cetera. Fiji has benefitted from the Western Division and we, from the West, are happy for it, that our region develops its wealth for the benefit of everyone in this country.

What has occurred lately, Madam Speaker, or rather what has emerged is the discovery of huge sources of minerals in the Western Division. Exploration has occurred in Fiji over the years but lately, with technology being what it is, geologists are now identifying huge deposits of gold, silver, copper, manganese and bauxite in the Western Division.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! May I remind you that the case is before the courts and I would rather that you just make a general comment on that, and not to get into too much detail that would impact on what is before the courts at the moment.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, if I am allowed to say this, I am creating the background on how we should address the challenge that is before us in the Western Division, because if you look at the reason as to why our people in the West have gone this way, it is because of their resources. We should find ways to have dialogue with them, to assure them that their resources are safe. I would urge, Madam Speaker, as I have said many times before, that a Committee from Parliament must go down to the West.

Madam Speaker, the Committee on Natural Resources ...

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! You are still getting too much in detail that may impact on what is before the courts. I request that you refrain from that.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, may I brief Parliament on what is there now, that could help us all understand what is in the West and help us understand how we can go about resolving some of these issues. I am not talking, Madam Speaker, about hijacking the work of the DPP because they are independent, no one can touch them. We respect them. All we need to do is for the House to appreciate what is there, what is the motivation that can help us resolve the issue, if you can allow me to do that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, for instance, if I talk about gold, since the beginning of Vatukoula, it has mined about 100 tonnes of gold. What we see in the West now, Madam Speaker, is the possibility of seven or eight more Vatukoula. For instance, Madam Speaker, in the island of Wayasewa in the Yatu Yasawa, there is gold in there now, similar to the gold that is being mined in Lihir Island, Papua New Guinea which has the biggest deposit of gold in the world. So, what you see in Lihir, Madam Speaker, which is the size of Ovalau, is now being found in Wayasewa. This is where I am coming from, Madam Speaker, to help us appreciate this, to help us as a people with goodwill to resolve this matter because it was said that they are a minority.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I apologise, I am not very clear here, to resolve what matter, Honourable Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- To help us understand what is happening in the West.

MADAM SPEAKER.- What is happening in the West?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The Christian State that was brought up by His Excellency President.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Yes, but you are getting into too much detail. I request that you refrain from doing that.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, if you look at the context of a Fijian *iTaukei* way of life, we cannot say that it is a small minority because there are relationships in the Western Division. We have this phenomena called the "*koi calevu*" phenomena. We are one family, whether you are in Nadroga/Navosa or Ba, you have a door, you have a house, you have ...

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there are too many interjections. We would like to hear what the honourable Gavoka is saying.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- So, Madam Speaker, when you say it is a small minority that is in remand, Madam Speaker, it is actually a bigger cross-section of the people because of the linkages in the traditional way. If you look at it, people in remand are from the *Vanua o Davutukia*, *Vanua Haunivalu*, *Vanua o Nabuavatu*, *Vanua o Tabanivono*, *Vanua o Naruku*, *Were levu o Were ni Dri*, *Vanua o Louvatu*, *Leweikoro i Vagadra*, *Tabanivono-i-Wai*, *Yavahuna*; all those are houses in Nadroga/Navosa that are dominant in the area.

I guess what I am saying, Madam Speaker, is that, let us not look at them as a minority. Look at them as representatives of a community that we need to have dialogue with. That is where I am coming



from, Madam Speaker, because if we have all that wealth, for instance, in Wayasewa, is the *Vanua o Boutolu*. One of the elders in remand today is from Wayasewa. He is an elder, so we must avoid a situation where we develop that gold in Wayasewa, while one of their elders is being hounded by the security forces or behind bars. That, Madam Speaker, is something that we must try and avoid.

When I was attending this briefing by a geologist not long ago, talking about the vast mineral wealth in the West, someone whispered to me and said, "This can be dangerous", and I knew what he meant. We all remember the movie "*Blood diamonds*", Madam Speaker, it was screened in Suva not long ago, and how diamonds virtually destroyed some parts of Africa. It was because that vast mineral wealth was discovered in an area that was disintegrating.

When we develop our mineral wealth, Madam Speaker, we must have unity, goodwill and we must be one people. Goodwill, Madam Speaker, is something that is not new to Fiji, goodwill is part of us.

I have said in this House many times that if 1987, 2000 and 2006 incidents had happened anywhere else, that country would have fallen into the abyss, but not in Fiji. Yes, we suffered, yes it was ugly, but we came back. That was because of the goodwill that has been established in this country since time began, and that is where I would like to ask us and everyone here in leadership, to work on the goodwill, to bring in the right environment, and directing towards the right direction to develop our natural resources.

Madam Speaker, up in the highlands of Navosa and Ba, hardly any development happens there. If you develop these minerals, Madam Speaker, it will open up those areas.

Rakiraki in Ra is also being identified as a field with the potential for gold. I am just talking about the Western Division, Madam Speaker, because I had discovered to my surprise that there are rock formation in Fiji that are not found anywhere else in the world. Can you imagine this, Madam Speaker? You look at the map of Fiji, the small dot in the ocean, and a premium geologist said, "We find things in Fiji that are not found anywhere else in the world." That is our riches, that is our wealth, and it should be for everyone. I am begging for goodwill, let us look at this as a people, Madam Speaker. The West as we know, has a good make up of people, very cosmopolitan having every community in the West, and we will develop that as one people.

Madam Speaker, I cannot say enough about goodwill and I am afraid that the Constitution we have today of which we swore an allegiance to last year, but we made our reservation, is not creating goodwill.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Hear! Hear!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I have spoken about the tyranny of the majority in this Parliament, and I have said once that when the Americans were framing their Constitution, they were afraid of the majority - their tyranny, the mob-rule. That is why they created the Senate, to slow and cool things down, as opposed to the majority running and doing its own thing. It can be frightening. That has worked very well for the United States and Fiji had this as well. I think it is something that we should re-look at, Madam Speaker, because the majority - mob-rule can be frightening for a country like Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I am hearing projections that by 2030, 80 per cent of the population in this country will be *iTaukei* and 20 per cent, other communities. With this Constitution of majority rule, I fear for the future of our country. I think the 1997 Constitution was better, we had guaranteed seats in Parliament - every member of the community had a seat in Parliament and entrenched legislation, there was a Senate which helped cool things down.

Madam Speaker, I continue to say this, it is too dangerous for Fiji. I hope we have the wisdom down the line, to try and make some amendments to our Constitution, to make it representative for everyone.

Keep the safeguards for every community in this country to have their representation in Parliament. The way it is going, by 2030, things could change dramatically in this country, and Fiji will not be what we want it to be.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President also spoke about the Military and I am afraid, Madam Speaker, the way it is, goodwill is absent, with the way men of the Military are being used. The statement, that it is a duty of the RFMF to assist the Police in the execution of its duties, is unconstitutional. The Constitution provides that the Police shall be responsible for law and order in Fiji, the Constitution does not provide that the Police shall be assisted by the Military. Madam Speaker, Article 131(2) provides that the RFMF shall be responsible for the security and defence of the State of Fiji at all times within the context of all Fijians.

What we have now, Madam Speaker, is the command to the RFMF to act in support of its concept of democracy, it should not. RFMF should not have this concept of democracy, the concept of democracy should be ours. They are the ones who should support it, otherwise, Madam Speaker, they are opening up doors for more intervention by the Military which we do not think is their role, which I do not think they will want it to be their role. Madam Speaker, this is truly frightening, if you allow this to continue, and I would urge that we do not misuse the Military, the way it is being done today.

Madam Speaker, if I can briefly touch on the landowners again, going back to the people in the West - developing their minerals, developing tourism; we must always remember that what they are getting today is only \$61 million, Madam Speaker, and that is not sufficient. We should strive to increase what goes to the landowners through their leases, royalties, et cetera.

We spoke the other week about what this country makes. Tourism alone, listening to the Honourable Minister yesterday, is now bringing in \$1.5 billion. For tourism leases, out of the \$61 million, would be about \$25 or \$30 million. Madam Speaker, that is not enough, we need to continue to digress diverse and bring more to the resource owners. That brings me to the Surfing Decree, Madam Speaker.

The Surfing Decree, the people of Nabila and Momi, were being paid for the use of their reef, which the Government has stopped. The people of Baravi, Nadroga; Davutikia, people of Kadavu and Beqa, were receiving proceeds from tourism but this Government has stopped that. Please, let us re-open that, let us free them that because in the greater scheme of things, the resource owners are not getting what they should be getting, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, on the economy, we are hearing some impressive figures but unfortunately, it is a jobless growth. With the figure 5.3 of GDP (Gross Domestic Product), we want to see more jobs created. We want to see poverty to improve. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, this 5.4 growth in GDP is not changing the colour of poverty in this country. Father Kevin Bar, one who is identified very closely with the poor, said that 30 per cent of Fiji live below the poverty line and 20 per cent barely make it over the poverty line. So, half of this country are not reaping the benefits of this economic growth.

Madam Speaker, I have spoken about the security officers. I wish that my colleague, the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, take this up. They will really need to re-look at this, and I hope and believe that something may have been done. We need to look after our security officers. They are working 12 hours a day, and in some cases, they are being paid \$20 a day.

In Singapore, Madam Speaker, the Government tops up their wages by 30 per cent, and this goes back to what we had said initially, let us not look at an hourly minimum rate, and let us look at a minimum wage. We have identified \$165 a week as the bare minimum for a family to survive. These should be some reasons to strive towards those, and I am grateful that my colleague is doing all he can to improve on this.

Madam Speaker, there is much to be done. There is more consultation to be done and in relation to our landowners, Madam Speaker, dialogue - listen and explain. Lecturing and threatening will not work.

Madam Speaker, let me conclude by this: too often, we have spoken about His Excellency the President, his long service, the examples that we can learn from him and too often, we hear people saying, "Away with the old politicians, away with their old ways" but I beg to differ, Madam Speaker. From the past, we can learn, from the past we can get our direction and let me say here that during the dark days of the year 2000, when Prime Minister Chaudhry was held hostage, Fiji was falling apart and we did not know where we were going. Those were 56 days of chaos, we did not know.

The Military, Madam Speaker, kept us safe, and I salute them for that. There was this young colonel, who was the spokesman for the Military, we used to rush home for the 6 o'clock News, just to see him speak, to give us back the confidence that we are all right. We remember those days, Madam Speaker.

During that period, Madam Speaker, the Commander of the Fiji Military Forces also made some speeches in the country where the Honourable Prime Minister in one of his speeches quoted from Jeremiah 6:16 and this is what he said, "Thus saith the Lord, Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it". That came from the Commander then and the Honourable Prime Minister today.

If you allow me, Madam Speaker, in Fijian, it says, "*Dou tu ena sala ka vakararai, ka taroga na i lakolako makawa se evei na sala e vinaka, ia dou lako ga kina.*" That was what the Honourable Prime Minister said then, the words were used by Jeremiah for the people of Judah. 200,000 years ago he was inspirational. He was used by the commander then, it was inspirational to us and I use it today, and it should be inspirational to us also as we moved forward.

Madam Speaker, thank you and I would like to thank His Excellency the President for his Address last week.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Semesa Karavaki to make his speech.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers and the Honourable Members of Parliament: it is indeed a great opportunity for me to rise this morning as part of our calling, to contribute and address His Excellency the President's Address. On that note, Madam Speaker, I thank His Excellency the President for his Address, given in this House on Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2015, pursuant to Section 81(4) of the 2013 Constitution.

In outlining the policies and programmes of Government, His Excellency the President, as I note, spent about 75 per cent of his Address, addressing the events in which sections of our community had clearly shown their dissent to the Government policies and pathway. Indeed, it is important to do that because of the stability and the unity that we all aspire for as leaders in this country.

The Government, Madam Speaker, is advocating a pathway of equality, as always being stated "something that has not happened in this country in the past". Equality of all citizens and it is also something that has not happened in the past is the entrenching in the Constitution of the policy of secularism.

Madam Speaker, it is our desire as leaders of this nation to ensure that we support policies that will promote peace and harmony between all who had chosen to make Fiji their home. In order to do this, the Government must not ignore the voice of dissent from citizens of this nation.

The Government must explore the reasons for dissent by those who do not agree with the policies of the Government. This cannot be ignored because those who are opposing the Government policies are natives or indigenous people of this land and country. Decision by these factions to establish a Christian State, clearly depicts their desired system of governance, to further compel these people to accept the Government system of equality at the expense of the *iTaukei* control over resources, and portrays clear manipulative measures that deny these people of their God-given ownership rights.

While focusing on development, Madam Speaker, and peace among all citizens of this nation, the pathway of achieving this is to recognise their God-given rights. The imposition of values and systems contrary to the beliefs and practices of the *iTaukei*, will surely encourage agitation among indigenous community. It is, therefore, ironical to compel the *iTaukei* to comply with the law when, on the other hand, unilateral decisions are being made by the Government in enacting laws...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, on a Point of Order, the Honourable Member is standing up and justifying, precisely against what His Excellency the President said; justifying actions against the State on the basis of religion and ethnicity. Can we please have the ruling on this?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Please take into consideration the issue that has been raised, Honourable Member. The statement that has been made is really applying to an issue that is currently being taken in the court, and refrain from giving too many details.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, this is a fact that we have here in Fiji, a fact that we cannot deny ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, it's not!

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- ... a fact that we must address in the most appropriate way through love and caring.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- You may continue, Honourable Member, but be mindful of the sentiments that have been expressed.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- For instance, Madam Speaker, some landowners in Raralevu were assured after meeting with the iTLTB officials and sitting tenants, that portions of their land would be returned with sufficient land area to be occupied by the sitting tenants. The landowners returned to the same area later on to identify the portion of land that they had earmarked for their own development but upon arrival, they were ordered by the tenants to exit the property because the lease had been completely renewed, contrary to the resolutions of the joint meeting with the iTLTB officials and the tenants. This is how landowners have been treated, even though the Native Land Trust Act mandates the administration of the Native Land is to promote the interests of the landowners.

