

WEDNESDAY, 28TH SEPTEMBER, 2016

The Parliament resumed at 9.30 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications and the Honourable Minister for Forests and the Honourable A.T. Vadei.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH OR AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

The following Member subscribed to the Administration of Oath or Affirmation of Allegiance and took his seat in the Chamber:

Honourable Howard Robin Thomas Politini

HON. SPEAKER.- Congratulations to the Honourable Member and welcome to Parliament. I also take this opportunity to welcome his family members who are observing from the gallery - welcome to Parliament. I have been advised that the Honourable Member will deliver his maiden speech on Friday morning. Thank you.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 27th September, 2016 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting.

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

POINT OF ORDER

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to express a few of my concerns to Riaz.

Madam Speaker, if at any time that I have hurt Honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji, during my recent speech or even to all the speeches and remarks that I have made in the past, I beg humbly to apologise to all and request for all your forgiveness, please. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please note, although it was not a Point of Order that I can rule on but we do note your comments.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Report of the Public Accounts Committee

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee to have the floor.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is my first Report as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and I welcome the opportunity to showcase the progress that the entities continue to make on behalf of Fiji.

This is a Report that I wish to present to the Parliament which the Public Accounts Committee did on the scrutiny of the Government-owned commercial companies, statutory enterprises, statutory authorities and regulatory bodies.

Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that this is a positive story of Government's improvement over the past decade across all commercial entities. Problems did exist in the past and were many but in 2016, the vast majority of these internal accounting issues have been addressed, with systems developed to maximise transparency and accuracy.

Clearing the backlog of Audit Reports from 2009 is an important exercise of the Parliament, however, it should be remembered that these Reports reflect on a culture up to seven years ago in Fiji's development as a growth and improvement have been occurring so quickly. These means many issues that appear in these Reports do not exist any longer and have long been resolved.

Still with these issues, the lessons learnt a long time ago by particular entities can be shared as part of this process and the positive story of Government's improvements can be seen by all when comparing 2009 to 2016. This makes clearing the backlog of Reports a worthwhile exercise for the Parliament of Fiji. There are several recommendations attached to this Report. The message is broadly a positive one from the Public Accounts Committee Members to all entities and that is to keep going.

The reformed zeal on display in many entities are very encouraging and should have the Parliament of Fiji excited about the future of public administration within the islands. Audit is an important part of improvement in public administration. It is not something to be feared but encouraged and welcomed.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Air Ports Fiji Limited captured this sentiment well when he stated in his public submission, and I quote:

“Audit is very necessary in order to ensure statutory enterprises and the funds of Government which is taxpayers' money is spent well.

I make a general observation. In many instances, audit is treated as creating fear in people and when one makes a mistake out of a hundred, it is focused upon so much that executives in state-owned enterprises or the Government sector stop making any decisions at all with that fear factor.

The state of enterprises must grow and develop in accordance with Government's vision but it is important to understand that it is not perfect. It is never going to be perfect as long as mistakes are picked out rightfully by the Office of the Auditor-General and your Committee, and then they are not repeated.”

Within each of these commercial entities, each commercial statutory entities review, Public Accounts Committee found no outstanding issues needing referral to investigate bodies such as FICAC and the relationship between most entities and the Audit office seems to be one of open and healthy dialogue. While some were of a higher standard than others, the Public Accounts Committee can assure the Parliament that the Audit Office has successfully audited the attached entities from 2009 to 2014 and the recommendations made by the Office of the Auditor-General are being pursued and clarified.

I would like to thank the representative of each entity covered by this Report, particularly at the time of the public hearings held by the Public Accounts Committee. Some entities received short notice and most responded in a very positive way.

It gave the Public Accounts Committee further confidence in the entities through their willingness to engage. I also thank the Honourable Committee Members, as this clearing of backlog is a time consuming process and can at times be a dry audit process.

Honourable Members from both Government and Opposition are engaged in a process in a constructive manner and this is appreciated.

I particularly thank the Deputy Chair, Honourable Mohammed Abe Dean for filling in as Acting Chairman on several occasions where competing demands met, I was elsewhere and mostly out of Viti Levu.

This Report contains 14 recommendations. These are made in good faith and we urge the relevant party for which the recommendations are made to consider and respond accordingly.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) I hereby move:

A motion without notice, that a debate on the contents of this Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do you have a seconder?

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is that the debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any member oppose?

(chorus of noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to have the floor.

Petition by the Honourable Gavoka on the return of Tovatova land
to the Yavusa Navauvau

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was tasked by the Honourable Speaker to scrutinise the petition presented by

Honourable Viliame Gavoka on issues pertaining to the return of land known as Tovatova to the Yavusa Navauvau.

Madam Speaker, the Committee deliberated on the petition and held its hearing in Tavua, that is the district where the concerned land is. The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights then scrutinised the petition and heard from the members who were interested in the matter.

The petitioners that claim that Tovatova land was purchased in 1870 from the chiefs of the native owners of Mataqali Nabila, Mataqali Navauvau with 97 muskets. A Mr. John Berry claimed that the whole of Tovatova land during the land Trans Commission and it was granted to him in 1885. Mr. Berry divided the land and sold 2,168 acres to Western Mining Corporation and 4,319 acres to the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, that is CSR.

The Committee noted that after Independence, the 4,319 acres of land belonging to CSR was returned to the State ownership in 1971 and is now classified as State Land Without Title, under Section 4 (2) of the Crown Lands Act.

The Committee has considered the provisions of Section 28 of the Constitution and Section 18 of the *iTaukei* Lands Trust Act, under which the petition was brought and also other laws as they are related to the petition, but they only deal with land acquired for public purposes which may revert to native owners after use.

There are no provisions in the relevant law and particularly those that the petitions were brought under for return of ownership of land to the traditional owners unless it was obtained for public purpose. In this matter, it is clear that the land was obtained through sale and later transferred, which was not for public purpose therefore, the petition does not have merit in the Committee's view.

The Committee's finding are contained in the Report and I am pleased to present it for the consideration by Parliament. In doing so, I wish to sincerely express my appreciation to the substantive Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and the alternate Members and the submitters who took time out to appear before the Committee and present their views to the Committee. And lastly, to the hardworking secretariat who assisted us throughout in this matter.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please present the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 125(5) I hereby move:

That a motion without notice, that a debate on the contents of this report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. B. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is, that the debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose?

There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call the Honourable Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to have the floor.

Review Report of the Ministry of Education's 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the review report of the Committee on the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs was established, pursuant to Section 109 (2) (b) of the Standing Orders of Parliament for the Republic of Fiji in which this Committee is mandated to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture, media, and their administration.

On 10th June, 2016, the Social Affairs Committee had summoned the Ministry to come and present the performance for the two years in terms of the activities and financial performance as well as the legislations and policies that they had administered.

The response from the Ministry was exceptionally positive in which they managed to clarify on all the issues which was raised by the Members during the inquiry.

Further, the Committee sought additional information from the Ministry during the enquiry; this in regard to their data on certain areas.

The review report was a bipartisan one, which has the input of both sides of the Committee. In addition, the Committee had noted all the key performance indicators of the Ministry, as well as to how their budgetary allocations were distributed and utilised within each key performance area.

I would like to thank the Ministry officials who made their submissions to the Committee and the Committee appreciates the substantial effort in providing all the inquiry information.

Also, I would like to extend my appreciation to all the Committee Members and alternate Members for their sustained work and commitment to the task until the finalisation of the bipartisan report.

The Members who were involved include Honourable Salote Radrodro (Deputy Chairperson); Honourable Veena Bhatnagar (Member); Honourable A.T. Vadei (Member); Honourable Mohammed Dean (Member); and Honourable Ruveni Nadalo as an alternate Member.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to also thank the Committee's secretariat staff and the research team for their hard work and support towards the production of this bipartisan report.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend this Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) I hereby move:

A motion without notice, that the debate on the contents of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is, that the debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Member oppose?

(chorus of noes)

There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Report on the Reserve Bank of Fiji's 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports
and the 2013 and 2014 Insurance Annual Reports

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Chairperson on the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you and good morning Madam Speaker. I am pleased to present the consolidated Report of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs on the Reserve Bank of Fiji's 2014, 2015 Annual Reports and the 2013, 2014 Insurance Annual Reports.

The Committee met on 20th September to conduct a review of the aforementioned Annual and Insurance Annual Reports of the Bank. After hearing evidence from the RBF, the Committee have no matters to bring to the attention of the House.

The Committee recommends that the House take note of its report.

At this juncture, I would also wish to extend my sincere thanks to the Honourable Members and secretariat who were involved in the production of this report.

My Committee colleagues: Honourable Vijay Nath (Deputy Chair); Honourable Dr. Brij Lal; Honourable Prem Singh; and Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

I would also like to acknowledge with thanks the Honourable Jilila Kumar, who sat in as an alternate during these meetings.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs. I commend this report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand the Report to Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without a notice, that the debate on the contents of this report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is, that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose?

There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to have the floor.

Ministry of Industry and Trade 2013 Annual Report
and the Tourism Fiji 2010-2012 Consolidated Annual Report

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to present the consolidated Report of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs on the Ministry of Industry and Trade 2013 Annual Report as well as the Tourism Fiji 2010 to 2012 consolidated Annual Report.

The Committee met on 20th September to conduct a review of the aforementioned Annual Reports. After consulting the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, the Committee has no matters to bring to the attention of the House. The Committee recommends that the House takes note of its report.

I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to the Honourable Members and Secretariat who were involved in the production of this report, namely:

1. Honourable Vijay Nath (Deputy Chair);
2. Honourable Dr Brij Lal (Member);
3. Honourable Prem Singh (Member); and
4. Honourable Viliame Gavoka (Member).

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice, that the debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is, that the debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Honourable Members oppose?

(chorus of noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

I now call on the Chairperson on the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to have the floor.

Ministry of Finance's 2013 Annual Report & the Independent Audit Report
of the whole of Government's Financial Statements and Appropriation Statements of the
Republic of Fiji for the year ended 31st December, 2013

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to present the consolidated Report of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs on the Ministry of Finance's 2013 Annual Report, as well as the Independent Audit Report of the whole of Government financial

statements and appropriation statements of the Republic of the Fiji Islands for the year ended 31st December, 2013.

The Committee met on 19th September to conduct a review of the aforementioned Annual Reports of the Ministry of Economy. After hearing evidence from the Ministry, the Committee has no matters to bring to the attention of the House and the Committee recommends that the House take note of its report.

At this juncture, I again wish to extend my sincere thanks to the Honourable Members:

1. Honourable Vijay Nath (Deputy Chair);
2. Honourable Dr Brij Lal (Member);
3. Honourable Prem Singh (Member); and
4. Honourable Viliame Gavoka (Member).

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121 (5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice, that the debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is, that the debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Honourable Member oppose?

(Chorus of noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously. I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Fiji Electricity Authority's 2014 Annual Report

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs on the Fiji Electricity Authority's (FEA) 2014 Annual Report.

The Committee met on 20th September to conduct a review of the aforementioned Annual Reports of Fiji the Electricity Authority. After consulting the Authority, the Committee has no matters to bring to the attention of the House.

The Committee recommends that the House take note of its report.

I also once again wish to thank the Honourable Members:

1. Honourable Vijay Nath (Deputy Chair);
2. Honourable Dr Brij Lal (Member);
3. Honourable Prem Singh (Member); and
4. Honourable Viliame Gavoka (Member).

I also wish to acknowledge with thanks the Honourable Vijay Nath, who acted as Chair in my absence on several occasions.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice, that the debate on the contents of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is, that a debate on the contents of the report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Honourable Members oppose?

(chorus of noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON HIS EXCELLENCY'S ADDRESS

HON. SPEAKER.- We will now resume debate on His Excellency's Speech and I give the floor to the Honourable Parveen Kumar.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members, I rise this morning to address the Statement delivered by His Excellency the President of Fiji.

At the outset, I wish to echo the sentiments made by earlier speakers, congratulating our Rugby Seven's Team for winning Fiji's first ever Olympic gold from Rio.

