

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

FRIDAY, 15TH MARCH, 2024

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	302
Communications from the Speaker	302-303
(1) Welcome	
(2) Student – Nasinu Gospel Primary School	
(3) Standing Committee – Amendment to Membership	
(4) Reinstatement of Parliamentary Business	
Presentation of Papers and Certain Documents	303-304
Reinstatement of Bill – Order Paper	304-305
Debate on the Address by His Excellency the President	305-322
<u>List of Speakers</u>	
1. Hon. J. Usamate (Pages 305-316)	
2. Hon. S.L. Rabuka (Right of Reply) (Pages 317-322)	
Adjournment	322

FRIDAY, 15TH MARCH, 2024

The Parliament met at 9.31 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MR. SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Members were present, except the honourable P.K. Bala and honourable A. Bia.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 14th March, 2024, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE SPEAKER

Welcome

I welcome all honourable Members to today's final sitting for the week. I understand it has been a hectic one. We had some very healthy exchanges, I hope you will utilise all the time available to you when given these two opportunities to speak; one is the Opening of Parliament by His Excellency the President and the second one is on the Budget, which is coming up in the horizon.

I also welcome those joining us in the gallery and those watching the proceedings on television and the internet. Thank you for your continued interest in the proceedings of Parliament.

Students - Nasinu Gospel Primary School

I have been given to understand that there is a school - Years 7 and 8 students from Nasinu Gospel Primary School. The students are being led by the Head of School, Ms. Sereima Waqalevu. I noticed two faces sitting amongst the students, one is Mr. Nata and then there is another one right at the back, maybe they are part-time teachers in this school. You are most welcome to your Parliament.

Every time I pass students, like yourself, I wonder what we have been doing in Parliament to ensure that there will be job opportunities available for you in the not too distant future. That is the role of your Parliament, students - to make laws, change the laws and even repeal the laws, that is our core function. We wish you well in this year's school work.

Standing Committee – Amendment to Membership

For the information of honourable Members, I have received official communication from the honourable Leader of the Opposition, informing of his resignation as the Chairperson and

Member of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, in order to devote more time to his parliamentary role as Leader of the Opposition. I have accepted his resignation upon being satisfied that Standing Order 117(3) has been complied with.

Standing Order 117(3) provides that a chairperson or a deputy chairperson may only be replaced if the chairperson or deputy chairperson has served for at least 12 months during the four-year term of Parliament. I have further accepted that honourable Jone Usamate will now be the Substantive Member of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

To that effect, I am putting the Deputy Chairperson, honourable Ratu Isikeli Tuiwailevu, on notice to preside over the election of the Chairperson accordingly at their next meeting in this second session.

Honourable Members, pursuant to Standing Order 115, honourable Jone Usamate is now appointed as a Member of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. Honourable Aseri Radrodro is now appointed as a Member of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, replacing honourable Sashi Kiran. Honourable Sashi Kiran will remain as a Member of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Reinstatement of Parliamentary Business

Honourable Members, the Business Committee has also unanimously agreed that all pending parliamentary business from the last session of Parliament will be reinstated so that the Standing Committees can continue from where they left off before Prorogation. For the further information of honourable Members, there are 103 Annual Reports with respective six Standing Committees and 12 Committee Reports pending debate in Parliament.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence had tabled its report on the Convention on Cybercrime on 14th July, 2023, and pursuant to Standing Order 130(4), it is the prerogative of the honourable Attorney-General to give Notice that he wishes to move a motion for the treaty to be approved by Parliament.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

The following Reports were tabled by the honourable Ministers responsible in accordance with Standing Order 38(1), and referred to the relevant Standing Committee for deliberation in accordance with Standing Order 38(2):

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

1. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited – Annual Report 2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 42 of 2019*)
2. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited – Annual Report 2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 42 of 2020*)
3. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited – Annual Report 2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 112 of 2021*)
4. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited – Annual Report 2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 78 of 2022*)
5. Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited – Annual Report 2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 94 of 2023*)
6. Investment Fiji – Annual Report 2021–2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 6 of 2023*)
7. Sugar Industry Tribunal - Annual Report 2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 2 of 2024*)

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

1. Ministry of Civil Service – 2019–2020 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 73 of 2023*)

Standing Committee on Social Affairs

1. iTaukei Affairs Board – Annual Report 2015–2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 12 of 2024*)
2. iTaukei Affairs Board – Annual Report 2017–2018 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 13 of 2024*)
3. iTaukei Affairs Board – Annual Report 2018–2019 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 14 of 2024*)
4. iTaukei Affairs Board – Annual Report 2019–2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 15 of 2024*)
5. iTaukei Affairs Board – Annual Report 2020–2021 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 16 of 2024*)
6. iTaukei Affairs Board – Annual Report 2021–2022 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 17 of 2024*)
7. Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management - Annual Reports 2018–2019 and 2019–2020 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 25 of 2024*)

Honourable Members, please take note that the following Reports are for information only and will not be referred to any Standing Committee:

1. Medium Term Fiscal Strategy for the Financial Year 2024-2025 to the Financial Year 2026-2027;
2. First Quarter Appropriation Statement – Actual Expenditure from 1st August, 2023 – 31st October, 2023; and
3. Mid-Year Fiscal Statement on Actual Expenditure from 1st August, 2023 – 31st January, 2024;
4. Reserve Bank of Fiji Quarterly Review for September 2023 and December 2023

REINSTATEMENT OF BILL – ORDER PAPER

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 97, I hereby move:

That the Heritage Bill be restored to the Order Paper.

