LEARNING FROM THE
2014 FIJI ELECTIONS

Professor Wadan Narsey

2018
Narsey, Wadan.
Other works by Wadan Narsey

**ALSO BY WADAN NARSEY**


*The Impact of PICTA on alcohol and tobacco industries in Forum Island Countries.* School of Economics, Faculty of Business and Economics, The University of the South Pacific. Suva. 2010.

*The Quantitative Analysis of Poverty in Fiji.* School of Economics, Faculty of Business and Economics, The University of the South Pacific and Vanuavou Publications. 2008.


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*Pacific Regional Post Secondary Education Study: Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Western Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.* World Bank Reports, Country Department III, East Asia and the Pacific Region.

  Volume 1 with A. Aime, D. Hamilton, Jin He and Ian P. Morris.

  Volume 2: Tracer Studies (with Ian P. Morris)

  Volumes 3 to 8: Country Studies Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Western Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. (with Ian P. Morris)

**Editor**

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**Reprints**


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Governments/political parties

Whenever there is a reference to a “government”, the date in the title will indicate which government is being referred to, according to the following list.

Governments (led by)

1987 FLP/NFP Coalition (Bavadra/M. Chaudhry/J. R. Reddy) (1 month, coup)
1987 (post coup) Military Government (Rabuka)
1988-1992 Interim Government (Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara)
1993-1999 SVT Government (Rabuka)
1999 FLP Coalition Government (Mahendra Chaudhry) (one year, coup)
2000 Interim Government (Laisenia Qarase)
2001 - 2006 SDL Government (Laisenia Qarase)
2006 SDL/FLP Government ((Laisenia Qarase) (9 months, coup)
2007 - 2014 Military Government (Voreqe Bainimarama and Aiyaz Khaiyum)
Sep. 2014- Fiji First Party Government (Voreqe Bainimarama and Aiyaz Khaiyum)

Political Parties (in chronological order)

NFP National Federation Party, was born in the sugar belts, with largely Indo-Fijian supporters and a few prominent Fijian leaders. Still going.

Alliance Party Led by Ratu Mara, first Prime Minister of Fiji, supported by Fijians and their chiefs, with minority support from Muslims and Gujarati. Faded in 1987.

Labor Party Led by Mahendra Chaudhry, with mostly Indo-Fijian supporters, but also urban working class Fijians. Faded after 2006 coup.

PANU Party of National Unity was based on indigenous Fijian support in the west. It was associated with firebrand leader Apisai Tora who supported coups but also did deals with other parties.


VLV A splinter Fijian group after 2000, supported by a Ratu Mara faction.

SDL Soqosoqo Duavata ni Lewenivanua led by Qarase, formed government after the 2001 elections, became SODELPA after the 2006 coup.

SODELPA Social Democratic Liberal Party (SDL) formed after the 2006 coup, led by Qarase.

FFP Fiji First Party, led by Voreqe Bainimarama and Aiyaz Khaiyum, formed just prior to the 2014 Elections.
Preface

Four long years have passed since the rigidly managed 2014 Elections and yet again in a few months’ time\(^1\), the Opposition parties and candidates will be unfairly rowing against the tide. Part of the explanation for the lack of positive changes in the elections environment is that academics, both from Fiji and abroad have refused to reveal clearly the gross unfairness of the 2014 Elections environment, nor have they dispelled the misconceptions and deliberate lies and propaganda around the 2006 treasonous coup by Voreqe Bainimarama.

Even more invidious and little discussed is the full truth around the 2000 coup wrongly labelled as the “George Speight coup” perpetrated by a small group of CRW soldiers eventually arrested by the RFMF, nor the 2000 mutiny by another group of CRW soldiers brutally put down by Bainimarama. Totally ignored in the literature around Bainimarama’s political ascendancy is that five soldiers not necessarily involved in the mutiny were taken from policy custody by the military in 2000, and brutally tortured to death without trial, judge or jury, with no one being held to account to this day, with a Director of Public Prosecutions and Director of Fiji Human Rights Commission both conveniently looking the other way. 2000 coup plotters and collaborators freely stride the Fiji and even the world stage, while a few even enjoy employment in UN organizations.

While elections are supposed to result in civilians rising to political leadership in Fiji, there is little likelihood that the 2018 Elections will be any different from the 2014 Elections with former military personnel being in control of both the major political parties: Bainimarama in control of the governing Fiji First Party and Sitiveni Rabuka the military leader of the 1987 coup, now the Leader of the main Opposition party, SODELPA. Even the minor National Federation Party has a former military officer and 2006 coup collaborator as its President. The Commissioner of Police and Commissioner of Prisons are both former military officers, the latter being a convicted criminal and brother in law of Bainimarama. Is it any wonder therefore that indigenous Fijian duxes of secondary schools aspire to being commanders of the RFMF as their first career choice.\(^2\)

Even though I am an economist, I have always been aware that people’s standards of living are to be explained not just by economic theory but also politics and other social sciences. Elections are important in that they may change the economic growth trajectories and standards of living for the better or worse. To that end, my efforts at community education have also focused on the political factors, such as constitutions and electoral systems, that lead to the formation of particular kinds of governments whose policies then inevitably impact on people’s material well-being. I have also been practically involved in voter and citizens’ education over the last four decades.

\(^1\) It is astonishing that as of the end of July 2018, the Bainimarama Government refuses to announce the exact date of elections (expected to be held between May and September) nor even their candidates.

\(^2\) While Bainimarama has frequently been the role model of choice for indigenous Fijian male students, the latest was Rear Admiral Naupoto who was cited by the head boy of Pundit Shreedhar Maharaj College as being his hero, because his cadetship had involved “discipline and teamwork” (Fiji Times, 7 April 2018).
My previous electoral education work

My earliest involvement in such work was as a member of a committee of the Young Women’s Christian Association in the early 1970s with the late Amelia Rokotuvuna when we made a submission to the Street Commission. After the 1987 coup, I began writing on the institutional discrimination against Indo-Fijians and became involved with the activities of the Citizens’ Constitutional Forum and other friends in critiquing the 1990 Constitution and the biased electoral system imposed on Fiji. At the invitation of Mr. Jai Ram Reddy (Leader of NFP), I entered the Fiji Parliament and was the Shadow Finance Minister for three years, 1996 to 1999. We co-operated with Rabuka and his SVT Party in peacefully getting the 1997 Constitution unanimously approved by the Fiji Parliament.

But even before the 1997 Constitution was approved and while I was in the Fiji Parliament, I critiqued the Alternative Vote system recommended by the Reeves Commission, much to the displeasure of one of its members.3 The 1999 Elections substantiated all my criticisms, and again after the 2001 Elections.

To try and better inform the voters and political parties for the 2006 Elections, I developed “Voter Education Kits” in not just English but also in the Fijian and Hindustani vernaculars, to try and reach those not literate in English. These VEKs were funded by the Fiji Elections Office and launched by Vice President Joni Madraiwiwi and can all be downloaded from my website NarseyOnFiji.

I also ran national workshops for the Fiji Elections Office in Suva, Nadi and Labasa, as well as for special interest groups such as NGOs, political parties and even 400 senior officers in the RFMF in an all-day workshop.4 These VEKs were “hands-on” exercises where workshop participants were required to physically count votes and shift preferences in “mock elections”. These VEKs are freely available on my website.

Voter Education for the 2014 Elections

For the 2014 Elections, I developed a similar Voter Education Kit for the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement and similarly conducted workshops for FWRM (to train trainers) as well as for some political parties. The NGOs were however banned by the Bainimarama Government from conducting any training. Nevertheless, this FWRM VEK was remarkable for the accuracy of its predictions, with the results for the Fiji First Party even more skewed than predicted. I present this Voter Education Kit as an Annex.

Issues for the 2014 Elections

With severe media censorship prevailing prior to the 2014 Elections, I began posting “Elections Bulletins” on my blog NarseyOnFiji beginning around February 2014 as well as firing off Letters to the Editor to the Fiji Times, Fiji Sun and the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA). Most of these Letters to the Editor were not

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3 Brij Lal, also my brother-in-law.

4 One of the surprising incidents at this workshop was Commodore Bainimarama ranting for ten minutes because I had made the statement that the army must be subservient to the government of the day. In hind-sight this was an indication of his plans for the future.
published but I put them on my blog nevertheless, as an indication of the ongoing censorship.

In June 2014 a few months before the elections, Fiji Times bravely requested me to write for them a series of articles on important elections issues that the voters should think about. Of course, these articles were all stringently vetted by the FT lawyers (then Munro Leys) in case the newspaper was subjected to financial and other legal penalties.

The Fiji Times publisher (Hank Arts) and their editor (Fred Wesley) are to be greatly commended for their courage in attempting to education the voting public despite the enormous repression they faced from the Bainimarama Government. It is a continuing horror story in Fiji’s legal history that these two courageous individuals have had a “sedition” charge hanging over them for two years for a Letter to the Editor published in the Fijian language newspaper Na Lalakai more than a year ago. While a magistrate acquitted them recently, the DPP announced that he would appeal the decision. Does the Bainimarama/Khaiyum Government hope that such ongoing charges will succeed in dampening the independence of the newspaper in the coming elections?

It is utterly shameful that the MIDA Chairman (Ashwin Raj) who is supposed to protect the independence and objectivity of the of the media has raised no voice for their basic human right to speedy justice. Neither has he raised his voice on the lack of independence and open bias of some media and some journalists.

I am happy that most of these articles were surprisingly accurate in their predictions for the elections outcome. For the record, I have left all these articles and earlier posts as they had appeared except that I have rearranged the order by content.

To make it easier for political parties and candidates, I have formatted the particular issues in red text.

The aftermath of the 2014 Elections

When the 2014 Elections results were announced by the Supervisor of Elections indicating that the Fiji First Party had won, I also used the phrase “the people have spoken”, however reluctantly given the elections had not been a “level playing field” for all the parties. But when political parties and candidates began to query the results from some polling stations where their supporters had voted, I found to my dismay that the Fiji Electoral Commission had not independently verified a single polling station result. The “results” had come out of a “black box” totally under the control of the Supervisor of Elections (Saneem) and the Minister for Elections (Aiyaz Khaiyum).

I had hoped that academic analyses of the 2014 Elections would be brave enough to raise all the unfair aspects and to call for their removal. That has not happened. One was a Special Issue of the Journal of Pacific Studies (edited by Professor Vijay Naidu and Dr. Sandra Tarte (of USP). The second was an ANU publication The People Have Spoken, edited by Professor Steven Ratuva (Director of the Macmillan Brown Center in NZ) and Dr. Stephanie Lawson.

It is extremely sad to me personally that the vast majority of my writings (whether in the Fiji Times or my blog NarseyOnFiji) were ignored by the academic editors and most of the writers (not all) of these two otherwise important academic publications on the 2014 Elections. Why they do so is beyond me. I address these two works in
my Part II (The Aftermath). This third about which I say little was a special edition of *The Round Table* edited by Brij Lal, including a mix of the other authors.

It is my hope that all political parties and candidates will make good use of the ideas presented in this volume in their election campaigns for the 2018 Elections, and that responsible voters can question the candidates on these issues.

It is a tragedy that the new smaller political parties have not taken on board the lessons of the 2014 Elections which is that should they be unable to receive the minimum number of voters required (5% of all votes or about 27,000 votes), their votes and seats (4 seats in the 2014 Elections) will effectively go to the larger parties (see readings 6 and 7). They would be better advised to run with the larger Opposition parties who have already established beyond doubt that they can get elected to parliament.


Professor Wadan Narsey
Melbourne
August 2018
PART 1    ISSUES IN THE 2014 ELECTIONS
1a CONSTITUTION AND ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

All elections are conducted under laws, decrees and rules. Most elections in Fiji have been conducted under constitutionally valid rule such as the 1970 and 1997 Constitutions. Some have been conducted under constitutions imposed on Fiji, such as the 1990 Constitution (imposed by Rabuka’s military government) and the 2013 Constitution (imposed by the Bainimarama Government).

In any sports game, the rules are NOT decided unilaterally by one side, and neither are the referees or “Upstairs Referee” appointed by on side.

It is an ongoing horror story that the Opposition political parties and Independent candidates are being forced to abide by the rules of the game as determined by the Bainimarama/Khaiyum Government and those authorities appointed by them: the Supervisor of Elections (Abdul Saneem), Fiji Electoral Commission, and the Chairman of MIDA and Human Rights Commission (Ashwin Raj)- who no independent person could ever accuse of being totally objective and neutral to both Government and Opposition.

In the 2014 Elections, the public was flooded by massive propaganda coming from the Bainimarama Government, using both taxpayer funds and the tens of millions which their corporate businessmen supporters poured into their FFP coffers. Political parties can take comfort that all these corporate supporters will just as easily switch their support to any other government that comes into place, as was realized by the Alliance Party, the SVT Party and the SDL Party when they lost power.

When Bainimarama did his 2006 coup, one of his justifications was that the 2006 Election was full of electoral fraud. I argued in a Fiji Times article in August 2014 (reproduced here) that this claim was a blatant lie.
1. No Electoral fraud in 2006 Elections

(The Fiji Times, 2 August 2014)\(^5\)

Many anonymous bloggers are already alleging that the Bainimarama Government will be rigging the forthcoming September 2014 elections. Such allegations have been made before, and despite being unsubstantiated, have had disastrous results, politically and economically, and must be guarded against.

Here I take you back to the last 2006 election where soon after the results were announced, the Fiji Labor Party (FLP) claimed that they had been cheated of victory by SDL’s electoral fraud. This electoral fraud claim was then used by Bainimarama, as one of his justifications for the 2006 coup.

But when the Leader of the FLP and a few of his colleagues joined Bainimarama’s government, none of them produced any significant evidence of electoral fraud, despite being in government for more than a year. Neither was there any significant evidence of electoral fraud produced by the Director of the Human Rights Commission (Dr. Shaista Shameem) who financed and propagated a report by Dr. James Anthony to justify the allegations.

Nevertheless, the claims of electoral fraud have been believed by many Indo-Fijians and the allegations never retracted to this day, and even repeated by Bainimarama for seven years. It is therefore useful to re-look at the voting numbers from 2006 (and from 2001 and 1999) to see what lessons they hold for guarding against electoral fraud in the 2014 elections.

In a box, I list a number of 2006 allegations which political parties, candidates and voters can think about to consider their relevance for the September 2014 elections.

Possible indicators of electoral fraud?

Given that the majority of SVT and SDL supporters were indigenous Fijians, and that the majority of supporters for the Fiji Labor Party were Indo-Fijians\(^6\), there were two possible ethnicity-based indicators of possible electoral fraud in 1999, 2001 and 2006:

(a) were the numbers of registered indigenous Fijian voters higher than the potential numbers of voters indicated by population projections, and higher than the Indo-Fijian proportion?

(b) was the proportion of registered Fijians voting systematically higher than the similar proportion for Indo-Fijians?

These two questions can be examined in aggregate for Fiji, or by individual constituencies.

The electoral results suggest completely the opposite of the allegations.

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\(^5\) This article is based on a submission I had made to the Yash Ghai Commission.
\(^6\) I prefer to use the term indigenous Fijians and “Indo-Fijians”.
The 2007 Census data and potential voters

One can work backwards from the 2007 Census results to estimate the numbers of potential voters for 2006 by reducing the Fijian number by 1.9% (that is the annual growth rate of Fijian voters) and by reducing the Indo-Fijian number by a smaller 0.1%, the growth rate of Indo-Fijian voters. Table 1 gives the results for percent. of potential voters who were registered by ethnicity. The last row indicates that a lower 98% of eligible Fijian voters were actually registered than the 99% of Indo-Fijians, but both were pretty close to 100%.

It is highly unlikely that hordes of non-existent indigenous Fijian voters had been registered by the SDL in order to swamp the Indo-Fijian vote.

Table 1  Perc. of Potential Voters Registered (2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number registered</th>
<th>Potential voters</th>
<th>Percent. Registered</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fijians</td>
<td>256,014</td>
<td>261,876</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Fijians</td>
<td>204,470</td>
<td>205,723</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
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And regardless of the excessive numbers of ballot papers that had apparently been printed, what percentage of those registered voters actually voted?

The last row of Table 2 tells you that a much lower 87% of registered Fijian voters actually voted in 2006, compared to the higher 89% of registered Indo-Fijians.

A higher proportion of potential Indo-Fijian voters were registered than Fijians. AND

A higher proportion of registered Indo-Fijian voters actually voted, than Fijians.

This was true in all the last three elections: 1999, 2001 and in 2006 as indicated by Table 3. In all these elections, the Indo-Fijian election turnout was higher than indigenous Fijian and the Others.

It was highly unlikely that the numbers of indigenous Fijians voting were in any way artificially inflated by either SVT or SDL.

Both ethnic communities saw much lower proportions voting in 2001 (soon after the 2000 coup) than in either 2001 or 2006.

But what about at the individual constituency level, where there WAS one strange anomaly of more people voting than voters actually registered?

One small and petty constituency irregularity

There was only one odd result in the 2006 elections, in the Cakaudrove East constituency where there were some 7,587 voters registered and 7,639 voters actually
voted, with the “extra” votes amounting to a mere 52 voters (Table 4). This was hardly evidence of electoral fraud, for two reasons.

First, one can easily imagine rural areas where small groups of Fijian voters may have just gone to the wrong polling booths. In fact, right alongside Cakaudrove East was another Fijian constituency, Cakaudrove West, where a massive 1,987 registered indigenous Fijian voters did not vote, OR more likely, some of them may have incorrectly voted in Cakaudrove East.

Second, note that the SDL won Cakaudrove East by a massive margin of 5,353 votes over all the other parties combined. The 52 extra votes was a drop in bucket and no one with any common sense would suppose that SDL would have even bothered to cheat in that constituency.

Unlike the current electoral system, in 2006, having extra votes in any one constituency is no help whatsoever to winning in any other constituency. Yet allegations of electoral without an iota of evidence have continued to be made and believed by Indo-Fijians.

Indo-Fijians believe what they wanted to believe

Most Indo-Fijians still believe the FLP’s allegations of electoral fraud in 2001 and 2006, although no such allegation was made about the 1999 elections when they won. One can understand the Indo-Fijian communities’ suspicions, given that twice (in 1987 and 2000), military coups removed their political leaders from control of government, with systemic violence directed against them.

There is little doubt that FLP’s allegations of electoral fraud against SDL undermined national and international confidence in the resulting SDL/FLP multiparty government, and helped to justify the 2006 Bainimarama coup. This “bitterness factor” may have ironically encouraged the FLP leader (and other Indo-Fijian leaders) to join the Bainimarama Government after the 2006 coup, however unethical it seemed to neutral observers.

The irony is that eight years later, the same FLP is in partnership with SODELPA (the successor to SDL) fighting the elections against the Bainimarama Government’s Fiji First Party.

There is little doubt that had all the lawfully elected governments been allowed to continue their full terms in 1987, 2000 and 2006, they would have accelerated economic growth to levels achieved by other comparable countries such as Mauritius and Singapore, and allowed many progressive social policies for Fiji such as in education and health.

Fiji faces the same problem today. Should the Fiji First Party win a surprisingly large number of seats in September, how likely is it that there will once again be:

* allegations of electoral fraud by the Bainimarama Government

* undermining local and international confidence in the legitimacy of the elections outcome

* fueling further political instability,

* further undermining investor confidence

* and once again reducing economic growth?
Lessons for the 2014 Elections

In the previous elections with 71 separate constituencies, if there were close results in any one of them, then a few hundred votes rigged this way and that, could have made a difference to that particular constituency result, and the overall national tally of political parties.

**BUT for the September 2014 elections, there is only one national constituency and the number of seats for each party will decided by its share of total votes in aggregate.**

Very differently from previous elections, fiddling or vote-rigging a few hundred votes here and there in some polling station, will not make any significant difference to the final aggregate numbers of votes and seats received by each political party.

An honest and efficient Elections Office will easily pick up any electoral fraud.

The September 2014 voter rolls are all computerized and voters will only be able to vote at their designated polling stations.

The two mobile companies, Digicel and Vodafone, have agreed to provide an extremely helpful free SMS service that has significantly reduced the headache and transport costs for voters having to find which polling station they are supposed to vote at.

This will still be a costly exercise for those not having access to a mobile phone—that Elections Office officials and political party workers can try and remedy.

Since there are no estimates of numbers of voters based on constituencies or ethnicity, such checks will be no longer possible, only checks on aggregate numbers of total potential voters, total registered and total voting.

**But there will be no difficulty in picking up if more persons have voted than are registered at any of these polling stations, or if there are systemic biases in percentages of registered voters voting at each polling station, favoring some political party or other.**

The only real possibility of “vote rigging” will be if results from polling stations are systematically changed in the reporting to the central Elections Office.

Political parties, NGOs and international observers must therefore make sure that they

(a) closely monitor the counting of votes for each candidate at as many of the polling stations as possible, and

(b) check their results with what is eventually put out by the Elections Office for that polling station.

Annex A  Previous alleged “irregularities” unlikely

I suggest that most of these previous allegations were not evidence of “widespread electoral fraud” by either the SVT or SDL, but merely symptoms of government inefficiencies and a “bad” electoral system (giving and counting of preferences in the alternative vote system, “above the line” and “below the line” ambiguities).
* lack of institutional knowledge by Supervisor of Elections;

* Elections Office lacking funding,

* electoral officials favoring some party

* “disenfranchisement of certain voter groups”

* flawed registration processes

* lack of integrity in the electoral roll

* the main voter roll not ready on time;

* excessive ballot papers being printed

* old traditional wooden ballot boxes being used with “sufficient gaps beneath the lids to allow ballot papers to be inserted after the boxes were sealed”,

* inappropriate allocation of polling stations and ballot boxes;

* "only 12% of polling stations were being headed by women"

* composition of the polling staff not reflecting the balance of Fiji’s ethnic communities

* high levels of invalid votes

* no recount of some close votes

I suspect that none of these allegations will have any relevance in the September 2014 elections, even if some may have doubts about the integrity of the cherubic Supervisor of Elections appointed by the Bainimarama Government.

Of greater impact and more questionable are the inherent advantages that the Bainimarama Government currently enjoys by being able to distribute tax-payers funds as a “government”, right up to election day, possibly influencing voters towards some government ministers or civil servants who are going to be candidates in the September elections.
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2. Constitution and contentious decrees (5/3/2014)
(NarseyOnFiji 5 March 2014)

The Bainimarama Regime has purportedly made numerous changes to the laws of Fiji, including the imposition of its own constitution, the 2013 Bainimarama/Khaiyum Constitution (2013 BKC). These laws are “operational” (i.e. being implemented by the judiciary) in the absence of any significant physical opposition or popular uprising from the people of Fiji.

Many voters will however have strong views on some of the changes implemented by the 2013 BKC. Voters and political parties should not waste their energies on debating the many changes which a future elected parliament will have every moral and lawful authority to change.

Voters simply need to know the stand of the political parties on the following:

Issue 1: Which constitution do we have now?

The average voters do not have a clue and probably do not care: they will simply go along with the Bainimarama Government who control the judiciary, army and police. The voters will take part in the elections under whatever electoral regulations this regime decides on. This is the pragmatic position taken by the existing political parties who simply want the return of an elected parliamentary government.

But the ultimate judge of the validity of a constitution has to be the judiciary, which has not made, or has not been allowed to make a judgment, following the definitive 2009 Court of Appeal.

The current situation appears confusing partly because the Ghai Constitution Commission made the critical mistake of attempting to present a “new” draft constitution, rather than an “Amendment” of the 1997 Constitution. Readers may wish to read the following which was part of my Final Submission to the Yash Ghai Commission:


Ultimately, any constitutional revision, must itself abide by the “rule of law” already existing. The public can heed the words of the current Chief Justice (Anthony Gates) in his ruling in the case Koroi v Commissioner of Inland Revenue (2001).

"It is not possible for any man to tear up the Constitution. He has no authority to do so. The Constitution remains in place until amended by Parliament, a body of elected members who collectively represent all of the voters and inhabitants of Fiji... Usurpers may take over as they have in other jurisdictions, and in some cases rule for many years apparently outside of, or without the Constitution. Eventually the original order has to be revisited, and the Constitution resurfaces .. and the courts will not assist usurpers simply because they are numerous, powerful, or even popular."

Technically, the 1997 Constitution is still in place. Therefore all contentious decrees or actions of the Bainimarama Government since December 2006 must be verified
by a future elected parliament, or changed, as explained in my Submission to the Ghai Commission here:


The issues discussed further in this Bulletin cannot be decided by a military dictatorship, however “progressive” some changes may appear to be, to some of our citizens.

(a) Voters ask political parties whether they support the 1997 Constitution; and

(b) Voters ask political parties whether they believe that the next elected parliament will be free to examine any changes from the 1997 Constitution, implied by the 2013 BKC and any changes proposed by the Ghai Draft Constitution.

Issue 2: The special place of indigenous Fijians

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was verified by the General Assembly in 2007. While accepting the fundamental equality of all peoples, the Declaration nevertheless noted that indigenous peoples the world over have suffered marginalization through colonialism and globalization.

The UN recognized the need to respect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples affirmed in historical treaties and other constructive agreements with the state.

The UN declaration encouraged states to enhance indigenous peoples rights through consultation and co-operation with them (and not by force).

Article 5 states clearly that indigenous people "have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions".

Just these few references suggest that the Bainimarama Regime, through the 2013 BKC and other decrees, is forcing many changes on the Fijian people and institutions in complete contradiction of the UN Convention: abolishing the GCC, removing the term "Fijian" from the indigenous people's exclusive use, banning the use of Fijian names of political parties, etc.).

(c) Voters ask all political parties to declare their position on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and their relevance for indigenous Fijians in the laws of Fiji.

Issue 3: Great Council of Chiefs (GCC)

Some may argue that the GCC has not served either the interests of indigenous Fijians or Fiji as a whole, as well as they could have and that the Bainimarama Government was right to “close down” the GCC. The first part of this statement may well be correct, as is suggested in this article of mine.

However, an unelected military government has no moral or legal authority to close down an institution which was an integral part of the system of governance approved by all elected Fiji parliaments. The next elected parliament will be free to resuscitate the GCC in its former or any reformed form.

(d) Voters may ask all political parties to declare their position on the Great Council of Chiefs, following an elected Parliament.

Issue 4: The Senate

The Senate was a useful “checks and balances” mechanism, to the elected House of Representatives- a useful “Upper House of Review” able to present a more mature perspective, less influenced by “populist” opinion.

It was an integral part of the 1997 Constitution in many ways. The next elected parliament will be free to resuscitate the Senate in its former or some reformed form.

(e) Voters may ask all political parties to declare their position on the Senate following an elected Parliament.

Issue 5: Changes to land legislation

It is not for the unelected Bainimarama Government to bring about any changes to Fiji’s land legislation. These will all need to be revisited by the next elected Parliament.

(f) Voters may ask all political parties to declare their position on all land legislation decreed by the Bainimarama Government, and their stand following an elected Parliament.

Issue 6: The electoral system and regulations to be used in future

The coming elections will be held under whatever regulations are issued by the Bainimarama Government. Given the secrecy of the Bainimarama Government and its non-accountability, the Fiji public still has no idea what the system will be.

However, the elected Fiji Parliament will be free to change the electoral system in way they wish. My submission to the Ghai Commission for a desirable electoral system may be read here:


(g) Voters may ask all political parties to declare their position on their vision of a future electoral system, following an elected Parliament.

Issue 7 The common name to be used for Fiji citizens

For some Fiji citizens, one of the positive initiatives of the Bainimarama Regime has been the attempt to create a common national identity and common name for all Fiji citizens.
There is no dispute with the attempt to create a common national identity. However, the decreed use of the word “Fijian” to describe all Fiji citizens is contentious on a number of grounds, as I have attempted to explain here: https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/2012/03/18/fijians-i-taukei-indians-and-indo-fijians-name-changes-by-military-decree/

Such name changes must not only be left to Parliamentary majority, but should require some consensus from the indigenous Fijian community who have historically associated with this name.

(b) Voters may ask all political parties to declare their position on the use of the word “Fijian” to describe all Fiji citizens, following an elected Parliament.

Issue 8: Immunity for coup perpetrators and supporters

While immunity may be granted by an elected parliament, such total immunity may not be granted for the abuse of fundamental human rights. The nature and extent of the immunity that the Bainimarama Government is granting itself may be read here:


The next elected parliament will need to revisit the entire question of immunity.

(i) Voters may ask all political parties to declare their position on immunity provisions, following an elected Parliament.
3. 2014 Election Demographics (13/3/2014)
(NarseyOnFiji 13 March 2014)

Most political parties are focusing on the importance of the “youth” vote in the 2014 Elections. So what are the facts about the youth defined as those aged 18 to 34? I give some indicative numbers using my own population projections from the 2007 Census data.

How many voters? Ethnic shares of voters

Table 1 gives my estimate of the total number of voters in 2014: some 588 thousands (give or take a few thousand).7

Table 1 also indicates that while the Fijian share of total population is estimated to be 60% in 2014, their share of voters (aged 18 and over) is a slightly lower 56%.

Conversely, the Indo-Fijian share of Total Population was 34% but of voters was 38%. This is a reflection of the much higher proportion of the Fijian population who are below the age of 18 because of the historically higher birth rate of Fijians for the last four decades.

The “Youth” vote and the “Elderly” Vote

The political focus on the “youth” vote is justified by the population projections. Table 3 indicates that 41% of the voters are aged between 18 and 34.

(a) Voters can ask political parties what they are offering the youth, especially those who come out of school and do not obtain paid employment?

What about the elderly?

But note also that some 21% of the voters are over the age of 54. This is very large percentage of voters whose needs from Government are quite different from the main voting group.

(b) Voters can ask what exactly are the political parties offering to improve the welfare of the elderly?

Ethnic perspectives on Youth and Elderly

Table 3 gives an interesting ethnic dimensions of the different age groups. Of the youth voting group, indigenous Fijians comprised 61% while Indo-Fijians comprised 33%. On the other hand, Indo-Fijians comprised 43% of the elderly, which is somewhat higher than their share of both the voters and the population.

7 The actual provisional number of votes was only 496 thousand.
The next 10 Years: even more declining Indo-Fijians.

The Fiji public are now well aware of how fast the Indo-Fijian population share is dropping because of emigration and lower birth rates. But few are aware of how far the changes have occurred at the lower age levels, for instance, at the Class 1 age group (6 years of age) and will occur over the next ten years. By 2024, the Indo-Fijian share of voters will have declined to about 30%.

These changes are also taking place but much faster, in school enrolments. Already people are aware that formerly Indo-Fijian dominated secondary schools (like Jay Narayan College in Suva) have become totally dominated by indigenous Fijians.

This trend is far more powerful at the primary school levels. The share of Class 1 enrolment will have declined from the already low 26% in 2014, to a mere 18% in ten years time: i.e. Fijians will be 75% of all Class 1 enrolment in ten years time.

All formerly Indo-Fijian dominated primary schools will become dominated by indigenous Fijian enrolment, or have to shut down.

One important corollary of the above population projections is that over the next decade or so, Indo-Fijians will be requiring less and less of total public resources made available by Government for education, health, and other public goods. I have written about this previously in the Fiji Times, that while population growth is seen as a “time bomb” in most developing countries, in Fiji it is the opposite, as far as race relations are concerned (available here).


I had also argued with political parties a decade ago, that there was little point in basing poverty alleviation policies on race, as both major ethnic groups were equally poor, and poverty alleviation based on need alone, would fairly give the majority share to indigenous Fijians.

4. How many voters do you really need? (14/6/2014)

(The Fiji Times, 14 June 2014)

The Elections Office has already registered more than 550,000 voters. This is pretty close to the number of all potential voters in the country, aged 18 and over. In September, these 550,000 voters will be asked to make a very simple choice between 5 or 6 political parties, and an Independent candidate or two.

So, here is an interesting question, whose answer can be read between the lines of my previous article (The Fiji Times, 6 June 2014):

How many voters do we really need to vote, in order to get the same result as if all 550,000 voters actually voted?

SURPRISING ANSWER:

If randomly selected throughout Fiji (e.g. by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics), you would only need about 10,000 voters to vote, and the result will be pretty much the same as getting all 550,000 voters to vote.

But as I explained previously, it would be a costly exercise to select a true random sample of 10,000 voters, and if the result is very close between any two parties, then even this random sample will not be good enough.

But remember that the Tebbutt Poll asks only 1030 voters and the Razor Team only asks 600 voters, as to which Party is most popular. So despite having almost complete coverage already, why is the government still trying to register more and more voters at great taxpayers’ expense, virtually everywhere in the world except Timbuktu? Is it to back up the frequent claim that this will be the most democratic elections Fiji has ever had?

Cynics might say that this is a “bit rich” coming from a government which has not bothered with voters or an elected parliament for eight years.

But two practical questions voters should consider are: will having all 100% of voters registered, or having all 100% of registered voters vote, make Fiji a more perfect democracy? What is the voter turnout in most democratic countries?

Voter turnouts and democracy

Throughout the democratic world, the percentage turnout of voters for national elections show great variation without any significant impact on the democratic process.

Voter turnout can be around 50% (as in United States or Switzerland), or around 60% (as in India), or in the 70% zone (as in UK or France), in the 80% zone (as in Australia, Sweden or Germany), or in the 90% zone (as in Belgium and Austria). Very rarely if those not voting had voted, would the outcome have been changed.

For a contrary example, there is a view that in a US election not too long ago, non-white voters in one state were deliberately discouraged from voting because they would have supported the Democratic Party and that state went to the Republicans by the narrowest of margins, also thereby giving the national presidency to the Republicans that year.
But that is hardly the case in Fiji even if some political strategists might be thinking that these extra voters being registered overseas will vote for a particular party (“the best laid plans of mice and men tend to go awry” - Robert Burns).

**Non-voters in Fiji**

Voters should remember that in the past Fiji elections, only some 85% to 90% of all registered voters have actually voted, and that is pretty high by international standards. There would have been very little difference to the outcome, if the remaining 10% to 15% not voting, had actually voted.

Often those not voting are old and infirm (remember that 4% of Fiji’s potential voters are more than 70 years old), or sick, or occupied in some other activity far more important to them personally than voting for a political party who will care little about them for the next four years.

In any case, most absentee voters would have voted in exactly the same way as their other family voters, making little difference to the eventual outcome.

But of course, it always makes a great media story (on television or newspaper) to show a hundred year old staggering along or being carried to a polling booth. Hurray for democracy!

But political parties, candidates and voters should not suffer from any illusion that all these extra voters being registered or the small numbers not being registered, will make any great difference to the final outcome in September.

A financially responsible government would ask: are the extra votes worth the huge extra costs to tax-payers?

Please do note that money for the September election is flowing like water under the Niagara Falls.

When all the costs are added up, these elections will be the most expensive Fiji has ever had, ironically engineered by an unelected government.

**Other democratic choices?**

For months now, the public has been inundated with messages that in these September elections, Fiji people will have their say on the government they want. Again, hooray for democracy! But why don’t we take the same principle a step further, on other important and contentious issues where national decision making is just as urgently needed.

For example, in addition to choosing one number from 280 numbers on the ballot paper, why not also ask voters (i.e. in a national referendum):

(1) which constitution do you want? (tick one):

**A** The 1997 Constitution

**B** The Yash Ghai Draft Constitution

**C** The 2013 Bainimarama Constitution
How many voters do you really need for a national elections?

(2) tick “Yes” or “No” to the question: do you want the GCC returned?

(3) tick “Yes” or “No” to the question: should all Fiji citizens be called “Fijians”? 

These are contentious issues on which the people of Fiji can very legitimately give their collective view on, thereby making politicians’ lives that much easier: “if that is what the people want, let them have it”.

Who knows, if all the Opinion Polls are reasonably accurate, the September elections might see the Fiji First Party form government AND the people’s democratic choice in the three referenda might give you the majority answering A or B to question 1, and “No” to questions (2) and (3).

But that would really test the Bainimarama Government’s commitment to genuine democracy, wouldn’t it?
5. Fiji’s electoral nightmare (30/3/2014)

[NarseyOnFiji, censored in Fiji].

The ELECTORAL DECREE 2014 (DECREE NO. 11 OF 2014) is finally out, suggesting that voting will be a nightmare for voters.

There will be one national constituency to elect 50 parliamentarians in a proportional system, based on “Open Lists” (another article on that).

Even before the Decree was issued, Bainimarama stated on his campaign trail that voters will choose from 250 candidates from five political parties (presumably with each party putting forward 50 candidates).

But the Schedule at the end of the Electoral Decree 2014 indicates the possibility of 280 candidates (presumably also allowing for 30 Independents).

The Decree expects that the voter will face one massive ballot paper, with 280 squares, with each square having a number between 135 and 414.

In the booth, and also publicized all around the country, will be listed all 280 candidates, with their names, photos and numbers.

The numbers, between 135 and 414, will be randomly allocated to the candidates and has to be remembered by the voters.