The Address by His Excellency the President was both inspiring and admirable. His Excellency the President has been a true servant of this nation; a soldier, civil servant, a politician and now President.

At this point, let me record my disappointment at the boycott by the National Federation Party (NFP) on the opening of this Parliament. It was a gutter level tactic.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- The Honourable Leader of NFP accused the Honourable Prime Minister of wasting Parliamentary time by speaking out against their vote. This is laughable.

Madam Speaker, the NFP has made a joke of itself and of their continued boycott. May I remind them that this is where the action is and not in pocket meetings.

As the Honourable Prime Minister pointed out, their behaviour was unworthy of a party with a heritage of leaders who were statesmen first and politician second.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You betrayed them!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- The difference is not under your leadership. Unfortunately, the actions of the NFP and its leadership shows only its sad demise from its once great leadership and membership.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Not only that, Madam Speaker, that same Monday morning their partner, SODELPA could not even show party unity as they again split and they have also voted on whether to attend or boycott Parliament.

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, I ask whether they are really concerned about the very people who have voted for them to be in Parliament and not outside.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- And once they turn up in this august House, they go over their same drip. They are a party of preaches, not politicians and not very good at either, may I add.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- A couple of cases in point, Madam Speaker, time and again, they have complained against the 2013 Constitution.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- These are the same people who went to the last Elections, crying out that a vote for them was a vote against the Constitution.

Do the maths my friends. Guess what? The people spoke. No, they shouted their rejection of these two parties loud and clear, they voted in FijiFirst and the 2013 Constitution.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, then these Opposition Members, typical of their 'flip-flop' politics, gladly took their oath in this august House under the same Constitution. What a hypocrisy?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Preachers and politicians, worthy of their profession, at least know and respect the meaning and pure nature of taking an oath under a particular Book, including the 2013 Constitution.

This is the same Constitution that provides for our people roads, electricity, housing, water, free education, welfare assistance and many more, Madam Speaker. Transport, care and planning for our environment and towns and cities and as my abled Ministry and colleague have pointed out, in the many other areas under their portfolio.

What the Constitution provides for in paper, Madam Speaker, we, in the FijiFirst Government deliver on ground. Madam Speaker that is the real reason for the Opposition's continued attacks on the founding document of our beloved nation. They just cannot take the FijiFirst list of achievements and its immense popularity. The massive recovery efforts from the *TC Winston* and the sound economic policies of our Government is just beyond their understanding.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, on Monday, one of the Members talked about being part of the Team. They are crying, they are not being passed the ball. What for?

They are like a poor football team, when in doubt, out! And what they want to boot out is the living document of our beloved nation - the 2013 Constitution. It is our controlling rule book. Then how do they expect to play the game, or be included in the game? The fact is, they do not want to play the game or be passed the ball. The only thing they want. ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR .- the only thing they can pass...

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Change your speech writer.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- You listen my friend, it hurts...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- This is the fact.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- The only thing they can pass ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Please, interjections are allowed in Parliament, but it must be done with responsibility. Continuous interjection tantamount to hackling. Please, do it with responsibility. Thank you. You may continue, Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you Madam Speaker. The fact is, they do not want to play the game or be passed the ball. The only thing they can pass is to pass the buck or return a 'hospital pass'.

(Laughter)

They are too busy, planning and deploying futile diversion to engage with the dynamic state of play in this nation under the FijiFirst Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, their continued attack against the 2013 Constitution is a failed and futile diversion from their inability to counter the success and achievements of the FijiFirst Government in any concrete terms. We rather have preachers, academics, or lawyers from the Opposition benches all full of hot air and nothing of substance...

(Laughter)

. ... to contribute in any meaningful manner. We walk the walk and they are not even able to talk the talk.

On walking the walk, Madam Speaker, let me now address His Excellency the President's call for Honourable Members to take stock of our performance so far, to review the progress we have made as a Parliament and as a nation and to reflect on ways in which we can improve our

quality of service to the Fijian people because it is to them that we owe our allegiance as Members of Parliament.

A half-way point, as His Excellency has outlined so well, is relevant to our need to take stock of achievements but also, to prioritise pathways towards greater achievement in the second half of our journey.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry covers a significant area and much of our work focus on the development aspect of our Government. Much of our work in areas like town planning, transportation, housing, environment and infrastructure are crucial economic drivers. As such, they are essential to Fiji as an investment destination, as much as they are vital to the key economic sectors, including tourism, sugar, manufacturing, agriculture, fisheries and forests.

Madam Speaker, let me begin with the Department of Town and Country Planning. My Ministry is currently reviewing two of its laws. Firstly, the Subdivision of Land Act, Cap 140, a law that came in being in 1937 and secondly, the Town Planning Act, Cap 139 in 1946. Both laws play a vital role in the investment and economy of our country that they include decision-making process on land and building development in Fiji and the planning of the urban and rural areas in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, a consultative forum with professionals, consultants and stakeholders is currently in process on the final draft. The intent is to have strengthened and focused revised laws towards an improved and sustainable urban and built environment.

Madam Speaker, next I turn to the very important area of housing. Madam Speaker, to support the implementation of the National Housing Policy, the Government approved the National Housing Policy Action Plan, whereby 24 activities were to be implemented.

As of 21st September 2016, the Ministry has completed 21 activities and 3 activities will be carried out in the remainder of 2016.

Madam Speaker, to support the Housing Policy implementation work, my Ministry will continue to upgrade 17 squatter settlements throughout Fiji in 2016-2017.

Roads: Madam Speaker, three years ago, my Ministry embarked on a programme to improve the state of the nation's roads. FRA provides ongoing maintenance and regular replacement of existing roads, bridges and jetties, to avoid these assets falling into disrepair.

Many of our bridges, Madam Speaker, are weak as a result of overloading and not being maintained. All in all, Madam Speaker, we are working on upgrading and maintaining our existing roads, jetties and bridges and building new ones and to last long.

Madam Speaker, much has been said of the recent development surrounding the recent withdrawal by the MWH. Madam Speaker, FRA has assured the former MWH workers of their rights to apply for advertised positions with them. FRA has assured my Ministry that they hope to provide employment to a large number of suitable, qualified and relevant former MWH workers.

Other matters related to the operational are subject to various legal processes and therefore, not open for discussion or disclosure at this point in time.

Madam Speaker, the Government is making an all-out effort to improve road safety in Fiji. As a responsible Government, we have provided a budget towards promoting safer roads in Fiji that would see the implementation of enhanced awareness campaigns and outreach programmes.

LTA will continue to strengthen its enforcement and compliance in areas of overloading, speeding and illegal operations. In this regard, the installation of roadside red light and speed cameras at certain locations, to combat speeding and red light related traffic infringements on our roads, are currently being implemented.

Madam Speaker, water is essential to our livelihood and an area of high priority of FijiFirst Government. Water Authority of Fiji was established to take over the responsibility for providing access to quality drinking water to residential and non-residential metered customers. This is not restricted to urban areas with a key priority being the setting up of water supply system in rural areas. Under the improvement of rural water scheme and the installation of 30 ecological purification system, we will improve the quality of water supply to villages and settlements.

Madam Speaker, despite the setback caused by *TC Winston*, last six months has seen 11 new rural electrification grid extension projects completed and commissioned. This year's allocation has already seen the mobilisation of electrical contractors to wire over 1300 rural homes for connection to these new and also existing power lines in Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

As outlined in my opening Address, Madam Speaker, my Department, under the Ministry is all geared to add to the momentum that we have built up during the first half. We are all fired up to deliver on all our missions as we head into the second half in an equitable, sustainable, and efficient manner on all our delivery..

Madam Speaker, I must take this opportunity to counter some of the other remarks made by the Opposition this week. I feel very strongly about some of the remarks made as they are a poor reflection on this august House. It is clear that we are continuing to deal with an Opposition, devoid of new ideas, remarks and contribution.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- I would like to urge all Fijians to move ahead in this inspiring and dynamic times in Fiji. I know that the older, current and younger generations no longer judge achievement by old yardsticks. It is interesting to note that all of a sudden, these old politicians are bending together and the Opposition is attempting to be the glue.

Madam Speaker, I must say that I am saddened by the hypocrisy shown by the Opposition Member in praising Mr. Jai Ram Reddy. How quickly, how quickly, Madam Speaker, people who not so long ago backstabbed this man ...

(inaudible interjection)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Hang on – you listen! Have they forgotten the time when they referred in negative terms to Reddy as being the Captain and `Bavadra the Boat?

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Don't point at me? You are a shameless person.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, this was said by these same people, 'Reddy the captain, Bavadra the boat'.

HON. P. SINGH.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member have just said to one of the Opposition Member that he was an hypocrite. It is un parliamentary, Madam Speaker. He is imputing improper motives and creating ill-will in Parliament by addressing the Member as an hypocrite.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. As you will recall, Honourable Members, if anyone uses the term that is rejected by another and had been targeted and raises his Point of Order, I will take that Point of Order. I will ask the Honourable Minister, please to withdraw the word.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- In fact, Madam Speaker, I have made my point and I withdraw. Thank you.

(Laughter)

HON. P.SINGH..- In addition, withdrawal is not unconditional. He said he has made his point.

HON. MEMBER..- What is the Point of Order?

HON. SPEAKER.- The withdrawal has been made, Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- In addition, Madam Speaker..

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of order, Madam Speaker.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- What is the Point of Order?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker, that is not an apology. The Honourable Member said he made the point. What is the point he made? He made the point that he is an hypocrite. That is the point he made and that is the Point of Order. He must withdraw that unconditionally.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I have made my ruling and that the withdrawal has been made and accepted. I will now ask the Honourable Minister to continue.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. In addition, one of the continued remarks that the Opposition harps on and on about is the neglect of our rural people.

Madam Speaker, this is no longer the time when these politicians, combined to keep the rural people isolated and in a hole as their private vote banks in sugar politics. Those days are gone, Madam Speaker. They do understand what is happening in and around.

Madam Speaker, the time for the politics of that era and those politicians is well passed. I have been on the ground and listening as we monitor the implementation of the many programmes under my various portfolios. Old tricks will not work anymore my friends.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- The politics of divide and rule that these old hands learnt from the Colonial Masters does not stand a chance in the new world under the 2013 Constitution and under the FijiFirst Government inclusive and achievement based. The FijiFirst Government has moved on past the politics of old that relied on separation of race and other interest groups and to sustain old political elites.

My message here is loud and clear, clear and loud that the endorsements we received and continue to receive from all Fijians to carry on as our achievements speaks for itself and it is the FijiFirst pathway as we enter the second half of our term in office.

This makes them undeserving - the Opposition, not only of mercy but fails to gain them the due respect as elected representatives of this Parliament, for they represent not only the electorates but under their oath to the 2013 Fijian Constitution. If not to their conscience - a commitment to the group.

In closing, Madam Speaker, once again, I would like to thank His Excellency the President for his Address that inspires us and will motivate our cause of action in the coming days, months and years towards a better Fiji for all Fijians.

May God bless you and may God bless Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, now I invite the Honourable Faiyaz Koya to have the floor.

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

Madam Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to take the floor to provide my response to the President, His Excellency, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote's Address at the opening of this session.

Madam Speaker, I fully support the message His Excellency sought to impart to us and my Ministry will continuously to strive to meet the high expectations set out by His Excellency for the next half of our term.

His Excellency's Statement, Madam Speaker, not only covered the progress made by this Government but also what we have achieved in this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, Fiji, as it exists today is a dynamic island economy that leads the region in development and consistently punches above its weight on the international stage.

A decade ago, Madam Speaker, that was not the case, but under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, today Fiji and the Fijian people stand stronger than ever before and today, we can celebrate a record of seven straight years of economic growth.

Today we can stand united, Madam Speaker, as never before in our history, and today, Madam Speaker, it is safe to say that Fiji is finally winning.

Earlier this year, Madam Speaker, we say how strong we can be when we stand together, as we did when confronting the challenge of *TC Winston*. And we can see how unified we are in times of celebration as we saw after our Rugby Sevens Gold victory. A victory that truly showed the world what our nation is capable of and Fiji, Madam Speaker, has illuminated the world.

