

Remarks by Fijihosting: The September 2001 elections in Fiji saw a win of the newly formed pro-indigenous SDL party and a loss the Fiji Labour Party (FLP). Less than two weeks later, the Parkinson Lecture was organised with the participation of well-known local personalities. At the end of these speeches we publish the two letters from both the SDL and FLP leaders informing the President of the Republic of Fiji what they think of the election result. A Court of Appeal ruling in regard to the constitutionality of the current government is expected in June 2003.

Parkinson Lecture, Wednesday 19 September 2001, USP, 7.00pm

Fiji's 2001 Election: Rebuilding a Fractured Nation

By P. Imrana Jalal

May I say at the outset that these are very much my own personal reflections and neither DFID Pacific, RRRT nor the Fiji Women's Rights Movement are responsible for my views.

Many years ago I was quoted in TIME magazine as saying..."for all too short a time we were one people...". The quote in TIME magazine was based on a Fiji Times column which I had penned. The occasion was the street celebrations and public holiday we all enjoyed when our conquering heroes, the Sevens Team returned from Hong Kong. Why do I share this thought? - because the feeling one got standing in the street was a unique feeling of oneness that one rarely feels in this, our divided society.

It is a difficult task to try and address issues of law and gender within the framework of rebuilding a fractured nation all in 10 mins but I shall try.

I have spent many years thinking over these issues and much of what I have to say is drawn from the columns I used to write in my Fiji Times Thursday column from 1995-1998.

GENDER

What is the role of women in rebuilding the nation? Women have been instrumental in the peace building process globally. One only has to look at the Women in Black in Israel and Palestine to see that women are at the forefront of peace building and appear to have a greater willingness to compromise. I don't know why. Maybe it is because they have less testosterone or maybe it is because they give birth to children so they value human life more or maybe its that they are socialised to nurture?? It matters not why. These skills ought to be better utilised. An example of women's role in peace building during the hostage crisis was the NCW sponsored daily multiracial peace and prayer vigil (WADAP). This peace initiative grew into the Fiji Blue Ribbon Campaign which grew into the Fiji Blue Democracy Campaign. This coalition of NGOs harnessed its enormous (unpaid) intellectual resources to fight the Chandrika Prasad case and it is largely due to their affidavits that the plaintiff won his case. What drives these NGOs and civil society organisations? A passion for justice and democracy and a deep seated belief in multi-racialism. They know that to take the path less traveled will make all the difference. It is time that the State recognises that civil society is not the enemy but a partner in national development with enormous skills and talents whose energies ought to be more effectively harnessed and utilised.

Might I use this opportunity to comment on race based women's NGOs. Like communal schools these are or ought to be a relic of our colonial past. The Soqsoqo Vakamaramas and Stri Sewa Sabhas of the world need to open their ranks to others and be more inclusive otherwise they cannot play a positive role in rebuilding or mutliracialism. As they currently exist they reinforce communalism and entrench hierarchal social classes.

Finally if there is to be Constitutional change, Article 38 on equality and discrimination and the Bill of Rights cannot and must not be tampered with.

LAW

What role can the law play in rebuilding our society? At the other end of the spectrum of the rule of law is chaos. No Government, even oppressive governments are safe without the rule of law. If there is no rule of law oppressive governments can be unseated just as democratic Governments can be unseated, so my warning is - flirt with dispensing the rule of law at your peril.

But what does it take to restore the rule of law?

First you cannot have reconciliation without justice. Justice means the rule of law must prevail because the alternative is the coup cycle phenomenon.

What is the coup cycle phenomenon? Fiji Islands is in danger of becoming a country which will always have coups with its concomitant economic, political and legal instability. The political and judicial response to a group of usurpers claiming effective control is crucial in determining whether or not a country becomes a coup prone country. We can break the coup cycle in two ways:

By refusing to recognise an unlawful regime in the Courts of Law put into place by a coup whether or not they include the coup makers;

By punishing the usurpers for treason.

The rewarding of usurpers creates the coup cycle. Successful coups encourage others to copycat coups both locally and internationally. It is an abyss from which there is no return. Just ask Pakistan. Ask Nigeria. Ask the Cote d'Ivoire. We must punish those who seek to change the Constitution through unconstitutional means and we must never again accept a coup installed Government because it rewards violence and lawlessness. It is rarely recognised that it is only when a democracy is in place can we come up with strategies to stop coups from happening. In the regard when it is sought to amend the Constitution I note that we might well seek to emulate anti-coup provisions found in new Constitutions which are attempting to break out of the coup cycle:

"This Constitution shall not lose its force and effect even when its observance is interrupted by a government established by the force of arms: and in any case, as soon as the people recover their liberty, its observance shall be reestablished..." (Art 3 (3) Uganda Constitution - Hatchard p2)

"Any person who...by any violent or other unlawful means, suspends or overthrows or abrogates this Constitution...commits the offence of high treason..." Art 3(3) Ghana Constitution

The Ugandan Constitution places also a legal duty and right on every citizen to defend their Constitution. This duty must be imposed also on us. This includes Judges of course. The independence and impartiality of the judiciary must always be guaranteed. Never again in our history ought Judges to venture into the legislative realms of Government except when their views are sought for law reform. We are paying for these transgressions now and we will continue to pay for them for a long, long time.

Second, in addition to the courts of law a public Commission must be established allowing for a national emotional and psychological catharsis to heal the wounds. Every person who believes they have been wronged whether during the crisis, before or after ought to be given locus standi to speak. If indigenous Fijians believe that they have been wronged by other races they must also be given a voice. We need to know what they want of us. What does it take to really belong? Indo-Fijians, Indigenous Fijians and others need to know what we expect of each other. This Commission must be under the sponsorship of the Fiji Human Rights Commission, a quasi State agency and non mainstream State actors. It ought to be brought out of the mainstream Government Departments which are resourced mainly by one ethnic group. The

Commissioners for the Reconciliation Commission cannot be the same tired old men who sit on every Government sponsored Board, Commission or Tribunal. They must be younger visionary leaders who belong to the new Fiji, not the communally minded Fiji of my parent's generation.

Third, we must build our Democracy through civics awareness at schools. A Civics Awareness/human rights course would teach the fundamentals of our Constitution and the value of living in a democracy. Democracy has taken a beating as a governmental system but has anyone come up with anything better? We must not forget that at the other end of the spectrum lies oppression and dictatorship.

REBUILDING A FRACTURED SOCIETY

And what of race relations?

The following text is taken from the Fiji Sun Letters to the Editor column yesterday:

(quote) "As a Fiji citizen of East Indian ancestry, I am proud of Mahendra Chaudhry as the leader of the Fiji-Indian community. Why should we have to take a backseat when it is the sweat of our ancestors that built this country while the lazy Taukei sat under the shade of the trees drinking yaqona to please their colonial masters. We want our piece of the pie right here, right now. This must be sorted out now for the future generations of this nation even if it means we all die. Mr Chaudhry we are proud of how you have conducted yourself with a gun pointed at your head. Do what you have to do. We will always be behind you." (end)

I know that there is deep seated fear behind this letter and perhaps some small elements of truth but if this is the best that we Indian Fijians have to offer then I fear for this country.

What can we as a people do to overcome these huge divisions?

Language

First, to take up a pet theme of my dear friend Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi - I believe also that Fijian must become our second national language (apart from English) and ought to be compulsory right from primary school. Do not panic! Not for one moment was Ratu Joni suggesting that Fijian replace English as the language of business. But that Fijian become the lingua franca of exchange, of social intercourse. All Indians in Thailand speak Thai. The Indians of Hong Kong speak fluent Chinese. This is the lens through which we can understand Fijian culture. If we make both ethnic languages compulsory and give schools the option most students will learn their own language. Fijian must be compulsory and Hindi can be an optional subject. This must be done by legislation. The appropriate resources must be allocated to this and we must embrace this project with our hearts and souls.

Schools

Second, we must by legislation and fiscal and other policies discourage communal schools. These are the ways of the past not of the future. Such schools are breeding grounds for ignorance which entrenches racism which in turn engenders an unhealthy form of nationalism. Multiracial schools are one key (not the only key) to multiracialism and integration. Communalism and ethnic divisions bring about the Bosnias of the world.