We cannot ignore the rift created among indigenous people by the policy of Government to distribute lease equally to landowners according to the race there in the VKB (*Vola ni Kawa Bula*), without consulting indigenous people. Madam Speaker, this has often been raised in this House.

We now note this confusion emerging from within the societies. This is the situation we expect to go through when the fabric of the indigenous values and beliefs are being sacrificed by the Government without consulting them, for the purpose of development. God's word does not sanction policies that will impede certain group by oppressing and suffering, through the suffering of the indigenous community.

There would be feelings of despair and desperation which would tend to demoralise society and open the door to crimes of every desperation. In its resolve, Madam Speaker, to bring about reformation to our system of Government, there are no developments, bonus payments, rhetorics by the Government of the goodness of its pathway can subdue the agitations of the indigenous people to assert their conscience, conviction of their preferred system.

When introducing new reforms, Madam Speaker, the Government must be conscious that there is no new thing under the sun. This is a well-known statement by King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 1:9 where he said, and I quote:

“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done and there is no new thing under the sun.”

That is why, Madam Speaker, it is important that when we look at what we are going through now, we must understand that all these things are not new. It had happened in the past, we must take stock of what had happened in the past and the experience of those who had gone through it, for our benefit in this time that we are living in.

The Address by His Excellency the President is his last to have been made in this House before the new President would be elected by this House later this year. His Excellency the President has given us something that we can talk about today, something that we can reflect on, and something that we can give suggestions and make suggestions, Madam Speaker, that may be a better way or better pathway to take.

We are reminded, Madam Speaker, of the important departing speech of King David when he addressed his son Solomon and the leaders of the nations of Israel. As I read, Madam Speaker, from 1 Chronicles 28: 8, this is what it states, and I quote:

“Now therefore, in the sight of all Israel, the congregation of the Lord, and in the audience of our God, keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God: that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you for ever.”

Continuing on with Verse 9, this is what he said, I quote:

“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts, if thou seek him, he will be found of thee but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever”.

His Excellency the President stated that if we fail to condemn the actions of the dissident groups, in particular, if Members of this august Parliament failed to do so, it would cast doubt upon the Members.

He added that it would cast doubt about whether the Members believe in the true, and truly subscribe to the fundamental democratic principles upon which our modern State is founded upon. Such statements, Madam Speaker, must not be used to perpetuate growth injustice being camouflaged in a Constitution that was meant to be shoved down the throats of those who were to oppose it.

This House has discussed how the Constitution deprived the landowners of the land acquired by the State prior to the effect of the date of the Constitution being 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2013. Section 28(2) of the Constitution guarantees the returns of compulsory acquired native land after 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2013, and not those that were acquired before that. This is injustice and it cannot continue as such that serious consideration must be taken to review and they looked at it. How can this policy be corrected, Madam Speaker, according to the principle of justice? Native land acquired by the State must remain as native land and lease paid to the landowners, as long as the land is used for the purpose of our position. Under the present system, the State is guilty of coveting native land and is therefore, condemned by Commandment 10 of the law of God.

When we look at stories in the Old Testament, we are being given a lesson to draw from, Madam Speaker. As Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10: 11 and, I quote:

“Now all this things happen unto those for examples, as they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come”.

We must not, Madam Speaker, look at the stories that are written in the *Bible* as fables or just mere stories. They are written for a purpose that we live in the end of time must learn from. This nation was in habitat for the purpose of its population of keeping and living according to the principles of the commandment of God, Jehovah.

When the Government unilaterally created the 2013 Constitution, imposing unjust principles for the people, it has in fact, given the right of choice to the indigenous people to choose their own system of government. Their God given right of ownership of their land depends on their choice. The Government must therefore, expect that the indigenous people may choose not to follow the ungodly policies contained in its imposed Constitution.

It is well established, Madam Speaker, that the indigenous people were given the first right of owning this country, before they were joined by other races and being so, they have been established as the race to take control and make decision on their own resources and institution.

As Luke wrote in Acts 17:26, and I quote:

“And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation”.

God, Madam Speaker, has already planned from the foundation of the earth where to put different races of the world and also had laid out the boundaries of their habitation, because the government had failed to consult the indigenous people when formulating policies affecting their institutions and resources. It is therefore, imperative that it must revisit these policies with humility.

The Government must remember that citizens of this country have the right to withdraw their support from the government. Their decisions would not, of course be based on the reliable information they receive. People may have voted for FijiFirst, Madam Speaker, during the Elections last year, however after assessing the performance of the government decided to withdraw their support. Our destiny is individually determined and not as a nation. The example of King Solomon should be a lesson to us, as leaders and in particular, to the government.

Madam Speaker, once loved by God, he later turned away and served other gods, as written in 1 Kings 11: 9 – 12, and I quote:

“And the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel who had appeared unto him twice. And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded. Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son”.

King Solomon, Madam Speaker, his son Rehoboam ascended to the throne after his death. The people requested that he lower the tax and he, instead of lowering it, increased the tax despite the request of the people.

In 1 Kings 12: 4, Madam Speaker, this is what he says, after King Rehoboam had spoken with the people and the people had come to Rehoboam to request him for the lowering of the tax. I quote:

“Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter and we will serve thee.

In 1 Kings 12: 14, I quote:

“And spake to them after the counsel of the young men saying (this is what it said after he had listened to their request) my father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.”

This is a leader, Madam Speaker, that did not listen to the plea of the people and it is interesting to know that even in this situation, the people have the right to decide for their own system of government. The 10 tribes of Israel therefore, decided to depart and not be part of the government of Rehoboam. He was not happy and immediately assembled men of war out of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to fight against the house of Israel. What he did, Madam Speaker, Rehoboam was not happy. He gathered all the men of war of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to go after the 10 tribes of Israel but God had decided that the nation of Israel must be divided.

To go after them, but God has a message for the leader, for the King in I Kings Chapter 12, verses 21 and 22:

“And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah with the tribe of Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men which were warriors to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon.

But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, and I quote:

“Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah and Benjamin and to the remnant of the people saying, Thus saith the Lord, you shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They heartened therefore to the word of the Lord and returned to depart. according to the word of the Lord”.

Madam Speaker, we see how God has his timetable and plan for every one of us, even for our nation, but with due respect, His Excellency the President. While we may aspire for the unity, this cannot be achieved by way of unjust policies. Government must take immediate steps to re-examine its policies towards the institutions and resources of indigenous people. It is my prayer, Madam Speaker, that we will come together as nation and one people under God.

Madam Speaker, the commitment of His Excellency the President to this past contribution to this nation, not only as the President of this nation but his past commitment, must be commended. It is my prayer also that we must take account that we are living in a time that we can witness violence around us daily and we can together revisit and look at the higher moral standard that God has set for us.

I take note, Madam Speaker, of those who aspire to embrace God's 10 Commandments because that is the only perfect Constitution that any nation can have. It is unblemished because the architect of that Constitution is God Himself. It is my prayer, Madam Speaker, as I contribute to the Address given by His Excellency the President and wish him well, and I pray that his life will be blessed more abundantly as he continues with His service after leaving office.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Madam Speaker, before I begin my response this morning, I would like to welcome back the Honourable Prime Minister from his travel.

Madam Speaker, I rise to thank His Excellency the President for His Address at the opening of the new session of Parliament on Monday, 14th September, 2015. In doing so, I would like to make some comments and recommendations on key issues, some which have already been raised also by previous speakers on His Excellency's Address.

On the General Elections, Madam Speaker, His Excellency had suggested that because the 20-member Multi-National Observer Group declared the 2014 Elections credible, they must not be questioned. But questions, Madam Speaker, are at the heart of democracy. We must encourage our people to ask questions, particularly of those in power. As an Opposition, we have a duty and a right to question Government and that applies particularly when doubts persist about the credibility of the elections process and results but they must be good reasons, Madam Speaker, for our questions. Here are some that have never been properly answered.

Why were the Terms of Reference of the official observer groups so restrictive? Why was no local observer group allowed to participate? Why was the process from start to finish controlled by the Minister for Elections, who was also the General Secretary of a participating political party and therefore, had a vested interest in the outcome?

Our doubts, Madam Speaker, were recently given credibility by no less than a former Electoral Commissioner, Professor Vijay Naidu. He resigned in December 2014 but for reasons yet to be explained by the Government, news of his resignation was deliberately suppressed and withheld from the people until August 2015. Where is the transparency in this manner, Madam Speaker? There was none. There was what I would term a "conspiracy of silence".

Professor Naidu stated in an interview with ABC that the Supervisor of Elections reported to both the Solicitor-General and the Honourable and learned Attorney-General who was also the General Secretary of FijiFirst. As far as I am aware, that has never been denied. So there is a clear indication from one of the Government's own appointees that the process was compromised.

As for the one value, one vote, Madam Speaker, that did not happen in the 2014 Elections. There is evidence of this here in this House; 17 Members on the Government side received fewer votes than five of our candidates who were not elected. This makes a nonsense of the claim of one value, one vote. The electoral system provided for the votes of each Member to be treated differently in value so that those who polled less enter Parliament because of the shared vote of their leader while Members who polled more are left out. So, how can we say, Madam Speaker, it is one vote, one value when it is clearly not.



On the issue of democracy, I must ask how democratic it is when Honourable Members on the other side are prohibited from voting freely on certain issues and exercising our conscience vote. An Honourable Member on the other side, Madam Speaker, lost his seat when he voted according to his conscience. To compare the voter turnout of 2006 with 2014 is like comparing a coconut with an orange. In 2006, the voting age was 21, in 2014, it was 18; this increased the voter number significantly and is the major reason for the increase in voter turnout.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Percentage.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Also, the voters in 2014 were anxious to vote for a democratic process after eight years of repressive rule. So, numbers were bound to be better. I also take issue with the suggestion that the result was the people expressing their free will, they did not. In fact, the people were intimidated and threatened, the message was coming across that there would be a *coup* if they voted for SODELPA and other parties. There was no level playing field and the reality of our democracy is that the uneven surface is still in place today. Madam Speaker, let me explain.

When Honourable Members of the Opposition visit their constituencies, we have to get permits to meet the people. Even in villages, settlements and islands, away from what are normally classified as "public places", we are told this is required by law. It is a form of political repression and control. When Honourable Members from the opposite side of the House have meetings, they insist that they are conducting government business and therefore, do not require permits to meet the people. Double standards, Madam Speaker. None of these restrictions were ever placed on Members of Parliament in our previous democracies between 1970 and 1987 that the current Government so frequently scorns. Yet, they are enforced today in our so-called new and genuine democracy.

At this point, Madam Speaker, I wish to comment on the use or possible misuse of public funds, in particular, I wish to commend the courage and professionalism of the Auditor-General, Mr. Tevita Bolanavanua, and his auditing staff on the compilation of the ....

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Order! That issue is still with the Public Accounts Committee and their Report is yet to be tabled in Parliament. Please refrain from referring to those issues.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, the General Elections was an important step in the nation's journey to democracy. At the same time, we should be clear that proper process and the integrity of the Elections could not be protected without a Caretaker Government, especially in the period leading up to September 2014. The Military regime rejected this out of hand. Again, it is not hard to work out why. Since the 2006 *coup*, the regime maintained an oppressive administration which severely limited and violated basic rights. For example, political rights have been limited by the political parties' registration, conduct, Funding and Disclosures Decree No. 4 of 2013.

Madam Speaker, I wish to mention here a proposal and request which was put to the Government by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in 2014, for them to organise a local observer for the General Elections. I understand that this initiative was being coordinated for the CSO community by the Citizen's Constitutional Forum (CCF) and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) with technical support from the German organisation – Bread for the World. The organisers said that the advantage of a local observer mission was to begin building local experience in the monitoring of elections, to be enhanced in future elections. The Government refused to allow the local observer mission, the unanswered question is; why, Madam Speaker? I suggest that in future General Elections, we need to demonstrate that general elections can stand the test of local as well as overseas scrutiny. Furthermore, I believe that we need to make a new commitment to achieving a visible national culture of accountability in order to build a sustainable democracy in our country.

On the sedition charges, Madam Speaker, which previous speakers have spoken on, His Excellency the President said on page 3 of the *Daily Hansard* of Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 and I quote:

“The current attempts by a small minority to set up an alternative state, a so called Christian State or to overthrow the current Government are unlawful and contrary to the national interest.”

So, what His Excellency the President is saying is that, *coups* are bad for Fiji, yet members of his Government were the perpetrators of the 2006 *coups* and overthrew the 2006 Government in an act which was unlawful and contrary to our national interest.

Madam Speaker, as we all know, this matter is before the courts so comments on it, as we are aware, must be limited. However, their legal counsel, Mr. Singh, had uttered public statements about insurrection and how perpetrators would be punished which are out of order and usurp the role of the Judiciary. He has also commented on the conduct of the State Prosecutors and the Police. So, Madam Speaker, I strongly suggest that we do all we can in this House, to protect the independence of the Judiciary, as well as the rights of accused persons who are before the courts.

On the role of the Military, Madam Speaker, previous speakers have also spoken on this. His Excellency said on page 3 of the *Daily Hansard* of Monday 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2015, and I quote:

“And as Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, I believe the RFMF must wherever and whenever required, support the police in bringing to justice those who want to destroy democracy and impose their will on others.”

Madam Speaker, we are all aware of the alarming presence of armed soldiers recently in the Western Division, to assist Police in investigating allegations of sedition and inciting communal antagonism. We have also heard comments in this Chamber and it is generally known by the people, that without Military backing, no *coup* can succeed. So, it is the Military and Military alone which has caused political instability and turmoil in Fiji, and there is no two ways about it, Madam Speaker.

There is also widespread agreement that the Military should return to the barracks, that the size of the Military is disproportionate to the size of the country and its population. Therefore, Madam Speaker, the Military should gradually be reduced in number.

On another note, Madam Speaker, the Fijian Teachers Association (FTA) is very concerned about His Excellency's Address where he said at page 3 of the *Daily Hansard* of Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 and I quote:

“...there is no threat to your religion, identity or culture or your rights. Your rights are protected in our Constitution for all time.”

This was also quoted previously by an honourable Member yesterday.