HON. A. V. B. C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 97 primarily focuses on the procedure with respect to the reinstatement of Bills to the Order Paper. As honourable Members are aware, the Parliament had prorogued on Monday, 4th December, 2023. During the Prorogation period, all Bills had passed which meant that all processes paused or come to a halt.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 97(1) further provides that those Bills which had lapsed may proceed in the new session of Parliament at the stage they had reached in the previous session by resolution of Parliament in restoring the Bills to the Order Paper. Therefore, this is purely a procedural motion which is necessary so as to allow Parliament to undertake or continue with its mandate to legislate, to make and pass laws; a core Parliamentary function which is entrenched under

Section 46 of the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the time of Prorogation, there was only one Bill that had lapsed and this was the Heritage Bill (Bill No. 25 of 2023). With the reinstatement of the Heritage Bill, Parliament and the respective Standing Committee would be able to proceed immediately where they left off. This would further mean that Parliament and the Standing Committees should be able to continue to undertake their legislative, representative and oversight functions.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I reiterate that this is merely a procedural motion, which is necessary to allow the lapsed Bill to be reinstated and restored to the Order Paper. I do commend this motion to Parliament and, I hereby seek the full support from all honourable Members to approve the motion before this august Parliament as it is imperative for Parliament and its Standing Committees to fulfil their legislative, representative and oversight functions.

MR SPEAKER.- The floor is now open for debate on the motion. There being none, and now I call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak in reply.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments to add.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Prime Minister, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers, honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji. In my last assignment as a Minister of the government, I called upon the two Permanent Secretaries that I had the honour to work with to always be fearless in giving me advice, even if they knew I might not like it.

Fearless advice is needed to progress anything. Fearless advice that tells it as it is and I am glad that they did that for me. I will continue to serve in Parliament by offering my expertise, my collaboration, bipartisanship where this is warranted but also by providing that necessary fearless advice and highlighting opportunities for improvement. That is what I am here for and that is what I intend to do.

On Monday, the honourable Prime Minister moved his motion to thank His Excellency for his most gracious Address. Implicit in that motion is the notion that Government will carry out the things that His Excellency said would be done or should be done. Well, Mr. Speaker, Sir in his Address last year, His Excellency called for a number of things to be done.

1. There will be a Special Parliamentary Committee on the Sugar Sector. This never happened. The honourable Minister for Sugar showed his utmost disrespect for His Excellency by not making sure that that Committee sat; and
2. The role of District Advisory Councillors would be elected. What happened?

HON. V. NATH.- Shame!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Hogwash.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Government decided to appoint the District Advisory Councillors and most of them, if not all, were supporters of one party. This is absolute disrespect for His Excellency the President, the Head of State of this country.

HON. S.D. TURAGA.- Hogwash.

HON. J. USAMATE.- His Excellency called upon the Government to ensure consultation in all legislative matters and to take such matters to the Standing Committees. Once again, the honourable Attorney-General blatantly disrespected the words of His Excellency. In your face disrespect, Sir.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Hogwash.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Point of Order.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- In relation to imputing improper motives.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- In terms of that, Sir,....

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Which Point of Order?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- These are facts.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Standing Order 62(1).

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, let me look into that.

Honourable Members, Standing Order 62(1), the honourable Usamate as I listened is just quoting from what was said in this august Parliament by the honourable Minister for Sugar and a few others. So, he is just quoting from what was being said.

Further to that he is also highlighting that nothing has been done. Maybe in reply to that then we provide an opportunity to go into that or probably the honourable Prime Minister in his Right of Reply. So, I will allow him to continue, honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau. The floor is yours, honourable Usamate and could you just keep the tone of your voice down?

(Laughter)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Who are you fighting with?

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I have lost my page, the honourable Attorney-General showed complete disrespect for His Excellency the President. Only

once, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was a matter taken to the Committee after the honourable Leader of the Opposition asked the honourable Prime Minister to change the stance on the Heritage Bill. Only once, not at his instigation on our request with the honourable Prime Minister's intervention.

His Excellency, Mr. Speaker, Sir, advised us that the Cooperatives Act will be reviewed and improved; not done. The honourable Deputy Prime Minister Kamikamica who is responsible for Cooperatives and always love shouting at the top of his voice, "16 years, 16, years, 16 years" has shown that he has ...

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Yes, it is a fact.

HON. J. USAMATE.- ...shown that he has completely ignored His Excellency's Address for the last 15 months; complete disrespect for His Excellency.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Vocea, he called for Members of Parliaments to be displied for not going to the invitation by His Excellency at the Opening of Parliament. That was an invitation! What this Government has done is to draft the Speech for His Excellency the President, get him to read it, then completely ignored it. That is the height of disrespect, they are utterly shameful. You took his words and threw it away into the gutter, you did that to our Head of State.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA. – Point of Order, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER. – Point of Order, Deputy Prime Minister.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA. - Honourable Usamate, as usual, is quite entertaining. Standing Order 60 - Relevance. The object of our debate is to debate His Excellency's Speech this year. I urge him to look forward. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER. - Thank you, my Ruling on that is, honourable Usamate, once more, is just quoting from what was said in this august Parliament. Therefore, I ask that you continue, honourable Usamate.