The first experience of multiracialism for most children will be primary school. There is little point in promoting multiracialism as a national ethos if we still go to communal schools. This is quite controversial because most Indians and Fijians believe that in order to preserve and guard their culture, language and way of life they must send their children to ethnic based schools which is why you get the ACS's QVS's MGM's etc. This is also a reflection of our colonial history. I remember not so long ago Drasa Ave School used to be called Lautoka European School! This preservation of language and culture has become increasingly important

in a cash economy driven by international market forces in which people see their precious way of life being eroded by Westernisation, globalisation and other inevitable forces. That is, they cling more to things that give them comfort and "identity". Parents are scared that if they send their children to "any" school they will lose control over them. They fear also to delegate their responsibility of child rearing to someone of another ethnic group. They fear the external variables over which they have no control.

Race relations and Integration

One price that is paid for over protecting our culture is communalism. The majority of Indian Fijians grow up in our own neighbourhoods, we mix with people of our own kind, we go to ethnic based schools and then marry our own kind and bring up our children similarly. We don't mix well because we think we do not have much in common, and we do not have a common language to expose this so there is little opportunity to forge the ties that bind.

The best argument for multiracial schools is to look at those who went to them. Here I'd like to pay a special tribute to Catholic schools who are or at least were the most multiracial school in Fiji when I was growing up. I thank God that I was privileged to attend a Catholic school because they truly have an enviable approach to multiracialism. For the most part the Indo-Fijians and Fijians who have the best cross-cultural skills are those who went to multi-racial schools and who had teachers from all races as their role models. This is not always true but is generally true.

We have to decide what is more important to us - the preservation of a way of life which is rapidly eroding anyway; or evolving a culture which is mutually compatible to all of us but one in which we all respect each other's culture and in so doing help each other's culture, language and way of life to survive the onslaught of modern life.

Won't some of the values most important to us rub off in the mixing? Perhaps so but it may be the small price we have to pay for harmonious co-existence.

My final thoughts are these - how do we Indo-Fijians fit into the new Fiji?? What are the sacrifices that we are going to have to make? What is the cost of integration? There is little point in the State trying to promote reconciliation on a grand scale when we do not really mix well except at a superficial level.

An essential element of harmonious co-existence is to end our communal way of thinking. To do that it is clear that we Indo-Fijians need to change. There is little doubt that indigenous Fijians need to change too but for the moment I reflect on my own ethnic community.

Frankly, and I know that I will make myself very unpopular by saying this, we need to change more than they need to change. Why? I believe it is not an act of betrayal but an act of love to examine our culture. And to admit it when we find it wanting, and to be willing to change..... Instead of becoming defensive which is an entirely natural reaction given our current situation lets try to be sensitive to their situation. They were the First Peoples of these islands. They are only 400,000 in number. There are over 1 billion of us racially and ethnically. There is little chance of our various cultures and languages dying out. They have a grievance, rightly or wrongly, they have a grievance. In politics as we know, perception is more important than reality. Even a country like New Zealand acknowledges the rights of Maoris as the First Peoples of NZ. We came, we settled. Whose responsibility it is to change more? On us lies the greater responsibility to integrate.

We are not Indians. The die was cast some 118 years ago. We are Fijians first and then we are Indo-Fijians or as Dr Routledge would have it, we are Indian-Fijians.

The sooner we accept this and for the better or worse that we belong to Fiji, and whether racial elements in the indigenous Fijian community like it or not, Fiji also belongs to us.

If we truly belong here, than we must demonstrate our commitment to this nation. How can you say that you are thinking when they regard us as foreigners? As not deserving of equal rights?

Yes, I know it is difficult to accept this suggestion if we have fewer rights than have our indigenous Fijian brothers and sisters but to borrow the words of that wonderful woman, George Eliot, the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision.

By this I mean that we must lead by example. Only then can we expect the indigenous Fijians will do the same.

And if we are going to demand equal rights we cannot bargain for better rights from a position of weakness. We must commit ourselves to this country that has been home to us for 4 generations. We must commit our money, our strength and our skills. We must give this country the best that we Indo-Fijians have to offer as people and we cannot do this by looking at Fiji merely as a stepping stone to a better country.

We must also start by forging sincere and more meaningful friendship with indigenous Fijians.

Yes, we do mix at work and get invited to the occasional weddings and parties - but there is very little what Fijians call veilakovaki and veicurumaki (mixing and socialising at a level that is not superficial or formal).

But we do, I hear you say in unspoken words. We work with them and our children play together.

But do we really? Are they truly friends? Don't most of us look down on them? Don't we call them "jati" behind closed doors? (as they call us kaindia carawai pani!) Don't we laugh at them because they place more emphasis on customs, traditions and non-material things then on working for money or on material things, like we do? Are these not things that are actually truly admirable? Don't our two great religions teach us that to pursue spiritual things is of greater benefit to us?

Don't most of us tolerate them because we have to? Many of us fear them because we believe that they rob our homes and force us to live behind burglar bars.

Do we invite indigenous Fijians into our homes apart from at Diwali or Eid? Do we learn about their culture, learn their language or their dances or understand their rituals? Do we try to understand how desperate they feel about losing to the cash economy and Western development the things that are most precious to them?

Do we count their sons and daughters amongst our closest friends apart from those workplace friendships? Do we give our sons and daughters to them in marriage? And do we welcome them as sons or daughters-in-law?

These are some of the troublesome questions that lie ahead of us. I do not have all the answers. But I do know one thing. We have to start somewhere. And the time is here and now. I have plenty of hope that we can build ourselves a future in this country. It is a good country - it has been good to us, as we have been good for it.

All we need is women and men of vision who can see beyond the petty communalism that has torn our beloved country apart.

I will briefly raise two topics, of particular relevance to the theme of tonight's event, 'Rebuilding a Fractured Nation'. The first topic is the relationship between politics and terrorism, or terrorism as a form of politics. The second topic deals with what I consider to be the principal characteristic of the 1997 Constitution, that it is a canoe constitution for a mobile phone society.

Politics and Terrorism

There are two relationships between politics and terrorism that I would like to consider. The first, with obvious reference to the recent tragic events in the USA, is where terrorism becomes a political tool employed by a nation-state to support its foreign and domestic policy objectives. As is well known, the Contras in Nicaragua, the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq were allies of the US and other western powers during the anti-Soviet period of the late 1970s and 1980s. Many of the fundamentalist Muslim groups which now carry out terrorism were nurtured, trained, financed and incorporated into the western security apparatus. We have seen the stories in the last week of how Taliban soldiers were trained in Scotland, how terrorists who hijacked and destroyed civilian flights received their flying training at the most prestigious US training schools. We have also seen how the very people who conducted parts of the operations which saw in excess of 5,000 people die, thousands more injured and traumatised, were in regular contact with US intelligence operatives up until 2 weeks before the savagery was unleashed on the WTC and Pentagon. The fanaticism with which terrorists engaged in suicide missions is a form of self-hatred, which is fuelled in part by the fact that the Muslim extremists who carried out the attacks know that they were once of use to the US and the west but are no longer such. We can reasonably expect that the US will now employ terrorism against its former allies, in the name of saving democracy from terrorism.

The second relationship between politics and terrorism is that which exists in Fiji. Since the takeover of parliament last year, politics in this country has been overdetermined by terrorism and terrorists. It is not simply that some of the latter and their probable controllers as well as supporters and advocates are now in parliament and in government. There is a more important form of political determination even than this. It is that what appears to be legal and constitutional politics is driven by the threat to re-invoke terrorism if governments do not pursue a particular direction, broadly defined as 'protecting indigenous rights'. Both the Commander of the RFMF and the President have acted repeatedly over the last year or so to 'prevent further unrest', ie to concede to terrorists their right and capacity to determine the direction of state policy. By this second relationship between politics and terrorism, Fiji is a nation-state where terrorism is not employed occasionally as part of a broader form of politics but is a nation-state where terrorism is the principal determining form of politics. Whether future governments in Fiji will act to resolve and remove the importance of terrorism from the body politic is of great long-term importance for the country.