What FTA would like to bring to the Government's attention is that, their rights would be better protected if the *iTaukei* Education Unit was reinstated in the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs. They believe this is in order, in light of the UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples) and also the ILO Convention 169, particularly in terms of scholarships and indigenous studies. Earlier this month, Dr. Paul Geraghty was quoted as saying that 19 out of 300 *iTaukei* dialects are now becoming extinct through colonisation, westernisation and people placing, Madam Speaker, a low value on their own dialects.

The Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs also added their concern that Fiji may lose one of its most prized identities, which is the language of the people. Therefore, it makes sense for the *iTaukei* Education Unit to be reinstated to try to preserve the religion, identity (as we know language is identity) and culture before it is too late to be salvaged.

Madam Speaker, I would venture to add here that it is not only the indigenous who need help, it is also everyone else, and I am speaking here in regards to the Toppers Scholarship which we know, caters for 600 very bright students. However, what is also needed are the other students who fall through that gap and are not being picked up by other scholarships which were previously given in the past. I am speaking here of the PSC Scholarships which can be brought in by another name, and also the Multi-Ethnic Scholarships, Madam Speaker, to cater for as many young people as possible.

Madam Speaker, on the Constitution, His Excellency said that He was extremely proud and privileged, as President to have been instrumental in bringing the Constitution into being, to give it its assent as Head of State and formally establish it as supreme law. Madam Speaker, our position is that, the Regime in power interfered with the 1997 Constitution, as Fiji's supreme law, and in several ways:

- 1) On 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2009, the Regime purported to abrogate the 1997 Constitution and forced upon the people a new Government Order;
- 2) On 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2013, with His Excellency's assent, the Fiji Government Constitution 2013 was promulgated and thrust upon the populace;
- 3) The 2013 Constitution contains many unsatisfactory features, and these have been specified by previous speakers in the past here in this House which are specified in our public comments;
- 4) The Constitution making process was flawed in many ways, not free and fair, non-inclusive and lacking public participation.

Accordingly, Madam Speaker, in agreement with other political parties, we will continue to explore ways of amending or repealing the 2013 Constitution through legal means.

On the economy, Madam Speaker, His Excellency said that the economy has recorded a 5.3 per cent increase in growth for 2014. We have had economic growth rates exceeding four per cent for more than three years, and we have also been advised that debt is good for Fiji. However, the rationalisation of public debt for building infrastructure is a matter of concern, particularly because of the unprecedented secret session of Parliament in August. "This is the People's House", that is what the honourable Prime Minister has called it. Yet, the Government felt no shame about banning the people from their own House in the interests of self-serving secrecy.

I suggest, Madam Speaker, that we lend in public debt, and consider a target to reach a balance debt in the medium term so that we do not endanger the financial future of our children, grandchildren and the nation. We can achieve growth from a well-managed and more open economy, founded on good transparent and accountable governance and sound policies, bolstered by confidence amongst investors and players and workers.

Also, in terms of the economy, Madam Speaker, people are asking us as to when will the Retirement Age Policy be reinstated. Many, especially civil servants, who look forward to retiring at 60 years were alarmed when the Decree stating the retirement age would be lowered to 55 years was implemented. Other countries have kept it at 60 years, and some have actually increased it. What these workers complained

about is the nepotism that they see practiced when some relatives of Government Ministers, who are well above their age of retirement, are part of the favoured few. So, they are asking if they could also be considered in that light, and in terms of contributing to the economy.

A recent article by the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party in this Parliament provides a lesson to the Government side in the flaws and failures of its management of the economy, and he still awaits an explanation from the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister of Finance on what happened to the missing \$100 million. The people want to know about this, Madam Speaker. What happened to it? Such a large amount of money cannot simply vanish into thin air!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order.

Madam Speaker, you have ruled previously that when a matter is before the Committee, it cannot be raised in this Chamber. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition is doing precisely that.

Madam Speaker, you have also ruled and written to us about it that we can comment on it in public, if it has been made public. However, if the matter has not been resolved, to arrive at a conclusion, it is actually usurping the powers of the Committee itself. That is precisely what the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is doing.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, you did raise that Point of Order, just as I was trying to address the same issue.

Honourable Leader of the Opposition, please refrain from referring to any reports of the Auditor-General or any issues that is before the Public Accounts Committee right now.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, His Excellency said that he made it his number one priority to engage young people and he made a point of visiting almost every secondary school in Fiji, and I would like to commend him for that. I recommend that the focus should be on employment and empowerment of young people. Unemployment, Madam Speaker, undermines the economic, physical and mental health of the nation.

On the Legislative Programme, Madam Speaker, His Excellency listed the Government's Legislative Programme for this session of Parliament and stated that it will be more extensive than the previous year. How can it be more extensive when we have had nine weeks in the last session and only four weeks next year, to debate 24 new laws and review the existing legislation? What this basically means, Madam Speaker, is six pieces of legislation on average per week. All legislation, as we know, need wide consultation with stakeholders. Ideally, it should be referred to the relevant Standing Committee for community participation. I know that the Honourable and learned Attorney-General is a fast worker and likes to push legislation through as soon as possible, sometimes not fully considering the consequences as we have seen in the amendments to the Decrees, some of which had amendments to amendments, to amendments to the Decrees. Please note that during the regime's years in power, that is, 2007 to 2014, 413 Decrees were promulgated. I hope therefore, for the sake of this country, each piece of legislation in this session is going to be carefully scrutinised.

Consider the law on Child Care and Protection, for example, Madam Speaker. Children need to believe their world is safe. Children need to believe people will not harm them, and will ensure their safety and protection. We must not have a repeat of the innocent nine year old raped victim in Nakasi and the Year 11 young rural girl getting off the bus in the afternoon after school in Rakiraki, and being hacked to death. We remember with sadness the three children who drank paraquat, which was also quoted by the Honourable Prime Minister this morning who had a whole new world to look forward to.

Madam Speaker, bills that are designed to offer care and protection cannot be fast tracked through Standing Order 51. We need to provide the best safety-nets for children to have relevant and adequate care and protection and to do that, we must have wider consultations, which basically means, Madam Speaker, you need to revise the Parliamentary Calender to allow for more sitting days to do a better job in this session.

On infrastructure, Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President said that Government is building infrastructure to invest in the future. My request to the Government, through the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, is to honour the assurance made by the Honourable Tikoduadua, when he was then Minister for Infrastructure earlier this year that he would start considering the construction of the Nasali-Vutia-Nukui Social Road in the 2016 Budget. This road would cover the 12 villages of Lomanikoro, Nasigatoka, Nabua, Nasilai, Drekena, Nadoi, Vunuku, Tavuya, Narocivo, Nukui, Muanaicake and Muanaira.

The schools in that area, Madam Speaker, are St. Joseph Husband of Mary Primary School, Rewa District School, Vutia District School, Nukui Village School and Rewa Secondary School.

Madam Speaker, I have here with me 847 petitions that have been signed by those who would be impacted by this road, who are 18 years and over. What these villagers are saying is that, they are praying for the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Honourable Minister for Finance and the Honourable Prime Minister that they will be assisted in these roads. Their comments are, and I quote:

*“Keimami sa masulaki ratou na turaga e tolu qori, honourable Bala, AG and PM, vakabibi na neitou turaga naita.”*

That is what I have there, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, other speakers before me have spoken highly of and applauded His Excellency's service to the nation. The Fijian *iTaukei* protocol does not give me that privilege, Madam Speaker. Suffice to say, Madam Speaker, when His Excellency has a choice with what he would like to be associated with, he almost always looks to champion the underdog or the disadvantaged. This, we have seen in his various activities over the years, and particularly more recently over maybe the last 15 years in his drive to care for the HIV/AIDs cause. Why he always has, you know what in his pocket, to drive the message home to whoever is his captive audience.

This same caring for the minority or disadvantaged we witnessed when he was the Speaker of the House in the Veiuto Parliament. We, as Government, could not understand why he was, in our view, biased against Government when we see ourselves as the democratically elected members, having to refer it to fewer Members on the other side because he believed that they too had earned their place in the House and represented people who had voted them in, but did not have the resources of the Government to implement their work.

Madam Speaker, I commend His Excellency's Address to the House. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much for that. I really would like honourable Members to be comfortable in saying, “condoms” because condoms save lives.

With those words, I now adjourn Parliament for refreshments, and we will resume at 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.10 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.42 a.m.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. We shall now continue from where we left off, and I invite the Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki to have the floor.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, members of Cabinet and Honourable Members: allow me to reply to His Excellency the President's Address delivered in this august House on Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2015.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to say that I represent the people who are traditionally the warriors. A people who hold reverence for their traditional chiefs, the *vanua*, Government, included of course, is its Head of State, the high office of His Excellency the President of Fiji. To our people in Naitasiri, the Office of His Excellency the President represents an epitome of sovereignty, it is a symbol of hope, justice and assurance, peace and harmony.

Madam Speaker, it is therefore, disappointing when that high office succumbs to the pressure of dictatorial leadership and reduces itself to beneath its usual expected status and performs or delivers an address that leaves a lot to be desired. I am saddened to say that I personally noted that His Excellency's Address lacked vision, and was given without an assurance of opportunities for our people through Government policies and a sound platform for national economic and social growth. I had to ask myself whether this performance had anything to do with His Excellency's announcement that he was ending his term in that high office before the end of this year.

Could it be, Madam Speaker, that His Excellency the President is no longer privy to the future plans of Government, for some unknown reasons?

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President spoke at length on the issue of sedition, the setting up of alternative States. Like our fellow Honourable Members in this august House, I had to wonder whether His Excellency the President was alluding that some of us were in fact involved in these seditious acts, as he took great pains to more or less lecture us on our roles as leaders and not why the current leadership of Government must be supported and any purported removal of this Government is to be condemned, I thought that was a bit of a mockery to make such a demand, given they are the very ones that ousted the previously elected government of Laisenia Qarase.

Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, we cannot stay rooted in the past but we have to forge ahead with renewed commitment to democracy, in the best interests of our people and nation. Thus, I will join with all law abiding Honourable Members of this House to agree to the call for the respect of the rule of law and for the denouncing of any instability that will be detrimental to our nation, especially to our children who have mostly experienced nothing else other than a *coup* nation. As principled elected leaders of this nation, we must be above approach. We must be honourable in our conduct, and I, therefore, call on each Honourable Member of this august House to genuinely reach out to do the necessary for the betterment of our new found democracy.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President highlighted that our economy has recorded a 5.3 per cent increase in 2014. He claims that we have also had sustained an unprecedented economic growth rates in excess of 4 per cent over the last three years. A good economy is a private sector driven economy. Unfortunately, Fiji's growth rate for the last few years has mostly been consumption driven. Whilst this may be for a while, Fiji however needs new sources of demand, both domestic and foreign. This is needed if we are to maintain healthy rates of growth. This, Madam Speaker, will not be easy to achieve because consumer spending constitutes the largest part of our economy and replacements for it through more investment, more Government spending or more exports. Either cannot increase rapidly or might create unwanted consequences of their own.

Madam Speaker, the key challenge for Fiji then will be sustaining growth and ensuring it as more inclusive through generating jobs. This will require significant public and private investments, but given emerging fiscal constraints and increase in private investments will be particularly important. While this will require further reforms, Madam Speaker, continued rehabilitation and new private investments in infrastructure as well as a vibrant business enabling environment will be crucial.

Madam Speaker, we will need to be cautious that the reforms in particular do not mean massive job losses as has been noted in the last eight years, especially the Public Service Reforms. This was despite Government's assurances that this would not be an issue.

Madam Speaker, we need to create more business friendly environments for both domestic and foreign investors which will be critical to sustaining Fiji's growth performance and reducing poverty. This cannot happen if we have regressive policies that are not conducive for investment purposes.

Recent World Bank figures show that our world ranking for ease of doing business have fallen sharply since 2009 from 56 to 81. We are now ranked at a dismal 81 in 2015, from a ranking of 73 in 2014. *The Doing Business Report* focuses on how difficult or easy it is for a local entrepreneur to open and run a small to medium size business when complying with relevant regulations.

According to the banks, *Doing Business 2015 - Going Beyond Efficiency Report*, Fiji makes starting a business more difficult by adding a requirement to obtain a Tax Identification Number when registering a new company in 2012. In 2013, the Report noted that starting a business was still difficult because new companies were required to apply for business licences to obtain a certificate from the National Fire Authority and a letter of compliance from the Ministry of Labour.

According to data collected by Doing Business, starting a business in Fiji requires 11 procedures and takes 59 days, costs 22.5 per cent of income per capita and requires paid in minimum capital of zero per cent of income per capita. Dealing with construction permits require 15 procedures, takes 141 days and costs 0.4 per cent of the warehouse value. Government cannot be serious about attracting investment, if this trend highlighted is not addressed.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President has alluded to the need to borrow to enable us to invest in our economic growth. A recent Asian Development Bank economic analysis on Fiji has revealed that to finance the country's capital investment programme, the Government has to borrow from non-traditional lenders such as the export, import banks in the People's Republic of China, Malaysia and India and the Fiji National Provident Fund. Public debt levels have increased from \$2.9 billion in 2006 to \$3.7 billion in 2012 and rose to around \$4.08 billion in 2014. Public debt as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014 has been confirmed by the Ministry of Finance Debt Report to be 47.7 per cent. Though a slight drop from 49.7 per cent in 2013, these debt levels remain worryingly high. The ADB has stated that this figure quoted excluded contingent liabilities of the State enterprises of about \$1.2 billion which if added, would leave public debt to about 80 per cent of GDP.

We need to prioritise, Madam Speaker, we are not in a rush to become another Singapore in the Pacific. Should we be serious about growing our economy through offshore investments, Madam Speaker, I would suggest we address our political instabilities and put to rest for good our very destructive *coup* past. That is the answer, no more public debt that the innocent taxpayers of this country will have to pay in years to come.

