

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 28TH NOVEMBER, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	69
Communications from the Chair	69
Adoption of Parliament Sitting Calendar	69-70
Debate on His Excellency the President's Address	70-132

List of Speakers

1.	Hon. P.D. Kumar	Pages 70-75
2.	Hon. I. Kuridrani	Pages 75-81
3.	Hon. Dr. Ratu A.R. Lalabalavu	Pages 81-86
4.	Hon. Ratu N. Lalabalavu	Pages 87-90
5.	Hon. M.R. Leawere	Pages 90-95
6.	Hon. A.A. Maharaj	Pages 95-99
7.	Hon. Ratu S. Matanitobua	Pages 99-104
8.	Hon. A.T. Nagata	Pages 104-108
9.	Hon. O. Naiqamu	Pages 109-113
10.	Hon. J.N. Nand	Pages 113-116
11.	Hon. V. Nath	Pages 116-121
12.	Hon. Ratu T. Navurelevu	Pages 121-124
13.	Hon. N. Nawaikula	Pages 124-132

WEDNESDAY, 28TH NOVEMBER, 2018

The Parliament resumed at 9.32 a.m., pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs; and the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sittings of Parliament held on Tuesday, 27th November 2018, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

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

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

ADOPTION OF PARLIAMENT SITTING CALENDAR

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

That the Parliament adopts the sitting calendar for the period January to November 2019, as follows:

JANUARY – DECEMBER 2019		
FEBRUARY	Monday, 11th – Friday 15th	Parliament Meeting
MARCH	Monday, 11th – Friday 15th	Parliament Meeting
APRIL	Monday, 1st – Friday 5th	Parliament Meeting
MAY	Monday, 13th – Friday 17th	Parliament Meeting
JUNE	Monday, 3rd – Friday 7th	Parliament Meeting
	Monday, 24th	Budget Address

JANUARY – DECEMBER 2019		
JULY	Monday 15th – Friday 19th	Parliament Meeting
AUGUST	Monday 12th – Friday 16th	Parliament Meeting
SEPTEMBER	Monday 2nd – Friday 6th	Parliament Meeting
NOVEMBER	Monday 25th – Friday 29th	Parliament Meeting

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon on the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak on his motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Business Committee has already discussed this and, of course, they have given their endorsement as well. I think the only other issue that I wish to highlight is about the June Session, where there is flexibility because we are yet to confirm when we will have the Budget Address and, of course, that will also decide when we will have the July Sittings, particularly the debate following the Budget Address. That has been discussed as well when the Business Committee did convene on Monday, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is up for debate and I invite input, if any.

There being none, Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- I have no further comments, Madam Speaker.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the response to His Excellency's Address and I now call upon the Honourable Premila Kumar to take the floor.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: I join the Honourable Prime Minister and colleagues in congratulating you, Madam Speaker, on your re-election to the very crucial position of the Speaker of this august Chamber. I also wish to congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister for ably leading FijiFirst for another term in Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I feel humbled and very privileged to be part of this Parliament. I deeply acknowledge this opportunity given to me by the Honourable Prime Minister and Leader of the FijiFirst Party. It is my pledge that I will serve this Government with dignity, dedication and honesty, for the betterment of all our citizens.

Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to be part of the ten women Parliamentarians and note that this is the best representation of women in Parliament at any point in time in Fijian history. And more importantly, we have a distinguished lady as the Speaker of Parliament. This is of course for celebration and I am sure our presence will inspire and encourage more women to take up leadership role in their respective field of work.

Madam Speaker, I joined FijiFirst because of its proven track record to deliver meaningful change to its people. It is a fact that the FijiFirst Government, under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, has achieved more for all Fijians than any other government in Fiji's history.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I say this with conviction because I have worked as a civil servant under other Governments. We cannot build a nation based on racial divide, provincialism, and religious chauvinism. I have been a victim of this myself when I was in the Civil Service.

Madam Speaker, my passion to serve Fiji and its people and the desire to play a more instrumental role in nation affairs comes from the FijiFirst's mission, policies and initiatives, to address important issues such as social justice, equal citizenry, a voice for the poor, disabled and disadvantaged, to make a better Fiji for all, and to ensure that no Fijian is left behind.

Madam Speaker, I am committed to implement the FijiFirst Party's Manifesto and the policies to make Fiji a prosperous, progressive, tolerant and modern society, where every Fiji citizen enjoys equal rights and opportunities to succeed in life and live in peace and harmony.

Madam Speaker, we can differ in ideologies and thoughts but let us get away from race, hate or religious vilification, and work towards the betterment of Fiji as a unified nation. As Members of this august Parliament, it is upon us to demonstrate maturity in our thinking, even if there are differences of opinions. It is our responsibility to ensure that we provide the correct information through this medium.

A strong economy is predicated on confidence, Madam Speaker. This confidence can only be inculcated if the country provides stability and security, which will then drive the locals to invest and grow their businesses. Confidence by local private sector is a very strong signal and stimulator of foreign investment. The FijiFirst Government has provided that confidence.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President called on Honourable Members of Parliament to work together to advance the national interest, reminding us that our first duty - above all others - is to keep the trust and confidence of those who believed in us. We represent Fijians, our powers come from their support, and I pledge to them my fullest dedication and service.

Madam Speaker, the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister has seen Fiji progress in leaps and bounds. This is not something that we just say, it is supported by statistics. The consistent, stable and pro-growth policies and initiatives have led Fiji to nine consecutive years of economic growth, despite global financial crisis and despite national disasters.

Unemployment rate has been reduced to 4.5 percent, which is the lowest in 20 years. We have the lowest tax rate in Fiji's history. I still remember those days when we were earning \$8,700, we had to pay 31 percent tax and today, the situation has changed where we earn \$30,000, yet we pay no tax.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- And I want the House to note that all Fijians have access to education; whether it is primary, secondary or tertiary education.

Madam Speaker, 90 percent of the population have access to electricity.

For the first time, Fiji is now considered to be an upper middle income country, with per capita income of around \$12,000, and this is an important sign that all Fijians are benefitting from FijiFirst policies.

Madam Speaker, for the nation to maintain the upward trajectory, the FijiFirst Government's vision is to continue to build on the work that has been done, and to provide new and innovative policies and initiatives. As the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development, I intend to continue building on the impressive and considerable achievements of my predecessors, in order to increase investments, grow the Fijian economy and create the jobs that we all know are needed, especially for our young people.

Madam Speaker, I am determined to make sure that more and more Fijians are included in and benefit from the growth of our nation's economy. I believe in empowering grassroot communities and encouraging rural development to bring more people into mainstream economy. I also believe that young people who are our future, need the right support and boost to harness their talents and ambitions. And we will continue to leverage our location in the region, to explore the untapped trade and investment potentials and opportunities.

As part of the Fijian Government's initiative to stimulate employment and encourage young Fijians to become job creators rather than job seekers, the Government introduced the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES). The YES is a unique initiative in itself as it is truly driven by the private sector. Madam Speaker, YES, since its inception, has attracted interest of young, budding entrepreneurs from all sectors.

Through consultations and feedback received, YES will now be open to those who are non-graduates. The eligibility age has increased to 40 years and grant amount to \$30,000. I encourage our youths to take advantage of this Programme.

Madam Speaker, on the subject of policies that work, the fact that the tourism industry is reaching \$2 billion as mentioned by Honourable Gavoka, is entirely due to the forward-looking policies of the FijiFirst Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- This has seen the industry reach its revenue targets well in advance of projections in our tourism development plan, known as Fijian Tourism 2021.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government recognises that we are an island nation with limited resources and in order to grow tourism, we need to focus on sustainability and quality rather than simply quantity.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- We do not wish to be like Kuta in Indonesia, Madam Speaker, where because of environmental destruction, their tourists number went down.

Service charges, as suggested by Honourable Gavoka, by tourism operators in some countries is a band-aid solution for poor pay and working conditions of tourism workers in those countries. The Fijian tourism industry has addressed the issues of employee welfare directly and our workers are well-looked after.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member has this concept all wrong. The experience of other countries show that implementation of service charges does not guarantee improvement in service delivery but becomes a burden on the industry, making it uncompetitive. Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government's vision is to implement policies to grow our tourism industry and not suffocate it with fully designed policies.

I would like to draw your attention now to the Service Turnover Tax (STT) and Environment and Climate Adaptation Fund (ECAL). As you know, STT and ECAL were introduced mainly to investment with annual gross turnover threshold of \$1.25 million. The STT and ECAL, particularly STT, was not applicable to the corner shop, it was not applicable the way it was advocated, but it is only applicable to those businesses with annual gross turnover of \$1.25 million.

So far, the Government has collected \$250 million from STT and ECAL. Now, you may be wondering what this STT and ECAL is. There is a book that has been published and I encourage all of you to read this and all the details are there. But in short, I would like to say that this particular fund is directed towards Climate Adaptation Programmes so that our tourism sector is sustainable. The last thing we want is to destroy our environment.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition is critical of TELS Programme. Let me tell them that in the past, there was no option given by the State to allow parents to send their children to universities or tertiary ...

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It was not there.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Let me tell you what TELS was all about. TELS was never there.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- It is definitely not the same, it is a completely different project, it is a completely different initiative. I will tell you what was happening in the past.

One had to be born in a rich family or an influential family to get a scholarship which was based on race and provincialism, or parents had to draw their FNPF, parents had to draw their pension fund.

Madam Speaker, TELS is not compulsory but it allows Fijian youths to access tertiary education, who do not qualify for scholarships and have no funds. In the past, these youths would have missed out because of financial constraints ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- ... but now through TELS, they are able to get tertiary education. So how is TELS a burden, when it enables youth to obtain tertiary education? TELS is the most sustainable way of educating youths. They only start paying this loan when they are employed.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Member, only speak when it is quite. If they continue to interject, you may stop. We will give you extra time. Thank you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They talk about freedom of expression.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Removal of TELS would either mean free university for all, which the Government cannot afford or going back to olden days, where parents had to take loan or withdraw their FNPF. There are only few countries in the world that provide free university education, where citizens in these countries pay extremely high levels of tax.

The Fijian Government has created incentives for accelerated repayment of TELS. Early loan repayments are now heavily incentivised, giving TELS recipients the opportunity to have a significant portion of their student debt paid off by Government.

Madam Speaker, moving on with my other portfolios, I will ensure that Local Government, as well as the Housing and Community Development areas of my work are more service-oriented and become more efficient.

Madam Speaker, I have realised that becoming a politician requires great commitment to serve the people, and my journey towards becoming a politician started when I worked as a consumer advocate. My love for politics came when I realised that it was the key to changing how I saw things and how I can make the difference. In this work, I interacted with people to solve their problems and attended to their needs. Of course, being a teacher and a teacher trainer also kept me in touch with the people, and as trade and investment facilitator it kept me in touch with the private sector.

However, during the Election campaign it took me to the days almost three decades ago, when I watched my father, the late Mr. Ram Karan, campaigning with the leaders of his time. He used to make sheds for campaigns and offered his premises to the politicians he supported. And let me tell you at that time, he was a big supporter of the Alliance Party.

My dad was a kava dealer, a business that my youngest brother, Sunil Karan, continues to do. My father knew many people both, on the two main islands and on the outer islands. I still remember in those days he used to visit Gau Island quite regularly and as a matter of fact, all my family members have visited that island. And he was connected to the farmers from Qarani Village. He bought kava from them and whenever they visited Suva, they actually stayed in our home. He had then assisted people on the island, particularly in Qarani Village and I remember two of Uncle Eroni's children from the village, who stayed at our home and attended high school for a few years.

My late father and my late mother, Mrs. Ram Karan, were both social workers. They played a big part in shaping my thinking and perhaps, moulding me to serve the community. My late mum has largely contributed to the building of a '*mandir*' and a hall for residence living in Bureta Street, particularly the squatter settlement that we have there. She worked tirelessly with women's groups until her demise three years ago. Today, I pay tribute to my parents for the values they have instilled in me to become the person I am.

My siblings, I being the eldest, have always supported me. My youngest brother, who has continued with and expanded my father's business supported me during my campaign, and his friends came forward to assist me in every possible way. I thank him and all my siblings, including Usha G-Fella for their assistance.

Madam Speaker, let me now focus on my family. My husband, Jaindra Kumar, has been my rock. He always supported me in my career and has fully backed my decision to enter politics. Without his support, I will not be here. My three children, Yamal, Eshmee and Shaman, have always been steadfast in their support to me. I thank my family for the encouragement all along.

Madam Speaker, relatives and friends play an important role in everyone's life. I am very fortunate to have friends and family, who have stood by me - their votes did count. There were also people unknown to me from all over Fiji who had come forward to support me and today, I wish to thank them most sincerely.

Madam Speaker, to conclude, I wish to echo the words of His Excellency the President during the opening of Parliament, and I quote:

“Unfortunately, elections are also about differences, because each party seeks to distinguish itself from the other. But now that the campaigning is done, we must come together to govern for the benefit of all the people. There will be disagreements, of course, but we are civilised people, and we can manage those disagreements with civility and respect, keeping before us the ideal that we are elected to solve problems and improve the life of every Fijian.”

To my colleagues and Honourable Members of this Parliament, we must remind ourselves that we all have obligations to move this country forward, and build a nation that our children and grandchildren will be proud of.

Thank you very much, *vinaka vakalevu* and *dhanyavaad*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Inosi Kuridrani to take the floor.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Madam Speaker, I rise with the grace of the Almighty God Jesus Christ to deliver my maiden speech and respond to the Address by His Excellency the President.

I wish to join all the Honourable Members of this august House to thank His Excellency the President for laying down the legislative agenda of the Government of the day, and outlining their policies and programmes which we note with a sense of appreciation and also concern, and I will justify the basis of both as I speak on the motion before the House.

Before I do that, Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate:

- all the Honourable Members upon their election or re-election to this House;
- you and your Deputy on your appointment to the Chair of this House;
- the Honourable Prime Minister and all the Honourable Cabinet Ministers on their appointment to Government; last but not least

- the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka. Sir, I look forward to serving under your leadership to fulfil the purpose of why the people of Fiji have voted us here.

Madam Speaker, may I also associate myself with all the Honourable Members to acknowledge the meaningful contributions of our past leaders and Governments. Fiji's progressive development to date is the culmination of all the hard work and sacrifices of our past leaders, who envisioned a peaceful, prosperous, multiracial and democratic Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I intend to speak on climate change, eco-tourism and the importance of the family foundation, in addition to my allocated portfolio. Our land, ecosystems and natural resources are a gift from God and passed down to us from our ancestors who were strong men and women who lived long and healthy lives because they lived in peace with nature. As generations passed and with the increase in industrialisation, we began to exploit our natural resources and damage our environment and ecosystems for the sake of development. This, in turn, has triggered changes in our climatic patterns, the burden of which we suffer today.

Madam Speaker, climate change is inevitable and no one in Fiji is immune to its devastating effects. In my village of Namatakula, Baravi, Nadroga, our shorelines have eroded and our land and marine resources are quickly depleting.

The land of my ancestors which was given down to my people, rich with its natural resources and vast marine life is now a harsh reality of a dried-up river, scarcity of local fruits and vegetables and the extinction of local fishes famous along our coastline, such as the *Tule*, and most of you might know it better from the classic song, "*Na Tule ni Hanahana*".

It saddens me that the generations to follow will occupy our land and not being able to enjoy the vast resources that I once enjoyed, let alone be able to play rugby on the beach without the waves sweeping right into the village. Madam Speaker, my village is renowned for producing some of Fiji's finest rugby superstars. If we are not able to practice playing rugby on the beach on a daily basis because of the effects of climate change, then in our terms, climate change is a pressing survival issue.

I wish to acknowledge with pride that my village, Namatakula, is championing the fight of resilience and adaptation to the effects of climate change. We refuse to be idle and watch the waves sweep by, we choose to be proactive and we choose to make a stand.

We have set up one of Fiji's first village-based community NGO called, *Kai Ni Cola*, which is purely managed and funded by the village. Our efforts have been recognised by the United Nations, which has featured an article about our plights for survival on the United Nations environmental website. And we had been represented at the Conference of Parties (COP 23) Meeting in Bonn, Germany, under the flagship of Greenpeace.

Other NGOs and stakeholders have collaborated with us on numerous projects, such as our mangrove rehabilitation, coral re-planting and areas of climate adaptation programmes. These projects saw us planting hundreds of mangrove trees at any one time, to act as a barrier to waves and increase soil stability. We have also built coral nurseries to revive the dying corals in our oceans. So, Madam Speaker, when I stand in this House to address issues of climate change, I am, in fact, talking about a fight for survival and resilience that is very personal to me.

Madam Speaker, the deliberations of the Kyoto Climate Conference in 2012 in Japan noted that the cloud systems over the Pacific is going to keep our region cool and to some degree, immune

from the effects of climate change. However, it was also noted that ice melting in the North and South Poles will result in the rise of seawater which will flood smaller island States, such as Fiji, making relocation a challenge for all of us. Today, that challenge and threat stares starkly at our face, but how prepared are we to tackle this issue of pressing concern?

Madam Speaker, I represented Navosa-i-Wai Constituency, formerly known as Colo West, in this year's General Election. A great number of our villages that make up this Constituency are situated along the coastline and river banks, including the island of Vatulele.

The pressing environmental issues of our time ranges from waste disposal methods and the release of toxic waste into our rivers, streams and oceans, destruction of our forest cover through ongoing tourism development, relocation issues, issues of food and water security and livelihoods, poverty, social instability, prevalence of disease, higher mortality, unequal distribution of resources, decline in income, decline in tourism-related activities, et cetera.

We have the Environment Management Act 2005 and other relevant legislations already in place, but the extent of work already done in Fiji to combat environmental issues leads me to question whether the requirements of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) on many of these works was ever done, and if indeed done, have they complied with the prescriptions of the Act?

We have our Right to Information in the Constitution of Fiji and I refer to Section 25 in this respect; I would like to impress the idea that the EIA reports of all the developments taking place in our country must be made available to the public so that the stakeholders can understand and determine whether or not these works have impacted our environment and if they do, to what extent and what are the mitigation processes and procedures recommended therein?