Madam Speaker, it is sad to see that even when surrounded by such displays of unity and such stark evidence of our unprecedented economic success, the other side of the House, I mean that particular side of the House, refuses to accept that Fiji is on the right track. They still rely on offensive and divisive political tactics to distract the Fijian people from future opportunities and to bolster their own political standings.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's development suffered for many years due to the same fear mongering tactics peddled by the Opposition today. And in the historic 2014 General Elections, it was the Fijian people who said loudly and clearly that those days are over.

The Opposition, Madam Speaker, cannot accept that they were not chosen. They cannot respect the will of our people and they simply cannot acknowledge that our nation is on a path of prosperity, a path that was forged by the unrelenting efforts of this Government.

Members of the Opposition, Madam Speaker, attack our 2013 Constitution. They call it a sham and they claim that it does not belong to the Fijian people. Yet, let us not forget, it was under that Constitution that we held our 2014 General Elections and it was in those Elections that the Fijian people voted overwhelmingly for the FijiFirst in support of that very same Constitution.

So, Madam Speaker, again there is a disconnect between the Members on that side of the House and the will of our people.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Bulitavu, stated on Monday that the FijiFirst Government only works for its supporters. Another deliberate falsehood! Our Prime Minister's vision for this country is rooted in inclusion, and that is not just rhetoric, Madam Speaker. He has personally visited villages all over Fiji and opened numerous development projects for ordinary people, regardless of how they have voted, and I was proud to join him on many occasions.

This Government understands that the more Fijians we bring into the mainstream, the more people we educate, the opportunities we create, the better off our nation will be.

We have policies in place, Madam Speaker, designed to boost development in the North, policies that have an equal impact on our people, regardless of where they call home or their political affiliation.

Madam Speaker, it is an all too common theme for Honourable Members of the Opposition to attempt to deceive our citizens, including the *iTaukei* community, into believing that their rights are, in anyway, under threat. It has not worked before, Madam Speaker, and yet we saw that same tactic deployed again at the start of this session.

On Monday, Madam Speaker, Honourable Dulakiverata, claimed that the Government is not providing landowners with their share of royalties and I have to ask: "Has this Honourable Member actually read the Constitution?" Has he seen that for the first time in our history, we have a Constitution that enshrines the rights of landowners to earn fair and equitable royalties on the extraction of minerals from their land?" It is there, Madam Speaker, I assure you it is there, It is there as clear as day. The protection, Madam Speaker, is in place.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Listen my friend and we are currently formulating laws to identify the processes for the payment of royalties.

A Mineral Development Technical Committee has already been established, consisting of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs, *iTaukei* Affairs Board, the iTLTB and the Ministry of Economy. All royalties, Madam Speaker, are in a trust fund and once that Committee has completed consultations and the laws are finalised, all moneys will be fairly distributed to landowners, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this Government has also successfully given Fijians living in informal settlements on State Land security of tenure and a stable future. The Ministry of Lands has identified 64 informal settlements, 15 of which have been surveyed with 496 lots. Of these lots, 233 approval notices have been approved to-date and 13 informal settlements have been earmarked for survey in the upcoming financial year.

Madam Speaker, there are few comforts in life that are greater than the peace of mind that your future is secure and it is this Government that has provided that peace of mind across informal settlements for the very first time. Madam Speaker, not only does the Opposition fail to recognise our economic achievement, we have actually seen cases where they have actively worked against Fiji's economic interest.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad and Honourable Viliame Gavoka have both misinformed, disingenuous comments to the media regarding Fiji's trade with PNG. Without bothering to confirm any information with my Ministry, these Honourable Members both decided that Fiji's interests were not their own. They opted to dispense with the facts and instead try and score cheap political points in their attempt to cause undue panic within our business community.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- A point of order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think the Honourable Member is misleading Parliament on the dispute between Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I said very clearly that any dispute between the two countries would be mutually harmful. That is not undermining Fiji - that is actually supporting. I think he is misleading Parliament on what I said, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Point is Order is on an issue that the Speaker is able make a ruling on and not on the content of speeches. Honourable Minister, please continue.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well Madam Speaker, the facts are these and please, listen. This Government, Madam Speaker, is pro-business. We work extensively with our private sector partners to drive economic development and there has never been a ban or unnecessary restriction on food imports from PNG.

Madam Speaker, it is our duty to protect our shores from threats to our people, our animals and our plant life. Any issues arising from this need to go through the appropriate frameworks, and that is exactly what Fiji and PNG are doing. We are having a constructive dialogue so that we can satisfy both of our biosecurity and health requirements.

From the tone taken by the Members of the Opposition on this particular issue, you would think that they had forgotten that it is to the Fijian people that they owe their duty. It is the safety of the Fijian people that is paramount, Madam Speaker, and it is the Fijian economy that we must all work to promote. It is Fiji that must come before the personal and political agendas of all Members of this Parliament. It hurts.

Madam Speaker, we saw similar irresponsible and unverifiable statements coming from the Opposition concerning Fiji's stand on PACER Plus negotiations. Falling victim to inaccurate reporting, Members of the Opposition again sought to undermine Fiji's position. Again, it was their own political positions that took priority over the interests of our people.

Madam Speaker, the PACER Plus negotiations are still open. Fiji is actively involved, and we will continue to push for an agreement that recognises Fiji's development challenges and that it is flexible enough to suit our needs.

Madam Speaker when Members of this House make such ill- informed statements on the trade issues that affect our people, it is Fiji's international reputation that suffers. There is an expectation, Madam Speaker, that Members of Parliament have a grasp of these issues and when that is not the case, that reflects poorly on all of us.

Madam Speaker, under this Government, *iTaukei* landowners who have deposited their land with the Land Bank have received a total of \$6.6 million in revenue. A total of 82 land parcels have been deposited, of which 36 leases have been issued. We will continue to work diligently to ensure that the *iTaukei* receive the full benefit of their land ownership and are equal beneficiaries under Government's other programmes and initiatives because it is in our Constitution that no Fijian be left out of our progress and development.

This is evident by our very successful Micro and Small Business Grant Scheme and the Integrated Human Resource Development Programme (IHRDP) and the Northern Development Programme (NDP).

In the first year of implementation, a total of 5,853 people were assisted through the Grant Scheme, Madam Speaker, directly and indirectly improving the lives of 29,265 Fijians.

Madam Speaker, for the 2012-2015 period, a total of \$3.72 million was allocated to implement the IHRDP, and as 31st December, 2015, \$3.55 million or 97 percent was actually utilised. Over that period, the Programme created 1,659 new jobs and had a positive impact on 6,806 Fijians.

In 2015, the NDP assisted 117 projects with a total value of \$803,822.07. The NDP, Madam Speaker, since its inception in January 2008, has funded 1,915 projects with a total value in grants of \$6.9 million - with a total value from the lenders of \$7.8 million. And of those 1,915 projects, 84 percent are currently underway.

Madam Speaker, approximately 33 percent of the IHRDP budget allocation has also been set aside for rehabilitation work projects that were badly affected by *Tropical Cyclone Winston*. Many of these projects were located in the red zone areas and we will be undertaking a similar exercise to rehabilitate beneficiaries under the NDP.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, to enable Fijians affected by the cyclone to fully reclaim their livelihoods, we have, with the assistance of the Indian Government, allocated \$4.7 million for the Micro and Small Business Grant Scheme. The expressions of interests for new applicants close next month.

In this financial year, Government committed \$6.4 million towards the rehabilitation of micro and small businesses affected by *Tropical Cyclone Winston* so that we can get these enterprises back into operation as quickly as possible.

To determine the extent of damages to our grant recipients, Madam Speaker, we have conducted assessments in Bua, Savusavu, Taveuni, Tailevu North, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Vatukoula and Rakiraki. These assessments involved site visits to verify damages and to determine the monetary value of the losses. We anticipate also, Madam Speaker, that at least 2,800 recipients of last year's grant will need support to get back on their feet, and that support is said to be distributed in November this year.

By taking the IHRDP and NDP under the Ministry, we are poised to create a fully-fledged Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Apex Body to oversee all of our support efforts to the MSME community.

Madam Speaker, as I stated in the budget session of Parliament, the MSME Apex Body will consolidate all programmes and projects related to the sector and work to solve common issues, such as access to finance, market access and issues relating to economies of scale and also to help build capacity among the recipients.

Madam Speaker, in this regard, the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism is advertising for consultancy services to establish a central coordinating agency for Micro and Small and Medium Enterprise and the consultancy will undertake a diagnostic review of the current MSME landscape in Fiji, develop a MSME Framework, formulate MSME development legislation and establish an MSME Central Coordination Agency.

The Report will be submitted in January 2017, with the MSME framework projected to be prepared by February 2017.

In the 2016-2017 Budget, Government launched another innovative strategy to diversify our economic base, so that we are not overly reliant on one or two sectors. To this end, an allocation of \$500,000 has been set aside to grow our Manufacturing and Services Zone in the Western Division. We have started with the feasibility studies on sites, and we have already identified two sites in Lautoka.

Madam Speaker, my two Ministries are working together to also conduct geo-tech studies of these particular sites as well. This Manufacturing and Services Zone will support Fiji's strong position as the regional hub for trade and commerce, and, on that note, I would like to review some of the highlights of Fiji's performance in trade.

Government has also put in place various initiatives to grow our economic pie, particularly in our tourism sector. This is a positive step towards long-term sustainability, yet it is a step the Opposition have completely failed to grasp.

For instance, Madam Speaker, the Fiji International is currently playing a key role in developing golf tourism in Fiji, a lucrative subset of the tourism market. A golfer spends an average of \$6,000 a week compared to the average tourist who spends \$1,000. So clearly, this is a market worth targeting.

Madam Speaker, \$32 million was generated in gross media value by the Fiji International and Tourism Fiji brand in the 2015 tournament across a wide-range on international markets, up to 90 percent for last year. With another \$1.5 million generated through spending by our visiting participants and \$1.585 million spent by PGA Australia contracting services from local companies.

So this particular niche market, Madam Speaker, is growing, thanks to Government's investment, and we will continue to see even greater returns on the back of the impressive results we have achieved so far.

On a short note, Madam Speaker, it is also interesting to note that the tourism related tax proposal for the Opposition changes from, one, being the benefit to the workers in the tourism industry and now a particular tax for the landowners. If I coin a phrase for my brother Minister, "flip-flop politics", rather 'flop politics', I think it is, is a very appropriate description.

Government is planning for the future, Madam Speaker, and we are seeking these opportunities, opportunities that translate into well-paying jobs for our people and make Fiji an even bigger draw for tourists from around the world. It is disappointing, Madam Speaker, that this particular vision is not shared by the Opposition, but, it is hardly surprising, given their record of pushing policies that look to the past and ignore the development opportunities.

We are also, Madam Speaker, developing sports tourism in other areas, particularly in rugby. We have formed a strategic partnership with Super Rugby, and we hope not only to bring more international rugby games and fans to our shores, but one day place a Fijian team in the Super Rugby fixture.

Madam Speaker, as mentioned by His Excellency, *Cyclone Winston* was followed by a country-wide relief and rehabilitation programme to tend to the immediate needs of affected Fijians. Now that we are in the rebuilding phase, my Ministry has been working closely with our partners to improve building codes and standards of building materials.

The Ministry, together with FRCA, has increased border control measures for imports to ensure that only high standard roofing coils and cyclonic screws enter the Fijian market. And the Fijian Building Standards Committee has already recommended additional amendments to the roofing and wall cladding standards, and standards for wind load for housing.

Madam Speaker, as stated by His Excellency the President, I hope that all of us remember that we are responsible to the people who have put us here. It is a disservice to the Fijian people when we spread misinformation. It is a disservice when we incite hatred and mistrust between our people. And it is a disservice, Madam Speaker, when we put our own interests above the interest of the country.

In the words of our President, Madam Speaker:

“Let us rededicate ourselves to the task of continuing to rejuvenate our nation and giving it the sense of direction and purpose that this nation deserves.”