HON. P.D. KUMAR. - Good try, honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE. – That was a good one, the honourable Member who keeps talking about the last 16 years is telling me to look forward.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- My request to the Government, honourable Prime Minister, Sir, do not treat his Speech this year with disrespect, do not do that. Repent of that. Shed that cloak of hypocrisy that has become such a fundamental part of your everyday dress.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- His Excellency has called upon us to represent the diverse voices and aspirations of our people. I absolutely endorse that, we must treat all Fijians equally.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.– We must eliminate elitism, favouritism and bias, and compartmentalization. that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is what FijiFirst stands for. Precisely what we stand

for.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hogwash!

HON. J. USAMATE.- I want to tell the Government and the people of Fiji, five ways that you can do this. First one, everyone in this country aspires to be treated equally. We aspire to recognition; we aspire to belonging. How do we do this? We call everyone a Fijian to give them that sense of belonging.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Will this Government do that? Will it meet that aspiration through a simple step of love, grace and togetherness? This does not take away anything from any of the communities in this country.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, Point of Order. Can we have that Point of Order, honourable Usamate?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Standing Order 62(4)(d). For some reason, Sir, the other side of Parliament seems to be suggesting that this side of Parliament is trying to divide the country. That is what his suggestion is implying. I absolutely condemn that suggestion, Sir. It is absolutely hogwash for him to suggest that this side of Parliament is trying to split up the people of Fiji. It is absolutely nonsense!

You have heard what honourable Vosarogo said yesterday about land and the need to unify this country. please, to the Opposition grow up and stop trying to suggest that we are trying to bring disunity into this country. Thank you, Sir.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- The truth hurts.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Let me rule on that, honourable Usamate, may I caution you, please, focus on what you are supposed to be delivering based on His Excellency's Address or the honourable Prime Minister's motion. That is all I ask. So, we confine ourselves to that and that will not attract any kind of criticism that we are trying to go into.

You are very good at that, honourable Usamate, being an experienced debater. But, again, you are very quick on your feet to jump back when you know you are verging into certain areas that you should not be going into. I implore upon you, let us focus on the Speech made by His Excellency the President or to that effect the motion by the honourable Prime Minister based on that Speech. You may continue, honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE. – Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second suggestion that I would have in terms of His Excellency's calling us to represent the diverse voices and aspirations of our people, is to note that all *iTaukei* landowners are equally *iTaukei*, they own land communally. They have an equal right to the land, they should

share that lease money equally. Why should we give more lease money to those who already have more? That is a way that you meet the aspirations of all *iTaukei* landowners equally. Why should those who have more stature, more resources, to those who are fitted by the people be treated differently? They should be treated equally.

The third way that we can meet what His Excellency has talked about is look after our young *iTaukei* landowners, who also have their own aspirations. Keep the lease money that is in trust for them, for them, not for anyone else, not for *Tutu* or *Momo* or of *Ratu*, but for them because the young also have their own aspirations.

The fourth way that I would suggest that we can meet the call by His Excellency to meet the diverse voices and aspirations of our people is that ordinary people aspire to eat, drink and have shelter everyday, to have some respect from the challenges of everyday living. But this Government, in its policies, have driven the cost of living to astronomical heights, to brutal heights even, Sir. Not only that, but the Government has also increased company taxation rates for our struggling domestic companies. Instead of paying 20 percent, now they are paying 25 percent. They are now struggling even more.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the poorest in our society also have their aspirations, our small local companies also have their aspirations, so do not strangle them, honourable Deputy Prime Minister! Do not shackle them! Let them breath, let them live, let them loose to fly and to soar and to meet their dreams.

You know what made it worse. As this Government made life tough for ordinary Fijians and struggling businesses, Government gave a tax rebate to one of the richest multi-national companies operating in Fiji, while also cutting the taxation rates for those earning the highest salaries in this country.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Shame!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- Point Of Order.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Allow me, Sir, to look at the Standing Order. Sir, apart from Standing Order 60 which is Relevance, I also cite Standing Order 74(1)(a) which talks about breaches of Standing Orders and practices of Parliament, and I am focusing on practices of Parliament here with regard to misleading Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have on two occasions explained to that side of Parliament that the tax incentives that were issued by the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance last year, there was nothing evil about it. It was a restructure of taxation, Sir.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- That is your opinion.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- It is not my opinion, it is the opinion of the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we explained here very simply, and this is what we always worry about - they talk about things they do not know.

(Laughter)

Sir, let me explain once more and hopefully, this will be the last time I stand to discuss this. There was a restructure of the taxation for the water industry. All companies and even companies that come into the water industry after this will be tax free. But in order to sort of allow that, what we have done is adjust the water tax so that the water tax covers for any differential. We are getting more revenue now than before.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, maybe they need a calculator so that we can explain very simply of what is happening. First, under Standing Order 74(1)(a) - misleading Parliament, because we have one clash now on two occasions already and I have advised them professionally of what has been happening. Second is relevance because the point that he is making is irrelevant because we have already explained its relevance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge honourable Usamate, stick to things that he knows and secondly, please let us be factual. We can take your fire here, no problem, but let us be factual. Thank you.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- That is a fact, honourable Minister.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Koroilavesau. I have not ruled on that yet.