Madam Speaker, I strongly believe that laws, policies and dialogue are not enough to address and resolve social and environmental issues, resulting from the effects of climate change. It needs collective participation and commitment from all levels of society - from the grassroots all the way to Government. It needs the integration of traditional indigenous knowledge of coping along with scientific methods, after all our ancestors have survived different weather patterns over the years using their traditional knowledge alone. More importantly, it needs the acknowledgement that indigenous knowledge is important in creating effective adaptation and mitigation strategies for our nation, Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I round up my contribution on climate change with a quote from a Red Indian woman who made this prophesy to her grandchild more than 200 years ago and reflected in the famous novel, *Rainbow Warrior*, by the *Sunday Times* of New Zealand:

“When the trees stand without leaves, the earth becomes barren, the water will turn black, the deer will fall in its path and the rain of fire will come from the sky, that's when men's greed would be fulfilled but sadly there will be no men left by that time.”

Madam Speaker, let me now speak on a co-related issue which is eco-tourism. Truly, we are blessed to be born into be citizens of one of the most beautiful islands of the world.

Madam Speaker, Fiji is renowned for its long white sandy beaches, tropical climate, lush green forests and the friendly smiles of its people. The authentic Fijian hospitality and friendliness has boosted our tourism industry, making it one of our major income sources to date. However, Madam Speaker, it is appalling to note that some hotels continue to exert money power to enjoy the cream of our tourism sector while the land and *i qoliqoli* owners receive peanuts in the form of few jobs and lease income.

Madam Speaker, I wish to support the suggestion by the Honourable Viliame Gavoka that there is a need to recognise and respect the ownership and fair return of the use of our natural resources to its rightful owners. Failing to follow the correct channels will breed animosity and limit economic development and national growth. During my time of campaigning, I collected stories of sadness and misfortune as people lamented on correct channels and traditional processes not being followed.

Madam Speaker, eco-tourism is vital for the environmental sustainability and financial independence of rural villages, such as those that make up the Navosa-i-Wai or Colo West Constituency. Partnership between hotel industries and the local communities should be strengthened to bring about a holistic approach to development, where local communities are empowered to take ownership of their environment for sustainability and economic gains.

As already mentioned previously, there should be an integration of indigenous knowledge of: cooking techniques, indigenous knowledge of medicinal herbs and healing, indigenous knowledge of arts and crafts and so forth, can be used to build capacity, knowledge and skill-based of the local communities to increase their participation in the tourism industry.

Madam Speaker, the last theme that I wish to touch on is the foundation of family. The family is the most important institution in our lives. It is the basis for our personal development. I quote the late Honourable Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara in his opening address at the Pacific Vision Festival in Auckland on 26th July, 1999 where he said, and I quote:

“It is from a traditional family that we absorb universal ideals and principles; we are taught the difference between right and wrong, and about the law, just punishment and discipline.”

When we strengthen the foundation of a family through an integrated approach grounded on our cultural values and practices, we are in fact building capacity for integrated development in key areas, such as leadership, education, sports, women empowerment, health, culture, tourism, et cetera. Madam Speaker, a strong family foundation breeds responsible citizens who are aware of their social commitments and national duties which then contributes to a thriving nation.

Madam Speaker, allow me to share very briefly some of the issues that were raised during my campaign in the Navosa-i-Wai Constituency, which I proudly represent. Questions were raised concerning claims of transparency, accountability and good governance by the FijiFirst Government over land and *i qoliqoli* issues.

Firstly, my tribe, Yavusa Vusu, is the traditional custodian of the *i qoliqoli* from Namatakula to the Korolevu passage. Previous Governments allowed us to receive compensation for the use our *i qoliqoli* and we charge \$5 per diver, as well as anchorage fees, to game fishing boats. Unfortunately, we have been denied this opportunity when this Act came into effect, thus affecting our common means of income for our people.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Secondly, the issue of licence to an investor, Kwan Dong, for the use of our *i qoliqoli* was approved by the Ministry of Lands without any consultation with the *i qoliqoli* owners. There was no EIA conducted, no plans to confirm the *i qoliqoli* boundary and no documents to confirm the project plan. To make matters worse, we have not met the investor, despite repeated requests to have this arranged. However, when we wrote to the Ministry of Lands to raise our concern, the Ministry replied that the investor is willing to give \$20,000 for development cost as compensation. Madam

Speaker, a proposed payment of \$20,000 was only to a development that was going to affect our environment, compromise our livelihoods and leaves very little for our future generations.

Thirdly, the mahogany land issue in Balenabelo Village in the district of Koroinasau, Mataqali Noinau; the 200-plus acres of mahogany plantation on their land was issued with the 99 year-lease effective from 20th January, 2018 without any consultation with the landowners. I refer to His Excellency the President's Address on Monday, 26th November, 2018 when he shared that not 1 percent of indigenous land has been touched; I beg to differ.

Fourthly, in Biausevu Village in the District of Komave, Mataqali Ketenatukani; the mahogany plantation of 840 acres was also issued a 99-year lease without the consent of the landowners.

Fifthly, in Nayawa Village in the District of Sigatoka, Mataqali Noimadu, their land which is currently under residential lease, is currently occupied by the Coastline Buses Limited. They have attempted to get clarification from the Government about the use of their land but have not received any concrete response. In fact, their last letter to the Office of the Prime Minister was delivered three months ago and to this day, they have not received an answer.

Sixthly, Raiwaqa Village in the District of Mavua, Mataqali Tokula; in July 2017, their 117 acres of land named Nataba, was to have its ownership returned and restored to the *mataqali*. To-date, only 30 acres of land has been returned and the balance of 87 acres is still under occupation by the tenants. Previous Governments had returned ownership of land of this nature to the *mataqali* within 21 days. Perhaps, this Government might take 21 years.

Lastly, Vatulele Island in the District of Vatulele; the island of Vatulele has been working collectively for the past five years to construct their jetty at Korolevu Beach to ease docking, loading and for unloading purposes. The project is expected to boost the island's economic and social development, and the people desperately needs Government's assistance to complete this project. Despite the Committee's effort to convince the Government to assist them, right to the extent of visiting the Office of the Prime Minister and other Government bodies, to this day, no financial assistance has been granted. The people have spent well over \$500,000 and are still waiting for financial assistance from the Government.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the *vanua* for their blessings and support in voting me to this seat:

- Na yavusa oVusu (Komave) - Viagwane na Tui Vusu;
- Na yavusa o Davutukia (Korolevuiwai) - Viagwane na Tui Davutukia

HON. A.SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Standing Orders are quite specific, the language of communication is in the English language, Madam Speaker.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- That is the problem with this Constitution.

HON. SPEAKER.- The communication in this Parliament is in the English language, except if you are quoting or if you are...

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That is the *i cavuti*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I would like that to be clear. Thank you. Honourable Bulitavu?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, just for clarification, that is how it is said, it is the *i cavuti* of the *vanua*. It cannot be said in English, it can only be said in the indigenous language and that should be understandable in this House. He is expressing the way he relates to those chiefly homes.

HON. SPEAKER.- If it is an expression by the citizen, then you must say, "I quote", then you can say it in Fijian, unquote. That would be acceptable in Parliament, but otherwise please, the language to be used in Parliament is English.

Thank you Honourable Member, you may continue.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the *vanua* for the blessings and support in voting me to this seat, and I quote:

- Na Yavusa o Vusu (Komave), Viyagwane na Tui Vusu;
- Na Yavusa Davutukia, Viyagwane na Tui Davutukia;
- Na Vanua o Conua, Viyagwane na Tui Conua;
- Na Vanua o Toga, vua na Viyagwane na Tui Feleaki;
- Na Vanua Wedredruga, na i Taukei Weredruga;
- Na Vanua o Navikabuta, na i Taukei Navikabuta;
- Na Vanua o Tuba i Noqi, Werelevu i Bukusia;
- Na Vanua o Nabuavatu, Werelevu i Nakutadrodoro qei nia na Werelevu i Raunivuga;
- Na Vanua o Davutukia, Bemana, o datou na Tako na Lavo;
- Na Vanua o Nalimolevu, vua na Vunisalevu na Tui Ekubu.

I am also indebted to my constituency campaign chairman, Voate Vasikavu, campaign managers, Karuani -Naoka and Filise Matabogi; campaign teams, volunteers, polling agents and all the voters from Navosa-i-Wai Constituency throughout Fiji and overseas who have voted me and my party into Parliament with the mission and vision to seek a free, just, prosperous and united Fiji under a leadership that listens.

I would also like to thank my wife and my children, and the rest of my families for their never ending support and commitment to this course. I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to my Party, SODELPA, for selecting me as a candidate for the 2018 General Election and the *vanua* for endorsing my candidature and giving me an opportunity to take an intervention at the national level of decision-making.

I wish to reassure my party, the *vanua* and my voters that I stand by the ideals and principles of SODELPA, and will always seek to champion the same to liberate Fiji from the by-products of eight long years of oppression that transited into the last four years of constitutional dictatorship.

Madam Speaker, while oppression can instil fear in some, it builds courage for others; the courage to stand up for what we believe in; the courage to seek freedom, the courage to fight for real democracy. With that courage, the Opposition team marches forth with confidence to reclaim and rebuild a nation that our future generation will be proud of. Let me state it here for the record, we are moving forward and forward only.

Madam Speaker, it is my wish that the deliberation in the House, the highest policy making body in this land, will foster a true spirit of comradeship, respectful collaboration and honoured partnership to bring about positive outcome in all areas of development.

With those few words, Madam Speaker, I support the motion before the House and in doing so, wish you all the Honourable Members in the House and the staff a merry Christmas and a blessed 2019.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu to take the floor.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise to speak on the motion before the House and in doing so, associate myself with all of you to express my sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands for his Address to the House.

First of all, I want to give thanks to the Almighty, our Lord Jesus Christ, for his abundant blessings. Leaving the pleasantries of commendation and thanks towards the end of my speech, I will get straight away into the debate proper. While I note that, His Excellency picked up some very broad themes to speak about, such as democracy, common national identity, politics of fear, culture of *coup*, and before summing, he made mention about the *i Taukei* land and the Constitution of Fiji.

As a responsible Opposition, loyal to the people of this land and living with the edicts of reality, we cannot allow many of these key themes to go unchallenged in this debate because the fact is, these themes or issues were chosen by the Government of the day.

Allow me, Madam Speaker, to begin with the 2013 Constitution. The fact about this repugnant document is that, it remains a draconian law imposed on the people of Fiji, falling short of international standards. It is simply a pity, how we can celebrate something that:

1. Has negated our genuine parliamentary democracy to constitutional dictatorship;
2. Makes a mockery of the Bill of Rights;
3. Has tampered with group rights and entrenched rights of the natives of Fiji;
4. Seeded draconian decrees curtailing to the freedom of expression; and
5. Has divided our people instead of uniting us;

which leads me to assert my Party position that there is a dire need to relook at the 2013 Constitution, if we are genuine about seeking national unity and stability, progress and prosperity.

Madam Speaker, as a new Member of this House, I do not wish to jump from the frying pan into the fire on issues which are sensitive and carry emotional value, and at the same time range as contentious national issues. However, it would be a dereliction of my duty if I do not comment on some of them.

We are told that no land has been lost in the last one decade and yesterday, the last speaker on the Government benches made a lot of noise about the consolidation of the *i Taukei* rights. I cross swords on that accord and in doing so, let me set the record straight.

Madam Speaker, when the 13 high chiefs of Fiji ceded Fiji to the United Kingdom, we, the natives of this land were guaranteed our status as the indigenous people of this land with native rights. We were guaranteed our land and resource ownership rights and based on that premise it was reflected, embraced and entrenched in every constitutional arrangement we had negotiated from 1970 to 2006.

The suspension and then the dissolution of the august body of the indigenous people of Fiji being the Great Council of Chiefs, elimination of entrenched group rights of the *i Taukei* people in the Constitution and the slapping of a number of decrees, diluting our control and management over our resources are more than enough evidence to substantiate the loss of *i Taukei* rights and resources

ownership. This is a sheer breach of that deed, good faith of the chiefs and the *i Taukei* people of Fiji, and a gross violation of Article 169 of the ILO Convention. Nothing is further from the truth.

Madam Speaker, I must commend the speech made yesterday by the former Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, when she spoke about how the antics of some of the Honourable Members on the other side of the House contributed in instilling fear-mongering, entrenching the dependency syndrome and using divisive tactics in the last Election to harm the spirit of unity and harmony in this nation. I fully agree and endorse those remarks. They are nothing, but facts.

Madam Speaker, in paying my tribute and thanking His Excellency the President which is the subject of this motion before the House, I am reminded of how His Excellency the President appealed to all the stakeholders in the General Election of 2018 to campaign upon issues. Living up to that credo, SODELPA fielded one of the best slate of candidates and alternative policies and programmes to seek office to govern the nation, but not the FijiFirst. Instead, the FijiFirst chose to turn a blind eye to that appeal from the Head of the State and deployed politics connivance and convenience, fear and diversion, personalisation and vote-buying and despite that, securing 50.02 percent of the mandate. It came at a lethal cost to the national unity that we now inherit from the verdict of the voters a nation divided as never ever before.

When I was elected to this House and as I sat here on Monday witnessing Honourable Members taking solemn oath, there was a gleam of hope in my heart and mind that perhaps, we have emerged wiser from the verdict of Election to shun the old habits of the past and have really transformed ourselves. But from the speeches that I have heard from the other side of the House, I can safely and surely say now that, indeed, old habits die hard. The bottom line, Madam Speaker, is that, we can only ignore the message by the people of Fiji at our own peril. They voted for change, freedom from bondage of over-regulation and over-taxation; they voted for reconciliation and to move away from debt trap and designs of constitutional dictatorship to a leadership that listens.

Now, Madam Speaker, that being so, if the FijiFirst Government with the disputed mandate of 50.02 percent vote share wants to ignore or reject that and treat the verdict of the people of Fiji by contempt, it will be the biggest insult to the intelligence of the people of Fiji.

Turning to my constituency or local issues, I wish to draw the attention of this House and the Government of the day to the following: They have embraced the truth and rejected the lies and the truth is that:

1. the rehabilitation works in the aftermath of *Tropical Cyclone Winston* continue pending and needs urgent action.
2. There is still no electricity in Tunuloa, to be specific in Sawanamate, despite the necessary infrastructure that has been put up for the service. This needs immediate attention and redress.
3. The water problem in Taveuni South and Matei continues to hinder the livelihoods of the people living there, as the State has not been able to find a permanent solution to that. The temporary measures in this respect while appreciated, is not the way forward.
4. Market security for farm produce, as opposed to the much-publicised Green Revolution remains the biggest challenge for farmers in Cakaudrove and many other places in Fiji, and without addressing this pressing issue, we cannot complete or achieve the intents of the so-called Green Revolution;

5. Road maintenance in the North and South of Taveuni is not well-maintained. It seems that the only time it is properly done is when a Government delegation is visiting.

Madam Speaker, I will now turn to my shadow portfolio. As one of the two medical professionals on this side of the House, it is only natural that I speak on Health and Medical Services. I wish to begin on a very pleasant note by thanking the past Ministers for Health and all those personnel who have been engaged in the public and private healthcare and medical services, for their tremendous work and meaningful contributions. Honourable Dr. Salik Govind, to you as well, Sir.

I also wish to felicitate the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services and the Honourable Assistant Minister on their appointments, expressing the hope that they will take on board the issues raised by the Opposition and the general public in relation to their Ministry and seek to address the same. Where the need may arise and our assistance may be sought, we are willing to put our expertise and knowledge to full use for the benefit of the nation.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services has been under the spotlight for some time and most of the time for adverse reasons, to highlight a few, they are as follows:

- highest NCD cases in the Pacific, mainly diabetes;
- paucity of medical supplies;
- poor state of health and medicare services in rural and remote areas;
- shortage of medic-personnel and specialists;
- high costs for treatment and death in respect of NCDs;
- poor out-patient services (doctor:patient; nurse:patient ratio); and
- public health issues around Fiji, and many others.

Madam Speaker, too often when issues are raised with passion and some degree of heat from this side of the House, it is only acceptable that we get a charged-up response and in the cut-and-thrust of the debate, emotions win over reason and political point-scoring over powers that need to redress the issues. It is time we learn to exercise restraint and learn to stay focussed on the job.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, allow me to highlight some of the pressing issues in the Healthcare and Medical Services sector which are as follows:

- Revival and empowerment of the primary and preventative healthcare measures at the grassroots level.
- Devising a national plan of action and implementing the same at all levels to curb and control NCDs.
- Compiling a national health database and updating the same periodically to monitor the quality and state of health of our people.
- Doing a critical review and logistics of the Free Medicine Scheme, and seeking to work out and implement logistics to enable the benefits of the Scheme to reach out to the maximum number of people towards whom the initiative is intended.

- Developing and upgrading healthcare and medical services at major health centres and hospitals to cure people and attend to emergency cases.
- Giving attention to nursing stations and health centres in rural and remote areas to seek to alleviate poverty of access and cut down on wastage of resources insofar as time and traveling, as well as delay in treatment are concerned.
- We need to have a critical review of the Public Private Partnership with regards to the privatisation of healthcare and medical services in Fiji. This has been denounced by the stakeholders recently and is causing simmering tensions in the medical personnel, as well as the public as to what would be the cost and effects of this privatisation process. In all sincerity, it is perceived to be another design of the International Monetary Fund, to keep us trapped to debt cycle and increase the index of poverty of access.
- Introduction and strengthening of mobile health, dental services for children and the elderly and explore means and ways to incorporate Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) clinics as part of the mobile services.
- Explore means and ways to establish a National Health Insurance Scheme in partnership with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) for local and foreign treatments.
- Constructing accommodation facilities for those travelling from rural and remote areas with patients who have nowhere to bath, sleep, wash or rest in urban areas.
- Developing a National Medicine Drug Supplies Bank and chalk out a plan of action for adequate distribution of medical supplies on time to all the centres around Fiji.
- Recruitment of suitably-qualified medical personnel while reviewing the salary bands and working conditions of the existing staff aggrieved by the Civil Service Reforms and related matters.

This list of issues are endless and I will continue to highlight many more in time to come.