Madam Speaker, thank you once again for allowing me this opportunity to provide my response to the Address of His Excellency, and I strongly support the vision that he laid out, and aspire to meet the high standards he set for us as elected representatives.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and God bless Fiji and this Honourable House.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you and I now invite the Honourable Mikaele Leawere to have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament, Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Assistant Ministers, Government and Opposition Whips, Members of Parliament, and members of the public in the gallery and our viewers; a *bula vinaka* to you all.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to contribute in response to His Excellency's Speech, delivered in this Honourable House on 12th September during the opening of Parliament. I would like to thank His Excellency for his most gracious Speech.

Madam Speaker, the purpose of His Excellency's Speech is to outline the policies and programmes of Government but it falls short of the standard of service given to the people.

His Excellency, Madam Speaker, said that “it is appropriate to take stock of our performance and renew the progress we have made in the last two years.” This is far from the truth as we have witnessed the poor quality of service provided by the Government of the day and not performing up to the expectation of the people. A very good example of this is the

slow Government's response to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of our schools, homes and infrastructure that were severely damaged by *Cyclone Winston*.

Madam Speaker, the recent resignations of the Members of the FijiFirst Government is a concern as they were unable probably to cope with the leadership of the current Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- These resignations have not assisted in evaluating and improving the quality of service. It has been aggravated further by moving his Ministers around. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs, though he had been doing excellent work, has been moved to Defence and how can Government guarantee quality performance when there is a reshuffle as such?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- The people of this nation, Madam Speaker, have now realised that the Government is not serious in its speech and genuine in its effort to bring about a Government that will be appreciated by the people.

Madam Speaker, the Fiji Sevens Team had achieved what other sporting bodies have never done before, except for the Para-Olympic by Honourable Delana. These boys deserve more than the money given to them and a house or a piece of land would be ideal like what we did for Ratu Peni Rayani Latianara. We do not only talk but we walk the talk ...

(Chorus of interjections)

... and that is what our paramount chief had done for the people of Serua, showing our concern for the man that had brought gold to this nation.

Part of the million dollars, Madam Speaker, for the international golf tournament in Natadola could have been used to purchase these properties for our Golden Seven-a-Side Team. They put Fiji on a pedestal and imagine the economic benefits the country enjoyed due to the win in Rio.

Madam Speaker, the concept of a National Sporting Academy is more important than ever before and we would like to see that it is established for upcoming athletes and young rugby enthusiasts in order to train and teach them about the sports they love.

The Academy should be aligned with other overseas sporting jurisdictions which will give it an international status in as far as recognition is concerned. Madam Speaker, we can just imagine the financial benefits Fiji will enjoy from such an important institution. Part of the \$9 million being pumped into the Natadola Tournament, Madam Speaker, could be utilized to establish this Academy.

Madam Speaker, a couple of days back, our Party Leader and the Leader of the NFP, Honourable Biman, the General Secretary of FICTU and the Labour Leader spent one night in the Police Station for something that the authorities call "a breach" in the Public Order (Amendment) Decree.

Madam Speaker, I would say that their being taken to the cell for questioning is a breach of Section 17 of the Constitution; which talks about the rights of every person to freedom of

speech, expression, thought, opinion and publication. Even though other parts of Section 17 said otherwise, we feel that its interpretation leaves a lot to be desired as those that had been questioned are only participants and not organisers; and should not have been taken in by the Police. This imprisonment had been purposely orchestrated to intimidate those that had participated in the dialogue and it was counterproductive.

On another note, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Education had made a blunder by firstly, sending out a circular to schools and withdrawing the same by citing that it was not vetted before dispatching. This circular, Madam Speaker, was meant to curb any statements made in public by teachers and it came with a penalty clause.

What about freedom of expression, as stated in the Constitution? Let us hope that this circular with not rear its ugly head in the future.

His Excellency, Madam Speaker, said that his Government is investing hundreds of millions of dollars a year in new infrastructure projects. And he goes on to say that these are building blocks or economic resilience and growth. Madam Speaker, growth means people and we talk about it at the back of our minds are those that make it happen.

The building blocks, Madam Speaker, should be how our people are being looked after. In particular, Madam Speaker, I am referring to civil servants.

Madam Speaker, from the outset, we call on the Government to award civil servants a pay rise. They have toiled tirelessly from 2006 till to-date and have never raised their voices but have continued with their work silently all these years.

In 2013, Madam Speaker, their salaries were increased as Elections was just around the corner. We should award recognition on these workers and give them the pay that they rightfully deserve in return for their loyalty through the service. I am not sure there will be a civil servants pay rise before 2018 Election or not, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, all I know as the workers advocate we are repeating our call on numerous occasions in this noble House for Government to increase civil servants pay and I thank the Honourable Minister for Education for listening to us, which resulted in the ECE teachers been given a salary increase. That is how this honourable House should be operating, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Teachers, nurses recently had been crying out silently like other civil servants and it is my hope that this year, they will receive their pay increase as well. Also, there is a need to relook at Police pay and align them to what army recruits are receiving as they have a much higher pay structure than police constables than correction officers.

We see these constables on the beat, rain or shine. We see them keeping everyone safe and they were not even recognised in the last pay increase. I call on the Government, Madam Speaker, to increase their pay fairly and I am sure that they can afford this due to the economic growth as alluded to by the His Excellency.

However, of concern, Madam Speaker, is the uncertainty facing civil servants in regards to their contracted appointments. Madam Speaker, lending institutions are hesitant to give loans to civil servants due to appointments on contracts. These give a sense of fear and frustration on the workers of this country. This means that the Government of the day can hire and fire anyone at any time because their position is insecure due to contracted appointments.

Madam Speaker, access to scholarships had been introduced by past Governments and there were opportunities for students, which enabled them to access university studies. However, during past governments, students of all races were able to attend universities locally and abroad through the Multi-Ethnic, Fijian Affairs Board and Public Service Commission scholarships. These scholarships, Madam Speaker, were available to all people of this nation, despite their respective ethnicity.

We call on Government to bring all these scholarships back so that students will have the opportunity to pursue university studies instead of a selective few that are chosen every year from the stringent selection criteria as stipulated in the Toppers Scholarships.

Madam Speaker, final year students at the Aviation School in Nadi were not awarded scholarships but first year students were assisted instead, and we ask Government to explain why? Why first year students? If we look at the cost implications, if it is scrutinised, the list of first year recipients, we will find some very familiar names.

However, Madam Speaker, we are looking at the possibility of reducing Fiji Roads expenditure and introduce free university tuitions for all Fijians. We will consult widely amongst all stakeholders for this new allocation and will involve Public Sector Unions will take the issues to FTA, FTU and COPE and seek their views. Importantly, Madam Speaker, we ask the Honourable Minister for Education to call for an Education Seminar, to ensure that we are on par with our island neighbours, especially Australia, New Zealand and other parts of the world.

Madam Speaker, on 4th September, the *Fiji Times* reported that the Honourable Minister for Education saying that “our children should be reading a lot of books and are told to make use of the libraries to improve their literacy rate”. What happens to our libraries now? Shall we concentrate only on these tablets, leaving our libraries aside?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- However, Madam Speaker, I would like to pose some questions to the Honourable Minister for Education regarding this new initiative. Can you just listen to my questions on what I am going to ask you?

1. What happens when a tablet has been reported stolen?
2. What if the student cannot afford to purchase a replacement?
3. How much do these tablets cost to the taxpayers of this country?
4. Is there a procurement process in place, in terms of tender?
5. Was there a feasibility study and survey conducted to determine its longevity and practicability?
6. Were stakeholders like the Unions, NGOs and universities consulted?
7. How about its security, safe keeping in schools and security of use?
8. Can we have a guarantee from the Honourable Minister that these tablets will not cause any problems, a few months down the line?
9. Are these tablets replacing textbooks altogether?
10. Are they 3G? If they are, certainly we have a problem due to networking especially for islands and remote schools.

Madam Speaker, whilst the Honourable Minister is trying to portray himself as the saviour in education in this country, there are hundreds of children still attend schools in tents. Schools in Koro like Kade and Ra schools like Penang, Vunisamaloa, Rakiraki District are still waiting. There are 227 schools are still in tents. Where are our priorities? Why progressing

with this new initiative which is very expensive while they have uncompleted tasks to attend to. Our utmost concern, Madam Speaker, is to ensure that our students go to decent classrooms and equipped appropriately with books, pens, tables, et cetera.

Last week, we read in the papers that these tents will be repaired and that means longer suffering for our students in non-conducive learning environments. Why not, Madam Speaker, use the cost at least of those tablets and free milk to help alleviate the problems faced by our students in tents?

Speaking of free milk, what are the benefits to our children? Was there an assessment conducted to find out its effectiveness? Who benefits more from this purchase of milk?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- What about the free bus fare scheme? Can the Honourable Minister inform the House, if the scheme has achieved its intended output? Was this closely monitored so that the Honourable Minister can ensure effective use of financial resources? Or was it again another purposely introduced initiative just to win the votes of the people?

Madam Speaker, the only tangible effect is that the bus companies have a lot of new buses and its effect on our students need to be ascertained.

Likewise, Madam Speaker, villages in Koro, in the Ra Province and the other affected areas are still waiting for help. The District of Nakorotubu in Ra are the worst hit in terms of the devastation and they are crying out for assistance seven months down the line. When are they going to be assisted? Why is it taking so long, taking into consideration the numerous donations given to the Government to continuously assist schools, families, villages and individuals in order to fully and quickly recover from the devastating caused by *Tropical Cyclone Winston*?

We cannot use the hardware suppliers, Madam Speaker, as an excuse and the onus lies on the Government to help and to help immediately. Surely this is not a sign of a caring Government!

Despite His Excellency's reassurance regarding his Government's huge relief effort, there is still a lot of work to be done, Madam Speaker, and we still have a lot of people suffering from much needed foods supplies and housing like these areas and other parts of Fiji.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Let me, Madam Speaker, touch very briefly on the concerns have been raising in this House regarding the province; why Waivunu and Navutu Sawmills have been closed? They are the source of revenue for Government and as well as employment opportunity for our people. FHL is no longer milling ...

HON. J. USAMATE.- *Dabe! Dabe!*

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- and with the abundance of forest resources (I would sit when Madam Speaker, tells me to) Government needs to refocus (would you want to take over Chair) and open up for other mills as well. Not only that, Madam Speaker, Serua and other parts of Fiji are abundant in natural resources like mahogany and native timber species with the closures, logging contractors have resorted to taking their logs to other mills.

Now sustainable mahogany industry is closing as well. What is happening, Madam Speaker? The company should table a report to its line Ministry for the information of this House as to why it has closed down.

Still on timber, parts of Fiji like Nabukelevu village and its surrounding areas are rich in native species and the road access is terrible. There is a school, nursing station in this area and I call on the Honourable Minister for Local Government to upgrade this road. This will not only alleviate the suffering that the people had endured whilst travelling this road but it will also provide easy access for carting logs to the mills. It will also open up other tourism developments like trekking, mountain climbing, et cetera, thus creating more employment opportunities.

The people of Masi in the *tikina* of Nuku had earlier requested the Honourable Prime Minister regarding the building of the bridge in 2014 but to-date nothing has happened. I hope this will take into consideration when they prepare the next year's budget.

Opening up this area and other areas in this country, Madam Speaker, will mean development in market access, health, timber resources and education for our people.

As His Excellency the President had highlighted in his most gracious Speech and I quote;

“It is appropriate for me as your Head of State to not only outline the Government's legislative programme for the coming year but for all of us to take stock of our performance standing order far and to review the progress we have made as a Parliament and as a nation over the past two years and to reflect on ways in which we can improve our quality of service to the Fijian people because it is to them that we owe our allegiance as members of Parliament and in my case as President.”

In reference to His Excellency's statement, I am pleading to the Honourable Prime Minister and respective line Ministers to consider the following issues as raised:

1. Upgrading the Vunibau, Deuba roads due to flooding.
2. Vunibau village is slowly being washed away by the Navua River.
3. Upgrading the Galoa Nursing Station to a 4 bed hospital.
4. Upgrading Korovisilou Health Centre as well.
5. And a health centre is been promised by Government at Navutulevu but nothing has eventuated.
6. Part of Wainiyabia Village has been taken away by businessmen and little did they realise they are sitting on our land that does not belong to them.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I would like to refer to the song that was mentioned yesterday '*Mississippi*.' Just two lines on the chorus I would like to mention here. "Mississippi will roll along until the end of time. This Government will roll out, the end is coming near."