In the polling booth, the voter will have to locate his/her preferred candidate, and circle, tick or cross the one square, which contains their chosen number, out of these 280 squares.

The ballot paper will not have names, or photos, or party symbols. Only numbers.

The voting nightmare

There are hundreds of thousands of voters throughout Fiji, who may have great difficulty in finding their preferred candidate on such a large ballot paper with 280 names and numbers.

Some political parties or candidates might quite sensibly think that they could help their supporters to take a small piece of paper, with the number of their preferred candidate written down.

But sorry, Section 52 (2) of the Electoral Decree states:

“It shall be unlawful for any person to bring into a polling station or polling venue any type of paper or any specimen or sample of a ballot paper or any card or instruction on how to vote.”

Section 52 (3) then warns voters,

“If the Supervisor or presiding officer has reasonable suspicion that a voter is in breach of subsection (2), he or she may request the assistance of a police officer to search the voter, and it shall be lawful for a police officer to take such measures as necessary to conduct a search of the voter.”

WHAT?
A decent law-abiding citizen of this country, exercising his or her right to make an informed choice in the election by taking a piece of paper into the polling booth to help him or her to vote, can be searched, on suspicion, like a common criminal?

AND FURTHERMORE,

if any such material is found on them, Section 52 (4) further warns,

"Any person who contravenes this section commits an offence and shall be liable upon conviction to a fine not exceeding $50,000 or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 10 years or to both.

What sorts of serious crime does Fiji’s justice system hand out such horrendous punishment?

The contemptuous charade continues

But we should not be surprised any more by this Bainimarama/Khaiyum Regime’s antics.

For this is an unelected military dictatorship, which removed a lawfully elected government in 2006, and ruled us without our permission and without anyone voting for them, for eight whole years.

They have unilaterally imposed unlawful decree after decree on us, culminating in the 2013 Bainimarama/Khaiyum Constitution, which promises them and their collaborators, total immunity for any crime they may have committed from 2000 to elections in 2014.

But they threaten decent law-abiding voters that if they innocently take a piece of paper into the polling booth to help them vote for their preferred candidate for the first time in eight years, they may be fined $50,000 and jailed for 10 years.

It would be a joke, if it was not such a nightmare. This Regime has ignored all recommendations from political parties and the general public for far more sensible, understandable, and workable proportional electoral systems (such as local constituencies with a small number of candidates, who voters could easily identify with and choose from).

Instead, through the advice of a secret scheming cabal of shadowy collaborators, this Bainimarama Regime has thrust this electoral nightmare on our people through this Electoral Decree 2014.

All that the freedom loving people of Fiji and other political parties can do is grit their teeth and see where peaceful participation in this pathetic electoral charade takes them.

Addendum: some sick jokes

Joke 1:

What if voters simply write their candidate’s number on some hidden part of their body, which they can look at, inside the privacy of the polling booth? Will all voters
be strip-searched by the police? There are lots of other sick jokes in the 2014 Electoral Decree.

Joke 2: from the Decree, section 115 states:

Restrictions on campaigns

115.—(1) Following the announcement of the date of the election, it shall be unlawful for any person, entity or organization (including any person employed or engaged by any such person, entity or organization) that receives any funding or assistance from a foreign government, inter-governmental or non-governmental organization or multilateral agency to engage in, participate in or conduct any campaign (including organizing debates, public forum, meetings, interviews, panel discussions, or publishing any material) that is related to the election or any election issue or matter.

So CFF, FWRM, WCC, and other NGOs forget these educational activities after the announcement of the date of elections.

[Universities are apparently allowed to have such education campaigns and organize debates, panel discussions, etc. But they could not be bothered. They are a joke.]

Joke 3

Section 63 (2) (d) states that in the 48 hour period prior to polling day and on the polling day until the close of polling at all polling stations, it is strictly prohibited for any person to-

"distribute in any manner (including through telephone, internet, email, social media or other electronic means) any campaign material or communicate political messages, including calls to vote for or against a particular political party or candidate in the election."

Really? Does this Decree effectively gives the Bainimarama Regime the draconian authority to monitor all our phone calls, emails, and Internet usage, and conduct electronic surveillance on citizens that infringes on their basic human right to privacy?

Joke 4

Section 113 Prohibition on use of State resources to campaign

(1) It shall be unlawful to use State authority, including law and tax enforcement authorities, to pressure or intimidate political opposition.

(2) It shall be unlawful for any public officer to conduct campaign activities.

But of course, there is some Decree which states that Bainimarama and his other unelected Ministers are not “public officers”, and they will be allowed to remain in office, handing out goodies all around the country (of course, not buying any votes) and maligning any "old politician" they want (except those in his own gang).
Joke 5

Section 27 (2) the nomination of an independent candidate is not valid unless it is accompanied by

(b) *signatures of at least 1,000 registered voters as supporters;* and

(c) *contain the full names, residential addresses, occupation and voter numbers of the supporters.*

So for poor Independent candidates, forget the principle of the "secrecy of the ballot box" and who are going to vote for you. The Regime and other political parties will know exactly who are your supporters, who they can target in whatever way they want.

Just as they can target the 5000 persons who sign up as "supporters" of political parties.

(NarseyOnFiji, 31 March 2014)

The 2014 Electoral Act has confirmed that there will be an “Open List” proportional system that will be used to count the votes and determine the selection of members of Parliament.

There will be one national constituency electing 50 parliamentarians, or roughly 2% of votes (about 10,800 votes) per parliamentarian.

But the stipulation of a 5% threshold for parties and Independents (roughly 27,000 votes), makes a mockery of the claims of proportionality and “one person-one vote-equal value”.

Small parties and Independents unable to get a minimum of around 27,000 votes cast will be disqualified from being elected to Parliament. Moreover, the votes received by them will have no further influence, and hence totally wasted.

If, by some miracle, Independents do get elected, they will be wasting at least two thirds of their supporters’ votes.

In contrast, many of the individuals elected under their Party umbrellas, will almost certainly have much smaller numbers of votes, compared to those being disqualified by the 5% threshold.

The counting method

Sections 104 to 106 of the Electoral Decree 2014, sets out the methods for the counting of votes and calculation of each party’s allocation in Parliament.

Unfortunately, the method outlined in the Decree, while legally appropriate, is difficult to understand and explain to the general public or even political parties (readers can have a go if they want).

Nevertheless, the simple arithmetical example I give below conveys how the numbers of parliamentarians for each party will be determined.

The voting basics

I estimate from demographic projections that there are about 580 thousand eligible voters in 2014. Some 540,000 voters appear to have been registered. Let us suppose that they all vote. Then the election basic numbers are as in Table A.

In a 50 seat parliament, each parliamentarian on average will represent 10,800 voters. This 5% threshold of 540,000 votes) works out to a massive 27,000 votes or almost three times the average received by parliamentarians in general.
Hypothetical results in the 2014 Elections

Let us suppose that the five political parties (FFP, SODELPA, FLP, NFP, PDP) and 3 Independents receive the following votes (you can allocate whatever actual Party name you wish to A, B, C, D and E). But according to the Decree Section 104 (3)

“The Electoral Commission must then disregard any total number of votes received under the name of any political party or any independent candidate that has not received a total that is at least 5% of the total number of votes received by all the political parties and independent candidates.”

I have shaded in yellow those who do not make the 5% threshold of 27,000 votes.

i.e. Party E and the Independents 2 and 3 are OUT and will not be in Parliament. So all their votes are wasted.

Independent 1 is elected with certainty (but with 30,000 votes).

The votes of Party E and all the Independents are excluded, in calculating the numbers of candidates from the political parties A, B, C and D, eligible to go into Parliament.

Hence 49 parliamentary seats have to be allocated to Parties A, B, C and D, and strictly in proportion to the votes they have received.

Table C gives in Column (3) the exact proportions of the total votes received by Parties A, B, C and D

Column (4) gives the exact number of parliamentarians they are entitled to (including the fractions)

Column (5) gives the numbers rounded up, so as to add up to 49 exactly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Proportion of 454,000</th>
<th>Fractional Number Of seats</th>
<th>Rounded Numbers Of seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party A</td>
<td>169000</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>18.24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party B</td>
<td>185000</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>19.97</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party C</td>
<td>45000</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party D</td>
<td>55000</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for above</strong></td>
<td><strong>454000</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total in Parliament</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[The more accurate method is to keep giving whole numbers to the parties with the largest fractions until you get 49: i.e. you would start with Party B which was entitled to 19.97, round it up to 20, then Party D (round 5.94 up to with 6) then Party C (round 4.86 up to 5). By that time you will already have 49, and so Party A does not receive an extra parliamentarian for the fraction 0.24]
When you add the 1 Independent, you get a total of 50 required for the parliament.

Lesson 1  Parties need to be prepared for a “hung” parliament

In the particular arithmetic example I have given above (Table C), the outcome is a “hung parliament” with no Party receiving a majority of 26 out of 50.

With the five parties (FFP, SODELPA, FLP, NFP, PDP) contesting, this may well be the likely outcome.

For fun, readers can try various coalitions post-election, which would give a minimum of 26. Even the one Independent or the small parties might become “king-makers”: eg, B, C and the Independent.

But there are many other lessons that parties, candidates and voters need to consider.

How are individual parliamentarians chosen?

Because this is an “Open List” system, whatever the original List provided by the contesting parties, their candidates will be ranked by the numbers of votes they receive. (not the party ranking)

Thus, if Party A is entitled to 18 seats in Parliament, then the first 18 in order of votes received will be selected.

The remain 32 candidates will not be selected (assuming that each party puts up 50 candidates).

This Open List system has the undeniable advantage that really unpopular candidates are not going to get into parliament just because they have joined a popular party. But they could still get in, if their other colleagues are equally unpopular.

If voters decide to vote only for “The Leader”, then some of the minor candidates may not get enough votes to make it to the top of the List (see Table E below).

Parties will have to agree with their candidate where they should campaign in order to win not just maximum votes for their party, but also for themselves as individuals.

Many candidates will want to campaign only in the populous areas where there are large numbers of voters, or where they feel they have the best chance.

Few will want to campaign in widespread areas where the numbers of voters are small, and the costs of campaigning will be high.

Lesson 2  Not only will each Party be competing against other parties, but candidates within each party will also be competing against each other.

Lesson 3  Some candidates will have to “sacrifice” their own chances of being elected, in order to campaign in remote less densely populated areas, in order to win maximum votes for their parties, even if they themselves do not win.

The impact of the 5% threshold

Table E shows very clearly, why the system is stacked against small parties and Independents (shown in green), because of the 5% threshold clauses in the Decree.
In the whole parliament, each of the 50 parliamentarians represent some 10,800 voters (last row and last column).

But Parties A, B, C and D roughly get 1 seat for every 9,200 votes they receive (last column).

In contrast, Party E with 25,000 votes does not get a single seat although in a strict proportional system they would have been entitled to at least 2 seats.

Neither do Independent 2 (with 20,000 votes) or Independent 3 (with 11,000 votes) get elected, even though they have got more than the averages for the other parties.

Independent 1, who gets elected with 30,000 votes, had more than three times the average for those elected from the parties.

In the example above, all the votes for Party E and Independents 2 and 3 are totally wasted.

Even Independent 1 who gets elected (but with 30,000 votes) is wasting the votes of some 20,000 or two thirds of his/her supporters.

Had these 30,000 votes gone to any party, they would have elected 3 parliamentarians. Effectively, their loss will be gained by the larger parties.

If the ultimate objective of candidates is to get into parliament and affect government policy, either as part of government or as Opposition, then Independents and small parties would be strongly advised to negotiate with the larger parties to obtain agreement on common manifestoes, and join them rather than going on their own.

An Independent joining a large party with the support of 30,000 voters, would take 2 other parliamentarians with him or her, to vote for his/her manifesto.

Lesson 4: This system is biased against small parties and Independents: they should consider joining like-minded large parties with similar manifesto objectives.

Lesson 5: Voters must understand that at least two thirds of their votes for Independents will be wasted, even if their candidate is successful. All their votes will be wasted if the Independent does not get the minimum of 27,000. Votes.

Lesson 6: Votes for large parties will not be wasted, even if the candidate voted for does not get elected. Even these votes are amalgamated for the Party and counted towards the Party share.
How many votes will “successful” party parliamentarians get?

Suppose that Party A is led by a nationally popular Leader and the total votes received (169,000) entitles Party A to receive 18 seats in Parliament (as in my example above).

All the candidates of Party A will be ranked in order, by the number of votes received, going down from The Great Leader down to Candidate 50 (as in Table E).

In the example here, out of the 169,000 votes going to Party A, The Leader has received 118,400 votes, Candidate 2 has received 15,000, Candidate 3 has received 10,000 votes.

The other 15 who get elected to Parliament received less than 3,000 votes each, going to the 18th parliamentarian, who has got only 200 votes but is elected.

These fifteen (plus the first three) are all elected under the Party’s quota of 18 seats in Parliament, largely because of the large number of votes garnered by the Leader. (Note: this weakness would apply equally to a “Closed List” system)

But the fact remains that the Electoral Decree, disqualifies Independents and candidates for all small Parties who receive less than the 5% threshold (less than around 27,000) even if they receive far more than those elected under the umbrella of Party votes.

In the example below, 17 out of the first 18 would not have been elected as Independents.

<p>| Table E: Selecting the Parliamentarians for Party A |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Elected?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Leader</td>
<td>118,400</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2800</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 others totaling</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total votes received</td>
<td>169,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lesson 7 Under this Electoral Decree, the claim of “one person-one vote-equal value” has little value for those who vote for Independents and small parties which end up not receiving the minimum threshold of 5% of votes cast (roughly 27,000 votes).

Women are unlikely to be represented fairly

Under the Closed List system (which most Parties had advocated to the Ghai Commission), women could have had a reasonable chance of being placed at the top of the different Party Lists and hence automatically elected, as part of their party quota.
But with the Open List system, women are back to the same situation they had with previous elections.

Given the harsh campaigning requirements, and the unwillingness of voters (both men and women) to vote for women candidates, good women candidates are unlikely to stand, and if they do, unlikely to be elected in reasonable numbers.

The one saving grace with the one national constituency is that good women candidates (as with good men candidates) will be able to appeal to all voters in Fiji and accumulate reasonable numbers of votes.

Lesson 8   Women candidates, in addition to espousing their good party policies, need to appeal especially to women voters (who comprise 50% of all voters), to vote for good women candidates, whose policies they agree with.
Many voters are still confused about how the “successful” candidates will be decided by the Elections Office. Many are still thinking that the Party’s Preferred List and ranking of candidates will be used to decide who are elected.

**NO. NO. NO.**

Whether any candidate is elected will be decided not just by how many votes the Party receives in total, but also by how many votes the candidates themselves receive relative to their fellow candidates.

Let me simplify the article I had written previously, which was too long for many readers and had too many lessons in it (even if they were all important).

### Eliminate Independents and Parties below 5% threshold

Suppose there are 540,000 votes cast (or about 90% of all registered voters).

The Electoral Decree says that parties and Independents MUST pass the 5% threshold of the votes cast, to qualify, or a minimum of 27,000 votes.

Suppose that 1 Independent satisfies the 5% threshold and is elected and the other does not. Supposed one small party is eliminated because it does not get the 5% threshold.

The votes given to the eliminated parties and independents no longer count.

Suppose you now have 4 parties left (A, B, C, D) amongst whom you have to allocate the remaining 49 seats, by strict proportionality.

### Allocation of Seats to Parties

The D’Hondt method uses quotients of the total votes received by each Party with the highest quotients being elected from each Party but the results will come exactly as Column (5) in Table 1 which shows the easier way to understand the proportionality of the electoral system.

Table 1 gives in

- Column (1) the eligible parties (A,B,C,D) who received more than 5% of the votes cast
- Column (2) the votes received by each qualifying party.
- Column (3) gives the exact proportions of the total votes received by each Party (adding up to 1).
- Column (4) gives the exact number (with fractions) of parliamentarians they are entitled to (adding up to 49).

You could just round off the fractions to the nearest whole number.
But the Electoral Decree insists that the D’Hondt method be used to decide the
results, which are now given in Column (5), and you will notice that some of the
parties with fractions have been given an additional seat.

They total 49 exactly, and adding the 1 Independent gives you the
50 elected to Parliament.

Then the Elections Office decides who exactly from the Parties are elected
to Parliament.

**Who gets elected to Parliament?**

The Party’s List ranking their candidates according to the Party’s preferences
does not matter.

All candidates for a successful Party will be ranked by the numbers of votes they receive (as in Table 2).

Thus, if Party A is entitled to 18 seats in Parliament (as in column (5) above), then the first 18 in order of the numbers of votes received, will be selected (see Table 2 with candidate numbers randomly chosen).

**Only if** there is a tie in votes for the last seat to be allocated, will the Party’s List decide which of the tied candidates is elected

The remaining 32 candidates will be unsuccessful regardless of how important they are to their Party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes Received</th>
<th>Proportion of 454,000</th>
<th>Fractional No Of seats</th>
<th>No of Seats By D'Hondt Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party A</td>
<td>169000</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>18.24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party B</td>
<td>185000</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>19.97</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party C</td>
<td>45000</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party D</td>
<td>55000</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>454000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Independ. 1 | 1 |

| Total in Parliament | 50 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate Number</th>
<th>Votes Received</th>
<th>Elected?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>321 (Leader?)</td>
<td>118,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>2800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>2600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>2400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>2200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>1600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>1400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 32 others with votes totaling | 1600 | NO |

| Total votes received | 169,000 |
Lessons for Candidates and Parties:

(1) For any individual candidate of Party A to win, he/she must be in the top 18 of Party A ranked by votes received.

(2) Any candidate who wants to get elected, MUST go out and get all the votes he/she can get for themselves and not depend on the Party Leader.

(3) If candidates merely ask their supporters to all vote only for “The Party Leader”, then they themselves may have difficulty getting elected.

(4) Of course, if the Party Leaders get large numbers of votes, then their Party will obtain a higher quota of seats in parliament, and they may be able to pull into parliament more of their Party candidates.

(5) The last candidate elected from such a Party may not receive too many votes at all (as in Party A above) and probably way less than Independents and small party candidates who are eliminated by the 5% threshold requirement.

(Edited version in *The Fiji Times*, 26 April 2014)

One election issue which has not been raised at all in the media, is the question of internal party democracy. In a recent interview on “4 The Record”, an aspiring political candidate and Party Leader stated that he saw the restoration of “democracy” as one of important objectives that would be included in his party’s elections manifesto.

When the talk show host asked the Party Leader to give his interpretation of the term “democracy”, the explanation was quite reasonable, described in the usual terms such as accountability of governments to voters for their decisions, including revenue collections through taxes and spending, and reporting to the public through annual Auditor General Reports.

But one aspect was missing from the discussion: what about the internal democracy of political parties themselves and their accountability to their supporters? Actual practice differs throughout the “so-called” democratic world and the questions below give you a start to understanding what happens in reality.

I say “so-called” as even a cursory examination of the way democracy works in United States with the Democratic and Republican parties will give you very revealing answers to the questions below.

As also will a close examination of parties in Australia and NZ, our nearest developed neighbors, whose democratic party principles are generally strong, but also clearly contestable as close analysis of the Kevin Rudd/Julia Gillard/Kevin Rudd passage through revolving door for the Prime Minister’s position would indicate.

The actual practice of Fiji’s political parties are equally, if not more interesting.

**What criteria to judge parties?**

In all political parties, there is a tension or conflict of interest between transparent accountability to the supporters, and the interests of often manipulative men and women in the shadows behind the leaders.

Voters and party supporters can better understand the nature of internal democracy of their own political parties by seeking answers to the following questions:

(a) how are Party Leaders and position holders chosen?

(b) How are candidates chosen?

(c) How are policies chosen?

(d) How free are party supporters to question their leaders without fear of victimization, and actually receive answers?

(e) How accountable are political parties to their supporters for their decisions?
(f) how accountable are political parties for the revenues that they raise from their supporters (obvious and often hidden corporate sources) and how do they spend them?

(g) Is there a genuine leadership structure and succession plan so that should the Party Leader disappear, for whatever reasons, there is an obvious successor available, or at least a second tier of Deputies from whom the Party Leader can be chosen by some democratic process?

Indeed nearly all the questions that one can ask of the accountability and transparency of governments, can be equally asked of the political parties and their leaders.

Usual practice in Fiji

Voters who have some knowledge of Fiji’s previous political parties will know that most of them fail nearly all the tests posed by these questions above. Quite often, the Party Leader or a small shadowy group of trusted advisers, make all the decisions, which are handed down to the party supporters on a “take it or leave it” basis.

Often there may even be annual general meetings which are orchestrated by those who control the Party, giving a great facade of democracy, but the decisions are all made by a small elite, and often the Great Party Leader, and “passed” by the gathering, with no debate tolerated.

Often, no one knows how much money has been raised and where the money has gone, with properly audited accounts as rare as hen’s teeth.

One can have long discussions about each of the questions above. But one very obvious one that all voters can themselves apply today is (g): do Party Leaders have a genuine democratic succession plan and genuine “Deputies”?

Who are the Genuine Deputies?

One can easily apply this question to the political Parties and governments led by Ratu Mara, Dr. Bavadra (or Jai Ram Reddy and Mahendra Chaudhry), Rabuka, Chaudhry, and lately Rear Admiral Bainimarama.

I suggest that it would be rare indeed to be able to find any with a definite succession plan, based on genuine democracy in the Party and government.

Indeed the practice used to be quite the opposite. Some Leaders made sure that there was no second tier leaders who could possibly challenge him.

If any arose and showed signs of leadership, they were chopped off (one version of the “tall poppy” syndrome).

Quite symptomatic of the lack of accountability of even the deposed leaders to their supporters is that most go away quietly without protest and without informing their supporters of what was happening, another expression of the collusive “culture of silence” amongst our leaders.

Party Leaders often chose deputies who had no independent support in the party, and were therefore totally dependent on the Leader for their position.

Some deputies and even symbolic presidents were chosen to give the appearance of “multi-racialism” and some even financed by the Leader from shadowy slush funds to keep them in line.
Some Party Leaders harbored ambitions for their own children and some succeeded some did not, but not for lack of trying: like the Kennedy or Bush dynasties in United States, Nehru/Gandhi in India, Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, the Kims of North Korea, and the list gets longer every year.

Often the departure of a dictatorial political leader left a terrible leadership vacuum in the party and total chaos for years, until the next leader was somehow chosen or rose to the top.

While most political parties and leaders are calling for the restoration of “democracy” to Fiji, what they usually want to talk about is having the government (and some other political party) accountable to the voters.

Few, if any, want to talk about the political parties own practice of internal democracy.

So all voters and party supporters can examine their own party, and any other political parties seeking their votes and ask the questions (a) to (g) above: how internally democratic are parties themselves?

(The Fiji Times, 6 June 2014)

Voters are being presented with the results of opinion polls by different groups of people. Allegations are being made about polls being deliberately “biased”.

But there is no need to allege that results are being deliberately manipulated one way or another.

The reality of sample surveys is that errors in methodology can easily give “wrong” results, even if the pollsters are genuine in their intentions.

Readers will find it easier if they read through my tabular comparison of the Razor and Tebbutt polls, with a genuinely good sample survey (even as low as 2%), run by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

Basically, if today we wanted to waste tax-payers’ money by asking all of Fiji 550,000 voters in an “Opinion Poll” to give their answers in the same secret way they will do in the polling booth in September (i.e. without telling any official how exactly they voted), of course, you will get a perfectly accurate answer, the same as you would get in the September elections.

To save some money (or a lot of money), you could ask a genuine random sample of 20,000 voters, and you would still get a pretty accurate result of each Party’s support.

To save even more money, you could ask an even smaller 5,000 voters randomly selected by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, to vote in the same secret way, and in my opinion, you will still get a pretty accurate answer, even if there will be some small errors.

BUT, a genuine random survey of even 5000 voters all over Fiji, urban and rural areas, including the outer islands, will cost you heaps of money, which no polling company wants to spend.

The possibility of sampling error becomes larger, as the sample size becomes smaller.

And if, to save money by not going all over Fiji, the persons polled are not truly randomly representative of all voters, then the results can be quite biased, or even worthless.

What happens then when you ask only 600 voters (Razor Group) or 1032 voters (Tebbutt Poll), using their particular methods?

What is a good opinion poll?

For any opinion poll, the possibility of systematic errors and biases depend on: the following:

(1) who owns and/or controls the opinion poll? Could it lead to bias?

(2) how are the question asked and responses recorded?

(3) how randomly are the respondents selected?
(4) how many respondents are selected relative to the population of voters (which will be around 550,000)?

(5) how close might be the true party support results in the September elections, for both large parties and small?

Using these five criteria, I present a comparison of the Razor and Tebbutt polls with the independent accurate sample surveys done by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

Although FBS surveys are household incomes and expenditures or employment, the principles are exactly the same as in Opinion Polls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiji Bureau of Statistics Sample Surveys</th>
<th>Razor Group</th>
<th>Tebbutt Poll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Could poll ownership bias results?</td>
<td>The Razor Research team and the Fiji Sun are both owned by CJ Patel.</td>
<td>The Tebbutt Polls is an independent company polling private company, but financed and the results published by The Fiji Times (as they used to do prior to the 2006 coup).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Fiji Sun receives more than a million dollars in advertising revenue from the Bainimarama Government, denied to its main competitor, The Fiji Times.</td>
<td>A Fiji Times article recently (24 May 2014) claimed “The Tebbutt Times Poll was a scientific and objective measure of public opinion in Fiji, based on true random sampling and using globally-accepted measures and procedures.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CJ Patel received preferential treatment in its purchase of the Rewa Dairy Company and continues to do so, with its imports of dairy products. CJ Patel’s Financial Controller chairs some of the most powerful government controlled boards such as Fiji National Provident Fund, Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority, and the several telecommunication companies owned by FNPF.</td>
<td>There are some doubts about the methodology, which I suggest below in Question 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voters naturally feel some doubt about the independence of the Razor Research results, even if they do not deliberately try to manipulate the results.</td>
<td>Several prominent Bainimarama Government supporters have also claimed that the Fiji Times some years ago was biased against the Fiji Labor Party Government in 1999, and against the Bainimarama Regime from 2006.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2. What questions are asked and how?

The FBS asks hundreds of questions on all major items of income and expenditure.

All questions are on the Bureau questionnaire and the answers are all faithfully recorded by civil servants. Most questions are not of a sensitive nature and so householders answer quite honestly.

But often some of the households, especially the rich ones, will not give the true answers on how much income they earn, or how much they spend on alcohol, or luxury goods, or other sensitive matters.

So the results can be biased downwards for the rich households. But results are fairly accurate for the rest of the 95% of all households.

### 3. How are the respondents selected?

The sample households are selected in a very random and technically sound way from all the households in the country, based on the last census information.

The sample comes proportionately from urban and rural and remote areas.

### For both Razor Research and Tebbutt Poll

Respondents are asked “face to face” these questions,

1. Who is your preferred Prime Minister?
2. Which is your preferred party?

Some respondents are not likely to give an honest answer to either the Razor Research Group, or the Tebbutt interviewers.

As the moderate Leader of NFP has said, there is a climate of fear in Fiji where Regime critics have been punished, civil servants’ employment terminated, resources denied people who do not support government, and recently, even a scholarships terminated for the exercise of a basic human right.

What respondents say to interviewers or even if they agree to sign up for the political parties registration, does not indicate how they will actually vote.

The “liu muri” or “aage piche” factor is very much alive and well in Fiji amongst all ethnic groups, and also amongst all political parties.

---

The Razor Group is asking people around bus stations in major towns.

How they are selected is anybody’s guess.

The Razor Group are hoping that they will get a good break-down of responses of urban groups by ethnicity, age and gender, but not of rural Fiji or Vanua Levu.
areas, including outer islands and Rotuma, and the four divisions.

Hence a truly random survey is logistically extremely difficult with Bureau staff wading through rivers, walking long distances where there are no roads, and hence very expensive (over $2 million).

BUT, the results are pretty accurate about the whole country and accurate generalizations can be made about many variables.

Note however, that many rich households will refuse to answer questionnaires from the Bureau, and often they are replaced by poorer households, so the results are not representative of the rich.

will get a mixture of urban and rural people.

Will that urban/rural mixture be around 50% as it is currently in Fiji?

Quite unlikely and the public are not given the detailed breakdowns, so we are no wiser.

Will the Razor Group get all classes of voters in Fiji by asking bus travelers?

Not likely as bus travelers are generally the poorer people?

The recent Tebbutt Poll was done between Monday and Wednesday when rural people are unlikely to be in towns.

If rural Fijians for example have different views on FFP/Bainimarama and SODELPA/Temumu, then even the Tebbutt Poll results will be biased probably in favor of FFP/Bainimarama.

What might be the extent of the bias because of the lack of proper random sampling?

We don’t know.
4. **How many households/persons in the sample survey?**

The Bureau’s random sample numbers have been around 3,000 to 5,000 households, or about 2% to 3% of all the households in the country.

*A 2% sample of all 550,000 voters would require a poll of 11,000 voters randomly selected from ALL OVER FIJI.*

But of course, the FBS surveys ask questions about hundreds of variables, and tries to get solid results for divisions, ethnicity, urban/rural and provinces.

| Since Opinion Polls ask very simple questions (as in 2 above), the sample size for the “Political Opinion Poll” can be much smaller than 11,000. But how much smaller? The Razor Team only asked 600 persons (300 were from the Central Division, 200 from the West and 100 from the North). This is probably far too small a number, and we don’t have any idea of the urban/rural, ethnicity, gender, age breakdown. | Since Opinion Polls ask very simple questions (as in 2 above), the sample size for the “Political Opinion Poll” can be much smaller than 11,000. But how much smaller? The Tebbutt Poll interviews just around 1032 persons. The results are probably accurate on urban voter views, if respondents give honest answer (see 2 above). But will rural voters vote the same way as urban voters? |
5. **How close are the true expected answers?**

If the true answers are very close, than the sample result can give you a wrong opinion.

For example, the Fiji Bureau of Statistics sample survey results for average household incomes in 2008-09 were as follows:

- Fijian: $17,000
- Indo-Fijian: $15,500
- Others: $34,000

Since “Others” includes Europeans, Part-Europeans, Chinese and Rotumans, one can very accurately say that the Others’ average household income for ALL households in Fiji is almost certainly more than that for the two major ethnic groups, perhaps double the average for Fijians.

The margin for error (or the percentage of time you would be wrong) with this particular conclusion would be very small indeed, perhaps less than 1%.

**What about comparing Fijians with Indo-Fijians?**

An ordinary member of the public might say that the Fijian average household income is definitely higher than that of Indo-Fijians by $1500 or by about 10%.

But the statistically smart person would remember: “hey, did I not just say that the very rich households often refuse to be part of the survey?”

And “did I not say that even when they are, they under-state their true incomes to the Bureau interviewers?”

So the Indo-Fijian average income from the survey is biased downwards: in reality, for both Razor Group and Tebutt Poll

Supposed that an Opinion Poll says that the “margin of error” for their results is 20% of the percentage support the poll reports for each party (usually they all claim much lower % margins of error).

Suppose the poll results are:

- Party A has 45% plus or minus (20% of 45%)
  i.e. the true support could be anywhere between 36% and 54%
- Party C is 15% (plus or minus (20% of 18%): i.e. the true support is between 12% and 18%

You can conclude, almost certainly, that the September 2014 elections will have similar ranking results.

Even if there are maximum errors, the ranking will not change: Party A will have roughly three to four times as many elected persons as Party C.

But suppose that the poll says that Party B has 40% plus or minus (20% of 40%): i.e. true support could be somewhere between 32% and 48%

Then while the Opinion Poll reports that Party A will have more elected parliamentarian than Party B (45% is more than 40%), if you allow for errors, the reality after the September 14 elections, based on the same poll may be as follows:

**Possibility 1.** Party A may have the lower possibility of 36% while Party B
the true Indo-Fijian average income in all Fiji might even be higher than the average Fijian household income, i.e. the OPPOSITE of the survey results.

So it can be with political parties whose support throughout Fiji is about the same: read the opposite.

may have the higher possibility of 48%.

i.e. Party B may have more in parliament than Party A (opposite of the apparent poll result).

BUT neither will have absolute majority,

BOTH will need a coalition to form government.

Possibility 2: Allowing for errors in the other direction,

Party A may have 54% (i.e. absolute majority)
and can form government on its own, without any coalition.
While Party B could have a mere 32%.

In summary: Where a Party’s support in the September elections is going to be close to that of another Party, then the opinion poll results today may not be good predictors of who will be the larger party.

This applies equally to the small parties as well.

While the Razor Research team results are not necessarily biased because of these relationships, the intelligent voters cannot avoid a perception of the possibility of bias in favor of the Bainimarama Regime, especially when the internal Razor Research processes are not available to public scrutiny.

What of other opinion polls?

There are online opinion polls run by various blogs, where the readers can click on the possible answers and the blog site automatically adds up the numbers supporting the various options.

While the respondents are anonymous, and no one knows how many times they can “vote”, the blog-sites are already known to be either opposed or supportive of the Bainimarama Regime.

Most of respondents therefore also probably have similar opinions to that of the blog-site, so the results may be inherently biased.
Sometimes, “opinion polls of taxi drivers” are used by lazy international journalists. Landing at Nadi sloshed and jet-lagged from their flights from London or Sydney, they want to write a quick story on Fiji’s politics, before heading off for fun and frolic to Denerau. But 70 percent of voters do not regularly travel by taxis, hence the taxi-driver poll is also unreliable.

Then you can have the “1 person opinion poll”. Making the rounds on the Internet currently are stories that Nostradamus five hundred years ago predicted the victory and even the name of India’s latest Prime Minister, Narendra Modi.

So here is this “Narseydamus Opinion Poll” with 3 predictions:

1. There will be a hung parliament (i.e. no party will win more than 25 seats) with two large parties very close in the results, so there will probably be a coalition government;

2. There will be the rise of a third party whose support might even approach that of the two large parties, with the third smaller party being the “king-maker”.

3. At least 1 Independent candidate will get more votes than at least 10 of the parliamentarians elected under the umbrella of the larger parties.

But I would not put any of my hard-earned personal money on the “Narseydamus Opinion Poll.

[Author’s note: I was wrong on 1 and 2, and correct on 3]
1b ECONOMY, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOBS

“It’s the economy, stupid” is the aphorism that is commonly used during elections the world over.

The most important issues for the average voter are his job (or unemployment) and his real income (i.e. how his family is coping with the cost of living).

Governments and competing political party manifestoes are judged first and foremost by these two criteria.

But we must also add the issue of Public Debt, which is the burden deliberately passed on to future generations by the current generations, usually through their elected governments.

Jobs, Incomes and Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Both the growth of numbers of jobs and incomes depend on how well the Gross Domestic Product (or total income produced in the country) is doing.

Unfortunately for Fiji, following the December 2006 coup, the GDP growth rate was negative for two (or three) years out of the first five years.

Table 1 gives the sectoral behavior of real GDP (using FBS data in 2005 prices).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1  Gross Domestic Product by components Index Numbers (2006=100)</th>
<th>% Ch.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agr., Forest. &amp; Fishing</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity and Water</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WS, Ret., Vehicles, Goods</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel &amp; Restaurants</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport &amp; Commun.</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate Business</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector, Ed. Health</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL GDP</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on GDP data of Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2005 constant prices)

100 is the 2006 base. An index number below 100 (in pink in the table) indicates that the GDP in that sector in that year was below that in 2006 (i.e. had gone backwards). Note the many gray squares.

The numerous pink cells indicate how badly the Fiji economy did in these five years. The last column of Table shows that in 2011, the real productive sectors were worse off than in 2006.

| Agriculture, for. and fishing | down by -7% (esp. sugar) |
| Manufacturing                | down by -6%               |
| Construction                 | down by -12%              |
| Wholesale, Retail etc        | down by -9%               |
| Public Sector                | down by -8%               |
| Other services               | down by -40%              |
The only sectors doing well were Hotels and Restaurants (up by 67%). And, for the wrong reasons (largely because of monopolistic pricing and profits)

Electricity and Water increased by a massive 105%
And Financial Services (banks, insurance companies) increased by 39%

Overall, total GDP in Fiji in 2011, was a mere 1% more than that in 2006- after five years, or the normal parliamentary life-time of a normal elected government.

One of the reasons why the sugar industry did not recover was that the EU withheld $300 million of assistance to the sugar industry when the Bainimarama Government failed to hold the elections in 2009. ($300 million is currently twice the annual earnings from sugar exports).

It is almost certain that should elections not be held in 2009, then the EU will reimpose all the sanctions they have been relaxing because of the promise of elections in September 2014.

Overall, it is no surprise that the 2010-11 Employment and Unemployment Survey (Report not published yet) reveals that wage employment between 2005 and 2011 declined by -3%.