The 1997 Constitution

There have been many criticisms of the 1997 Constitution, and in particular its electoral arrangements, some informed others less so. Sometimes, quite understandably, this Constitution has been defended on the grounds that the alternatives are even worse, including that proposed along the lines by the recent unconstitutional Ravuvu Commission. But what exists now is 'the even worse' alternative ie politics driven by the constant invocation of the threat of terrorism. Therefore I don't see why one has to retreat into a defense of a political form which is itself inimical to the long-term future of the country.

Why do I describe the 1997 Constitution as a "canoe constitution for a mobile phone society"? The first, the idea of canoe comes from Brij Lal's description of one of the means by which the Constitutional Commission traveled around the country seeking views. The second is to use the

imagery of last year's crisis, where much of the organisation of terror and the response to it was conducted very publicly by mobile phone. This piece of equipment is a product of what Fiji is becoming, an urban society. One of the largest phone companies of the world Nokia is based in Finland, a country which largely went through the urbanisation that Fiji is now going through, in the fifty years after World War II.

There are many ways in which the 1997 Constitution is a document which looks to the past not the future. The one I want to emphasise tonight is the massive malapportionment of the electorates and thus the parliament and government. How many people in this room are aware that in some seats there are 3 or 4,000 registered voters and in others over 21,000.? That is, a ratio of 5 up to 7 to 1: a voter, a human being in some constituencies is judged as five to seven times more human, more worthy a citizen than another. Further, how many people are aware that this malapportionment has the principal effect of distorting politics and the entire political economy towards the rural areas?

So governments elected by this malapportionment not unsurprisingly claim that the future and the real problems of Fiji are in the rural areas not the towns and cities. Indeed if Mr Qarase has his way, as stated during the election campaign, he will reform the constitution to give even more seats to rural areas.

Why is the malapportionment important for a mobile phone society? The answer does not depend upon invoking liberal democratic norms of one vote one value. After all, no sane person would want to invoke that type of explanation in Fiji where democracy is a foreign flower, a western intrusion in the country once described as 'the way the world should be'. The answer I will give instead depends upon an even more fundamental matter, one of the most pervasive and all-encompassing phenomenon known to humanity. This phenomenon is the connection between urbanisation, higher living standards and the expansion of human capacities for improvement.

Urbanisation itself was probably the most important political sociological phenomenon of the last century, for the whole of humanity and possibly also for the portion which lived in Fiji. In no society known to humans, since the late eighteenth century at least, has it been possible to stop urbanisation-even when people wanted to do so. The best such social reactionaries have managed has been to delay the process, which itself builds up the basis for later conflicts.

In the countries which have advanced most, where the living standards of the people have improved most, political arrangements have hitched urbanisation, industrialisation and democratisation together. Occasionally, this has also meant adopting policies which have raised living standards in the countryside too, but the principal driver was urban manufacturing industry, not agricultural advance. Sometimes, the hitching process involved a civil war: the USA is a well-known example of this category of country. In other countries, a major international conflict provided the principal stimulation: Japan and Finland are two countries which come to mind here. The UK is of course the country most often cited where the process was less violent and itself 'more democratic'.

The 1997 Constitution in numerous ways acts to turn politics in Fiji back to the rural areas, and to the past, with increasingly widespread poverty and cultural stagnation, rather than forward to an urban, industrial and enlightened future. For this future to occur it will probably be necessary to also go through the pains associated with rapid rates of urban migration, high levels of unemployment, landlessness and urban crime. But since the future can not belong to the countryside, it is important that political arrangements now do not pretend otherwise.

I have been asked to do a review, a sociological review of the process of the political change in Fiji. I don't know exactly what that means. Maybe I should start with some of the key points which I can identify and pick up after listening. After listening to the last few speakers, I feel very small, they have really said everything that I have been preparing to say since this morning.

I have picked this topic which is very popular, particularly the notion of civil society and its role in national reconciliation. Now what I will be looking at today is looking at the nature of our society at the moment. The way it has evolved and some of the ways in which we can identify the contradictions and possibly use those contradictions as the basis for hope for future in this country. Now let me start off by looking at what William said earlier. Now one of the themes of fighting for Mandela's cause, which was responsible really for the reconciliation process of Africa. And elsewhere, I would probably start with he was Christian in many ways. The Christian concepts, the political prisoner. Now for a long time, the people in this country have been Christians or Christians in their thoughts. That's what I was looking at in the papers.

Perception and the way in which we see ourselves, the way in which we see others and the way in which others see us, are very powerful, powerful in terms of determining the way in which we live, the way the world changes, and lastly in particular, there was so much confusion, people became Christians in their own conscience. All of the people don't know what happened. Some of them are still trying to see what has happened. There's so much they cannot comprehend. I was coming back from the United States a few days ago. There was confusion everywhere and no one could fully comprehend the magnitude of what had happened. And people began looking at themselves in terms of little compartments, cultural, ideological, and also in terms of perception. So there was this whole wave of how people were relating to each other, how people were perceiving each other.

First were those who argue that what happened last year was purely ethnically motivated, that ethnicity was the primary factor, that ethnicity was fundamental to the coup, Fijians versus Indians, the Taukeis versus the Indo-Fijians, and the press sort of picked this up and blew it out of proportion in many ways, and that kind of consolidated and legitimised the kind of ethnic perceptions which people already have, that the world is basically black and white, Indians and Fijians. Of course as we all know, the world is much more complex than that.

Now what happened last year, there were all kinds of factors which were involved that had to do with the intra-Fijian conflicts. There were those who denied ethnicity altogether. They said that what happened last year had nothing to do with ethnicity. It basically had to do with the power conflict between the various Fijian power blocs. Interestingly, a couple of months ago, I think it was last month, a book came out on this, by someone who is going to be one of my colleagues, who made reference to this in a collection of articles in a book called "Revisiting the Coup". I saw it in the book shop, I did not buy it. He said basically that the coup was a projection of the nature of the criminal allies within the Fijian social political system where the various power blocs were competing for power. It was a rather simplistic, a very narrow conceptualisation of the complexity of what had happened last year.

The ethnic divide, ironically shifted the blame onto a particular ethnic group whose people were involved, these people were responsible, and therefore it is a problem, it is not our problem. Now there were those who said that, we are free to do generally, the way that demagogues were creating conditions to find ideas to come into existence and burn out rational ideas which existed in our society. And there were those who said basically it had to do with the clash of cultures. After all, Indians and Fijians cannot live together. This group of people worship this god, and this group of people worship this god, this is what they eat and this is what they wear. In fact the clash of cultures notions is used elsewhere in the United States to try and explain what is happening at the moment. One of the world renowned Professors in the United States argued that the global problem now has to do with the clash of cultures. We have the Eastern cultures and the Western cultures.

In the case of Fiji, that was one of the global ideas that was prevalent last year. And there were those that argued that it was purely a class process. The conflict between the have and the have nots. To extend that, some argued there was a conspiracy by the Indian businesses calling for the Fijians to be paramount themselves, and I heard it a lot, it read it in the papers, and people I talked to, the Indo-Fijians businessmen, what they tried to do, they bought out Fijian leaders, they paid for this, and they sponsored the coup, to further their interests, and at the same time, to sustain that structure within the Fijian community. And there were those that tried to psychologise the whole process and said there's a misunderstanding between the two ethnic groups using the stereo-types, and the stereo-types have been in existence in Fiji for a long time. They are quite negative in many ways but as we'll see later, they are positive as well, there are positive sides too.

The negative effect is the Fijians looking at Indians being selfish and cunning and so forth, and on the other hand, Indians looking at Fijians as being lazy and stupid, junglees and so forth. Now the stereotypes renew and feed into the popular sort of political thinking last year when it effectively reinforced the fires that were burning which reinforced the kind of arguments, political arguments which these political leaders were using to articulate at the time. So a lot of us are Christians, living in this paradise called Fiji, and there was confusion, nobody could understand precisely what was happening.

Now what I propose to do today is to argue that in fact all these particular aspects will in fact fuse into a kind of synthesis, and the term that has been used recently by some sociologists is a synchrotic society, a synchrotic state, is a very stupid word, it's not in the Oxford dictionary. I checked in it yesterday. So this came into existence last year. Which exhibits the kind of contradictions, the kind of one the one accommodation in a political system on one hand. On one hand, on one level, you have all kinds of political enemies all kinds of agonies, class, political contradictions, and on the other hand in all those contradictions, you can create moments of accommodation, to accommodate those differences of races in our society.