Madam Speaker, I wish to make a brief conservative comment on this part of His Excellency's Address. Whilst I am optimistic these proposed changes will be people-focused than people-friendly, I know that there are more crucial issues that could be included in these reviews. An example would be the

draconian Land Bank Decree of 2009, the Surfing Decree and the Mahogany Industry Development Decree of 2010, which denies our people their right to seek legal redress on issues pertaining to their resources.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to spend some time on the REDD+ commitment that Fiji has adopted. The REDD+ Policy is intended to support global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the socio economic development of forest resource owners and local communities, relevant domestic legislations and policies and contribute to the implementation of international agreements, Conventions and treaties that Fiji associated itself with, signed or ratified. This initiative, Madam Speaker, was first launched in 2012. To-date, many of our people who have looked forward to the implementation of this great initiative remain wary. This is despite knowing that \$20 million project will bring important long term environmental and economic benefits to Fiji.

Landowners note that this project has been earmarked to provide the raw materials required to ensure less reliance on imports and contribute to generating an estimated 400,000 days of employment and increased jobs for years to come. We have felt the devastating effects of climate change resulting from river erosion and the rising high sea levels. After many years of waiting and suffering, those in Vunidogoloa Village in Cakaudrove have finally become the first village to be reallocated because of rise in sea levels. In Serea Village, Naitasiri, the villagers are still waiting for the diversion of the existing Wainimala River which has affected the village boundary and vegetation due to erosion.

Why it is then that our landowners are worried? First, there is a lot of vagueness in the Terms of Reference of this project. Government has indicated that it wishes to represent the interests of landowners. Many of us, however, are unable to trust Government because of the draconian policies, like the Mahogany Decree of 2010, as was previously mentioned.

We are also weary of the interest of loggers who have indicated their interest to participate. We need to know that we will not experience what Vanuatu logging experienced, where forests were not only destroyed but unscrupulous businesses also took advantage of the vulnerability of the resource and landowners, with the assistance of dirty politicians and Government officials.

Madam Speaker, the mahogany industry needs a total review to address the full participation of landowners in the industry. The review of the issue of licences, the need for the industry to be operated sustainably in a long-term and in particular, the need for a comprehensively reforestation programme. There is no replanting currently for the last two years, even though the reforestation levy has been paid by the mahogany log licence holders.

A requirement to obtain a licence to purchase mahogany logs is to value add in Fiji. Mahogany export figures for 2014 is 20,547 cubic metres volume. Value adding and processing account for only 12 per cent and 88 per cent of sawn timber are exported, which should be value added in Fiji.

The aim of achieving a fair return to landowners for the mahogany timber on their land, the question, Madam Speaker, is, what is a fair return? Log proceeds so far has not been disbursed to landowners through the Fiji Mahogany Trust and this money of only \$10.50 per hectare UCV.

The interest of the people of Fiji as a whole, including opportunities for increased employment and skills training, 40 per cent component of mahogany is currently left in the forest to rot. Money rotting away and employment opportunities goes to waste.

Fisheries - Fisheries is very important to Fiji's economy, making an important contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product. In relative terms, fisheries is the third largest natural resource sector, currently according to the Investment Fiji Official website, that is just behind sugar and other crops. To indicate a portion of its contribution to Fiji's economy, a recent study, for example highlighted the direct



contribution of coastal commercial and subsistence fishing to the GDP of Fiji is about \$73 million, almost eight times greater than the offshore fishing, which is around 27,000 tonnes of fish produced. As stored data are questionable but suggests that coastal fishery exports in 2007 and 2008 were \$25 million and \$46 million respectively.

Madam Speaker, we note that despite obvious contributions this sector has made to Fiji in terms of GDP, employment opportunities and even subsistence consumption, major challenges are not being properly addressed by Government, for example, the near collapse of the tuna fishing industry. If we are to believe in media reports, then Chinese over fishing is to be blamed. Figures from the Forum Fisheries Agency have indicated that in 2013, there had been a 125 per cent jump in the size of Chinese South Pacific tuna fleet. The agency warned that the Chinese were increasing catch levels and forcing down the allowable catch rates for other nations. Our industry players are crying for help, Madam Speaker.

Many have expressed they cannot compete with the heavily subsidised Chinese vessels. A major contributor to this challenge is the failure to control activity outside of Fiji, which has resulted in the present decline in catches. As for last year, only 5 of the 35 boat owners belonging to the Fiji Tuna Boat Owners Association was still fishing, about 8,000 people, Madam Speaker, rely on this industry for jobs. Without a doubt, Government has to re-look at its policies, it has to curb these Chinese vessels from killing off our local entrepreneurs in this industry.

Currently, requirements of investing into Fiji's fishing industry requires a 30 per cent equity to be held by a Fiji citizen, along with a foreign investor who is expected to have at least \$500,000 in owners contribution, or paid up capital in the form of cash – from operational date to be brought into Fiji.

Another issue that has negatively impact on the fishing industry is the imposition of fish levy tax of \$350 per tonne on foreign fishing vessels using a strict trans-shipment points as highlighted by a report by the stakeholders. These fish are caught outside Fiji waters. These foreign vessels numbering 400 to 600 per year have abandoned Fiji, and finding refuge in other rival Pacific ports. Fiji lost out on cash revenue for port charges and services, ship maintenance, fuel and food supplies to these vessels and the crew. All these issues perhaps to be relooked at altogether.

Madam Speaker, I will now conclude with a brief comment on the current Rugby World Cup underway in England. We all know the result of the first match against England. Our boys played well, however, there remain areas for improvement, which we expect that they will address before the crucial game against Australia on Thursday morning. I know that like every other proud Fijian, here at home or around the world, our hearts and prayers are with our warriors as they battle it out in the land of the English Rose.

Madam Speaker, our Honourable Prime Minister is back with us today and we welcome him warmly. It is nice to note that he was able to be with our boys at the opening match, courtesy of the Vodafone-led consortium of sponsors for the Fiji Rugby Union. Who paid for the Prime Minister and President of the Fiji Rugby Union to attend the Rugby World Cup in England?

Madam Speaker, I have a question in this regard. Was the sponsorship a patriotic gesture, with no strings attached, or was it bribery? I would not try to contemplate the response, if in time, a reciprocal favour is requested. Is this type of donation legal, or does it require an investigation by the relevant authority?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! I think that comment is disorderly in this House. Please refrain from further comments on the same issue.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, it would have been proper for Government to foot the bill since he is the Prime Minister of Fiji, or even by the Fiji Rugby Union (FRU) itself for he is the President of the FRU. We know that similar incidents in the past have been classified as bribery or corruption and so we would like to understand, for the sake of transparency and accountability, the very pillars of ethics championed by the Honourable Prime Minister and the Government on the classification of this money and its condition.

Madam Speaker, people have been hauled before the courts by FICAC for similar such incidences in the recent past. We have a right to know.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I take this time to wish His Excellency the President and his good family the best for the future.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I know invite the Honourable Jioji Konrote to have the floor.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) J.K. KONROTE.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable colleagues of the House and our friends in the public gallery - good afternoon, *ni sa bula vinaka, namaste and as-salam.u-alaikum.*

Madam Speaker, once again, it gives me the honour and privilege to rise in this august House to acknowledge, commend and congratulate His Excellency the President, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau for his very bold, succinct and most inspirational and gracious opening Address last week.

His Presidential Address was systematic of a great leader, who is not only Head of State but also someone who, as a high chief, is very cognisant of his responsibilities and obligations towards all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, as a former soldier and military commander, His Excellency the President reminded honourable Members of this House, this national Parliament and the nation as a whole, in no uncertain terms that it is considered prudent and proper for all of us that the outcome of the 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2014 General Elections be accepted, but more importantly, respected for the people have spoken.

His Excellency the President also reiterated that the Elections was declared credible by an independent multi-national observers and that the result cannot and should not be questioned.

Furthermore, His Excellency the President derided and condemned the actions of a small indigenous *iTaukei* minority group, who attempted to challenge and overturn the will of the people by trying to set up an alternative state, a Christian State, with the ultimate aim of overthrowing the current FijiFirst Bainimarama-led Government.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency then, as to be expected, laid down the gauntlet in this august House and challenged each and every one of us as Honourable Members of Parliament and representatives of the people to support democracy, and strongly condemn irresponsible and unlawful actions of this minority group which could be disruptive to the harmonious and peaceful social interaction and cohesion and economic stability.

Such seditious actions is contrary to the national interest, hence His Excellency's call on every right thinking Fijian to rally to the defence of democratic process, the rule of law, to protect and uphold the rights of every Fijian to live a peaceful, prosperous life and at the same time, enjoy and practice their rights.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency further challenged our integrity and reminded us to do some soul-searching because if we fail to condemn these actions, then we have failed miserably in our ability and

good judgement to do the right thing as expected of us and this would inevitably cast doubt (as His Excellency the President quite rightly pointed out) on our suitability and credibility to represent the best interest of our people who voted us into Parliament.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of this august House, His Excellency the President has called to question the integrity of this Parliament but more importantly, our own individual personal commitments, wisdom and morale courage in doing what is expected and required of us as representatives of the people.

Are we going to be oblivious and dismissive to this assault on democracy and cast doubts about whether we believe in and truly and honestly want to promote and subscribe to the fundamental democratic principles upon which our modern State is founded upon, or are we going to have the morale courage to stand up and be counted and condemn in the strongest terms the perpetrators and supporters of these insurrections who should be subjected to the full force of the law?

Madam Speaker, in addressing this issue of insurrection, His Excellency the President reminded us, the Honourable Members of this august House of the Oaths of Allegiance and Affirmations which we had sworn to accept, respect, protect, uphold and defend democracy, and have a sacred, unshakeable and unbreakable trust with Almighty God and the Fijian people.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President was quite emphatic when he referred to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief and reminded the nation that the RFMF must wherever and whenever required, support the Police in bringing to justice all those who want to destroy democracy and impose their will on others. He then went on to remind the Commander and all ranks of the RFMF in no uncertain terms, that it is their constitutional duty to do so as the final and ultimate guarantors of the security of this beloved country of ours.

Madam Speaker, as a former soldier and Senior Military Commander, please allow me to speak very briefly about the RFMF and how some Honourable Members of this august House continue to denigrate and refer to the institution in very scathing and vitriolic terms which I find to be most insulting, insensitive and dismissive and equally disrespectful to the memories of past, present and future generations of our servicemen and women, who through no fault of theirs had been unfortunately tarnished by the same brush as a consequence of what had happened since 1987.

Madam Speaker, I accept the fact that the stigma of the RFMF's involvement in what I regard as Fiji's evolution into nationhood and socio-political and economic maturity as a young and developing nation and democracy, will linger on for some time. But, Madam Speaker, I would like to urge the Honourable Members of this august House that as respectable and responsible, loving and caring citizens, let us now come together as representatives of the people and endeavour to listen and be more respectful towards one another and adopt a genuine and truly conciliatory and bi-partisan approach and attitude in how we interact in this august House.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of this House, let us focus on the future and devote our full attention and energy in coming together and moving the country forward instead of dwelling in a dark past and harbouring ill feelings and bias against an institution which I and most Fijians hold dear to our hearts, despite what had happened.

Madam Speaker, in His Address, His Excellency the President will issue a Command Directive to the Commander and all Ranks of the RFMF in his capacity as a Commander-in-Chief in which they are obligated under oath to support the Police in the maintenance and upholding of the rule of law in this country.

In fact, Madam Speaker, in issuing that Command Directive, His Excellency the President was only reminding our young servicemen and women of today who are presently serving within the ranks of the RFMF of their primary responsibility under the Constitution and in accordance with the Oaths of Allegiance which they had sworn to uphold at all times - an Oath which is solemn and sacrosanct.

Sadly and regrettably, Madam Speaker, we have an Honourable Member of this august House who had the gall to refer to His Excellency the President's Address to be and I quote: "marred by ironies, innuendoes and contractions." He even referred to the despicable events of 2000 when a similar attempt was made by a group of disgruntled opportunists who were encouraged and supported by some chiefs and members of the indigenous community to take over the reins of Government and impose their racist policies on the nation. But he failed to reveal the truth about the reasons and subsequent events pertaining to the illegal attempt to remove the government of the day and the critical and pivotal role played by the RFMF in foiling the attempts and saving the day.

Madam Speaker, his utterances were so badly skewed and biased against the RFMF that it is imperative and proper that I support the President's reference to the RFMF as the final guarantor of law and order as is now very clearly articulated and defined under Section 131 of the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, it is so sad in this day and age to have some Members within this Chamber of Parliament who continue to harbour and nurture the same anger and ill feelings towards the only institution in the land that stood its ground and held this country together when the rule of law and national security was challenged and threatened by the actions and attempts of extremists who had racist and selfish ambitions to run the country in 2000.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, please allow me to refresh our memories and inform this august House of the truth of what happened in my capacity as a former Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs because 15 years on from those dark days, critics of RFMF are still very selective and biased in their views and reporting of the events and also equally dismissive of the vital role played by the RFMF in assisting the Police to restore law and order and the eventual creation of a favourable socio political and economic situation which was conducive for a successful General Elections in 2001 and a return to democratic rule.

Madam Speaker, the truth is, it was the RFMF under the firm, loyal, unwavering and courageous command and leadership of the then Commodore Bainimarama, Commander RFMF and now Rear Admiral, the honourable Prime Minister, who, with the total support and overwhelming support of the loyal soldiers and sailors who despite very intimidating and vicious attacks from certain sections of the community against them and their families, stood their ground and refused to baulk and surrender the sovereignty and destiny of our beloved Fiji to a group of thugs and their supporters.

Madam Speaker, and Honourable Members, then to the utter bewilderment and surprise of many, the RFMF prevailed and brought this beloved nation of ours back from the brink of total anarchy and rebellion into sanity and peace.

Madam Speaker, references was made to the mutinous act of some rebellious elements of the RFMF which resulted into the death of three loyal soldiers who gallantly died in defence of the values and virtues which as members of the RFMF, either past or present should uphold at all times in accordance with the Oath of Allegiance that we had sworn to protect the integrity and sovereignty of our beloved nation and the safety and wellbeing of all Fijians at all times.

Madam Speaker, as we meet and deliberate in this august House, let us be forever mindful and more importantly acknowledge with respect and gratitude the many sacrifices that our forefathers have made since the formation of RFMF in peace and war, during the colonial era to the present day. Sacrifices in

sweat, blood and tears and sadly lives to strengthen the national foundation on which the character, reputation and destiny of our beloved nation for all Fijians is built.