However, what is important is for the Honourable Minister to, please, take note of those issues and take remedial action of which we are hopeful. I say this as opposed to our previous distasteful experience as new Member because for the first time after 2014, we now have a Minister who is a medical practitioner. It is a good move and we welcome and commend that appointment.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I note with immense interest, like the rest of this august House, the legislative agenda of the Government of the day and would be too keen to hear the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services outline the scope of the legislative agenda with relation to:

- Public health protections;
- Anti-Doping; and
- Substance abuse control.

Before I sum up, Madam Speaker, I wish to acknowledge and thank the following for their blessings, guidance, assistance and support: my parents for my upbringing according to the traditional ethos, blending with modern life which enabled me to have firsthand experience of the twin worlds which we live in at one and at the same time we must learn to appreciate, integrate and value as part of heritage and identity.

It is a sheer privilege and honour for me to get elected and serve with my father, the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu in this House on the same party ticket. It probably has no historical parallel and for many budding politicians aspiring for Parliament, whose parents or relatives are either Members now or those who have taken interest in politics, this feat of achievement will, for many years, remain a source of inspiration.

Madam Speaker, to expound on this accord, I further also wish to place on record our family's legacy in its proper context beginning with my grandfather, the late Senator Ratu Glanville Lalabalavu, who was a member of the National Federation Party. He was one of the pioneer Senators in 1970, followed by my father, Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, who has been a Member of Parliament (MP) since 1999, which a brief breach from 2006 to 2014, and now myself. It is not dynasty of politics at work or about our traditional leadership but a recognition of political leadership and more than that, an answer to the call of our people.

The chiefs and the *Vanua* of Cakaudrove Province and the Tovata Confederacy deserve my heartfelt thanks for their unwavering support, to bless and give me the opportunity as a young and emerging leader, the opportunity to rise and answer their call and make this intervention at the national level.

I also wish to remember and thank my teachers, elders and trainers, work colleagues and fellow students, relatives and friends, siblings and mentor figures, for their continuous encouragement in training and development that I received as a health professional, village and urban dweller, and not forgetting my days as a university scholar.

The next on my thanksgiving list are my wife, Kalisiana and three sons - Tui, Raivalita and William. Also to Lewa, Adi Una, Adi Mila and Eden. My mother, Eta Tora; my brothers and sisters; Marica Kikau; the Lalabalavu and Tora families, not forgetting Leena, Wani and Tila; the Business House of Taveuni; and the Clean-up Taveuni Crew.

I wish to make specific mention to those who were part of my campaign team, namely, Turani, Volai, Mika, Kimi, Naca, PM, Tuiloma, Ratu Jone, Bola, Ratu Inia, Bulou and Team SODELPA 720 of 2018.

In any election of the gigantic scale that we have fought with a single constituency facing the might of the freebies, culture of silence, unabated propaganda, it was indeed a daunting task to run a campaign to match that level of opposition, but the strong faith of my campaign managers, volunteers, polling and counting agents, supporters and voters saw me elected. I am deeply indebted to all of them.

In politics, Madam Speaker, ours is where the party or the nation is always greater and larger than the individual and the leadership that listens. I wish to assure the Party of my unreserved support and must put on record that I stand by the objectives and principles, mission and vision of SODELPA to the core, which includes my total support for my party leadership, like every other Honourable Member of our party in this Parliament.

On the same note, Madam Speaker, I wish to pay very special tribute to the former Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, for exemplary leadership in the last four years while expressing hope that our leader, who is a celebrated Statesman, Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka, a proud son of my province, *noqu qase*, as well as Fiji, to lead us to greater heights in the next four years. He has already begun that by leading us to impressive electoral triumph of six more seats that we have had last time around.

Allow me to finish, Madam Speaker, by saying that we in SODELPA advocated and stood for change. That quest for change, we deemed was necessary, given the modern slavery upon our people in the form of over-regulation and over-taxation. It was a journey to liberate Fiji from the shackles of constitutional dictatorship and pave the way forward for a free, just, and prosperous united Fiji.

With those few words, Madam Speaker, I offer my good wishes to you and your deputy, congratulating all the Honourable Members upon their election to this Chamber and those appointed to the Cabinet.

I support the motion before the Parliament and wish everyone a Merry Christmas. God bless Fiji.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. We will now suspend proceedings and break for refreshment and we will resume at 11.10 a.m. Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.39 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.11 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu to take the floor.

HON. RATU N. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen: I rise to present my compliments to the Address given by His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands on Monday, 26th November, 2018. I join my colleagues who have spoken before me in acknowledging His Excellency's Address to this august Parliament in outlining the Government's vision, intentions and plans for yet another Parliamentary year, for our beloved Fiji.

Madam Speaker, from the outset, it would be remiss of me if I do not congratulate your good self in being re-elected to the high office once more, and not forgetting your Deputy, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar, who also has been able to be elected as Deputy Speaker.

I offer my congratulations, Madam Speaker, to the FijiFirst Party for achieving 27 seats in this august Parliament and likewise, my congratulations to the three fellow Opposition Members from the National Federation Party (NFP), and my sincere congratulation to the 21 from the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA). For the three Honourable Members from the NFP, I wish to commend them for making it this far.

As a son of a former member of the Party, like fellow colleagues of mine in this august Chamber, Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, and some on the opposite side as well, the NFP has come a long way and needs to be commended for the continuous efforts they have made to be able to represent their constituents in this Parliament. I congratulate NFP for that.

The political campaign, Madam Speaker, had witnessed intense competition for the 51 seats and this has ended, and we are now sitting for the first session of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, SODELPA has made inroads into the FijiFirst Party and we have gained six seats through capturing the votes of their supporters to add to the 15 seats which the Party had won in 2014. It is evidently clear that we will soon overtake the FijiFirst Party and shall be sitting on that side of the Chamber.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RATU N. LALABALAVU.- Madam Speaker, having said that, I congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister for his continuing reign in the leadership of our beloved Fiji, as well as his fellow Cabinet Ministers.

Madam Speaker, from the outset, I wish to acknowledge before you all Honourable Members that Christianity is the civilising influence on indigenous Fijian society, that it was through Christianity that empowered us to love our neighbour and to share our land and resources.

Madam Speaker, while still on that, the approval of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga or the Great Council of Chiefs for the transfer of the legal title for Native land to the Native Land Trust Board (now known as the iTaukei Land Trust Board) in 1940 was instrumental in the large scale freeing up of native land for sugarcane farming and later tourism, which are the largest earners of foreign exchange for Fiji today.

Madam Speaker, this single act of entrusting indigenous peoples' Native land into the Native Lands Trust Board and now known as the iTaukei Land Trust Board, and freeing it for leasing initially for sugarcane and later other uses, had paved the way for the rapid economic development of our beloved Fiji.

Madam Speaker, sugar became and remains the backbone of Fiji's economy, supporting directly and indirectly one-quarter of our population. The success of the sugarcane farming and sugar production and the resultant and consequential effect on the rest of the economy is due mainly to the hard work and resilience of the largely Indo-Fijian cane farmers, originally the *Girmit*, who chose to remain in Fiji rather than return to India and their descendants.

Madam Speaker, I would like to commend to you and Honourable Members of this august Parliament the significant of two reciprocal acts:

1. The entrusting of our Native land upon the consent of the landowning units and through the approval of our chiefs to the Native Land Trust Board, and the leasing of land for initial cane farming purposes; and
2. The hard work and resilience of our Indo-Fijian farmers.

Upon reflection, ladies and gentlemen, the two complementing actions of our forefathers in fact cemented the first national social partnership and co-operation between our communities.

Madam Speaker, that first social partnership must be acknowledged, appreciated and celebrated. It forms the basis for future co-operation and we must continue to build upon it. Having said that, Madam Speaker, I remain perplexed on the Interim Government's decision to abolish the Agricultural Land and Tenants Act (ALTA), which was passed into law on the blessings of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga. That Act had provided security of the tenants and today it is not there.

At a very basic level, Madam Speaker, the issue of contention between our two main communities in Fiji, is one which is based mainly on misunderstanding and fear. There is misunderstanding and misinterpretation of each other's needs, that is, the indigenous Fijian community as resource owners, and other ethnic communities who have made Fiji their home and who largely comprise the tenant community in Fiji. Madam Speaker, unfortunately this contention over land and resources is at the heart of our encounter. Developments at the national level do trickle down to the ordinary people or the grassroots and it is sad to see the divide that has widened over the last 11 years since 2006.

Madam Speaker, I believe that we, as Members of this august Chamber, have a duty to speak, act, embrace and foremost, to commit to a unified Fiji, and let us begin in this Parliament to recognise the benefits of adopting a bipartisan approach for the benefit of our Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I believe we fundamentally need a change to a government that is more consultative. I personally believe that the traditional leaders and the leaders of our tenant community should begin to be in dialogue to:

- understand each other better and better understand each other's needs;
- seek for the lasting ways which can narrow the misunderstanding between the two communities; and
- seek common goals and strategies to work through these for the benefit of all people and in particular, for our future generations.

What can we do as individuals, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, at the people level, whilst many may not be able to have much influence at national level, we do have power to influence and effect change at individual and community level. As an indigenous Fijian and as a Chief and indigenous leader, today I wish to reassure our Indo-Fijian brothers and sisters, as well as our other ethnic minorities in Fiji, of our acceptance that you too belong to Fiji with the indigenous Fijians. We, indigenous Fijians, respect and appreciate your contributions to Fiji. We want to work with you for a more peaceful and prosperous Fiji now, and for our future generations. We all have a role to play as individuals and as leaders in our families, in our community, in our *vanua*, in our province, or even in our confederacy.

Madam Speaker, let me, at this juncture, make some remarks to His Excellency's Opening Address. On His Excellency the President's comments on the 2018 General Election, His Excellency commented on the lower voter turnout in the 2018 General Election.

Madam Speaker, this is a very serious matter. The percentage of voter turnout for 2018 was about 72 percent, compared to 84 percent in 2014. And in terms of those registered voters who did not turn up to vote, a total of 178,000 voters did not turn up to vote, compared to 90,000 voters in 2014. Madam Speaker, blame should not only be put against the bad weather or flooding in a small percentage of areas only.

Madam Speaker, the lower voter turnout and the other serious concerns raised on the process of the General Election reflects very poorly on those entrusted by the Constitutional Offices Commission namely, the Electoral Commission and the Supervisor of Elections, to ensure the conduct of a free and fair general election, together with the highest standards of transparency and accountability is adopted and maintained. The people of Fiji are raising their doubts on the so-called claim of integrity, transparency and accountability in the process of the General Election. The people of Fiji are questioning the processes undertaken and those have created anxiety amongst the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President had made reference to the 2013 Constitution on the protection of native Fijian land. Earlier, Madam Speaker, speakers from this side of the House have made reference to the lies emanating from the other side of the House, on claims that some Native land had been alienated during the SVT or SDL Governments.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- What about Kadavu?

HON. RATU N. LALABALAVU.- I hope the Honourable Minister for Lands will look into this.

It is my hope that the people of Fiji have now learnt the truth that no Native land was sold, but land exchange or "swap" was made solely for the benefit of the landowning units, and it was only after their consent, as well as the consent of the Native Lands Trust Board were obtained.

On that claim, I note in particular that the FijiFirst Government is now trying to adopt the Lands Tribunal. Again, Madam Speaker, this was first developed by the Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua (SVT) Party which is now SODELPA, to address the various land issues in existence in Fiji. Now, they are beginning to acknowledge the policies of the previous Governments, and it is our hope that they will take these policies forward for the benefit of the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, you may also remember that the SDL Government had developed two other Bills - i Qoliqoli Bill, which has been wonderfully described by the Honourable Kuridrani and the Reconciliation of Unity Bill. I am wondering, Madam Speaker, as to why the FijiFirst Government has not found it appropriate to also borrow the two proposals for the benefit of native Fijians. Madam

Speaker, the adoption of the two Bills would go a long way in acknowledging the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the ILO Conventions 169 on the indigenous and tribal people.

In concluding, Madam Speaker, I personally agree that we, Honourable Members of this august House, have a big role to play in bringing about respect, safety, freedom and dignity for all the people of this nation.

Madam Speaker, Fiji is big enough for all the races that live in Fiji and call Fiji their home. I invite all Honourable Members of the House that we must put aside our differences and work together to bring about national unity and progress. My only one regret, Madam Speaker, is that, I only have one life to live and serve my country of Fiji.

May God Bless the people of Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to join all the Honourable Members of this House to thank His Excellency the President for his gracious Address while opening this new Parliament. I also wish to associate myself with this august House to pray for the continued good health and long life of His Excellency the President and the First Lady.

May I also take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to felicitate you and, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your accession to be presiding offices in this House. I express every hope while pledging our continued support and respect for the Chair, that you will do all within your means to enhance and consolidate our parliamentary standards and traditions.

Madam Speaker, this year, we marked the 48th Independent Anniversary of our nation Fiji. There were a lot of people and organisations and some are still around, who matter in this journey of our transition from a colony to a dominion, and then to a republic. They have, in their respective roles as leaders, done us all proud and in the process, bequeathed us a legacy to emulate and be the custodians of our nationhood until we pass the baton to the future generation.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I deem it an honour to stand here in the highest court of this land on behalf of my Party, my *vanua* and my voters, to pay my highest respect to our previous leaders and past Governments for their contributions towards the geo-political and socio-economic development and advancement of Fiji. I would also like to acknowledge the election of all the new Honourable Members of this august House and further to that, the appointment of the Honourable Cabinet Ministers. I wish each and every one of them a fruitful tenure in office.

Madam Speaker, allow me to thank my paramount chief and former Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, for her exemplary leadership on the Opposition benches in the last four years. On the same note, I wish to also express my gratitude to my parliamentary colleagues in the last Parliament who are not here today. They carry my best wishes in their future endeavours.

Madam Speaker, the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) contested that 2018 General Election under a leadership that listens, and that Honourable leader is none other than the Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka, who now leads us in the Opposition. It is a privilege for me, Madam Speaker, to be part of his parliamentary team, given his immense contributions to our national life as a sportsman, career military officer and national statesman, who is well decorated and

internationally recognised. Like every Member on this side of the House, Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Rabuka enjoys my unwavering support in our bid to make Fiji free again.

Let me begin, Madam Speaker, by making reference to the ideological similarities in our national policies and programmes in so far as the pronouncements made in His Excellency's Address from the throne, and the mission and vision shared in SODELPA's Manifesto of 2018.

Madam Speaker, it is said that it is better to be slapped with truth than to be pampered with a lie. The truth is that, we have inherited a divided nation and disputed mandate, resultant from the General Election this month. One-third of the Electorate have voted to maintain the status quo of the last 12 years, one-third voted for change and one-third of the Electorate abstained to vote.

Yesterday, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Viliame Gavoka spoke very eloquently about the need for the Fijian Elections Office to look into the reasons for the low voter turnout. I agree with that. Voter apathy may have many reasons and for those many reasons, there could be the loss of confidence in the electoral process, given the draconian electoral legislations because our people have been used to a robust democracy in the past and are aware of how democracies work via the social media overseas.

This makes our model of democracy, Madam Speaker, or constitutional dictatorship less appealing to them. So how can we achieve national unity when people do not know or value their right to vote or have lost the confidence to participate in our national affairs? That being so, if it is as such, it reflects poorly on the national leadership to unite our people and the inability of such leadership to lead by exuding confidence for participatory governance.

As if that was not the only reason, Madam Speaker, why we lack national unity, His Excellency the President was absolutely right when he stated the role of free media and the responsibility in reporting. He went to make a very profound statement, and let me quote:

“To publish blatant lies or misleading statements is irresponsible and only serves to enable deceit and the subversion of our national unity, our institutions, our economy and our development.”

Madam Speaker, I have been misquoted in saying that from the 20 cents plastic levy, 10 cents goes to the Honourable Prime Minister and another 10 cents to the Honourable Attorney-General. I deny making that insinuation and hold the person who said that, rumour-mongering responsible for sowing the seeds of discord between me and the two Honourable Members which, of course, got flared up because of our political affiliations.

Madam Speaker, we have a long way into the information age from the days of the messengers carrying the message from place to place to postal services, telephone lines and to mobile phones, faxes to emails, and from newsprints to television and telex messages, to *Twitter* and *Facebook*. All these inventions have indeed reduced this world to a small global village and the world is now at our fingertips. While sharing information at such a grand scale is a great stride for the evolution of robust democracies, the abuse of the same can also have a counter effect and become tools detrimental to the democratic health of a nation.

Madam Speaker, let me expound on this accord a little further. The imposition of draconian Decrees which we are told, have now taken a new avatar as Acts slapped on the media and now the regulation of the cyber region by the Online Safety Act, we have to accept and embrace the hard cold fact that we have limited the scope of freedom of expression. This is made worse by the caveats attached to the Bill of Rights in the 2013 Constitution.

Given those limitations, Madam Speaker, we have forced a significant portion of our population to the verge of revolt by waging cyber warfare against the FijiFirst Government and some even against us, the Opposition. Therefore, one should be surprised to read in the social media comments like, "I love my country but my Government scare me or I hate my Government". The all-time low freedom index has forced our people from hating and opposing the FijiFirst and to resort to hate the State now. This is the price of over-regulating the lives of our people and one of the major causes of national disunity.

Still on national unity, Madam Speaker, when leaders of political parties speak about violence, *coups*, daggers, hate and take refuge in name calling such as snake and beast, it plays an important part in shaping up the opinions of our people. I think those of us who were here in Parliament would recall how well His Excellency the President pleaded with us to contest the Election on issues which we did, but the record of the incumbents was otherwise and leaves much to be desired in terms of achieving national unity.

True leadership, Madam Speaker, is not about creating conflict situations. True leadership is about averting conflict situations and rising above the petty squabbles and personal differences to appreciate the alternative and seek to resolve issues and differences with dialogue and consensus building.

Madam Speaker, that is why we in the Opposition continue to impress the idea of bipartisan approach to national issues and conflict situations. That is, after all, the Pacific way and the only way of doing things should we desire national unity. So it might be prudent to say that the observations made by His Excellency in regard to national unity which was the overarching theme of his Address squarely befits the call we have been making against the tyranny of the super majority in the last four years.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, as usual, my speech cannot and would not be complete without the mention of education because that is where my heart and mind always lies, given my past and empathy for the noble profession of teaching. While giving my best regards to the new Honourable Minister for Education, whose optimistic tone of address yesterday was a complete U-turn in contrast to our criticism...