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, "we are now a nation unified, more so than any time in our history and we are a nation on the move", that is alluded to by His Excellency..

Let us work together in unity and listen to each other as elucidated by His Excellency. I call on Government to work with the Opposition and not to change laws to suit them. Let us

move this nation together as we are passionate in our desire to make Fiji a Fiji we are all proud to call our nation. God bless Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members for such a robust debate. We will now suspend Parliament as we break for refreshment.

Parliament will resume at 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.53 a.m

The Parliament resumed at 11.28 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- We resume from where we left off and I would like to invite the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to have the floor.

HON. A. A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentleman: a very good morning to you all.

I would like to join other Members to thank His Excellency for a gracious Speech. It was a very spectacle moment to listen to the Head of State address us all at the opening of the 2016 Parliament Session.

During his Address, he was very clear on the progress we, the Government. have made in the past two years and that too without any constructive contribution coming from the Opposition.

We must never forget the fact that we are elected in this august House by the people of this country to ensure that we run the affairs of the country with honesty and trust that is placed upon us.

While the Government side and the general public as well are putting in all efforts to have a united country, it would be in disguise that some Honourable Members go around the country spreading information which are not appropriate or are not true.

I have said this before in this august House that regardless of ethnic groups, religion and geographical location as to where we come from, it is very important for us to stay united. This was pretty much obvious, whether it was the celebration of first ever Olympic gold medal win or whether it was the celebration of our first ever Constitution Day, people of Fiji were united. It was the first time to see all ethnic groups coming together to celebrate the Gold Medal win and Constitution Day.

It is interesting, Madam Speaker, to see that I am using a lot of 'first' word, and why not, it is Fiji's first ever FijiFirst party which is determined to be the first party in Fiji to take Fiji to a new level of prosperity, economic growth, modernisation and most important, building a united Fiji for all Fijians.

A Fiji where citizens are not discriminated, based on skin colour, hair texture, ethnic group, or religious backgrounds.

It is very funny at times to see the level of debate and contribution made by some Honourable Opposition Members because majority of the time it seems that debate is used to portray falsifying information for gain of political mileage.

What people of this country now want and expect to see while watching live coverage of Parliament session is to see who gives worthy contribution for the betterment of the country.

Using live coverage as campaign programme is not appropriate because it would be futility on your own self, thinking it may gain you extra vote. People are smart now, they opt

to analyse the content of the speech, rather than just blindly following what anyone says. Such actions by certain politicians are not only disrupting the unity of the nation but also provides hindrance to growth and progress of the country. Such deception have led our indigenous community in our country, 'resource rich and cash poor', thus contributing to the increase in poverty level in our beloved country.

Only indigenous communities were given the freedom and been encouraged to make their own decisions for past few decade, today we would have been in country with negligible poverty level. I say this for a reason Madam Speaker.

Today we can see around the country so many squatter settlements whereby landlords have never gained the right value in terms of lease money. Had they been given encouragement to develop their land and give it out on lease, our indigenous landlord would have been in a much better economic position. This would have not just helped the indigenous community but also would have contributed vastly in countries progress with improved infrastructure in term of road, electricity, water, sewer line and housing.

It is only the FijiFirst Government which is leading in this path by giving incentive to indigenous landlords to develop their land and get a better value. It is only through our Honourable Prime Minister, indigenous communities have been given the freedom to decide on their own on how to utilise their land and how to get a better value out of their land. Had our leaders in the past had such vision for our country, we would have been living in a country which by now would have been recognised as a developed nation rather than a developing nation.

While we are doing these in all efforts to progress our country at a faster pace than any other island nation in the South Pacific, false information and deception to Fijians by some of the politician is only providing hindrance in our country's development.

We need to ask, are our ambition for political gain greater than our country? Two years have passed by since the last General Elections. While it is great to see what Government has achieved, it is also interesting to see what the Honourable Opposition have opposed. The Government tried to achieve the best for the nation and for the people, while the Opposition has opposed each and every effort that we, the Government side, have tried to build for a better Fiji.

It is high time that the Honourable Opposition Members realise that everyone has had enough of the deception and false information given to the people of Fiji. Countries have been misled in the past but that needs to stop.

Now we would stand up in Parliament and object every time an Honourable Member gives false information in front of the camera. Now, we will also let people know of the fact that there are times when members from Opposition agree to Bills at Committee stage, but opt to oppose the Bill when it comes to Parliament.

Why is this done, Madam Speaker? Just because the camera in the House are switched on and their voters are watching? Or just for political gain and party agenda, knowing that the piece of legislation in front of them is beneficial to the country, Opposition opt to oppose the Bill?

Madam Speaker, this needs to stop from now onwards. Every time Opposition utters a word which does not reflect the fact or their action at Committee stage, we will let the country know what transpired at Committee stage

Madam Speaker, I would at this juncture like to inform the House that what was uttered yesterday about the Honourable NFP Leader was again a true example of misleading information by the Honourable Member, when our beloved Prime Minister objected to it.

I quote from yesterday's *Hansard* and at page 70, and this was uttered by Honourable Gavoka: "I was shocked yesterday when the Honourable Prime Minister attacked the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad for his absence in Parliament on that day. Have you forgotten that Honourable Biman, the Leader of NFP, was in jail that day? I repeat 'was in jail that day' or have you forgotten that."

To the Honourable Member, we do not need our PM to actually clarify this. We are there to clarify when people are actually misleading the Parliament. Let me remind you Honourable Member, that you tend to forget or ought to forget a lot of things.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Please do not address another Member directly but speak through the Speaker.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, I have evidence here that the Honourable NFP leader did boycott the opening session of Parliament.

The Party President did a press release which I heard over here in which he states very clearly and I quote again from Fiji Village:

"National Federation Party Parliamentarian Professor Biman Prasad and Prem Singh boycotted the official opening of the Parliament session by President Jioji Konrote earlier today. NFP President Tupou Draunidalo says the Party's Management Board decided that NFP Parliamentarians will boycott the President's Address today".

(Chorus of interjections)

Where in this quote did the NFP President say anything about leader being in jail on Monday 12th September, Madam Speaker?

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, as per the Honourable Member said about NFP Leader was in jail, let me quote from the *Fiji Times*, dated 12th September, 2016 and I quote:

"Five of six men detained by Police for comment they allegedly uttered that could affect safety and security of all Fijians were released last night".

On 12th, when we say 'last night' it means the night before. It cannot be a Monday night after being released.

Madam Speaker, I again quote from the *Fiji Sun* by Jyoti Pratibha

“Five men politician and a trade unionist and a staff member of a non-government organisation were yesterday released from police custody”.

Madam Speaker, these papers were published on Monday 12th September, even that happened on Sunday during the day and that can only be published at night. They cannot publish future things. People are learned enough to know what is happening.

Madam Speaker, how low can Opposition go when it comes to party politics and their own personal hidden agenda? I ask the Opposition, how can you people just say this kind of things and not expect people to find out what is right and what is wrong, breaking the trust of the people who voted you into this Parliament so openly?

Madam Speaker, I believe I have said enough and Fijians are capable enough to gather what Opposition is trying to achieve by such false information and deception.

Also interestingly, Madam Speaker, is to note that knowing a Member was wrong, NFP opted to be part of it, yet another deception and not rectifying the issue as they try doing it today by raising a Point of Order. They could have actually raised a Point of Order and clarified there and then that the Honourable Member is wrong, but since the Member was on their side, they opted to remain silent.

At the same juncture Madam Speaker, I would like to emphasise that our Honourable Prime Minister was very much correct when he objected to the Honourable Member when he was misleading the country.

Madam Speaker, I thank His Excellency for bringing this issue in his Presidential Speech and reminding everyone in this august House as to why we are referred as to as Honourable Members. Now that the Elections is near, more baseless facts and rumours would fly around in the country, but I urge the general public not to listen to such things and believe in yourself, and believe in what you see, analyse it yourself at your own discretion where the FijiFirst Government is taking the country.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The development in terms of infrastructure, roads, bridges electricity, water, sewer line, housing, school fees, bus fares for children, social welfare for senior citizens, grants for microenterprises, even to an extent of giving out cash depending on the eligibility to rebuild their life after *TC Winston*. See around yourself and ask your own self, is this not what we need for us and our future generation? Or is it that we want unharvested forests, minerals that were never going to be mined or extracted, unattended roads which have been left to deteriorate for ages, houses without electricity, no access to drinking clean water, parents are not able to afford school fees and bus fares, students are not able to afford tertiary education due to unavailability of funds, toppers deprived of scholarships due to race and ethnic-based policy on whom to award the scholarship. This is what Opposition is going to give the general public if they ever come into power, which is highly likely.

Madam Speaker, it is time that all of us unite as one and take this country forward. And also let us help our Honourable Prime Minister achieve the vision he has seen for Fiji. We are here to serve the people of Fiji and not to serve our selves. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

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

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen: *Ni sa bula vinaka* to you all.

I want to thank His Excellency the President for a very interesting Opening Address. I would like to draw attention to few issues that he had referred to in my response remarks.

Madam Speaker, the President stated and I quote:

“First and foremost in my Government’s mind is to empower our young people through its education revolution. This includes free schooling, more scholarships, tertiary loans plus access to affordable transport to attend these institutions.”

Wonderful words undoubtedly. However, I want to raise the point regarding equality of access to resources and by resources I mean teaching materials, physical infrastructure and more importantly, the teachers.

How can we have an education revolution when most of the qualified and experienced teachers are either retired at their prime, at 55, or if they are still employed, are posted to schools in the urban centres?

What about the rural schools? Do they not deserve to have quality teachers too? How many of our rural schools can boast of buildings that are conducive to learning? Some schools still have classes in tents. To have an education revolution, we need to begin at the elementary or primary level, rather than focussing attention on tertiary level of education. There are children who roam the streets and are not in school, Madam Speaker.

His Excellency stated that, and I quote:

“We are determined to provide young Fijians with every opportunity to have prosperous and satisfying future.”

How sustainable are these education opportunities that His Excellency the President referred to? That is what the ordinary people are talking about.

Madam Speaker, unity, an interesting concept, but do we need to be the same? The sense of unity that His Excellency the President talked about will really be strengthened if we embrace our differences. In embracing our differences, we become much richer as a nation.

Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states and I quote:

“Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits”.

The stifling and at times gagging of cultural groups is to dismiss the opportune occasions to learn from each other and to enrich each other. The inability to use the vernacular in certain places attests to this.

It goes without saying that this is an abuse of Article 27 of the UDHR. That would be what I call 'missed opportunity', Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, His Excellency during his President speech alluded to liberty, equality and fraternity as part of his government's *raison d'être*, or reason for being.

Where is the liberty when citizens of this country are unable to exercise their rights to freedom of opinions and expression? Even this august House became a victim to that when Honourable Roko Tupou Draunidalo and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu were summarily dismissed from the House on varied allegations. Yesterday, Honourable Ratu Isoa Tikoca appeared before the Privileges Committee to SODELPA's curiosity. Who is next is anyone's guess?

Citizens do not wish to exercise their right to free expression because of fear of reprisals, verbal, psychological or physical.

How can we expect a thriving democracy, when the basic rights of freedom of expression is stifled?

The media treads gingerly because they fear lawsuits, how then is it expected to perform its responsibility of being the watchdog of Government and informing the citizenry?

Madam Speaker, how can there be equality when vulnerable groups in our society continue to be placed in powerless positions?

Women continue to live in fear of being victims of domestic violence, rape and even marital rape. People with disability are unable to enjoy the freedom of movement because policies have not been put in place to ensure that public transportation system is enabled for wheel chair-bound people.

Are the designs and teaching resources and staff in our schools inclusive of persons with disabilities?

Madam Speaker, on fraternity; how can there be fraternity when this eminent House seems hell-bent on divide and rule? I wonder if we are beginning to witness the modern version of Colonial Britain's policy of divide and rule.