Second, real income (i.e. adjusted for inflation) declined by an unprecedented 30%. (the exceptions were for the military, police and prisons).

The incidence of poverty during this period may have increased to above 45%.

Poverty would have been even higher, had it not been for large foreign remittances of around $300 millions (which is twice that of the sugar industry).

Table 2 gives the most recent estimates of growth rates of Fiji’s GDP since the 2006 coup (the figures for 2010 to 2014 have been recently revised by the FBS using 2008 prices).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-1.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There has been reasonable economic growth since 2010, but not enough.

Even taking the optimistic estimates from 2010 to 2014, the average growth rate between 2006 and 2014 under the Bainimarama Regime will be a mere 1.1% per year (see graph). This is the worst record of any government since independence in 1970.
Under Ratu Mara it was 3.5% per annum (over 17 years)
Under Rabuka it was 2.0% per annum (over 11 years);
Under Chaudhry it was 8.8% (over 1 year)
Under Qarase it was 2.3% per annum (over 5 years).

Over the last 8 years, Fiji’s record is also the worst amongst the Melanesian countries.
This poor performance is hidden from the public view and mind because of the
daily propaganda praising the Bainimarama Government in newspapers, radio, and
television.

Excessive expenditure on infrastructure over just two years

It is clear that the economic growth of the last three years has been underpinned by a
massive increase in public expenditure, and especially on infrastructure: an increase
of one billion dollars spent over 2013 and 2014.

The Reserve Bank of Fiji in its latest report recognizes this by projecting that
growth rate for 2015 and 2016 will be a lower 2.4% when the effects of the
infrastructure investment wears off.

Note also that such a massive expenditure of $1 billion over a two year period is
likely to lead to significant wastages by both FRA and the sub-contractors as they rush
to spend the large allocations (one of the contractors in Vanua Levu has already
declared packed up with tax-payers apparently bearing part of the cost).

Questions have been asked through the media who is auditing the FRA (and if
FRA has been paying its top executives massive salaries in excess of $800 thousands).
There have no been answers from the PS Finance.

Remember that PWD used to have a maximum annual investment of around $80
million and its top executives barely earned $100 thousands, for doing similar work?

Lack of private sector confidence

Fiji’s overall lack of growth has been due to the lack of private sector investment.
Total investment (both private and public) as a percentage of GDP should be around
25%. Unfortunately it has been around 15% only, and most of that has been due to
public sector investment by government and statutory corporations.

Why has Fiji’s growth record been so poor between 2007 and 2011? Put simply,
private sector confidence and investment have been undermined by the numerous
decrees which stipulate that grievances cannot be taken to court.

Of course, there has also been the lack of political stability, the absence of an
elected parliament, and too many ad hoc economic decisions being made by a few
people in power.

We have seen this with respect to the pensioners’ legal case (which was already
being heard by the courts), foreign investments at Momi appropriate, and the leases
at Nadi Airport which were dissolved by decree (probably giving competing corporate
interests more leased space).

It is accepted that there must be one law for the rich and the poor, and
punishments have to act as deterrents so that criminals do not re-offend and potential
criminals get the message.
But, it cannot give private investors any confidence to invest in Fiji when one of the largest private investors and tax-payers in Fiji (and an elderly person moreover) is given a jail sentence, instead of a large fine which would have been more useful for the state coffers, and also served as a very effective deterrent to businessmen who feel hits to their pocket far more than free accommodation and food at Naboro.

(a) Voters must ask all political parties whether they will guarantee to remove all decrees which stipulate that grievances may not be taken to court.

(b) Voters must ask all political parties what their policy will be on public investment on infrastructure

Public Sector Incomes

The Bainimarama Government for several years after 2006, refused to give any significant upward adjustment to public sector incomes.

Only in this last budget, and just 9 months before the elections, they granted an extremely large 20% increase to public servants.

They also granted, supposedly on the recommendations of an accounting company, outrageous large increases to $221 thousands per year, for select Permanent Secretaries.

Ministers’ salaries have not been declared since 2007, with some believed to be paid through a private accounting company.

Most outrageously, the Public Accounts Committee has been sacked “to prepare for the next parliament”.

Was the PAC beginning to query the payment of ministers’ salaries through a private accounting company?

(c) Voters must ask all political parties what their policy will be on public sector salaries, including that of Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, and ordinary civil servants.

(d) Voters must ask all political parties what their policy will be on the independence of the Public Accounts Committee, and the need for Auditor General Reports to be compulsorily and annually made public.

Wages Councils undermined for the poorest workers

The poorest workers are those not represented by unions, and who are mostly paid wages well below the Basic Needs Poverty Line and who are supposed to be protected by the ten Wages Councils.

These were formerly under the Chairmanship of Father Kevin Barr, trying to adjust minimum wages sector by sector, depending on how well each sector was doing.

But Father Barr’s Wages Regulation Orders, different for the different sector, were postponed year after year by the Minister, because of unethical pressures by employers and the Employers’ Federation, with not a single employer showing their audited accounts to the Wages Council Chairman (Barr) or the Labor Minister (as required).
Eventually only partial adjustments were allowed, which did not keep pace with the large increases in the cost of living. Most of these workers fell further into poverty, because Government essentially capitulated to employers.

Finally Father Barr accused the Bainimarama Government of practicing “crony capitalism”. Over a minor irrelevant remark, he was later abused on the phone and threatened with non-renewal of work permit and eventually sacked as Chairman of Wages Council.

For five years, the employers’ interests were far more important to Government than these poorest workers in the country, who number around 50 thousand, potentially yet another large voting block in the next election.

(e) Voters must ask all political parties what their policy will be the independence of Wages Councils, and the implementation of their Wages Regulation Orders.

National Minimum Wages

In 2013, with much fanfare, the Chairman of the Commerce Commission of Fiji (Dr. Mahendra Reddy), issued a National Minimum Wage of $2.32 an hour, supposedly after an objective and scientific study.

He rejected alternative arguments coming from me (at a debate at FNU attended by the Minister and PS of Labor) that some employers and industries might not be able to pay even that minimum wage (and enforcing a high minimum wage would mean that workers would simply lose their jobs), while others who could afford to pay more, would refuse to do so by pointing to the lower National Minimum Wage.

In any case, in the last month, the Minister of Labor (apparently again under pressure from the Employers’ Federation, unilaterally reduced he National Minimum Wage to an even lower $2 per hour (with no comment from Dr Mahendra Reddy to enlighten the hordes of FNU students who had gathered at FNU to vote for him after the debate).

(f) Voters must ask all political parties what their policy will be the National Minimum Wage.

Regressive taxation measures

Since the Bainimarama Regime took control at the end of 2006, they have changed the taxation system heavily in favor of the rich and wealthy.

While they keep claiming (quite falsely) that the poor now do not pay any tax because the income tax threshold had been raised to $15 thousand dollars per year, the reality has been that all pay tax through VAT on many of their essential expenditures.

(i) VAT, which affects the poor people far more seriously than the rich, has been increased from 12% to 15%.

(ii) Income tax at the highest income levels has been reduced totally unnecessarily from 30% marginal tax to 20%, lower even than all our neighboring countries.
(iii) Corporate tax has also been reduced totally unnecessarily from 30% to 20% (and for companies listed on the Stock Exchange even lower to 17%) lower than all our neighboring countries.

All these taxation changes have helped the rich, while hurting the poor. The Bainimarama Regime has significantly worsened income distribution.

On the positive side, the Bainimarama Regime has in the last budget, brought in comprehensive subsidies in education, which mean that primary, and secondary education will not be a financial burden on poor families. Moreover, all students who get accepted at tertiary institutions will be able to access either full scholarships or loans. IN the last few days, pre-school has also been supposedly made free.

These education policies by the Bainimarama Government counter, to some extent, the changes in taxation policy, for those families with children at school, but not for others.

The building of rural roads should also be of great assistance to the rural poor, facilitating the marketing of their produce and better access to essential urban services.

For those being access to better roads, these progressive expenditures of taxpayers’ money also counters the income distribution effects of negative changes in taxation.

However, good transparent public policy requires that income redistribution measures (such as through progressive taxation) must be followed independently of good measures in public expenditure, simply because the beneficiaries of the two are not the same groups.

(h) Voters must ask all political parties what their policies will be on

(i) VAT

(ii) income tax at the higher levels

(iii) corporate tax

Remittance incomes

Fiji’s remittance incomes originate with those working abroad (caregivers, security guards, army personnel in the British Army and elsewhere), and emigrants sending money home to their families.

Considerably more Remittance Money may be generated if trade agreements with Australia, NZ and other developed countries could be signed so as to include the mobility of unskilled labor, whether as part of the Seasonal Worker Scheme or others to be negotiated.

Labor mobility as part of aid scheme will not have the same security as such benefits may be withdrawn if, as during election times in those countries, there is pressure from labor unions there.

This issue will be discussed more in a later Election Issues Bulletin on regional and international relations.

(i) Voters must ask all political parties what their policies will be on Trade Agreements with Australia and NZ, and access to their labor markets for Fiji’s unskilled labor.
All governments borrow money in order to pay for infrastructure, whose cost the future generations need to share with the current generations.

The real issue is: what should be the balance between the current generation and the future generation.

If excessive amounts are spent today to enable the current generation to enjoy the benefits of the current increases in recurrent and capital expenditure spending, then the future generations will be forced to unfairly shoulder a considerably higher Public Debt per household.

Remember that in every budget, Debt Repayments (Principal and Interest) is paid a FIRST CHARGE out of Government Revenue (and always shown on the first page of the detailed budget estimate documents).

*This Public Debt MUST be paid by future generations by combination of higher taxation, reduced public services (like education or health or social welfare), constraints on public sector salaries, and reduced recurrent and capital expenditure.*

In the worst case scenario, irresponsible governments who insist on “living beyond their means” today, try to borrow more and more in the future, increasing Public Debt until it becomes totally unmanageable for the future generation. (this is what some of the nations in Europe were doing until they crashed recently, requiring a massive bailout from the European Union).

In the absence of Reports of the Auditor General since 2006, there is no guarantee that the figures quoted in the Annual Budgets on Public Debt are correct: Public Debt figures may well be higher than reported.

According to the unaudited Budget figures, the Bainimarama Government has increased the Public Debt quite significantly from the $2.8 billion in 2006 to about $4 billion in 2014.

But the Bainimarama Government’s 2014 budget also stated that they will limit current borrowing, by raising some $450 million through sales of government assets.

[This is equivalent to a farm showing lower deficits today, by selling the farm assets, including the cash cows, to generate revenues.]

If the planned asset sales of around $450 million are excluded (as they properly should), Government would have had to borrow $450 million more to finance their planned expenditure.

The Public Debt would increase correspondingly to around $4.5 billion (in red, under 2014* in Table 3).

In practical terms, what this means is that the Bainimarama Government, without the permission of taxpayers through an elected parliament, has increased the Public Debt per household from about

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Public Debt</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2014*</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Debt ($million)</td>
<td>2863</td>
<td>3,999</td>
<td>4449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Households (000)</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt per household ($)</td>
<td>16839</td>
<td>20869</td>
<td>23218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
$17 thousand in 2006 to 
$21 thousand in 2014 (an increase of 24% per household (official figures)

and to more than 

$23 thousands (an increase of 38%) if we exclude the planned asset sales.

Given that most of the poorer households in Fiji have not seen any significant increase in money incomes during this period, the 38% higher Public Debt per household must constitute a considerably higher burden on most households, compared to that in 2006.

Future pressures on taxpayers and households will be even more intense if the economy fails to grow after 2014, for whatever reason (e.g. elections being cancelled or postponed, or if the Fiji Military Forces do not abide by the election results).

An alternative way of looking at Public Debt in in relation to GDP. Table 4 indicates that the Debt:GDP ratio will not have gone down from 53.3% to 48.3% in 2014 (as officially claimed), but increased slightly to 53.7% (if we leave out revenues from asset sales).

(j) Voters must ask all political parties what their policies will be on Public Debt, Annual Government Deficits, and Asset Sales.

No New Industries of Scale

One of the major failures of the Bainimarama Government has been their inability to come up with any ideas whatsoever to generate major new industries. Three areas which have gone begging have been:

(i) The Bainimarama Government has failed to start retirement homes and villages in Fiji: tardiness in setting up ancillary medical services and other input services (possible employment of 20,000 within five years)

(ii) The Bainimarama Government has failed to start call-center and data-processing industries: inability of Commerce Commission to reduce call charges (possible employment of 20,000 within five years)

(iii) The Bainimarama Government has failed to start value adding industries based on mahogany harvests: massive contracts given out to preferred corporate clients, for export of essentially unprocessed timber, while domestic timber processors are denied supplies. (possible employment of 5,000 within five years)

(k) Voters must ask all political parties to explain their detailed economic growth and development strategies.
11. Government claims on economic growth (19/7/2014)

(The Fiji Times, 19 July 2014)

It is easy to get carried away by daily government propaganda in all the media. While some voters believe that the most important issue for the forthcoming elections is constitutionality, the rule of law and total public accountability, others are only concerned about Governments delivering “bread and butter” benefits to households, such as education, health, roads, water, jobs and incomes that keep pace with the cost of living. These “bread and butter” benefits depend totally on the growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and public and private investments.

[Note that GDP does not include overseas remittance income, which has been twice the value of the sugar industry in recent years, and has been crucial in keeping poverty at bay.]

Where government revenues are not enough, governments borrow and increase the Public Debt and/or sell off government assets.

The current vote buying

The current government activities dispensing goodies are very visible because of very slick media exposure on a daily basis now, with no expense spared.

According to the Ghai Commission Draft, the Bainimarama Government should have relinquished their positions once the elections date was gazetted, so that they would not have an unfair advantage over other political parties as “Ministers dispensing tax-payers money” just prior to the elections.

Unfortunately, that is exactly what is happening on a daily basis with Bainimarama and his Ministers travelling the length and breadth of the country, giving out goodies everywhere.

They are perpetually boasting to a largely ignorant public that they are the “first government” and the “first Prime Minister” to do this or that, a blatant example of “vote buying” if ever there was one, on par with the Agriculture Scam and the Commodity Development Framework vote-buying scam of the past.

But to be fair to all political parties (and their candidates), one must assess the current government’s performance over the last eight years of rule as a self-imposed government, prime minister and ministers, with that of previous, mostly elected governments, which this article does. I remind that the military themselves have prevented three governments from serving their full terms:

* the NFP/FLP Coalition was removed in 1987 after serving only one month;

* the Chaudhry Government was removed in 1999 after one year; and

* the SDL/FLP Coalition was removed by Bainimarama in 2006 soon after the beginning of their second term on unproven allegations of widespread corruption and electoral fraud.
Fiji’s Gross Domestic Product (revised numbers)

The Fiji Bureau of Statistics and Reserve Bank of Fiji have again revised their estimates of the growth of GDP since 2006, as in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GDP Growth (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>-1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010r</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 e</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014 p</td>
<td>3.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015 p</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The economy stagnated from 2006 to 2009, with two years of negative growth in 2007 (-0.7%) and 2009 (-1.4%), grew at 3% in 2010 (revised upwards from the old estimate of 0.3%), then slowed down to 2.7% in 2011 a lower 1.7% in 2012.

Then, boosted by a massive one billion dollar increase in infrastructure spending (roads and water) in 2013 and 2014, and some increase in private investments, the GDP is estimated to have increased in 2013 by 3.6%, and is projected to increase by 3.8% for 2014.

But the FBS/RBF estimates state that the economic growth will slow down again to 2.4% in 2015 and 2016 (presumably when the infrastructure effects wear off).

Comparing different governments

Graph 1 gives the compound annual growth rates for all the governments since independence in 1970, using the revised growth rates given by FBS for the last four years.

For the Bainimarama Government, the overall compound growth rate between 2007 and 2014 is estimated to be 1.7% per year, the lowest of all governments.

This is lower than the 8.8% Chaudhry (1 year), 3.5% per year under Ratu Mara (17 years), Qarase’s 2.3% (7 years), and slightly lower than 2.0% under Mara/Rabuka (11 years).

Note that ALL these previous governments have built roads, water and sewerage systems, hydroelectric dams, ports and harbors, just as Bainimarama’s government is doing currently, but with nowhere the same media exposure as currently.

Note that the low average growth rate for the Bainimarama Government, is largely because nearly all the productive sectors, according to FBS data, were in decline between 2006 and 2011:
Agric., forestry and fishing decreased by -7%
Manufacturing decreased by -6%
Construction decreased by -12%
Wholesale, Retail etc decreased by -9%
Public Sector decreased by -8%
Other services decreased by -40%.

The only sectors doing well were Hotels and Restaurants (increased by 67%), Electricity and Water (increased by a large 105%) and Financial Services (banks, insurance) increased by 39%.

But most sectors have shown improvements over the last two years as indicated by the partial indicators given recently by the Deputy Governor of RBF (Mr. Ariff Ali).

**Building Permits Data**

One real tangible indicator of investor confidence is the number building permits approved every year (and of course, certificates of completion).

Table 2 indicates that there has been a significant long term decline in annual average building permits for the private sector. This is no doubt partly due to lack of confidence in the economy and politics, but also partly because new home owners, rather than building new homes, have been buying homes sold by departing emigrants.

But the numbers of building permits for Other Purposes (which includes commercial buildings), also declined from an average of 332 in the period before the first coup in 1987, to 208 during the period of the Bainimarama Government. This is largely a reflection of lack of investor confidence, made worse because the numbers should have been rising with rising GDP.

Statistics on the value of the building permits as a percentage of GDP also shows the same downwards trend for building permits for private households.

The data for the commercial sector shows the expected sharp plunges associated with the coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006, but the overall averages show much less variability because of a few projects with large individual values.

**Investment as Percentage of GDP**

This powerful indicator needs to be above 25% for reasonable economic growth, and has indeed been achieved for 2013 and 2014.
But, the overall record of all governments since 1987 have been extremely poor as is indicated by Table 3, with private investment just beginning to rise.

RBF data indicates that between 2007 and 2014, public and private investments have been roughly of the same order (9% of GDP), with both being on the rise in the last three years.

### The 2010-11 Employment and Unemployment Survey

A Report by the FBS on the 2010-11 Employment and Unemployment Survey was completed in May 2013 but the Bainimarama Government refuses to allow it to be published. That Report shows that while the labor force rose significantly between 2004-05 and 2010-11, wage employment declined by -3%, with unemployment no doubt rising significantly (confirmed as important by opinion polls of potential voters).

In the same period, real income (i.e. adjusted for inflation) of all economically active people declined by an extremely high 30% indicating that dollar incomes of most workers (except the military, police and prisons) failed to keep pace with changes in the cost of living (CPI) (also confirmed as important by opinion polls of potential voters).

Quite consistent with the above results, FNPF data also indicates that “New Members” decreased by -34% from an annual average of 18,773 (between 2004 and 2006) to 12,470 between 2007 and 2012 (and this despite the intensified efforts by FNPF to register more employees).

Real incomes and employment have probably been on the rise in the last two years, especially with large public sector salary increases awarded in the budget last year, and some growth taking place in the private sector, but there are no published data available.

### Recent Economic Growth and Increased Public Debt

Table 1 above has indicated that economic growth has averaged about 3% between 2010 and 2014, but this has been largely financed by government borrowing and increases in public debt.

According to the unaudited Annual Budget figures, the Bainimarama Government increased the Public Debt from $2863 millions in 2006 to about $3999 million in 2014, which would have been about $4449 million, had it not been for planned sales of government assets amounting to $450 millions.

[Note that you should not be including as the normal “revenue” of a farm, the proceeds of the sale of the milking cows].

In effect, the Debt per Household has increase from $16,839 in 2006 to $20,869 in 2014, and $23,348 if we exclude the assets sales: an overall increase of 39%.

| Table 3 Average Annual Investment to GDP Ratio (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Public | Private | Total |
| 1970 to 1986 (Mara) (17 yrs) | 10 | 13 | 22 |
| 1987 to 1998 (Mara/Rabuka) (11 yrs) | 7 | 5 | 13 |
| 1999 (Chaudhry) (1 yr) | 10 | 4 | 14 |
| 2000 to 2006 (Qarase) (7 yrs) | 9 | 6 | 15 |
| 2007 to 2014 (Bainimarama) (8 yrs) | 9 | 9 | 18 |
Given that most households’ money income has not changed much during this period, the 38% higher Public Debt per household implies a much higher long term burden that MUST BE PAID BY FUTURE GENERATIONS.

Debt:GDP ratio in 2014 will be slightly more than in 2006 if the 2014 planned assets sales of $575 millions are excluded.

Please note also that while many Bainimarama Government advertisements (eg in Fiji Sun, 19 July 2014) are showing the Govt. Net Deficit to GDP ratio as a mere 1.9% for 2014, this is quite misleading because the Bainimarama Government is also planning to sell public assets in order to raise $575 millions as “revenue”.

Why not sell of all the public assets and you could boast that you have a great government which is in surplus?

But without these expected assets sales revenues of $575 millions, the Net Deficit as a percentage of GDP would be a much higher 7.7%, the highest over the last fourteen years, as also would be the Public Debt, not something to boast about.
12. Who is going to pay for dinner? (2014)

(unknown date)

Whenever any candidate, political party, or Party Leader promises some lollies to the voters, the first question that the voters must ask: where is the money coming from?

It is quite a sad indictment of the quality of programs being put on by our media, that such penetrating and intelligent questions are not being asked, nor being pursued when less than clear answers are given.

In a recent talk back program, the host asked a political candidate and Party Leader to explain how the huge revenue shortfall would be made up if VAT was reduced from 15% to 10%, as the candidate was promising if he were the Minister of Finance.

Unfortunately, the Talk Show host, a pleasant enough fellow and a old friend of mine, did not have the economics knowledge to question further when the candidate stated, on very doubtful grounds, that economic growth would take care of it. It will, in the long run, but certainly not over the next three years.

The lack of sound economics knowledge among media hosts of elections debates and presenters, is going to be a perennial problem during the elections campaigns when candidates and parties promise the earth (in terms of lollies and policy changes) to voters.

In our case, given the popularity of sports amongst voters, they can demand from candidates and political parties, that given that sports is what they care most passionately about, the future Minister of Finance must find the money to adequately support our national sports, and not depend on corporate sponsors who effectively undermine our national health objectives and the Ministry of Health.

Voters can demand that the Minister of Finance could reallocate funding, for example from military expenditure to sport.

Or the Fiji Roads Authority could easily do without $50 million a year from their excessive allocation of $500 million annually, and probably not even notice it is gone, and probably even reduce their waste.

Or why not increase corporate taxes and income taxes to the higher level of 30% they were before they were recently and very unwise reduced, for no good cause whatsoever. This might also improve social justice and income distribution in our society.

But of course, these measures to raise revenue or make revenue available for what the people want out of tax revenues, might be extremely unpopular with some powerful interest groups, which is why candidates who want to please everybody will not make the difficult statements during election campaigns.

But eventually, if voters are insistent enough, and helped by knowledgeable, honest, inquisitive, and challenging media representatives and hosts of debates, they will have to make the difficult choice between statements that can get them hundreds of thousands of votes from the ordinary citizens, and losing a few hundred votes from the corporate sector voters.

Of course, regardless of the legal decrees about the financing of political parties and candidates, you can bet your bottom dollar that most of the corporate interests in Fiji, whether they local or expatriate, whether Australian, NZ, American, or Chinese, they will be financing people who might be of use to them in the future,
some will hedge their bets by financing all sides. Brown paper bags filled with newly printed colored paper, leave no audit trail.

But of course, some socially irresponsible political parties can always say that they will keep increasing their borrowing, increase the Public Debt and get the future generations, to pay for all the goodies that the current generation want to enjoy without themselves paying for them.

That also ought to a major issue in this coming elections.
13. The Facts on Poverty and Social Justice

(The Fiji Times, 26 July 2014)

[Qualification: There are many voters who believe that an unelected government, deemed illegal by the highest Fiji Court of Appeal, should not be changing policies on taxation, government expenditure and public debt for eight years. One founding slogan for the American War of Independence was: “no taxation without representation”.]

Economies can show high rates of growth, but have mixed results on the poor:

(1) the poor can become poorer, because the cost of living increases more than their incomes (some evidence of this).

(2) the poor can become poorer because of increased Value Added Tax, while the rich can become richer because of reduced direct taxes (some evidence of this).

(3) the poorest can become better off even as the rich become richer, and income distribution can still become worse (no evidence of this).

As with the economic growth analysis, the analysis of changes in poverty may also be broken into two periods: one of increasing poverty between 2005 and 2011, and the second between 2011 and 2014 when many positive budget measures were brought in in the areas of education and infrastructure especially.

The likely changes in poverty are examined through household survey data from the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, the Wages Councils, changes in taxation, and the annual budget measures of the last three years.

Changes between 2002-03 and 2008-09

The FBS Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) for 2002-03 and 2008-09 give the changes in poverty between these two survey periods, with four years during the Qarase Government, and two years during the Bainimarama Government (the Bainimarama coup took place in December 2006).

Poverty between 2002-3 and 2008-9:

- in rural areas increased from 40% to 43%
- in urban areas reduced from 28% to 18%
- Fiji as a whole, reduced from 35% to 31%

Given the declining agricultural output in the sugar and non-sugar sectors, one can say confidently that rural poverty would have increased steadily through this entire period, both under the Qarase Government and the Bainimarama Government.
But because of the overall cumulative positive economic growth rate of 15% between 2000 and 2006, urban poverty under the Qarase Government would have been decreasing.

Changes in poverty between 2004-05 and 2010-11

The first year of this period was under the Qarase government, while the remaining five years were under the Bainimarama Government.

Assuming that the patterns of remittances were roughly the same throughout, the Employment and Unemployment Survey (EUS) data for 2004-05 and 2010-11, can be used to examine poverty at both the individual worker level, and also at the household level. The EUS data at the household level indicate that the percentage of population in households below an estimated poverty line, changes as follows, between 2004-05 and 2010-11:

* in Fiji overall, poverty increased from 30% to 45%
* in rural areas, poverty increased from 34% to 55%
* in urban areas, poverty increased from 25% to 35%

The EUS individual worker data indicate that

* poverty of the workers depending on subsistence increased from 35% to 67%.
* the poverty of employees not covered by Fiji National Provident Fund, increased from 50% to 60% (those covered by FNPF remained the same at 20%).

This last result is not surprising given Governments’ failure to implement Wages Councils (next section).

Government failure to implement Wages Councils

The poorest wage earners who are not represented by unions are supposed to be protected by the ten Wages Councils, set very sensibly at different levels for different sectors depending on how well each sector was doing. For most of the post-coup period, the Wages Councils were under the Chairmanship of Father Kevin Barr.

Unfortunately, Father Barr’s Wages Regulation Orders were postponed year after year by the Minister for Labor under orders from the Bainimarama Government, because of unethical pressures by employers and the Employers’ Federation.

While the stagnating economy after the 2006 coup may well have been an important factor for some employers, not a single employer ever showed their audited accounts in justification for their inability to pay, to the Wages Council Chairman (Barr) or the Labor Minister.

After postponement for four years, small partial adjustments were allowed, which did not keep pace with the large increases in the cost of living, and most of these
workers, already extremely poor and numbering about 50,000, slipped further into poverty (as the EUS data indicates).

Eventually, Father Kevin Barr was sacked as Chairman of Wages Council, after accusing the Bainimarama Government of practicing “crony capitalism”, and threatened with expulsion from Fiji (Father Barr is an Australian citizen).

Then there was the National Minimum Wages debacle by the Chairman of the Commerce Commission (Dr Mahendra Reddy), who with great public fanfare, set a “scientific” national minimum wage of $2.32 per hour, only to retreat into silence, when the Bainimarama Government unilaterally, again under pressure from employers, reduced it to $2 per hour.

**Regressive taxation: taxing the poor and helping the rich**

There has been a false claim that because of the raising of the income tax threshold to $15,000, the poor now do not pay any tax, but the reality is that all consumers pay tax through VAT, on essential and non-essential expenditures alike.

Since 2006, the Bainimarama Government has changed the taxation system heavily in favor of the rich and increased the burdens on the poor:

(a) VAT has been increased from 12.5% to 15% increasing the cost of living for the poor;

(b) Income tax at the highest income levels has been reduced totally unnecessarily from 30% marginal tax to 20%, lower even than all our neighboring countries, thereby increasing the after-tax income for the rich (except for those earning over $270k).

(c) Corporate tax has also been reduced totally unnecessarily from 28% to 20%, with most foreign companies repatriating their increased profits.

These tax reductions have probably given back more than $150 million to the rich, and the lost revenues regained by taxing the poor and the middle classes more, through the VAT. Income distribution and social justice has worsened in this period.

However, there have been some positive measures for the poor through budget measures in the last two years.

**Changes in poverty 2011 to 2014: high growth and budget measures**

The period 2011 to 2014 has seen an average growth rate of 3% growth rate, massive infrastructure investments amounting to more than $1 billion, and the continuation of the remittance receipts from abroad (now amounting to more than $370 millions according to RBF figures).

While there is no data to assist, almost certainly, poverty will have been reducing between 2011 and 2014 but annual budget figures also have a bearing on household poverty from the government expenditure side, which may be picked up in future household income and expenditure surveys.

The Bainimarama Government in the last three years has also brought in comprehensive subsidies on bus fares and tuition fees, and increased access to scholarships and loans for tertiary education. Commitments have also been made to make pre-schools free.
These are all clear and much appreciated benefits for the poor and there is statistical evidence of the positive effects.

The EUS data indicates that between 2005 and 2011, the percentages of children attending school have increased by 4% at primary schools (to almost complete coverage now), and by 7% at secondary to reach 88%, and by 7% at tertiary ages to reach 40%.

Almost certainly, the improvements in school attendance have continued to grow after 2011, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels given the easier access to scholarships and loans.

Of particular benefit to Indo-Fijian families is that there are no obstacles in their children’s paths to higher education, whereas previously there used to be quotas on scholarships, and limited access to loans.

These education policies by the Bainimarama Government counter, to some extent, the changes in taxation policy described above, but not for those poor families without children at school.

Note that the awarding of scholarships in select areas based totally on academic merit has meant reduced access to indigenous Fijians in these areas.

Given that the emigration data indicates clearly that qualified non-Fijians are far more likely to emigrate than indigenous Fijians, then the current ethnically blinkered scholarship policies, are likely to lead to severe skill shortages in the future in those areas.

Another recent positive measure has been the allowances for the elderly which is of some assistance to the destitute.

More importantly, the building of rural roads and other socially necessary infrastructure on water and sewerage throughout Fiji (especially in the poorest Northern Division) will be of great assistance to the rural poor, facilitating the marketing of their produce and better access to essential urban services, and improving their livelihoods and standards of living.

However, these future benefits will only eventuate, if the increased infrastructure expenditure translates into higher economic growth, which can pay for the current large increases in Public Debt, which will otherwise be a burden on the future generations of the poor and middle classes. It also depends crucially on the Republic of Fiji Military Forces respecting the democratic outcome of the September 2014 elections and staying clear of politics whatever the result.
14. Gender Issues (19 March 2014)

It is an international cliche that women are not just a half of the population but a half of all voters, and potentially the most powerful voting block in any election. Unfortunately for themselves, women rarely, if ever, vote as a block.

But what do the political parties have to offer women in real practical terms, that will make a difference to their lives, and decide which party they vote for?

We can start with these elections and formation of Cabinet, but there are far more important issues relating to jobs, incomes, household work and leisure.

Women’s Representation in Parliament and Cabinet

One of the interesting aspect of the Bainimarama Government is that despite being totally in control of all appointments and not answerable to voters, Bainimarama had only 1 woman in his Cabinet (perhaps there were no Cabinet positions left for women, after 2 individuals decided to hog 10 cabinet positions between them).

While other elected governments may have been a bit better, none gave a fair go at having a good balance of women in their election line-ups or in their cabinets.

What will be the gender balance of all the political parties in the forthcoming elections?

Much will depend on whether the electoral system has a “Closed List” (in which case women can be properly represented at the top for each party) or an “Open List” in which case women will struggle as they always have.

(a) voters can ask Commodore Bainimarama (and his Party when it eventually appears next month) why they rejected the Closed List system (if they do) that would have been extremely useful for women to be properly represented in Parliament

(b) Representation in Parliament and Cabinet: Voters must ask all political parties how they will ensure a fair balance of women (say more than 40%) in their elections line-ups

(ii) in their Cabinet, should they form or be part of Government.

Women in Employment and Incomes

There are many studies of Fiji’s labor market that indicate that women are under-represented in both the private and public sectors at the higher levels, and, despite their equal qualifications and experience, are on lower salaries than men.

For example, this study of mine not only has data on incomes and employment but also unpaid household work:

There is also another Report which has been long been finalized but yet to be approved by Planning Office for publication by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (*Fiji Women and Men at Work and Leisure, Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2014*).

[Author's note: This report has not been published, to date (2018).]

This report will not only have the latest data on employment (paid and unpaid) and incomes, but also interesting data on leisure activities such as sports, kava drinking, watching television and attending religious gatherings.

These studies show that some improvement for women are taking place in employment and incomes, especially for younger more educated women, but the changes are happening extremely slowly.

**Gender equality in senior positions and incomes:**

(c) voters must ask the political parties what concrete measures they will take if they are part of the next government to ensure gender equality in employment and incomes at the higher levels in the public service particularly, and board membership of government public enterprises.

(d) voters must ask the political parties what concrete measures they will take to ensure on gender equality in training for professional and technical programs where females are grossly under-represented

**The killer household work.**

Few understand that the total amount of unpaid household work (in hours), is roughly equal to the total amount (in hours) of paid work in Fiji (as it is internationally).

The two national studies (I have referred to above) have confirmed that there is gross gender imbalance in the unpaid household work (cooking, child care, clothes, cleaning, garden) done by working men and working women, and boys and girls.

In Fiji, working women do some 15 hours per week more than working men, while girls do some 4 hours per week more than boys. There is very little improvement taking place in either gap.

This imbalance in household work reduces the time available to women and girls for professional development and leisure activities, such as sports.

(e) Voters must ask the political parties what policies they will put in place to encourage greater gender equality between men and women, and boys and girls, in the unpaid household work that is done throughout Fiji.

**Leisure activities**

The most recent data coming out from FBS surveys will indicate that women have available some 5 to 7 hours less per week in leisure activities than men, and girls have some 4 hours per week less than boys.

Males and females spend about the same time on religious gatherings and watching television.
But men spend far too much time (between 5 to 7 hours more on average) on kava gatherings and drinking, which time is not available for doing their proper share of household work.

(f) To encourage a better sharing of household work, voters can ask political parties what will be their policies on encouraging men to reduce the time they spend at kava gatherings.

Women’s organizations

It has often been the case in Fiji’s history that women’s organizations have not only fought for specifically women’s issues and interests but also national issues and interests, which have required them, of necessity, to be critical of the government of the day.

Often, the government of the day (several governments) have ostracized those critical women’s organizations and disregarded their inputs into national and international policy making, while recognizing and supporting only those women’s organizations that pander to them.

In a truly democratic and free society, a responsible government would be inclusive of all organizations, and be principled and strong enough to accommodate robust debate and criticisms of governments and their policies.

(g) Voters can ask all political parties whether

(a) they will follow principles of inclusivity towards women’s organizations (such as Fiji Women’s Rights Movement, Fiji Women’s Crisis Center, Femlink, Soqosoqo Vakmarama, etc) which may take principled stances which occasionally may disagree with government positions.

(b) they will give priority to women’s issues as articulated by their organizations, such as the prevention of violence against women.
15. Affirmative Action for Indigenous Fijians in business

In my previous Bulletin 3, I have pointed out that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples fully justifies the special treatment of indigenous peoples where they lag behind other ethnic groups, for systematic reasons.

In Bulletin 2, I gave the example of scholarships for education, where they needed special allocations to ensure that they were not marginalized from training necessary to reach proper balance in the economy.

This balance for indigenous people is absolutely necessary in the business sector, where indigenous Fijians have a tiny share of corporate ownership.

It has been totally remiss of several largely Indo-Fijian dominated political parties to use Fijian Holdings Limited as a political football, in trying to tarnish the SVT or the SDL by alleging that they were only making elite or rich Fijians richer.

I argued here in this Statement for Mr. Qarase in his recent trial that the only serious gap between indigenous Fijians and the other ethnic groups is at the top in the corporate sector, and it was necessary for Fiji’s economic development, that well-off or rich Fijians must be made richer.

https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/2012/09/01/making-rich-fijians-richer-contextual-statement-for-defense-counsel-for-Mr-qarase/

Except in education, there is no need for affirmative action for the bottom 90% of the populations where Fijians and Indo-Fijians are pretty similar in terms of household income and expenditure.

But there must be Affirmative Action to foster indigenous Fijians in Business, just as other ethnic groups have received in Fiji’s history (read the article above).