(Laughter)

...I seek her indulgence to the rest of this House to highlight some sticky areas in the Fiji Education Sector.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Firstly, Madam Speaker, the teacher unions and their members are concerned about the intervention of the Fijian Elections Office in union elections, despite the prescription of Article 87 of the ILO Convention...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Read the Law.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- ...which states and I quote:

"Workers and employees organizations shall have the right to draw up their constitutions and rules, to elect their representatives in full freedom, to organize their administration and activities and to formulate their programmes. The public authorities should

refrain from any interference which would restrict this right or impede the lawful exercise thereof.”

His Excellency the President spoke of democracy and the preservation of the same. Here the interference of the Fijian Elections Office in union elections runs contrary to that spirit.

Madam Speaker, I applaud the Honourable Prime Minister speaking with some pride about Fiji sitting on the UN Human Rights Council, and yet we have laws that continue to muzzle the same human rights in Fiji. That code of law needs an immediate revision.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, our teachers are gravely concerned about the secrecy in which the Human Resources Unit at the Ministry of Education processes the Open Merit Recruitment and Selection (OMRS) which has resulted in irregular appointments, unfair human resource distribution and teachers toiling under unsecured atmosphere. There needs to be transparency and a clean-up of this Unit in the Ministry of Education, new Honourable Minister!

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, there is a huge backlog of cases and cases involving teachers in the Employment Tribunal, the outcome of which may alter the fate of some teachers for good or bad. This brings me to the point of requesting the Honourable Minister responsible to empower the Employment Tribunal with necessary resources to attend to this backlog because “justice delayed is justice denied”.

While still on the Employment Tribunal and taking the court proceedings for or against the teachers, Madam Speaker, teachers need to enjoy the liberty and adequate compensation to prepare and travel to attend hearings either as complainants, accused or being a witness. That is their constitutional right and we must learn to cater for that.

Fourthly, Madam Speaker, I fully support the remarks made yesterday by the former Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, in regards to the need for the establishment of an Education Commission and in addition to a host of issues arising out of the Fiji Education Sector Programme and some of these are:

- The role of faith-based schools and PTAs in such schools;
- Incorporating faith-based education in the school programme;
- Curriculum development and advisory services;
- Examinations and LANA in schools;
- Management of the Text Book Scheme;
- Development of a Human Resource Bank of teachers to fill in the vacancies as and when they arise;
- Upgrading of schools;
- Teacher – student health and well- being;
- Strategies for teaching and learning at varied levels;
- Library and Archives services; and
- Other related issues.

Madam Speaker, I wish to briefly remind the Government and this House that action on the revival of the mahogany industry pending its reform is pending, and has come at a great cost to the stakeholders, robbing them of their income and fortune. As a result of that, Madam Speaker, the sawmills in Rovadrau, Navutu and Waivunu in Serua continue to lay idle as white elephants.

Further to that, I wish to thank the former Honourable Minister for Waterways for addressing the drainage problem along the coastal villages in Serua, and I would humbly plead with him that the remainder of the works be completed as soon as practicable.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, may I also request the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure and Transport to take note of the road conditions in Deuba/Vunibau area and in the interior of Serua, such as Nabukelevu and Nuku. The present road conditions is affecting the villagers to travel and cart goods. It is hindering the forestry activity in the region and posing the single potent threat to the children, pregnant women and the sick needing emergency attention.

Still on infrastructure, Madam Speaker, while appreciating and commending the installation of streetlights in villages, Korovisilou is still waiting to be lit up.

Madam Speaker, the other pressing issue with regard to public utility is the water supply to residents in Makosoi Settlement near Pacific Harbour. This is an ongoing problem for some time now. Each time a complaint is made, the water supply is normal for a while and then it gets disrupted again. The residents of the area have drawn the attention of the authorities, including the former Honourable Minister to this problem but to date, the only redress has been the usual band-aid solution.

On agriculture, Madam Speaker, the people of Fiji are still waiting to see the Green Revolution and if there is indeed such a revolution, then its benefit need to trickle down to the ordinary people. The fact is, we have failed our agricultural industry while still failing to establish new industries. What is needed, Madam Speaker, is the development of the infrastructure in the agricultural zones, immunity from threats and crop rehabilitation measures in the aftermath of disasters.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister for iTaukei Affairs may be fully aware of the proposals and concerns raised by the delegates to him and his officers or representatives in the Serua Provincial Council meeting. We are awaiting action and redress on those issues and the sooner it is done, the better for the people.

The last local issue that I intend to speak on is the proposed Navua Town, Madam Speaker. Last year, Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua rightly called for the Wainadoi to Galoa region be declared a tax free zone to enable the people in the area to prepare Navua to become a town, empower themselves to sustain the town by the development of industries and to absorb the building up pressure of demography and economic movement in the Suva to Pacific Harbour belt.

Before I sum up, Madam Speaker, I have a long list of thank you to say to the people because of whom I stand here and speak in this House today. Firstly, I wish to acknowledge the role and support of my loving wife, Adi Miliakere Leawere, who has been my guardian angel and my *Mataqali*, Dreketi Nadrau. They have stood by my side in every situation to encourage me to take the lead role in education, trade unionism and now politics. Indeed, I owe a lot to them.

Secondly, I wish to pay my highest respect to the Vanua o Korolevu, Turaga na Vunivalu, vanua o Burenitu; all the *Turaga* of Serua Province and the voters from my province and those who voted for me from all the different regions of Fiji and overseas. May I also thank the Taukei Qamo, Tui Dravuni, *vanua o* Sayake, Vusu, Nasoroiwaca and those whom I failed to mention today.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, I wish to commend and thank my very able and dedicated group of campaign managers, volunteers, polling and counting agents, as well as those who contributed in any way to make my return to Parliament a possibility.

Fourthly, Madam Speaker, I am deeply indebted to my elders, teachers and mentors, who have groomed me for this leadership position. Without their guidance and training, I would be much

poorer and not able to withstand the challenges that I faced in my life to rise to become a Member of this House.

Madam Speaker, I thank my party and the management board for their support in assisting me to retain my seat.

Fifthly, let me also express my gratitude to the Ministry of Education, the Fijian Teacher's Association and the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji under whose sponsorship, I have attended numerous leadership training and development programmes in Fiji and overseas which has enriched my knowledge and expertise to now effectively contribute towards the discussions on a wide range of issues that are raised and debated in this House and at the Committee level.

Madam Speaker, I intend to finish as usual with a quote and today, I wish to quote from the *Holy Bible* - 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13, Verses 1 – 8:

“What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels? If I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge? And what if I had faith that moved mountains? I would be nothing, unless I loved others. What if I give all that I owned and let myself be burnt alive? I would gain nothing, unless I loved others. Love is kind, patient, never jealous, boastful, proud or rude. Love is not selfish or quick-tempered. It does not keep a record of wrongs that others do. Love rejoice in truth but not in evil. Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful and trusting. Love never fails”.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Amen!

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, that is the remedy to heal the wounds inflicted upon this nation in the last General Election and in the last one decade. I, therefore, join my colleagues on this side of the House to plead for national reconciliation to pave the way forward for a free, just, prosperous and united Fiji. There is no other way.

With those few words, Madam Speaker, I support the motion before the House and wish you and every Honourable Member and the staff a Merry Christmas and a prosperous 2019. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Alvick Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament; *bula, ram ram, namaskar, salaam* and a very good morning to you all.

Madam Speaker, I rise in this august Parliament to give my maiden speech but before I do that, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker. I would like, at this stage, to congratulate Honourable Veena Bhatnagar as Deputy Speaker. It was an honour for me to nominate you two ladies to those respectable positions.

While it is interesting to see FijiFirst believe in empowering women and allowing them to take lead role in politics, SODELPA on the other hand removed an empowered lady from the position of the Leader of the Opposition. What a shame!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- And here, we have Honourable Salote Radrodro talking about women empowerment for the past four years. Your own Party does not believe in women empowerment, Honourable Radrodro.

Furthermore, I would like to thank His Excellency the President for opening Parliament and for his gracious Address. First of all, I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister, Party Secretary and FijiFirst Party for having faith in me and allowing me to be a candidate to contest the 2018 General Election.

FijiFirst has been a Party of action and not words. Yet, again FijiFirst has shown how much the Party believes in youth empowerment as I am one of those who is a living example of youth empowerment. Having made it back to back to the Fijian Parliament as the youngest elected Member was not an easy task. It has been a steady growth for me as a politician for the past four years as I entered Parliament in 2014 as the youngest Member and I, yet again, maintained that in the 2018 General Election. I have been trying to reach out to the public directly and this is what I have been doing for the past four years.

It became a routine for me to visit people and having met them face to face allowed me to invest in that personal touch and gave me a better understanding about what was happening at ground level. My voters saw and recognised my hard work on the ground and not just voted, but also I would like to thank my Party for recognising my hard work, having entrusted me with some of the major responsibilities of the Party. Some of them are as having me as Government Whip and Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports.

My success story would not have been possible without the blessings of my family. My sincere and heartfelt thanks to my parents, Pt Maharaj and Malti Devi. I dedicate my success to you two and thank you for your blessings. At this moment, I would like to remember my grandmother, who passed away during our second sitting in Parliament after the 2014 General Election; my brother and sister in law, Mr. Alrick Avhikash Maharaj and Kriti Prasad and my niece and nephew Avhikrit and Anaya Maharaj. There are few more names that I would like to acknowledge who have played a pivotal role for me during the 2018 General Election. Mr. Mahendra Chaudary and Chaudary family of Sawani, Nausori. Just for information, not the Leader of Fiji Labour Party.

(Laughter)

Mr. Mika of Waila, Nausori, Mr. Balbindar Singh of Tailevu, Mr. Chandar, Mr. Veer Singh, Mr. Salen, Lucky brothers and family, Mr. Rajendra Autar, Mr. Subnesh and family and Mr. Mahen of Labasa. A big hearty thanks to each and everyone in Bulileka, Labasa.

Mr. Nalin and family, Mr. Lingam, Mr. Sushil Raj of Vunivau along with Mr. Babu and Ms. Losalini of Naleba; Mr. Binnay of Coqeloa, Mr. Hiren of Nabekavu, Mr. Arun and Rajen of Lagalaga, Mr. Amka and Ami of Taganikula and Mr. Harish of Papalagi, Labasa; Mr. Janif, Mr. Farook, Ms. Sashi and Ms. Sujata of Bua; Ms. Ashwini, Mr. Bimal, Mr. Rahil and Mr. Vinod of Dreketi; and not forgetting Mr. Keshwa and Ms Priya of Lautoka, thank you for helping me out with my campaign in the West along with Mr. Bimal of Newworld, Lautoka. A hearty thanks goes to Mr. Binesh and the whole community of Sabeto, Nadi, for supporting me in Nadi.

Politics in Fiji should not be about seats in Parliament but rather about serving the people of Fiji. A lot was said during the Election campaigns but I am glad that people voted and accepted the government that believes in securing the future of our children, development of the nation and service delivery.

Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I turn my attention to two important areas of youth and sports. Indeed, with a mandate of leading a non-formal education for young people between the ages of 15 and 35, much work has been done and a lot remains to be done. With the Honourable Minister, we will ensure an increased co-operation between the two Ministries to which we have been appointed. We need to get more young people into entrepreneurship.

We have 70 percent of our population who are under the age of 40 which bodes very well with our economy as we provide relevant skills training for them and as they age, we will not face the same challenges as a developed nation. The FijiFirst Government is determined to facilitate the development of job creators and with the innovation of young minds combined with their energy, we will support the process of more educational, employment and leadership opportunities for our youth.

The Ministry is addressing the needs of urban and rural youth working to break down the gender stereotypes of various trades and employment training, cooperating with other Ministries, as it is only through such co-operation that we can create a holistic solution and process. Working with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, we need to provide support for those who have not returned to school; with my other Ministry, to create a supply of young people willing to work overseas; and with the Ministry of Agriculture, to promote modern farming techniques combined increasingly with organic production which is attractive, both locally and in overseas markets.

The Ministry of Fisheries supports young people developing their fishing skills and expertise in a sustainable way, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports augments that with boat masters courses and ensure safety at sea.

The five Youth Training Centres across the country provide training in agriculture, carpentry, music and now one of them provides training specifically aimed at our young women. The Youth Training Centres are developed further and now working to provide short courses in residential environment for other young people, to ensure that centres are used 365 days a year. This will undoubtedly ensure a better return on investment for Government.

Sports is also a key component of any society which brings us together to support our local community through national teams. It creates opportunities for Fijians to come together and promote social cohesion and better health and wellness. Physical activity, together with improved nutrition and more systematic approach to physical education in schools, will help us address issues of NCDs.

The Ministry is in its final stage of consultation on the revised National Sports and Physical Activity Policy which will then be presented to Cabinet for consideration. Through this, we will be able to coordinate our approach to sports and physical activity with our National Sports Organisation, the Sports Commission, the Council and, indeed, other Ministries.

We are convinced that it will assist us in improving mental and physical well-being, as well as help unearth more talents across all sports while presenting Fiji as a great host of events internationally. We are already looking forward to hosting the World Junior Weightlifting Championship next year and the Under-20 World Netball Cup in 2021.

Madam Speaker, when I see the other side, I see self-proclaimed youths and when I look at the Government side, I do see actual youths. When I look to the other side, I see a leader who did not have any vision for Fiji back in 1987 and shot a gun in this august House in which he sits today, showing disrespect to the highest office of the land, someone who totally shattered the economy of the country and ruined Fiji, someone under whose prime ministership the door of our National Bank was closed forever.

Madam Speaker, when I see the leader on our side, I see a leader who:

- sees the future;
- sees beyond the horizon;
- believes in equality;
- is improving the lifestyle of ordinary Fijians;
- sees everyone as Fijian;
- stands and serves for every Fijian regardless of their religious and ethnic background; and
- who believes in the truth and ensures that he and his Members speak nothing but the truth.

Unlike on the other side, the leader sits silently and listens as his Members lie in Parliament.

Madam Speaker, when I see that side, I can recall land swap. While one of the Honourable Members tried his best to justify this yesterday and another Honourable Member again today, we are glad that they admit that it was done through them that the *i Taukei* land was lost forever at Denarau and Momi Bay. We do not say it was sold, what we are saying is that, the prime land in Momi and Denarau was lost forever.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Tell us, I am coming to you.

On one side, they always say that SODELPA and SDL are two different Governments and we should not compare them, and on the other hand, a SODELPA Member stands and defends the action of the SDL Government. What a shame! It will not help, Honourable Member, old mindset and modern day politics, do not go together.

Madam Speaker, I can still see a Member on the other side who, as an iTLTB Manager, went from house to house asking landlords not to renew land leases.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, he is misleading, I never acted as Manager for iTLTB.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Get your facts right before you come here. And I never asked for leases not to be renewed. Where is your evidence, you do not come here and lie!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You do not come here and lie. Go outside there, do not come here and lie.

(Laughter)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I did not mention any Honourable Member's name.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I have not taken anyone's name.

(Laughter)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I have not named anyone.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the comment was really made on the content of your speech, so you did not qualify as a point of order, so you may continue.

If you like, you can bring up that issue as a substantive motion at a later sitting, however, this time I would like the Honourable Maharaj to continue.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- As that happened, Madam Speaker, it created a chaos in the sugarcane industry and the economy as a whole.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You told me, "Stop".

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- You should be knowing that better when you were told to stop.

Madam Speaker, I see another Honourable Member on the other side under whose leadership as Minister for Education, scholarships were issued under ethnic lines.

Madam Speaker, as Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports, when I look to the other side of the House, it reminds me of the FRU lottery, but we will ensure that such things do not happen under the current leadership.

Madam Speaker, a lot was said about votes increased and the decrease of seats but the fact is, we are still in the Government and that is the truth. FijiFirst still runs the Government and the two teams are sitting in the Opposition.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- This is a fact and it will not change. Therefore, NFP, your change will just not come any time soon.

With those words, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank everyone once again for the support they have shown me during the 2018 General Election and I shall continue to give my contribution in this august House.

Thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua to have the floor.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise to express my sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands for his Address in this House. I join all Honourable Members of this House to pray for His Excellency's continued good health and long life.

Allow me, Madam Speaker, to felicitate you and your Deputy on your accessions to the High Chairs in this House and as always, we will continue to look forward to the assistance and guidance of the Chair to maintain and enhance the dignity and decorum of this House. On the same note, may I not mince my words to assure you both of our assistance and co-operation.

Further to that, Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate all the Honourable Members of this House who have been re-elected and those who have been elected to this House for the first time ever. May we all have a fruitful tenure of office and serve our nation to the best of our abilities.

For those of us who served in the last House, Madam Speaker, we cannot forget but remember with some sense of fondness those Honourable Members who have either retired or lost out in the recent Elections. I join this House to wish all of them a good bout of health and all the best in their future expeditions.

Let me also offer my best wishes to the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers and the Honourable Assistant Ministers on their appointments and I hope that they are learning from their past mistakes and that they will do better this time around or minus that 0.2 percent support. We will be exchanging seats in the next Election and I would be too happy to hear the same compliments given from the Opposition benches by them to us.

I will fall short of my duty and meeting the standards of this august House, Madam Speaker, if I do not acknowledge the immense contributions made by our past governments, leaders and parliamentarians who have laid down the highest parliamentary traditions worthy of praise and emulation by future generations to evolve a robust parliamentary democracy and public policy-making system. In paying my tribute to them, I must state for the record that their legacy has a permanent place in our history and continues to inspire all of us except some who choose to be naïve.

Madam Speaker, I wish to pay special tribute to a very brave lady and paramount chief of Fiji, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, who served with distinction as the Leader of Opposition in the last four years, despite all the hurdles put on our path. It was our sheer privilege and honour to serve under her leadership and wage our battle here and outside this Parliament to seek to reclaim Fiji.

On the same note, I wish to declare my full and unwavering support to the current Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka, who is a celebrated statesman, having made us proud in sports, military and national leadership. His resurgence into our national life is a sign of redemption and culmination of the hopes and wishes of thousands of Fiji citizens at home and abroad to make Fiji free again.