Fiji is a very classical example of that synchrotic state. You have reached of course the coups on the one hand, and the next day you say let's have an election, accommodation, but yes that has been reached in many ways. And then you talk about communal identity on one level, and then the next day you say oh let's have a national identity. So this state of contradiction has been part of the history of this country. The contradiction haunts us up until now. What is the communal identity that we have sustained at what cost, to the national identity that also we have to cherish as part of the process of national reconciliation. Then you have economic liberalism on the other hand, the two economists have talked about earlier the need to make profit, the need to sustain the economy through private enterprise.

Secondly, is seeking intervention in terms of positive action for Fijians. And recently we have the classical example of the austerely driven political parties. Just before the elections, people were talking in terms of principles, the high principles that they stood for. At the end of the elections, people began to ditch the principles and began orchestrating across ethnic and political lines. Chaudhary talking to the Matanitu Vanua, and the Moderates, at least one joined SDL and so forth.

It was synchrotic in the sense that the contradictions at some point begins the process of accommodation. So you see this when you are talking about fractures, or how we heal fractures, one of the suggestions would be that we see these contradictions, we also see areas of conversions of ways in which this country can move forward. For instance in the context of the stereotypes I was talking about earlier times hold on. The stereotype is that Fijians are seeing Indians as being selfish as being cunning and so forth, as being untrustworthy. And Indians see Fijians as being lazy and so forth. But at the same time, there are Fijians who also perceive Indians as being hard-working, in terms of their morals.

So many Fijian kids would want to be students of Indian schools and the reason being that, they want to be part of a system of a hard-working environment, where people work very hard. So selfishness has been translated into hard work. Individualism has been translated into hard work. So it's basically two sides of the same coin. Or in the case of the Fijian culture itself,

last year, there was a lot of talk about the way in which the Fijian chiefly system and Fijian ethno-nationalism as a way for reconciliation. At the same time, ironically, it was also the chiefly system to some extent that preserved peace at home, the sway that ensured that Fijian did not end up having an all-out civil war, like they have in Bosnia and other parts of the world. People from outside Fiji have been asking or simply wondering why it hasn't happened here.

The journalists had been waiting to see whether they could see it in Fiji. One of the arguments that have been raised is that there's so much resilience in civil society. The conflict, the ethnic conflict in Fiji is fought purely on the level of the state, in discourse. In other words, politicians trying to get into power, by mobilising ethnic feelings. But within the civil society itself, there's a lot of resilience. There's a lot of accommodation being placed that's really an example of a syncretic society. Even within the civil system there's a lot of restraint that can be mobilised, that can be used as a means of articulating nationalistic demands, articulating ethno-nationalist demands of extreme violence. At the same time, some would say, oh, no, no, no, don't do that. It is un-Fijian to do such a thing. So on the one hand it can be used as a means of political articulation with violence, at the same time it can be used as a means of peace-making.

What I'm trying to say here is that within the contradiction, we can actually identify some of the elements, some of the positive elements, with areas of convergence, which can be made to last. The civil society will play a very important role in terms of this. The political leaders, the politicians in many ways fail us, in terms of the ways in which they set the tone for this country. In support we have to democratise the whole process of peace-making, of reconciliation, so that the ordinary people of the country, the ordinary people of Fiji should be directly involved not only in articulation but also articulate those sentiments which are good for this country, Fiji. Because we should all live in peace.

"My 10 minutes is based on the assumption that the fractured nation we are seeking to heal is one that aspires to be a prosperous multicultural and multi religious nation state. As the private sector representative on this panel my aim is to provide a pragmatic view and frankly I think it is time for some plain and practical speaking.

There is only one way of achieving this goal, "economic growth". Just as Bill Clinton centered his first election campaign on the domestic American economy it is my proposition that it is time for Fiji to place a moratorium on constitutional debate at a national level and focus on the basics of the economy and economic growth.

Before I am accused of being too simplistic let me explain the logic behind this statement. As the Prime Minister has identified and as we all saw last year much of the raw hatred displayed post May 19th was based on real or at least perceived economic disparity. The "have-nots" were whipped up into a frenzy that was to many irrational but the damage done very real.

Poverty will always push the masses towards extremist politics. Therefore it is my contention that we will not see the concepts of moderation and multiracialism truly take hold until we experience real economic growth.

However as one can see from many of the very simplistic and sometimes downright naïve campaign promises that we have seen of late it is easier to promise economic growth then to deliver it.

For a start there is some good news. Despite a gloomy global business environment the economy remains flush with funds, interest rates are low and many of the institutions needed to raise the funds that fuel growth like the South Pacific Stock exchange have matured and are now fully functional. I am confident that over the next 6 months we will see an initial surge of growth as the private sector fast track projects that have been in a holding pattern since May 19th.

In addition Fiji remains uniquely positioned in the Pacific to take advantage of growing regional links. Literacy rates are high, our population generally better educated and certainly our public sector functions more efficiently then anywhere else in the Pacific.

Sustained growth however will require taking advantage of these factors plus a whole lot more. The reality is that the various Governments of Fiji since 1987 have done little but patch holes on the increasingly leaky infrastructure of our nation. This has been the cause of much frustration within the business community. While we can claim regional leadership in many of these areas this is more a reflection of the almost total collapse of public infrastructure across the South Pacific then investment by the Fiji Government.

Most obvious is the physical infrastructure, the dreadful state of our roads, the challenges faced by the FEA, the water supply and more. But just as important is the institutional infrastructure that has suffered in recent years. Since 1987 our politicians have been so distracted by the process of wrestling for power that they have failed to tackle change and reform within in many of our key institutions. Let me give you two quick examples.

Land is an issue much debated and I don't have the time to go into this area in detail. But it is clear that the system of land management in Fiji is in desperate need of radical over haul. I would hope that current reviews of the NLTB and Fijian administration recognise that both landowner and tenant have moved on and that their needs are very different from the early to mid 20th century when much of the philosophies of land management in Fiji were developed.

Telecommunications policy has left the business community tearing their proverbial hair out. There have been over the last ten years numerous shifts in direction and then over the last two years almost total paralysis.

These two examples point to the need for a period of constructive debate focused not on the constitution but on fixing key problem areas in a timely fashion. Interestingly this desire to get on with the basics does not only come from the Business community. In a poll conducted by Tebbut Research in late July, incidentally the only one that correctly predicted the dominance of the SDL and FLP in this election, respondents were asked what they thought was the most important issue in the coming election. Coming in at number 1 for both communities was racial unity, harmony and peace, good leadership at number 2, then employment, land issues, a good government, better living standards, the economy and coming in at number 13 a grand 1% of the population said that the constitution was the key issue.

It is clear that the community at large want their politicians to roll their sleeves up and get stuck into the practical side of delivering the infrastructure they need to rebuild their lives. Once this is achieved we will be in a position to sensibly debate the constitution and where it should head.

It should be noted that my call for a moratorium on this debate only to the politicians. Clearly much work still needs to go educating community leaders on the true meaning of the constitution and its implications.

I would also like to highlight a further cost of our leaders not getting on with the job of delivering good practical governance and one not often commented on publicly. While the underprivileged masses who have no choice may be driven to more extremist politicians out of pure frustration the privileged of all races will simply pack their bags and leave.

This already represents a massive problem for the commercial sector and it is a problem that will get worse. The issue of migration is one that needs considerable thought. While economic growth will attract back some home sick Fiji Islanders part of healing our nation must be an effort to try and get more of this group to return to Fiji.

It is tempting, as I have heard politicians from both sides say, to write this group of as deserters. But we need to appreciate the potential this group represents in terms of investment, knowledge and leadership. We need to be making it easier for this group to resume their lives in Fiji and not more difficult.

We have to accept that we are at the bottom of a global talent food chain. The USA and Europe pinch talent from Australia, Australia takes from New Zealand and guess where New Zealand comes recruiting. I propose that one of the key measurements of satisfactory governance for Fiji should be the migration rate!

Finally let me get on to the role of the media in this healing process. Fiji is lucky to have a well-developed and varied media. As I have said on many occasions per capita Fiji must almost be a world leader when it comes to the number of media outlets. In addition the people of Fiji are in general very high consumers of media.