Madam Speaker, *Tropical Cyclone Winston* has come and gone. The brunt of the devastation was incredible. Some Fijians are still recovering from the destruction. Many kind hands both local and abroad, stretched out to help and as the President noted, we are truly grateful, but in the interest of transparency and accountability, will the nation ever get a full account of how much was received in cash and kind and how these were dispersed?

Madam Speaker, the 2013 Constitution has been forced on the people, including Code of Conduct Bill, Parliamentary Power and Privileges Bill and Information Bill, to name a few. The valid questions of these Bills are the legality and the constitutionality of the Constitution. No wonder we hear the statements from Mr Ban Ki-moon at the UN Assembly.

Madam Speaker, let me correct the Honourable Minister for Lands on what he said this morning on the fair share of royalty on land and *qoliqoli* owners. The Honourable Minister said that the 2013 Constitution is the first to enshrine this and the FijiFirst Government is the first government to provide for a fair share of royalty. This is incorrect, Madam Speaker, because the SVT Government, under Section 126(3) and (4) of the 1997 Constitution was this Government that came up with the fair share of royalty provision. It first appeared in the 1997 Constitution.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, Honourable Minister, please check the law.

Madam Speaker, before I take my seat, I cannot sit without giving my gratitude to the Rio Sevens Team tamers, the players, Ratu Peni Rayani Latianara and company. They have written history and I wish them to the very best and we look forward to the start of 2016 to 2017 International Rugby Board Sevens Season.

Vinaka vakalevu and God bless Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Now, I give the floor to Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament and members of the general public.

Madam Speaker, to take the football illustration of His Excellency the President, it may be half time but there are bigger and better things to come in the second half. We are just getting warmed up. Above all things, good government is about leadership, performance and accountability. That is what this Government is committed to.

Madam Speaker, as a nation we have nothing to fear, except fear itself. As His Excellency so eloquently put it, when speaking of our gold medal sevens team, "Fijian's can do almost anything". To that, I add "Yes we can". "Yes we will".

Again, to use the rugby example, let us not run around in circles without purpose, but work together to move the ball forward, to a position where we as a nation can score.

It is easy to be negative. It is easy to score trivial political points. It is easy to be a carping armchair critic. Healthy debate and interchange of ideas is one thing, but sometimes we have too many critics and talkers in our country and sometimes that is true of this House. Let us instead be a nation of thinkers and doers, who are committed to excellence in every field of endeavour.

As a Member of this House, we have a sacred duty to the nation to move forward and not waste time; a duty to put the nation before self-interest and self-advancement; a duty not to confuse national interests with the interests of political parties.

His Excellency is absolutely correct in identifying the transforming power of economic growth. Economic growth allows us to fund infrastructure so as to bring about further economic growth and to bring about a better and fairer society.

Economic growth is a prime mover of educational and health reform. It is the means of job creation. It is the path away from poverty and social vulnerability. Fijians are just renowned as footballers but we are and can be more than that. Let us work together to become the economic and social miracle of the South Pacific. Yes we can.

One of the building blocks to economic growth and a fairer society is a revolution in education. This is not just about an increase in funding but more about fairer and improved access to education for all. All young people, regardless of background or position, are priceless national assets. Each must have fair access to a good education and the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills to optimise their opportunities in life.

Let us not squander the latent talents of our young people. We cannot all be star rugby players but we can all provide in other ways. In the past, far too many young people have missed out because their parents could not afford to keep them in education. When we educate our young people, we must see to it that they are gainfully employed in suitable jobs, in the national interest.

Far too often, young people are discouraged by lack of real opportunities in the workforce, even when they get an education, then we are all poorer as a result. We need economic growth to drive those opportunities. We need fairer access into the workplace and for advancement. I ask all Honourable Members in a bipartisan way to commit themselves to pursuing these objectives.

No decent self-respecting society can afford to neglect the poor and the vulnerable and the sick. As a nation, we are once more making good progress in the field of health care, in particular this Government has devoted considerable resource to providing free medicines and in expanding health care infrastructure.

I am pleased to see the progress in new hospital facilities in Ba and Nakasi. Once again, our capacity to do more in this area is driven by economic growth. I noticed with some interest the growth of medical tourism in countries like Thailand and India, which are able to successfully integrate high medical standards with comparatively low labour costs. There is no reason why Fiji cannot aspire to do the same thing.

I am very pleased the Government has made unprecedented progress in helping the disadvantaged in our community. For the first time, we have social security pensions to help those who cannot support themselves. Madam Speaker, that shows true leadership and performance.

There is much more to be done before our beloved Fiji reaches peak performance, but just like our Sevens Team, we must commit ourselves to do whatever it takes. If they can do it, so can the rest of us. There is no gain without pain. We must all run the hard yards together.

In the post-colonial past, we have tended to cruise along, keeping things just as they were in the first half of the twentieth century. As a nation, we need to urgently move on from that. We need to see what we can do to modernise our institutions and concepts of administration. We need to move away from cosy colonial compliance to striving for excellence in the twenty first century

in the model best suited for Fiji. If this upsets the status quo in our society, I make no apologies. For the common good, let us all embrace change.

We have challenges before us in attaining efficient use of land resources, both in terms of unutilised rural land and rejuvenating tired and obsolete parts of our cities. We have a challenge before us in providing affordable housing for low-income families. We need to be creative, innovative and flexible about how we do these things.

The rural economy still has a long way to go to reach optimal performance. This has hampered to a great extent by outmoded and inefficient modes of land use and production. In turn, these difficulties are contributed to by a lack of capital and deficiencies in training. In some cases, we have been shown to move from traditional markets, which are less viable than they were in previous years. The ideal modern farmer is a smart farmer, well-versed in modern techniques, sensitive to marketing opportunities and able to operate from a sound financial model.

We need to move away from subsistence and other underperforming models of agriculture to best realise the agricultural potential of this country. Worldwide, there is a growing concern to achieve food security, and Fiji has tremendous opportunity to take advantage of this.

Perhaps what lies in the heart of the problems when it comes to agricultural production amongst the *iTaukei* are in-built structural and social barriers. As a society, we really need to reflect carefully about the desirability of doling out small parcels of land within a *mataqali*, to allow a *mataqali* member to plant a small area of crops.

Often the allocation of land and its size is at the whim of the *mataqali* head. This system brings with it a self-fulfilling prophecy that *mataqali* members and their families will be restricted to village life on a very small income – without the chance of enjoyment of the economies of scale and reduced unit costs of production, which larger scale agriculture brings about.

The existing system is chaotic and inefficient. Typically *iTaukei* farmers are not given proper agricultural training, they lack modern equipment and capital. The small surpluses in their crops, not required for home consumption, are marketed for low prices at local markets. Some see this as an idyllic way of life. I say “let us not take that for granted”. I say, “let us find out what the participants really want and what is best for the national interest.”

Part of the agricultural problem is breaking free from small scale supply of staple food to local markets, where typically, only low prices are achieved. However, more sophisticated forms of marketing and identification of markets with high yields are beyond the resources of most small scale farmers.

We need to develop and encourage forms of co-operative or Government sponsored endeavours to break free from the small scale farmer, to mould and more and more become producers of high yield specialty crops. That is in the interest of those farmers and the national interest. What I am advocating has been done before in the sugar industry. Whoever have heard of a cane grower, growing a quarter of an acre of sugarcane and personally refining the sugar and delivering it to a market abroad? The thought is absurd and so it is with many other crops.

Madam Speaker, the inescapable conclusion one must reach when travelling around many rural areas is that a very high percentage of the land is not being used for any economically gainful purpose. Some may say that it is a good thing. I say this is a matter which requires careful and

independent evaluation. Let us not guess but rather make a determined effort to see where the greatest good lies. Let us not be chained to the past but rather look to see where the best future lies.

One possibility is eco-tourism. There are many parts of Fiji which have areas of great natural beauty and are in a pristine natural condition. Eco-tourism is a growing market worldwide. This is a great opportunity for Fiji and a great opportunity for remote communities whose opportunities for agricultural development are limited.

In my home region, we have the Sovi Basin. The Sovi Basin is a magic natural wonderland but like many such areas, it is hard to get to and there are limited accommodation choices. To open up such areas for eco-tourism, we need capital, business skills, marketing skills and environmental expertise. This type of venture potentially opens up many opportunities for employment. At the same time, we must do it in a planned and controlled way so the pristine environment is not spoiled for future generations.

As a nation, we can do much more to develop this area and it must be done at a national level with sensible standards and controls. It needs a plan and needs leadership.

I have spoken in the past about rural infrastructure. Part of the structural barriers I refer to are the lack of decent roads to get produce to the market on a reliable basis or to allow access for eco-tourism. In this regard, I am glad to see we have made much progress with this Government on rural roads and bridges. However, a great deal more is required, but we need to do that on a planned basis – not just assume nothing more is required because that is how things have been in the past.

Part of the new legislative programme will be concerned with matters such as subdivisions and town planning laws and I see this as a real opportunity to do housing good. Let us work together so that squatter settlements finally become a thing of the past. Let us work together so that no person is forced to live on the streets. This requires give-and-take and goodwill. It requires a lot of imagination and hard work, but yes, we can do it.

Madam Speaker, new modes of funding and development will need to be identified, as a matter of priority, to ensure that all those who are without proper shelter are properly housed in this Government. We need to cast the net widely so as to identify all who can help. I am well aware there are budgetary constraints on the Government, but sometimes we have to work smarter and harder to find better ways to get the job done, and to get the job done - yes, we must.

Madam Speaker, it has been my honour to have worked closely with Honourable Rika in the past session, in attempting to find a housing solution for the 300 squatter families in Vatuwaqa for whom the landowner is willing to put up an alternative site in Makoi. This is just one awful example of people in dire need of proper housing, for whom a solution must be found. It is not a case where band aid solution should be offered, such as a water connection here and power connection there. We need to find better ways of rolling out community housing faster, better and cheaper.

We need to identify alternative ways to fund public housing. Some might suggest setting up a special purpose housing co-operative funding for commercial sources without urban guarantee. Others might suggest a land tax imposed on large scale vacant or unutilised residential.

I am glad to see the efficient way in which disaster co-ordination and repair works have been undertaken in the wake of *Tropical Cyclone Winston*. To all those from this country who helped, I give my thanks.

Let me also express my gratitude to our friends abroad, particularly in Australia and New Zealand, for the generous and prompt aid in the time of emergency. Yes, we can work with the international community.

There was a further dividend for us in working so closely for many weeks with Australia and New Zealand. It allowed many of the Government and aid agency people to see what enormous strides Fiji has made over the last couple years in restoring a fully functional parliamentary democracy and will contribute to better relations in the future. I sincerely hope every endeavour will be made to build on this new rapport.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I was very happy to hear His Excellency remark on the need to put "honour" back into "Honourable". It costs us nothing to be courteous, honest and dignified in our dealings with each other as fellow Members and in discharging our duties in community.

There is no need for descent into public abuse and name calling. We need to lead by example by courtesy; and decency and dignity when speaking in public or in writing for the media. We need true facts and logic, not lies, to inform what we say. We will be better leaders and the country will be all the better for it.

May I conclude in wishing you, Madam Speaker, and all fellow Members a happy and constructive new session. May God bless Fiji.

(Applause)

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

HON. R.N. NADALO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members of the House, ladies and gentlemen and the people of our beloved nation.

The Presidential Address on September 12th this year, touched on an important issue which is now close to our hearts. This is the issue of climate change, which refers to change (increase/decrease) to long-term weather patterns, such as temperature, rainfall and snowfall.

A warmer earth from the global warming relate to change in rainfall patterns, a rising sea level and what range of impacts on plants, wild life and humans. When scientists talk about the issue of climate change, their concern is about global warming caused by human activities.

The Honourable Prime Minister in his address on the international stage, where we are taking the lead to draw international attention to the urgent need to confront and address the challenges of climate change. Here in Fiji and the Pacific Region, the effects of climate change are clearly evident, coastal areas are eroded and villages are being relocated. Our summer is getting warmer due to increasing greenhouse gases, increasing precipitation has contributed to devastating floods. Cyclone has become stronger in intensity and one such example is *Tropical Cyclone*, which was a super cyclone.