Having done with these commendations, Madam Speaker, I will now dwell to speak on the motion before this Chamber and in doing so seek to speak upon some important themes highlighted by His Excellency the President before summing up by moving a vote of thanks to some people and organisations who matter to me a lot and without whose support I would not be here.

Madam Speaker, I continue to hold the position of the shadow Minister for Youth and Sports while the Minister for Youth and Sports has changed. Before speaking on my portfolio, I wish to thank the former Minister for Youth and Sports, Mr. Laisenia Tuitubou, for his contributions and leadership in respect of youth empowerment and sports development.

I take this opportunity to welcome the Honourable Parveen Bala on board as the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports, expressing the hope that given his background and immense interest in youth affairs and sports, he will certainly action many of the issues pending for action and development in this sphere.

Madam Speaker, I also thank the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports for his brief statement on youth and sports and look forward for a detailed plan of action before we can discuss and we in the Opposition side can make our input in that regard.

Madam Speaker, allow me to get into the debate proper and speak on some of the issues highlighted by His Excellency the President. I intend to begin with the results of the General Elections.

The decrease of the FijiFirst seat share from 32 to 27 and vote share from 59 percent to 50.02 percent, is clear sign of rejection, the over-regulation and over- taxation while an increase of SODELPA votes share from 30 percent to 42 percent and the seat share is from 15 to 21, is a sign of the people voting for freedom from constitutional dictatorship. The difference of 147 votes presents a divided nation and a disputed mandate. They can govern by the 27 seats majority but cannot be the political conscience and guide of the nation anymore. This brings to the fore one of the many causes of disunity.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President spoke about *i Taukei* rights and resource ownership. That statement cannot and should not go unchallenged because:

- there is a breach of the spirit of the Deed of Cession;
- tampering with entrenched group rights;
- unprecedented environmental exploitation;
- shipping of Fiji soil to China under the cover of Bauxite mining;
- dilution of indigenous rights pertaining to the control and management of our resources;
- delayed payment of the fair share, lease and royalty payments;
- lack of affirmative action and social justice programme for the native Fijians and the people of Rotuma; and
- Non-recognition and unfair compensation of our ownership rights.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly endorse the very important points made here this morning by the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, who related the historical and the *vanua*-based connection with our resource rights and status as the indigenous people of this land. We would not like to be misled and fooled by the notion that all is well when we are gradually by the designs of the implementation of cultural autonomy becoming foreigners in our own land.

Madam Speaker, the other key element or feature that was at brazen display in His Excellency's speech was the boastfulness or self-praise of the FijiFirst Government by its own self. It displays the height to which their arrogance has reached whereby they fail to acknowledge the verdict by the voters and continue to excel in the ostrich culture. It was evident in the campaign and now again in this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President also spoke about our transition into democratic mode hailing it as a genuine democracy. The Opposition does not agree with that, given the following;

1. The draconian nature of the 2013 Constitution and other legislations;
2. Contempt for indigenous rights and group rights;
3. Limits scope for freedom of expression;
4. Over regulation and over- taxation of the lives of our people;
5. Selected recording historical events such as remembering with profound fondness the *coups* of 1987 and 2000 and forgetting about the carnage of democracy in 2006.

As if that was not enough, Madam Speaker, the amendments carried out to our standing orders here in this Chamber, not once, but four times in the last four years, which is an average of once a year. We challenge that the notion of the Parliament democracy by noting;

1. Curtailing of our rights as member by limiting time of our speech and debating of substantive motions as in the past;
2. Sheer contempt of bipartisan approach to national issues;
3. Fast-tracking of legislations;
4. Making it near to impossible for members of the public to petition the Parliament which is a key redress mechanism to the Parliamentary process; and
5. The narrowed scope of public participate in the parliamentary process.

As it is said, nothing further from the truth, what kind of democracy we are after skinning the cat and yet we are told the opposite of that. Madam Speaker, it has fashionable and staple feature of this Government and its former self to live with burden of contradictions and yet proclaim otherwise. However, let me tell them the people of Fiji learn to know more and better about you by each passing day.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency the President had also came near to the theme of "Productivity Citizenry", whose basis are the sense of belongingness and ownership of our state law, policies and programmes, that I humbly submit has not been the case pushing many of our people into the mood of resignation and migration. That has resulted into brain drain and apathy contribute to national development plan.

Therefore, let me remind the Government of the day that they have no moral authority to hold this nation to political ransom, compromise the future of the generations yet to be born or parade themselves as having the mandate to speak for the nation. Today, they are speaking for only and I repeat only 50.02 percent of the people of this land, which is only about one third of the total population. This is the reality of their mandate.

This brings me, Madam Speaker, to impress in the need for bipartisan and pragmatic approach to the national issues beginning with dialogue and consensus building on national issues. There is no other way we can do things in a nation that is polarised but I am afraid with some of speeches made in the last two days in this Parliament, it runs contrary to that spirit and we are back heading towards the path of confrontation and hostility in this Chamber. This will neither help us nor this nation. So I again join the very commendable conclusion made by the Honourable Minister for Education to plead for reconciliation, tolerance and unity, and I hope many other Honourable Members on the other side of the Chamber will shun their ego and learn to become and work as real leaders.

Madam Speaker, I was going to speak very elaborately on other issues but I am pressed for time. Let me wind down by picking up another sticky area which was highlighted way back in the maiden address by Ratu Tua'akitau Cokanauto in 1999 when he spoke on the theme of 'Public Administration vs Political Influence.'

Ever since the establishment of the English political and legal system in Fiji, we have seen the evolution of institutions and structures primarily to administer, serve and empower the people. The element of public interest has always been paramount insofar as our public administration is concerned and by the same reason, we have over the years imbedded the checks and balances system to ensure that politicians governing the nation and in control of public administration do not end up exerting such a degree of political influence that jeopardises our institutions and structures pertaining to public administration.

When we reflect at how things are done and when I say that I will not mince my words but say we talk about nepotism, actions taken by the security forces and anti-corrupt institutions and our border security as well as the point we have reached insofar as environmental exploitation in concerned, the traits

of political influence in our public administration are more than apparent. This is simple, disconcerting and eroding public confidence by each passing day.

Madam Speaker, we must appreciate and not shy away from the fact that we are practicing politicians who are here by the popular will of our people. It is not unnatural when people who get into positions of power develop a thick taste of it and wish to preserve it as long as they wish. No one sees anything wrong with that as long as you account and answer for your actions, face the people to refresh your mandate, and have the ability to define the differences between political influence and public administration.

The element of fear of loss of power and the quest for more power has pushed us and our Government to over-regulate and over-tax our lives. As if this was not enough, the level or degree of political influence we now watch and as I said is very apparent wherever you look in our public administration has destroyed the last shreds of morality in our public life. Those who have read about Mahatma Gandhi will remember well that he said and I quote: "Politics without principle is immoral. It is a sin."

The extended problem we have, Madam Speaker, in addressing issues of public probity is not accepting and embracing that it exists but by refusing or denying its existence and shoving it under the carpet. This has made institutions like the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC), a farce, like hunting political institutions targetting to cleanse any opposition to the Government of the day rather than gathering the necessary will to weed out any political influence in the public administration.

A few words on my home province of Namosi, Madam Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the Government and this House to the following issues in this respect:

- Need development of seawall along the Namosi coast to protect the villages living on the coastline, given the threat by climate change;
- Development of the Wainadoi Water Scheme and include Nabukavesi and perhaps, Naboro as part of the project, given the abundance of sources;
- Development of eco-tourism initiatives in the Namosi Highlands;
- Regular upgrading of the Namosi-Nabukaluka Road as a major link between the provinces of Namosi and Naitasiri;
- Implementing and completion of various projects proposed by the Namosi Provincial Council;
- Development a river retaining wall or boulders along the Waidova Settlement in Navua to save the historical villages and sites from the dreaded prospect of being washed away;
- Upgrade the Navua Municipal Market and provide a designated space for the resettled farmers of Raiwaqa, Navua, to sell their farm produce; and lastly
- Declaration of Wainadoi to Galoa as a Tax Free Zone.

Madam Speaker, before I sum up, I wish to thank my wife, Mrs. Akeneta Matanitobua, my relatives and my campaign manager, Ro Mocelutu Mataitini, and my loyal campaign team, all my hardworking polling and counting agents and the *vanua* of Namosi for their sheer sacrifice and

unwavering faith throughout the last Election battle. Today, like many other provinces, Namosi stands proud to reunite with SODELPA. We have come to an age and era of redemption.

I also wish to put on record my sincere appreciation to my fellow candidate, Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member, your time is up.

Just looking at the time, Honourable Members, I beg your indulgence that we will end here or can we take just another one before lunch, which means we will finish early in the afternoon. We have one more speech.

(Applause)

Thank you very much, I now give the floor to the Honourable Alipate Nagata.

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistants Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and my fellow Honourable Members of Parliament; *Vina na cola* and *Ni sa bula*.

Madam Speaker, I rise with certain degree of nervousness at this special moment for it is so overwhelming and unprecedented to such innocent young risk-taker as myself to come out unscathed after the recent General Election, is nothing less than a miracle.

Madam Speaker, it would be presumptuous for me to attribute my relative success to anyone or anything without acknowledging the contribution of the God Almighty, the Sustainer of every living thing. To Him 'be Glory' of the great things he hath done to be personally and to this nation in its recent decisive moment.

Madam Speaker, although overcome my sheer adoration and decorum of this occasion and the dignified impact of this august Chamber to my humble soul, seems to suggest the accidental nature of my election, nevertheless the reverse is true. That is, I am an integral part of the Honourable Members chosen to move this country ahead in the coming four years. Irrespective of our ideological and philosophical upbringing, that is the reality that confronts each representative of this House.

Madam Speaker, please allow me to congratulate you on your re-appointment as a Speaker for this august House. Your history as first female speaker, and the expertise in your last four-year term and work experience over the years, speak volumes of your quality and example, particularly as role model for all aspiring women to follow your footsteps. The number of women, highest in the history of this House is testament. I would like to think at some degree, it is due to your influence, that is not to mention the physical maintenance of a healthy and youthful appearance that is nothing less than adorable. God bless you, Madam Speaker, *vinaka vakalevu*.

Madam Speaker, it is always prudent to give credit where it is due. Therefore, I want to acknowledge the contribution of our leaders who have gone before us. It is difficult to name them, but a special mention for my own success is the contribution of Adi Kuini Teimumu Vuikaba Speed, the late Marama na Tui Noikoro, a former Deputy Prime Minister of the Labour Government, mother of the incumbent HOPE Party President - Roko Tupou Takaiwai Senirewa Draunidalo. Adi Kuini's outspokenness in the national affairs from the multicultural perspective is the source of inspiration to me in my political career.

Madam Speaker, before commenting on His Excellency the President's Address, let me take this opportunity to thank the Prime Minister, the Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama; and the General Secretary of the FijiFirst Party, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum; as prime mover to all the successive events that led to the unbelievable support demonstrated in the outcome of the Election. The fact that I could be so trusted and be considered as a worthy candidate will always make me indebted to the FijiFirst Party leadership.

Madam Speaker, I wish to contribute to His Excellency the Head of State on His Address on Monday, 26th November, 2018. First of all, the warmth and clearness of his Address reflects his experience in self-sacrifice and self-denial that littered his Military Service given to this country. The success of his last term of office is indicative of his humility, popularity and religious upbringing.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency Address, may I quote:

“Democracy is not a static thing, it must grow with the people and incorporate newfound wisdom. It must confront problem and respond to demands that we cannot even contemplate today.”

Madam Speaker, how true and prophetic is that quotation, that relatively defines the situation that exists in this country today.

The maintenance of archaic and outdated ideas and claim that has bedevilled this nation for decades have to change to accept the new reality and challenge of a postmodern world. Simplistic thinking that reduces the complex element of economy, culture and tradition, and politics into a volatile explosive tainted by lie and half-truths that were so pervasive in the recent month prior to Election.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Madam Speaker, His Excellency seemed to hit the nail on the head when he said, and I quote:

“...the same blatant, harmful and indefensible lie, the lie that Fiji and the Fijian people are somehow stronger divided than we are united...”

... accompanied by a political culture of fear, mistrust and communal antagonism that poisoned the minds of Fijians for generations.”

Madam Speaker, the former British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan, in his campaign once said, ‘the wind of change is blowing in’. I appeal to our people not to obstruct the wind of change and progress that is currently blowing across this country. There is nothing in the whole world that can stop it. Those who reject it will be left behind. Let us get into the bandwagon of progress, peace and united under the banner blue of being One Nation, One Destiny, One People unreservedly called Fijians.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Madam Speaker, straight after the General Election night on 14th November, 2018, the *Fiji Sun* online kept asking, who is Alipate Nagata? Even in the middle of counting on the same night, the *Island Business* was trying to construct a theory about me. Madam Speaker, may I beg your favour to explain briefly about my background.

I was born in the family of Alipate Nagata and Anaseini Dakua of Nukuilau Village in Navosa as my biological parents with six boys. When I was seven months old, my mother decided to go for a teacher

in-service training in Lautoka. Out of necessity, my maternal uncle, Peni Dakua, of Vatubalavu, Navosa with wife - Aunt Atelini Ravutu from Nasegai, Kadavu; both were teachers decided to adopt me. So, now when I talk about dad and mum, I am referring to my adoptive family rather than biological family.

Madam Speaker, my mother, Atelini Dakua is relatively known for alternative health in the NEWSTART natural remedy realm, beginning approximately a decade ago, when mum operated a health canteen in the Ante-Natal Ward at Colonial War Memorial Hospital and currently she is part of the Hospital Ministry, feeding pregnant women every Monday at CWM Hospital and operating a health shop at Shop 12, South Mall Building, Rodwell Road, Suva.

Meanwhile, she is now with the recently dissolved Grant Management Unit (GMU) of the Ministry of Health. This week, they should have been in Lakeba, Lau, headed by Vasiti Nawadra Taylor, but for the untimely death of the late Adi Ateca Mara Ganilau, the trip has been postponed.

Madam Speaker, this is not a public relation or commercial exercise. I am mentioning this because our country has a challenge with Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). Every Honourable Member of this House has an obligation to help the citizens of this country from the onslaught of this terrible menace. Every single 51 Honourable Member of this House can be an ambassador for sugar diabetes, and try to save hundreds who may be doomed to die this year.

Madam Speaker, after acquiring a Bachelor of Arts in Business Studies (Accounting) at the Pacific Adventist University in Papua New Guinea, I had a stint with Air New Guinea in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. I served as an accountant in several institutions, like the Fiji Mission of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA), Fulton College, Lelean Memorial School from 2009 – 2013.

I was also involved in some overseas businesses as an accountant and consultant, like the:

- Foster Enterprises, a commercial farming business involving Nasinu villagers in Cakaudrove, Vanua Levu;
- Willies Holding Company Limited in the Solomon Islands that deals with renewable energy;
- Managed the Safe Landing Resort in Nacula, Yasawa and Exin Building Care Services, a self-employed initiative to assist the young school leavers.

Recently, I was an Accountant/Marketing Executive with BM Patel Hardware Limited in Nakavu, Nadi, before finally employed by the Fijian Elections Office as a Voter Awareness Assistant, the last before joining the FijiFirst candidates for the 2018 General Election.

Madam Speaker, I must admit that it was my voluntary activities and social consciousness, integrated with my dad's accomplishment and reputation that appealed to have won the day for me. In 2006, I was a Logistics Assistant to my dad, Peni Dakua, who was a Fiji Labour Party candidate for Nadroga/Navosa Serua Open Seat which he lost narrowly to his close relative and SDL Candidate, Mr. Jone Navakamocea. With the help of ADRA, my dad was involved with community hall, a couple of churches and a couple of water systems. My dad was also instrumental in the planning and negotiation of the construction of the Bainimarama/Vatutoko Primary School in Nubuyanitu village, Navosa.

Madam Speaker, in 2010, I was the Assistant Manager for the Lelean Memorial School U19 Rugby Team. Recently, I have been appointed as the Manager of the Fiji Indoor Volleyball Men's Team.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I pass on a belated congratulations to our national teams, the:

- Fiji Volleyball Men's Team and Officials for winning the Oceania Championship in New Caledonia on August 2018;
- Fiji Airways Fijiana 15s Team for defending its Oceania title; and
- Fiji Airways Drua Team and Officials and the Fiji Rugby Union, for winning the historical match against the French 15's Rugby Team.

That is the final goal of every sporting youth, to represent this country with a winning combination.

Madam Speaker, in 2017, I was also appointed to become a youth worker for Nadroga/Navosa Provincial Youth Council.

Madam Speaker, it is time for acknowledgement. May I repeat that my desire to be in this Government, simply to reciprocate the Government of the day with the leadership of Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, has been able to accomplish:

- A rapidly expanding economy.
- Modernise infrastructure.
- Greater opportunity for all citizens.
- Modernising education and health facilities.
- Grant for small businesses.
- Social welfare – pension, food voucher, bus fare assistance, \$1,000 assistance to mothers who give birth and earn less than \$30,000 a year.
- Rural electrification and new hospitals. Today the new subdivision hospital in Keiyasi is a pride of all the Navosa people. The rural electrification has passed Vatubalavu Village on its way up to Korolevu.
- The Sigatoka Valley Road has been sealed halfway, in no time it should be on its way up to Keiyasi. The East Bank, as stated in our Manifesto, will also be tarsealed.

I believe that this is a foretaste for things to come, and I want to be part of a progressive ideology and at the forefront of a modern Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I cannot fail but to acknowledge the people who had assisted me and the numerous voters whom I cannot possibly mention their names because of space constraints. The few I can mention:

- My campaign manager, Mr. Ropate Labalaba, Mrs. Emi Lewaravu, Aseri Warodo and Martha Mangal for assisting me in my door-to-door campaign.
- The *Tako* and *Lavo* throughout Fiji.
- The *Talatala* and *Vakatawa* of Korolevu and Nakoro, Navosa.
- The Tui Magodro and the people of the *Tikina* of Magodro.
- The *Tikina* of Navatusila, Noikoro, Nasikawa, Namataku and Bemana.
- Mr. Pilitati and family.