As we speak, Madam Speaker, thousands of our sons and daughters, husbands and wives are continuing to serve within the ranks of the RFMF and about 800 of them are presently deployed on peacekeeping and peace supporters operations under active service conditions in some of the most volatile and dangerous conflict zones of the world today, such as Syria in the Golan Heights, Bagdad in Iraq, Southern Lebanon, the Northern Israeli border in the Sinai, to name a few.

Madam Speaker, recently two soldiers of the second battalion of the Fiji Infantry Regiment which is deployed as a unit of the Multinational Forces and Observers in Sinai were hospitalised for sustaining shrapnel wounds from an improvised explosive device which was set off by dissidents who were fighting against the Egyptians authority in the Northern Sinai peninsula where our troops are deployed to assist in monitoring and maintaining the peace between Israel and Egypt. Shortly thereafter, another of our soldiers was shot in the stomach and thankfully it was not fatal and we all share the concern and anxiety of their families and loved ones at home and pray for their well-being and speedy recovery.

Madam Speaker, since 1978, when Fiji began participating in peacekeeping operations worldwide, about 53 members of the RFMF have paid the supreme sacrifice in loyally and faithfully serving the nation in our proud military tradition of selfless service for God and country and maintain a legacy of service – a proud and enviable legacy which was initially forged by our forefathers who were first deployed for Active Service during the First World War and which was continued on by the RFMF Commandos and units of the 1st and 3rd Battalions, Fiji Infantry Regiment who fought ever so gallantly with the US Army Marines and the allied troops in the jungles of the Solomon Islands against the Japanese during the 2nd World War.

Madam Speaker, it was the same spirit of service and pride in maintaining their legacy that compelled successive contingents of the 1st Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment to do so well in the fight against Communist terrorists in the jungles of Malaya and established an enviable reputation amongst other Commonwealth and British troops who took part in Malayan Emergency campaign in the 1950s.

Madam Speaker, in listening to His Excellency's Address, I could detect a certain degree of sadness when he was referring to the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces because of a never-ending tirade and criticism being levelled against RFMF in this august House by some Honourable Members of the Opposition which I perceive to be mostly unwarranted and uncalled for, because as a brother officer in Arms, He and I have a lot in common as former senior military commanders who have commanded troops here in Fiji and during active service on operational service overseas when we had the honour and privilege of commanding our peacekeepers and other international troops under very trying and dangerous circumstances.

Madam Speaker, we know and accept the trials and burden of command at the national and international levels because we understand and constantly share the loneliness of being away from families and loved ones, plus the ever-present and growing threats to lives of both troops and civilians, and at the same time, the need to remain focussed, alert and more importantly, not to err under any circumstance, because when you does, it could inevitably result in loss of lives. This is why I concur with the adage that "command is total and absolute"; hence the President's reminder to the RFMF to be alert and prepare to assist the Police when there is a challenge and assault on democracy.

Madam Speaker, this is also why it greatly irks me to sit in this august House and listen to some Members from the Opposition who continue to vehemently harangue us about the RFMF and the past.

What had happened is now history, but then as a nation, let us all learn from our mistakes of the past and ensure that we do not repeat them.

Madam Speaker, it is my humble opinion that unless you have served your time within the ranks of the RFMF and proved yourself as a true son or daughter of Fiji, one certainly does not qualify to be so condescending, condemning and continue to make vitriolic statements within this august House towards an institution which now more than ever, deserve our support.

Madam Speaker, let us acknowledge with gratitude the service of the sons and daughters of our beloved nation who have served RFMF so well and died in the service for the maintenance of world peace.

Let us remember them and their families in our prayers and hope that they have not died in vain.

Madam Speaker, it is a fact of life and reality that despite our different religious beliefs and faiths, we all agree and acknowledge an Almighty God who is loving, caring and equally forgiving, and it is in this context that I would like to urge all Members of this august House that it is now high-time, we come together as the people's representatives and if we truly and honestly care about the well-being and future of this beloved nation of ours, then I believe it is prudent and apt that we now adopt a more bi-partisan attitude and attempt to discard the yoke and shackles of envy, jealousy and hatred towards the RFMF, and one another; and instead embrace a spirit of forgiveness and a revitalised sense of patriotism which should inevitably create a better future for the present and future generations of Fijians.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency referred us to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights provisions contained therein. In this regard, may I assure your good self, Madam Speaker and Members of this august House that I am very much guided by Section 31(1) of the Constitution which requires and obligates me as the Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations to; "take responsible measures within the Ministry's available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the right of every person to work and be entitled to a just minimum wage."

Madam Speaker, as I had articulated in some of my Ministerial Statements that my staff and I have got a mandate, in fact, an obligatory undertaking to try to reduce the present national unemployment rate from its present 6 per cent to about 5 per cent by the end of next year.

It is our biggest challenge to create more work and as a Ministry, we have put in place and am glad to report that we are actually applying some of the strategies to employ more of our unemployed youths, with the assistance and cooperation of other Government Ministries, our Tripartite partners and NGOs within the private sector and not forgetting our neighbouring countries like Australia and New Zealand with labour mobility arrangements under their respective recognised Seasonal Workers Schemes.

Madam Speaker, we note with relief and appreciation the Government's initiative to establish more Technical Colleges around the country, where more of our young people could be trained to qualify as semi-skilled tradesmen and women because of the acute shortage of qualified personnel in our building industry.

Madam Speaker, we also acknowledge and welcome another Government initiative in granting financial assistance to entrepreneurs through the Ministry of Trade and Commerce for the creation of small business enterprises which are not only beneficial to our aspiring business men and women, but hopefully would also create more jobs for our unemployed.

Madam Speaker, our ability to access the New Zealand and Australian Labour Mobility market through these countries' respective recognised Seasonal Workers Schemes since the end of last year and the beginning of this year is greatly appreciated.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, our workers who have gone to Australia have been doing very well and it goes to prove that our selection process and criteria works. For the information of this House, we sent 13 females who departed our shores over the weekend.

Madam Speaker, following the recent visit of the Honourable Prime Minister to Canada, the Ministry has been instructed to pursue the possibility of sending some of our people to work in Canada for former Fiji residents who are now doing well in business.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to report to this august House that the successful outcomes of how we select our workers is working

Madam Speaker, in its overall efforts to continue to improve the life of all Fijians, Government has amended the Workmen's Compensation Act (Cap 94) and increased the payable quantum from \$24,000 to \$50,000.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to refer once again to His Excellency the President's Address for I note with sadness that he was delivering his last address in this august House prior to his retirement towards the end of the year.

Madam Speaker, as a nation, we have come to know him over the past six years as the People's President, a high chief who is kind, and compassionate, humble and approachable, easy-going and humorous, accommodating and caring, but at the same time, he is also someone who always manages to hold himself with great poise and dignity.

In fact, Madam Speaker, His Excellency's many years of service to Fiji as a Soldier and Senior Military Commander, a Diplomat (Head of Mission), a Government Permanent Secretary and Government Cabinet Minister and Honourable Speaker of Parliament is a paragon of loyalty, dedication and great commitment to a nation of Fijians who are very privileged and honoured to have him as President and Head of State during one of Fiji's most important and challenging times.

Madam Speaker, as a brother officer, I salute him for who he is and what he stands for – an undying love and passion for Fiji and all Fijians; and I wish His Excellency, His good wife Adi Koila and their family well in their retirement. May God bless Him and may God bless Fiji.

Thank you.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- I was waiting for the Honourable Minister to finish but under Standing Order 18, I wish to ask you for some consistency in your ruling when the Honourable Gavoka and other Members on this side tried to address the issues that the Head of State had brought here. I resisted personally because I respect the independence of the Judiciary, Madam Speaker, but you ruled them out, saying that they could not discuss the substance of what the Head of State had talked about. Here, we have the Honourable Minister ....

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order. The point of order is out of time because you should have brought that up immediately when the issue was raised. Thank you.

HON. ROKO T.T.S. DRAUNIDALO.- I will be more interruptive then.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I seek the leave of the House to accommodate just one more speaker, so that we can shorten the afternoon session. Does anyone oppose?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Just one more speaker and I will now give the floor to the Honourable Semi Koroilavesau.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: I rise in this Honourable House to make my short contribution to thank His Excellency, the President for his most gracious Address.

I also wish to join other Members of this Honourable House in congratulating His Excellency the President of Fiji for His remarkable achievements over the last six years as the President of Fiji, and as Commander-in-Chief of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's interaction with the people of Fiji is public knowledge. He has been termed as the People's President, and rightly so. His equal treatment of all people, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation has set a fine example of inclusiveness and acceptance for all of us to follow.

I must congratulate His Excellency the President for giving His assent to the Constitution on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013. It is the supreme law of this country, which paved the way for the Elections in September 2014 to be conducted for the first time on the basis of "equal votes of equal value." It is on par with the constitution of some of the world's most advance democracies and provides a framework for the development of a modern and progressive state.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President's Address concentrated on the Constitution, democracy and stability for the benefit of all Fijians. I applaud His Excellency for His strong message to all Fijians, to ensure that we all work together for the enjoyment of peace, progress and stability. Madam Speaker, as I have briefly stated earlier, the Constitution also made it possible for the General Elections to be held in September last year. The adoption of the Constitution has made it possible for the Honourable House to function and it is the very reason we are here today.

Madam Speaker, our Constitution is a document which should be celebrated. Do we recognise the significance of such an act? Celebrating this document enables us and our people to be proud of it. It enables us, the current and the future generations, to develop an interest in the supreme law of the land. The Constitution can be set to have an abstract document in the past, left to the common dissection of analysis of legal and political authorities.

Having a day set aside to celebrate, it encourages every Fijian to see this document as their own, as something they will leave and discuss. A day of celebration endeavours to take the law to the people, it is their law after all. We should all seek to promote such an ideal that is the accessibility of laws, especially in our capacity as Members of Parliament and representatives of the people.



Furthermore, there are many elements in our Constitution that make it worthy of our celebration. I have already mentioned the principle of equal citizenry. This, enshrined in our Constitution, is a true mark of equality. There have been many claims of equality in the past but none as substantial as this.

Our Constitution has struck out against ethnic division, a divided society that constantly draws line between the "us" and "them". A divided society that once and for all we will be united. For once, we have a document and the supreme law of the land, no doubt that actively stems out division. Of this, we should be thankful.

Madam Speaker, our Constitution establishes a secular state, Why is this a good thing? Well, I ask a few simple questions:

- 1) If we are to be a Secular State, what religion would our state be?
- 2) If we are to be Christians, if we are to be a Christian State, what denomination our state will be?

I am a man of God and I worship the Almighty with all my heart but I believe that God does not force His laws upon us. He gives us a neutral space to choose His paths for ourselves - generally from the heart. It is a deeply personal matter which that State must not try to control and this is why the proper place for religion in our laws is the guarantee and freedom to choose. Choose your religion and worship in the way you believe is right. Celebrate Sabbath or your religious day, or on the day you believe in. One of the Almighty's first gift to us, I believe, is freewill. Our law should protect that, our Constitution does protect that.

Our Constitution guarantees a host of rights; that approach the Constitution did not touch before, including rights that are expressional in nature. Examples of these are the rights to food, water, housing and sanitation. I have described these aspirational aspects because that is what I see them as. They are rights enshrined in the Constitution, which we, as a nation, must never for a moment forget. They push us to work to alleviate issues such as poverty and social inequalities. Their presence in the Constitution is an ever present demand that we aspire to always do better to our people by declaring them as rights, a sense of necessity is created. That is the type of Constitution that we need; a document which does not allow us to fall into a state of social complacency, a document which demands action.

Madam Speaker, yesterday some of the Honourable Members of the Opposition asked, if we remember how FijiFirst Government came in to being. I do remember. If my recollection is correct, this Government was chosen through a democratic process after a General Election. That decision by the Fijian voters was unequivocal and must be respected.

Our people have spoken. Respect for their decisions means that we should cease unnecessary questioning of the validity of this Government, question our policies, and question our decisions. That is the mark of a democratic State. But, please do not follow the lines of argument which may invalidate the will of the people. Our people are not dwelling on the past. They are looking towards the future. Should we all not do that?

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President has called on every Fijian to rally to the defence of a democratic process and the right of every Fijian to practice their rights. Traditionally, as Commander in Chief of the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces, he rightly stated that the RFMF must whenever and wherever required, support the Police in bringing to justice those who want to destroy democracy and impose their will on others.

Madam Speaker, I call on all honourable Members of this House to support democracy and take a stand against those who wish to subvert the democratic process. His Excellency the President reminded us of the oaths or affirmation of allegiance we all made to protect and defend democracy and the sacred and unbreakable trust with God and the Fijian people. We must uphold that oath or affirmation.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I must congratulate you for your achievement as the Speaker of this Parliament for the last 12 months and I thank you for your indulgence.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will now adjourn the House and we will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.37 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, a very good afternoon. We will continue from where we left off before lunch. I invite the Honourable Faiyaz Koya to take the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party and Honourable Members of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to allow me to take the floor to provide my response to the President, His Excellency, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau's Address. I fully support the statement made by His Excellency the President and my Ministry will continue to meet the high expectations that His Excellency has stated.

Madam Speaker, before I proceed with my statement, I would like to take a few minutes to show my appreciation to His Excellency the President. His Excellency, I thank you very much for having laid the charge towards a true democracy and for showing all of us how to be a true Fijian and how to serve Fiji. Madam Speaker, His Excellency is an inspiration to all of us and on a personal note, I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to him for being an inspiration to me personally.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency articulated well that after 44 years of Independence, we today have a true democracy, a democracy that has given each and every Fijian equal rights. It was during one of the darkest periods in the Fijian history that the Honourable Prime Minister emerged with the vision as well as the strength and determination to steer Fiji towards a road of genuine democracy and prosperity where each one of us, every Fijian enjoys equal citizenry and all other equal rights.