According to scientists, this super cyclone will not be the last but is an indication of the many more cyclones in the years ahead. The intensity, frequency and duration of super cyclones or hurricanes as well as the frequency of the strongest have all increased since the

early 1980s. Cyclone or hurricane intensity and rainfall are projected to increase as the climate around the globe continues to warm.

Global warming is a very serious threat. Evidence collected by scientists have shown that virtually all the ice masses are melting. The Arctic ice is actually melting very fast and glaciers are melting. There are severe droughts, hundreds and millions of people in areas of the world are on the edge of starvation from drought, which has been going on for years.

The groundwater is depleted as the Himalayan glaciers melt and this will undermine the water supply for huge areas in South Asia.

The sea level is rising and this will contribute to the migrations crisis. Chances are it could rise three to six feet in the not too distant future and it will have a devastating effect, not just on coastal villages and cities, but on coastal plains and for countries who are at sea level where hundreds of millions of people will be severely threatened.

Madam Speaker, another main issue that affect all of us due to climate change is food security. Climate change affects four dimensions of food security – food availability, food accessibility, food utilization and food systems stability. It will have an impact on human health, livelihood assets, good production and distribution channels, as well as changing purchasing powers and market flows.

We are facing more frequent and more intense extreme weather events caused by changing temperatures and precipitation patterns. People who are already vulnerable to food insecurity are likely to be the first affected. Agriculture-based livelihood systems that are already vulnerable to food security face immediate risk of increased crop failure, new patterns of pests and diseases, lack of appropriate seeds and planting materials and loss of livestock.

This is what the FijiFirst Government is trying to address proactively, so that our future can be secure for us and our future generation. We are already witnessing the change in global food markets, the change in market demands due to crop failure and yield decline. Due to this impact will be felt in both rural and urban locations, where supply chains are disrupted, market prices increase, assets and livelihood opportunities are lost, purchasing power falls, human health is endangered and affected people are unable to cope. These are the challenges that we as a country need to think of and will likely face if no action is taken.

Madam Speaker, *Tropical Cyclone* wreaks havoc with extreme winds, torrential rains, high waves, extensive coastal flooding and damaging landslides.

Evidence as shown for the past 50 years or so have seen the highest death tolls and greatest damages on the record for these kind of storm, for example in 1970, *Bhola Cyclone* in Bangladesh killed about 300,000 people while *Hurricane Katrina* inflicted \$125 billion in losses in 2005.

For us, the experience of *Tropical Cyclone Winston* will never be forgotten for the devastation it brought and the suffering and turmoil it left in its aftermath. People experienced trauma through loss of lives, damage and complete loss of property in terms of their houses, farms which were source of livelihood, damage to fisheries, quality of education to mention a few.

It has been a very difficult and traumatic time for the country for the cyclone, not only it claimed the lives of 44 people, it left many thousands of people homeless, students did not go to school for weeks, schools were destroyed with other public infrastructure.

For a small nation like ours, disaster of this magnitude puts great pressure on our capacities and abilities to provide relief through provisions of urgently needed food supplies, basic medical supplies, shelter and assistance to damaged infrastructure and we are thankful to the Government and the international donors for stepping in to assist the people of Fiji.

So for Fiji and the Pacific Region and the world, addressing climate change is imperative.

Our future generations are depending on us to do whatever we can to turn things around. Many people do not realise that we are committed right now towards significant amount of global warming and sea level rise. The longer we wait to do something about it, the more change we will have.

How can we individually and collectively do to address this pressing issue of our time? How can one person help reduce or stop climate change?

Madam Speaker if each and everyone in this country make a commitment or take a simple step and multiply by millions of people all over the world, for instance, to practice careful use of water, reduce waste or plant a tree is a step in the right direction. Planting Trees help to slow climate change because they absorb carbon dioxide during photosynthesis. Trees also provides shade, which helps keep streets and houses cooler in the summer time and reduces the need for air conditioning.

Madam Speaker, there is another pressing issue that faces the world today and that I would like to inform the House that this is equally important to address as we are trying to address climate change. This is the issue of nuclear disarmament. I believe Madam Speaker that this is a topic that we cannot ignore. To do so will be to contribute to our undoing.

As you are aware, Madam Speaker, I led a delegation to Kazakhstan, to attend the Astana Conference on Building Nuclear Weapons Free World.

What came out clearly in this conference is that we do not need another Hiroshima or Nagasaki. We do not need nuclear weapons. The world, if we are not aware, has been close to ground zero. So many times where miscalculation, wrong advice, hot headed ambitions, disrespect for world peace has sent us close to the brink.

According to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, published in January 2015, the world is three minutes away from midnight. For your information, after the atomic bombing, specialist have established a Doomsday Clock. Every year, a panel of specialists make an estimation of how close we are to midnight. 'Midnight' means termination of species. Three minutes to midnight is as close as it is been since the early 1980s.

The nuclear threat is very real. It is escalating and very real. One need only to look at the confrontations on the China Seas, the continuous defiance of North Korea and the threat of confrontation in the Middle East over plans to send missiles to Syria.

A nuclear war will ensure the total annihilation of mankind, not to mention the effects it will have on the environment and ultimately the climate.

To close, Madam Speaker, I would like to bring to the notice of this august House that this bulletin mentioned also invoked the two major threats to survival; nuclear weapons and “unchecked climate change”.

As the main contributor towards this advance towards catastrophe, concerns have been raised that world leaders have failed to act with the speed or on the scale required to protect citizens from potential catastrophe, endangering every person on the earth by failing to perform their most important duty – ensuring and preserving the health and viability of human civilisation.”

Madam Speaker, we as individuals, as a family, as a community and as a country need to take action-through the promotion, of the Green Growth Policy that was launched by the Honourable Prime Minister.

Along these lines, Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, I thank you for listening.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo.

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen.

Madam Speaker, I rise to make my contribution towards the President's Address at the Opening of the New Session of Parliament, delivered at this august House on Monday, 12th September, 2016.

Madam Speaker, in my opening remarks, I would like to draw our attention to a phrase that was used by the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, whilst addressing the 71st Annual Debate of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on the 20th of this month, and I quote:

“My message to all is clear: Serve your people. Do not subvert democracy; do not pilfer your country's resources; do not imprison and torture your critics”.

Madam Speaker, we are fortunate that our Honourable Prime Minister was also present in that Assembly and hoped that he had taken heed of that great advice in order for our nation

to amend and improve some of the Decrees and Sections of the Constitution that does not go hand in hand with the remarks of the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon.

Madam Speaker, in replying to the President's Address, I will try and analyse his speech based on the performance of the Government in the last two years and how it has impacted the premise uttered by the UN Secretary-General in his opening address in UN General Assembly last week.

Madam Speaker, the use of the word "New Democracy" seems to be consistent with what was said by the former President, as well as the current President. What is puzzling me, Madam Speaker, is that Democracy whether it is new or old, it still has the same meaning and that is the "Rule by the People and for the People."

Madam Speaker, we thank the Government for coming up with the term "New Democracy" and on that note, I just want to highlight some of their notable achievements in the last two years in that area:-

1. The restriction imposed on the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) in August 2014, to provide an Independent, Professional Domestic Election Observer Group and they opted for the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) instead.

The question in here is, why was the Civil Society Organisation rejected against the Multinational Observer Group, when the two should be complementing each other in this exercise, because one is well-versed with the local situation whilst the other is on the international arena?

2. Madam Speaker, currently there is no clear demarcation of the Separation of Powers within the three of the Government, namely the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary.

An example of this Madam Speaker, is the current Attorney-General is also the current Minister of Elections and the Secretary-General of the Fiji First Political Party.

3. Madam Speaker, the civil servants are no longer career civil servants but are now Contracted Civil Servants.

This means that their career within the Civil Service cannot be guaranteed until they reach the age of 55. Their jobs are unsecured because they are mostly given three years contract and that can be terminated at any time before their contract term is up.

Madam Speaker, basic necessity such as housing, cars, education for their children, et cetera which were readily available to them being career civil servants are hard for them to enjoy now because the financial institutions would be uncomfortable enough to provide those facilities to them because their employment term cannot be really guaranteed. This has created an environment of fear in the workplace, restricting them in performing to their full potential.

4. There are massive terminations in Ministries and Government entities that we are not aware of because of the restrictions of the Media Decree that is still in place, which really limits the freedom of expression in any normal democracy.
5. Currently, there is no Tribunal in place as compared to previous governments, which normally deals with grievances that are normally faced with civil servants.

In a democratic government, Madam Speaker, institutions such as the above should be in place, otherwise we are only practicing democracy in name only.

6. The preservation of the various draconian Decrees promulgated in the 2013 Constitution which include the Decrees regulating the electoral and political party issues need to be amended to ensure that they are consistent with the content of the Constitution.
7. The ignorance of the Government to implement the recommendation of the Multi Observer Group and Electoral Commission to the Fiji Electoral System needs to be adhered to immediately before we reengage ourselves with the 2018 National General Elections, otherwise the exercise will be just of suspect.
8. The indigenous group rights which are enshrined in the UNDRIP of the ILO Convention of 169 is no longer recognised by this Government and coupled with the imposition of the 17 Decrees targeting to weaken the rights of the of the indigenous people in their own land, is way of the mark when compared to the opening remarks echoed by the UN Secretary General in the recent UN General Assembly.

We are a member of the UN General Assembly, Madam Speaker, and it is very important that we must be seen to be strictly adhering to the UN General Assembly rules of engagement at all times otherwise, we will be like a hypocrite in front of our global family.

Madam Speaker, on the role of Parliament, it is noted that in the last two years, the sitting time of Parliament was irregular. In the first session, it sat eight times, whilst the second session sat only four times.

Madam Speaker, the main role of Parliament is to make laws and full processes of making laws in Parliament must be fully adhered to at all times to ensure that the end product cannot be criticised by any person or organisation outside Parliament. To-date, a total of 118 Bills have gone through Parliament: 285 Bills were presented in 2014; 38 in 2015; and 52 in 2016.

Madam Speaker, one of the main features of this current Parliament is the adoption of Section 51 of the Standing Orders to fast track Bills that are being submitted to Parliament for debate. Of the 118 Bills that are being submitted to Parliament, 42 of that or 36 percent did undergo Section 51 of the Standing Orders, which is quite high in any Parliament and the Government is requested to only allow Bills that are absolutely necessary to undergo this process in future.

Madam Speaker, the other main roles of the Honourable Members of Parliament is to visit their constituents when the Parliament is not in session. In our current Parliament, this is

very much restricted because of the absence of constituency allowance in our current Parliament as compared to the previous Parliaments.

In the absence of the above, the Honourable Members of Parliament especially in the Opposition team are not able to visit their constituents regularly as it should be, whilst the Government team are fully utilising the Government resources available to them to keep on visiting their constituents on a regular basis.

Madam Speaker, to improve the situation, it is only proper that Honourable Members of Parliament should be allocated constituency allowances, in order to be able to discharge their roles efficiently as currently practiced throughout the democratic government globally.

Madam Speaker, another notable feature of this Parliament is the consistently changing of the Parliamentary Standing Orders to suit the Government's legislative agenda. A notable example to the above were the suspensions of two Honourable Members of the Opposition from Parliament and the removal of Honourable Professor Biman Prasad as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Madam Speaker, the action by the Government in the area mentioned above is totally uncalled for and undermines the dignity that are normally bestowed to this august House.

Madam Speaker, there seems to be lack of trust shown by the Government towards the Opposition in reaching common goals for the benefit of the whole nation. Despite putting constructive petitions and motions to the Government side. We should try and improve on the above in the next two years to ensure the smooth journey of the current Parliament.

Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate to note that the destruction that was sustained after the *Tropical Cyclone Winston* struck us, are still very much visible in the areas of Vanua Levu, Taveuni, Koro, Tailevu and Ra. It is now seven months from the time it struck us but not much has been seen on the ground. The rehabilitation work is really very slow and the people on the ground are very desperate to know as to when can they be finally relieved from this ordeal.