- the Banaban community in Rabi and Savutalele.
- Mr. and Mrs. Albert from Rotuma.
- The FijiFirst Party volunteers who worked tirelessly, not forgetting the FijiFirst Party Office staff at the headquarters and offices throughout Fiji.
- The Rokotakala's, Fangas and the Tuilaus of Suvavou Village.
- The Lomanibai (Suvavou) ex-workers children.
- Rupeni Racule, Poogie and the Kalekana Community.
- The Victor family and the Newtown Community.

Also, the FijiFirst Party 2018 fellow candidates, Mrs. Ela Sayed-Khaiyum, Nakeke's of Nailaga, Ba, Tokasa Takawa's family of Malake, Ra, Aunty Joana of Narewa, Rakiraki and Mr. Namosimalua and family of Vitawa, Rakiraki, Mr. and Mrs. Pita Tagavanaivalu of Australia, Sakealevu family of Lautoka, Kilikali Church members, Yavusania and Sikituru Church members, Rakiraki Central Church members, former teachers, staff and students of Fulton College and Lelean Memorial School, Makosoi Estate Community in Pacific Harbour, Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Fiji and its members, Talatala Asipeli Seu and Kauyaca family of Qaranivalu Road, Kalabu, Rokodiva's, Nanise Cakau and family, Ramokosoi and Kevetibau family of Nausori. To all my *naita* of the *Tikina* of Dawasamu and Sawakasa, Uncle Mosese and Aunt Iva Ravutu and my grandfather, Mosese Ravutu (Senior) of Labasa, Ratu Baka of Namada and the coastal villages of Navosa. Last but not the least, to the Dakua and Nagata extended family, *Yavusa* Rakavidi and the *Yavusa/Mataqali* Nabosewale, *vinaka vakalevu* for your unwavering support and prayers.

Madam Speaker, modern society is dominated and governed by noise, newspapers, radio and speed, so that humans have lost the sense of inner meditation of mature reflection and thoughtful action. Humans are trying to cover up the unease in their hearts, their spiritual emptiness, their defeats and their rebellion. We hope that God will become a priority in this august Parliament and pursue a common goal of making Fiji a better, prosperous and a happy nation for every Fijian. *Vinaka vakalevu*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. At this point we will suspend proceedings for lunch. Please note that lunch is provided to Honourable Members in the Big Committee Room.

Honourable Members of the Business Committee are reminded of their meeting now at the Small Committee Room to finalise the Order Paper for Friday. Parliament will resume at 2.20 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.38 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.31 p.m.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet colleagues, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament on both sides of the House, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: *Bula vinaka, ram ram, as-salamu alaykum* and good afternoon to you all.

I wish to start by acknowledging the Almighty God for the opportunity for me to serve our beloved nation in Parliament and as a Cabinet Minister for a second term. I also wish to acknowledge the unrelenting support from my wife, Bale, and my grandson for inspiring me all the way, my family, and my campaign team from the Honourable Prime Minister and the FijiFirst movement, and all those who have helped me to secure a seat in this august House.

It is by the grace of these fundamental pillars of support in my life that has brought me here today. No Member should take the roots of their support for granted, and in light of recent events, it is something we should all have, the humility to appreciate before throwing up our hands and walking out. It is our job, and our elected duty to do the work of this House inside this House.

Madam Speaker, may I also extend my own congratulations on your re-appointment as Speaker, and the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar's appointment as Deputy Speaker. I also congratulate the increasing number of women parliamentarians on both sides of the House. As a father and grandfather, witnessing the rise and empowerment of you and so many women in our great nation, brings great pride to my heart. The fact that my granddaughter will have so many doors open to her, doors that have been closed in Fiji for generations, is truly a remarkable achievement for Fiji.

Madam Speaker, while His Excellency the President's Address, much like the many doors being opened to women in our society, shows us a Fijian spirit of positivity and progress, I have been severely disappointed to see a much darker and deeply negative energy being channelled in the remarks of the Opposition.

Yesterday, we heard Honourable Members speaking of differences between the Fijian people on the basis of ethnicity. That is what they are wholly focussed on and instead of moving us forward, this drags us down as a nation.

On this side of the House, we are not constantly harping about ethnicity, not because we do not respect the *i Taukei* culture but because FijiFirst is not a single-issue, racially-driven Party.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Instead, we are focussed on what we have in common; a shared love for Fiji and a commitment to Fijian progress. And that focus on a much bigger picture is exactly what has brought us to where we are today.

Madam Speaker, this week Honourable Members of the Opposition have claimed that this Government is ignoring, or even oppressing indigenous people. As a proud *i Taukei* man, Madam Speaker, I find this to be not only dishonest, but the exact opposite of the truth.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Make no mistake, Madam Speaker, the rich and unique history of the *i Taukei* is reaching new heights because of the economic progress that the FijiFirst Government has achieved and it will be forever preserved in books and online precisely because this Government has

provided education and access to technology that will allow this. It is because of this progress of FijiFirst and the 2013 Fijian Constitution, that our culture, the culture of the *i Taukei* is more secure and more protected than ever.

Madam Speaker, let us not kid ourselves; without the last decade of progress, the brightest and most fortunate in Fiji would be leaving for greener pastures overseas. Today, Fijians of all ethnicities, including and especially the *i Taukei* are finding that the grass is very green right here at home.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Opportunities to achieve wealth or success in Fiji have never been greater.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Fiji's booming era of economic development under FijiFirst is the reason that a new, larger generation of *i Taukei* scholars and political leaders will exist to be the keepers and guardians of each indigenous community's unique culture, customs, traditions and language.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, let us rise above instilling fear of some victim mentality being spread by the Opposition. We are better than this. I see this in the Ministry of Forestry firsthand. All throughout Fiji, *vanua* are not being destroyed, as the Opposition would lead you to believe.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Very poor.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- They are being built up by our nation's economic development, and specifically by forward-thinking programmes and grants from the FijiFirst Government.

Little *i Taukei* boys and girls are benefiting from our prosperity more than ever, just like Indo-Fijian boys and girls and all the others who make up our nation's rich fabric. And as we march forward, they will continue to do so for generations, so long as we choose to continue to live in harmony instead of creating fear and chaos among each other.

The benefits of this harmonious existence can be seen, not only in Fijian society, but in the very forests that my Ministry oversees. Each forest is an ecosystem that thrives when the right balance is struck, and all of the many diverse parts of that ecosystem not only coexist, but help each other to grow stronger. Meanwhile, if things are thrown out of balance, the entire forest can suffer or even die out.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition would try to make you believe that FijiFirst does not believe that different types of plants or trees exist. That is not the case at all. We just know that things here in Fiji work best when we all work in harmony and in this metaphor, we just have a proven record in growing forests, while they have a record of burning them down. As they say, "The proof is in the pudding", Madam Speaker, and FijiFirst's track record speaks for itself. When it comes to the Ministry of Forestry, the success that we have accomplished continues to break new records.

Our forests are producing more timber, yielding higher profits, and paying out more money to landowning units. As you have already heard this week - but only from one side of the aisle - from ministry to ministry, all across the board, those types of achievements are undeniable. When you see a pattern of growth like this, it is not by some coincidence, it is the result of a responsible and visionary economic management.

I congratulate and salute our Prime Minister, Honourable Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, for everything Fiji has accomplished under his leadership. We owe him a great deal of gratitude for the economic and political stability that many take for granted today, and I pray that history should never forget that.

Madam Speaker, as my Ministry looks to the future, we will strive to be a leader in continuing this immense and undeniable progress of national development. We will expand the forestry industry to grow and evolve alongside Fiji's economy as a whole, providing wide-ranging support, from seedlings to new research and development, to protection from new environmental threats and fires.

We will support players of all sizes, from large operators like Fiji Pine to small and medium-sized enterprises, to new businesses started by the new generation of empowered craftsmen and entrepreneurs filling our communities. Most importantly, we will do so in a way that is forward-thinking and sustainable, striking a balance between the forestry sector's contribution to our economic growth and its cultivation to meet current and future needs. In this way, both our environment and economy will continue to flourish for many generations to come.

In this respect, the Ministry has successfully committed two protected forest areas to the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, one of which was recently dedicated by the Duke of Sussex, Prince Harry, during his visit just over a month ago. This initiative has strengthened Fiji's commitment to conservation and put the global spotlight on Fiji as a leader in preserving our precious forests because our forests, when managed responsibly, can yield great economic benefit. We must also value them as the lungs of our nation, the providers of the very air that gives us life.

Madam Speaker, allow me to respond to the comments made by Honourable Bulanauca yesterday on the pine industry. Madam Speaker, Honourable Bulanauca is out of touch with reality and probably his memory is stuck at the darker days of the 1990s and early 2000 when he was a Minister under the Qarase-led Government. Times have changed, however, their lies have not.

Madam Speaker, in this Honourable House today, I would like to tell Honourable Bulanauca, "Stop spinning your lies and embrace the truth. This is the only the honourable thing for you to do as a Member of Parliament." Honourable Bulanauca will better serve the people of Fiji in doing this.

Madam Speaker, allow me to state the facts where the pine industry is now, as compared to the 1990s and early 2000.

The pine industry was on the verge of collapse. Over the last seven years, the pine industry has been transformed and has resulted in record profits. This year, a whopping record profit of more than \$35 million is being forecasted.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- This is unheard of by a company that was making losses after losses.

The pine industry has paid debts of \$57 million in the last eight years. These debts include a European Investment Bank loan borrowed in 1986, plus debts to local financial institutions, like the Fiji Development Bank, Westpac and the Fiji National Provident Fund.

Today the Pine Group, for all intended purposes, is debt free. The only debt Fiji Pine is now repaying is the interest-free Government debt of \$7 million which was borrowed between 1990 to 2001. The money used to pay off the loan is real money, not paper or monopoly money, as the other side of the House have been saying.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- The loans have not been re-financed. They have been paid off from operational cash generations. Lease rental has been increased from \$4 per hectare in the late 1990s to \$13 per hectare today.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Stumpage has been increased from 3 percent in the late 1990s to 12 percent now.

Madam Speaker, in the late 1990s and early 2000, landowners had stopped giving their consent for the renewal of the expiring leases. Why, Madam Speaker? Because there was no returns to the landowners. This is the truth, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Fiji Pine has now rebuilt trust with the landowners. The renewal of 26,575.90 hectares of expiring leases in the last seven years is testimony to the rebuilding of that trust. In return, Fiji Pine has repaid the trust by giving returns and bonuses to the landowners.

Until 2012, landowners did not receive any returns from the operations and profitability of the Fiji Pine Group. Madam Speaker, 2013 was the first year where landowners received this return with a humble sum of \$347,440. This year, the return to landowners has increased to a whopping \$7 million.

Madam Speaker, following this record payout, Honourable Nawaikula, in his *Facebook* page came with another episode where he asked where the money came from? He has also falsely alleged that the company did not have audited accounts for many years. He further mentioned that the Management would be held responsible for giving these returns to the landowners.

Madam Speaker, the fact is that when Fiji Pine is doing well for its landowners, the Opposition cannot sleep well. They have to make up stories and lies to try to undermine the success of Fiji Pine.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Fiji Pine has replanted 14,764 hectares of land in the past seven years. By doing so, we are re-building the future of our landowners and their future generations. Prior to that, no replanting was done for over a decade. Fiji Pine and Tropik Woods Limited are the only entities in the Pacific Islands that are Forest Stewardship Council Certified for its sustainable and best forestry practices over the last five years.

Madam Speaker, this is international recognition by an independent body that will support the high market value price for our pine industry. What story can the Opposition make out of this?

Madam Speaker, today Fiji Pine Group's factory capital, with its subsidiaries in Tropik Wood Industries and Tropik Woods Products Limited, are state-of-the-art. The old and obsolete factory machine has been entirely replaced. Altogether, \$60 million worth of upgrading works at the new factory, such as the state-of-the-art sawmill line in Drasa was built with operational cash flows generated without a single cent of borrowing.

Madam Speaker, during the Election campaign, the Opposition spun new sets of lies by saying that this transformation of the pine industry was done through the US\$50 million climate fund grant.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Very poor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- That's how you got your votes.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Let me tell the Opposition categorically that Fiji Pine did not receive a cent of any grant to achieve this transformation. In fact, I checked with the Company yesterday and I was told that despite paying on the cost, yes, the Company still has \$50 million in term deposit. By the end of this year, they are forecasting to have about \$30 million cash at bank.

Yes, this transformation is unbelievable. It saddens me when the Opposition tries to diminish the phenomenal achievements of Fiji Pine through misinformation and lies. I beg the Opposition to celebrate this achievement. Let us give credit where credit is due for the sake of our future generations.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, my Ministry will rise to a challenge issued by His Excellency the President, and do our part to help make our nation greater for the benefit of all Fijians today, tomorrow, and far into the future. Each time we look at our forests, may we all be reminded of the many social, environmental and economic benefits of a system that works together in harmony in order to thrive.

May God bless our beloved nation, Fiji. Thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Joseph Nand to have the floor.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of this august House, members of the media and those watching the programme on television: first of all I wish to congratulate you on your re-appointment for another term. You have indeed been a source of inspiration, especially, for all the female citizens of this beloved nation. Madam Speaker, I am honoured to be seated here in the Fijian Parliament because of the verdict of this nation's populace who have voted for our FijiFirst Party. I congratulate our Honourable Prime Minister, the leader of the FijiFirst Party, for his dynamic and visionary leadership that led to a decisive victory.

At this juncture, I wish to thank many of my friends, namely: Mr. Avinesh Raj, Mr. and Mrs. Ramesh Chand, Mr. Mukesh Chand, Mrs. Nalini Devi, Mr. Imran Hussein, Mr. Poseci, Mr. Parmit Singh, Mr. Sayed Shah, Mr. and Mrs. Narend Kumar, Ms. Jasmeen Maharaj; my relatives, my wife, Vinita Nand and children, Justin and Chetan Nand, for their tremendous support during my campaign that propel me to Parliament from Maro Settlement of Sigatoka.

Madam Speaker, for the last 23 years, I have worked for the Ministry of Education as a teacher for Agricultural Science, Head of Department of Agricultural Science, Assistant Principal, and subsequently Vice Principal of various secondary schools in Fiji. I take this opportunity to thank those hardworking teachers - those who are serving now and those that have retired, school management committees and District Education Officers, for their service and support during my engagement in the school system over the last two decades.

Madam Speaker, person changes into memories and memories change into person. As I revisit my humble beginning in a small cane farming area of Kawakawa, Waiqele in Labasa, my father Shankara Swamy, was a labourer who was employed by farmers to harvest sugarcane and my mother, Mariam SantaWati Alapam, a domestic worker toiled in the hot Friendly Northern sun, to ensure that I receive the best of education. Due to intense financial difficulties, I was compelled to leave school at the middle of

Form Four, now Year 10, however, my parents did not give up. They worked out something and managed to put me back in school after a couple of weeks.

Madam Speaker, my journey into the noble profession started as a grant-in-aid secondary school teacher in the then small rural school, namely Seaqqa Secondary School, in the education district of Macuata, Bua. Later on, I gained temporary civil servant status before fully being absorbed in the teaching fraternity as a civil servant in 1999.

Madam Speaker, alongside my teaching engagements, I took ardent interest in football coaching and over the years have coached various secondary schools, district youth teams, clubs, religious body teams, and on a national level, the Districts of Nadi and Nadroga - the beautiful province.

Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that under able leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General, there has been striking progress under FijiFirst in the last four years.

Madam Speaker, let me briefly dwell on those areas in which my Ministry is involved in.

Madam Speaker, there has been the incorporation of various streams of knowledge into the curriculum. Fiji is one of the few countries worldwide which currently has a stand-alone focus on anti-corruption in our curriculum. This is important to continue to reinforce the era of transparency and accountability to which we are committed. This is supported by climate change, consumerism, the power of democracy and voting in elections; all to ensure that our future generations are active and engaged citizens.

Madam Speaker, the Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Board (TSLB) is a game changer as it now looks at students on the basis of need, combined with merit, and not on their ethnic background. This is equality in action and reinforces our commitment to the constitutional principle of being equal before the law and of non-discrimination.

Madam Speaker, through the Fiji Volunteer Service, some of our retired teachers have been able to serve the needs of our neighbours and to ensure that we benefit not only from their schemes, but also from the remittances from the country. We acknowledge that with our retirement age, we are able to present viable options for our teachers to continue their profession. I will do it in a different country while addressing the issue of youth unemployment.

Much has been said, Madam Speaker, about our free education, text books, milk and Weet-Bix, and transport assistance. We also need to acknowledge the empowerment of schools through the free education grant, capital expenditure provided by this FijiFirst Government. This is all aimed at ensuring an inclusive and supporting education system for students and teachers alike.

Madam Speaker, in order to support students who are good with their hands and can make major contributions to scarce skills in the various trades. The Technical College of Fiji were established in 2015. We are now working to ensure that standards are improved through the accreditation of courses provided and that all the trainers are accredited, to ensure qualifications of quality.

We have worked to improve the equipment on which trainings are developed, to ensure that there are top quality graduates from the Technical Colleges in Fiji, and more have been achieved by the FijiFirst Government, and we look forward to four more years of taking these and other initiatives forward for the benefit of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, I will now look at some of the achievements and engagements of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts.

In a meeting with the Permanent Secretary of Education, Heritage and Arts, I found out the following and it gives me great pleasure to address this Parliament on developments within the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts.

This is the largest Ministry in the Civil Service and presents a complex but important function in the lives of our young children, with a major impact on our current and future economies.

Madam Speaker, Fiji's reputation was enhanced earlier on in the year when the Honourable Attorney-General took on the role of Chair of the Council of Annual Education Ministers in Nadi and still the Honourable Minister is to adopt the Nadi Declaration which will guide the work of CCEN over the next two and a half years.

Fiji now has the honour to chair the meeting of Ministers over this period and will monitor the implementation of the Nadi Declaration, while also pushing the Ministry to up its game in that period.

The Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Baroness Patricia Scotland praised the organisation of the event and Team Fiji really put its foot front forward under the leadership of the Honourable Attorney-General.