One year on, Madam Speaker, we have proven that we are not leaving any Fijian behind, as we build the new Fiji. Today, every child has a right to be educated, whether their parents can afford it or not, we are building a knowledge-based society. Now everyone can get tertiary education, either privately-funded, through scholarships or through the Tertiary and Scholarships and Loan Scheme.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has increased capital expenditure from an average of 19 per cent of total expenditure; \$4.23 billion from 2001 to 2005 to 36 per cent or \$1 billion in 2014. This increased expenditure is an investment by the Fijian Government for Fiji's strong and prosperous future. Madam Speaker, also in 2014, approximately 17.3 per cent of total expenditure or \$487 million was allocated for the improvement of roads and infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, for much of our post-Independence period, we did not get far in terms of growth and the various governments that supposedly served Fiji did not see the importance in providing Fijians with the necessary infrastructure to contribute to the development.

Madam Speaker, after one year in office, as the Minister responsible for Industry, Trade and Tourism, I have witnessed first-hand the difference the FijiFirst Government's various policies have made to the growth of the Fijian economy. The stable and long-term policies have led to sustainable growth, we are experiencing the best period of economic growth since Independence.

As His Excellency the President had stated, we had never before had three straight years of over 4 per cent of growth and the recently revised figures for 2014 have indicated the highest growth yet of 5.3 per cent.

Madam Speaker, as His Excellency the President said, economic growth means improved lives for all. It means prosperity for all and a brighter future for all Fijians. We cannot and will not allow anyone

to derail this growth. As a nation, we need to come together and move the nation forward and not to be led astray by those with personal agendas that prioritise their personal power and positions over Fiji's progress.

Madam Speaker, we have harnessed more opportunities by creating a policy environment targeted at increasing exports, developing micro and small businesses, growing tourism, encouraging more women in business and fostering the diversification of existing businesses, to name a few. These are not only words, as we have seen the difference where it matters the most. Over the past year, I have regularly updated this august House on the various strategies and policies that have improved the livelihood of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, the recently launched Micro and Small Business Grant Scheme has supported 2,118 businesses to date. This Scheme started with a budget of \$1 million, but thanks to the enthusiasm of Fijians with visions to make a livelihood for themselves and contributions to our economy, this amount was increased to \$3 million. I am also pleased to inform and to announce that the Indian Government has, by way of a grant, committed another \$4.7 million to this Scheme. This will enable us to assist all 7,661 successful applicants. This is not about hand-outs, but it is about empowering Fijians by investing in their future. A total of 1,630 Fijians or 77 per cent of total assisted are from rural communities and 40 per cent are women.

The Ministry, together with the Fiji Development Bank, has begun its first round of inspections of recipients to determine how they are progressing with their business ventures and what additional support, in terms of mentoring or training they require. This will enable the Government to develop tailor-made support packages and maximise the return on our investment.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Fijian Trade Policy Framework recognises that the developments of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises are vital to the Fijian industrialisation process due to its potential to generate economic activities along the manufacturing and service provision value chains.

The FijiFirst Government recognises that Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises are essential components of the Fijian economy due to their ability to create employment for both rural and urban population, generate income and alleviate poverty. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises are also market pathfinders and are crucial in developing new areas of business innovation, technology development, processes and diversification as well as exports for niche products.

Madam Speaker, access to finance for investment from mainstream financial institutions has made a major bottleneck to micro, small and medium enterprises growth. Hence, Micro and Small Business Grant Scheme is a stepping stone for those businesses. Since they are now part of the Fiji Development Bank database, the regular assessment of their projects will allow them to obtain financial advice and further financial support through loans from Fiji Development Bank.

Madam Speaker, last year, we had 11.5 per cent growth in exports in 2014 – an increase of \$2.3 billion, led by sugar, mineral water, timber, textiles, molasses, coconut oil, *yaqona* and other domestic exports. These exports more than offset the decline in exports of gold, garments, fish, fruits and vegetables. Imports also increased by 11.1 per cent, led by a 16 per cent increase in the import of investment goods. We now experience investments at 25 per cent of GDP. This has been led by private sector investment which account for 19 per cent of our total investments.

Madam Speaker, the textile, clothing and footwear industry that was threatened with closure following the loss of preferential market access in the United States market back in early 2000, has bounced back. Today, they are employing approximately 7,000 Fijians, 90 per cent of which are women, compared to the 4,000 only a few years ago. This industry has indicated an even greater need

for more employees to meet the demand of the international market. The Fijian Government has continued to assist this sector, through provision of marketing grants, and is currently negotiating better market access in existing and new markets. The technical colleges which provide for basic sewing courses will also prepare employees for the growing demand by this sector.

Madam Speaker, the Fijian Trade Policy Framework provides an over-arching policy direction for a consolidated approach by the Government, private and civil society, to ensure continued sustainable growth.

Madam Speaker, tourism continues to be the largest foreign income earner for Fiji. In 2014, Madam Speaker, was the best year in the Fijian history for this particular sector, as we reached 692,630 visitors and earned \$1.4 billion in foreign income.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform this august Parliament that we are doing even better this year. For the period from January to August this year, we had a total of 488,343 visitors to Fiji – an increase of 8.7 per cent over the same period in 2014. Furthermore, earnings for the first half of the year also increased by 12.2 per cent, a \$377.8 million increase over the 2014 period. Madam Speaker, we are on track to achieve our target of 714,000 visitors this year and mark 2015 as the most successful year yet, for our tourism sector.

At this juncture, Madam Speaker, it must be pointed out that the private sector has shown enormous support for the Government's policies by investing heavily in the tourism industry. Madam Speaker, the Fijian Government had a vision to make the tourism industry a \$2 billion industry by 2020, however, we are set to reach that target even sooner. We will launch the Fijian Tourism Development Plan (FTDP) at the end of the year. The Plan will provide an overall guide for marketing, investment and capacity building in the tourism sector.

Madam Speaker, there are some existing policies and initiatives that the Fijian Government has in place. These various strategies and plans will pave the way for the future of trade, investment, tourism, empowerment of the grassroots communities along with Fiji's general growth and prosperity.

I also wish to take some time, Madam Speaker, this afternoon to address some concerns that were voiced earlier this week in Parliament. On the issue raised as to why the Micro and Small Business Grant has not reached Labasa, Madam Speaker, disbursements for the Micro and Small Business Scheme have so far been conducted in Suva, Navua, Sigatoka, Savusavu, Taveuni and Nadi. The Ministry has assisted 2,118 businesses to-date, and will be providing support to another 5,543 businesses. The Ministry and the Fiji Development Bank officials verify all applicants, which require site visits to authenticate the projects. The verification of applicants has been completed in the Northern Division.

The Ministry is working according to a schedule and will conduct another round of disbursements in the Northern Division, and that will include Labasa, Seaqaqa, Nabouwalu and the remaining successful applicants in Savusavu. This will be followed by disbursements in Lautoka, Ba, Rakiraki, Nausori and Levuka. The Ministry plans to complete the disbursement exercise before the end of the year, and will soon begin its monitoring exercise for the first batch of recipients. It should be noted, Madam Speaker, that for Labasa alone, there are 252 applicants that have qualified to receive grants totalling \$225,715.39.

As for the claim that most businesses under the NCSMED Northern Development Programme (NDP) have failed, Madam Speaker, this could not be further from the truth. For 2015, the NDP has to-date, assisted a total of 117 projects to the value of \$803,822.07. The NDP, since its inception in 2008 to September, has funded a total of 1,915 projects, with a total value of grants of \$6.9 million which is 47 per cent, and the total value of loans from lenders of \$7.8 million, which is 53 per cent.

Madam Speaker, out of these 1,915 projects, 84 per cent are now up and running and earning income. These projects include:

- 1) Fishing, 565 projects valued at \$6.5 million;
- 2) Dalo/Yaqona, 575 projects valued at \$2.8 million;
- 3) Sugarcane farming, 141 projects valued at \$852,000;
- 4) Livestock farming, 183 projects valued at \$1.99 million;
- 5) Rice farming, 53 projects valued at \$302,000;
- 6) Apiary farming, 38 projects valued at \$220,000; and
- 7) Other projects funded by the NDP are in pearl farming, virgin coconut oil, soap manufacturing, handicraft, horticulture, sewing and bakeries.

The monitoring of these projects has revealed a number of positive impacts and these are:

- for every project, there has been an average of 3.5 jobs created, bringing total employment creation to 6,702;
- 10 per cent employment created in the informal sector;
- total livelihoods supported is around 33,510, based on an average family size of five;
- increase in assets for those assisted with an average asset size of \$2,130 to \$14,000; and
- increase in annual income from an average of \$5,400 per annum to an average of \$19,000 per annum.

This overwhelming evidence showcases the great impact our NDP is having and the benefits it is bringing to so many Fijians. We will continue, Madam Speaker, to closely monitor the programme and ensure that it maintains and improves upon its current level of success.

Madam Speaker, I would like to also take this opportunity to thank all and sundry at the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism for their exemplary work throughout last year. They have worked long and laborious hours throughout the year, to ensure that goals set by the Ministry are met.

Again, Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to thank you again for giving me this opportunity to provide my response to the Address of His Excellency, the President of Fiji. I strongly support the statement made by His Excellency and the challenge that he has given to us, to fulfil our promise of developing a new Fiji.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and God bless Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I invite the Honourable Parveen Kumar to take the floor.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of this Parliament: it is my honour and privilege to respond to His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Fiji's opening statements of this session of Parliament. His Excellency the President in his usual precise and clear manner struck a chord with me on several issues while recounting Government's legislative programmes.

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank all Honourable Members on both sides of Parliament in wishing him health and happiness, and for commending him as a public servant and statesman of the highest order.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's opening remarks hopefully prompted others, as it did to me, to pause and reflect on our roles and duties in the visionary promise of a new inclusive Fiji. A new Fiji not only promised but also realised by the FijiFirst Government after our first year.

Madam Speaker, I note in particular, His Excellency the President's statements on Government, governance and the will of the people. It is the will of the people of Fiji, their collective will at the ballot boxes in the 2014 Elections, that brought all fifty of us – women and men from all walks of life, into this august Parliament.

In my maiden speech in Parliament, Madam Speaker, I commented on our free and fair Elections, and I also congratulated the Supervisor of Elections and his team for the job well done. We all know of the irregularities and logistical issues of previous Elections in terms of missing voter names, incorrect name placements and even the Supervisor of Elections went missing on the opening day of Elections. Madam Speaker, to name a few more issues; there were delays in arrival of ballot boxes, missing ballot boxes, long queues and more ballot papers than the votes beyond reasonable numbers to make up shortfalls.

Madam Speaker, despite some critiques, last year's Elections superseded all others and was a demonstration of an efficient in a voter friendly practice. As outlined by His Excellency the President, the voter turnout was a record for elections in Fiji, all achieved in a single day of voting.

Madam Speaker, yesterday, I heard some Honourable Members from the other side intimating that the conditions were not right for elections, but let me quote from the statement of the Multi-National Observer Group; "the conditions were in place for Fijians to exercise their rights freely".

Madam Speaker, our previous Constitutions classified Fiji into racial boxes mainly because of the racial appeals embedded in the electoral system. The fate of the nation was decided along communal ethnic lines with voters forced to vote within their categorised ethnic blocks.

Madam Speaker, racial politics has been used in the past to maintain power under the pretext of trying to unite the communities, and as rightly highlighted by the Government Whip earlier in the day, that we have been a divided nation all this time.

The present Constitution is not conducive to politicians and political bodies that demonstrate a disregard for a national unity and nation building. I know there are still many doomsayers, those who wish to harm this platform and what is promised for Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I commend His Excellency the President for his profound statement as we arrive at the first anniversary of the FijiFirst Government and this Parliament. Over that year, every minute of every hour of every day was spent for the betterment of Fiji by the Members of the FijiFirst Government, and we will not stop now, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of this Parliament, I personally know that the Members of our Government will join me in this: make a pledge to work even harder towards justifying the faith placed in us by the people of our beloved Fiji. That is what matters most, Madam Speaker, it is simple as that, unlike the Opposition who are too busy in boycotts and walkouts.

(Laughter)

It saddens me to see this but I believe that they will get their just view when the next expression of the will of the people is made at the ballot box, a simple fact, as was highlighted by His Excellency the President in his Address that we are all here to serve the will of the people.

Madam Speaker, I will now turn to the land and maritime transport sector, two essential components of the country's economy to prosper. The reason 5.3 per cent economic growth for 2014 is encouraging. This includes the 1.9 per cent contribution by the transportation sector.

My Assistant Minister, the Honourable Vijay Nath, will brief this august Parliament on the infrastructure sector at tomorrow's sitting, just as my Assistant Minister for Local Government has highlighted about the Ministry of Local Government's programme yesterday.

Madam Speaker, the review of the Land Transport Act of 1998 is long overdue. However, I am happy to report to this Parliament that the Ministry of Transport, together with the Land Transport Authority (LTA) and ably supported by the Office of the Solicitor General, are working to bring these much needed amendments. These amendments will modernise our Land Transport laws to meet international best practices. These amendments will embrace the technology of this new age of information.

Madam Speaker, the LTA has, in the recent past, been under the radar for wrong reasons. The challenge to bring about operational effectiveness and improve customer service is now at the forefront of the LTA Management Performance Indicators. This will be closely monitored by the LTA Board to ensure compliance.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity this afternoon to call upon all stakeholders of the Land Transport Sector to partner with the LTA in bringing about improved operational and customer service at the Authority. Together, we can bring about positive changes for the improvement of the land transport sector.

Madam Speaker, as an island nation, the ocean plays a critical role to our economic livelihood. The maritime sector contributes to around 90 per cent of our international trade. The Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) has and will continue to play a critical role in ensuring the establishment of safe sea lines of communication for all domestic and international maritime traffic. The MSAF will continue to ensure that we comply with our international obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). Maritime trade is the backbone of the international and domestic trade. The enabling environment created by both, the LTA and MSAF, are important for the economic participation of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, to support the FijiFirst Government's maritime and transport programmes, there must be a guarantee for security. The call by His Excellency the President for all Fijians to defend democracy is timely. The call on the Republic of Fiji Military Forces to support the Fiji Police Force in its role is paramount for ensuring peace and stability in our country. Madam Speaker, guaranteed peace and stability are essential requirements for any potential investor, and I have said so many times in this august Parliament that we have that environment now, and the investor confidence is very high. There is no doubt about it, Madam Speaker.