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to stand on Standing Order 60. Sir, the honourable Deputy Prime Minister is just interfering with the flow or the delivery of honourable Usamate.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Please, I have already stated to the honourable Speaker. He is the Speaker, not you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Koroilavesau. Honourable Members, this is political debate that is ongoing in this august Parliament and that is the politics of it. They will try and take the wind out of your sails to derail your train of thought. So, now, honourable Usamate, who is on the floor has been sitting for a couple of minutes now. The wind of sail probably has missed the boat that honourable Usamate is the captain of, so that is pure debate. It is for and against.

We used to do this during our time in the Opposition, trying to derail the train of thought but, again, honourable Usamate, may I, once again, humbly ask you to, please, focus on what you have prepared for your response.

On the *iTaukei* affairs, if you want to highlight issues there, maybe you just go and visit the honourable Minister for *iTaukei* Affairs because sitting here as a traditional leader as well, it is hard for me to comprehend all that has been said. Otherwise, I will have to take it within my stride, just have a very thick skin to let it go by and then we can talk it over again when the time is right. So, honourable Usamate, I kindly ask you just concentrate on your speech proper and that is all. Thank you. I have ruled on that one honourable Tuisawau.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to raise a Point of Order on a serious matter.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- On Standing Order 62(4)(d), provoking ill feelings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he had mentioned the distribution of leases and mentioned the words, “why should the Ratu benefit more than other members and the young members”, to the effect, provoking the revolution of the non-Ratus against the Ratus. That is basically what he is trying to do.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F.Q. TUIWASAU.- Provoking ill feelings between the heads of the *mataqali* and the *yavusa* and their members. That is basically the effect of those words, and he should withdraw that.

That was what has been happening in the FijiFirst rule for the last 16 years - instigating members of *mataqali* and *yavusa* against their heads. That is basically what they are doing, and that is basically communism. They better take that back. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Thank you, honourable Tuisawau. My ruling on your Point of Order, is that I have never heard honourable Usamate mentioned “Ratu” and the “non-Ratu”. He was just speaking in general, and that is how we address things here. You only have to highlight issues in such a way, now you have got wind of what he was intending to say, but he never uttered those words. Honourable Usamate, please, continue.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am not surprised that the honorable Member tried to put up a particular spill on my very clear words and what I was saying.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance tells us that inflation has been decreasing, but he knows that the basket of goods that are used to calculate inflation is out of date, so the measure that they use are out of date.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We are reviewing it now.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, but it is currently out of date.

In 2022, the World Bank reported that the poverty rate in Fiji was 24.1 percent, this was when COVID-19 was at its peak. The current Deputy Prime Minister then questioned that report. He said, “Oh, it is 50 percent.” He questioned the report of the World Bank, and he always love to pull figures out of thin air. Nowadays, he happily quotes the figures and reports from the the World Bank, IFC, and the like.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given what he has done to the brutal cost of living, there is a very high probability that the poverty rate is now approaching the 50 percent that he was talking about at that particular point in time.

Mr. Speaker. Sir, His Excellency called us to embrace with resolve the principles of democracy and humanity. To embrace means to take it upon yourself, to cherish it and to keep it close. Resolve means to never give it up. What are those principles of democracy?

The principle is that we rule by the people, for the people, for all the people, not just some of the people – that we do not rule for self-interest, that we do not just rule just to satisfy the whims of our political cronies, that we do not give them positions to keep them happy, as has been endemic in this Administration.

The halls and corridors of Ministries, statutory bodies, statutory authorities, high commissions and embassies are now flushed with those who have no merit, other than they are being political

cronies of those in power. An utter disgrace!

Humanity is about caring for people. On Monday the honorable Kirpal expressed his concern about something that might be happening, that might impact on some people that are using land for generations. I thank the honorable Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Culture, Heritage and Arts. Thank you, Sir, for your explanation on the process that is being undertaken and his assurance that both, the tenants' issues and those of traditional landowners would be looked into.

However, what was shocking to me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was that honourable Kiran tried to tell honourable Kirpal off because he was concerned for humanity. Does she and this Government not have a concern for farmers who fear losing the land that they have lived on for generations? Who have the fear of losing their livelihoods? They need to be able to focus on the issue at hand and not to put a spin on it, like what honorable Tuisawau just tried to do.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency called for investment into infrastructure, and I totally agree. This zero-infrastructure Government needs to take heed of those words. All they have done this year is to commission ongoing FijiFirst projects.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- FijiFirst investment in infrastructure is unmatched in the annals of history of this country...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- ...unmatched schools, bridges, roads, hospitals, jetties, airports, we did it all!

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- One of the reasons that Fiji is recovering so quickly now is because of the investment we put in, and you are reaping the benefits of it.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Tuisawau mentioned a few things he made some accusations about. He said, "unheard governance issues, lack of accountability, lack of transparency" - if he has evidence of that, he needs to put it on the table, he needs to show the evidence of what he is talking about.