Madam Speaker, later in the year, the Commonwealth theme continuing, Fiji rose to the challenge and is the first Pacific nation to contribute to the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan and donated funds and set the pace for other Pacific nations and for small islands states to follow suit. This one time contribution will help to create four Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarships for Climate Resilience and demonstrate our ongoing commitment to climate change issues, particularly as the Honourable Prime Minister leads the handover of range to call in for COP24.

The four scholarships will allow FNU to host a student from the Caribbean, to study its Interdisciplinary Masters in Climate Change Mitigation and Resilience and the USP student to study Masters in Climate Change. The other two scholarships will allow students from the Pacific to study at the University of West Indies. This initiative is facilitated by the authorisation of the Commonwealth University and we will no doubt ensure that small islands states are able to bring ideas, to bring home to address climate changes in all its forms.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry also hosted the International network of Libraries Oceania Conference which brought together over 100 of our colleagues from 15 countries to develop a Plan of Action for Libraries in the Pacific. And in doing so, to demonstrate the important contribution of libraries to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. There is no doubt that libraries are integral to support learning of our students and adults and the eight goals will help guide our schools and community libraries to develop later.

Madam Speaker, in other areas, the upgrade of facilities for the Fiji Museum continues and this is important to preserve our rich cultural history.

The Department of Heritage and Arts continues to work with the National Heritage Trust to present and promote Levuka as a world heritage site. Our National Archives also continue to provide historical reports reminding us of important events in years and decades gone by.

Madam Speaker, this year, the Ministry is taking over the payment of salaries for Early Childhood Care and Education Teachers. These teachers are now formally contracted by the Ministry and over 1,400

teachers now enjoy normal conditions of service for any civil servant, including leave. We know that the introduction of this was not without problems but the Ministry is now who in much better position today than it was this time last year. All these appointments have been done through OMRS.

Madam Speaker, as part of the modernisation programme, the Ministry continues to develop the Fiji Education Management Information System. This now allows online applications to be submitted for posts advertised to register for teacher registration through the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority to apply for leave. This has led to the requests from Vanuatu, Samoa and Solomon islands. They use the famous architectures so that they are able to collect and analyse data for informed decision-making. In the near future, this will be further develop as an app. We will investigate releasing more information publicly as part of increasing transparency.

Madam Speaker, let me dwell on the role of parents in creating a literate nation which our Government is vigorously pursuing. Parents need to work hand in hand with the Ministry of Education and teachers in order to ease the process of educating their children. They need to make sure that they, as parents, provide ample guidance and supervision of their children outside school hours as in my experience as a teacher, I have found out the level of discipline and positive attitude in students have very much declined. Therefore, the parents are required to create intense family bonding and spend ample time with their children so that values such as respect, positive attitude, discipline and responsibility are inculcated in their children.

Madam Speaker, let me narrate a very short story that has great significance into the efforts of nation building, and story goes something like this.

As he walked past the cane fields, noticing the thin trays, he became thirsty. He took out the *bilo* from his bag and reached for the nearby creek to scoop some water to quench his thirst before continuing the usual journey to his home. As he scooped the *bilo* of water, ready to drink, he realised that the water in the *bilo* was muddy. He waited patiently for the sediments in the water to settle down before he could get the clear water to drink. He realised that the muddy water in the *bilo* was going through a process of sedimentation.

Madam Speaker, our nation, under the guidance of our Honourable Prime Minister, is also going through a process of sedimentation. As far as the development aspect is concerned, it will take some time before all areas in our beloved nation are fully developed through the various initiatives and development projects. It can also be said that the sedimentation is taking place in people's minds.

Madam Speaker, that is the problem with the Opposition. The Honourable Members of the Oppositions cannot digest that they have actually lost the Elections - that is the problem with them. Madam Speaker, I think it pains them very much. I want to remind Honourable Opposition Members that we have two doctors here, who can ease your pain. I ask Honourable Members to actively get involved in saving the nation's population so that the process of sedimentation is much quicker. We must constantly remind ourselves that we are here for a purpose and let us do this duty honestly and faithfully. May the Lord guide and bless Fiji. Thank you for your patience.

(Applause)

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

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament: *Bula Vinaka, RamRam, Namaskar, As-salamu alaykum*, and a very good afternoon to you all.

Madam Speaker, I am humbled and privileged to be given the second term by the FijiFirst Leader and the supporters to serve as a Member of Parliament and Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services.

Madam Speaker, at the outset, congratulations to you on your reappointment as Speaker of the Parliament. Congratulations also to our Honourable Prime Minister for being appointed as the Honourable Prime Minister of Fiji. Sir, you are a great motivator to us all and through your able leadership, we are able to progress with excellence in building a better Fiji for all.

Madam Speaker, I wish to also take this opportunity to thank our hard working Attorney-General and Minister for Economy for his great motivation and support during the 2018 National Elections. Congratulations to the newly sworn-in Ministers, Assistant Ministers and Members of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, my sincere appreciation goes to each and every one who supported and voted for the FijiFirst Party. Every individual who supported the FijiFirst Party and promoted the ideologies in your communities deserve credit. Their contributions to progress our beloved nation forward is humbly acknowledged.

Madam Speaker, may I at this juncture, acknowledge the unwavering support given to me by the hard working campaign team, including campaign managers and volunteers, who stood beside me during my campaign drive. I would not have made it back to Parliament without their tireless support, effort, commitment and dedication throughout the long days and late nights of campaigns. While I thank everyone involved, I wish to make mention of my campaign managers, namely:

- my brother - Sonu Vinay Nath;
- my brother- in-laws - Anil Prasad, Lagesh Prasad of Popo's Farm and Dhirend Prasad of Waituri;
- my cousins - Ashish and Tarun of Waituri;
- Ajay Prasad, Mrs. Ram Pati of Ram Pati & Sons, Satya of Koronivia;
- Deo Raj (Bijju), Raven and Anna Bappu of Baulevu;
- Mahen Chaudhry and family of Sawani;
- Sylvester family and *Turaga ni Koro* of Naboutini;
- Varun Maharaj, Vinod Maharaj and Salesh of Raralevu;
- Mannu of Vuci;
- Mrs. Janoop Sharma family of Muaniweni;
- Mrs. Binesh Prasad family of Nasi;
- Sheik family of Verata, Wailevu;
- Naren, Ronald and family of Votualevu;
- Brother Ravi and Sastri Ji from Laxmi Narayan Temple;
- Mohammed Shaheen and Umesh of Nadi;
- Jaywant Pratap, Jairam, Jagdish Prasad, Dharmen Singh, Umeshwar Ram, Koroqaqa Sports Club; and
- Everyone living in Koroqaqa, Baulevu, where I hail from.

Madam Speaker, I firmly believe in the principles and policies of the FijiFirst Government. I am optimistic that what the FijiFirst represents is a symbolic reference point towards national building by all Fijians. The journey to success has been initiated by our FijiFirst leader through the introduction of key policies in the areas of education, health, infrastructure, social schemes and economy.

The introduction of the good policy schemes need genuine commitment, dedication and a mindset to serve everyone. These policies have been implemented and have positively impacted society.

Madam Speaker, the ideology of uniting and treating everyone equal through fiscal initiatives need strong leadership and courage. It is easier to build barriers and split communities through politics rather than promote and support common citizenry, in particular when we have been denied of this fundamental right.

Madam Speaker, this august Parliament should not be swayed with people of self-interest, but rather we should support those who are here to serve the people of Fiji. As a Member of Parliament, I feel we have an essential duty to genuinely promote equality in governance and service delivery to create social and economic opportunities. I strongly feel that our duty is to stay away from petty politics and the conventional politics approach of divide and rule.

Globally, Madam Speaker, mankind is progressing at a rate beyond people's imagination. We must forge ahead, implementing and making universal agendas head on. This is to ensure that our youth are in a better position to forge this nation ahead.

Madam Speaker, as I reflect our achievement over the last four years, I thank our FijiFirst Leader for the foresight in introducing education, health, infrastructure and social schemes. During the FijiFirst Fund Day, I shared my personal hardship that I went through during my school days. Due to financial constraints, I was unable to further my education.

Madam Speaker, the younger generation is privileged, the Tertiary Education Loans Scheme (TELS) has given them an opportunity to further their tertiary education. My plea to the young generation is to act responsibly and establish a career path through Government initiatives. Our children are our future and their ability to strike at the right path to advance their career shall be a win to our nation. We are certainly on an educational revolution track through which literacy will become paramount in decision-making without any conditions.

Madam Speaker, on this note, His Excellency's Address during the Parliament opening session assured that the investment in the Fijian Education System will continue. This is highly recommendable and should be accepted with pride. It shows that as a nation, we treasure education and that the Government is fully committed in ensuring no stone is left untouched in progressing a child's dream in our country.

His Excellency also summed up our economy track performance as being historic, given the record nine-year economy growth. Madam Speaker, I can say with confidence that growth rate will continue to be positive under the able leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister.

Economic growth spills benefits everyone and develops a better foundation for the future generation. For this reason, Madam Speaker, every right-minded person should support economic growth and support policies that foster economic expansion.

I take this opportunity to thank our leaders in not only stabilising but progressing our economy. Some 30 years ago, I remember as a youth that to borrow from the bank was difficult and one factor being the high interest rate. There is little or no progress for our family or an individual without borrowing.

Madam Speaker, I wished the cost of borrowing 30 years ago were as low as today. This would have meant I could have invested more in the Fijian economy as a youth. The decrease in the cost of borrowing over the recent years through sound policies itself can be classed as economic freedom.

Madam Speaker, His Excellency's assurance that Government shall continue to incentivise our economy shows the will and commitment of our leaders. The support to all economic players from corporate to micro-business, including juice sellers, bottle collectors, barbeque sellers, corn sellers and

garment workers, to name a few could benefit as low taxation has been creating the right signal for investment.

Madam Speaker, to transform the lives of all Fijians, His Excellency highlighted the modernity of our infrastructure to a quality that matches anything you will find overseas in developed nations.

Madam Speaker, I wish to put on record that I disagree with comments raised by Honourable Bulitavu. He highlighted two critical issues that needed to be corrected:

1. Our existing infrastructure has been meted out on band-aid solution; and
2. The new infrastructure development is of very low and poor quality, compromising our standards.

Madam Speaker, this Government has always championed and will continue to champion the need to provide infrastructure that is sustainable and accessible to all. Since day one, we have always been adamant.

Madam Speaker, Government increased the budget, changed policies, implemented reforms and committed to the replacement of aged infrastructure. Some of those infrastructures are very old, they should have been changed in the 1980s, 1990s and Year 2000. This was never done.

Madam Speaker, the replacement of aging infrastructure does not happen overnight. It should have happened in 1980 and 1990. Honourable Bulitavu, we are not into the business of doing band-aid solution or quick-fixes, we are here to do a job and to do it well.

Madam Speaker, one just has to take a look at what has been done by the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) over the past years. The Government has put taxpayers' money to good use. Some of the major projects have been:

1. Nadi Airport to Martintar Road Upgrade which was a top-notch project.
2. Denarau Bypass, which has given an uplift to the properties.
3. Labasa to Nabouwalu Highway Upgrade, it was never touched.
4. Tarsealing of the Buca Bay Road and the Nabouwalu to Dreketi Highway.
5. We, of course, will commence the four-lane improvement of the Queen's Road between Nadi to Lautoka next March or April.
6. We will, in our term, also tarseal the East Bank of the Sigatoka River.

Madam Speaker, I must also say that the commitment of Government to improve and modernise the Fiji Road Network was also demonstrated in the last seven years. The Government had provided six-fold increased budget in terms of road allocation.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Anare Jale highlighted his concerns regarding the road conditions and streetlights in Tovata and Kalabu, the need for proper bus stops and the condition of Lakeba Wharf. I wish to reassure the Honourable Anare Jale that Government is committed to address these issues through its budgetary provision granted to the FRA.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V. NATH.- You read the budget booklet that was given to you.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V. NATH.- That is the problem! They do not read, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. NATH.- He would have already seen the change but perhaps in his enthusiasm, forgot to mention that.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Bulitavu's second point regarding standards, historically, work carried out were done according to outdated and inappropriate standards. That is totally wrong, Madam Speaker, I do not agree.

Madam Speaker, the reality is, the FRA has worked to a rationalised different standards and specifications, and now operates with a unified document as used in Australia or New Zealand. This is in terms of water, and the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) has adopted Australia's Water Service Association of Australian Standards (WSAA).

Having said that, Madam Speaker, at no time has Government compromised the infrastructure standard. In fact, we have worked diligently to ensure that this infrastructures are resilient and accessible to all. This is the role of Government being responsible to the people of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Viliame Gavoka made a comparison of the Government's investments in the International Golf Tournament at Natadola and the accessibility to water and water services by the surrounding communities. Furthermore, the Honourable Anare Jale made reference to non-accessible to proper water supply and sanitation services. Madam Speaker, Government is committed to provide water and sanitation to all ordinary Fijians, no matter where they live.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. V. NATH.- The beauty of the Government, Madam Speaker, is that we have certainly embedded this in our Constitution, which they do not read. They are sitting here because of this Constitution.

They have contested the Election because of this Constitution and I will read it for them.

(Laughter)

HON. V. NATH.- Section 35 says the Right to housing and sanitation and Section 36 says the Right to adequate food and water.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. NATH.- You read this, this is the book!

(Laughter)

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, the National Development Plan (NDP), we have set a target that 100 percent of Fiji's urban and peri-urban population will have access to clean and safe drinking

water within the next few years. Similarly, for the sanitation sector, 70 percent of the population is targeted to have access to the centralised sewerage system within the next 20 years.

Madam Speaker, Government has invested a lot into our water and wastewater sector. Over the last 10 years, the budget allocations for WAF increased more than 100 percent. This is a good indicator of how serious Government is prepared to develop Fiji water and the wastewater sector.

Madam Speaker, todate, WAF currently provides quality drinking water and wastewater services to over 164,000 residents and non-residential metered customers, reaching over 700,000 people nationwide. This is equivalent to a national coverage of 78 percent who have access to clean and safe, drinking water and 25 percent have access to centralised sewerage system.

Madam Speaker, the problem is that, they fail to read the book which we give. The Budget book is very well prepared, they should read, it is all there. Again because they know that the television is working, they want to show the people who were voted for them that this is their intention, but, no, it is already in the system.

Madam Speaker, Government will continue with our infrastructure upgrading programme and we are committed to implementing and building a reliable and resilient infrastructure for the modern Fiji.

To conclude, I wish to dedicate my win to my lovely wife Kiman, my two children Kaashvi and Krish, my wonderful mother Lakshmi Nath and all those who have supported and voted for me, Madam Speaker. Thank you, *dhanyavaad* and *vinaka vakalevu*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu to take the floor.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister (who is absent), the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, my colleagues Honourable Members of Parliament, guests in the gallery, families and voters listening to the radio and watching proceedings on television.

I am indeed honoured to rise with all my sinful heart to address this august House with my maiden speech. I appreciate the Presidential Address in the opening of Parliament 2018-2019.

I must also thank my family, my siblings, community chiefs of the *Tikina* of Udu, Namuka, Dogotuki, Nadogo, Labasa and supporters throughout the nation and abroad for the great support they rendered to me. A big *vinaka vakalevu* to all my faithful voters and special thanks to my Campaign Manager, Timoci Bilitavu for his time and effort during the campaign period. I must also thank all who rendered their support in whatever way that contributed to this achievement. A special thanks to the Vunibua Youth Club of Namuka located on the farmland in Seavaci, Vaturova in the province of Cakaudrove who stood by me offering ideal assistance during my campaign. I give credit to Joji, Ratu Meli, Pati and Sami and other boys for supporting me, not forgetting farmers and vehicle owners; Misi Pote, Isireli, Tui Benau and Semisi from Dogotuki who offered great assistance.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank SODELPA team under the guidance of the Party President *Na Turaga Bale na Tui Cakau*, Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, the *Marama Bale Na Roko Tui Dreketi*, Honourable Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa, and party leader Honourable Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka and the management team. A big *vinaka vakalevu* to you all for your spiritual and moral support.

Madam Speaker, I praise my God, the Father, the Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for His gracious love and power that has enabled me to overcome days with various events and anointing me this image to pursue this career as my destination.

Madam Speaker, I wish to share my views over the identity that is somewhat created by God. In the beginning when human beings were created, we were created together with our respective ethnic groups, culture and traditions and our ancestors inherited designated lands to live on. The *i Taukei* are the first settlers here in Fiji which is their designated land with due respect to the ethnic group we belong to.

Madam Speaker, my intention of driving this issue is to make us more understand of our ethnic group rights. We, the indigenous of Fiji will continue to stand by that truth and will make all effort to protect our right.

Madam Speaker, I request the Government of the day to reconsider their views over our stand and understand and respect our values. Once we understand those values and respect the rights, I am certain we will create unity amongst ethnic groups over the nation.

Madam Speaker, I am originally from Macuata in the North and voted by the people of Macuata. I will continue to raise issues concerning development needs in the rural areas in the North. I give credit to the Government for upgrading the Nukuserelagi Road in the *Tikina* of Dogotuki. Special thanks to former Member of Parliament, Mr. Parmod Chand for providing effective bus service to this route for the people of Udu, Dogotuki, Namuka and Nadogo.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Madam Speaker, the three-kilometre farm road recently constructed at Seavaci for Namuka Youth Farmers is a motivating factor and will encourage Namuka youths in utilising their farm land. However, gravel and culvert are needed to make it more accessible for Namuka youth farmers.

Despite this assistance by the Government, the following areas need road access in the North.-

- The *Tikina* of Udu from Lagi to Vunikodi serving the *Tikina* of Udu and the *Tikina* of Tawake
- Access road from Lakeba Village to Nabubu Village in the *Tikina* of Namuka
- Access road to the village of Naduru, the capital of the *Tikina* of Dogotuki
- Access road to Sogobiau, the capital village of the *Tikina* of Nadogo.

Madam Speaker, road is needed in the rural areas in the North to provide access for rural farmers utilising their farm land. Having access for rural farmers will encourage commercial farming that will enhance economic achievement.

Madam Speaker, once again Labasa Town is crucial for development in the Northern Division. It is our main commercial centre and again I request the Government to reconsider a master plan for Labasa Town development.