However a multitude of outlets doesn't always equal quality of coverage. While I think one can safely say that no viewpoint in recent times has not been given fair coverage. The media industry in Fiji needs to focus more time on interpreting the political rhetoric that comes from our various leaders. Too often we are guilty of being captured by viewpoint without analysing critically the validity of the statement or point of view.

This has allowed a large number of politicians to get away with simplistic, populist but impractical policy. The debate over VAT on food is a good example of this. There is no doubt that removing VAT from basic food items is popular, who doesn't want cheaper food, but I don't believe the media has adequately explained to the people of Fiji the difficulties of enforcing such a policy and the potential cost to the community in lost tax revenue. On that issue I note that other more developed countries have also had difficulty in this area. One just has to look at Australia and the mess they have got into over VAT or GST!

The media in any small country has to be constantly vigilant that it does not allow itself to be captured by those who wish to mislead or push a particular personal agenda. This represents a constant challenge for media owners, editors and journalists.

There are other issues of quality, accuracy, punctuation and grammar that one could comment on but many of these issues are also the by-products of a stagnant economy.

To conclude I believe the task of healing this fractured nation of ours is far from impossible. While I have been accused by many of being the eternal optimist, a stance that takes hard work to maintain in the South Pacific, I remain confident that we are about to enter a period of economic and social growth. This faith is rooted in the fact that the people of Fiji have developed a healthy level of scepticism in their leaders. The overwhelming support for the SDL and the Fiji Labour Party was not in my mind a move to extremism but a cry for strong leadership. If our Prime Minister and the leader of the Fiji Labour Party believe they can take that support for granted there is no doubt in my mind that they will be held to account.

Which brings me to my final point. Last year I was fortunate enough to get the chance to visit South Africa and Cape Town in particular. That visit has made a major impact on me. Fiji shares much with South Africa a multi racial, multireligious society and one that was "fractured" in a manner we can only pray we never experience. We have borrowed much of our constitution from South Africa and we still have much to learn from their experience with this form of Government. However there was one thing that struck me when talking to South Africans of all description. When I asked them what it was that healed their nation there was one unanimous answer, Mandela!

The power of visionary leadership can never be underestimated. Our two communities have given a strong mandate to two men it is now up to them to put aside their rivalries, dislikes and various agendas and work together. Whether it is as Prime Minister and Leader of the opposition or as partners in cabinet we desperately need from them a display of leadership.

During that visit we travelled to Robben Island Mandela's prison for twenty-three years and were fortunate to be hosted on a tour conducted by Ahmed Kathrada one of Nelson Mandela's fellow inmates. We were over come by the fact that these men could walk out of prison after such a long time with a philosophy that they would forgive but never forget what had been done to them by the Apartheid regime. As we walked through the gates of Robben Island my wife turned to me and said "I don't think I'll ever be able to use the word hate again because I have no right to use it"."

"Some of the things I would like to talk about will suggest that there's another side to some of the things that William was talking about, which is central to bringing our fractured nation together. I couldn't agree with him more about the need to have economic growth. The changes to economic growth in Fiji and the amount of extra money for government to play around with, will be more than enough to satisfy everyone's blueprint.

You will recollect that the Labour Party during the election campaign and after the elections, VAT policy would not be negotiable. We are not going to give up from that tax. Justice Gates came out with his judgement. There's a good side to Justice Gate's judgement and there's a bad news to it too. The good side is that I think he was right in saying that tax laws should not be changed by governments. But the other side of his statement and his suggested recommendation suggests that Justice Gate's is a good economist as well and perhaps a better economist than the people in the Fiji Labour were saying.

Justice Gate's said the government, tax collected in this month, they should give that entire \$20 million back to the poor people. Economists know that the vat that comes from everybody in society, out of that \$20 million probably only \$5 million would come from the poor and \$15 million from the middle class and upper class.

Economists would say that the government shouldn't only take that money but give it back to whoever they got it from. Justice Gates says give it all back to the poor which is what I was saying two years ago to the Fiji Labour Party. I said don't remove VAT from these items, it would only create loopholes for people to evade that. Because what actually happened this year, over time that amount will actually keep growing and you're better off using the entire \$20 million for poverty alleviation. So Justice Gates recommendation should have given the Fiji Labour Party the hint that they're better off keeping the VAT and using the entire \$20 million for the poor.

William was right in saying that the media don't do their bit in explaining some of these issues to the public. And you've got some of the other little things like the so-called reduction of interest rates and housing down to six per cent. And that's only for the first year, the next 27 years it will still be at ten to 12 percent. An economist would look at Housing Authority, which lends to the low-income end of the market to small borrowers and you know that they can never be as profitable as Home Finance. And if Home Finance are looking to survive at 11/12 percent it would be virtually impossible for Housing Authority to survive on six percent interest rates. These are the issues that the media do not tackle and we're not talking about the media because some of us have a lot of grouches about the media.

Fiji TV at the height of the coup and in crisis's and so on, had half a minute news item in Fijian every night. Certain radio stations were the most popular in this country, if you listen to what comes out of the other stations, it makes a lot of money. But its not every station which you can say educates our public in detail.

Economic growth is essential thing and we've got to ask ourselves for the next five years or ten year, regardless of who is in power, is there going to be that kind of political climate which is going to create investor confidence. A lot of people to invest in this country, both local and foreigner. And you know very well that if there is political instability in the country arising from whatever purpose, where the people believe that they are rightfully denied their share of cabinet in government, where they believe that they have been denied jobs in the civil service. For whatever reason, whether they think people are denying them their proper share of the economic cake. If there's political instability, if there's strikes, harvest boycotts, marches in the streets, no investor wants to invest, the economy is not going to grow and people's livelihoods are going to suffer. With all the things that William was talking about which is poverty, then people will feed on poverty and the evil are able to feed on poverty.

We have to ask ourselves, will kind of situation we have in this country at the moment, liable to meet investor confidence. I'm sad to say that I disagree with the Constitution. It has been

approved by the House of Representatives, Senate and the Great Council of Chiefs. Is it the law of the land? It is as important as actually having good leadership and other things. And if the Constitution is not being followed then people in society have legitimate right to go to the streets and do what they think is legitimate avenue of address.

I'm sad to say that we do not have investor confidence and neither will we have economic growth and everything that goes along with it.

Three areas that I will focus on where I believe in the next five years this country has the capacity to fall apart. And its related to the political scenarios which we can have where you have on the one hand, a major party in this country, the Fiji Labour Party entitled to be in Cabinet according to the highest legal authority in the country, the Chief Justice, and they need capital. We don't need the source of strength of the Fiji Labour Party. The people who voted for it from the Indo-Fijian community but lets not make the mistake that they do have the followin in the sugar belts, they do have the following of the urban working classes and the towns, and also having increasingly improved their support among the middle working class and professionals among the Indo-Fijians. And amongst the working classes right around the country, in government, in public enterprises there are Indo-Fijians workers as well as indigenous Fijian workers. Those of you who have looked at recent statistics will know that the balance now favours roughly two thirds indigenous Fijians and about one third Indo-Fijians in all these public sector bodies.

So when it comes to a confrontation on deregulation, on structural reform in the public enterprise sector, any party which claims to represent the workers side, the farmers side, has got the capacity to totally turn the economy upside down.

What are the three areas on which there's going to be a need for major public policy action by government (whatever government is there). One is the sugar industry, because it still is one of the pillars of this economy, the second one is public sector reform - the government sector and all the public enterprises in the country, and thirdly, and I will disagree with this part in talking about the relatively importance in this country, is the rural-urban development.

Talking about the sugar industry, look at the problems that are in the sugar industry: land leases; farming practices; quality cane payments that need to be brought in; harvesting practices; transport charges; mill workers wages and conditions. Did any government at the time reform in the sugar industry without the cooperation of the unions who are representing the workers, without the cooperation of the farmers, its going to be impossible. And if the main party which represents the interests step out of government, you can imagine the scenario two months from now, six months from now, a year from now when government tries to bring about the very essential report in this industry.