He had talked about the audit report, we have not seen it. Let us see it. Let us see what issues are in that report, and I am suspicious of the validity of that report because the CEO's contract was terminated even before the audit had commenced and that questions the creditability of that report because the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) had their own credibility for not questioning issues that had been raised in audits before that.

Honourable Tuisawau has questioned Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) prior to his taking over. He needs to remember that all the bridge openings that have been taking place were things that had been done for the past 15 months and was from the NDP that we had initiated by Fiji First.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- All those projects are listed there. So, as you go commissioning those projects, remember those are all FijiFirst projects.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Pothole Reduction Programme is in that NDP, there is nothing new there.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It is the Government's job.

HON. J. USAMATE.- In the last two years of the FijiFirst Government, more than 800 kilometres of sealed roads were rehabilitated in just two years.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- This was in addition to the full (not partial) routine maintenance of the entire Fiji FRA Road Network. In your 15 months in office, you have only 15 months, 24 months, 24 months is 800 kilometres. Your 15 months, 300 kilometres. The 800 kilometres: 300 kilometres, big difference - *tamani duidui rau*, big *duidui* there.

You have talked about feasibility studies not being carried out under the FijiFirst Government, the FRA was delivering projects on the basis of the NDP. When you have the people in FRA that have the capacity, you do not always need to do feasibility studies because you can do it during the design phase of projects because there are people there who can do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I could go on and on, on all the things that he said. He talked about the Queen Elizabeth Drive, he said that this Drive should have been done at \$10 million per kilometre. He said that we did it at \$15 million, that it should be done at \$10 million. If you do it at \$10 million, you will not be able to build that bridge. Have you seen that new bridge? Have you seen the realignment of the road? Have you seen the lifting of the elevation of the road to bring resilience into the infrastructure because if you want to do it at \$10 million, you will just have a small gravel road, following the contours of the bridge.

(Laughter)

You have to be realistic with what you talk about.

He said the Toga Bridge was delayed because the people of Toga did not support FijiFirst. Absolute hogwash! Their tender has been given years ago to a local company of *iTaukei* engineers. They were given the tender for Naseyani Bridge in Ra and this one, but they could not complete the job. Then FRA had to retender the job. So, do not come into Parliament and tell lies to the people. Tell the truth! People expect the truth in this Parliament.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Very poor, very poor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The honourable Minister says that water from Viria is flowing now.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER.- Yes, honourable Deputy Prime Minister, your Point of Order?

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- I will refer honourable Usamate to Standing Order 74(1)(a).

Sir, I know he is flying rather well but I ask the question why he used “*iTaukei* company” when he spoke just now. He said “*iTaukei* company”, what is the relevance of an *iTaukei* company? He could have just said, “company”.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Sir, again, I really urge the other side to stop creating ill-will in this country. The people of Fiji are watching what they are doing, Sir. Please, focus on issues, just say, “company”. Why identify the company?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- Sir, I urge the other side of Parliament to grow up, let us talk about issues and not label things.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- You stop gagging us.

MR. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- We are all Fijians. If they want to know, from this side of Parliament, we are all Fijians. We are all here to stay and work together. So, please, make that certain remark is not acceptable. I urge honourable Usamate to withdraw his statement. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have been debating for quite some time now. When there is an instant reaction on either side to what has been said, you are slowly falling into the trap that has been set by you divulging your views altogether without allowing the other side to continue so that you can get a full picture of what they have stated. They just kind of picking on issues now, and I think we are above that.

Let us continue to play that role. For Government, there is always a never-ending criticism from the Opposition, honourable Members, never ending. For the Opposition, you just have to state your facts quite clean. Everything should be based on facts, not so much on hearsay. That is all I ask. Honourable Usamate, please, continue and take the request from the Government side, they are urging you to just continue and stop heavily criticising the Government.

(Laughter)

MR. SPEAKER.- That is the way I see it.

HON. I.B. SERUIRATU.- They can't take it.

MR. SPEAKER.- They can take it, honourable Leader of the Opposition. But they either take it sitting down or otherwise there will be stop starting stop starting our debate with this kind of attitude. It will be a never ending one from this side as well. Point of Order, Point of Order! Please, continue, honourable Usamate. Where are we in terms of time, Madam Secretary-General?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Assistant Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister stated that they were bringing water into Mataniborosisi on the outskirts on Suva, and I thank them for that.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Who said that?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Honourable Assistant Minister Tubuna.

The suggestion was that we did not do anything about it, but he needs to look at what actually happened there. I actually went there myself. I walked there, and I talked to the people there, it was the landowners who put the stop to it. I think because they wanted to use that land for something else. So sometimes when you say something in this Parliament, I hope it was not selective reporting or intentional amnesia; I hope not.

MR. SPEAKER.- He is a landowner too for your information, honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Sir.

Some of the comments have been made about honourable Minister Tuisawau on the Queen Elizabeth Drive, for me it shows a bit of the minuteness of the vision of this Government's vision. National leadership must be about State building. It is about building a modern nation. The Queen Elizabeth Drive is something about doing that. If you look outside this building, you will see Albert Park, you will see that the grandstand has been moved from this side to that side, you will see the quality of the turf that we had put in that park, and the GPH has been done. When we did that, the whole phase of Suva changed. People who come into this country see a new, modern Fiji. When people go along Queen Elizabeth Drive, they will see the modern Fiji. You must have the kind of vision that projects a modern growing Fiji, and I remind honourable Tuisawau to think like that.