Issue Voters can ask political parties what will be their policies towards Affirmative Action to assist indigenous Fijians in business
16. SMEs: the rhetoric and the reality (5/7/2014)

(The Fiji Times, 5 July 2014)

For decades, successive governments have talked about helping Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as an essential part of Fiji’s development effort.

Labor experts all acknowledge that SMEs create far more employment than the larger enterprises, and they are also good for income distribution and reducing poverty.

But what should government’s approach be when the small “giant killer”, eventually becomes a giant, who then indirectly stifles the SMEs?

Look at today’s business giants like Jack’s Handicrafts, Tappoos, Motibhai Patel, and many others, who once upon a time were SMEs themselves.

Today, these Fiji brand names are synonymous with quality products and quality shopping environments, to match those in Australia or NZ or any other developed country, and vital in attracting the high spending tourists from abroad.

Then there are the small handicraft operators such as at those at the Suva City Council’s Handicraft Center operating on Stinson Parade, below the SCC car-park.

They struggle to make a living, partly because tourist buses and taxis do not visit them regularly, preferring for very understandable reasons, to take them to the large tourist outlets like Jacks, Tappoos, or Motibhais.

The tough question is: why have successive governments not given SMEs in the SCC Handicraft Center the same assistance they give large operators, despite all the rhetoric over the years? This is a general problem and deserves a systemic answer.

Jack the Giant Killer

The young generation today will have little idea that commercial giants like Jacks Handicrafts or Tappoos or Motibhai Patel, and many others in many other fields, were also once, small struggling businesses in newly independent Fiji. In the colonial era, some were even itinerant hawkers struggling around the dusty Queens and Kings gravel roads.

They struggled against the old colonial commercial giants such as the octopus like subsidiaries of Burns Philp, Carpenters, Stinson Pearce, and other expatriate firms, who also used to get preferential treatment from the expatriate commercial banks, insurance companies, the old colonial government, and even the newly independent Fiji Government.

But, by sheer dint of hard work, entrepreneurial ability and frugality, a small family run SMEs grew and diversified into activities all over Fiji, ultimately becoming the giant Jack’s Handicrafts, a pillar of today’s tourism industry.

Whether in Nadi, Sigatoka or Suva, tourists will today encounter under one Jacks roof, in pleasant tiled air-conditioned surroundings, a full range of handicraft items, clothes, and all kinds of Knick knacks, made in Fiji or imported. Jack’s also has diversified vertically into his own factories, with skilled designers and workers.

The prices suit virtually every pocket, tourists and locals alike, from those wanting to spend a few dollars, to those wanting to splash tens of thousands.

To make sure that he provides the complete product to the tourists, he also has some of the best restaurants around, with great chefs.
Take for granted today, that all these quality outlets have clean quality toilets, important for all tourists, especially the females and the elderly.

Tour operators and hotels recognize Jacks for excellence in the shopping experience, and very naturally direct tourists their way.

But also, as is practiced world-wide, giant retailers try to corner as many of the visiting tourists as possible, by giving commissions to tour operators and tourist bus or taxi drivers, to drop their tourists at their outlets.

**SMEs disadvantaged**

For every bus or taxi full of tourists going to the large outlets, that is one bus or taxi less for the small handicraft shops, such as the SCC Handicraft Center, which barely sees any tourist buses or taxis for the last decade.

These SMEs are run by middlemen or the producers and their families, and they are of all ethnic groups- Fijians, Indo-Fijians, and even other Pacific Islanders.

The shopping environment of the SCC Handicraft Center and these SMES are dark and dingy, with toilets preferably not to be visited, and with food and drink outlets which will not appeal to tourists (even if adequate for locals).

Most importantly, no SME from the SCC Handicraft Center can pay commissions to tourist bus operators or taxi drivers to bring their tourists to them.

It is no wonder that these SMEs stagnate and their families struggle to put food on their tables: there is simply no level playing field for them.

**How help the SMEs?**

We cannot expect the giant businesses to, out of the “goodness of their heart”, to look after the SMEs at the SCC Handicrafts Center. Unfortunately, in the Darwinian capitalist jungle, moral and ethical businessmen trying to be fair to SMEs cannot compete against more cut-throat businesses.

Governments might convince the tour companies and large retail outlets to take a certain proportion of their tour buses and taxis to the SCC Center: but moral suasion hardly ever works (except for ruthless dictatorships).

To attract tourists, it would be absolutely necessary to upgrade the physical quality of the SCC Handicraft Center, perhaps with attractive tiling, painting and conveniences.

But note that any good businessman, like Jacks or Tappoos or Motibhai Patel, would never use SCC’s prime sea-front location for a mere multi-level car-park.

SCC could, with Government subsidy, increase the number of outlets by converting the upper story car-parks to more shopping outlets and perhaps attractive restaurants facing the Suva Bay.

Of course, the typical government will say: sorry, we have no money. But then, there is no shortage of funds when it comes to helping large tourist developers and investors, on the grounds that they put Fiji’s tourism industry on the world map, they pay substantial taxes and city rates, and are responsible for large amounts of employment creation.

Witness the massive public capital infrastructure expenditure amounting to hundreds of millions on water, sewerage, tar-sealed roads etc at Natadola, Momi, Denerau and other tourism areas, agreed to by successive governments.
Notice that in Suva, Suva City Council itself has restructured the public road system at great cost to make tourist bus bays for Tappoos and Jacks on Victoria Parade, and also widened the pedestrian pavement for City Central shopping complex at the corner of Cumming Street and Waimanu Road.

This is despite the fact that they have simultaneously reduced public access to other rate payers by narrowing the roads.

Other SMEs facing same problems

There are thousands of SMEs throughout Fiji who face the similar problem that large enterprises in capitalism have inherent advantages that stifle the SMEs. Look at the massive growth of super-markets in all the major urban centers, and in newly urbanizing areas like Nasinu in Greater Suva and Namaka in Nadi, all helped by Local Councils, the Town and Country Planning arms of government and tax payers’ funds.

Not surprisingly, there is a decline of the small shops all over the country, unable to compete with discount prices and range offered by the super-markets, unless the SMEs work incredibly long hours.

Look at the great decline in the small “push-carts” which once used to be so common throughout Fiji.

To make things worse, these SMEs (and even humble pushcarts) face all kinds of exorbitant license fees and charges, which are a high proportion of their small turnover.

They hardly ever get any of the financial assistance that large enterprises normally get from those in authority.

Unfortunately, FRCA also has had to make up for lost revenue caused by the recent reduction of corporate and income tax from 30% to 20%, by squeezing the SMEs, who do not have cunning corporate lawyers and accountants to legally avoid (and illegally evade) their taxes.

The CEO of one very active NGO highlighted to me how rural people working in the informal sector now have to pay so many license fees which they never had to before: a license to catch prawns, a license to sell prawns to the public, a license to store prawns, etc. etc. Soon they will be needing a license to die.

The power of SMEs in an election year

It is politically understandable that governments will not generally spend equivalent amounts for SMEs as they spend for the large corporations.

After all, SMEs cannot throw fancy cocktail parties for government ministers at Denerau, or contribute large amounts to election campaigns.

Nor can SMEs make the large contributions to political parties that the large corporations can, and they often make contributions to ALL the large parties, just to hedge their bets.

Often the large corporations are able to get the law “bent” so that they can get “permissions” given where they should not, such as the destruction of mangroves by reclamation, or parts of public parks given to them for commercial development, or other financial transactions between them and government carried out less than arms length.
The value of all these economic and financial benefits is hundreds or even thousand times the financial contributions these corporations may make to political parties or private bank accounts in Fiji or overseas. None of the SMEs or those in the informal sector can give these kinds of benefits to government ministers.

These days, a beer and saina or bhajia, or Black Label and duck curry chaser will not take the SME too far with Ministers.

But in an election year, owners of SMEs and all their family members aged over 18 (and remember, poor families are big), can contribute far more votes than the few owners of large corporations.

*Issue:* What have political parties and candidates got to offer SMEs in their manifestoes?
17. Monopolies and the Commerce Commission (24/5/2014)

(The Fiji Times, 24 May 2014)

Most political parties and candidates quite rightly see the high cost of living as a major issue for voters.

Where higher prices are due to the exercise of monopoly power or “substantial market power”, then some governments have tried to use the Commerce Commission to reduce the prices and cost of living, by law, because of the failure of the free markets.

This is what Dr. Mahendra Reddy (Chairman of the CC) has tried with hardware merchants, pharmacies, and even bakeries, even though there is quite a degree of competition in these areas, and price control can and do have all kinds of negative side effects (such as shortages and/or lower product quality).

This Elections Bulletin is about two industries displaying clear abuses of “substantial market power” which harms consumer interests, with the Commerce Commission seemingly powerless.

The first example is the exorbitant air fares charged by Fiji Airways on the domestic routes, in the process seriously undermining development policies for the North.

The second example is the super profits squeezed from consumers by mobile companies through their pricing and other predatory practices.

Look North but don’t travel north?

There have been many reports by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics that point out the relatively higher rates of poverty is in the Northern division.

Many governments, including the Bainimarama Government, have correctly attempted to articulate “Look North” policies to accelerate northern development, to improve incomes and standards of living, and to reduce the tendency for migration to Viti Levu.

Thus in the last budget, there have also been large investments in northern division roads and other infrastructure. There have also been a number of new tourism investments.

BUT, undermining all these efforts by government and private investors are the incredibly high air fares to and from the northern division (and Rotuma and the outer islands), due to the exercise of monopoly power by Fiji Airways.

The Commerce Commission well knows that when there was competition on the domestic routes, the fares were considerably lower than they currently are, which at times can be as much as the return air fare to Auckland or Brisbane.

Effectively, the monopoly domestic fares have acted like an unfair “tax” on all air travelers who travel to and from the north, thereby reducing not just their personal welfare, but also constraining economic growth of businesses, including the discouragement of tourism.

Of course, Fiji Airways profits have been boosted and as a side effect, their loans from FNPF are repaid more easily. But good economics will advise that the air travelers to the North and outer islands should NOT be cross-subsidizing Fiji Airways (or FNPF).
Despite many public protests, the Commerce Commission has not been able to control the domestic air fares, but knowing Dr Mahendra Reddy, he has probably tried. Can Dr. Reddy explain to the public if there been any government pressure preventing him from bringing down the domestic air fares?

For the forthcoming elections, all voters associated with the northern division, Rotuma and outer islands, can ask all political parties and candidates what would be their recommendation to the Commerce Commission for the regulation of domestic air fares.

Note that the voters in the Northern division and outer islands could easily decide the election of 8 members of parliament, and even more, if their numerous relatives on Viti Levu vote with them (the Nabua to Nausori corridor is virtually a colony of Vanua Levu).

**Mobile charges**

When someone physically steals 50 cents from you in the street, the police and the courts come down on you like a ton of bricks, while some one embezzling a hundred thousand dollars can also be justifiably jailed for a few years.

Yet monopolies, like Fiji’s mobile companies can use their “substantial market power” and through exorbitant charges, make extra millions of dollars in addition to their normal profits, and it is all legal.

All of us have had the frustration of making a call, barely being connected and not speaking a word, and seeing that you have been immediately charged 45 cents. Or you might speak for a couple of minutes, and be charged $3, more than the cost of a call overseas.

Or if you charge up your mobile phone with $20 of pre-paid call (in other words you transfer your hard-earned money to the mobile company ahead of your planned usage), and you don’t use it up by a specified time (usually less than a month), that money is simply taken away from you.

Virtually everyone in the country, men women and children, are now using mobile phones, because of their great convenience. It is usually the poorer people who use pre-paid.

The Fiji public, including children, now spend more money on mobiles than they spend on either education or health. The mobile companies, and one in particular, are making phenomenal profits, possibly approaching the hundred million dollars mark by now.

They make so much super profits on their investments that they can afford to throw away a few millions in grandly advertised charity and sports sponsorships, as a sign of their “generosity”.

But the reality is that they are merely using a small proportion of the excessive profits they make through their substantial market power.

The great puzzle however, is: why has the Commerce Commission not reduced by law the mobile phone charges to reasonable fair rates based on actual usage, which still give the company a reasonable profit on their investments?

Why has the Commerce Commission not demanded that mobile companies must not charge higher rates on users who call from networks other than their own?
Why has the Commerce Commission not demanded that mobile companies cannot appropriate the unused credit that consumers have already paid them for? The public have been asking these questions for years, but the Commerce Commission Chairman (Dr. Mahendra Reddy) is not answering.

**Why a silent Commerce Commission?**

The Commerce Commission has not explained to the public why he has not imposed price control on these two blatant examples of the exercise of “substantial market power”, by Fiji Airways and the mobile companies.

Of course, the public can see from the media reports (television, radio, newspapers, and coconut wireless) that there are very friendly relations between government ministers on the one hand, and the management of mobile phone companies and the domestic airline, with each giving the other much public prominence.

Have there been political pressures applied on the Commerce Commission to not act in these two areas, in the ways that he frequently, energetically and very publicly, intervenes in the hardware, pharmacy and select bakery areas?

*Voters can ask all political parties and candidates for the forthcoming elections, that should they be elected and/or form government what will their policy be on requiring the Commerce Commission to regulate:*

(a) mobile phone charges and practices; and

(b) domestic air fares.

*I am sure some voters (and political parties and candidates) will also ask about*

milk product prices,

savings and time deposit interest rates,

hire purchase interest rates.

and more.
18. Fiji National Provident Fund (21 February 2014)

The Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), is the largest financial institution in Fiji in terms of assets, bigger than the commercial banks combined, and the largest lender to the Fiji Government.

The members of the FNPF (current contributors and pensioners) number around two hundred thousands, or roughly 40% of all the voters for the coming elections in Fiji. They represent an extremely powerful “voting block”.

The Bainimarama Government recently defended their extra-legal policy changes at FNPF. They claimed that previous governments had used the FNPF as their “piggy bank” (Fiji Sun, 7 Feb. 2014).

This last statement is certainly correct, but that criticism can equally be leveled at the Bainimarama Government itself, with more serious criticisms, including their massive reduction of pension rates from 15% to 9%.

Further, despite being in control for seven years, this Bainimarama Government has done nothing to ensure that future governments will not be able to control and use the FNPF as their “piggy bank”.

Mismanagement of FNPF

This Bainimarama Government is an unelected government which seized power through a military coup in 2006. Marginalizing both unions and employers who used to nominate their representatives to the FNPF Board, the Bainimarama Government appointed all the FNPF board members, some of whom have been non-citizens, and some who have Permanent Residency in other countries.

By military decree the Bainimarama Government and the FNPF Board, forced through a massive decrease in pension rates of all pensioners.

The FNPF propaganda has focused only on those who used to enjoy admittedly over-generous rates above 15% (to as much as 25%)- but even these were voluntarily offered by FNPF as legal contracts and accepted by those pensioners.

But the official propaganda ignores the more significant reduction of future pension rates from 15% to 9%, with grave public doubts about the fairness of the 9% rate.

Existing pensioners who chose not to accept the 9% pension rates were forced to withdraw their original sums, despite a clear legal contract being in place between them and FNPF.

These reductions were forced through, despite the fact that the pensioners’ had mounted legal challenge, which had been accepted for hearing by Fiji’s High Court.

The FNPF management, against all rules of good corporate practice, have arrogantly assumed the right to state and justify major changes in FNPF policies, which should properly be the domain of a lawfully appointed Board.

Even private expatriate consultants from Australia and NZ, have justified the policy changes through the media, implicitly supporting the unlawful military decrees.

The FNPF Board has mismanaged a number of major investments, in particular those at Natadola, Momi and the GPH, resulting in the writing down of hundreds of millions of dollars in assets. Undesirable loans have also been made, such as to Fiji Sugar Corporation.
The FNPF Board and Management have refused to release any of the reports of inquiries into the mismanagement of the investments, making a mockery of the frequent claims of transparency and accountability made by the FNPF Board and the Bainimarama Government.

**What voters should ask political parties:**

Voters in the coming elections must make the governance of FNPF an important election issue.

Voters must ask all political parties, including any party that Commodore Bainimarama might set up, what their policies will be on a thorough reform of the management of FNPF, including the following:

(a) Two thirds of the Board of the FNPF (and the Chairman) must be elected for five year terms by the members of the FNPF.

(b) The legal case that pensioners had in the courts must be reactivated, with the judiciary requested to hand down a lawful solution to the case, which could include (c) below.

(c) The FNPF Board commission a thorough independent review that recommends a fair pension rate that is consistent with the long-term sustainability of FNPF.

(d) All reports into the mismanagement of FNPF funds as well as the reports that have justified the recent changes in pensions, be made public.

Readers may wish to refer to some of my previous posts on FNPF and its activities in the Fiji economy here:

http://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/fnpf/

and in particular


or the full Report:

Narsey Report for Burness-Shameem case 13 August 2011.
19. Destroying mangroves for development (21/6/2014)

(The Fiji Times, 21 June 2014)

A letter writer to The Fiji Times recently argued that some destruction of the environment was necessary if Fiji was to develop, and this justified the reclamation of two large areas of mangroves in Suva (see Google Earth picture).

While such a view makes many environmentalists furious, there is a point in the argument probably shared by many others: all physical developments, such as roads or farm extensions, involve the destruction of the original environment, so why not these two mangrove areas?

This article tries to explain why these two areas of mangroves should be left alone, and why there are other less destructive alternatives.

Changing attitudes to the environment

Once upon a time, there were few concerns raised about the impact of investment projects on the environment. In the last three decades, scientists have realized the enormity of the long-term destruction that they had unwittingly unleashed on Nature, with the extinction of species, destructive changes in the physical geography of rivers and soils, etc. and severe long term costs expressing themselves as “climate change”.

Some of these changes, such as the negative effects of the Aswan Dam in Egypt are irreversible, while other attempts to turn back the environmental damage, such as returning the farmland to the original state in the Murray River Basin in Australia or reducing the levels of carbon emissions globally, are extremely difficult and costly.

This is why an entire field in economics, “environmental economics” and what are called “environmental impact assessments” (EIAs) have been developed to enable societies to make sensible decisions about development projects, with a full understanding of the environmental impacts, BEFORE the projects are initiated.

But most countries in the world now completely ban the destruction of mangroves and fight hard to regenerate mangroves.

How EIAs work

A good EIA tries to examine all the impacts (environmental, economic, and social) that the development project will have on the lives of the affected people, the current and future generations, and all the natural species, known and unknown.

The benefits of the projects are usually obvious and easy to quantify: the jobs, incomes, convenience to shoppers or residents, profits of project owners, taxes to government, etc.

But the EIA also has to put a monetary value on all the environmental costs of the project, often requiring a “market valuation” such as the value of lost timber, incomes, medicines, marine resources, not just in the immediate area, but through the food chain, to other geographic areas.

Often, to determine monetary values of environmental benefits, economists will often ask “what would you pay to enjoy this environment benefit?” Of course, the answer usually depends on how rich the respondent is.
The weaknesses of EIAs

A good EIA is a difficult exercise full of disagreements between environmentalists and economists, between environmentalists themselves, and between economists themselves.

Developed countries usually have a better understanding of the species that are in particular environments, from birds to butterflies, to all kinds of species of plants and living organisms, and also some idea of their economic value.

But they also lack basic knowledge and base data about species they know to exist, and knowledge nightmares about species they have yet to discover, but which they know are there, simply because of the past history of discovering new species in such areas.

Of course, it is impossible to know the economic value of species into the future given that it all depends on the development of science and technology.

The difficulties are greater in tropical coastal regions, mangroves, reefs and oceans where there is an absolute dearth of scientific knowledge, but which are the new frontiers for the pharmaceuticals and other industries.

EIAs also suffer from a fundamental weakness that all future values and costs have to be converted to “present values” through the use of discount rates on future flows.

This effectively reduces the future values, and impact on future generations, even though the benefits to and costs for the future generations are no less real, and might even become higher as natural resources become scarcer globally.

In sum, the development project is approved if the total value of the benefits (jobs, incomes, profits, taxes, foreign exchange etc.) are higher than environment costs and there is a net positive benefit for the economy.

Losers don’t have to be actually compensated to have a “an improvement in the economy”. (Bad luck, losers!)

All these difficulties are far more difficult in Fiji where there is an absolute dearth of scientific knowledge about what exists in our mangroves.

But ultimately, enlightened people will argue that it is vital to preserve our environments and bio-diversity, and every unique species, regardless of their so called “economic value” or lack of economic value, as perceived by the current generation.

EIAs for the Suva mangroves

The public might want to ask, was there ever any EIAs done for the two reclamation projects in Suva, between Grantham Road and Fletcher Road, and at Nasese? But that would be the wrong question.

Far more important is to ask: why is there any need to reclaim these mangrove areas in the first place?

One reclamation (at Nasese) is to build a housing sub-division and the other reclamation is to apparently build a 20+ story commercial and residential complex with other amenities.

BUT the fact is that while gold mines can only be developed where the raw materials are, these two projects did not require that they be situated were the mangroves are.
There is more than ample land all over Suva, much belonging to Fijian landowners, whose incomes would be considerably enhanced by the use of their land for these investment projects.

So why destroy these two areas of mangroves?
The likely answer is that the investors in these two relocations have probably made the calculation that there is far more profit to be made by reclaiming at these ideal central locations in Suva, than building elsewhere and paying more for the land.

But at what cost?

We have not even gone into the possibility that both these mangrove areas are the flood plains for two rivers, and reclamation is likely to cause flooding to the surrounding low-lying areas, especially after heavy rain, and high tides.

But is private profit to these investors enough reason to destroy permanently these two mangrove areas and cause much damage to nature and other private interests?

What exactly will the EIAs show? If the EIAs show a net loss, will the authorities ensure that the development is stopped, mangrove regeneration encouraged and the investment moved to another location?

Or will government simply go ahead and approve the project anyway regardless of what the EIA reveals?

Mahatma Gandhi is supposed to have said:

“The earth, the air, the land and the water are not an inheritance from our forefathers but on loan from our children. So we have to handover to them at least as it was handed over to us”.

I am sure that is at the heart of the sentiments on Green Sustainable Growth Strategy articulated by Brig. General (retd) Bainimarama last week, except that mangroves are not being handed over as we received them.

Voters can ask: What do political parties and candidates think of these two projects where mangroves are being destroyed for no good reason? Is this a valid and worthy election issue?
20. Good and bad International relations (17/5/2014)  
(The Fiji Times, 17 May 2014)

For some countries and voters, their country’s official and formal relationships with other countries, whether on a bilateral basis or on multi-lateral basis, can affect their lives, and ought to influence how they vote.

The external formal relations of Fiji with other countries, can have an impact on the emotional sense of security of our people.

That sense of security has taken a battering since the unelected Bainimarama Regime took control in 2006, and discarded old friendly relationships with traditional partners, while building new ones bringing both benefits and costs.

When formal relationships break down, voters and their families can suffer in direct and indirect ways. When new formal relationships are built bringing benefits through aid, loans, investment or trade, then some groups of voters may collectively also feel better off and more secure.

Over the last seven years, Fiji has faced both these sets of changes to its external relationships, with negative and positive impacts on groups of Fiji citizens and voters.

Voters can legitimately ask all political parties and candidates what their strategies will be for all of Fiji’s external relationships should they get into parliament.

I examine just a few, and very superficially at that.

Australia and NZ

Australia and NZ Fiji have had close relations with Fiji for more than a century. Their investments have dominated the Fiji economy right up till political independence and even today, they dominate the financial sector. Australia and NZ also supply a large proportion of our tourists for an industry which has replaced the sugar industry as the pillar of our economy. We are a large market for their goods.

Australia and NZ have also taken large numbers of our skilled emigrants, whose human capital value is several times the aid they give us and whose loss we can ill-afford, but they also have a impact through large remittances sent home.

When the 2006 coup took place, Australia and NZ, to show their support of constitutionality and abhorrence of illegal coups, imposed “smart” sanctions which ended up being totally ineffective (easy to say in hind-sight). Nevertheless, they maintained their “people to people” aid relations.

But Fiji was unwisely excluded from the Pacer negotiations, and far more importantly also from the potentially valuable Guest Worker schemes which could have assist employment and boosted remittance incomes. In turn, Fiji unwisely expelled High Commissioners from Australia and NZ, for no real gain whatsoever, but causing much trauma to Fiji families whose potential benefits were threatened.

When Australia and NZ recently re-established relations in anticipation of the September elections, some critics complained that this was “selling out of principles” and alleged that Australia and NZ were only doing this in response to their fear of China’s increasing importance in Fiji.

But the facts are that Australia and NZ are doing everything in their powers to facilitate the return of Fiji to an elected Parliament and government, whether of
Bainimarama, some other Party or some Coalition. This is what all voters will welcome.

Should the Fiji Military Forces not respect the outcome of the elections (and there is no evidence to suppose that) then the policy options will be again open to Australia and NZ. That is their head-ache, not of our political parties.

The reality also is that with large and increasing numbers of Fiji citizens in Australia and NZ, our historical trading, political and social relations, our geographical proximity, and our common objectives in this vast South Pacific ocean, Fiji MUST maintain solid formal relations with Australia and NZ, whatever our internal political situation.

However reluctant it may have been in the past, Australia and NZ will eventually be forced to take on a more enlightened and non-discriminatory leadership role in its Pacific backwater, instead of the sporadic, ad hoc and knee-jerk interest they have shown so far.

Much depends on the next elected government and dominant party.

European Union

Following the 2006 coup, the EU took a similar stance to that of Australia and NZ.

When the Bainimarama Government (which FLPs Chaudhry was then part of as Finance Minister) refused to hold the promised elections in 2009, EU withheld some $300 million of aid which could have assisted significantly in the rehabilitation of the sugar industry and the much-needed diversification.

Of all the sanctions by our developed country partners, this probably hurt the most and partly explains why our sugar industry is still in a mess.

Of course, the larger part of the explanation is that the EU has moved away from its sugar preferences (as economists had warned for decades) and the Fiji cane farmers and millers are terribly inefficient in farming, cane harvesting, cane transport and milling.

But the EU is still in a position to assist in Fiji’s development, especially if good Economic Partnership Agreements are signed (and that is not too obvious at the moment).

UK and Commonwealth

Despite Britain’s reduced exposure in Fiji and the Pacific, Fiji still has its very special relationship based on Fijian soldiers working for the British Army, although Britain has not done its own image any good over the years as a stalwart of parliamentary democracy, in too readily recognizing military coups and illegal leaders.

But, and this is despite the reduced professional image of Fiji soldiers given their ready support of military coups, Fijian soldiers are still valued by Britain for their services, past, present and in the immediate future (even though it is also cutting back their military strengths.)

One international grouping which suspended Fiji following the 2006 coup has been the Commonwealth.

While some argue that the Commonwealth is an anachronism that has little to offer Fiji, one sanction that has really hurt was exclusion from the Commonwealth Games, making sport-people scapegoats for the failures of its military political leaders.
These Games have been very important in taking Fiji competitors up several notches above the South Pacific Games, but towards “reachable” standards, in contrast to the Olympic Games which are way beyond the imagination of our athletes. Fiji has been readmitted to the Commonwealth Games (but too late for Rugby Sevens). Full admission after the elections may enable Fiji to access the many relevant technical assistance programs they have on offer.

**United States**

United States relationship with Fiji has been extremely complex and probably quite difficult for them also. On the one hand, their government has a very public stance in support of constitutionality everywhere in the world, with US Congress usually holding their government to greater account (however imperfectly). On the other hand, US has been reluctant to use possibly the most powerful sanction on the Fiji Military Forces hierarchy, the withdrawal of support for Fiji peace keepers throughout the world, working for UN and private security companies.

While some years ago, US withdrew some of its global activities from the Pacific (such as the Peace Corps), it has now returned, partly because of the perceived threat from Chinese influence, and partly because of reduced confidence in the ability of Australia and NZ to manage their backyard in keeping with US interests and strategies.

US also has much to offer if Fiji can get its act together, much of it unexplored because of our southern perspectives.

**New donors: China, Malaysia, India, Arab countries**

Perhaps the largest amount of hysteria in blogs has been generated by Chinese, Indian, and Malaysian aid and loans to Fiji and their many investment projects (some obviously in trouble).

Some of the public concerns have been quite legitimate, for instance building approvals being illegally given, over-riding Fiji’s environmental laws, or alleged lower standards in building of housing, roads and hydroelectric schemes, all worsened because of the absence of public accountability of the current government.

However, recent announcements by Chinese companies indicate that Fiji concerns about appropriate standards are being addressed by the use of Australasian companies as standards auditors for their large projects in Fiji.

But note that much of Chinese aid has been in infrastructure development whose benefits are localized over time, while other donors have usually been helping in human development (education and health) which Fiji can and does lose through emigration.

Chinese aid is complementary to other aid, and is apparently given without any obvious conditions (although all foreign aid has their foreign policy objectives).

On a priori grounds, Chinese, Indian and Malaysian aid may also offer more suitable technology than developed country donors and consultants.

Overall, the “aid market” has been made “more competitive” for Fiji by the entry of China, Malaysia, India, and several Arab countries.
Of course some investors may attempt to circumvent local protective legislation. But that would not be possible without the collusion of Fiji’s civil servants and political leaders, who are our responsibility, not the donors.

Regional Organizations:

Fiji has many regional organizations available for formal membership.

Fiji was expelled from Forum Secretariat after its decision not to hold the 2009 elections, with some alleging that Australia and NZ were the instigators.

Fiji is also part of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, PNG) which has increased enormously in importance for Fiji, because of the new-found minerals and LNG wealth in PNG.

Fiji has also begun a competitor to the Forum Secretariat, with its base also in Suva, but excluding Australia and NZ from membership, while supported by China.

There is also a nebulous “Pacific Plan” being slowly poled along by well-paid Australian and NZ consultants, giving an appearance of greater regional integration, while soft-pedaling on the PACER Plus, potentially of much greater and long-lasting importance to Fiji. These competing regional organizations are urgently in need for rationalization. Much will depend on what Fiji’s political parties and candidates see as potential future benefits from these regional organizations.

Voters can ask political parties and candidates what their policies would be with respect to formal relations with donor countries, and regional and international organizations

* in diplomatic representation,
* trade
* investment,
* labor mobility,
* sports (rugby, soccer and netball)
* aid.
* easier visa access to Fiji citizens
* cultural relations
* sporting industries (such as Super 15)

Can improved relations with these donor countries and regional and international organizations give rise to substantial economic, social and political benefits which could influence Fiji’s voters?

Are all political parties and candidates on the same page or even reading the same book on international relations which might convince some voters to give them their vote?
1c EDUCATION, HEALTH and SPORTS
21. Will voters pay for better health system? (28/6/2014)

(The Fiji Times, 28 June 2014)

The most important issues for voters, according to the opinion polls, are jobs, cost of living, education and health, in that order. But given that people will pay whatever they can to save the lives of their loves ones, health is probably even more important than education. Yet health has not received as much funding, and from all governments, as education. And it shows.

Dilapidated public health system

There is general consensus that Fiji’s public health system is in a very poor state, which even our political leaders are reluctant to use. One only has to go to the Colonial War Memorial Hospital to see the terribly dilapidated state of the wards with paint peeling, with floor tiles lifting off, the over-crowding, the general shortages of beds, medicines and health equipment.

There is a shortage of qualified experienced doctors and nurses, with long shifts being the order of the day. The Health Centers, which the MoH has tried to emphasize in a bid to reduce the demand on the main hospitals, also periodically suffer shortages of doctors, nurses, and medicines.

The low salaries of doctors and nurses have also encouraged our health professionals to emigrate to greener pastures.

Basic fact: our public health system needs more money.

Governments have always said: we are already giving enough and we just do not have any more. Is that true? I come to that later.

But the rich do have the money, and sadly for them as well, the private hospitals sometimes fail them.

The rickety private hospitals

Fiji’s richer people resort to the services of private hospitals, often paid for by private health insurance. But their complaints are also mounting. As profit organizations, private hospitals have to necessarily charge for every little service they provide, and their bills can become astronomical.

The private hospitals often do not have their own specialists on site or even on call, so must use CWM specialists, who often end up doing second shifts, sometimes with poorer quality of service.

The small scale of private hospitals means they cannot attend to multiple emergencies, and inevitably some patients suffer needlessly, and a few may even die, as also happens at our under-funded public hospital and health centers.

Private hospitals cannot stay open all night long and there are sad stories of emergency patients being turned away and told to go the CWM. Again a few may die on the way while the logistics of transfers are laboriously worked out.

Some doctors are even advising their emergency patients to go to the CWM first.

Clearly, the private hospitals cannot be the answer to the health needs of the bulk of Fiji’s population, most of whom simply cannot afford that generally higher quality of service which comes at a stiff price.
Clearly, the public health system must receive more funds. But where will the money come from? A mix of approaches is called for.

**Must have private fees**

The members of the public have always rebelled at the idea of paying fees on some kind of a subsidized a user pays basis. But the current public health fees are ridiculously low, not even covering the cost of the food and linen, which the patients would have had to cover at home anyway: why should tax-payers pay for these costs when some one becomes sick?

Why should tax-payers not pay for some of the costs of medicines? After all, they pay willingly for their consumption of cigarettes, alcohol, kava, fatty chops and sugary fizzy drinks, all of which make their health worse, requiring the use of other tax payers’ funds?

Consumer pay for barbers, tailors and beauticians, engineers, architects, so why not for doctors and nurses?

With better revenues generated on a user pays principle, where the patients can afford to pay, the public hospitals would be able to provide a much better quality of services which the poor who do not have the means, could enjoy as well.

But, do political parties and candidates have the courage to tell the voters that they must not expect total hand-outs, and should pay for part of their medical costs if they have the means to pay?

**Paying for Health Insurance: why not part of VAT**

Taxpayers can argue, with some validity, that the taxes that they pay to Government, ARE partly their health insurance premiums. But government also has to pay for other essential public goods and not just health.

Tax-payers can argue that government can reduce their excessive allocations for totally non-productive expenditures such as the military, which many countries without any external enemies, easily do without.

Taxpayers can argue that Government should reduce their excessive allocations to large infrastructure projects, where they are being used inefficiently.

A few might argue that income tax could be increased by a small percentage, to fund the National Health Insurance Scheme. But that tax falls on only some of the people in Fiji, not all.

The tax which virtually everyone pays is the Value Added Tax, currently at 15%. Perhaps 3 percentage points (or one fifth of current revenues) could be “ear-marked” to the Ministry of Health as funds for a National Health Insurance Scheme, over and above their normal core expenditures such as salaries and wages.

The great benefit of this mechanism would be that VAT rises automatically and very buoyantly as the economy grows, even when the economy may not be doing too well.

BUT WAIT: that VAT revenue is already being used for other public purposes: how will that lost VAT revenue be replaced by government?

This of course, was media challenge ingenuously posed by Mr. Khaiyum to Professor Biman Prasad, leader of the National Federation Party. Professor Prasad
argued that future economic growth would eventually replace the lost revenues (which it would, but only in the long run).

But two years ago the Bainimarama Government had quite unnecessarily reduced the corporate tax from 30% to 20% and also reduced income tax at the higher end from 30% to 20% thereby losing government more than $180 millions, while increasing the VAT from 12% to 15%. This made the rich richer and the poor poorer, thereby eroding social justice in Fiji.

This was very conveniently forgotten by Mr. Khaiyum at the recent launching of the Exporter of the Year Award Scheme, when he attacked Professor Biman Prasad for sensibly proposing a VAT reduction to ease the cost of living for the poor.

It would seem that Mr. Khaiyum, Minister for Elections etc, is quite comfortable with using his official position in government to campaign for votes from the corporate sector and the rich, while attacking other parties' candidates.

Health funds will are never enough

Every year, the media highlights sad cases where some seriously ill patient desperately needs overseas treatment, but cannot get it, and they die. No doubt the National Health Insurance Scheme will be able to cover some of these cases and costs but not all as I pointed out in a Fiji Times article twelve years ago (“Who is to live and who is to die: the case of Jerry, Suka and Priya” *The Fiji Times*, 27 June 2001) also available on my blogsite, NarseyOnFiji.

This article also has a full elaboration of the moral dilemma involved for Health officials in making decisions over such issues, as well as suggesting other possible sources of funding for public services like health (including the avoidance of coups).

Basically, using the $50,000 or so for a well-publicized overseas treatment for one person must mean that the rest of the MoH must spend less on doctors, nurses, medicines, transport, equipment, with the result that far more people will die quietly out of sight of the media.

It is also unfortunate that other initiatives such as the Fiji National University Teaching Hospital together with providers from India, have taken far too long to get off the ground, for all kinds of avoidable and shocking reasons.

Three policies for political parties and candidates to consider:

(a) allocate a part of VAT (2% to 3%) for a National Health Insurance Scheme

(b) help pay for it by returning the corporate tax and highest marginal tax back to 30% it was before, thereby also improving the equity and social justice in our tax system.