You cannot blame any party for using an industrial situation like that to undermine the authority of the government increase its own popularity with the voters. Which also includes indigenous Fijians. I know that there is great big faith that has been going on between some of my academic friends about the importance of ethnic factors or class factors in the history of this country and the debate has gone backwards and forwards. That we have been in Fiji over the last 15, 20 years at a time when the ethnic factors are extremely important there comes a union action by the FPSA against government and all the indigenous Fijian workers are solidly behind Mr Mahendra Chaudry because he is the one putting bread and butter on the table for them. And he's not going to be any different when it comes to reforming the public enterprises where the majority of workers are also indigenous Fijians. So you have the possibility that when the sugar industry is tackled by the government, unless the major political parties are with the government for the day, you are going to have fewer crisis and work tension.

Public sector reform. In our public sector enterprises, something like \$1000 million of tax payers funds have been invested in the last 30 years and the majority of them have been loss making. The ones that have been making profits, they have fitted them away with terms on conditions and all kinds of inefficiencies. And the ones that have been tax and dividends have one or two percent of the book value of the asset. We have to ask ourselves, in this country

where you have the formal sector, you have people who are wage and salary people like ourselves, people in government, in public enterprises, in the large corporate sector where the unions exist, and we will protect our wages or salaries come hell or high water whatever happens to the economy, if we have cost of living adjustments and all that.

And then there's a second underworld out there. There is the informal sector, there's BBQ sellers on the streets, there are people working for small private companies that don't follow union conditions and there are hundreds of thousands of people in the rural areas who of course don't have anybody giving them cost of living adjustments, they have to cope with globalisation, prices increases, everything on their own. If you have a rooted public sector, if there's a huge public sector which people are not working, putting in their hours, if they are receiving salaries way beyond their productivity. What is happening in the economy, there's a massive movement of revenue from the people in the informal sector to people in the formal sector. We are talking about in past 1984 when there was a wage freeze and we have a time to protect the interest of the workers and there are many employers who have been rigging off workers for decades. There's also another side for our economic relativity in the country which we in the towns and urban areas hardly ever considered. We haven't thought about all the things we take for granted. We take good schools for granted, and if you look at pass rates and failure rates in rural schools. It is absolutely horrifying. If you look at those things you will understand why families don't want to live in rural areas where the kids are condemned for failure, look at the absence of healthcare centers, look at the absence of entertainment, roads, all these things which we take for granted. Unless there is massive investment by government in the rural infrastructure, you will continue to have this rural-urban drift. You are going to have people from Naitasiri and Namosi hills coming down every time there's a demonstration promising them the earth if they overturn the Constitution and the government of the day.

How do you get these development funds? The cake is shrinking because of bad leadership and bad politics and so on. You're going to have to find these funds from somewhere else. And an economy from Fiji is going to find it by living it inefficiency, you've got to make the public assets there work in the interests of the tax payers and you can't do that unless you have public sector reform. Some of these public sector reforms will require redundancies on a big scale. If you look at the numbers required to downsize Telecom and FEA, you're talking about industrial action on a massive scale, unless the unions can be convinced by the leaders that there is a better way of coming to an agreement with the unions.

We in Fiji have the capacity to learn from own experience in the past and to build on it. And what I believe we need in this country is recognition by the political leaders that they actually need help. If you look at the two political grouping that exist currently, I believe the capacity of both these political parties to contemplate to each others political agendas and objectives provided that they ensure that these problems that exist on the economic front are tackled in a cooperative manner. If they are not tackled in a cooperative manner then what I see is that both sides will find it in their interest to totally disrupt what is going on in this country.

This lecture is about healing a fractured nation but I think we should be thinking more about that. We should be thinking about how we can bring the major parties together to make the economic cake in this country grow bigger but with justice and fairness for all the people who contribute to the making of this cake."

"May I say that my employers agreed that I be part of this public panel discussion in my personal capacity. These are very much my own personal views and not the Office of the Prime Minister where I work, nor the Fiji Government responsible for it.

In medical terms, a fracture can mean a compound or simple fracture. We are here to talk about rebuilding our fractured nation. In our current context, I will as an economist, address you on the core fractures or issues affecting the development of our nation. These issues will need to be carefully studied and fixed.

I will be sharing with you my own experiences as to how public policy can be shaped and used to address these issues. The time slot of 10 minutes unfortunately limits the number of issues that I could cover but I shall try.

I start off by posing you this question: Are we chasing an elusive dream? I say this because I ask what guarantee is there that we rebuild Fiji again and there is not a 4th coup in 14 years time. Conveniently, I have a deep interest in this subject of Rebuilding Fiji, because of the kind of work I do for the Government. My interest stems from the view that Fiji as a country has not fully developed anywhere near its real economic potential. The irony is that I first joined Government in 1989 at a time when the country was rebuilding itself after the 1987 coups. Having spent the first seven years in the Central Planning Office, I saw with my own eyes the extensive effort it took to rebuild the nation. It took over ten years for Fiji to recover and a lot of hard work, sacrifice, pain and sweat was put into it.

Just when things were looking well, the coup reared its ugly head again on May 19th last year. All that was rebuild over the previous 14 years was destroyed in a single day. You can therefore imagine how I felt on that dreadful and horrific morning.

The coup caused a major set back for the country and economy. It shattered many people's dreams and hopes in Fiji. A lot of people were forced to migrate in search of better pastures and a better life. The rest of us are left to once again pick up the pieces. We are back to square one with the task of rebuilding this nation once again.

I have spent many years searching for answers as to how best we could develop Fiji to be the country and society that we all want it to be. We often hear people say that the answer is simple. Oh! You just do this and you do that and all will be well. I am sorry to say that it is more complex than that.

That should give us a reason to think. This time round, we must learn from our lessons and avoid the mistakes of the past in rebuilding our nation. Otherwise, I fear that our dreams for a Fiji Islands paradise will be eluding us once again.

My search for national solutions has taken me beyond the parameters of public policy that I have been asked to speak to tonight because of the multitude of variables that have to be considered. The scope is obviously broad and comprehensive.

1. Having a visionary leadership

What is relevance of having a national vision?

When we talk of rebuilding a nation, it is simply a first step in a long process of researching the end result that we want. Having a vision defines what this end result is.

I think it was Abraham Lincoln, the first US President, who said: "If we know where we are and where we want to go, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it."

Although these wise words may have been uttered over one hundred years ago, it is quite relevant to our situation in Fiji today. As a nation, we need to commit to a common long-term vision on the kind of country and society that you and I want. This vision will be our end result and will determine what we need to do to achieve it and how to do it.

With your indulgence, allow me to have a go at this vision:

"We want Fiji to be country and society that is stable, offering its people a secure life and guaranteed rights; where people can earn a good income for their labour, and enjoy good living standards and lifestyle; where children can be properly raised with opportunities and hope for their future; to be a place where all can have a sense of belonging and there is no discrimination based on gender, race, religion or creed; where people are caring especially for the poor; where the special place of indigenous is recognised; and where a person can plan his or her future with certainty."

2. Economic Rebuilding

In pursuing this vision, there are lots of things that we need to do in rebuilding our fractured nation. It is important that we carefully priorities what we need to do first. To me, the rebuilding of our economy comes first. I believe we need to increase the size of the economic cake so that there is more wealth and income to be shared by everyone. The size of the cake is the limit to what is possible. This should be the priority of Government and it is a relief to me that Hon. Prime Minister Qarase thinks the same.

It is logical that we should expand the economy with great urgency because it will help restore the jobs, salaries and full working hours. New jobs will also be created for our young people. In addition, Government will be able to raise more revenue to fund its budget and its services to the people of Fiji. There are endless demands on Government's expenditure right now, especially in helping our disenfranchised people. The ability of Government to deliver will depend on its finances and ability to pay.

How can this be achieved? To sustain and accelerate economic recovery and growth in Fiji, I believe that we need to embark on having a sound and stable policy environment, an intensive program of public sector reform, increased investment in education and health, and enabling environment to boost private sector growth.

We need to do everything possible to stimulate private investment to which government should show an unwavering commitment. This is to be supplemented by a well-targeted public sector investment program. The economy is showing very slow signs of recovery from last year's downturn of 4.8%. The projection this year is around 1 %. A high level of investment is needed to fast track our economic recovery. We can raise investment by targeting our key growth sectors including agriculture, fisheries, forests, manufacturing, and especially tourism. Information technology also offers good prospects for economic diversification and job creation.