The Members of this Government used to allege all kinds of conspiracies. Waqavuka conspiracy, honourable Tuisawau was right at the forefront of that. What happened to that conspiracy? Just nothing, nada, there was nothing there. There was conspiracy about Walesi; nothing has happened. Honourable Tuisawau recently said that the FijiFirst Government had done nothing about converting Schedule A land and Schedule B land to *iTaukei*. He said that in his *Facebook* post. A complete lie! By 2019, 93 percent of Schedule A land that was to be converted to *iTaukei* land had already been done. Schedule B land by 2019, 87 percent had already been converted. So, we see here a history of saying things that are not based on truth.

HON. H. CHAND.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Figments of one's imagination, shaken out, taken out to be the absolute truth in all the things.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President advised that this Coalition Government has restored the confidence of our development partners in Government.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Yes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- I apologise to His Excellency, but I disagree with his statement. Under FijiFirst, Fiji's reputation was established globally. We took on climate change leadership role, we took on the co-presidency with Sweden of the first World Ocean Conference, we took General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA), COP-23 Presidency and Presidency of the G77+ China, we established a global reputation of how we handled COVID-19. Countries came here to learn and asked us what we did so that they could go and replicate it themselves.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- During our watch, the *Vuvale* partnership was established with Australia, and the *Duavata* with New Zealand. Under the firm leadership of Mr. Bainimarama, we

moved away from subservience to our development partners, we worked with them on our own terms. We did not kowtow or bend backwards for anyone. We put our own needs as a priority, whatever they be. We put Fijians first and they came to us on our terms because we had backbone. Learn that word.

HON. RO F.Q. TUISAWAU.- Hogwash.

HON. J. USAMATE.- The honourable Leader of the Opposition shared his views on the Prime Minister's proposed Ocean of Peace approach. I, however, find it rather strange if not bemusing that the honourable Prime Minister calls for Ocean of Peace and then the Government of Fiji then takes the side of one party in a conflict halfway round the world in the Gaza Strip.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Very poor!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there had been more than 30,000 deaths in Gaza and 1,200 of course died in that Hamas incursion into Israel. The killing and death in Gaza is continuing as I speak right now. Most of those killed in Gaza are women and children. Women like our wives and our daughters, children like our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

MR. SPEAKER.- Please, round off, honourable Member

HON. J. USAMATE.- The honourable Prime Minister calls for Ocean of Peace and then supports thousands of deaths in Gaza.

HON. K.K. LAL.- Brutal

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the golden rule is to do unto others as you would have them do to you. Would this Government want some other country to march into Fiji and kill 30,000 of our people? To kill our women and children in Fiji?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- No!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Where is Christ in this stance? Is this Government advocating for Ocean of Peace and deaths in the sands, buildings, hospitals and refugee camps in Gaza? That is the question I pose. There must be congruence in our national policies. If we support peace, then we support peace at all times.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Civil Service Day. His Excellency has advised us that Civil Service Day will return this year to celebrate the contribution of civil servants; very good. We listen to the honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services talking about that fantastic nurse on Cicia Island who delivered the twins, those are the kind of people that we have in the Civil Service.

I remember as Minister for Health during *TC Winston*, there was one nurse who could not get to her home in time, I think she spent the night in the forest and the next day she started delivering service to the people around Tailevu North. I will never forget that. And we have lots of people like that in the civil service. The civil service is replete with people such as this, people worthy of celebration. However, this Government is one that has abused the civil service. It got rid of career professionals and put in place party lackeys and cronies in their place. It has undermined the independence of the civil service as a body that is apolitical. It has politicized the civil service. It is tearing the civil service to shreds.

MR. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I humbly ask you to resume your seat since you ran

out of time and I thank you.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the honourable Leader of the Opposition, honourable Deputy Prime Ministers, honourable Ministers and Assistant Ministers, honourable Members of Parliament, I acknowledge the presence of our school children here with us this morning and I hope they do not believe that adults talk like this normally or debate like this normally. This is Parliament where we are allowed to exchange our views under the chairmanship and the rulership of the honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise this morning to give my right of reply as the mover of this motion before Parliament. Once again, I thank His Excellency the President on behalf of this august assembly for His Address in Opening Parliament on Monday, 4th March, 2024. Regardless of what and how we said it, we all agreed with His Excellency that honourable Members must exercise national leadership that:

1. instils confidence;
2. advances unity, equality and harmony;
3. embraces diversity; and
4. promotes prosperity in all our communities.

No matter how we said it, how loud we said it, that was all we agree we should be trying to do in Parliament.

His Excellency emphasised the importance of representing the voters of this land, the voices of all the people even those who had not attained the voting age. We are representing their voices, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We must respect their views and debate sensibly and promote advocacy and uphold the principles of democracy. It is pleasing to note that the majority of the honourable Members have expressed their support and embraced His Excellency the President's advice. I assure our honourable colleagues in the Opposition that their constructive suggestions and recommendations will be considered by Government as we move forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, honourable Usamate's point about the sugar industry and the elections, may I remind him that the Opposition at that time had proposed that, and we will get to it. I got word from the honourable Minister for Sugar this morning, he might have read your speech before he came to me this morning.