(c) institute a “partial user pays system” where patients pay for part of the costs of their treatments, where they can afford to, with those who cannot and who pass a means test, being covered by tax-payers through the National Health Insurance Scheme.
22. Voter issues in Education (27 February 2014)

Issue 1: Free Pre-schools.

One of the Bainimarama Government’s good measures is that all students at primary and secondary school are able to a certain minimum funding from tax-payers. However, the funding should begin from pre-school.

I have shown in these two articles here, that the major beneficiaries of pre-school education are the poorest students whose homes do not have a good learning environment. Moreover, the benefit that poor children receive at Pre-school or Early Childhood education, persist through later years of education.


https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/2012/03/19/free-pre-schools-for-the-poor-the-fiji-times-30-july-2010/

Another gender benefit of ensuring free pre-school for poor and middle class children is that their mothers will be able to use the available time for income earning or professional development or much-earned leisure activities.

**Voters should ask all political parties what their policies will be on**

All areas of Fiji (rural and urban) where certain minimum numbers (to be decided by education stakeholders) of pre-school age children are located, should be funded to provide

(a) proper pre-school classrooms and teaching materials

(b) properly paid pre-school teachers, preferably qualified, with unqualified teachers where absolutely necessary, with programs to ensure that they become qualified over time.

(c) attendance should be totally free

Issue 2: Re-establish national exams at Year 8, Form 4, Form 6 and Form 7

The Bainimarama Government made a decision to phase out all national examinations. I have previously explained the damaging consequences of this decision, here:

Voters should ask all political parties what their policies will be on

(d) Restoring the national examinations at Year 8, Form 4, Form 6 and Form 8.

(e) Retaining and strengthening the scarce curriculum, examinations and assessment staff at the Min of Education.

(f) Insist that the results of the national examinations are not used to “push” students out of the education system but to guide them in their areas of weaknesses and strengths and guide them into labor-market oriented training that suits their skills.

Issue 3: Lift Retirement Age from 55 to 60

One of the negative policies implemented by the Bainimarama Government has been the compulsory enforcement of the retirement age at 55.

This policy has not been applied to Bainimarama himself or to some members of his family.

This policy has ensured the disastrous effect in schools and in many other parts of the civil service.

In education, qualified and experienced persons in senior positions in the education system as Head Teachers and Assistant Head Teachers, Heads of Departments and education experts in the Head Office, have been forced to retire.

Some have been renewed for short periods, but at the discretion of the Minister or higher up, often depending on “who you know”.

To add insult to injury, some have been offered to other Pacific countries to assist with their shortages, raising the question: why is Fiji offering their services which they do not want themselves?

Voters should ask all political parties what their policies will be on

(g) Lifting the retirement age for all civil servants to 60

(h) with annual renewals thereafter depending on satisfactory medical examinations.
Issue 4: Schools must be allowed to raise funds independently, in addition to receiving the grants they currently receive.

I have explained previously in a Letter to the Editor, the irrationality of the Ministry of Education policy decision that schools must not raise funds independently.


Voters should ask all political parties what their policies will be on allowing all schools to

(i) raise funds that the school management feel is necessary to achieve the standards that they wish for, with the approval of the majority of the parents

(j) giving those parents who do not wish to take part in such fund-raising to go to other schools of their choice.

Issue 5: Education scholarships

While 600 scholarships are being offered to students completely on merit, indigenous Fijians, females and other minority groups may not get a balanced proportion of these scholarships.

Voters must ask all political parties what their policy would be on

(k) Making available additional scholarships that ensures a reasonable degree of ethnic and gender balance in the total scholarships made available, especially for the important fields in which Fiji will require expertise into the future.

(l) that there be equity between those who receive scholarships and those who receive loans, with bonding requirements be the same for all categories of students assisted at tertiary level.
This Election Issues article focuses on three questions, which also have general applicability to a few other elections issues:

Q1 What do voters really want their taxes to be spent on?

Q2: Why should a good Health Minister watching national television for the last two weeks been absolutely angry?

Q3 Who is going to pay for dinner?

I will link these three questions together in one elections issue, the financing of sports.

**What do voters want taxes spent on?**

Naturally, political parties, leaders and candidates have been talking about jobs, incomes and cost of living as the important issues for the September elections.

Some are talking about land and qoliqoli rights, the environment, their pensions, a sense of national identity etc.

But what is it that bothers our voting public most, according to their “revealed interests” (very similar to the economics term “revealed preferences”)?

Look at the numbers of Letters to the Editor: 90 percent or more are written about rugby sevens, fifteens, soccer, netball, athletics, day after day, month after month.

Are Editors deliberately censoring out the serious letters and feeding the population a diet of sports as the ultimate “opium of the masses”, more powerful than religions? If so, there are no public protests about this censorship, if it exists.

Look also at the extraordinary amount of space given in newspapers and the amount of television time given to sports (and of course, to Bollywood and Hollywood, another issue).

Yet despite this intense interest of voters (and tax-payers) in sports, our national sports do not get adequate funding at all, however important the public might think it is.

Instead, the public see most of their passionately loved sports lurching from one financial crisis to another, year after year, with total instability and inadequacy of funding from tax-payers.

Most times, because of the lack of government funding, sports organizations look to corporate sponsors (we won’t discuss the disgraceful court cases over contracts).

More importantly, corporate sponsors expect that their products will be marketed through the events they sponsor, even if they end up working at cross-purposes with the core good health objectives and initiatives of the Ministry of Health.

Once upon a time, the contentious issue was tobacco products, until their advertising was banned.

One of these days, when the Ministry of Health develops some backbone and seriously tackles at source, the socially destructive effects of excessive alcohol consumption, the pervasive alcohol advertising in our media (especially radio) will take center stage.
For the purposes of this election issues article, I focus on fizzy drinks and the national athletics competition.

On national television these last three weeks, there have been two kinds of stories, which concerned sensible people should link together, but have not.

The first “good news/bad news” item was the excellent coverage given to dedicated Ministry of Health personnel such as Dr. Isimeli Tukana, pointing out the grave dangers posed to the health of the nation, by the hugely increasing consumption of “fizzy drinks”, which are usually loaded with sugar (The Fiji Times, 28 April 2014).

For several years now, Dr. Tukana and his Ministry of Health colleagues have been properly highlighting the massive costs to the nation of Non Communicable Diseases like diabetes, partly caused by over-indulgence in processed foods and drinks (and also of course, changes to a sedentary lifestyle).

Not only do the affected people suffer (costs of medication, and for hundreds, amputation of limbs), but tens of millions of the Ministry of Health budget is wasted dealing with diseases which are essentially avoidable lifestyle diseases.

At the same time as this health issue, for several weeks, the television viewers (and no doubt radio listeners) have been flooded with not just advertisements, but so-called “news items”, on a quite worthwhile national athletics competition, but named after a fizzy drink.

Of course, one by product of this media exposure and incessant marketing has to be increasing consumption of this fizzy drink and profits for the company concerned—otherwise why would they sponsor the sport event?

Health experts, including the World Health Organization, the Health and Education Departments of virtually all developed countries (including our neighbors Australia and NZ), associate this particular popular fizzy drink with the problem of diabetes amongst children and young adults, and actively try to discourage its consumption and ban its advertisement with school children.

Of course, the company concerned will say, it is up to schools, parents, and the children themselves to consume sensibly and not be controlled by law.

But the reality is that advertisements, and sports advertisement in particular, are an essential part of the very successful advertising strategy for this drink, not just in Fiji but the world over, as this company is an incredibly successful, powerful and profitable multinational.

The paradox is that in Fiji, the authorities have allowed this company to financially sponsor the national athletics competition, which is prominently named by this product.

This fizzy drink is therefore mentioned every time there is a news item about the national sports competition which is a national mania.

The salary of an athletic sport official has been paid by this company for several years now.

In the run-up to the actual competition itself, a company representative, wearing the colors associated with this drink, has been on national television every single night.

He has not just been talking up the games, but also advertising his product by using the name in virtually every sentence he is shown uttering on national television. (I have nothing against this person— he is just doing his job.

On television every night were also the images of the Fizzy Drink Games “torch” being carried around from school to school, with children lining up during school hours, in adulation of the torch.
There has apparently been no objection from the Permanent Secretary or Minister of Education that an undesirable product was also being actively advertised amongst school children.

**Why is the Minister of Health not angry?**

*Why has the Minister of Health not been publicly angry that this fizzy drink sponsorship of national athletics, is actively undermining the attempts by his own Health officials like Dr. Tukana, to discourage the consumption of this item which is strongly associated with a major and costly health problem in Fiji?*

Why has he not been telling the Minister of Sports that he should stop this corporate sponsorship of national athletic?

Probably because the Minister of Sports would tell him, where is the money to replace the corporate sponsors?

Why has the Minister of Education not been telling the Minister of Sports that he does not want school children to take part in this national charade?

So why are the Minister of Health and Minister of Sports not going to the Minister of Finance to tell him that he should make available the money to adequately fund not just the national athletics, but also rugby, soccer, net ball etc., which every year, are scrounging around for money to fulfil their basic objectives?

Because the Minister of Finance will probably ask them: where is the money going to come from?

**Will political parties commit to**

(a) stopping commercial sponsorship of sport and provide the sports with the required funding?

(b) Ensuring that financial resources (from both government and the private sector) and made available for sports sponsorship for female sports, matches that available for male-associated sports

(c) Ensuring that all major sports (rugby, soccer, netball, athletics) receive adequate annual funding from government which forms an adequate base for them to build on.

(d) Fighting through PACER Plus negotiations to get a Pacific rugby team (including Fiji, Samoa and Tonga) as part of the Super 15 competition.
24. Sports and gender

The data from the latest Fiji Bureau of Statistics surveys will show that women and girls devote much less time (3 to 5 hours less per week) to sports than do men and boys.

This gap persists into middle ages and later, leading to poor health outcomes in females, and obesity in many.

Much of the problems begin at the secondary school ages, where the sports facilities and school for female sports, is nowhere as strong as are available for males sports such as rugby and soccer.

These disparities continue into the national competitions and higher levels, where sports sponsorship (from both government and the private sector) for male-associated sports is far in excess for female associated sports such as netball.

Female sports often have to struggle to obtain funds to participate in international events, or even get local television coverage. Readers might look at this 2005 article: https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/2012/03/28/gender-discrimination-in-sports-sponsorship-women-netballers-missing-the-gravy-train-the-fiji-times-29-may-2005/

Fiji’s exclusion from Super 15 rugby is also a sad opportunity gone missing not just for our rugby but also tourism. See here: https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/2012/03/22/colonialism-again-rugby-style-the-fiji-times-25-july-2004/
or here. https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/2012/03/22/the-rugby-hypocrisy-continues-the-fiji-times-17-march-2006/

Issue Voters can ask all political parties what will be their policies on

(a) Ensuring that there is equality of sports equipment, facilities and grounds, for girls as for boys throughout all the primary and secondary schools in Fiji.

(b) Female sports receive as much coverage in the media as male sports.

(The Fiji Times, 10 May 2014)

If public participation is anything to go by, the second most popular public event after sports, has to be music competitions. The Fiji public are passionate, indeed maniacal, about singing competitions of all kinds- MIC (Make It Count) being one of them.

Yet, despite the popular interest, there is a total lack of tax-payers’ funds devoted to this incredibly popular interest. The singing or dance competitions are forced to resort to corporate sponsors, such as mobile companies, with all kinds of impacts, some quite undesirable for society.

The undesirable impacts of mobile texting

Most singing competitions ask the viewers or supporters of particular singers, to send in a text in support of that singer.

Disguised as “democratic voting”, this is a crude money making scheme by the mobile companies, whose revenues and profits are probably are far in excess of the prize money made available.

There is no control on how many texts may be sent by any one member of the public.

Often, the number of text messages have an impact on the result, in eliminating some candidates who may be good or may foster some candidate who may be quite average musically.

Of course, some good competitors may be retained as special choices by judges, but not all good candidates can be so protected.

As a music or singing competition, this is hardly fair or democratic. The ones most likely to send in the text messages, and many as they can afford, are the well-off, regardless of the talent or performance of the singer.

The supporters of poor singers are likely to be themselves quite poor. Often children use up their pocket money or lunch money or text-book money on the texting.

No doubt, the mobile companies are also happy that children are getting used to texting, which is then a continued money maker for them.

All this would be totally unnecessary if there were tax-payers’ funds made available on an adequate scale so that no corporate sponsor is required at all.

All you would then need would be the contestants and good fair judges and good judging system. That is all.

How much of tax-payers’ money would you need? A mere one million dollars would go a long way.

Where would this tax money come from? This pitiful amount can be easily re-allocated by the Minister of Finance from all the other wasteful areas I have listed in my previous elections bulletins.

But Fiji’s music industry needs more than just one million, as you can see from the projects I outline below.
Visiting quality musicians- but largely for the rich

Suva has just seen a great blues and jazz festival. I am sorry, I must correct myself. Suva’s rich elite have just seen a brilliant blues and jazz festival.

There were great performers such as Billy TK Junior and the Groove Shakers, Strait Shooters, Blues Mountain, and the great one-man show John Tuala (JT) from Samoa/NZ. Of course, there were also our own stars, Tom Mawi, Akuila Qumi, Deja Vu etc.

But to see these overseas performers, the public had to pay a $30 fee (Holiday Inn, Yacht Club, or O’Reilly’s) and $50 for the final performance on Sunday night.

Not surprisingly, at all these events, more than three-quarters of the audience were whites, with a sprinkling of locals. None of these events looked anywhere near being sold out, indicating that lower prices would easily have improved the attendance.

To make it worse, some embassies took away some of their stars (whose trip they may have funded) to special events at their compounds, for their invited guests only, of course, again from the Suva elites.

There was no public performance at which Fiji’s poorer music fans and budding musicians could attend and be inspired by these overseas musicians, the like of whom are rarely to be seen in Fiji.

But if an adequate revenue was the fundamental objective, how much money would these festival organizers have raised in one night? Perhaps five thousand dollars at a maximum.

Why could not the relevant government ministry devoted to the fostering of music in Fiji have simply given a ten thousand dollar grant to the festival organizers, to stage at least one public performance at Albert Park in Suva, and one at Churchill Park in the west, open to the public for free?

What is $10,000 in the budget of this Bainimarama Government or indeed any government we have ever had, compared to the tens of millions wasted annually? Why should Fiji’s music industry even beg any foreign embassy or donor for assistance on something that the tax-payers really care about, and which we should pay for ourselves?

Music projects with the FPRA

It is extraordinary that despite all the talk by Fijians about fostering the indigenous language and culture, there is no systematic attempt to foster Fijian music.

* There are no music books of Fijian songs, old classics or new.

* There are no translations of Fijians songs.

* There are no anthologies of CDs that trace the development and evolution of Fijian music since the beginnings of recordings as you have in the west for rock, blues, jazz, or classical music.

* There are no annual competitions to write songs for our many brilliant performers who have to sing songs by other composers: performers are rarely brilliant composers themselves.
Such songs could easily be part of the Education curriculum’s praiseworthy attempt to teach conversational Fijian and Hindi to all students in Fiji.

There are no special competitions which could foster the skills of our budding musicians with music instruments popular in Fiji, such as guitars, ukeleles, drums, lali. Or the less popular instruments such as saxophones, harmonicas, trumpets, trombones, clarinets, flutes, etc

One never hears of even a government department whose sole responsibility is the fostering of indigenous and local music and does so actively.

Despite much publicity over the years, composers and performers still do not get their proper share of the royalties they are legally entitled to, with piracy abounding, sometimes from very unlikely sources.

These are several projects which the Fiji Performing Right Association (FPRA) are currently in the process of trying to initiate, with some assistance from me.

Perhaps another project would be to put together in a book the many historical and excellent informative articles being written by Fiji Times columnist Felix Chaudhry on “old musicians” (not to be talked of in the same breath as “old politicians”).

Taking the lead with these projects are FPRA’s President Eremasi Tamanisau (a famous surname for Fijian classics), and musicians Saimoni Vuatalevu, Seru Serevi, and Laisa Vulakoro.

They also need assistance and participation from all of Fiji’s composers who should get in touch with the FPRA Secretariat (and Josaia Cama) if they wish to be involved or to benefit from these projects.

Voters in the forthcoming elections can also ask political parties what they will promise for music.

Political party manifestoes?

How much of tax-payers’ money would such music projects need? I would suggest that a mere ten million dollars would go a long way, and I won’t even bother to outline where such funds can be so easily found by the Minister of Finance, for a purpose so close to voters’ hearts.

Political parties should note that the largest block of voters are the young people between 18 and 34, who as a generation are far more keen on music, than on reading.

Political parties who give election commitments in their manifestoes that they will provide some minimum level of funding for music projects of the kind that I have outlined in this bulletin, might just gather a significant number of floating voters who have no particular election issue.

Remember that while voters might tell survey interviewers that the most important issues for them in the elections are jobs and cost of living, their actual voting decision may be more influenced by how good-looking the candidate is, or candidates who promise in a very concrete way to foster local music and musicians.
Political parties might even want to recruit prominent, highly visible and popular local musicians as candidates, who I suspect may receive more votes than the professional politicians, talking complex policy issues.

Political parties and candidates might think about getting prominent musicians to perform in their elections campaigns to attract voters to their meetings, although whether they get the votes may be another issue altogether.

It would be interesting indeed to see if political party pandering to Fiji’s music mania can translate into seats in parliament.

The Fiji Performing Right Association Ltd, which is a strong force for trying to protect the royalty incomes of their members, needs far great support from government resources.

They also need new initiatives to strengthen the capacity of their members to grow their industry, and strengthen indigenous music and arts in Fiji, and music in all the vernaculars.

Issue Voters can ask all political parties what will be their policies to

(a) strengthen the local music industry, arts and cultures

(b) providing adequate resources to the Fiji Performing Right Association Ltd to better assist their members through their special projects aimed at schools and the general public.
26. National Identity and Inclusiveness

Since the 1987 coup, one of the most contentious issues which have impacted on public perceptions and attitudes towards the government of the day, those in authority, and political parties, is whether they foster a sense of “inclusivity” amongst all ethnic groups.

Sadly, indigenous Fijian ethno-nationalists have tended to stigmatize Indo-Fijians (people of Indian origin), and to a lesser extent kaivalagi (of “European origin”) and kailoma (mixed European and local origins) as “vulagi” (“visitors”).

At the extremes, one politician (Butadroka) thrived by calling on Indo-Fijians to be repatriated to India.

One Cabinet Minister from the SDL Party not too long ago called Indo-Fijians “weeds” with no censure or apologies from the party leadership.

Such open racism has inevitably created a deep sense of “not belonging” and vulnerability amongst these Fiji citizens, and they flock to any Fijian leader who is inclusive towards them.

Indo-Fijians loved Dr. Bavadra in the brief period he was allowed to lead Fiji.

Many will also remember that during the 1999 Elections, one Dr. Baba (then part of the FLP) received adulatory rakhis during raksha bandha, from Indo-Fijian ladies (the rakhi is a colorful thread tied on the wrist to express the love of sisters for their protective brothers).

Historically, no Fijian leader has emphasized the principles of equality and inclusivity of all ethnic groups in Fiji, as much as Commodore Bainimarama.

In large measure, the support that Bainimarama gets from many Indo-Fijians (and also from many kailoma and kaivalagi) is due to this message of equality of all races, which he backs with the appointment of prominent Indo-Fijians to high places, to the removal or ethnic criteria in education, and to his unfortunate dictatorial declaration that all Fiji citizens are to be called “Fijians” (which will no doubt be challenged in the next parliament).

But it is a wonder that other Fijian politicians do not emulate Bainimarama’s rhetoric and messages in this regard, given its importance in nation-building.

On the contrary, one politician who tried to become the leader of SODELPA made the totally false and ridiculous allegation in an email that Mr. Jai Ram Reddy (former leader of NFP) was collaborating with the FLP leader (Mr. Chaudhry) to unite the “Indians”, and he asked his own party “what are we Fijians doing”? One would have thought that political leaders would by now have stopped using divisive racial politics.

Note that treating all citizens as equals does not preclude Affirmative Action policies for indigenous Fijians where they systematically lag behind such as in education or business (while not discriminating against others’ legitimate rights as citizens).

But note that non-indigenous Fijian votes, although only 35% of all votes, may well be critical in deciding which parties form government in the next parliament.

Voters can ask all political parties to specify what will be their policies towards non-indigenous ethnic communities in Fiji as full citizens to be accorded full respect and inclusivity in national life.
This election has thrown up an old issue—whether Fiji should be a “secular” state or a “Christian” State.

The Bainimarama Government has declared that under their constitution, Fiji is a “secular state” no particular religion or God will be held superior to another, and no one will be forced to practice another religion.

But one political party, whose manifesto states that it believes in Christian principles, has proclaimed that they will not pray to a “face-less” God. “God” has now become a political football in this forthcoming elections, for at least two political parties.

Does it matter at all to God what political parties say about how they want Him to be worshipped in their little corner of the universe? Does it matter to the ordinary people?

The myth of a secular state

The “secular state” is part of the 2013 Constitution created and currently being enforced by the Bainimarama government. The Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) has asserted that the military will enforce the constitution, and presumably the “secular state” bit as well. The RFMF itself is supposed to be a “secular” organization, without any allegiance to any religion BUT the paradox is that in all its own church services, the prayers are to the Christian god Jesus Christ, and not to any of the Hindu gods, or the Muslim Allah, or any other “faceless gods”.

27. The politics and myths of secular and Christian states

(The Fiji Times, 9 Aug 2014)
In virtually all government department functions, both before and after the 2013 Constitution was promulgated, the “Grace” prayers before a meal are nearly always asking Jesus Christ to bless the meal and the hands that prepared it.

Even our so-called radical Christian priests who are committed to multi-racialism and respect other religions, will still offer prayers to Jesus Christ, even when people of other religions are present at that gathering as they often are.

I know of very few Christian priests or even Christians who acknowledge mixed company by giving a secular prayer to “God” (one exception was the late Father John Bonato of USP). But also to my knowledge, no one believing in any other religion has particularly cared that the prayers were to Jesus Christ and not to their own God.

So why might SODELPA be raising the issue of a “Christian state” just before this elections, when the practice of the Bainimarama Government and the stated objectives of SODELPA are not too far apart at all.

**SODELPA’s concerns**

The argument put forward by SODELPA is that Fiji should be a “Christian” state, as recognition of the religion which brought indigenous Fijians out of their precolonial supposedly heathen and savage “pagan” state.

But this issue had pretty well gone away after the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution when the secular state was accepted without any great fuss, so why would SODELPA resuscitate it again now?

I suggest that it is probably a reaction to Bainimarama Government’s history of discriminatory restrictions on the Methodist Church (such as limitations on their annual conferences in the last few years) when no such restrictions were applied to any other religions.

Sadly, none of these other religious organizations (Catholics, Hindus or Muslims), protested at the discrimination against their sister religious organization, thereby losing a great opportunity to reduce Fiji’s cycles of religious intolerance.

Perhaps some SODELPA elections strategists feel that pushing for a Christian state might win them some votes, just as Fiji First Party thinks that declaration of a “secular” state will win them some Hindu and Muslim votes.

Of course, some SODELPA strategists may genuinely believe that the Fijian “state” should be Christian with “Christian values”. When I once complained about bloggers repeating that Jesus would come to the rescue of democracy and “fix up” the “evil” blokes and mildly suggested that surely, “God helps those who help themselves”, one Christian stalwart of the party asked me contemptuously “Wadan, who is your God”?

Well, on a USP panel discussion about social justice somewhat dominated by clerics, where I had diffidently mentioned that I was an atheist, or more correctly an agnostic, I was promptly reassured by the Head of one Christian church on the panel, “Don’t worry Wadan, I know you have Christian principles”.

So this agnostic seems to have an insurance policy when he kicks the bucket and if the Archbishop’s “God” is sitting in judgment on the other side (if there is one), I may get the nod to go upstairs to a cool and pleasant Nirvana rather than downstairs to a slightly warmer place.
Which God is the “true” One?

Many philosophers have tried to rationalize the historical reality that virtually all human societies spread the wide world over, and for thousands of years, have “envisaged” some “God” to pray to.

It is very reassuring to ordinary mortals to think that there is a source of all life and creation, Who gives meaning to our lives and deaths, Who is there to reward the good and punish the evil, and Who hands down a set of rules to encourage the “moral” behavior of the adherents, usually, but not always, resulting in a more peaceful community.

One only has to be part of any community praying together over births, marriages, or deaths, to understand that “God” provides a strength to that community, that is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

You can also read the more sophisticated philosophical views of Swami Vivekananda (born 1863, died 1902) recorded in eight volumes comprising one million words) but condensed into a more readable book What Religion Is.

While I personally do not believe in all of Vivekananda’s views, I find refreshing his belief in and rationalization of the validity of ALL religions. Vivekananda (and all religious philosophers) distinguish between the ultimate supreme “God” of a religion, and the religious institution, the “formal organization of men and women” that espouse that particular religion, and who are usually the source of alleged differences and competition between religions. Vivekananda argued that religions and sects are not competing but are complementary to each other, with each one being born in the context of particular social conditions of time and place.

Religions are therefore perpetually evolving, as the social conditions and human needs change over time. Where the parent body is unable to change to accommodate some group’s concerns, a new sect can be born and thrive, or people change religions, sometimes with the encouragement of “missionaries”.

Indeed, there has never been so much “religious choice” available to humans, not just between religions (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, etc.), but also different sects within each major religion, but all believing in some supreme entity at the core of their beliefs.

Some religions have male gods only, some have female gods, and some animal gods; some have “castes” and elite classes, some don’t; some treat women as inferior and to be restricted in some way or another, some don’t; some believe in heaven, hell and limbo after death, some believe in reincarnation; some have elaborate rituals, some don’t; some have glorious churches or temples or mosques for the priests, while the ordinary people live in hovels; some have the opposite; some have dietary restrictions, some don’t.

Some religions existed five thousand years ago (like Hinduism), some started two thousand years ago (like Christianity and Buddhism), and some started in the last few hundred years.

Vivekananda saw all religions as evolving towards some “universal religion”, with none being “superior” to any other. Vivekananda and most religious philosophers have been dismayed that so many human practitioners of religions felt that their religion was superior to others, and used this prejudice to justify their violence against the “non-believers”, as has happened for centuries and continue today.
Does God have a “face”? 

It is also natural that most ordinary people cannot imagine a “face-less” or indefinable God, but need a human “face” to relate to, and the “faces” have quite interesting if debatable physical features.

Many Christians today see Jesus Christ as a golden haired European with blue eyes when historically he was a brown-skinned, black-haired Jew born two thousand years ago in Palestine.

The Hindus have innumerable “faces” for God, imagined in statues or paintings, which some other religions contemptuously refer to as “sinful” “idols”.

Islam does not have a “face” for God, although there may be depictions of his prophet, Mohammed, an actual historical figure.

The Buddhists have thousands images of Buddha, in all kinds of shapes and sizes, although Buddha is not considered God.

I suspect that if He/She exists, the God of All Creation could not care less whether He/She is given a “face” or not.

The “face of God” prayed to certainly makes no difference to the kind of life that each person lives, whether “good” or “bad”, which is what all that religions demand of people at the core.

Every religion has “parables” which illustrate that “non-believers” with good actions (the Samaritan) are preferred by God to priests who profess to be religious but whose actions indicate a lack of love for their fellow human being.

State and Religion

Religion is a deeply personal matter between the individual and his or her God. It is meaningless to talk about a “secular state” or a “Christian state”. For all religions, no God is ever going to sit in judgment on any “government” or “state” but only on individuals.

Conversely, individuals within a Christian or Islamic or Buddhist or Hindu state are not going to be judged by God by the nature or designation of their state, but only by their own individual deeds and thoughts. Neither does the State judge individuals by the principles of any religion, but by the laws which the people of the state have accepted, even if the body of laws may have elements from certain religions.

I suggest that voters need not worry their heads at all about whether the state is declared to be “secular” or Christian or Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim. No parliamentarian will ever be able to influence God’s view about any individual voter, candidate, party or government. Why waste energy on this non-issue?

Perhaps some clerics who use amplifiers to blast their sermons to all in the neighborhood, regardless of their faith or lack of it, need to ask if God is deaf.

Issue: Voters can ask the political parties who seek their votes what their policies are on “Christian” states and “Secular” states.
(NarseyOnFiji, 21 August 2014)

Author’s note and summary of this article:

The media is projecting the September 2014 Elections as a “normal” election in which competing parties are to be compared by their respective policies and benefits that they have given or promise to give to voters.

All elections do have such elements, but historians will remember this election more so for the choice that voters are going to make between parties that stand for the “rule of law” and trust, and a military backed party that has shown no respect for the rule of law, keeping promises and trusting the people.

This article is addressed more towards Indo-Fijian voters who will effectively be making another decision: will they choose parties which believe in good race relations and the respect for the indigenous Fijian people and leaders (whoever they are) OR will they follow Indo-Fijian leaders who for largely selfish reasons, have given their unprincipled support for eight years to an illegal unelected military government which shrewdly offers Indo-Fijians a few benefits just a year prior to elections, embellished by massive propaganda about equal citizenry, while deliberately ignoring the previous eight years of Bainimarama’s rule?

The questions raised here applied equally to the majority of indigenous Fijians in the coups of 1987 and 2000 when they also followed leaders who lost their commitment to legality, just as they applied to Europeans, kailoma, Rotumans, and Chinese citizens, then and today.

The elephant in the room is the Republic of Fiji Military Forces- can they be trusted by either Indo-Fijians or indigenous Fijians to abide by the rule of law, when their history since 1987 indicates totally the opposite, and willingness to accept reducing social legitimacy of their immunity?

I have broken this long article into three parts: Introduction, Bainimarama’s illegality and broken promise and Indo-Fijians going into a political cul-de-sac

Introduction

Rajendra Prasad’s recent Fiji Sun article (30 July 2014), while superficial in its contents, nevertheless had a pertinent concluding question “Will this election be won on deceit and lies or will it be won on truth and understanding?”

Unfortunately, it is not clear from the Bainimarama-controlled media which parties are the sources of deceit and lies, and which are the ones calling for truth and understanding.

If the opinion polls are anything to go by, a significant proportion of Indo-Fijians are gravitating towards Bainimarama’s military-led Fiji First Party, apparently believing his slogans that “we are all Fijians” and that “we are all equal”.

They, and also many indigenous Fijians and other ethnic groups, are also understandably pleased with some positive policies such as the freeing up of education and the building of infrastructure such as roads and water (even if they do not comprehend the costs).

For academics who have long struggled against the discrimination that Indo-Fijians have faced in Fiji and the Pacific, Bainimarama’s slogans of racial equality should also be music to our ears, but unfortunately what will not go away, is Bainimarama’s consistent record of illegality and broken promises.
Will Indo-Fijian voters put their faith in Bainimarama’s Fiji First Party whose real power base is the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, or will they put their faith in the other people-based political parties such as SODELPA, NFP, FLP, PDP and others?

Whatever the outcome in September, there is perverse light at the end of the tunnel that with all ethnic and religious groups having supported coups at one time or another since 1987 and no “innocent side” left, a future Truth and Reconciliation Commission has greater chances of success than the last aborted one by the Qarase government.

Part I    Bainimarama’s illegality, poor governance and broken promises

These are the uncomfortable facts about Bainimarama and his government, which Indo-Fijian leaders have the onerous social responsibility to educate their voters about:

- Bainimarama was originally in support of the 2000 coup (detailed below for the ignorant)

- Bainimarama’s refused to have an inquiry into the subsequent 2000 mutiny against him;

- Bainimarama removed all senior RFMF officers who opposed his plans to remove Qarase’s government, between 2003 and 2006;

- Bainimarama’s justification for the 2006 coup is still unproved, eight years later;

- Bainimarama broke his international promise to hold elections in 2009 (resulting in a loss of $300 million of EU aid, suspension from Forum Secretariat and the Commonwealth, and ruptured relations with traditional donors Australia and NZ)

- he issued a large number of decrees that fundamentally undermine the legitimate rights of workers and trade unions

- he issued decrees that restrict the basic human rights of freedom of speech and assembly, and freedom of the media

- he issued decrees that prevented the judiciary from hearing legitimate calls for justice, such as the pensioners’ case against the illegal reduction of their pensions

- he betrayed the work of his own NCBBF and the People’s Charter

- he betrayed his own Yash Ghai Commission and promise of Constituent Assembly;
• he unilaterally imposed the 2013 Constitution;

• the total unaccountability on government finances and refusal to release the Auditor General Reports since 2007, as well as other important reports on the FNPF;

• his dictatorial destruction of indigenous Fijian institutions which have been legitimate parts of our last lawful 1997 Constitution, and which have evolved over a hundred years through peaceful political dialogue

• His undermining of Fiji’s commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

• his blatant use of taxpayers’ funds right up to polling day to buy votes;

• his gross misuse of tax-payer funds to pay American propaganda company Qorvis, to put a gloss on his image, indicating the inability of the Ministry of Information to make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.

• his total control of the media which have effectively become his propaganda arms

• his blatant nepotism in appointing family members to high positions and differential treatment of convicted family members and those perceived as his opponents.

• his refusal to keep most promises he has made over the last seven years; including that no military personnel will benefit from the coup- all have done so, especially himself.

• He betrayed his promise that none of the Interim Ministers in his Government would ever stand for elections- but nearly all have.

I elaborate a few of these below for those whose memory does not stretch back fourteen years, and for those who have not bothered to read material which is already on the web, such as the military’s own Evans Board of Inquiry Report (Evans BOIR).

The shaky record of the RFMF and Bainimarama

Many Indo-Fijians believe Bainimarama’s frequent claim that he desires racial equality for Indo-Fijians and an essential part of that story is his claim that in 2000 he saved Indo-Fijians from the anarchy posed by George Speight and the ethno-nationalists, who had the support of the Great Council of Chiefs and the Methodist Church.

Who knows, perhaps Bainimarama IS today a genuinely reformed leader, believing in multiracialism, the equality of all ethnic communities, and perhaps his view is also shared by his senior army officers.
Yes, in the end he did apprehend George Speight and those of his group who were left “holding the coup baby” when the real leaders failed to front up, and he did imprison those who “took false oaths” during the coup and those who planned the mutiny.

But the evidence in the Evans BOIR also indicate are that Bainimarama’s role and views at the beginning of the 2000 coup were totally the opposite, and his views then were also shared by most senior RFMF officers, who are unlikely to have changed today.

**What was Bainimarama’s role at the beginning of the coup?**

The Fiji public (and Bainimarama supporters like Thakur Ranjit Singh, Rajendra Prasad and Satendra Nandan) should ask why there has never been a public inquiry into the 2000 coup, incorrectly and deceitfully labeled as the “George Speight coup”, nor into the horrendous mutiny that same year when eight soldiers lost their lives.

But there is enough evidence in the RFMF’s Evans BOIR (all thousand pages of it), available on the Internet here and here, to indicate that Bainimarama initially supported the 2000 coup and the “Fijian cause”. (I referred to this material previously in my submission to the Yash Ghai Commission of Inquiry available here).

The Evans Board of Inquiry, chaired by Lt. Col. Jackson Evans and also including Major (now Brigadier) Aziz Mohammed (who should know these facts), was tasked with inquiring into the CRW Unit’s takeover of Parliament on the 19 May 2000.

While many senior witnesses were evasive, the evidence of Lt. Col. Viliame Seruvakula (on pp. 937-949 of the BOIR) was totally credible, corroborated by several other witnesses, indicating that:

(a) Bainimarama was told by his intelligence unit more than six months in advance that senior army officers, Fijian politicians, high chiefs (some named) and Methodist leaders were plotting the coup at several private houses (BOIR, pp 938-939). He did nothing to stop it.

(b) Bainimarama was personally told by Seruvakula the exact date of the coup a week before, but he chose to go to Norway on some trivial matter leaving his subordinates to “deal with it” (just as former commander Ratu Epeli Nailatikau did, prior to the 1987 coup).

(c) Seruvakula named the leader of the CRW soldiers in parliament as Ligairi, who Bainimarama personally brought out of retirement: Ligairi moved freely in and out of army HQ even while holding the Chaudhry Government hostage in Parliament.

(d) The Evans BOIR concluded that the CRW Unit and many senior army officers had the understanding that the “army was supporting the takeover, by the logistic and administrative support given” with arms, ammunition and rations flowing into parliament, while the CRW soldiers’ salaries were also continued. Lt. Col. Tarakinikini, Lt. Col. Samu Raduva and Baleinamau were named by Seruvakula as sympathetic to the coup, and he informed the BOIR that his intelligence reports to the RFMF hierarchy were being leaked to the coup makers.
(e) Then in the middle of the hostage crisis, Speight’s group put out a gazette that Colonel Vatu would be the new RFMF Commander and Lt. Col. Tarakinikini would be the new Chief of Staff (I suspect this was the turning point for Bainimarama).