There are many good investment projects in these sectors such as Natadola, the Air Pacific Hotel, Taunovo Resort etc. that are on hold because they fall short of their required equity or debt capital. This is not surprising given Fiji's high-risk profile and the private sector reluctance to invest. The further delay in these projects means Fiji's inability to create sufficient jobs for the tens of thousands of school leavers that enter the job market each year.

Government will need to defy convention and play a catalytic role to help generate these pending investments. It could do this by providing the seed money required to implement some of the projects, especially the major ones. I believe that this would be the only way to get some projects implemented.

The projects, however, must be financially sound and viable and Government must be selective. It will be necessary for a state investment company to be set-up to be the vehicle through which Government can make its investments. Government will merely be a shareholder and will not be directly managing the entities.

Government can choose to sell its shares to the Fiji public after an entity is up and running. In this way, Government will also be helping local people to invest in shares and in business. This will be quite useful in ensuing local ownership in foreign investments.

3. Land

Land is in abundance in Fiji totalling some 18,333sq.km. but only 15 % of its is under some sort of development or cultivation. The rest, which are less marginal, remains unutilised and idle. This portion, which is largely Fijian customary owned land under NLTB, will require some capital improvements before they can be bought into productive use. Land in my view holds the key to Fiji's future development. The challenge is to make it available for commercial use either by its owner or others. Apart from its sentimental value, idle land is of little economic value to its owner but any leases arrangement must not be at the expense of the landowner. This is sensitive ground that I am treading on because land has always been central to questions of politics, power, race and economics in Fiji.

We look to the new government with hope that a resolution to ALTA will be found at the earliest possible time. There is no easy solution to the matter. A solution can only be found if all stakeholders can meet in good faith and find a solution that is in everyone's interest. The founding principle should ensure fairness to the landowner and tenant, with fair market rentals and fair leases.

I believe that the role of NLTB should also be reviewed in line with change in time and the aspirations and security of landowners and tenants. Apart from administering leases and collecting rents, the NBLTB should play a more proactive role in the development of Fijian owned land. This will require a comprehensive landuse plan. With this plan, NLTB can then coordinate land development with line ministries in the development of infrastructure and the attraction of investors.

4. Caring for others

The seriousness of social dislocation and poverty in this country has always been understated or ignored at the convenience of others who are not affected. This is especially when the present statistics reveal that 10% of the population of Fiji share 70% of the national wealth whilst 90% of the people share a mere 30% of the wealth. The 1997 Poverty Report also estimated that over 30% of our population are living in poverty.

With these statistics, it needs to be recognised that poverty exists and that economically and socially disadvantaged groups are emerging and increasing. The trend is disturbing indeed and Government's direct intervention must be made more profound in ensuring the even distribution of the nations wealth for the betterment and economic and social empower of the less fortunate.

There is Government Poverty Strategy already in place. Essentially, Fiji should set its priorities and sets of actions across three pillars:

- Promote economic opportunities for people through equitable growth, better access to markets, and expanded assets;
- Facilitating empowerment by making state institutions more responsive to poor people and removing barriers that exclude women, ethnic and racial groups, and the socially disadvantaged.;
- Enhancing Security by preventing and managing economy wide shocks and providing mechanisms to reduce the sources of vulnerability that poor people face.

With this framework, the Government should bear in mind the different cultural and social traits of people that are poor. Three groups were identified in the 1997 Poverty Report: Fijian, Indo-Fijians and others. This means that employing a uniform solution for all races and groups will not be effective. Alternatively, a better solution would be to treat different groups with pocket based programs that are custom to suit their needs.

5. A new partnership

With the advent and empowerment of social partners as powerful agents of development, I believe that it will be in the interest of the Government to work very closely with them. Having a reinforced partnership between Government and all social partners will be the super glue that will seal the synergy that is necessary for national development. Gone are the days when the running of Government was a highly secretive business. In this day and age, when the

principles of transparency, accountability and good governance have taken over as the preferred norms, Government's will make greater development impacts by working with its social partners. After all, don't they serve the same objectives?

I am convinced that the key to sustained and sustainable economic growth and development lies in forming solid partnerships with the private sector, unions, NGO's and civil society.

As for economic growth, a reinforced partnership between government and the private sector is without question. The private sector is the engine for future growth and must be a strong and trusting relationship between the two parties. As for social development, the Government must learn to harness the strength and potential of NGO's and civil society. These social organisations complement the machinery of Government and have the focus and capacity in what they do.

6. Racial Healing

Many people say that our country is torn and is wounded due to the racial grievances that Fijians and Indians have against each other. It must be reconciled if there is to be any chance of rebuilding our nation.

Reconciliation will be our salvation they said.

We have been on the brink of an abyss since May 19th. By God's grace and the goodwill and tolerance of our citizens, we do not fall over the edge. We averted complete anarchy. Now, society is seemingly calm and stable again. Daily life is returning to normalcy and a newly elected SDL led Coalition Government is now in office to rule us for the next five years. But, at the same time, political and race relations are badly strained. Well, with respect, I say that reconciliation is indispensable to healing of Fiji. Without it, the wounds that exist still polarise our society. The new Government has set aside a Ministry of Reconciliation to take on this responsibility. They do not have all the answers and we must help them. Without undermining the importance of reconciliation, might I ask as the following:

- Who are the parties that are reconciling?
- Reconciling for what?
- What will be the mode of reconciliation?
- How long will the reconciliation take?
- If there is a cost to it, who will pay?

I ask these questions because I personally do not have to reconcile with anybody because I have not wronged anybody including Indo-Fijians. Therefore, why should I be sharing the burden of the peoples' crime. I come from an area where the security of lease tenants was fully protected during the height of the crisis last year. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for those from Muaniweni who needed reconciliation.

Fijians and their problems: This is important in the interest of learning what they want, and how best they can achieve it without overburdening anyone else. I wish to speak specifically on the crisis of Fijian leadership at the village and community level."

Letters to the President

Friday, September 21, 2001

Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda, CF MBE, JP
President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands,
Government House,
SUVA.

Your Excellency,

I write further to my letter of 12 September, 2001 in which I urged you not to swear in the illegal and unconstitutional Cabinet (government) of Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase.

Regrettably, you in your wisdom decided otherwise. The Hon. Chief Justice in an extrajudicial statement on 14 September, 2001 has drawn the attention of the nation to the fact that the Qarase government is unconstitutional without the inclusion of representatives of the Fiji Labour Party.

I wish to respectfully urge Your Excellency to take due cognisance of the statement as it may assist in finding a solution to the current constitutional crisis facing the nation on the issue of whether there is a legitimate constitutional government in place in the Fiji Islands.

The Chief Justice has alluded to the "seemingly clear and unequivocal provisions of Section 99 of the Constitution" and has concluded that "the letter and spirit of the Constitution under the section pertaining to the formation of a Cabinet based on the constitutional concept of a multiparty government may have been overlooked."

Mr Qarase in attempting to justify his illegal and unconstitutional actions, has made several statements, some of it bordering on the untruth, while others apparently stemming from his ignorance of the relevant constitutional provisions or his desire to simply act in contempt of those provisions.

I wish to make it very clear, Your Excellency, that I laid down absolutely no conditions to the acceptance of Mr Qarase's invitation to the Fiji Labour party to be represented in his Cabinet. The letters exchanged between us on this subject will bear testimony to this fact.

Mr Qarase cannot manufacture "conditional acceptance" on my party by referring to my drawing his attention to the relevant provisions of the Constitution which he must observe in establishing a multi-party Cabinet. Similarly, my reference to the Korolevu Declaration (Parliamentary Paper 15/99) cannot be interpreted as stipulating a condition to the acceptance of Mr Qarase's invitation.

The procedure for establishing a multi-party Cabinet is laid down in Section 99 of the Constitution. As is to be expected, the Constitution does not provide the finer details of how the proportionate number of Cabinet seats is to be determined, how Cabinet portfolios are to be allocated or how significant differences on policy matters are to be resolved in a multi-party government. These are matters for discussion/consultation. The Korolevu Declaration is the outcome of one such discussion/consultation between the political parties prior to the 1999 general elections.