We, as a nation, need to stand united to capitalise on our improved economic performance. It is time to move forward and embrace the Fiji we all want for the future, the way we should be, a pearl in the South West Pacific.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- In his farewell speech during His Address to Parliament, the words of His Excellency the President remains with us and leave its legacy for all Fijians for many years to come.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of this Parliament, I am honoured to have had this opportunity to finish my speech today by thanking His Excellency the President, whom I have deeply respected and admired for many years. May he continue to live in a healthy and hearty patience that he had described in his Address, either he is mingling with people at the Suva Market, or walking in the golf course.



As we bid farewell to His Excellency the President, I look forward to a change of mindset towards a more constructive Parliament in our next sitting, where we argue and debate, but all in the interest of an inclusive and progressive Fiji. Let us unite and dedicate ourselves to the task of nation building, and ensure that our children, grandchildren and generation to come, enjoy the bright and secure future that they deserve from us.

On that happy and constructive note, Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of this Parliament, I wish everyone the best in the coming weeks. God bless Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Jilila Kumar.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament: allow me to begin by extending my sincere gratitude to His Excellency, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, for his thought provoking and compelling Address. There were many issues that His Excellency, to use an old saying "it hit the nail on its head". One of these issues was patriotism, and I would like to address the House on this issue.

You will rarely find a Fijian who is not patriotic. We are a nation of patriots, raising generations of patriots; and why not? For a drop in the ocean, we have made quite a few waves. Take for example, last Saturday morning, it seems like the whole nation rose with the sun to watch our boys play in the World Cup and cheered them on. Madam Speaker, let me take a moment to say 'well done' to our boys and all the best for the rest of the World Cup. While we did not all gather around one television to support you, we are all gathered around you in our hearts and minds and our overwhelming pride and support, will never falter or fail.

Yes, you will find proud Fijians everywhere and also I believe in this Parliament, we may disagree on a lot of issues but what unites us is our love for our nation and our people. That is something not likely to change anytime soon. Can we agree on that? On that note, let us consider a symbol that is dear to us all, the flag. I understand this is a very sensitive topic so, I shall attempt to address it with as much grace and decorum as I can master.

Change never comes easy, the idea of change alone is often enough to get people up in arms, but sometimes, change is necessary. Our flag has served us well over the decades. It was first adopted in 1970 when the Colonial empire acknowledged our decision to become Independent and for 45 years, it has been synonymous with our nation. However, the face of our nation has changed, we are now a fully inclusive nation, where for the first time in history we are all Fijians regardless of ethnicity, and this was no simple change. It is the creation of a unified national identity and is enshrined in the Constitution, the supreme law of our land.

It may have taken us 45 years of Independence to realistically engage in this discussion, but it is here now and we must address it. We all agree that the flag is the ultimate symbol of a nation. On the upper left quarter of our flag is the Union Jack. The Union Jack is also known as the Union Flag and is the Flag of the United Kingdom. Take a moment to fully consider what that means. On the flag of our independent nation rests the symbol, and not just any symbol, but rather the flag of another nation. Every wave of our flag is also the wave of another, Madam Speaker. A true patriot is proud of his or her nation. That pride should be reflected in our flag.

Please do not misunderstand, I do believe that as a former British Colony, there is much we should be thankful to the British for. But never have I mistaken gratitude for service and bearing the mark of another may be likened to some form of service. Yes, I am thankful.

Madam Speaker, I believe my nation's flag should be a symbol of our evolved identity and a true symbol of our independence. Are we confident and bold enough to make that move? I say, "Yes, of course we are." As I briefly mentioned earlier, we are now all Fijians. Have we fully grasped the significance of that change?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order!

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of Order

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.-Has she addressed the flag. So where are you talking from?

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I am talking on patriotism.

MADAM SPEAKER.- There have been a lot of topics covered during this debate that is outside of His Excellency's Address.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I ask for consistency.

MADAM SPEAKER.- For this debate, there is a freedom of speech for every Member of Parliament and that is something that I will uphold. You may continue, Honourable Kumar.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I briefly mentioned earlier, we are now all Fijians, have we fully grasped the significance of that change? We stand at a point in history where finally all Fijians are united under a single national identity.

We have heard the whispers of dissent. We have heard people say that it is just a word. Well, it is a word and it will only be a word unless we fight to make it something more. Our laws have developed to point us in the direction of a united Fiji. However, there is more that is needed, we must all work together to facilitate the declaration of our national identity. We must push to eradicate intolerance, ethnic and social class discord.

We are the representatives of Fijians as a whole, not of any ethnic grouping or any social class or any province in particular. True patriotism, Madam Speaker, is working for the benefit of our nation. Division does not do us any good whatsoever. Which brings me to another issue which His Excellency the President mentioned in his Address, namely, that of the recent attempts by a certain group to create an alternative State.

Firstly, I wish to address the claims by the Opposition that when His Excellency ....

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Please refrain from talking about the sedition cases before the courts, I have made a ruling on that.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

Firstly I wish to address the claims that when His Excellency called us to condemn the attempt by this group, he somehow subverted the role of the courts. He did no such thing.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Please talk on another topic, refrain from speaking on that.

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, the final point that I would like to briefly raise is in regards to our Constitution. Not only do we have a document that gives us all a united identity, we now have a host of guaranteed rights and protections that were never so clearly established in the past. These are

reasons for us to be proud of our Constitution and celebrate our progress thus far. This is the document that will take us forward. To those of us who are living in the past, I say, stop doing so. Dwelling on past errors never helped anyone. Move forward. Stop waiting for some grand undoing. Move forward. The only way to help our country is to let go of the desire to dismantle and work to build. Celebrate our progress and keep moving forward.

As Honourable Members of Parliament, can we move forward together for the good of our people? We must, Madam Speaker. As Honourable Members of Parliament, can we put aside our petty differences, let go of any personal grudges we may have and move forward for the good of our people? We must, Madam Speaker. As Honourable Members of Parliament, can we believe in the vision of a united Fiji, placing the needs of our country above those of our own, for the good of our people? We must.

Madam Speaker, we are all lucky to be here today, and I say this because we have been chosen to represent the people of Fiji at our nation's most illustrious hour. She has come a long way, our Fiji, and now she stands at a point of development and change never before seen in her history. I for one, am honoured to be here, in the collective House of our people during this most auspicious of times.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge three men, who I believe, are true patriots:

- 1) His Excellency the President, whose unfailing service and graciousness has gently guided our nation back to democracy and stability, who has been a figure of hope for our people.
- 2) The honourable Prime Minister, who undoubtedly has the interest of our nation at heart. I would like to quote his words delivered as part of his maiden speech in Parliament last year, I quote:

“I passionately believe in one Fiji in which everyone belongs and no one gets left behind, and I passionately believe in being patriotic – putting our nation's interests before ourselves and defending our unity as a nation against those who wish to divide us.”

Those are words we should all, as representatives of the people, take fully to heart.

- 3) The Honourable and learned Attorney-General, who has undoubtedly worked tirelessly to build our nation, our economy and our institutions so as to ensure that there is order, consistency and economic security.

The mark of a patriot is never just expressions of commitment and pride, it is work. It is seen through actions. These are men who have acted where others have only spoken. These men are true patriots.

*Vinaka vakalevu.* God bless us all and God bless Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Brij Lal.

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament, *bula re*.

I take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to His Excellency the President for his most gracious and visionary Address. He highlighted the work that has to be undertaken in the second year of Parliament. He laid out a very powerful agenda that the FijiFirst Government will fully fulfil. It was a historic speech, as His Excellency the President will soon retire from his high office.

I, as the Deputy Chief Scout, had the opportunity of working very closely with him in the last six years where the President served as the Chief Scout of Fiji. Last year (2014), the Fiji Scouts Association celebrated 100 years of scouting in Fiji. On behalf of the Fiji Scouts Association, I thank His Excellency the President most sincerely for his guidance, encouragement and push to strengthen the organisation. The Scouts wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

Madam Speaker, the world is faced with many challenges today. We are often bombarded with bad news. We hear stories of hate, discrimination, war, cruelty, crime and heartbreak, which can often bring us down, but despite the hurt in the world, there is a lot of good. Amongst us, there are a number of people who are kind and compassionate, people do care, they do give and above all, they love and share their kindness with the people they have never met. That is the spirit we need to maintain in Fiji, and not fragmentation.

Einstein said, and I quote: "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them." It is time for us to rise above that. We have to show more maturity. Definitely, the universal leadership values and qualities are missing in some people in this country. As good citizens of this country, we must display proper values. There are several attributes that are universally believed to foster good leadership and I strongly encourage all to acquire them. Some of these values are:

- Demonstrating trustworthiness, a sense of justice and honesty;
- Having foresight;
- Encouraging, motivating and building confidence;
- Being positive and dynamic; and
- Being communicative, informed and a team builder.

In the words of leadership, Professor Harry M. Jansen said, and I quote:

"Becoming the best kind of leader isn't about emulating a role model historic figure. Rather, your leadership must be rooted in who you are and what matters most to you. When you truly know yourself and what you stand for, it is much easier to know what to do in any situation."

That will help us to become the best leaders that we want to become.

Madam Speaker, let me speak about the youth. To the youths of Fiji, I say; "I admire you, I salute you and I am with you." Professor Abdul Kalam once said, and I quote:

"Of all the resources, the ignited mind of the youth is the most powerful resource on the earth, above the earth and below the earth."

We are proud to be living in a country that is proud of its sporting achievements (both for the abled and disabled), we are proud of our brave soldiers serving in peacekeeping duties overseas, proud that our country is free of any major disease, proud that we have sufficient clean drinking water, proud of the clean environment and extremely proud that we attract thousands of visitors to our shore because of our sand, smiles and sunshine.

Dear youths, let us work together with the FijiFirst Government in building a better Fiji. There was once a monk talking to a hundred youths about peace and happiness. He said, and I quote:

"In the present world, we have a problem of distrust, unhappiness transforming into violence. When we remove "I" and "me" from the mind, we will eliminate ego; if we get rid of the ego, hatred towards fellow human beings will vanish; if the hatred goes out of the mind, the

violence in thinking and action will disappear; if violence in our mind is taken away, peace springs in human minds. Then peace and peace and peace alone will blossom in the society.”

Dear youths, let us take advantage of our multi-racial country, multi-lingual and multi-cultural setup to strengthen our living together. Let us thank the FijiFirst Government for bringing the Constitution Day holiday. Surely, we can all study the Constitution and understand our rights rather than being fooled by some, who have their personal agendas.

Madam Speaker, let me now talk about women. Aristotle, the father of political science, said “that state is a union of families and villages.” Family is the basic unit of society, which is the foundation of state itself. Happy families create a healthy society and a healthy society is a pre-requisite for strong political order in a democratic society.

The role of women cannot be overemphasised. Women have been playing leading roles in shaping the nation. They have contributed positively to the progress of humanity. We salute all the women of this country, whether they are serving in the Government, private sector, operating small income generating businesses, being a housewife, politician or an ordinary citizen of Fiji. I appeal to all young and old, to respect the women. All forms of discrimination and abuse have to be stopped immediately, and we all have to act on this together. It is important for all of us to take care of our health as every country needs healthy citizens.

Why are our children abandoned, abused and neglected? We have to strengthen our kinship ties, and family values have to be taught to our children from their very young days. I always ask, why are our actions heartless when we have a heart?

Our Forward March - Madam Speaker, life is a journey that must be travelled, no matter how bad the roads are. We will improve all the roads.

(Laughter)

We are all on a journey 2014 to 2018 with the FijiFirst Government. Let us play our part now so that we do not have to regret later. I am reminded of the poem by the poet Rumi, who said and I quote:

“I am born with potential.  
I am born with goodness and trust.  
I am born with ideas and dreams.  
I am born with greatness.  
I am born with confidence.  
I am born with courage.  
So, I am not meant for crawling  
I have wings and I will try  
I will fly and fly.”

(Laughter)

I appeal to all the youths, women, men, politicians and citizens of Fiji to join us on this flight with your full positive contributions in developing a prosperous Fiji. Remember, learning gives creativity; creativity leads to thinking; thinking provides knowledge and knowledge makes you great. Fiji needs great people. You and I make this Fiji.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to ask everyone, what would you like to be remembered for? You have to evolve yourself and shape your life. You should write it on a page. That page must be a very important page in the book of human history for Fiji.

You will be remembered for creating that one page in the history of the nation, whether that page is a page of innovation, a page of invention, a page of discovery of societal changes or a page of removing poverty or a page of fighting injustice. Whether anyone writes this page or not, the FijiFirst Government has already written these pages in bold letters, and it forms the strongest part of development of Fiji.

(Laughter)

I am sure that with our collective vision and action, we ensure prosperity without poverty, peace without fear and a happy place to live for all citizens of Fiji. Everyone dreams of living in a prosperous Fiji, a happy Fiji, a peaceful Fiji and a safe Fiji. May this Government and the Almighty God grant all these.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I will now give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: just before I begin, I would like commend Honourable Dr. Brij Lal, he sounds like a minister, so maybe, he should be given a portfolio.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, I stand to respond to the Address by His Excellency the President to this august Parliament on Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 which marks the opening of our new Parliamentary Calendar, and I thank His Excellency for his most gracious Address.

His Excellency, in that singular Address, drew on a couple of crucial and valid issues.

We have had our Elections, ushering into our political landscape the much anticipated democracy, hence leveraging a dynamic and ever evolving legislative process subsequently. We keep faith in the fact that our people have spoken. In the next two years, I believe, we will all be subjected to public scrutiny, as Honourable Members of this Parliament, in our collective and individual quests and preparations to go to the polls.

It goes without noting that some of us have been here before, while others are traversing this platform for the first time. Nevertheless, we must allude to the undeniable fact that our actions and inactions here will be marked in our nation's history and will definitely carry eternal scores for posterity.

This is an honour bestowed upon us that we must not take lightly. Collectively, the strength of our nation lies in our capacity to be leaders we are called upon to be, to enact laws worthy of that calling, and to objectively scrutinise those that need review, and this process allows us to derive from our resources and our people the best that we can achieve as a nation.