His point about all Fijians, yes, we agree but I also remind us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that some Fijians are original landowners, freehold landowners, lessees and lessors, some people live in rural areas and maritime islands and the Government had made a commitment to look after all our citizens.

HON. M.S.N. KAMIKAMICA.- *Vinaka.*

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- However, it was sad to note that some honourable Members continue to deliver political rhetoric and statements, perhaps somewhat short of facts, logic and substance.

Parliamentary debates, Sir, should be evidence-based, supported by facts and figures from credible sources rather than the social media or rumours. I am sure there are many sources available to us. We just have to exercise more caution to find out which really is the credible source. I am confident that as we move forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can build bridges and address challenges facing the nation in the spirit of promoting national unity and communal harmony.

As I saw the students sitting here this morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am reminded to just say some words of encouragement to the parents of those. These beautiful looking children, during the debate we heard mentioned of the ills of society of today. We heard about the woes still felt in the rural areas that have no roads or not good roads, shipping and all those other facilities that we now complain about. If I was to ask the honourable Members, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to put their hand up if they grew up in a maritime island and went to school where there was no road. I am sure many of us would put our hands up.

I would like, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we mentioned these areas to encourage those in those areas to continue to look after their children. I walked almost one whole day to get to the road when I was going to Bucalevu and if we were fortunate when we got to the road, we could catch a ride from one of those PWD trucks that were building the Savusavu to Buca Bay Road at that time. There were no proper jetties to get across to Taveuni from the Vanua Levu side. We had to go by *velovelo* or those little punts to take us to the boats.

I would like to encourage all of us to encourage those who are coming through those difficult areas and times to soldier on, look after our children so that we do not have the problems that we have raised during this debate about street dwellers, poverty and school dropouts. I remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that you were talking about school dropouts during the *Soqosoqo Vakavulewa ni Taukei* (SVT) time and the Minister for Education and Assistant Minister were talking about what to do with school dropouts? After about an hour of talks, they realized that I had not said anything. They said, "Prime Minister, you have not said anything." I asked them, "who is a school dropouts?" They said, "those that do not complete the school system." "What is the complete school system?" I asked. "Go on to university or what do you think?" I said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, "we make them prime ministers." It is not how far you go in the school, your parents support and your own determination, that determines your destiny.

On governance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I reiterate and believe that faith, mutual respect for one another and diversity are what makes our nation strong. If we respect and appreciate each other's different views, we will surely find a common ground towards achieving our common goals for the betterment of our country.

We owe it to the future generations to do that collectively. This is the essence of our democracy, and this is the essence of parliamentary debate - the battle of ideas from which out of which comes the best solution to our challenges. The formulation of policies through consultations with all stakeholders will create an environment of inclusiveness, ownership and confidence which I will continue to champion.

The People's Coalition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not afraid to admit our weaknesses and we acknowledge the mistakes that we have made. We are willing to take on board the views expressed by any member of the society and all honourable Members of Parliament, and we will take those on and act accordingly. The Government will continue to encourage the free exchange of ideas and criticisms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, only this week we received a request from an honourable Member of the Opposition about the plight of a lady teacher in the West. I am glad that the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education came back the following day to say that her problem had been solved.

However, we must all recognise that freedom of speech also as we express ourselves, comes with responsibility. Concerns have been raised by some honourable Members on the propensity of racial vilification on social media – very good solution to that is do not read social media, but I have

a page. I can challenge anyone to challenge me on any vilification that appears on my page. Let me assure the honourable Members and the public that the Government takes very seriously those allegations and there are laws on cyber bullying and ongoing investigations by relevant authorities on a number of cases also are ongoing.

As individuals we must all exercise restraint and maturity becoming of a Member of the Parliament of Fiji. We must also recognise that the standard of debates in Parliament sets the tone of debates across the nation, among the people in their interaction in person and online. That is why I caution the young students to take this and use it in their own classrooms or in their villages.

Authorities must continue to monitor online communications that may incite communal or religious antagonism and enforce the relevant law accordingly.

Issues relating to the Constitution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to reassure the nation that the Coalition Government will continue to abide by the Constitution and the rule of law. Responding to calls for review of the Constitution does not mean that the Government disrespects the process required for the amendment of our Constitution as laid out in the Constitution.

However, the Constitution empowers Cabinet to refer a question of law to the Supreme Court under section 91(5) for clarification of a particular section of the Constitution. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has come under fire on some of the issues raised by Government from the appointment and we have asked that the Supreme Court will rule on it.

On the economy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance has ably responded to the debate on the economy, I wish to highlight a number of key points which I believe the Opposition may need to take onboard. There has been some discussion on the increasing price of goods and services due to inflation, but we must all appreciate that most of the inflation is actually imported, as a former learned Attorney-General had stated many times during his term as the Minister for Economy.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- He added to inflation by increasing VAT.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- I will check the *Uncorrected Daily Hansard* to find out about this.

Therefore, the Government's effort to cushion the impacts of inflation is through budgetary measures to support the most vulnerable in our society through the removal of VAT on basic food items and medicines.