(f) Seruvakula gave evidence that while he saw the coup as treason against the state, a number of senior army officers were “sitting on the fence”, waiting to see which group won, and some were even countermanding his attempts to place blockades which could have ended the hostage crisis much sooner (BOIR, pp. 947-948).

What is public knowledge is that Bainimarama (with the support of former RFMF Commanders), instead of protecting their Commander-in-chief and President as their military oaths required them to, asked Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to “step aside”, then he claimed to have abrogated the Constitution and taken Executive Authority (until Justice Gates ruled otherwise), and he tried even then to become the Prime Minister (until dissuaded by some officers).

Bainimarama was the only senior RFMF officer who refused to be interviewed by the Evan Board of Inquiry. Other senior military officers who appeared before the Evans Board of Inquiry, were clearly evasive and gave minimal information, when they clearly would have known much more.

The sad conclusion from the above facts is that Bainimarama, most of his senior officers, and many prominent civilians not prosecuted to this day (but some clearly named in the Evans BOIR) fully supported the 2000 coup at the beginning, even if Bainimarama changed afterwards.

*It is also pertinent that when the hostage crisis was ended by Bainimarama, he did not return the lawfully elected Chaudhry Government to power, but appointed Qarase as Prime Minister of a completely indigenous Fijian government. Bainimarama was also opposed to having an Indo-Fijian Prime Minister.*

Also on record are public statements by senior RFMF officers who opposed Bainimarama’s plans between 2003 and 2006 to remove the Qarase Government, that throw light on the December 2006 coup, which took place just when Bainimarama about to be charged by the police under Police Commissioner Andrew Hughes, for a number of alleged serious offenses.

The public silence of many former senior military officers and many indigenous Fijian politicians on the 2006 coup is disappointing, but not surprising given their collaboration in the 2000 and for some, even the 1987 coups, and some are also prominent supporters of SDL/SODELPA.

Given Bainimarama’s allegedly anti-coup stance today, Satendra Nandan, Rajendra Prasad and Thakur Ranjit Singh and our intrepid journalists from Fiji Sun and FBC need to ask why Bainimarama has included in his government for the last eight years, perennial coup supporters, like Inoke Kibuabola, Filipe Bole and Isikeli Mataitoga.
The 2006 coup on false grounds

While Bainimarama claimed the 2006 coup was to eliminate widespread corruption and electoral fraud, eight years later he has produced no evidence of either.

Central to the 2006 coup was the takeover of the judiciary by Justice Anthony Gates, following the irregular chairmanship of the Judicial Services Commission by Nazhat Shameem who subsequently offered her legal services to the Bainimarama Government.

There then followed judicial decisions by the High Court (Gate, Byrne and Pathik) which justified dubious decisions by President Iloilo, legitimating Bainimarama’s government for three years.

But when the illegality of the 2006 coup was confirmed by the superior 2009 Court of Appeal judgment, Bainimarama purported to abrogate the 1997 Constitution and pressed on regardless with full support from his collaborators.

The betrayal of the NCBBF

An extremely astute ex-post justification of the 2006 coup was the setting up of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji (NCBBF), the brainchild of NZ citizen and former ADB operative, John Samy resulting in the “Charter Charade”.

The former Archbishop of the Catholic Church (the late Petero Mataca) full of hope for the future, co-chaired the NCBBF with Bainimarama, and attracted many other Catholics including two prominent white priests (both foreign citizens), into serving the Bainimarama Government initiatives and boards, giving the coup more local and international credibility.

The NCBBF’s main output, the People’s Charter and alleged Roadmap for Fiji, stated that the 1997 Constitution was its foundation and would be strengthened. It was taken around the country by army personnel and supposedly signed by more than 450 thousand Fiji citizens, a virtual referendum, the last attempt by Bainimarama at popular approval.

But in 2009, when the Court of Appeal ruled against him, Bainimarama, having already dumped Mahendra Chaudhry for reasons never publicly clarified, dumped the 1997 Constitution, as well as John Samy and Mataca, the two of whom futilely complained (read here) but went away quietly without any statement to the Fiji public whose faith they effectively betrayed.

The betrayal of the Yash Ghai Constitution Review Commission

In 2011, Bainimarama set up his hand-picked Yash Ghai Commission which inquired throughout Fiji with great fanfare and at great cost, obtaining submissions from thousands of people in good faith. The Draft Constitution was supposed to be discussed and popularly approved by a Constituent Assembly to be set up by Bainimarama himself.

Despite the Ghai Draft Constitution satisfying all the restrictive decrees including the provision of immunity, Bainimarama unceremoniously dumped it, as well as the Constituent Assembly, for no good reasons. That rejection clearly indicated his lack of trust in the people, but the rejection we understand better today (read here), especially Bainimarama’s unwillingness to acknowledge fault before being granted
immunity, his desire to continue wielding total state power and manage the September elections while dispensing taxpayers’ funds, right up to elections day.

The Yash Ghai Commission members also went away quietly without any accountability to the Fiji public, while one member who is an Australian citizen continues his propaganda for the Bainimarama Government, blithely unconcerned at the total breach of faith with the Ghai Commission of which he was a member.

The willingness of RFMF to commit treason

While many politicians are praising the statement by the current RFMF Commander (Brig. Gen. Mosese Tikoitoga) that he will respect whatever is the outcome of the September 2014 Elections, the RFMF’s actual track record since 1987 is not on his side and he has a mountain to climb if he is to restore the RFMF to its pre-1987 record of ethical professionalism.

Since 1987, the military hierarchy of the RFMF, including all Fijian former Commanders have a 100 percent record of collaboration in coups, albeit for changing reasons.

The public has never been informed of any proactive resignation of any senior army or naval officer on the grounds that he was unwilling to follow his/her Commander into illegality.

Bainimarama managed to conduct the coups of 2006 and 2009 and remain in power, because of the continued support of his senior army and naval officers who control the army and navy.

Since 2006, all senior military officers have received substantial material benefits through appointments to high positions and rapid promotions, making a mockery of Bainimarama’s original promise that no military personnel (including himself) would benefit from his coup.

Several military officers and current ministers are also standing for elections, making a mockery of Bainimarama’s original promise that none of his Interim Ministers (or himself) would ever stand for elections.

When treason is committed so often, it also means that the entire extended family of the military officers- their wives, brothers, sisters, parents, uncles and aunts, their adult children, all went along with treason, as did most of the Fijian community, including the Great Council of Chiefs and the Methodist Church in 1987 and 2000.

In 1987 and 2000, the military genie was let out of the bottle by the Fijian political elite and social leaders, ostensibly for the “Fijian cause”. But the military has now done coups in 2006 and 2009 against the Fijian political elite, largely for self-interest.

Will the military genie now go back into the bottle, given that they care less and less about who gives them immunity?

The reducing popular legitimacy of immunity clauses

Anyone in the RFMF with legal common sense should be worried about the reducing “social legitimacy of immunity” for coup makers and collaborators since 1987, and refusal to trust the people:

a) The first coup-maker (Rabuka) was given immunity in the 1997 Constitution unanimously approved and legitimated by the elected Fiji Parliament;
b) the front-man for the 2000 coup (George Speight) also demanded and was supposedly given immunity (by whom?), which was withdrawn by Bainimarama supposedly because some conditions not met;

c) Bainimarama was given conditional immunity in the Ghai Draft Constitution which would have been approved by a People’s Constituent Assembly (set up by himself), but even this semblance of popular approval and lawful exit strategy if the constitution was approved by the next parliament was rejected by Bainimarama, perhaps on others’ dubious advice, but ultimately his responsibility.

d) Today, the Bainimarama Government has totally dispensed with popular approval and given themselves total immunity from 2000 to the elections in 2014, by unilaterally imposing the 2013 Constitution on the country.

The irony should not be lost on the Fiji public that there has been no immunity for political opponents like Qarase and Chaudhry and targeted businessmen and supporters of Qarase and Chaudhry, or some senior military officers who have faced criminal charges, some fined and some jailed.

The “Fijian” in Bainimarama

Indo-Fijians still have the illusion that the 2000 coup was all about the removal of the Indo-Fijian government of Chaudhry. Few realize that it was also a playing out of powerful Fijian confederacy politics in which “mainland” Bauan and Cakaudrove chiefs got rid of a Lauan President, even if he happened to be the father-in-law of two former RFMF Commanders who astonishingly threw their lot in with Bainimarama, for whatever reason.

Despite Bainimarama suppressing the Great Council of Chiefs, he has used prominent chiefs at every opportunity for his own objectives, as indicated clearly by his use of two high chiefs as Presidents to sign his numerous decrees.

While Bainimarama (and Khaiyum) decreed that the Fijian “SDL” name would not be allowed and was eventually replaced by an English name (SODELPA), Bainimarama himself uses the Fijian language when speaking publicly to his RFMF soldiers, as well as to all the Fijian voters he is now courting.

The military everywhere abide by seniority of rank yet when Bainimarama appointed his successor as Commander of RFMF, he strangely bypassed the second-ranked Brigadier Aziz and chose the lower ranked Colonel Mose Tikoitoga. Was it that Bainimarama did not trust his army officers to follow an Indo-Fijian commander, or was it that Aziz’s rank of Brigadier was not on merit but other reasons? None of the possible answers are reassuring.

What is clear however and disturbing, is that the loud clarion call for multi-racialism and racial equality is coming only from Rear Admiral (Ret) Bainimarama, with virtually no other military officer or minister in his government (apart from Khaiyum) clearly identifiable with this message.
I suspect that the rank and file of the RFMF (99% indigenous Fijian) are unlikely to have any strong commitment to multiracialism and equality of all races, and they are likely to vote in line with the bulk of the indigenous Fijian population.

99% of the RFMF are also Christians who go to church every Sunday and regularly take part in Fijian protocol that embraces the role of the church, chiefs and vanua in their lives.

It may appear trivial, but Bainimarama’s own family faithfully acknowledges Fijian protocol as at the recent reguregu at the home of Meli Bainimarama (Ambassador in Malaysia), held for his brother, the late Timoci Bainimarama (former Government Statistician and occasional work colleague of mine).

I was bemused to observe that at least one sevusevu acceptance speech by the Bainimarama family, acknowledged the symbolic leader of the land and vanua, Roko Tui Dreketi, who incidentally happens to be the Ro Temumu Kepa, Leader of SODELPA, and opponent of Bainimarama in the September elections.

Ultimately however, despite the daily prominence of a few ego-laden Indo-Fijians supporting Bainimarama, Bainimarama’s government is still largely Fijian, with the power base being Fijian army leaders and civil servants, rather than the old Fijian political elite.

I suspect that many intelligent Indo-Fijian leaders are aware of most of the facts outlined above, but still will to lead their supporters in a political cul de sac.

Part II  Indo-Fijians going into a political cul-de-sac

There is a tough choice for Indo-Fijian voters and leaders: will they give their support to Bainimarama’s military government and Fiji First Party who are offering them many material benefits but squashing the Fijian leaders, or will they support parties which wish to co-operate lawfully and peacefully with Fijian people and their leaders, whoever they are, and regardless of their perceived faults?

For more than a century Indo-Fijian political leaders (AD Patel, Sid Koya, Jai Ram Reddy and Mahendra Chaudhry) and communities behaved with total political integrity towards the indigenous Fijians and Fijian institutions, in fighting for the legitimate rights of Indo-Fijians.

They operated within the law, despite being periodic victims of violence from the military, police, and politically organized gangs of thugs, such as in the coups of 1987 and 2000, which had the undeniable support of the Great Council of Chiefs, the Methodist Church, Fijian political parties and leaders, and many Fijian people.

The motivating slogans then were “the indigenous Fijian cause” or “Fiji for Fijians” or “No Indian can be Prime Minister”. The Fijian governments succeeding each coup duly implemented some discriminatory “affirmative actions” or another.

But since 2006, Indo-Fijian leaders have also betrayed their history of political integrity, by supporting Bainimarama’s illegal coups and government, many for totally selfish reasons.

The betrayal of political integrity by Indo-Fijian leaders

I tried to articulate three years ago why prominent Indo-Fijians from virtually all spheres of social leadership, came out in support of the illegal 2006 coup: the Leader of the Fiji Labor Party (then having the undisputed support of Indo-Fijian voters),
High Court judges, ambitious lawyers, the Director of the Human Rights Commission, senior civil servants, most Indo-Fijian leaders of the Hindu organizations the Sanatan Dharam and Arya Samaj, the Muslim organizations, the large business houses of all races, influential Indo-Fijian technocrats who had emigrated, and even university vice chancellors (who thought they owed their positions to the Bainimarama Government).

And it was because of the critical “musical chairs” support of these capable Indo-Fijians, and the equally important support of prominent indigenous Fijians, Europeans, and kailoma, that a military commander with narrow naval training but strategically astute, went from strength to strength to where he is today, seeking to emulate Rabuka as a coup leader who became an elected Prime Minister. This may well have been his ambition since the 2000 coup.

In his well-strategized quest, Bainimarama controlled the government-owned radio and television stations (Fiji Broadcasting Corporation) with Aiyaz Khaiyum’s brother was appointed as CEO in a blatant act of nepotism, and a private newspaper Fiji Sun (whose owner receives millions of dollars of preferential financial benefits in return), as well as the main TV station (operating under a six-monthly renewal of license).

Most of the Fiji media, some owned and controlled by Indo-Fijians, have with the support of uncritical journalists, become ardent propaganda arms (read here) of the Bainimarama Government, assisted by an astute American PR company (Qorvis) hired at great taxpayers’ expense. Other commercial media organizations in fear of government sanctions, have also given unbalanced exposure to the government, while discouraging or simply disregarding any opposing views.

In NZ, Radio Tarana, whose owner Robert Khan has strong links to a clique of Indo-Fijian NZ citizens who have financially benefited from the Bainimarama coup, has largely succeeded with eight years of propaganda on behalf of Bainimarama, disregarding all opposing voices.

Most critically also, there have been many amoral and some blatantly immoral and unethical business leaders (of all races) who have been enthusiastic backers of the Bainimarama Regime, all benefiting enormously through a massive 33% cut in corporate tax (giving them more than a $100 million), but also from many special deals cut with Ministers.

This next three weeks will see Fiji First Party conducting probably the most intensive propaganda blitz ever in the history of Fiji’s elections. Political parties should inform the voters that such large sums can only come from contributions by the largest businesses owned by locals and expatriates , who will, as always, throw a few peanuts at the other parties, “just in case”.

Most of the directors of these businesses already have their savings, families and permanent residencies in Australia, NZ or Canada. They have no stake in Fiji other than their investments, and they have no qualms about playing Russian roulette with the lives of ordinary uneducated Indo-Fijians who have no prospects of ever emigrating.

But, despite the propaganda blitz, will ordinary Indo-Fijian voters blindly follow their leaders?
Why Indo-Fijian voters blindly follow their leaders

It would be useful for political parties and candidates to understand why so many ordinary Indo-Fijians ignore the fundamental illegality of Bainimarama:

- Of course, as with indigenous Fijians in 1987 and 2000, they blindly take the lead from their leaders;
- Bainimarama’s message of racial equality for the Indo-Fijian minority, gives enormous emotional comfort to a long-vulnerable Indo-Fijian community;
- Having had their temples desecrated previously, Indo-Fijians are comforted by Bainimarama’s statements that all religions must be treated equally under a secular state;
- Many Indo-Fijians are not opposed to Bainimarama’s closure of the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) and the suppression of the Methodists, who they saw as supporting the coups of 1987 and 2000 and the violence against Indo-Fijian people.
- Most important for the poor Indo-Fijians, the Bainimarama Government with elections pending, has delivered many concrete benefits such as in education;
- Indo-Fijians believe the erroneous allegations that the previous electoral systems were all “racist” and that the new “1 person 1 vote 1 value” proportional system will now be “genuinely democratic” and fair to Indo-Fijians for the first time in Fiji’s political history (I debunk these particular myths elsewhere).

In sum, large numbers of ordinary Indo-Fijians appear willing to support an illegal government and illegal Prime Minister, as long as they themselves receive benefits, whether in education or jobs for a few boys at the top, business contracts, or enhanced emotional security as an “equal citizen”.

This is not very different from indigenous Fijians and their leaders, who supported the 1987 and 2000 coups because they wanted and obtained, material and emotional benefits from the post-coup indigenous Fijian governments, and subsequently voted for the Fijian ethno-nationalist parties whether SVT or SDL.

A most interesting PhD topic would be to examine why entire communities of all ethnic groups in Fiji, tolerate treason by their members, with no social sanction imposed on collaborators.

Fiji has now come full circle in the support of illegal treasonous coups by ALL its ethnic communities (and Europeans, kailoma and Chinese are all in there as well).

But how wise are Indo-Fijians in trusting Bainimarama’s government and the RFMF into the future, despite the opposition of the main indigenous Fijian party and the majority of indigenous people?
The future is firmly Fijian

This is an undeniable demographic fact: With the Fijian share of total population steadily rising as Indo-Fijians, with smaller families, keep emigrating, all future elections based on the principle of “one person one vote” and strict proportionality, will bring in governments elected largely by indigenous Fijian voters, with Indo-Fijian voters becoming more and more marginal as their share declines to 25% within a decade, as I advised in a 2002 Fiji Times article advising the Qarase government that there was no need for affirmative polices based on race (which can be read here.) I reproduce one graph from that article here.

In the grand historical drama that has taken place in Fiji since 2000, the main protagonists and drivers are Fijian, and the central plots are about indigenous Fijian control of power, not about differences between Fijians and Indo-Fijians.

The long line of apparently influential Indo-Fijian coup collaborators (Shameems, Samy, Khaiyum, Chaudhries, Chandras and Chands, etc.) will go down in history as mere “supporting cast” providing comic relief to the main plot, as in some Shakespearean plays or the fascinating Korean historical drama, Yi San.

It is surely commonsense that the long term security and well-being of ordinary Indo-Fijians depends not on the RFMF, but on the mutual respect and goodwill of the bulk of the indigenous Fijian people and their democratically elected leaders, whoever they happen to be and whatever faults they appear to have.

This goodwill had been built up so slowly and painfully by wise political leaders like Jai Ram Reddy, but betrayed and squandered by today’s selfish Indo-Fijian leaders, with the exception of those in the National Federation Party.

Chaudhry’s recent explanation (on Fiji TV’s Close Up program) that he wished for a post-election coalition between FLP and Ro Temumu Kepa’s SODELPA (the successor of SDL) because of the need for Indo-Fijians to co-operate peacefully with indigenous Fijians can be optimistically described as “better late than never”, given that NFP and Jai Ram Reddy in the 1999 elections had been pilloried by FLP for taking exactly the same approach with the SVT and Rabuka.

It is quite likely that the bulk of indigenous Fijians will gratefully accept the numerous material benefits being rained down on them by Bainimarama, but will still vote for SODELPA or other parties like NFP, FLP and PDP (call it liumuri or political sophistication, whatever you wish).

While many Indo-Fijians (and some less-than-neutral FBC and Fiji Sun journalists) are critical of recent statements by Qarase and Ro Temumu on the primacy of the indigenous Fijians in Fiji and the importance of Christianity to SODELPA, I suspect that these views are shared by most indigenous Fijian people, including the majority of the RFMF and their officers.
Indo-Fijians might consider that leaders like Qarase and Ro Temumu are giving their honest views, and however unpalatable to some, “What you see is what you get”. Not so with some other politicians whose speeches have been written and embellished by astute Qorvis propagandists and writers.

Indo-Fijians, who also have their fair share of racists, need to understand that the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (which most Indo-Fijian leaders have probably never read even though Fiji is a party to it), allows the special treatment of indigenous peoples, their cultures, their right to group politically around their expressions of cultural identity including language and labels, such as the word “Fijian”. I have tried to explain here the complex issues around calling everyone “Fijian” and that Indo-Fijians do not need that term in order to be treated as “equal citizens”.

Ultimately, however, even if some indigenous Fijian leaders display some non-indigenous people perceive as “racist”, that cannot be used by Indo-Fijians to justify and support treason and an illegal government.

It is a tragedy that this is exactly what is being done so frequently in the Bainimarama-controlled Fiji media through the tunnel vision writings of Satendra Nandan, Thakur Ranjit Singh and Rajendra Prasad, who do this all from the safety of their Australian and NZ citizenship, and who appear to have not the slightest sympathy or empathy for the sentiments, concerns and very legitimate fears of a small indigenous community of half a million people, so unique in the world.

These writers should ask why the Indo-Fijian intellectuals within Fiji (like university vice chancellors or senior academics at USP, FNU and University of Fiji or leading businessmen and women or professionals like lawyers, accountants, school principals and teachers) are all remaining deadly quiet on these issues, apart from the fact that like most educated Indo-Fijians, they already have their overseas PR’s or are intending to obtain them.

Whatever they do in the future, all social leaders, Indo-Fijian, indigenous Fijian and Others, have a grave social responsibility to educate their voters that one of the more important political choice for voters is between parties which believe in parliamentary legality and total accountability to the public, and those that do not.

Where is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

One of the first initiatives of the next elected Parliaments should be a “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”. It is reassuring that in the last week the Methodist Church organized a grand reconciliation between different groups who had split over the support given to previous coups in 1987 and 2000, and justice was finally accorded to the brave Rev. Josateki Koroi.

It is also reassuring that the Catholic Church is beginning to reexamine its own stance towards governments and state policy, and has made a statement about the supposed “personal stance” of the former Archbishop (the late Mataca) towards the Bainimarama Government initiatives such as the NCBBF. They have more to do in relation to some of their priests (like David Arms) who give support to treason and illegal governments and Prime Ministers.

The previous national reconciliation attempt by the Qarase Government was unhealthily one-sided with the supposedly “guilty parties” (Fijian parties SDL and
SVT) seeking reconciliation with the “innocent victims” (Indo-Fijian parties FLP and NFP).

The next Truth and Reconciliation Commission will have a perverse advantage that there will be no innocent ethnic group, with all our ethnic communities having supported illegal treasonous coups at one time or another.

Did I say “truth”? I jest. We can forget about the “truth” for a long time to come, given the continuing pervasiveness of our cancerous conspiracies of silence (which I wrote about previously).
PART 2 MEDIA CENSORSHIP BLINDING VOTERS

The Opposition Parties and Independents must demand that the media and MIDA be totally neutral and not the horrible biased entities there were in the 2014 Elections no doubt having a significant impact on the election outcomes.

Yet most academic analyses of the 2014 Elections (two are discussed at the end of this section) have failed to consider adequately the enormous impact that the Bainimarama Government’s media censorship, as well as that of institutions such as MIDA and USP, had on the outcome of the 2014 Elections.

The vast majority of the voters believed the rhetoric and propaganda of the Bainimarama Government while apparently ignoring the criticisms by the Opposition parties and candidates. They voted accordingly. Yet it is clear from the following evidence that the media was biased in many ways:

* a totally pro-government newspaper and its journalists (Fiji Sun);

* a completely government controlled television station and radio stations (Fiji Broadcasting Corporation) headed by the Riyaz Khaiyum, brother of the Attorney General and Minister for Election (Aiyaz Khaiyum)

* an “independent” television station whose board was taken over by the Bainimarama Government which appointed a Sri Lankan CEO, and whose critical journalists were under threat of suspension or actually suspended.

* an independent newspaper (Fiji Times) perpetually under threat of prosecution or prosecuted for matters which would never be considered crimes in Australia or NZ.

* There was a Media Industry Development Authority headed by a Chairman (Ashwin Raj) which gave ample evidence of being pro-Bainimarama Government and ready to pounce on Opposition parties and Independents.

The same Ashwin Raj was also Head of the Human Rights Commission which failed to address many abuses of human rights by the Bainimarama Government, while ready to condemn any perception of misdemeanors by the Opposition MPs.

This section tries to give a flavor of the extent of the media censorship as perceived by one Fiji citizen who attempted to obtain responses from the media and from MIDA on several areas of concern. This section “bears witness” to the disgraceful role played by organizations and their CEOs: such as MIDA (Ashwin Raj), USP (VC Rajesh Chandra), the biased media owners (Fiji Sun and CJ Patel family), Police and Military in facilitating media censorship in Fiji during the critical period in the run up to the 2014 Elections. Their roles need to be recorded historically and they need to be held to account.

I have little doubt that the Opposition Parties and candidates will face very similar biases in the run-up to the 2018 Elections. They should plan ahead to “bear witness” to their trials and tribulations, so that historians will be able to write truthfully. It is sad that several prominent historians of the 2014 Elections, have refused to acknowledge much of the material here.
Day by day, this Military Government and the Military Police (that is what they have to be now called), take this country deeper and deeper into an evil “police state”. At midnight, a whole group of police officers woke up Ro Temumu Kepa to take her to the Police Station. Was she a dangerous criminal about to commit a crime at midnight? Caught in the act? So dangerous as to require several police officers? No. She is just an elderly woman, insisting on her basic human right to host an annual meeting of the Methodist Church of Fiji; the basic human right for all their Church members to participate at the meeting; their basic human right to discuss whatever issues affect their lives- economic, social or political. Who are the military to decide otherwise?

How demoralizing for professional police officers to blindly following this Military Government’s immoral orders, and treat this senior lady, Roko Tui Dreketi, like a common dangerous criminal.

They could have called on her in the morning. She was not running away from anyone. But no, the police had to mount a raid at midnight. Which evil person made that decision? Notice that the media have been stopped from reporting on these immoral arrests and detentions.

Quite clearly, this military government and police have totally lost their way. Shame on them.

Shame on the Military Council and all the military-appointed Ministers who are going along with this evil immoral treasonous Military Government of Frank Bainimarama.

Shame on all those citizens and non-citizens who have taken appointments from this illegal Military Government and continue to do so.

Shame on all those coup supporters (all those in the NCBBF, CCF etc.) who are now totally silent in the face of this onslaught on our people’s civil rights, while some make tiny bleating noises here and there, having helped to create this military monster over the last two and a half years.

Shame on all those businessmen who support Bainimarama and his immoral actions.

The blog-sites need to boldly name all of these coup supporters with pictures so that the ordinary public can identify them.

It is time that the rest of Fiji stops tolerating and associating with all these evil people who are destroying our country.

When are we going to draw the line. It is time for the ordinary decent folk to speak up, using their names. Do it on the blog-sites if the newspapers and TV won’t give you space.

As was said once before, if you do not speak up when others are taken away, one day there will be no one left to speak for you.
Since 2006, it has become a popular pastime for every Tom, Dick, and Harry to malign the "bad old politicians" of Fiji, and this trend will no doubt become a frenzy as "new politicians" offer themselves.

Many who write thus to the media are perhaps too young or ignorant to know what the "old politicians" did or did not do, compared to the new politicians. But one does not expect the same song from Sir James Ah Koy, himself an "old politician" who personally benefited from the political largesse of several "old politicians" and Prime Ministers of Fiji (and received a knighthood from PNG "old politicians").

Of course, such a message about "bad old politicians" is useful propaganda for a government which strangely contains a couple of "old politicians" (like Bole and Kubuabola), yet still claims it is the “first” government to do anything worthwhile for Fiji.

Nevertheless, it is the solemn responsibility of the older generation to set the record straight about what the old politicians did or did not do, compared to what the new politicians are doing.

It is also useful for future voters to examine the political record of "old politicians" like Ah Koy, who was once a Minister of Finance in Rabuka’s Government, and who is offering himself up again as a "new" politician.

Ah Koy as “new politician”?

Some political historians might scratch their heads at how Ah Koy once entered Parliament as a Chinese “General” voter, then later managed to get elected as an indigenous “Fijian” MP for Kadavu, then rediscovered his Chinese roots to become Ambassador to China, and is now offering himself as a “born-again” new politician, ready to serve in Commodore Bainimarama’s Party-to-be.

Economic historians may ask how and why Ah Koy was appointed in the first place as Minister of Finance in Rabuka’s SVT Government, replacing a performing Mr. Vunibobo.

Economic historians must examine Ah Koy’s performance as Minister of Finance, and especially his disastrous decision to create the ATH telecommunication super monopoly, in order to sell Government’s shares to Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) at the inflated price of $253 million, thereby “coincidentally” covering the cost of the National Bank of Fiji (NBF) disaster.

Those interested can read about the mess Ah Koy created, here: (XXX).

Ah Koy also convinced many members of the public to buy ATH shares whose values were destined to fall in the long term because of inevitable competition in the telecommunications industry (and they have fallen significantly to the dismay of their holders).

Another still ongoing negative effect is that FNPF, to recoup its massive investment, has had to exploit ATH’s monopoly power through higher telecommunication prices, thereby hurting not just ordinary consumers, but also holding back the telecommunications based industries for more than a decade, and stifling economic growth.
The same Ah Koy is today trumpeting that the current batch of unelected leaders are the "best politicians" this country has ever had, even though some of them, as Ah Koy well knows, had their fingers in all the coups of 1987, 2000, 2006 and 2009.

But what do the facts say about the actual performance of the “old” politicians as opposed to that of the “new”?

What about positive actions by old politicians?

Of course, there were “bad old politicians” who were responsible for the military coups, or the NBF disaster or the several vote-buying agricultural scams we have had over the years under virtually every Prime Minister (except Bavadra).

But there also have been dozens of "old politicians" who have provided good leadership either as part of Government, or as the Opposition whose keen scrutiny helped keep governments in line.

Unlike the current “new politicians”, these old politicians were elected to Parliament or they were nominated to Senate by the elected Governments and Oppositions, to look after the interests of “their” electorates, whether communal or national, as lawfully defined by the existing constitution and electoral system.

We have had prominent names like Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, AD Patel, Ratu Penaia Ganilau, Ratu George Cakobau, Sidiq Koya, Karam Ramrakha, the Togavatu brothers, Jai Ram Reddy, Doug Brown, Josefata Kamikamica, Mosese Qionibaravi, Charles Walker, Jone Naisara, John Falvey, Tom Vakatora, Irene Jai Narayan, Vincent Lobendhan, and even a Khaiyum, once my colleague in Parliament.

[Disclaimer: While I served in the Fiji Parliament from 1996 to 1999, I have been told by my legal adviser that I am not an "old politician", being neither old nor a politician].

Many old politicians served their electorates, with great energy and dedication. Most made no personal fortunes themselves, when many could have made more money or had easier lives by ignoring politics altogether. These old politicians helped Fiji to build roads, hydroelectric dams, ports, water and sewerage systems, schools, and health centers.

They presided over a healthy sugar industry with twice the current sugar output, grew a buoyant tourism industry, started massive mahogany plantations, fostered many other industries such as gold and fisheries, began the Fiji National Provident Fund, and built a Fiji economy which was the envy of all other Pacific Islands.

In partnership with private education authorities, their governments helped build an excellent education system, which staffed a good civil service for three decades, and even facilitated tens of thousands to emigrate and obtain excellent jobs and incomes abroad.

There were good “old politicians”, both in Government and Opposition, who guided our country through turbulent periods such as the military coups and financial disasters like the NBF collapse.

Many of our “good old politicians” (like Jai Ram Reddy and Sitiveni Rabuka) patiently guided the revision of the racist 1990 Constitution through peaceful democratic parliamentary processes, cooperation and the power of ideas and goodwill (not by brute military force, as being done currently).
Some old politicians, like Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, provided astute regional political leadership to the South Pacific countries (including a giant like PNG), while playing leading roles in international agreements such as the Law of the Sea and Lome. Many old politicians, in the service of their people and Fiji, often neglected their families, who today cannot but feel deep dismay and pain that the “old politicians” are all being tarred with the same brush, and maligned so unfairly and ignorantly, by today’s politicians and brash political aspirants.

**What about the facts on the “new” politicians?**

This maligning of the old politicians is even more astonishing given the facts on the new politicians.

Under the “new politicians”, the Fiji economy stagnated between 2006 and 2011, with the sugar industry in ruins, formal sector employment declining, real incomes falling by more than thirty percent, and poverty correspondingly increased.

The economy has grown since 2011, but it is barely making up for five years of stagnation.

The parts of the economy that have kept Fiji afloat (such as tourism and large foreign remittances which are twice the sugar industry earnings) owe nothing whatsoever to the “new politicians”, who daily give themselves *salus salus* and media attention, whenever the private sector or donors launch their successful projects, or tax-payers money is being prominently thrown around (of course, not as vote-buying scams?).

Yes, there are new roads being built currently, but they were also built before, except that no one today knows the current unit construction costs with tax-payers’ money flowing freely through the welcoming hands of the Road Transport Authority, while the public debt is increased astronomically.

The facts also show that none of the “old politicians” ever prevented Auditor General’s Reports from being published for six years, and none received unknown ministerial salaries paid through a private accounting company (even today).

None signed commercial agreements for large loans and other projects, whose details have been completely hidden from the public.

None secretly approved investor projects totally undermining the strict marine environment protection laws that exist today.

None ever trashed a Draft Constitution they had themselves commissioned, in order to design and approve another constitution granting themselves immunity for unknown criminal actions, stretching from 2000 till 2014, while simultaneously jailing a former Prime Minister over minor charges.

We can wait for Regime supporters to list the positives emanating from the new politicians, apart from the dubious pleasure some seem to have of calling themselves “Fijians” and the farcical illusion of being “equal” to everyone else because of the new electoral system.

**Why this loss of memory?**

Fiji, sadly, suffers from a severe loss of institutional and historical memory that allows unfair generalizations about the “old politicians” to be made with impunity and without public challenge.
This is partly because of the massive emigration of our intelligentsia and partly because of the intimidation of those remaining.

Partly also, the media (television, radio and print) has been forced by draconian application of the media decrees, to become instruments of government propaganda, which by any objective criteria of space and time devoted, is completely out of proportion to the few opposing views that are allowed to trickle through.

Nevertheless, it is the solemn civic duty of the older generation to defend, through whatever media is available to them, the reputation of the many "good old politicians" who they once elected to parliament, and who served them and Fiji, in an open, transparent and accountable way, whatever their faults.

Any society which does not defend its own former good leaders is guilty of selfish ingratitude. They are also failing in their civic responsibility to remind the younger generations that the foundations of the quality of life they enjoy today were built by the older generations, led by the “old politicians” who are being gratuitously maligned today in an indiscriminate fashion.

Some day, the “new politicians” will find that “what goes around, will come around”.

For more than three years now, the Bainimarama regime has been in effective control of the governance of Fiji, and even recognized as such by international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and Asian Development Band.

Bainimarama says that he will not hold elections until 2014, by which time he thinks the principles of his “People’s Charter” will have been fully entrenched in all processes of government.

But the current media censorship not only takes away our citizens’ basic human right to freedom of expression, it totally undermines the values, commitments and pledges made in the Military Government’s own Charter.

Since this Military Regime will, by 2014, have been the effective government for eight years (longer than any elected government), why does it not follow the good governance principles laid down in its own Charter- the need for every government to be open, transparent and accountable to the public, which, in the absence of a democratically elected parliament, can only be through full media freedom.

Full media freedom is even more vital for public service efficiency, given that the civil service is being gradually militarized in key positions, posing serious problems for the Public Service Commission and the use of tax-payers funds: how ensure that these military personnel behave as fully professional civil servants and not as army personnel, uncritically taking orders from their superiors?

How will the Military Government be judged by history, if the public service and the economy fail to perform, cocooned by the media censorship?

Surely, both the Military Government (however long it stays in power) and Fiji have everything to gain and little to lose, if the Public Emergency Decree and the media censorship are removed.

The continuing media censorship

For several months now, the Military Government has totally censored the media- television, newspapers and radio, removing any news item deemed to be critical of government, their policies and their performance.

At a personal level, Fiji TV or the radio stations no longer bother to interview me for comments on economic issues; while most of my newspaper articles are censored.

Most recently, the military’s censors stopped the publication of my article pointing out the pervasive economic implications of Fiji’s long term demographic changes relating to our ethnic mix: the effects on our education system, the composition of our labor force, future entrepreneurship, dependency ratios (a key demographic factor in wealth accumulation), and ethnic patterns of consumption, of great relevance to the businesses world. There was nothing overtly political in this article. You can read it on (XXX). But this Military Government’s censors decided that the Fiji public will not be allowed to read this article.

The irony is that while they keep repeating that their Charter will guide this country for the foreseeable future, their media censorship contradicts their Charter at every
Do not forget that the Charter started off (page 2) that “We the People of Fiji Affirm that our Constitution represents the supreme law of our country, that it provides the framework for the conduct of government and the people”.

But any protection that the 1997 Constitution may have provided against unfair media censorship, went out the window, when Bainimarama abrogated the Constitution in 2009.

But the rest of the Military Government’s Charter is still a great supporter of our fundamental right to freedom of expression, even if the Military Censors are not.

The Charter Values

Amongst the values that the Charter espouses (page 4) is “respect for the diverse cultural, religious and philosophical beliefs”. The section on “Moving Forward Together” says “our nation is in urgent need of genuine, trust-based dialogue and peace building for which qualities of humility, compassion, honesty and openness to other views and interests are essential”.

But some people’s views and philosophical beliefs are not respected by the Military Censors, and will not be allowed to be aired in public, however genuine, constructive and peace building.