The Korolevu Declaration was subsequently endorsed by Parliament as Parliamentary Paper 15/99. The procedures, practices and recommendations therein are applicable in the event of a dispute or disagreement between the political parties on any subject covered in the Declaration. The fact that the SDL was not a signatory to that document is of no significance in its application. The Korolevu Declaration has established a practice which was agreed to by all political parties at the time and successfully used in establishing a multi-party government following the 1999 general elections.

Mr Qarase's insistence that all parties in his multi-party Cabinet must accept unconditionally the SDL manifesto as the "fundamental policy guide of Cabinet" stems from his apparent lack of understanding of the concept of a multi-party government.

The significance of Section 99 (5) lies in the commitment to power sharing between different ethnic communities. It represents a crucial means of overcoming Fiji's historical legacy of the communalism and

ethnic polarization. It is also a mechanism of redressing an imbalance in the distribution of seats in Parliament between ethnic Fijians and other minority communities.

It is for these reasons that the Fiji Constitution requires a multi-party cabinet and sets out very clear provisions for the procedure that must be followed to establish this (Section 99 (3), 99 (5), and 99 (9)).

Mr Qarase's lament that his party (SDL) would end up being a majority in his own Cabinet should the Fiji Labour Party become a party of government, is of his own making and a consequence of his unilateral action. He can easily overcome this problem by dismissing ministers he had hastily appointed from the minority parties not entitled to be in government.

Finally, I wish to inform Your Excellency that vote rigging and electoral fraud on a massive scale was perpetrated on the voters of Fiji in the general elections. We have sufficient evidence to back our claim.

We have filed reports on this with the United Nations and the Commonwealth Observer Missions and are also petitioning the High Court to challenge the results in several constituencies.

I urge Your Excellency to intervene to find a constitutional solution to the current impasse in view of the rejection of the Qarase government by the international community (New Zealand and the United Kingdom Governments have already issued public statements to this effect) and the serious adverse consequences that Mr Qarase's unilateral and unconstitutional actions will have on the future of our nation and her people.

Yours sincerely,

Mahendra P Chaudhry,
Parliamentary Leader,
Fiji Labour Party.

His Excellency, Ratu Josefa Iloilovatu Uluivuda, CF MBE, JP
President of the Republic of the Fiji Islands
Government House
SUVA

Your Excellency,

IN view of the statement by the Hon Chief Justice last Friday that "the letter and spirit of the Constitution under the section pertaining to the formation of a Cabinet based on the constitutional concept of a multi-party government may have been overlooked", I thought I should write to explain my position.

As far as I am concerned, I have fulfilled what is required of me as Prime Minister, under section 99 of the Constitution. I am required to establish a multi-party Government and I am to invite to Cabinet any party with seats in the House of Representatives totalling more than 10 per cent of the total number of seats in that Chambers. I have done both.

I has been argued that the inclusion in Cabinet of parties that fulfil the requirement to be invited under section 99(5) is mandatory. If this is so, why then is there a need or necessity for the Prime Minister to issue an invitation? Section 99 (7) makes reference to an invited party declining the invitation extended to it under section 99(5). This in itself means that it is not mandatory for an invited party to be in Cabinet. All these are constitutional issues that require determination to establish their legal meaning. Only a court of law can do this, and if the Fiji Labour Party wishes to initiate court proceedings for this purpose, they should be allowed to do so.

But it is also my sincere view that the Fiji Labour Party can best assist in the current situation by accepting the position of Opposition in Parliament. The Fiji Labour Party should seriously consider that in the national interest of ensuring good governance in Fiji. An essential component of a responsible and accountable Government is an effective and credible Opposition in Parliament.

The multi-party Cabinet you have appointed on my recommendation already includes the two independent members of the House of Representatives, the Conservative Alliance and Hon. Mr Kenneth Zinck from the New Labour Unity Party. If the Fiji Labour Party and its 27 members were to join Government, the only parties felt to form the Opposition would be the United General party and the National Federation Party with their one member of the House of Representatives, each.

There are other practical considerations.

In my letter of invitation I had made it clear that parties joining my Cabinet would have to agree beforehand that the policy manifesto of the SDL Party would be the fundamental policy guide of Cabinet. We are the majority party in Parliament, and in Cabinet. We have been elected on the basis of our policy manifesto. Naturally and logically, it is not unreasonable to expect all parties joining the Cabinet to accept this condition. This, in fact, is what all the members of my multi-party Cabinet from outside the SDL have accepted.

The Fiji Labour Party, however did not accept the same condition, even though the FLP Leader, Mr Chaudhry, had himself acknowledged in a press conference the importance of a clear collective understanding on fundamental policies at the outset of the formation of a multi-party Cabinet.

There is another practical reason why this pre-condition is critically important. Cabinet makes collective decisions by consensus. This means a party in Cabinet, through its members, can effectively exercise a veto power in the Cabinet's decision-making process, and so unless there is a clear collective understanding from the outset of the basic policy framework that will guide Cabinet in its work, the Cabinet is likely to be an unworkable one, and because of that, it will not be able to provide the strong, consistent and effective leadership that we need if we are to make substantive progress in taking Fiji forward.

There are fundamental policy differences between the SDL and the Fiji Labour Party, and as examples, I cite our respective differences on the resolution of expiring agricultural leases on native land, and also on the review of the Constitution. I made it clear to Mr Chaudhry that we, in the SDL, have been mandated both by our voters and by representative Fijian institutions like the Great Council of Chiefs and the NLTB to pursue these policies. We have no mandate to make compromises on these issues of vital importance to the indigenous Fijian people.

Mr Chaudhry now says that he and his party had accepted my invitation under section 99(5) of the Constitution unconditionally. This is completely incorrect and false. This is because in addition to their rejection of my condition that they accept at the outset the SDL manifesto as the fundamental policy guide of the multi-party Cabinet, he himself stipulated two specific conditions in his letter dated 10th September, 2001.

He insisted firstly that his party's participation in Cabinet and in government would be in accordance with the Korolevu Declaration as well as the Constitution. In addition, he reserved his right to be consulted, inter alii, on "the appointment of Ministers, Assistant Ministers, Senators, policy formation and in matters pertinent to minority partners in Parliament."

These are conditions, which I cannot accept. The Korolevu Declaration is a political agreement. It is not an enactment by Parliament. It is not part of the Constitution. Procedures for decision-making in Cabinet are covered in the Manual of Cabinet Procedure. My party, the SDL, is not a signatory to the Korolevu Declaration and is, therefore, not bound by it.

On Mr Chaudhry's condition to be consulted, he is actually demanding a right that he is not entitled to under the Constitution. In effect, his condition is an attempt to usurp the constitutional authority of the Prime Minister under section 99 of the Constitution. His demand is, therefore, an unconstitutional condition which I could not and cannot accept.

Finally, there is the practical consideration of numbers. If the Fiji Labour Party were to join Cabinet, it would be entitled to 8 seats, leaving 12 for the SDL in a Cabinet of 20 Ministers. But with SDL sharing out 4 of its seats to its multi-party Cabinet partners, it would be left with only 8 Ministers. In this situation, the Prime Minister will not be able to maintain a workable Cabinet, and provide effective leadership in Government. In fact, with the consensus system of decision-making in Cabinet, the Prime Minister is reduced to nothing more than a referee, rather than the leader, setting the policy agenda of Cabinet and driving government to deal decisively with issues of good government, development, and national stability and unity.

Based on all the above considerations, and, in particular, the national interest of ensuring good government in Fiji, I would respectfully urge Your Excellency to accept Hon Mahendra Chaudhry as Leader of Opposition in the House of Representatives, at the appropriate time. This would be fully consistent with the normal practice in all parliamentary democracies.

I submit the above, your Excellency, with the assurance that the Government as presently constituted is not illegal and should be allowed to proceed. If the Fiji Labour Party seeks judicial determination of its entitlement under section 99 of the Constitution, it should be allowed to do so. But the Government as you have appointed should carry on in governing Fiji. It is a multi-party Cabinet, and it has the necessary numbers to maintain itself as the majority in the House of Representatives.

I remain Sir
Your Excellency's
Most Obedient Servant

(Laisenia Qarase)
Prime Minister