We have also increased social protection allowances and directed resources to the agriculture sector to ensure food security. Only this morning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a member of the Government Caucus raised the issue of Kava Bars remaining open longer than the alcohol bars and urging us to speak to our electorates and encourage people to plant more because a lot are not going back because they have been at the bar until the morning.

As the Leader of the Opposition in 2020, I recall urging the former Minister for Economy that it is important to appreciate that Fiji will continue to face certain challenges and constraints due to our vulnerability and narrow-based economy. Despite claims of growth, prosperity and boom in the past decade, our average annual economic growth rate barely exceeded 3 percent, well below the average growth rate of 4.3 percent during the Alliance and the SVT days.

However, the so-called boom failed to substantially improve income levels and the quality of life for the majority of our people. Figures provided by the Bureau of Statistics and our development

partners confirm that Fiji's economic performance was dismal. Despite the favourable trading environment since 2017, economic growth was stagnant because the economy continued to be driven by consumption with low levels on investments.

Based on this premise, development partners, including the IMF, continuously reminded the then Minister of Economy to consolidate Government finances because of economic headwinds. If you check the *Daily Hansard*, you will know that I said all these words when I was on that side.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite that advice, the previous Government continued to take an expansionary approach, focusing on consumption rather than investment. Government borrowing was directed to consumption rather than investment.

While we have inherited high national debt and limited fiscal space, we will continue the past practices of inconsistent policies which provide low or no return on investment. Honourable Opposition Members did not consider these facts when pointing fingers at Government in terms of how the economy has fared in our first year in office. They must understand that there is always a lag period before an impact is felt in the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the claim by honourable Koya (who is on the phone) that FijiFirst left us a booming economy, is not true. What they left us is a debt burden of almost 100 percent of GDP, despite the fact of high liquidity in the market, which was around \$600 million annually.

(Hon. P.D. Kumar interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Listen!

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, investors were reluctant to borrow and played the wait and see game. The lack of confidence due to the inconsistency of policies, poor law and order situation, human rights violations and our low ratings on the ease of doing business ranking are what the Coalition Government has inherited. This resulted in the lack of employment opportunities and the hardships faced by our citizens.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Why are you lying?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Listen!

HON. S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am optimistic that the \$3 billion investment in the pipeline will be realised because there is a renewed confidence in the economy with more transparency, certainty and consistency of policies.

On Foreign Affairs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the detailed response by honourable Qereqeretabua regarding our Foreign Policy and the reasons for our travels abroad, the Opposition continues to imply that overseas travel is a waste of Government resources.

I wish to clarify that as Head of Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs, travel was necessary to restore trust and respect in the region and internationally. For us in the Pacific, humility is the key to the art of diplomacy. The previous practice of boasting about punching above our weight and leapfrogging, did not reflect the Pacific way.

On the Ocean of Peace, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I respect the views expressed by the honourable Leader of the Opposition and by honourable Usamate. But the rules-based international order that provided stability for so long is now under threat, so we need to promote peace.

The proposal is consistent with the UN Charter and the UN Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace. Regionally, the concept is consistent with the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security* and the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* which the honourable Leader of the Opposition was instrumental in. This proposal aims to restore the strategic equilibrium. It also provides an opportunity for our partners to engage with the peaceful norms of the Pacific as an Ocean of Peace.

On ICJ, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there continues to be wilful misunderstanding of the Government's submission to the International Court of Justice, on the occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. We have heard mention of the security of our own peacekeepers in the Middle East.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the Alliance Government committed Fiji to peacekeeping, they realised we were going to a very risky situation, and we continue to do that, regardless of what we do at this time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I reassure this august Parliament that we stand for sovereignty of nation States, the principles of non-aggression and non-interference in the domestic affairs of States and the resolution of conflict by peaceful means according to Chapter VI of the UN Charter. We will continue to uphold the integrity of multilateral institutions.

On climate change, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must respond collectively to this great challenge. And I call on us all to reach across, as the honourable Leader of the Opposition had done by going with us to COP28. We will continue to reach across the floor for bipartisan discussions and also participation in the international forum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to reiterate that merit is the underlying requirement for all appointments to the Foreign Service, Municipal Councils and Boards of State-Owned Entities. A lot of those appointments, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were not made by the Ministers. They were made by various machinery in the Civil Service, also with the boards and councils, et cetera.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I assure Parliament that all Heads of Missions appointed met the requirements for the positions and the selections were made by appropriate authorities and boards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to assure the honourable lady Member of the Opposition that Government does not interfere in the appointment of CEOs of public enterprises, and these are decisions left to the respective Boards.

(Chorus of interjections)

MR. SPEAKER.— Order, order!.

HON. S.L. RABUKA.— Mr. Speaker, Sir, in conclusion, I wish to reiterate His Excellency the President's reminder that we focus on our commonalities, rather than our differences.

HON. S.D. TURAGA. — *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. S.L. RABUKA.— And to end, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I call on all honourable Members to take that message to heart, as we work together to build a stronger nation, with social cohesion and unity of purpose for this generation that is coming up. May God bless Fiji.

MR. SPEAKER. — Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 15th April, 2024 at 9.30 a.m.

HON. A.V.B.C. BAINIVALU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER. - Honourable Members, that concludes the end of our sitting for this week. I thank you all for your contributions throughout the week.

I now declare that Parliament adjourns until Monday, 15th April, 2024 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.59 a.m.