Madam Speaker, many people who were being assisted under the 'Home Initiative Scheme', the assistance is now being temporarily stopped due to the lack of building materials available locally. We have been advised that the hardware stores are now getting materials from overseas and if that is the case, then the amount of materials that each household will get will be further reduced because of the high cost of materials from overseas despite the Government giving zero-rated duty on these materials.

Madam Speaker, after the Cyclone had struck, the Government should have diverted all the resources it had towards the cyclone rehabilitation work and defer all its programmes for the year to the upcoming year. If the above was done, Madam Speaker, I am pretty certain that majority of the rehabilitation work would have been completed by now rather than relying on our overseas counterparts to do that for us.

Madam Speaker, as of now, majority of our population are not really aware as to the total financial assistance and aid in kind that we had received after the cyclone from our overseas governments, and how much we were able to raise locally and what is the balance

that needs to be spent out within the next three years, so that at the end of this period all the rehabilitation would be fully met and paid for.

The problem here, Madam Speaker, is that the Government side wants to take up the lead role in the rehabilitation work rather than leaving those tasks to be performed by the Divisional Commissioners and their respective teams.

Madam Speaker, as stated in the *Fiji Times* dated 22nd of September, 2016, there are 421 schools that are currently using temporary shelters and they are expected to continue on that trend up to the new year. This is really unsatisfactory and the Government must be requested to pay more attention in this area so that all the schools should be ready before the start of the first school term next year.

Madam Speaker, as of now, there should be some clear guidelines issued by the Government to all the affected areas as to how all the outstanding work are going to be handled and the affected people should be advised accordingly in order to give them those much needed relief. We were all fortunate that our tourism industry was not affected very much by *TC Winston* and therefore, it should be given all the assistance it requires in order to provide the anchor for our economic base.

On the other hand, Madam Speaker, the Government should encourage investment into the country by providing all the necessary incentives to attract investors into our shores. We need investors, Madam Speaker, and we do not need handouts.

Madam Speaker, investors, with the right economic climate, will be able to create employment, which in turn will raise the standard of living and make life more sustainable.

Handouts-outs, on the other hand, Madam Speaker, will only lead to wastage of public funds because the people who have been assisted in this area have not been given necessary training of how to manage small businesses. There is no one really out there to monitor their operations and this scheme can also drag the Fiji Development Bank's profit margin down if their bills in managing this operation is not going to be paid for by the Government.

Madam Speaker, we badly need private investors into the country for our economic growth, however, by locking up political leaders whilst they were discussing the fate of our sugar industry and the deportation of the two expatriate workers from MWH by the Government recently without a clear explanation, back then, to the public at large, will not do good to our country in the long term because it will deter investors to come and invest in here, knowing that their security whilst in here in Fiji cannot be guaranteed.

Madam Speaker, so far we have been hearing in this august House about the favourable economic growth rate that this Government has been achieving, that is 5.3 percent in 2014 and consecutive growth rate in excess of 4 percent for over 3 years.

Madam Speaker, we do appreciate the Government for those achievements in those 3 years, but have these growth rates in those 3 years created the required level of employment, decent wages, proper housing, affordable food prices and good health?

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.-The answer to the above question, Madam Speaker, would be an emphatic no because the growth achieved is not really going down to the people in terms of employment and adequate wages and we need to ask the question as to why this is so.

A possible answer to the above, Madam Speaker, would be the impact of reforms that the Government has come up with in the following areas:

- a. Madam Speaker, the civil servants are currently working in an environment of fear because if they do step out of line, they will be sacked immediately and there is no Tribunal available to them, as it used to be, where they can take their grievances to.

Madam Speaker, latest issues that recently happened and relate to the above are:

- i. The issuance of a circular from the Ministry of Education dated 20th of this month, Madam Speaker, restricting all Heads of Schools, the Ministry of Education staff and Divisional and District Officers from delivering public speeches and interviews.

Even though, Madam Speaker, the circular was later withdrawn on the very next day, but the intention of the Ministry has been known publicly and that was to restrict the freedom of the personnel within the Ministry to fully express themselves publically without fear as enshrined in Section 17 of the 2013 Constitution.

- ii. Secondly, on the same week, Madam Speaker, MWH, a company that was contracted to work hand in hand with the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) pulled out of Fiji, resulting in the loss of employment of around 150 workers that were employed by them.

Madam Speaker, the problem here is that some misunderstanding in the Joint Agreement regarding the finalisation of the contract payments. That issue came out clear in this dispute, Madam Speaker, why was it that the two parties cannot take up their dispute to the Court of Law, to decide as to who is correct in that particular situation?

It is also interesting, Madam Speaker, to note as to why the Government had to step in immediately and order that the two gentlemen be deported when the problem has not been fully resolved. This type of action, Madam Speaker, needs some explanation from the Government and if that cannot be forthcoming, it will make a very bad image about the Government.

Madam Speaker, unemployment is one of the major issues that the Government is consistently trying to reduce all these years. To improve the status of unemployment in our country, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Employment has embarked on another initiative known as the 'Seasonal Workers Scheme' and we thank the Government for that.

However, Madam Speaker, in 2015, a total of 222 were employed under the scheme, that was 84 in New Zealand and 138 in Australia. The downside of the scheme as I see it, Madam Speaker, are as follows:

- i. The total number of people engaged in the Scheme as at 2015 was only 222, which was quiet insignificant when compared to the total number of 40,677 unemployed as at June 2015;
- ii. The employment duration Madam Speaker, in New Zealand and Australia will only be for 6 months and not the full year around; and
- iii. The weather and working conditions may not

(Chorus of interjections.)

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Vijay Nath.

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentleman: *Namaskar* and a very good afternoon to you all.

I rise in support of my Honourable Minister to address the Statement delivered by His Excellency the President of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to thank His Excellency for his most gracious Address and his invaluable service to this nation. His Excellency stated the need to develop and maintain a safe and a prosperous Fiji, and the need to embrace true democratic principles and for all of us as Members of this august House to work together in improving our quality of service to the Fijian people.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's Address must be applauded. We all heard his call to respect the voice of the people and to respect democracy. This requires renewed efforts from the Honourable Members of Parliament to work cooperatively to advance national interest by improving the lives of ordinary Fijians.

Madam Speaker, in this regard, I call on all Honourable Members of Parliament to recommit to the aspiration of our Constitution, which we all pledge to uphold in the scope and spirit of our Constitution.

Madam Speaker, I wish to comment on the issues raised by His Excellency during His Address and I wish to start by commending the Government, the Members of this august House and the international community for the relief effort and assistance in the aftermath of *Tropical Cyclone Winston*. Your effort had enabled Fiji to get back to its feet.

This brings me to another important aspect of His Excellency's Address, where he congratulated the Rugby Sevens Team for winning Fiji's first Olympic Gold Medal at the Olympic Games 2016 held in *Rio*. This win has held the profound effect of the national psyche. In doing so, I echo the sentiment of His Excellency to harness the spirit of our Olympic win and tap the wonderful sense of unity.

Madam Speaker, in support of my Minister, I will focus my contribution to this august House, highlighting the work carried out by our Ministry in Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji, Government Shipping Services, Fiji Meteorological & Hydrological Services and the Department of Works.

Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), Madam Speaker, plays a pivotal role in the oversight of its regulatory function, covering maritime safety, maritime enforcement and the prevention of maritime pollution.

For the 2016 and 2017 Budgets, Madam Speaker, MSAF received an operational grant of \$3.4 million, an increase of \$1 million from the 2016 budget. Also, MSAF received a capital grant of \$2 million.

Madam Speaker, currently repair works are now underway with lighthouse and ATONS. Also, our Ministry has accepted FJ\$1 million oil spill equipment from the New Zealand Government to safeguard our shores and sea.

Government Shipping Services, Madam Speaker, provides Government with specialised fleet of nine, now having two fishing vessels that allows to transport Government officials as well as machinery, building supplies, rural development materials, livestock and other cargoes needed for development projects.

With this responsibility, Madam Speaker, Government has seen the need to re-fleet our vessels, to enhance better services to our maritime communities.

This will reflect in the 2016-2017 national budget, with an allocation of \$4 million provided for the purchase of a new multi-purpose vessel.

Madam Speaker, while we are re-fleeting our vessels, we are also mindful of our berthing facilities to ensure the new vessels berth in a safe and controlled environment.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, \$3.4 million has been allocated in the continuing upgrade of government wharf and \$2.3 million for the completion of the new GSS warehouse. The new building will house the engineering electrical workshop, office space plus dry and cold storage facility. Both facilities are now under construction and will be completed later this year.

Madam Speaker, in terms of Shipping Franchise Scheme, \$2.3 million has been allocated to support cost effect shipping services to outer islands that are otherwise considered to be uneconomical and to promote a more competitive shipping industry. This franchise scheme support nine routes servicing over 80 ports, never before, Madam Speaker. This scheme is essential to provide connectivity between business family and friends.

Fiji Meteorological and Hydrological Services: Madam Speaker, the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology remain committed to providing timely weather, climate and hydrology information to the general public, marine, aviation and industry at all times. The department also remains committed to our neighbouring countries that rely on us to provide the much needed normal and severe weather information.

The Department continues to modernise and improve the services to all parts of Fiji in order to warn public in advance and allow them to prepare for extreme events like tropical cyclones, heavy rain, storm surges, coastal and river flooding.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, the construction of the new Labasa office will provide improved services to the greater population of Vanua Levu and nearby islands once the office becomes operation by mid next year.

A capital project on the rehabilitation of Vanua Balavu Weather Station will enable islands in the Northern Lau Group to be well covered and continuously monitored and or coastal communities are well informed of weather and sea conditions.

In order to ensure Fiji has modern meteorological services at our airports, the Fiji Meteorological and Hydrological services is underway to replace our automatic weather observation stations at the approach of the runway at Nadi International Airport at a cost of \$1.2 million. This will provide much needed weather information to all aircrafts landing and taking off from Nadi. It will make our airport safer and boost tourism to comply with international standard.

Fiji sits on the decision making body of World Meteorological Organisation, the Executive Council of the Inter-Governmental Board on Climate Services. Fiji is very strategically positioned regionally and internationally to contribute the international meteorology and hydrology. In this regard, Fiji has hosted three regional training so far this year to enhance capacity development of our regional countries.

Madam Speaker, I would like to inform the House that the Fiji Meteorological and Hydrological Services role has grown after the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, Sustainable Development Goal and Paris Climate Change Agreement.

Therefore, the expansion responsibilities remains a challenge and to meet the current demands and future challenges, the Department will enquire a full resource in terms of manpower and technology.

Moving forward, the department will focus on improving its quality service and service delivery through improved disaster risk reduction, resilience and prevention; strengthen capacity and new capacity development and improved climate services and climate resilience.

Madam Speaker, no matter how good the information is, if it does not reach the people on time, then the information becomes useless. We saw during *TC Winston*, even though information was in the media, TV, radio, people did not heed the warnings and advisory services seriously.

To take it more effectively, the Department of Meteorology is establishing a media centre at the Nadi Office. Through this centre, information will be distributed to all media organisations daily through various channels in different languages, that includes, radio, TV, *Facebook* among others. This very critical information will allow access up to-date weather, climate and hydrology to the wider population, especially for those in the rural and maritime settings.

Department of Works: Madam Speaker, my ministry continues to construct and upgrade the public buildings, to ensure that civil servants work in proper facilities.

This is taken care of by the Department of Works, which is comprised of three Divisional Engineering Units. It is the only engineering arm of Government and is responsible for building, operating, maintaining and upgrading of Government buildings, quarters and electrical services.

Also, in an effort of providing electricity to ensure that five rural Government stations in Lakeba, Rotuma, Vunisea, Nabouwalu and in Taveuni are operational. Government has allocated \$400,000 to facilitate this, we are proud of the work they do.

Lastly, on the introduction of new laws and review of the existing ones, this side of the House is optimistic that the review will be positive for our people. Our ministry is currently reviewing existing legislation to ensure that it meets the international obligation and enhancing improving services delivery to all Fijians.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I thank you again for your indulgence.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. May God Bless Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you and that brings to the end of the Order Paper in today's sitting and I thank you all for your contributions to the debate today.

The Parliament is now adjourned until 9.30 a.m., tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.52 p.m.