Dissident voices have been noted, Madam Speaker, as alluded to by His Excellency the President. We cannot allow ourselves ever at any point to succumb to lawlessness. This nation has suffered enough already since the first *coup* of 1987. We have since experienced three political upheavals. How do we

justify these actions of sedition or the religious inclination of some to form their own government, if we can call it that?

They may have valid reasons, Madam Speaker, for being dissatisfied and aggrieved with the nature of our governance. After all, most of those voices are resource owners, who are beginning to be awakened to the economic disparities ....

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Please refrain from referring to the sedition issue.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, the only way to rid our nation of this culture of political instabilities we have created, is to ensure we have sound policies that have been implemented, with prior consultations and involvement of our people. Merely having the military on our side can only work to a certain extent, but we all know from the benefit of both hindsight and foresight that it cannot entrench this acceptable culture that enables peace to thrive for our collective gains.

Perpetuity in government does not equate developmental strides in our national life. We will be depriving ourselves and our people the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to have a robust nation, a sound economy, and a satisfied and peaceful population.

Madam Speaker, I am hopeful, therefore, that we will begin this new parliamentary year with renewed commitment to truly be participatory and conciliatory in our zest to contribute positively to nation building, and to ultimately create a new history for Fiji.

We are now at that threshold where we should learn from this well-travelled road we have been down before, and learn the many lessons that we can draw from it, we should evade the possibility of once again, descending into anarchy.

I do not wish to lament on the process of lack thereof, of consultation of this new Constitution, Madam Speaker, we have gained for ourselves, especially for us as legislators who have, by virtue of this Constitution, entered this august Parliament following the 2014 General Elections. However, I have this to say about this book of laws that has been so elaborately defended by His Excellency the President.

It is evidently clear that there is a need to review parts of that Constitution. There are, within those laws, glaring needs for redress or for proper interpretation and application. I will address some examples for us today.

On the first paragraph of the Preamble in the 2013 Constitution, Madam Speaker, we have these words and indulge me, for a moment, as I briefly quote them:

“WE, THE PEOPLE OF FIJI,

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

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

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

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

It goes on to highlight, Madam Speaker, that as a people, we give ourselves through this document, commitment that we recognise and protect human rights and respect human dignity, amongst other commitments that include justice.

Now, as an indigenous Fijian, the first part or the beginning of this Preamble and the spirit of the rest of it, tells me that I have been unjustly treated. As a Member of this august Parliament, I am discouraged from exercising those guaranteed constitutional rights that has promised to recognise my unique culture, traditions and language. When I am not allowed to exercise my constitutionally given right to speak in my own traditional language when I wish to in this august Chamber, makes a mockery of the very Constitution that His Excellency the President has alluded to, "as being the best Constitution in the world, internationally lauded and critically acclaimed and promulgated after widespread consultations."

Madam Speaker, you will note that this august Parliament makes a mockery of the very Constitution that His Excellency has alluded to and I quote:

"It is regarded as one of the best in the world...." "Indeed our Constitution has been internationally lauded, and critically acclaimed".

Madam Speaker, you will note that this Constitution meanwhile, also gives the same rights to the other ethnicities whom we are now all known as Fijians, many of whom are also included in this august House. I, also ask on their behalf, Madam Speaker, that their constitutional rights to speak in their own dialects or language be provided as well.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I wish to also briefly say that the workers of Fiji have noted His Excellency's emphasis on the Bill of Rights provisions of the 2013 Constitution. This Constitution, given the process, it undertook before promulgation cannot be relied upon, and not to be reneged by the powers that be, which may at any point, determine the freedom of association and collective bargaining in it, be removed.

Madam Speaker, whilst on that note, please be reminded that this is the only Constitution of a democracy that defines trade unionists as public offices and subsequently bars them from political party membership and activity. With my background as well in trade union, I am aware that there is no guarantee to any of these rights, as enshrined in the 2013 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency has applauded our new holiday to be celebrated beginning 2016. This will be, our Constitution Day holiday. This is nothing new. Great nations like the United States of America celebrate a similar holiday. However, contrary to ours, that great nation has only had one Constitution since it fought and gained democratic governance for its people. Much is therefore, desired from ours in that respect, so I would rather, we not kid ourselves and instead given recognition to more meaningful holidays, for example bringing back the Ratu Sukuna Day, or even better, have a National Indigenous People's Day, just as we celebrate World Indigenous People's Day every 9<sup>th</sup> of August annually.

Madam Speaker, on the subject of economic national growth, His Excellency credited that our economy experienced a 5.3 per cent increase in growth for 2014, and claims a four per cent growth over the last three years.

The World Bank however in its global statistics has tagged our growth at a conservative 3.8 per cent in 2014, a 3.5 per cent growth in 2013, a low 1.8 per cent in 2012, a 2.7 per cent in 2011, and a 3.0 per cent in 2010. So, what guarantees are there that these figures given by His Excellency and obviously derived



from the Reserve Bank of Fiji are correct. We can expressly judge for ourselves where we are getting it all wrong.

Madam Speaker, we only have to look at the economic indicators that are globally used like unemployment, poverty levels and cost of living, to note that there is an obvious disparity that is being fed to our common people, and obviously placed in public parlance.

Madam Speaker, I will now choose to speak specifically on the area of education. His Excellency has generally stated that we need a vibrant economy to ensure prosperity and a brighter future for all. It is universally accepted that education is a key cornerstone for economic long term stability and growth.

His Excellency has highlighted that he has made a point of visiting almost every school in Fiji, and the reaction from our children is such that they have no interest in listening to the voice of division and fear mongering. They are calling for stability, and the opportunity to carve out worthwhile lives for themselves. How true is that statement, Madam Speaker?

Our children need stability. They do not need confusing policies. Recently, the honourable Minister for Education has stated that in the New Year, 11 rural schools will be converted into technical colleges to accommodate our children in the rural areas. Madam Speaker, these 11 Colleges will see the closure of certain schools to allow them to be turned into technical institutions.

Alternatively, Madam Speaker, we should have introduced two streams in schools, to allow our children to have a choice of either attending technical colleges or pursuing higher education at tertiary institutions like the University of the South Pacific, University of Fiji and Fiji National University, amongst the many others. If we were to dissect and interpret the underlying messages in this so called 'new concept', this will mean, Madam Speaker, that we are indirectly telling our children in these rural areas that they are possibly best suited only for blue collar jobs. Alternatively, we are also telling them they are not good enough for white collar jobs and so they need to progress from whatever level of secondary education they have attained to enter this newly established technical options.

These decisions, Madam Speaker, mean we are denying our children and their parents their constitutional rights of choice and freedom to choose for themselves their own educational options and their future. This is their future that we are talking about.

Meanwhile, Madam Speaker, despite several requests made in this august House, and through other forums, Government has not to-date provided us with breakdowns in ethnicities, the new scholarships scheme of toppers and TELS. The argument has been such that we share a common identity and thus, there are no classifications of race.

Madam Speaker, we both know that in reality this is not practical. Renowned Academic at the University of the South Pacific, Dr. Esther Williams, in a recent publication had quoted the views of a researcher and academic in the field of education in Fiji in 1981. In that review, she quoted:

“The future of Fiji is inextricably linked to the fate of the Fijian people or the *iTaukei*. The longer the Fijian people cling to their traditional lifestyles, and the more the Indians dominate the economic life of the country, the greater is the risk of grave future racial trouble”.

Madam Speaker, I am a school teacher and an Executive Education Officer by profession with numerous years of viable contributions to this important sector. I will reiterate these notable comments by Dr. Esther Williams that we need to tread cautiously, with a true spirit of healing for our people. We cannot afford to have ill-conceived and dubiously designed policies that can only bring about divisiveness and more problems for our own selves in the future. So, what is the real agenda for these technical colleges,

Madam Speaker? The honourable Minister should be heeding our advice, and not shooting first and asking questions later and this is what is happening in his Ministry under his watch.

Madam Speaker, I draw your attention to Shri Vivekananda College in Nadi, an outstanding college that provides two streams of options for their students. Those students, who are able to do academically well, complete their studies at SVC, and join higher universities of their own choice, to become whatever they wish, from being teachers, doctors, lawyers, et cetera. Those who do not do so well academically, will go on to do their vocational studies, which is also provided by the school.

I encourage the honourable Minister for Education to visit this school and see for himself how they have done so well in this respect. After all, SVC is also the first school in Fiji to use digital learning. This is done totally without books or pens, or a chalk and a blackboard. They have advanced into the new era of learning with electronic devices and teachers aid.

Madam Speaker, still on education, the previous Minister for Education, Mr. Filipe Bole has through government initiatives, introduced Forms 6 and 7 to rural areas. We have also at the same time, witnessed the introduction of computer learnings in most rural schools through computer laboratories which our honourable Prime Minister has been very actively and passionately involved in. However, a controversial policy decision has been introduced by the honourable Minister for Education that will possibly contradict those of his predecessor. This is for the government boarding schools of QVS, RKS, ACS, Natabua High School and Labasa College to become schools concentrated on enlisting students only from the rural areas. What will become of all these introduced school blocks and buildings and computer labs and resources that Government has established in these rural areas, Madam Speaker?

The 2007 Census by the way has confirmed that the majority of *iTaukei* people, for example, now live in urban centres. Again, what then, Madam Speaker? Do we stick to a policy that encourages the curbing of rural to urban migration drift that we know has contributed to so many other social ills and problems, or do we discourage it?

Early childhood education has meanwhile become a policy of Government, demanding that all schools nationwide have such provisions for their schools. The question I would like to ask is this, do we have sufficient resources to demand this kind of policy; and do we have enough teachers trained in early childhood learning, to be able to demand such a policy to begin as early as 2016?

Secondly, what sort of remuneration will these early childhood teachers receive? Graduate teachers as we know are paid ED9A salary structure which is only \$12,360.00, well below the \$16,000 figure provided by FIRCA in 2013. What about the salaries of these early childhood teachers?

As it is, we have reduced the salary entry level for graduate teachers entering teaching for the first time. However, just like every other teacher, the demand for all sorts of commitment from these teachers have become burdensome and unrealistic, where they are now expected to provide reports for the Ministry and are monitored according to performance of their student passing. Compare that to the remunerations teachers are receiving, I call it 'Modern Day Slavery!'

The policies, Madam Speaker, being demanded now, in my opinion, are regressive. They can only ensure teachers spend long hours on report preparations so they can fulfil their monitoring elements in order to continue to safeguard their jobs and yet, the pivotal part of their primary role which is to teach and educate the children will be relegated to minimal commitments. Who will suffer in this scenario? Our students, teachers and our society, of course.

Madam Speaker, if we were to tie down the performance of our children against the renewal of contracts of our teachers, this will be a most unwise thing to do. I refer back to the study by Dr. Esther

Williams, who also highlighted the performance of our children contrary to the accusations against the non-performance of teachers, which is a result of a combination of factors, some of which are the home environment the students come from, the resources their schools have, their accessibility to reach school daily, parental support at home, quality of teachers and many more. So, obviously to begin to assess teachers against the passing rates of their students and penalise them is a breach of contract, and would also be an unjustifiable, ill-conceived decision and makes a mockery of the whole compact of the educational sector.

These reforms have proved very drastic at the moment, Madam Speaker. I have a paper here which shows that the exam papers for year six and year eight, which they are about to sit have been leaked to the public. Civil servants have recently in 2012, began new contracts with Government. Whilst salaries have slightly increased and promotions received, many of them who have served for years in Government have lost out on benefits they used to enjoy, like long service leave allowances and leave pays. These incentives used as reward tools for ardent commitment to work for our workers, despite the lure of better jobs in the private sector, hence making a robust civil service as the engine for government business.

Civil servants now have limited freedom to join unions and if they have, then the unions themselves have been restricted in their performances. Apart from these, civil servants have yet to have a comprehensive salary increase despite inflation rates being one of the highest we have experienced in the country.

Madam Speaker, I note that we will be deliberating on legislations and subsidiary legislations with the possibility of amending some of these laws, as His Excellency has highlighted in the new Parliament year. We hope to see wider consultations amongst stakeholders, especially in the involvement of unions, whenever and wherever possible.

However, an Honourable Member said in her speech that the Fiji Government speaks less, but quickly acts on issues and deliver. People of Serua, Madam Speaker, have made numerous requests to the Minister for Health regarding the upgrading of the Galoa and Korovisilou Health Centres, in view of the increased population that they have. The Minister for Infrastructure and Transport is requested to consider the Serua and Deuba Roads upgrading and electrification request for those in Batinikia, the re-opening of Wainivunu and Navutu sawmills, the development of the Nabukelevu Road, the extension of the Navua Market, the Masi Village access, the seawall in Naboutini, Lomary and Sigasigalaca, the bridge in Vunaniu, the dam in Namaqumaqua, and the road hump in Navutulevu. These are some issues the people of Serua are anxiously waiting for.

These issues are yet to be resolved and there are no actions taken and Government has to be reminded to address them urgently. However, I must thank the Government for the assistance rendered to the province so far and we look forward to some changes in 2016.

On that note, I am reminded by what President Barack Obama said, as part of his speech in his address, when he won the Elections. I quote:

“America must change, our union can be perfected on what we have already achieved and gives us hope for what we can and we must achieve tomorrow”.

Likewise, Fiji must change in tangible terms and not merely in the number of statistics, our output can be enhanced, therefore, a brighter tomorrow can be guaranteed by our collective resolve.

Let us thrash issues in the most peaceful manner, with utmost sense of civility, and yes, we can and yes, we will. I am hopeful that all I have shared today might give our fellow Members on the other side of this august House, Madam Speaker, food for thought, as we look forward to the announcement of the

Budget in the next few weeks and hope and maybe hopefully, they will feel it important to implement some recommendations for considerations as submitted from this side of the House.

*Vinaka Saka Vakalevu, Shukriyaa, Dhanyavaad.* May God Bless us and may God Bless Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I would like to thank all honourable Members for such a very well researched and extensive debate today. That brings us to the end of our sitting and I thank you all for your contributions.

The Parliament is now adjourned to 9.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2015.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.59 p.m.