Then the Charter states (page 6) “our nation must have a freely and fairly elected Parliament...” and “we believe in an executive government answerable to the Parliament, an independent judiciary, and Security Forces that ... are answerable to the government and Parliament in accordance with our Constitution”.

But given that Bainimarama will not give the people of Fiji an elected Parliament until 2014, only media freedom can ensure accountability to the public.

The Charter states (page 7) “we believe in a strong and free civil society as vital to democracy, good and just governance....”. But the Military Government refuses freedom of speech or assembly.

Then again that Charter states “we aspire for Fiji to be an educated, knowledge-based society where all our people have access to education and continuous learning”.

But the Military Government decides what knowledge the people have access to, through their censorship of the media.

While the Charter says “we must use our individual and collective knowledge and skills to develop our country”, the Military Censors are deciding that the skills and knowledge of some individuals (anyone who disagrees with the Military Government) will not be made available to the public,

The Charter goes on (page 8) “We reaffirm our recognition of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals and groups, safeguarded by adherence to the rule of law”.

But Military Decrees, including the Public Emergency Decree which implements the media censorship, now define the law- when there is no emergency at all in the country.

The Charter’s Key Pillars

Pillar 1 of the Charter talks about “sustainable democracy and good and just governance”. It states (page 11) “The government must be fully accountable to the
people of Fiji through Parliament and its procedures”.

The Charter says that to oversee Governments, there must be independent and well resourced offices of the Ombudsman, Human Rights Commission, Auditor General, and FICAC. The Charter states:

“The Government must publish timely public reports with adequate details so that the people of Fiji are aware of what is being done in their name and with their taxes”.

But the current Military Government does not abide by this Pillar: it will not make public the Auditor General’s Reports for 2007 or 2008. And it is unlikely that there will be any Auditor General’s Report on government expenditure and revenues for 2009.

[Author’s note: The Auditor General’s Reports were made public after the 2014 Elections, to make sure that voters were not influenced by findings damaging to the Bainimarama Government].

The Charter’s Pillar 3 on “ensuring effective, enlightened and accountable leadership” points out that a critical problem in the past has been that “our leaders in most cases have failed to involve us in making the major decisions that affect our well-being and our daily lives”. But this criticism applies equally to our current leaders.

The Military Government does not consult any of our people’s chosen leaders on major decisions on taxation, government expenditure, sales of government assets, control of public companies and assets through board appointments, and hiring and firing of civil servants.

Even the workers’ pension fund is in the control of the current Military Government, without any accountability to the workers or the pensioners, or the public.

While the Pillar identifies amongst the ideal qualities necessary for any future leaders of Fiji to include “openness” and “accountability”, the media censorship will not allow it.

**Militarization of the civil service**

It is clear that the Military Government is steadily appointing military personnel to key civil service positions, perhaps in the hope that there will be increased efficiency.

But this poses a major problem for the Public Service Commission. Civil servants are required to give their professional advice to their superiors, disagreeing if necessary with their superiors, a vital mechanism to protect tax-payers’ interests from wrong political decisions.

But professional military personnel have been drilled all their lives to blindly obey orders coming from their superiors, without question, even if they think that the orders or decisions are wrong. So how can the PSC and Jo Serulagilagi convert these military appointees into professional civil servants?

The PSC has another problem. Military personnel are trained for military duties, not complex public service. Some may be good, some may be unsuitable. How can the PSC, which has little role in the appointment of these military civil servants, remove any for non-performance?
Pillar 4 of the Charter on “enhancing public sector efficiency” wants a public service which is “accountable”. But how can the public sector be accountable to the Fiji public, when the media is not allowed to publish many stories highlighting problems in the public sector?

While the Charter aims (page 21) to “remove political interference in the public sector”, what the public continues to see is the Military Government’s frequent hiring and firing of civil servants and board members.

It is well known that most civil servants and board members, for fear of losing their positions, are afraid to disagree with the decisions made by the Military Government.

Over the last three years, some of this Military Government’s policy mistakes which have wasted taxpayers’ valuable funds (remember the initial school bus-fares fiasco?), may not have occurred if civil servants’ advice had been followed from the beginning, and the public had been freely allowed to express their views through the media.

With the pervasive media censorship, the public currently has little knowledge of any other bad policy decisions which might also be wasting tax-payers’ funds. But by the time the public finds out the facts, it will be too late- like the NBF disaster or all our Agricultural Scams which have cost tax-payers hundreds of millions of dollars.

It should be obvious to the public that Bainimarama is now performing like all the previous elected or unelected Prime Ministers we have had (Mara, Rabuka, Chaudhry, and Qarase): regularly getting in touch with people throughout the country, promising tax-payers’ funds for roads, bridges, water, disaster assistance and advocating development initiatives in general.

He is also (unilaterally) tackling long-standing problems like the reform of land tenure and national identity.

But if he ever stands for elections down the line (he would only be following in the footsteps of Rabuka and Qarase!) he will be judged not just on the goodies he hands out today, but also by his performance in managing the economy and tax-payers’ funds.

Note that despite Rabuka’s absolute and populist rule in his first few years in power after 1987 (Fiji oldies, remember that period?), eventually he was voted out. Just read today what indigenous Fijians themselves are writing (albeit anonymously) about Rabuka on the blog sites.

It will be in Bainimarama’s long term political interest or his personal historical record that his Military Government does not waste taxpayers’ funds.

For that, an important safety mechanism is accountability to the public through full media freedom, especially when there is no elected parliament which can hold government to account as is so powerfully advocated by the Charter.

The Charter’s commitments and pledges

On pages 37 and 38 of the Charter document, there is a long list of what we, the people of Fiji agree to “Commit to”. We can agree with every single one of them- even where it says we “support the Constitution and the People’s Charter” as the foundation for building a better Fiji.

We can also agree with the Charter where it requires that “we hereby pledge, as citizens of Fiji”, to uphold and be guided by all these commitments through “our own
individual conduct and conscience” while “holding responsible and accountable those who hold positions of leadership and responsibility” (i.e. including the current Military Government).

I believe that my media contributions are fully in keeping with what the Charter requires us to Commit to and Pledge as responsible Fiji citizens.

So why do the Military Censors ban my articles from the Fiji media, even the recent innocuous one on the economic implications of Fiji’s long term demographic changes?

**The open and anonymous threats**

Friends tell me- “why get distressed over this little issue. Accept that you are living under a military dictatorship. Just do your work and enjoy your life”. But, a decent life, even according to this Military Government’s Charter, requires freedom of expression and freedom of the media. It distresses me deeply and daily, that these basic human rights have been removed from my life, while there are other erosions of freedoms, some subtly, some openly.

At my workplace, where we should expect an uncompromising defense of academic freedom, one can find oneself unreasonably excluded from politically sensitive situations, such as a University meeting with an international mediator on Fiji’s political crisis, or the University’s participation in an international meeting (where the Fiji Government representatives were to be present) to discuss the impact of the global financial crisis on the Pacific.

A few weeks ago, an anonymous telephone caller from the army (“Jack”- no surname) warned me that somewhere (he mentioned the Fiji Golf Club) I had been overheard saying negative things against the “Government of the Day”.

Jack told me to remember what had happened to relatives of mine who had been deported back to Australia. I said, “sorry, I am a Fiji citizen, without any PR elsewhere. In any case, if I disagree with the Government of the Day, it is on policies and principles”. But Jack called again the next day and repeated the same message.

**The climate of fear: where do you draw the line**

It is distressing that we do not even have the freedom to speak amongst friends at public places, in case someone overhears and conveys some garbled version to the military intelligence who can then threaten you, for no reason at all. What does this powerful Military Government have to fear from elderly academics like me?

Why are military personnel being encouraged by their superiors into this kind of unethical and unprofessional behavior? Once entrenched, such disregard for basic human rights will be difficult to eradicate. Who doubts today that had it not been for the successful 1987 coup by Rabuka, those of 2000 and 2006 would have been far less likely.

The Fiji public placidly accepts the media censorship’s erosion of our freedom of speech- a fundamental human right. Surely this is not some “minor issue”.

We forget that just as small waves can slowly erode a solid shore, grain by grain, until the mighty coconut tree falls over, so also can a good society deteriorate into misery and a climate of fear, if we fail to defend every single one of our precious basic human rights.
I am happy to follow this Military Government’s Charter, but all of it, not just the bits that this Military Government chooses to follow.

It is a sad indictment of all those people who formulated and supported the Charter, that they remain totally uncritical of this Military Government’s media censorship, which contradicts their Charter at every turn.

Surely this Military Government (and the FTIB) know that investors cannot have full confidence about investing in an economy where there is pervasive media censorship?

Without this investment, our economy will stagnate (as currently), leaving this Military Government with an uphill task of dealing with our increasing problems of unemployment and poverty, while undermining the Military Government’s record as an efficient manager of the economy.

Surely, both this Military Government (however long it stays in power) and Fiji, have everything to gain and little to lose, if the Public Emergency Decree and the media censorship are removed and there is an end to personal intimidation.
32. Deeper darkness during Diwali (Cens)

[Pacific Scoop, 12 December 2010]

The Hindus of Fiji have just celebrated the festival of Diwali: sharing food, sweets and companionship with families, friends and neighbors. Long a national holiday, Diwali, like Christmas, has become a joyous festival for all races and religions, with diya and electric lights brightening up the night.

For Hindus, Diwali is associated with the celebration of Prince Ram’s return to Ayodhya after his unjust banishment and exile, with diyas lit to welcome him back.

Speeches by Fiji’s leaders highlighted that Diwali celebrates the victory of light over darkness, representing the victory of truth over ignorance.

But no leader spoke of the deeper darkness of media censorship imposed by Bainimarama’s military dictatorship, hiding the truth about the disasters besetting Fiji.

The few Diwali delights

Certainly, many Indo-Fijians are happy that Bainimarama keeps talking about wanting racial equality in Fiji. Here at last, is a Fijian Prime Minister who seems to want Indo-Fijian culture to share center stage with others in Fiji.

Many Indo-Fijians, after a century of being made to feel that they are forever vulagi, are happy that they can call themselves “Fijians”. A few are pleased that they don’t have to fill out the ethnicity space in the immigration arrival and departure cards. Great!

There appears to be reduced random violence around the country and a greater sense of personal security amongst ordinary Indo-Fijians and that is most valued.

Tourism Fiji might even include Diwali in their advertisements and, and an Indian face or two might make it into their posters.

After four years in power, the Bainimarama Government is now talking about merging scholarship systems for indigenous Fijians with those for the Others.

Great, but already indigenous Fijians are more than 62% of the population, and a financially struggling Government will have great difficulty giving scholarships to all who deserve it, indigenous or otherwise.

That’s about it - the sum total of Diwali delights for Indo-Fijians after four years of the Bainimarama Government.

Bainimarama claimed that he would enforce a non-racial electoral system, and there is indeed consensus on a “one-person one vote”, proportional system. But Bainimarama is in no hurry to implement it.

Bainimarama claimed to deliver land reform, but there is nothing in sight after four years: other than an unfulfilled Land Bank proposal. There is also an unwise promise of 99 year leases, by which time the land-owners’ children will be dead as well, and Indo-Fijian farmers an extinct species and distant memory in Fiji.

So what else has Bainimarama offered Fiji for four years since his 2006 coup?

The Charter Cloak of Darkness

Bainimarama did the 2006 coup claiming widespread corruption and electoral fraud. Four years later, no great evidence has been found.

Bainimarama claimed that no military personnel would benefit from his coup. But
he personally, has enjoyed all the perks of being Prime Minister and Finance Minister (official and on the side); and a little icing on his cake, $184 thousands of back-pay for 30 years of leave allegedly not taken.

His (remaining) senior military personnel have benefited enormously from this coup, through huge increases in salary and perks, and appointments to better paying senior civil service positions.

Bainimarama keeps repeating his hollow mantra- that Fiji will be guided by the principles of the Charter and the Roadmap, but contrary to the very first paragraph of the Charter, the 1997 Constitution was abrogated last year when the Court of Appeal judgment went against Bainimarama.

While one of the pillars of the Charter is that the Fiji Government will abide by the principles of transparency and accountability to the people of Fiji, that ideal has been trashed for four years now and continues to be trashed every day. Not a whimper from the Charter supporters.

Bainimarama has stopped the release of all the recent the Auditor General’s Reports, and all the other Reports on the disasters at FNPF, Natadola, Momi and FSC.

He has long stopped the audit of the Regimental Funds, thought to have been abused by virtually all the Military Commanders.

Without any public emergency in sight, an illegal Military President mindlessly keeps signing the Public Emergency Decree and enforcing media censorship.

Despite Diwali, the Fiji public will not be allowed to see any light of knowledge, or publicly meet and freely discuss any of the huge disasters created by the Bainimarama Government.

Disasters in the Darkness

Look at all the disasters that have occurred since Bainimarama’s coup:

* in just four years since 2006, a loss of more than one thousand million dollars ($1.2 billion) of national income, because our economy has not grown and has probably contracted;

* consequently, a loss of more than $300 millions of potential government revenue, and potential expenditure on health, education, poverty alleviation, etc;

* a write-off of $300 millions in FNPF’s investments in Natadola and Momi, and more to come (public cannot see any reports)

* likely taxpayers’ loss of $300 millions to cover the mistakes made at FSC by this Military Government’s appointees since 2006; (and what exactly did that Deloitte Report cost, telling the sugar industry what it already knew?)

* loss of $300 millions of EU funds to help the sugar industry and develop alternative livelihoods in the rural areas, because Bainimarama arrogantly and callously refused to hold elections in 2009 (who cares about the lives of 100 thousand, mostly Indo-Fijian people, depending on the sugar industry?)
* loss of $150 millions of tax-payers’ funds through unlawful military over-expenditure from 2006 to 2009 (taxpayers are not allowed to see the Auditor General’s Reports).

* another $30 millions lost through illegal over-expenditure by the previous Police Commissioner; (tax-payers are not allowed to see the Auditor Generals’ Reports).

* combined with the refusal to reduce the illegally expanded military expenditure, the falling government revenues, and the need to spend money to cover the disasters at FSC, will ensure that there will be even larger increases in Public Debt that Bainimarama and Khaiyum will callously pass on to the future generations, in a few weeks, with yet another illegal budget (no questions to be allowed);

* illegal decisions made by this Military Government, on the sale and purchase of tax-payers’ assets worth hundreds of millions of dollars; issuing and cancellation of contracts worth hundreds of millions; questionable changes in the education system; questionable allocations of public funds to special interest groups; plans to introduce socially evil industries like casinos; (cost unknown)

* the continuing destructive undermining of civil service professionalism through arbitrary firing of civil servants without any considerations of natural justice and rights of appeal; appointments of friends and cronies to top positions; and a steady drain of good civil servants (Fijian and Indo-Fijian) who can easily find jobs elsewhere and do (cost unknown)

* the continuing appointment of military personnel to key positions, who by their very military training are unable to question doubtful decisions made at the top, so obey mindlessly; (cost unknown)

* the continuing undermining of the professionalism and the international marketability of the Fiji Military Forces, which has effectively become a private militia swearing personal allegiance to Bainimarama, and not to an elected Government, and Fiji taxpayers who pay their salaries. (cost unknown)

* continuing undermining of civil service financial procedures, with Ministers (including Bainimarama and Khaiyum) allegedly being paid multiple salaries through a private accounting firm related to Aiyaz Khaiyum; (cost unknown)

* the continuing political damage to Fiji’s traditional ties with neighbors and donors (Australia, NZ, EU) and organizations (Commonwealth, Forum Secretariat and MSG); with economic losses resulting (lost aid, banned from Commonwealth Games etc). (cost unknown).

* The continuing misuse of public funds through vindictive prosecution of targeted individuals and human rights advocates seen as “enemies” of the Military Government.

The cost of these disasters easily adds up to more than $2,000 millions- or half the GDP of Fiji. The National Bank of Fiji disaster (which cost a mere $200 millions or so) was peanuts compared to what Fiji is facing now.

A once leading legal light in the judiciary (Nazhat Shameem) today passionately preaches, and quite rightly, about corporate accountability, constantly pleading that Fiji learn from the NBF disaster and the Agriculture Scam. But she conveniently ignores the bigger disasters right before her very eyes- but then she herself helped to start the Bainimarama coup rolling with a coup in the judiciary.
The sad fact is that Bainimarama and Khaiyum have already been running Fiji for four years. Had theirs been a normal elected government, there would be elections this year. Would a Bainimarama/Khaiyum Government be ever elected, given their record above? It is no wonder that Bainimarama and Khaiyum want to hang on to power for another four years, without any accountability to tax-payers.

They will continue to rush around the country, making noble speeches, being garlanded by the ever servile business community, increasing numbers of provincial councils, and narrow vested groups.

Bainimarama will feed them generously with tax-payers’ money, in return for statements of support. But Bainimarama should get his Ministry of Information to dig out similar photos of all past Prime Ministers, Finance Ministers and Attorney Generals.

All were similarly garlanded, and often similarly surrounded by the same faces. When the tide turned, the same smiling faces deserted to the new holders of power. Ask Rabuka and Qarase. They left mixed legacies, some good, but mistakes as well.

But at least, voters voted them in to govern on their behalf; and voters must share responsibility for whatever mistakes they made; and the leaders were ultimately accountable to the voters, at the next election.

But Fiji’s voters and taxpayers did not ask Bainimarama and Khaiyum to govern Fiji. It is surely clear now, that Bainimarama and Khaiyum (and all their collaborators) have no intention whatsoever of being accountable to the tax-payers for what they are doing now to Fiji. They no doubt plan to walk smugly away, after they have had their fill at the tax-payers’ trough.

They care little about the gutted FNPF, the destroyed FSC and the sugar industry, the increased Public Debt, the increased poverty, and the thoughtless destruction of all the national social and economic institutions, with nothing to replace them.

Where’s the good governance?

How sad that the accounting and auditing bodies (like the Fiji Institute of Accountants) have not uttered a word for this military government to be accountable to its tax-payers. Instead, their leading lights actively collaborate with the government, in return for directorships and business contracts.

All the three universities in Fiji now have academic courses to ensure that all graduates fully appreciate the critical importance of principles of good governance, ethics, transparency and accountability to the tax-payers who pay their costs.

Yet no University management in Fiji has publicly stood up for academic freedom, and called for an end to the damaging media censorship that contradicts all the principles of good governance, transparency and accountability.

University managements in Fiji placidly accept that they must obtain permits before they can organize academic conferences, public seminars or departmental retreats, to discuss academic issues.

That same disregard is shown by most organizations in Fiji, such as Principals’ Associations, that have their annual meetings to discuss future directions, and how to create the good young leaders of tomorrow.
MEDIA CENSORSHIP

The Darkness during Diwali

For two successive Diwalis this military government has spouted the hollow rhetoric that Diwali celebrates the victory of light over darkness, and truth over ignorance. But their media censorship throws a deeper darkness over Fiji, that no Diwali celebration is going to dispel.

It may be noted however, that Diwali is also about forgiving those who do wrong. There are no truly evil people in this world, just evil deeds, many resulting from very human people thoughtlessly taking just one wrong turn on the hard road of life.

The coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006 are replete with such persons, from all the major ethnic groups in Fiji, from all the classes, and all the professions.

Most coup supporters have eventually regretted what they did, when they realized the evil consequences of the coups.

All of Fiji’s religions encourage those who have taken the wrong road, to turn back. Those who did and supported the 2000 and 1987 coups need to seek genuine forgiveness and reconciliation with those they wronged.

Those who have supported the 2006 coup and its Charter, and who now see the light, need to help bring Fiji back from the brink, to bring back true transparency and accountability to the Military Government, to remove the Public Emergency Decree and media censorship, and to help throw light into our current darkness.

That would give festivals such as Diwali a more meaningful significance in our lives.

33. Questions for Tebbutt Poll (9/9/2011) (Cens)

[Pacific Scoop, 9 September 2011]

The interpretations that the Lowy Institute and coup supporters are putting on the recent Tebbutt Research Poll in Fiji would be laughable, if only the long-term consequences of such propaganda were not so tragic for ordinary people of Fiji.

Students of survey methodology should find this “Lowy Institute Poll” a lesson on how not to conduct a poll, and how not to interpret sensitive opinion polls in a Fiji dominated by a climate of fear and intimidation.

A number of relevant questions need to be asked:

1. Was the poll genuinely representative of the views of Fiji people?
2. Could the questions be understood by ordinary Fiji citizens in the time given?
3. Could citizens honestly answer, given the climate of fear in Fiji
4. Why did the Lowy Institute not report all the tables and which tables did the Lowy Institute choose not to release?
5. Why did the Lowy Institute ignore the political climate of fear in Fiji?
6. Who financed the poll and their interests in Fiji.
1. **The Tebbutt sample was not representative of Fiji nationally**

The experts in the Household Survey Unit of the Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics will tell you that to randomly select and poll even one thousand households from the 180,000 households throughout Fiji, is extremely difficult.

You would need to use the 2007 Census locations for all the households through Fiji (*urban and rural, including the islands*) and *randomly select* a properly stratified sample of 1000 households, a very technical and difficult statistical exercise in a country like Fiji. Secondly, it is a logistical and cost nightmare to train, transport and accommodate interviewers throughout the length and breadth of Fiji.

> Probably to save time, effort and money, the Tebbutt Poll restricted the sampling to urban and peri-urban areas on Viti Levu: Suva, Lami, Nasinu, and Nausori in Central Division, and Nadi, Lantoka, and Ba in the Western Division. Rural Viti Levu and rural and urban Vanua Levu, and all other islands were left out.

Rural households are the traditional supporters of Qarase and Chaudhry both marginalized by Bainimarama. In many rural areas, their traditional leaders continue to oppose the Bainimarama Regime: Naitasiri (Takiveikata in jail); Rewa (Ro Temumu Kepa continues to suffer persecution by the Regime), and Cakaudrove (Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu forced to lie low).

The omitted rural households have also fared very badly since 2006, while urban households have not suffered so much.

The results of the latest poverty analysis shows that, between 2002 and 2009, poverty in rural areas has worsened: the sugar industry has been decimated and most of the farmers and cane cutters dependent on the sugar industry will not have been polled.

While the polled urban households generally gained between 2002 and 2009, largely because of their dependence on formal sector employment (with wages and salaries not being cut despite the economic depression) and large remittance inflows from abroad.

The poll was therefore systematically biased towards favorable responses (even if they were genuinely given) did not sample rural responses which probably would have been more negative.

**The illusion of sampling “science”**

The Lowy Report tries to create the impression of the poll being very scientific. It claimed (in italics) and my comments (in parentheses) (page 23 of the Report):

> “The sample was stratified by ethnicity (iTaukei, Indo-Fijian, and other ethnicities), gender, age, and location”.

I doubt if this was how the sample was selected.

*Start points were selected at random, and respondents were selected at random from within the household, to quota.*
Start points may have been selected at random, but it is extremely unlikely that the interviewers would have randomly chosen all the next households to interview, until they reached their “quota”. Probably those closest to the main roads.

“Data was post-weighted to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics population estimates (based on the 2006 census)”.

All the Tebbutt Poll would have done was ensured that the responses were scaled up to the same national proportions of the ethnic groups recorded by the 2007 Census. But there is little likelihood that urban responses on Viti Levu can be scaled up to represent possible rural responses throughout Fiji, or both urban and rural Vanua Levu.

Then there is a statement suggesting great statistical accuracy “at 95% confidence level”:

“A truly random survey of the sampled population with this sample size, surveyed with 100% response rate, would produce results with a maximum ±3.04% margin of error at 95% confidence level.”

Yes indeed, this might be true IF it was a “truly random sample”. But it was not a random sample, instead, systematically biased towards favorable responses given under fear.

It is a pity that the Director of Polling (Fergus Hanson) and Research Consultant (Sol Lebovic) did not point out all these very serious statistical qualifications.

2. The unrealistic questions

There were some 25 questions in each interview lasting a total of 10 to 15 minutes according to the Lowy Report, or roughly 24 seconds to 36 seconds per question. Let us just say 30 seconds on average.

But how the questions below have been asked in that time, and understood by average Fiji persons, in English or, heaven forbid, in Fijian or Hindustani translations.

Table 1a: Please rate your feelings towards some countries, with 100 meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, 0 (zero) meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from zero to 100: the higher the number the more favorable your feelings are toward that country.

There were 14 countries to comment on, in 10 seconds?

Table 1b: Thinking now about the Fiji Government’s relations with governments from other countries, do you personally agree or disagree that it is important for the Fiji government to have a good relationship with the governments of each of the following countries…

Again, 14 countries to comment on: and what could the answer possibly be except yes to all.

In Table 1b at the top are, in order of popularity: Australia, NZ, US, and UK. All countries who have totally disapproved of and acted against the Bainimarama Regime in stopping aid from the EU and getting expelled from the Commonwealth and
Forum.

China and India, the countries that have supported the Bainimarama Regime come only fifth and sixth, while the Melanesian Spearhead Group countries who Bainimarama has been actively courting, come even lower down.

Table 2a: Do you personally agree or disagree with the approach the Australian Government has taken towards the current Government in Fiji in response to the 2006 coup?

Table 2b: Following the 2006 coup, the Australian government imposed travel sanctions against members of the Fiji Government and Military and supported the suspension of Fiji from the Commonwealth. Which one of the following approaches do you personally think the Australian government should now take?

How on earth could an average Fiji citizen assess such a complex foreign policy measure by Australia, which flummox even academics and Think Tank experts, like Jenny Hayward-Jones. But hold it. An amazing 36% of Fiji citizens agreed with the sanctions?

Table 3: Foreign countries should try to pressure for democratic elections in Fiji, OR Foreign countries should allow Fiji to sort out its return to democracy on its own

Table 4A: Do you personally agree or disagree with Fiji’s suspension from the Commonwealth?

Table 4B: Do you personally agree or disagree with the decision to exclude Fiji from participation in the Commonwealth Games?

What on earth can be the normal reaction of ordinary citizens to any kind of sanctions against one’s country and one’s people?

Table 5: Due to travel sanctions, Fiji’s rugby team might miss out on participating in the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand. I am going to read you three statements about this, and please tell me which one you agree with most.

Astonishing for rugby mad Fiji, 37% agreed that the sanctions were necessary.

Table 6A: Do you personally agree or disagree that Fiji currently plays a leadership role in the Pacific?

Table 6B: Thinking back to Fiji’s leadership role say 5 years ago, and comparing that to nowadays, would you personally say that Fiji’s leadership role in the Pacific is now stronger, weaker or about the same?

What on earth is happening? 45% of the respondents said that Fiji’s role in the region was now stronger?

Table 7: Please think now about regional organizations. Overall, which one do you personally think is more important for Fiji…
Only 16% thought that MSG was more important for Fiji, compared to 51% for Forum. What? The organization that Bainimarama is most contemptuous of, got four times the approval that the MSG gets?

Table 8: Do you personally think that Australia/New Zealand should be a member of the Pacific Islands Forum?

Now which ordinary Fiji citizen would know about the implications for the Pacific countries of having Australia and NZ as members or not members of the Forum?

Table 9: Do you personally agree or disagree with Fiji’s suspension from the Pacific Islands Forum?

What on earth could be the answer to this from ordinary Fiji citizens?

Table 10: Overall, how good a job do you personally think Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama is doing as Prime Minister?

Wow. 66% approved of his role as Prime Ministers. Which person in his right mind in Fiji today would dare tell some interviewer from Suva (who could well be an informer for the army) that Bainimarama was not doing a good job? What does such a question mean, if there are no alternative Prime Ministers given such as Qarase, Chaudhry, Mick Beddoes, Jai Ram Reddy or Madraiwiwi?

Table 11: Overall, do you personally think that things in Fiji are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction?

How on earth could this question be interpreted by the average Fiji citizen? Right direction? Wrong direction? With respect to what policy?

Table 12: Overall, would you personally say the government is doing a very good job, a fairly good job, an average job, a fairly poor job or a very poor job of listening to the views of people like yourself?

87% allegedly said this Military Regime is doing a good or average job of listening to the ordinary people?

In a country where the Parliament (of ordinary people’s representatives) has been closed, whose GCC has been shut down, where sports organizations have been taken over by the Regime; where legitimate gatherings of (some) churches and unions are banned and people prosecuted; where dissidents are taken up to the camp for “questioning”; where a regional university can be financially blackmailed to get rid of questioning academics?

Table 13: How good a job do you personally think the Government is doing in terms of delivering services in education, health, transport: More than 69% said good.

Which ordinary citizen being polled will know how much this coup has cost the country in terms of lost incomes and government revenues and services (more than a billion dollars over four years) in return for a few tens of millions thrown at school bus fares or squatter housing?

Which ordinary citizen being polled will know about the hundreds of millions of
dollars of tax-payers’ funds gone missing and four years of Auditor Generals Report not being released by the same Bainimarama Government?

Table 14: How would you rate what the Government is doing in terms of working on.

More than 80% said good or average for the following (my comments in parentheses):

- Ending racial inequalities and divisions (worse now)
- Improving land ownership laws (nothing doing)
- Increasing employment opportunities (worse now)
- Improving the economy (worse now)
- Reducing poverty (worse now)
- Preparing to draft a new Constitution (wait another 3 years?)
- Making progress towards elections (wait another 3 years)
- Reforming the electoral system (wait another 3 years)

Table 15: Thinking about what effect the new constitution will have, please say whether you personally agree or disagree with the following statements... More than 70% agree:

- Will lead to a better democracy in Fiji
- Will end racial inequalities and divisions in Fiji
- Will end the coup culture in Fiji

Table 16: Please say which one of the three statements comes closest to your own personal views about democracy.

- Preferable to any other kind of government 53%
- Non-democratic government preferable under some circumstances 25%
- Doesn’t matter to someone like me 21%

What on earth will ordinary citizens (or even the experts) say about questions 15 and 16, when they don’t even know that the Charter, Roadmaps etc. are all repetitions of whatever is there in the 1997 Constitution, and they have no idea at all of what a genuine democracy is, or that a “non-democratic government” is here a surrogate for an illegal treasonous military Regime?

Table 17: Do you personally think that the Church and other religious organizations should be involved a lot, a little or not at all in politics?

66% said “Not At All”, obviously thinking only of the Methodists being currently bashed by Bainimarama- not of the Hindus, Catholics and Muslims who politically and actively supported Bainimarama’s 2006 coup and his and John Samy’s Charter charade.

Table 18A: Overall, do you personally approve or disapprove of the RFMF’s role in Fiji at the moment? 68% approved.

Who in Fiji would dare to tell an interviewer that they disapprove of the army in the current climate? How much do the ordinary citizens know about how much extra
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tax-payers funds the military has been illegally swallowing up since 2006, denying them funds for health (shortage of basic medicines at hospitals- buy your own says Neil Sharma) education and social welfare.

But hold it. 31% actually said they disapproved, even in this biased sample? What would the number be without the media censorship, Public Emergency Decree and arbitrary arrests?

_Table 18B: Still looking to the future, do you personally agree or disagree that the Republic of Fiji Military Forces should play a permanent role in politics?

53% agreed. Goodness me.

_Table 19: Since the December 2006 coup, do you personally think the local media in Fiji has become more reliable and trustworthy, less reliable and trustworthy or is it about the same as before the coup?

In a country which continues to suffer from total media censorship (see previous articles) 43% of the poll respondents said the media was now more reliable; and 31% said it was the same. i.e. 74% said the media was the same or more reliable after the 2006 coup. This must really take the cake.

_Table 20. More than 95% of the respondents still said that these human rights were important:

- The right to freely express yourself (no such freedom in Fiji)
- The right to freely vote in national elections (no such freedom in Fiji)
- The right to a fair trial (no such freedom in Fiji)
- The right to a media free from censorship (no such freedom in Fiji)

Yet the Bainimarama Regime has deprived Fiji’s people of all these basic human rights.

**What is reported and what is not reported**

Earlier Tebbutt Poll reports (for The Fiji Times) usually gave break-downs by ethnicity, age, gender and division. They consistently showed greater Fijian support for Qarase than for Bainimarama; and that Indo-Fijians showed greater support for Bainimarama- largely because of his rhetoric of racial equality.

Whether that Indo-Fijian support would still be there today in a secret referendum is an interesting question, given that the sugar industry has significantly declined, casual wage earners (mostly Indo-Fijian) have suffered badly because of the stagnating economy, and Indo-Fijian leaders have been marginalized (a few swallows don’t make a summer).

The detailed ethnic break-downs are not given for every table, however dubious the results.

Were the rural areas to be randomly polled as well, all the results in support of Bainimarama would go down, despite the upward pressure from the “fear factor”.

**Is there a Lowy Report bias towards Bainimarama?**
The Report portrays the Bainimarama Regime in a good light. The introduction to the Lowy Report alleges that the differences between the Qarase SDL/FLP Government and Bainimarama emerged over the three contentious Bills-Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill, the Qoliqoli Bill and the Land Tribunal Bill.

But more and more evidence is coming out that Bainimarama had been planning the 2006 coup from the time that the Qarase Government wanted him prosecuted for the several deaths in military custody, surcharged for over-spending the military budget in 2004, 2005 and removed as Commander for insubordination.

There are allegations that Bainimarama may have initially supported the 2000 coup and the removal of Chaudhry’s Government. But the Lowy Report simplistically claims

“When the government did not meet all the military’s demands, Bainimarama seized power and assumed the position of Prime Minister, which he has maintained to date. He promised to engage in a clean-up campaign to rid Fiji of corruption and to eliminate racial inequalities in Fiji. Bainimarama said elections would be held when the country was stable and when appropriate electoral reforms were implemented”.

No comment at all on all the broken promises since 2006 or the final treasonous abrogation of the 1997 Constitution in 2009, by a manipulated senile President.

The Lowy Report is full of strange strained logic which puts a positive spin on the Bainimarama Regime, and tries to ultimately suggest that Australia is out of line and should lift all its sanctions and restore all links with the Bainimarama Regime.

This is the line that Jenny Hayward-Jones has consistently taken over the last couple of years, driven largely by the view that Australia has been out maneuvered and being displaced in the Pacific by China.

It would be more honest of the Lowy Institute if they were to honestly come out and maintain their arguments purely on foreign policy interests of Australia vis a vis China.

There was no need to engage in a statistical charade of an opinion poll, with unrealistic questions being asked of ordinary Fiji citizens in a climate of fear, with outrageous conclusions being reached based on the unreliable responses received.

It is not plausible of the Fiji Regime spokesperson (Smith-Johns) to claim that the Regime had no idea that such a nationwide survey was being conducted. Nor is it plausible for Tebbutt Research to claim that they did not ask for permission from the Regime but just “sought legal opinion”.

It also does not help that this poll was co-financed privately by one Mark Johnson AO who supposedly has mineral exploration interests in Vanua Levu.

Is this an attempt to put pressure on the Australian Government?

It is ludicrous that the Lowy Institute should use the dubious responses from a 1032 ordinary relatively under-educated citizens of Fiji, to place pressure on the Australian Government to change its foreign policy stance on Fiji. Or to pressure the Forum countries to do the same.

It is dismaying that writers like Graham Davis, who are given credibility by national Australian newspapers like The Australian, should contemptuously contrast the “high popularity rating” of Bainimarama from the biased Tebbutt Poll with the allegedly
low rating of Prime Minister Julia Gillard in Australia.

For a proper comparison to be made, Julia Gillard would have to:

* use guns to remove a lawful government and make herself Prime Minister
* illegally over-spend tax-payers funds amounting to more than twice the Health Budget
* stop five years of Auditor General’s Reports on Government revenues and expenditure
* hide reports on the losses of hundreds of millions of dollars of pension funds resulting from decisions made by boards appointed by herself;
* illegally pay herself 30 years of back-pay for leave she allegedly did not take
* stop the audit of Regimental Funds abused by successive Military Commanders
* pay herself multiple salaries through a private accounting firm which also receives large business deals without going through proper tender processes
* have total media censorship in place, with a Public Emergency Decree that bans all meetings not wanted by her
* and ensure a judiciary that enforces Military Decrees including those which state that the Regime may not be taken to court for anything.

The list of Bainimarama’s misdemeanors is still growing.

Fiji is a small place and truth will eventually come out. Simply because this regime had maintained a stranglehold on Fiji for the last five years does not in any way make it right or that it is going to be good for Fiji in the long run.

Nor does it mean that neighboring Forum countries should just accept the “bad boy” back in the fold, as Anote Tong (Kiribati President) so naively suggests.

Forum countries who keep supporting Bainimarama for whatever reason they have, need to think about the day when their own soldiers or police forces may forget their oaths of obedience to the lawful elected government of the day and copy Bainimarama.

We Fiji people know now that we cannot expect any support from the US Government who knew all the dirt on the Bainimarama Regime, but chose to not support Australia and NZ pressures on Fiji, because of their own foreign policy need for Fijian troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. Human rights and democracy in Fiji was low on their scale of values.