There is a need for the relocation of the market and the bus stand. The present site is very congested.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Due to the current site, a woman was crushed to death by a bus at the bus station in Labasa a few months ago. We are asking the Government for a second by-pass road to ease traffic jam in and out of Labasa Town.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Nothing there in the budget.

Madam Speaker, rural development is crucial for the nation. We note the success of the Kibbutz system in Israel. I would like the same in the North so we need to utilise the land and sea resources.

Madam Speaker, again I request the Government to reconsider the initiative to revive the operation of the Wainikoro Fishing Co-operative. This Co-operative is to provide opportunities for business entity for the *Tikina* of Nadogo, Namuka, Dogotuki, Udu and the *Tikina* of Tawake in the province of Cakaudrove. The facilities at Wainikoro would enhance economic productivity for the community and the nation as a whole.

I hope the Honourable Minister for Fisheries would initiate an effective plan on how to revive the Wainikoro Fishing Co-operative and make use of the facilities that was funded by the Japanese Government and managed by the Fisheries and Cooperative Department.

Madam Speaker, the *Tikina* of Nadogo, Namuka, Dogotuki, Udu and the *Tikina* of Tawake in the province of Cakaudrove use boats as their means of transportation most of the time. This is because of the lack of road access, unavailability of vehicles and inadequate service of buses in the respective areas. There is a need for improving navigation by installing proper beacons to guide sailors. Most of the beacons has been destroyed and during high tide the damaged beacon would have submerged and caused a great threat to travellers. The issue has been raised through *tikina* meeting to Government representatives but nothing has eventuated. The present state of beacons is causing a high risk of accident to travellers.

I propose, Madam Speaker, beacon reflectors to be installed to enable clear visibility for boat masters. My concern is that the *Tikina* of Nadogo, Namuka, Dogotuki, Udu and the *Tikina* of Tawake in the province of Cakaudrove use boats as its usual means of transportation as I had early mentioned.

Madam Speaker, several villages along the coastal area are experiencing the effect of climate change in the form of coastal erosion. We need seawalls and site reclamation in coastal villages in the *Tikina* of Udu, Namuka, Nadogo and Dogotuki, more specifically the villages of Salevukoso, Delaivadra and Nabubu in the *Tikina* of Namuka, Sogobiau and Kavewa in the *Tikina* of Nadogo.

Madam Speaker, as suggested a Green Revolution, we need interaction with the people in the rural areas on how well we can utilise our land resources. We need effective plans from stakeholders in consultation with landowners and capital be made available to assist in developing their resources.

We need to take into account all concerns about land from resources owners whether minute or trivial in view of the Government. Landowners, resource owners contribute to development by virtue of their ownership and this has to be appreciated and taken care of from time to time. It will create unity and understanding on thorny issues and appreciates that we are different culturally but are one for the nation.

Madam Speaker, it is a fact that we have our cultural differences and have to iron out these issues for fairness and equity for the benefit of all to move forward as a nation. No one should be left out, not the resource owners.

Madam Speaker, our peacekeepers consist of loyal members of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, Fiji Police Force, Fiji Corrections Services and relevant ministries deployed for peacekeeping duties to the Middle East and other parts of the world. They are the frontline contingent of the country contributing dearly over the economy of this nation in the past 40 years. Despite the risk, their contribution and loyalty, they are being deprived of reasonable reward and allowances.

As I am the Assistant Opposition spokesman for the Ministry of Defence, I request the Government to reconsider the following:

1. To increase daily allowances for officers on peacekeeping duties; and
2. To reconsider a reasonable amount to be reimbursed to retired officers who are had served in peacekeeping duties.

Madam Speaker, in this term of Parliament, I would encourage more development and capacity building in the communities in the North in order to enhance their lives.

Madam Speaker, I will allow myself to learn and ensure that the reward goes to my voters and the people of the North that I serve and may overlap to voters throughout our nation.

Madam Speaker, to conclude we need self-realization about Fiji and to map out its future that takes into account the concerns I highlighted above:

1. Our indigenous rights and its values to be recognised; and
2. The empowerment of resource owners to manager their own resources.

Once again, Madam Speaker, the Secretary-General and your team, my colleagues the Honourable Members of Parliament, I wish you all the very best in this term of Parliament and I wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy new year. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

(Applause)

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Do not get too agitated.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Congratulations, Madam Speaker, for coming back to us, congratulations to the Honourable Prime Minister and to the Honourable Ministers appointed on the other side in the Cabinet, as well as to the Government side for winning, but very small.

(Laughter)

Having said that I am really disappointed we lost the Election because we should have been on the other side to do a lot of goods. There are so many things that the nation needs and it is in a very bad state. The health is totally in a bad state. It has been 12 years and you cannot even improve the incidences of NCDs. Agriculture we were promised about the revolution. You know what, if we were there, we will end all these. We will end the despair of the civil servants, we will announce to them that we will take the way the despair of three-year contracts that is taking away the workers' right. It is evil to impose a three-year contract.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Five-year contract!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Three years or five years, if we were there, we would have lumped all these, all these, will go out.

The education sector is in shambles.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- All that they can show is infrastructure, no quality. We have reached the one billion dollar mark in budget for education, but where is it? The outcome is what is important to see is, the results are going down and you are hiding that in your annual accounts.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- They do not understand that.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So we were going to change all that, but we can wait. So we want to tell the civil servants out there, "Very sorry, you will have to wait with us again. We will have to suffer the despair for another four years."

And worst of all, the Fiji Pine landowners. The Honourable Minister should know, he was the Chairman of the Fiji Pine Trust and he should know the extent of the exploitation that the Government and the company was doing to the poor landowners. He should know that! But he decided to join the fat cats, he decided to join the bandwagon, and now he is criticising that. You know what?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He is delivering to the landowners, that is what he is doing.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- They are continuing to feed them scraps. If we were there, on that side of the House, we will announce to them, "You now will become the owners of the company."

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Honourable Member should address his comments to the Honourable Speaker rather than to the Minister...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- ...just to make sure that you are aware of that.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me just repeat that, if we were there on that side, we will tell the poor pine landowners, "We will end feeding you with scraps and we will make you owners of that company as was promised to them by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara." That is what they should be working towards, not feeding them with scraps.

To continue, Madam Speaker, with humility, I thank God for the life of everyone in this House, including your good self, that side, this side, Jeanette, Mrs. Namosimalua and even those who are outside. And because God is good, we should always thank God.

I thank Mili, my wife, for keeping me focussed.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, you too! Everyone!

I wish to thank especially, my campaign team managers - Gilbert Vakalalabure and Pita Naroba, both of Natewa Village. But most of all, I wish to thank each and every individual, the 5,187 individuals, who voted and trusted me to be their voice in Parliament. Madam Speaker, 4,206 are from Vanua Levu and Cakaudrove West, especially from the *vanua vakaturaga o Cuku*, Teiteiciva, Saqani, Dawato, Vaturova, Wairiki, Wailevu and Natewa.

Madam Speaker, allow me to mention the names of those villages with gratitude. Thank you very much to all those from the villages of Yasawa, Nagasauva, Tawake, Wainiika, Wainigadru, Naboutini, Vuniwai, Natuvu, Lakeba, Biaugunu, Saqani, Navetau, Malake, Vanuavou, Yasawa, Togaviti, Korotasere, Balawaviriki, Vaturamulo, Seavaci, Baleyaga, Nayarabale, Satulaki, Suweni, Matalolo, Dawara, Keka, Natuvu ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, there is a lot, very good people, not like you.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... Valeni, Naiqaqi, Natua, Vunidawamoli, Nakasa, Dreketi, Wailevu, Vativa, Naloaloo, Nabalebale, Nukubolu, Nakawaga, Bagata, Vunivesi, Naisali ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- There are good people here, unlike you.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ...Nadavaci, Vusasivo, Natewa, Dawa, Vusa, Buca, Tukavesi, Nadogo, Valevoni, Nacula, Batiri and Lekutulevu. They can be watching there, somewhere here, wave to them.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, there are 62 villages that I visited in the three weeks of campaigning and stopping to sleep in many of their villages for the nights. Those are the very highlight of my campaign, sleeping in these villages and joining these poor villagers.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- To the 498 individuals who voted for me in the Central Division, thank you for your trust and mandate. I thank also the 163 individuals who voted for me in the Eastern Division and 229 in the West and 93 by postal votes.

So to all of you, 5,187 individuals, thank you very much for your vote. You are the only reason I am up standing here in this House.

Madam Speaker, let me now look at the Election results and the message that it is telling us.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Deliver your promise.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I cannot deliver the promise now, I told them that we can wait even 100 years.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But when you say the truth, the truth will eventually prevail.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You a traitor because you know what the truth is and you enjoy to go against it.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So from the result, Madam Speaker,

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Withdraw that, Madam Speaker.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I withdraw it. Please, do not interject, do not disturb me.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- A Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think that is disrespectful and needs to be withdrawn.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- I know you have withdrawn, can you just withdraw again so they can hear.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He called me a liar.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, he said, "Lies".

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I withdraw, genuinely.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So, Madam Speaker, from the results, to me the first clear message from the result is that, the public does not want that side of the House.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You do not even have a majority.

(Honourable Members interject)

HONOURABLE MEMBER.- Prove it, prove it!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- 50.02 percent, you should be ashamed, you should be humbled by that. You should no longer be arrogant.

HONOURABLE MEMBER.- We are a team.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And 147 votes.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- 147.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So you are all a "Mr. 147".

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And they are here hanging by the skin of their teeth.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Only because of all the freebies and the handouts like the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the Agriculture Care, what is that?

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Home Care.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- He talks about the elephant in the room.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The bus card top up care, the ITLTB care and many other types of care.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- \$100 million.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And add to that, Madam Speaker, the use of Government resources in all types of roadshows. You cannot even get a majority still.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You should have had 51 seats.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So where are the 51 seats? You become smaller.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You know, all these things were used by Government to buy votes but the public are much clever now.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Considering the fact that there was no clear majority with only 50.02 percent, not even a majority.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- 147 votes.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, with that result, the other side of the House must be humble and act accordingly and do not ever show arrogance in this House, very small.

The second thing that the Electioneers are telling me is that voting is still very much along racial lines. The Indo-Fijians, for their security, voted for FijiFirst, abandoning NFP and Labour. All native Fijians, with the exception of those 147 or so, voted for FijiFirst, SODELPA because they value their culture, tradition, group rights, that is currently under attack by the FijiFirst Government.

The results tell me that the public out there are not embracing the FijiFirst policy of equal citizenry that is devoid of ethnicity. Inasmuch as the Government wants to impose those ideals through laws that dissipate and terminate the ethnic group rights and identity of native Fijians and policies that forbid ethnic benchmarking, the Election results tell me that the public out there still feel safe and secure within the ethnic group, and why not, Madam Speaker? Because the United Nations (UN) is telling us that your ethnicity is your human right. As a matter of fact, the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) confirmed that indigenous ethnic group rights have the right to maintain their ethnic and cultural group identity. Accordingly, UNDRIP has confirmed up to 57 such rights, otherwise known as group rights that are essential to keeping and protecting the group together under its distinct identity.

Unfortunately, these are the very things that the FijiFirst Government must remove from the *i Taukei* to destroy and dissipate their group structure and identity. These are now being imposed on native Fijians against their will under the FijiFirst sunset clause policies that are manifested under a total of 23, what I call “sunset laws” and “sunset policies” and fortified ultimately by the 2013 sunset constitution.

The way forward, Madam Speaker, is not equal citizenry achieved through the removal of ethnicity but unity in diversity respecting the group rights of each ethnic group, not multiculturalism achieved through the removal of ethnic group rights but multiculturalism respecting the integrity of each ethnic group.

Madam Speaker, let me now turn to His Excellency the President's Address. By convention and tradition, the speech is normally intended to set out the Government's programme for the following year in a very objective and impartial manner, but His Excellency's speech was nothing like that. Instead, it is like a big brother talking down to his subjects on how to behave and keeping in line, somewhat like animal farm. Take Page 6, for example, where His Excellency the President asserted that big brother attitude saying, and I quote:

“I warned earlier this year that it would be tempting to descend into demagoguery. I warned against race betting, appeals to ethnic identity and efforts to divide our people by telling lies. It pains me to say that some parties and politicians failed to heed my warning. We saw a political discourse descend into dangerous and hateful rhetoric, particularly, on the topic of indigenous rights.”

Madam Speaker, I want to say for the record that the one message I explained to all villagers I visited during my campaign is that, the Fiji Government is attacking their ethnic group rights under its

so-called sunset measures that are comprised in each of the sunset laws, sunset policies and the 2013 sunset constitution, and I do not think I am lying to them on that.

Madam Speaker, I said to them that the sunset clause, under its author is calling for the removal of their native, cultural autonomy or the *vanua* and by that, the removal of their group rights that are essential for keeping the group together and bonded under its distinct ethnic identity.

Madam Speaker, I said to them that the reason why the FijiFirst Government wants to impose its sunset policies is because it claims cultural autonomy institutionalises racism, and therefore the need to remove it altogether, along with any form of ethnic benchmarking or referencing.

Madam Speaker, I said to them that sunset policies have their footprints in all aspects and policies of the FijiFirst Government, including the 23 laws that are specifically targeted to terminate, dissipate and water-down their indigenous rights.

Madam Speaker, I said to them that included in this is the 2013 Constitution that removed the rights of the Great Council of Chief (GCC) to appoint the President and also removed their right of prior consent before changes are made to their native land laws affecting native land, VKB and registration.

So, it is totally unfortunate and that is why I am calling it the “2013 Sunset Constitution”. It was central in the Constitution the removal of those rights that were there before, that were there from the Deed of Cession, that was the reason why the high chiefs that we listened to give this land to Great Britain because they needed the protection of that and you felt it in your right to remove it.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And finally, Madam Speaker, I explained to them that the sunset laws and policies are wrong.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What sunset laws?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Alright, let me dwell into that.

In 1988, the first of this was - we go into chronology.

The 2007 Great Council of Chiefs suspension and regulation, that is one of them. What right did that interfere with? It is the indigenous right to maintain that cultural institution. It is the indigenous right to get prior consent before changes are made.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Then you have the 2008 Great Council of Chiefs (Amended) Regulation. When they cannot do anything to the GCC, they amended the membership so that they can interfere with the independence. One of the indigenous rights of the indigenous people is to maintain their institute independently but that amendment allowed the Government to nationalise and decide who should be the Chairman of the Great Council of Chiefs and who should be the members of that.

And it has done the same through other amendments to the provincial councils. The Government decides who the Chairman is, the Government decides who the members are and it has done the same to the iTaukei Land Trust Board.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Now, the Government, who is sitting as Chairman of iTLTB. Now the Government interferes with their right to run their resources, to manage their resources independently. So, all these are there and culminated in the termination of the GCC. All these interfered with the indigenous rights to protect their cultural institutions, to have the independent management of their institutions, and you are asking me, what are these for?

HON. MEMBER.- What sunset laws?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am asking you especially, as an indigenous Member of Parliament. If you know this and you still choose to be part of that; what can I say? What can I say to you? They are using you. They are putting you up as a native Member, including they are using the face of the Prime Minister, a native face to undergo this.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, let me now go to the 1987 and 2000 *coups*.

I am sad that His Excellency had denounced only the 1987 and 2000 *coups* but not the 2006 *coup*. I am sad because we are all legislators here and we should therefore abide to the maximum that no one is above the law.

A *coup* is a *coup* is a *coup*, committed by the forceful removal of a democratic government and 1987, 2000 and 2006 all come within that definition.

I was hoping that His Excellency would be impartial and fair to suggest reconciliation by insisting that

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, we are not able to hear you, when you are all quite, then we will give you some extra time.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I was hoping that His Excellency would be impartial and fair to suggest reconciliation by insisting that both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition make public apologies from the floor of this Chamber to the victims who were affected by their actions and to the public at large for the devastation done to the country. Now, it would be good that they join to apologise from the floor of this Parliament.

I know that the Honourable Leader of Opposition has visited each and every individual, victim who suffered as a result of his actions in the 1987 *coup*, even travelling overseas to do so and I am sure he is ready to make a public apology in the floor of this Parliament. But can the Honourable Prime Minister bring himself down to that level and to admit that he committed a serious wrong and mistake and apologise to these victims, especially the CRW wives and their orphaned children?

Madam Speaker, at page 3, His Excellency says that the 2013 Constitution established our new democracy. I wish to say for the record that the 2013 Constitution was imposed on the population and in silent protest, and out of fear and duress. Can I also remind the other side of the House who appear confident that the 2013 Constitution is the final document, that there is a decision in the Court of Appeal in April 2009 in the Bainimara and Qarase case that says that the 1997 Constitution is still the real Constitution.

Can I also remind the other side of the House that there is also a 2002 decision - the Commissioner of Inland Revenue and Koroi where our Chief Justice said that the Constitution is like a Bible, it is a living word, and the document that can be trampled upon and torn apart, but it will come back someday.

And all these is telling us that the 2013 Constitution is not the final document and it is due for changes as it should, and that it is only there because the FijiFirst Government is sitting there. The moment you go out, the next Government will take it into account, take it to task or amend it.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Follow the law.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, on page 3, His Excellency says, “we have established the institution of State that remain fiercely independent.” Madam Speaker, I beg to differ. Can we in this House ever say that FICAC is independent or for that matter the Human Rights Commission?

It is sad that we establish institutions which have been abused by the Government. It has turned them into hunting dogs to hunt down dissidents, those who criticise the Government and those whose careers it want to cut short.

Madam Speaker, on page 5, His Excellency says and I quote:

“I am proud to say that our Constitution grants the strongest ever protection of *iTaukei* land in Fijian history, because of those protections there is no way that *iTaukei* land...”

There is a lot more that I can say. Thank you very much and a Merry Christmas to everyone.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of our sitting for today, and I thank you all for your contributions to the debate. We will resume with our next speaker tomorrow morning.

The Business Committee sat at lunch time today and since there was a quorum, the Order Paper for Friday has been finalised and e-mailed to all Honourable Members.

Honourable Members, please note that the Business Committee has also agreed to the increase in membership of the Standing Committees from five to seven. Thank you, Honourable Members.

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

The Parliament adjourned at 4.02 p.m.