For the Pacific, the Lowy Institute has just undermined itself very badly as an independent and objective “Think Tank”. It stands accused of being a private lobby group, indulging in propaganda, manipulating opinion polls, to justify its foreign policy view for Australia, based largely on fear of China.

The Australian Government needs to ask whether the Lowy Institute really deserves Australian tax-payers funds if it engages in such exercises that undermine long term
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law and order, constitutionality, and basic human rights in Pacific Island countries.

Author’s postscript (30/1/2018):

Readers will note that by 2014, with a massive amount of vote buying and manipulation of the elections system and total control of the media, the Bainimarama Government had managed to win just over 59% of the votes.

The question remains: what support would they have had in 2011, had the Tebbutt Poll been conducted in a free atmosphere, which still does not prevail in 2015.

The Poll questions are nevertheless a useful checklist for research students. The challenge would be to add questions critical for the public interest, that the Tebbutt Poll ignored, and which would have brought the interviewees’ attention to the negative aspects of the Bainimarama rule.
Part I  The Fourth Estate

The media can be so powerful in the molding of public opinion and national events, that a special term was coined to describe it- the "Fourth Estate".\(^8\) The media can have three distinct roles in relation to the government of the day:

(a) it may protect the public interest by acting as a watchdog on both government and people;

(b) it can undermine governments in the interests of powerful lobby groups, or

(c) it can be a propaganda arm of the government itself.

Fiji's media has performed all three roles at various times over the last few decades. Since 2009, however, the Regime's tight control and media self-censorship has prevented the media from being a "watch-dog" on government, while some media organizations have become largely propaganda arms for the Regime.

It is unfortunate, however, that some critics are targeting the hapless journalists, who surely are minor cogs in the media machine. The reality is that journalists are totally under the control of editors and publishers, who in turn are ultimately controlled by the media owners.

The real weak link in Fiji's media industry is that Fiji's media owners are not dedicated "independent media companies per se", but corporate entities with wider business interests, which are vulnerable to a variety of discretionary government policies.

Currently, the dominant Fiji media owners have far more to lose financially if they allowed their media organizations to get on the wrong side of the Regime, by letting their publishers, editors and journalists maintain a robust independent and critical media organization.

The public should therefore scrutinize not the journalists, but the owners of the Fiji media.

One of the most shocking revelations about Fiji society since 2009 has been the virtual lack of public protest about the ongoing media censorship that has taken away our basic human right of freedom of speech and media.

To encourage our people to think more deeply about how far we have departed from the wonderful benefits bestowed by a free and open media, this article first outlines the criteria by which the media and the journalists are objectively assessed internationally. I also give my personal impressionistic judgment about the recent performance of the media and journalists.

Part II of this article will then look at the role of media ownership in this sorry state of affairs.

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\(^8\) The first three sources of social and political power were supposed to be religious leaders, nobility and elected representatives in parliament- with some cynically thinking that lawyers should be in there as well.
But first, how is the media currently failing Fiji.

Objectives of good public media

Pacific journalism students can get a good grounding on the objectives, principles and key issues by which public media may be judged, at any of the journalism schools in the Pacific, such as at The University of the South Pacific or the Auckland University of Technology.

The public can also look at freely available Internet sites such as at [http://pmintegrity.com/pm_docs/PrinciplesofPublicMedia.pdf](http://pmintegrity.com/pm_docs/PrinciplesofPublicMedia.pdf) which offer useful criteria to judge any public media, whether in the Pacific or elsewhere. For instance, does the Fiji media enable the public to:

(a) have full and free access to public information relevant to their lives, especially in monitoring government activities with the tax-payers' funds

(b) ask questions, provide answers, share viewpoints, and extend public education

(c) ensure an informed and engaged public that enables a strong and effective democracy

(d) produce original cultural material that strengthens local communities and their culture.

There certainly have been improvements on criterion (d) in recent years, driven largely by increased competition. But the larger Fiji media organizations score quite poorly on the more important criteria (a), (b), and (c).

These weaknesses of the media are far more damaging to Fiji currently, because the Bainimarama Regime has operated unfettered for six years, without an elected parliament and opposition parties who would normally have scrutinized the government.

Current weaknesses of Fiji media

Some journalist educators in the region, and other external parties, have recently engaged in an acrimonious but interesting debate about the Fiji media, with the Canadian USP Head of Journalism (Marc Edge) being forced to leave.

Pacific Island journalism students should discipline themselves to go beyond the raw personalities, emotions and largely unsubstantiated allegations that surfaced, and clarify the journalism principles involved, so that they can understand better their own profession and the current media environment.

As someone who has contributed prolifically through the media for more than twenty five years (most of my writings are available on my website [https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/](https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/) and interviews are in the Fiji TV archives) my personal view is that the Fiji media has significantly deteriorated since 2009.

Journalism students might wish to do solid empirical analysis of the content (topics, objectivity, column inches, length of time) of the Fiji media output since 2006, to examine the extent to which my impressions below are substantiated by the data.

* Since 2006, there has been a tendency to suppress information that might throw the Regime in a negative light
* Citizens have not been allowed to ask critical questions, or give their own critical views even in Letters to the Editor (while huge space is given to entertainment).

* Reporting is totally unbalanced with Regime and pro-Regime statements given multiple times the exposure given to opposing views.

* views of Regime opponents or even serious academic criticisms of some specific Regime policies since 2009 have been either totally blanked out or receive a bare bones coverage (I have personally been a victim of this- I elaborate below).

* Some media editors and journalists often present pro-Regime opinions as facts without any critical questioning.

There would be general agreement that the Fiji media has not been a strong opponent of media censorship or a strong supporter of democracy.

**Just five important examples**

For those coming late into the debate, I give just four examples of the media's failure to scrutinize and question adequately the illegal unelected Regime's spending of taxpayers' funds:

* The Regime has bluntly refused to release its own Auditor General's reports on government revenues and expenditure since 2006, although it is clear from limited budget data that there has been serious over-spending and financial irregularities by the Military and Police, amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars (while the Regime has jailed a former Prime Minister on alleged corruption amounting to a few thousand dollars some twenty years ago);

* The Regime refuses to allow the audit of the Fiji Regimental Funds which are thought to have been seriously abused by several RFMF commanders.

* The Regime has refused to release the audits on the massive over-expenditures and capital write-downs at the FNPF's investments at Natadola and Momi Bay, by a Regime appointed Board.

* the Regime has not publicly denied that ministers' salaries were at one stage being paid through a private accounting firm owned by the aunt of the Regime's Attorney General (it may be regularized now but the evidence has yet to be presented).

* there have been several cases of nepotism involving the Bainimarama family.

Yet the media frequently articulates the Regime's statements that

* it did the 2006 coup because of alleged massive corruption in the Qarase Government (yet no evidence has yet been shown after six years);
the country must be guided by the principles in the Charter, which include accountability and transparency of government.

The Regime, without practicing the principles itself,

* has demanded monthly financial audits from the Yash Ghai Constitution Review Commission which received its funding not from tax-payers but international donors;

* is now demanding total financial transparency from the political parties and leaders receiving voluntary funding from the public, while excluding its own Ministers for the last six years.

Since 2009, the media has not been able to point out the Regime's fundamental inconsistencies and gross hypocrisy, as it would have done in any free democratic country, whether developed or developing.

This is evident even by a cursory reading of my articles published in Fiji media just prior to 2009 and those that had to be published on blogs thereafter because of media censorship in Fiji.

**How assess Fiji journalists?**

Standards by which professional journalists, whether in the Pacific or elsewhere, may be assessed are easily available on the Internet and I quote extensively from this website of the Society of Professional Journalists based in US [http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp](http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp). Journalists must:

* seek truth and report it.

* be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

* support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.

* give voice to the voiceless;

* recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

* act independently and be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

* as a profession, be accountable to the public: encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media, admit mistakes and correct them promptly, expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media, and abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

By these universally desirable criteria and even a cursory study of the actual media output, Fiji journalists come up very short indeed at this point in time.
But I certainly would not hold the journalists responsible for the current status quo, whatever the appearance of their failure. For what comes out as the media’s "output", is not the copy that journalists give to their editors or would like to give.

Journalists are at the lowest rung in the media machine, the front-line workers, told by the editors what to investigate and write up, giving their output to the editors, who then edit and put their stamp on the final product, even if there is a personal byline given to an article.

Furthermore, behind the editors are the publishers who exercise control over the editors and the media organization, on the broad nature of what ultimately goes into print or on the airwaves.

There is no public information, and not likely to be any, on the inter-reactions between publishers and editors (This should be a great research topic for Pacific journalism students).

But even publishers have to do what the media owners tell them to do. Again, there is no public information, and not likely to be, on the inter-reaction between media owners and publishers. (Bookmark: what a great research topic for Pacific journalism students).

The harsh reality in Fiji is that any journalist or editor or publisher, who insists on maintaining his or her media independence is soon out of a job or thrown out of the country, with no legal redress, or even total circumvention of judicial decisions. It has happened in recent years.

Journalists and editors soon get the message. Jobs are scarce in Fiji and there is no dole to look after your family if you do not have a job.

Despite these constraints, there are a few journalists, editors, publishers, and indeed, even a small media owner or two, who courageously attempt to be professional, without committing hari-kari.

Bottom line: it is totally unfair to point the finger at journalists, editors, or even publishers, for the weaknesses of the Fiji media industry.

The public must therefore demand that the hitherto silent media owners behind the scenes, come out of the shadows, and be publicly accountable for their media’s output and failures outlined above.

The unfortunate reality is that these media owners have severe conflicts of business interests in Fiji, with their media interests.

I will briefly look at the dominant media payers: The Fiji Times, Fiji Sun, Fiji TV, Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC), Communications Fiji Limited, all of which practice some form of self-censorship or other.

At a USP journalism meeting not too long ago, a radio journalist strangely demanded proof that the media was practicing self-censorship, while the Regime's Permanent Secretary simultaneously was pleading with journalists not to practice self-censorship.

The section below presents my personal experience with respect to television, newspapers and radio which throws a little personal light on the matter.
Part II  The Biased Fiji media owners

The two major print outlets are *The Fiji Times* and the *Fiji Sun*. There are two television stations (Fiji TV and FBC) and two radio stations (FBC and Communications Fiji Ltd).

**The Fiji Times predicament**

*The Fiji Times*, once owned by the Murdoch empire, recently changed hands because of a Regime decree requiring local ownership. The Regime has been penalizing *The Fiji Times* by arbitrarily denying it advertising revenue amounting to more than a million dollars a year, all (or probably more) diverted to the *Fiji Sun*.

A *Fiji Times* editor and publisher have been hauled into court and faced heavy penalties over what many would see as minor infringements. Since 2009, its senior writers have been reluctant to take articles from me, or even reply to emails.

*The Fiji Times* new owner is a local business mogul, Motibhai and Company Limited, whose leading director and multi-millionaire Motibhai Patel, was recently found guilty of corruption and jailed over a relatively minor matter involving a Government corporation of which he was Board Chairman.

Motibhai Patel is currently in Australia for medical treatment, while a bench warrant has been issued for him to return to Fiji to face additional charges of abuse of office arising out of the same chairmanship of the Government corporation. Here is stress indeed.

An additional factor is that Motibhai Patel has a considerably larger financial interest in leasing duty free outlets at the Nadi Airport from Airports Fiji Limited (AFL) which is under the direct control of the Regime.

Once enjoying a complete monopoly, these lucrative duty free outlets were recently opened up to competition through the entry of another local company (Tappoos) which also happens to have large business deals with the Fiji National Provident Fund, the largest financial institution in Fiji, and also under the direct control of the Regime.

All airport leases were recently dissolved by Decree (not challengeable in court) and reallocations are pending.

Any further reduction of space for Motibhai Patel by AFL (which may occur purely with the commercial objective of increasing government revenue) has the potential to significantly reduce Motibhai’s profits by amounts which are far greater than the profits from *The Fiji Times which has already taken a beating because of the denial of Government advertising*.

It is totally understandable if the current publisher and editor of *The Fiji Times* were to take great care to minimize newspaper content critical of the Regime.

This would not even require any instruction from the owner—merely sensitivity on the part of the publisher and editor to their elderly owner’s predicament.

**The Fiji Sun**

*The Fiji Sun* is owned by the CJ Patel family (key director Sandip Patel), a large corporate player in the Fiji economy with major importing and franchising interests involving many international brands.
CJ Patel recently purchased the monopoly Rewa Dairy company, concurrently with the receipt of substantial discriminatory assistance from the Regime, thereby raising the price of milk and milk products.

CJ Patel’s Financial Controller (a Sri Lankan, Ajith Godagoda) has been appointed by and serves the Regime on a wide range of influential Government Boards often as the chair.

On the Fiji National Provident Fund, the Board with the direction and support of the Regime, has rammed through massive reductions to existing pensions by Decree, with an already existing legal challenge being thrown out of court (although under the ill-fated Ghai Draft Constitution, such challenges would have been re-allowed—thereby sealing its own fate).

The Fiji Sun owners therefore face the prospect of enjoying many financial incentives (including a monopoly on government advertising revenues) to be totally supportive of the Regime through the news paper, and censor opposite views, as it has blatantly done for the last four years.

The Fiji Sun refuses to print my articles questioning Regime policies but freely prints pro-Regime articles viciously attacking me and my views, while refusing me the right of reply.

They have allowed an article from me on electoral reform, when the Ghai Commission was still in favor, and a letter to the editor on the destruction of mangroves by developers, completely counter to established environment policy planning.

**Television and radio**

There are three television stations of which two will be discussed here: Fiji Television, and the government-owned Fiji Broadcasting Corporation, which started off as a radio station.

The historically dominant Fiji Television is independently owned by Fijian provincial councils (Yasana Holdings) and other private shareholders including the local business mogul and tycoon Hari Punja.

Hari Punja has a wide variety of business interests in Fiji, many vulnerable to discretionary government policies or tariffs and other measures with potential costs far outweighing any profits from Fiji TV.

Negatively perceived by the Regime, Fiji TV faces the continuing trauma of having its license currently renewed on a six monthly basis, arguably a blatant policy of intimidation.  

Its management and senior staff have been subjected to intimidation by the Regime and it now practices self-censorship on many programs which previously would have been called good "investigative journalism".

Fiji TV Management has told me (and understandably they had to think about their employees’ jobs) that they regretted I was persona non-grata on many programs which used to previously seek my contribution as an economist commenting on current policy matters.

They also could not run any more special programs which previously performed the valuable task of publicizing and popularizing the results and policy implications

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9 The Fiji TV license was only granted a 12 year extension in June 2015.
of several Fiji Bureau of Statistics Reports which I have authored over the last three years. There was nothing particularly political in these reports.

**Fiji Broadcasting Corporation**

The FBC, which has trilingual radio stations (Fijian, Hindi, English), has recently ventured into television, and is totally under the control of the Military Regime. The current CEO is the brother of the Regime's Attorney General, and was appointed after the Regime sacked the previous CEO with no apparent justification.

In the absence of publicly available financial statements, it may be surmised that FBC only survives because of massive subsidies from Government advertising, ultimately paid for by tax-payers.

Neither the FBC radio stations nor the FBC television station has over the last three years sought my views on any economic matter, which they used to do routinely before media censorship began in 2009.

The other independent radio company (Communications Fiji Limited) also with trilingual radio stations and probably more popularity, is owned privately with local magnate, Hari Punja originally having substantial shares and the chairmanship until last year, when the Regime's Decree banned media cross-ownership.10

This is a largely profit-oriented entertainment based media outlet, with little emphasis on public education programs, hence little possibility of raising the ire of the Regime, while a few clearly pro-Regime staffers are strangely unfettered as they propagate the Bainimarama Government’s propaganda.

All these media organizations have virtually stopped the kinds of critical analysis of the Military Regime or news items, they regularly and responsibly carried before the 2009 abrogation of the 1997 Constitution.

A large part of the explanation has to be that none of the "owners" of the major media outlets are purely dedicated to the media, and instead have other far more valuable economic interests which are extremely vulnerable to discretionary policies by the Regime.

**Media ownership and media independence**11

There is an excellent study by Michelle Foster, *Calling the Shots: how media ownership affects the independence of the news media. A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance. November 27, 2012, available here:*

http://cima.ned.org/publications/calling-shots-how-ownership-structures-affect-independence-news-media

Following a study of four diverse countries (US, China, Serbia and Honduras), Foster concluded that "Who owns the media and its infrastructure and who controls its sources of capital and revenue are crucial for any media system" with possibly "adverse consequences for the ability of citizens and communities to hold their governments accountable".

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10 Punja chose to sell his shares in the radio stations in order to keep his television shares which probably offer greater financial benefits to his company throughout Fiji and Sky Pacific.

11 "The impact of media ownership on media independence in Fiji and Pacific Islands” must surely be a great research topic for a PhD in journalism.]
Foster concluded that while governments' control of media markets can bring about greater transparency and diversity (in quotes): “yet the entire system can also be designed to limit independent reporting:

- Regulators can allocate the broadcast spectrum in ways that lack transparency.
- Government agencies can use political criteria for issuing media licenses.
- Cross-ownership restrictions can prevent independent voices from gaining traction.
- Government agencies can direct advertising budgets as rewards and punishments.
- State organs can transform public service media into ruling-party mouthpieces.
- State news agencies can simultaneously access tax-free government funding while competing against independent media for advertising revenue.”

Fiji media observers will know how applicable these findings also are to Fiji.

One would have need to add real physical intimidation of editors and journalists by the Military Regime, resulting in eventual departure (resignations) of some of them from their jobs or deportation from the country.

**Where is Professor Subramani (Chairman of MIDA)?**

This country is in the throes of developing codes of ethics for non-existent parliamentarians, political parties and leaders (although not apparently for unelected Regime Ministers who have totally controlled the country with an iron fist for the last six years, with no end in sight). When, if ever, is the Media Authority of Fiji and Professor Subramani going to develop a code of ethics for media owners, publishers, editors and journalists?

Why is it that despite three years of controversy over media censorship, Professor Subramani is not to be seen or heard? Subramani certainly has not come to the defense of the vulnerable journalists and editors who have been at the total mercy of the Regime, and who are being made scapegoats for the failings of the media owners.

There are also crucial policy matters which need to be clarified and guidelines established.

Given the problems caused by conflicts of interest in business ownership, that should be a central item on the agenda: media owners should not have any other substantial business interests in the economy.

It has also been the experience elsewhere in the world, that the selection of a government owned media organization is not the most economically efficient mode of delivery of public services which a purely profit-oriented company would not engage in, and for which there will always be an unfilled need.

As such, there is a clear need for competitive bidding for tax-payers'/government resources to enable "not-for-profit" services to be made available to the public.

If Professor Subramani is not up to these and other responsibilities as the Head of the Media Development Authority, he needs to resign and let someone more committed do the job instead of further tarnishing his reputation.
Currently, his total silence on media censorship conveys the message that he is yet another embittered Indo-Fijian academic emigrant who has come back to Fiji to blindly assist the Bainimarama Regime deny Fiji people their basic human right of freedom of speech, perhaps driven by tired empty mantra of racial equality.

Perhaps the Fiji public one should be grateful that he has not gone the whole hog with Regime propaganda, as did Dr. Shaista Shameem during her charade as Director of the Human Rights Commission.

The most depressing aspect of all this is that the educated Fiji public have shown no concern whatsoever over the loss of their basic human right and liberty of freedom of expression.
35. **USP Censors: what should good journalists do?**  
**(2013)**

*I was invited to be the Chief Guest of the USP Journalism Students Association to celebrate UNESCO World Press Freedom Day. The day before, I was removed from the program under instruction from USP management. It is astonishing, and a symptom of the extent of erosion of basic human rights, that the USP Council took no stance on the USP management exercising this blatant censorship of academic freedom, and neither did the USP Staff Association or the USP Students Association.*

Since 2009, the Fiji Regime's decrees, public stance and prosecutions of media owners, publishers and editors, have effectively prevented the media from being a "watch-dog" on government. Some media organizations are now largely propaganda arms for the Regime. But it is unfortunate that some critics are targeting journalists, who are minor cogs in the media machine.

The reality is that journalists are totally under the control of editors and publishers, who in turn are ultimately controlled by the media owners.

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[Author's note: I omit a large section which repeats the arguments made in the previous article on how media ownership constricts media freedom in Fiji.]

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**What of public opinion?**

In the frequent calls for the journalists to be more critical and proactive, it is completely forgotten that the media serves the public, which should also be held accountable.

If the media is good as a watchdog and is fair and objective, the major beneficiaries are the public whose interests are safeguarded, leading to an improvement in public interests all round.

If the media fails to be honest, fair and critical of government and other dominant players in the economy and society, then the result can be gross misuse of tax-payers funds, destruction of the environment, miscarriage of justice against vulnerable and weak citizens of society and a host of other social ills, such as excessive pre-occupation with social trivia such as entertainment and sports. These are indeed some of the sad results we are seeing in Fiji today.

So the sixty four thousand dollar question is: what are the public doing about their loss of human right to media freedom?

*The public are doing nothing: do they deserve what they get?*

There is little point in blaming the poor journalists.
Where to for journalists?

Journalists are in no position to insist that their stories be published as is. Editors will change them, or even reject them totally.

What journalists need to do therefore is to keep a record of all the stories they write, the dates they submit to the editors, and the story that appears or does not appear.

Some day, media censorship will end and our society will return to practicing their human right to freedom of expression.

As part of our attempt to understand this period in Fiji’s sad history, there will also be studies of the nature and frequency of media censorship during this time.

The records maintained by journalists and principled editors will be an invaluable part of the history from which our future generations can learn.

Journalism has as much a part to play in the history of our people as any other academic discipline such as history, politics or economics.

Journalism may be the most important given its centrality in informing public opinion, which is the cornerstone of any true democracy.

36. Transparency International Censors (Jan 2013)

[TransparencyOnFiji, Jan. 2013]

Earlier this year (8 January 2013) I accepted a request from Transparency International Fiji (TI Fiji) to give the Siwatibau Lecture on the good governance implications of planned changes to Fiji’s electoral system.

Mrs. Suliana Siwatibau (wife of former USP Vice Chancellor, the late Mr. Savenaca Siwatibau, in whose memory the Siwatibau Lecture is annually presented) informed TI Fiji (23 Jan. 2013) that I was an "excellent choice" to be the speaker, and suggested the theme "Promoting clean elections through a PR system in Fiji". I agreed.

Although TI Fiji made repeated requests to be given a copy of the electoral provisions in the Regime's Constitution, they were informed by the Attorney General's office that the details would be released with the Constitution itself.

On the 22 August 2013, after the Regime's Constitution (including the details on the electoral system) was released to the public. But the Program Officer for TI Fiji informed me that

"we have as an organization made a tactical shift away from the election theme... we wish to address concerns that the Siwatibau Memorial Lecture has not been well planned in recent years... I have been assigned to organize a panel of speakers, rather than one lecture .... on Corruption in Education... I will consult you, the Siwatibau family, and USP on this theme."

Given that the theme and speaker for the Siwatibau Lecture had already been approved by the Siwatibau family, the "tactical shift" by Transparency International appears to have been made after consultation over the Siwatibau Lecture with the
USP Vice Chancellor (Professor Rajesh Chandra) who sits on the Board of TI Fiji. He is also an ardent supporter of the Bainimarama Regime.

Is it a coincidence that earlier in the year, the USP Vice Chancellor also instructed the USP Journalism Programme to remove me as Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker on World Press Freedom Day?

The current changes to Fiji's electoral system are being hailed by the Bainimarama Regime as the most revolutionary and progressive in Fiji's history and would indeed be a topic worth discussing in the Siwatibau Lecture.

At the recent CPA Conference, Commodore Bainimarama called for a battle of ideas in the run-up to the September 2014 elections, while Mr. Aiyaz Khaiyum bemoaned the fact that there was a lack of intellectual discourse on the Fiji Constitution.

It is a pity that both Transparency International Fiji and The University of the South Pacific, refuse to heed the call by the Bainimarama Government for independent intellectual debate over the constitution. Instead of the ethos of free intellectual debate, transparency and accountability that should be associated with their institutional names, they practice blatant censorship.

Transparency International (parent body) may wish to note the further "coincidence" that former Chairmen of TI Fiji include Ikbal Janif (current Chairman of USP Council and member of several Fiji government statutory boards) and Winston Thompson (Fiji's Ambassador to US and Chairman of USP's University Grants Committee), both of whom are also ardent supporters of the Bainimarama Regime.

The late Mr. Savenaca Siwatibau was a strong proponent of constitutionality, law and order and good governance. In 2000, Savenaca Siwatibau firmly refused the offer from the coup plotters, to become the Interim Prime Minister of Fiji. He chose instead to become the Vice Chancellor of USP, from where he became a leading voice in Fiji and the Pacific on good governance, transparency and accountability.

[Author's note: Transparency International (Fiji) has been conspicuously silent on national issues of good governance, accountability and transparency, since 2006. Several coup supporters have been the chairmen of TI (Fiji) such as

(a) Winston Thompson who at a public meeting at USP denied that Fiji had lost as much as the public thought from the National Bank of Fiji disaster (which Bainimarama often referred to as part of the evil past). Thompson had been Chairman of the NBF when it was doing downhill.

(b) Ikbal Janif, Deputy Chairman and Chairman of USP, allowing the VC full freedom to practice academic censorship and eject critical academics.

The total capitulation of such organizations which ought to be dedicated to revealing lack of transparency and corruption in Fiji, ought to be a fertile research field for academics wanting to explain how society’s checks and balances fail.]
In recent weeks, the Fiji print media have begun to play a more responsible role in holding those in authority to account. They are printing critical letters to the Editor, some of them several months after they were originally sent (and resent recently).

Some idea of the extent of self-censorship in the past, and recent easing may be gauged by examining just this page on my personal blog site which published the letters as they were sent over the last year.

https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/z4-censored-letters-to-editor/

Some recently published letters question Ministry of Education policies, while some question the extent to which the Permanent Secretary of Finance is exercising proper responsibility over ministerial salaries.

However, some important letters are still not being published, for instance the following calling on the Electoral Commission to act immediately in the interests of free and fair elections.

Given that the promised September elections are going to be crucial to the restoration of accountable parliamentary democracy in Fiji, the media clearly has some way to go in returning to its pre-2006 robust role holding those in authority to account.
Since 2009, most of my serious opinion articles have been censored from the Fiji media. In the last few months I resorted to writing Letters to the Editor, simply to try and raise important issues with the public.

Most of these letters were also not published until Mr. Ashwin Raj was appointed as Chairman of MIDA, and I began cc’ing my Letters to the Editor to him, after which roughly a half began to be published. I was surprised therefore to receive the following email from Mr. Ashwin Raj (dated 28 March 2014)

Dear Dr. Narsey,

While I acknowledge your contribution to public discourse on matters germaine to national interest, it is imperative that I am not openly (or otherwise) copied in the quotidian nature your correspondence with the media.

Given my position as Chairman of MIDA and given my ongoing efforts in ensuring that both MIDA and the Fijian media remain independent, fair and transparent at all times, this act of openly copying me each time you request the media to publish your letters and opinion pieces can be construed as an act of coercion.

You are, of course, most welcome to approach MIDA in the event that your articles have been systematically excluded by the Fijian media. ..... from my press conference this week ... I am requiring all media outlets to disclose their in-house editorial policy.

The public or any other concerned entity has the right to know why some letters, articles and opinion pieces get published to the exclusion of others.

Ashwin

I replied to him

Chairman
MIDA
Dear Mr. Raj

You know that I have been one of the few academics who has been writing serious feature articles for the newspapers (and giving interviews to television and radio) on matters of public interest for the last thirty years, usually on economics but also on politics, constitution and governance (please see the attached list). .. Put together, they are the equivalent of several substantial books. .... (I attach a list of these articles, published by the media and lately, only on the blogs)....
Of relevance is that the numbers of articles published by Fiji Times and Fiji Sun, have been as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2009</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2014</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can see clearly, how just this one academic has been effectively censored by the media. I am also virtually banned from interviews by the television and radio stations, which interviews used to be quite common before 2010. Currently I am only interviewed by international media.

I have also resorted to Letters to the Editor, which, while not a satisfactory medium for the ideas I write about, nevertheless have the potential to make the public aware of important issues. But even those Letters to the Editor were initially not being printed.

I am personally affronted that my basic human right to communicate my views to the public, has not just been eroded but totally denied.

Since you have been appointed as Chairman of MIDA, I have been cc’ing my Letters to the Editor to you, so that you can see at first hand, which letters are printed and which are not. I have a page on my blog site which makes this clear. [https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/z4-censored-letters-to-editor/](https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/z4-censored-letters-to-editor/)

I am happy to note (and I thank you) that more have been printed since you have been appointed as Chairman. My cc’ing the letters to you is not to “coerce” you in any way, but to make you directly aware of the censorship that is going on.

I look forward to your ascertaining from the media

(a) What exactly is their general policy

(b) Why they have censored some of my Letters to the Editor and

(c) Why they do not take the kinds of articles from me they used to publish regularly prior to 2010.

I look forward to you communicating your findings to the public and to me, as a directly affected and concerned citizen and tax payer of Fiji.

Regards

Professor Wadan Narsey

[Author’s note: The Chairman of MIDA did not reply.]
39. USP’s self-censorship continues (7/5/2014)

[NarseyOnFiji, 7 May 2014]

As part of the World Press Freedom Day celebrations, the USP School of Journalism (headed by Pat Craddock) held a Panel Discussion at USP on Friday 2 May 2014, to discuss the topic “Media Freedom and the Fiji General Election”.

This certainly was progress of sorts in Fiji, in the run-up to the elections planned for September. But who would have thought that the media reports on the panel discussion would themselves illustrate very clearly how self-censorship continues in Fiji, quite contrary to the MIDA Chairman’s guarantee of protection of the media?

The chairperson of the panel was Stanley Simpson, former journalist and a former graduate of the USP Journalism program. Panelists included Ricardo Morris (publisher of the Republika), Seona Smiles (former Fiji Times senior reporter), Netani Rika (former editor of Fiji Times), Rachna Lal (senior journalist from Fiji Sun), and Ashwin Raj, Chairman of the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA). Of course, Professor Wadan Narsey was not invited to be on the panel.

Quite interesting for journalists and media outlets was the MIDA Chairman’s declaration that he would protect journalists who remained true to their journalism ethics and reported freely without fear or favor.

Mr. Ashwin Raj came across as honestly and earnestly attempting to fulfill his duties to the best of his ability, under the existing media laws.

But the self-censored reporting of Fiji’s Press Freedom Day also showed that the media editors simply do not believe the assertion by the Chairman of MIDA that he would protect them if they reported fearlessly and fairly.

Critical views censored

Despite the MIDA Chairman’s statements that he would protect the media, the newspapers and television gave very little coverage to some of the more sensitive and critical views of the panelists.

Neither did they give any coverage to the four critical questions asked by a Professor Narsey who has written extensively on media censorship in Fiji and who tried to focus the panel on the topic they had been given- the role of the media in the coming elections.

1. Following on from Mr. Ashwin Raj’s declaration that media freedom could not be discussed without a thorough understanding of nature of media ownership, Professor Narsey asked the panel how the media owners could allow their journalists to be fearless in their questioning, when the media owners were not dedicated media operators, but had much wider and more important commercial interests which could be hurt badly by discretionary policies of a hostile government. How indeed could MIDA address the problem of vulnerable media ownership, over which issue it had no legal powers?

2. Professor Narsey asked, how could one newspaper report honestly and without fear, when its editor was under a 6 month suspended jail sentence; its owner had
been given massive fines over arguably trivial offences; and who remained outside of Fiji while a bench warrant had been issued against him on another minor charge; how could one television station report fearlessly when its license was renewed only a six-monthly basis, clearly intended to be an intimidating measure?

3. Professor Narsey asked, how could the voters in the election be educated about the relative merits of competing political parties, when both daily newspapers refused to print most of the critical letters which subjected the government of the day to greater scrutiny?

4. Why did MIDA allow this media censorship to continue?

Mr. Ashwin Raj replied that he had asked the newspaper editors to explain why they published some Letters and not others, but to date, he had received no answer from any of them although several weeks had passed.

Ms. Rachna Lal (of the Fiji Sun), when pressed, also said that she did not know why some of the professor’s letters were not printed despite being relevant to the issues considered important in the elections. The professor informed that some acts of censorship were quite obvious, such as

* being banned as Chief Guest at the 2013 World Press Freedom event at USP, or

* being “dis-invited” as Chief Guest at the 2013 Fiji Food Security Day celebrations.

But how could the MIDA Chairman address the far more subtle forms of censorship, such as being silently excluded from the public policy arena since 2009 by all the media (except The Fiji Times in the last three weeks)?

These questions were not reported by the print media, not even by Fiji TV, even though it had a special Close Up program on the Panel Discussion.

The MIDA Chairman needs to ask himself why the media did not take up his challenge to be courageous in reporting fairly and freely, despite his promised protection.

**Stanley Simpson, a less than neutral chair**

One member of the audience accused the organizers of the panel discussion of only inviting Bainimarama Government sympathizers to be on the panel. That view was not correct given the quite critical views expressed by panelists Ricardo Morris, Seona Smiles and Netani Rika, although Ms. Rachna Lal expressed her newspaper’s (Fiji Sun’s) broad support for the Bainimarama Government.

However, some questions may be levelled at the chairman of the panel, Stanley Simpson and the organizer of the panel discussion, Pat Craddock.

Simpson was not the humble investigative journalist of old, but a new personality arrogantly exuding power, who made no bones about wanting to limit critical questions and comments from the floor.

Simpson made no effort to remind the MIDA Chairman to answer the uncomfortable questions put to him from the floor, although Ashwin Raj, to his credit, insisted on answering them at the end of the discussion.
Simpson also arrogantly threatened the audience that he would close down the panel discussion if there continued to be interjections from the floor, as there was from a rather passionate lady who objected to the event being dominated by long responses from one panelist, while the audience could not get a word in edge-ways.

Stanley Simpson has also become the Interim Secretary of the newly formed Fijian Media Association for journalists, until they elect their new officials.

A cautious Head of Journalism?

A more interesting unasked question was why Mr. Pat Craddock did not invite any academics to be on his panel discussion, whether from the School of Journalism itself, or from the small group of other USP academics who have written much about media freedom and censorship.

Well known to Mr. Craddock would have been a Professor of Economics who has written many criticisms of media censorship in Fiji, censored from the Fiji media, but available on international outlets such as Cafe Pacific, run by David Robie and his School of Journalism at Auckland University of Technology.

Many articles critical of media censorship have therefore had to be published on my personal blog https://narseyonfiji.wordpress.com/ and other blogs.

Mr. Craddock would have been aware that this Professor was banned last year by the USP management, from being a Chief Guest at the Journalism students’ celebration of World Press Freedom Day. Did he think that inviting this person to be on the 2014 panel discussion might raise the ire of USP management?

Perhaps Craddock was also aware that a previous Head of Journalism (Marc Edge) had fallen foul of the Bainimarama Government, so did he err on the side of caution in not inviting the same critical academic critic to be on the panel?

Whatever the mix of reasons, it leaves Mr. Pat Craddock, the new stop-gap Head of Journalism, vulnerable to criticism that he is not averse to practicing self-censorship on Fiji’s Press Freedom Day, just like the media owners and journalists.

While the Head of the USP School of Journalism can take some credit for being able to put on a well-publicized and critical panel discussion, Fiji’s Press Freedom has some way to go before it can be the fearless and fair reporter of elections issues, that the MIDA Chairman (Mr. Ashwin Raj) allegedly wants it to be.
International eyes are all on Fiji to see whether the planned September 2014 Elections will be “free and fair” in the eyes of the media, local and international. One would think that the Bainimarama Government and its belligerent Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA) would be doubly cautious to give no hint of media censorship by the regime. But no.

They and their spokespersons continue to engage in niggling and not so niggling behavior that media owners and journalists can easily construe as fear-mongering tactics.

Behind the tensions about media censorship in Fiji, there are strong links to the regional geopolitics where new powers like China and now Indonesia are challenging the influence of Australia and NZ.

Organizations like the Forum Secretariat and the newly formed Pacific Islands Development Forum, and the University of the South Pacific, are the new battle-grounds for winning influence with Pacific countries.

In this two-part analysis, I discuss recent examples of media censorship in Fiji: the first involving the recent Pacific Islands Development Forum, and the second journalism educators at the University of the South Pacific.

### PIDF refusing accreditation of journalists

A few weeks ago the Bainimarama Government organized its own Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), presented as an alternative to a Forum Secretariat allegedly over-influenced by Australia and NZ.

With Forum Secretariat meetings accused of being “closed shops” attended by governments and donors, Bainimarama proudly announced that: "For the first time, we have brought into the room those most affected by government decisions—the grassroots through their representatives in civil society and business” (The Fiji Times, 23 June 2014).

One would have then thought that such a forum would be glad to have prominent media journalists, especially those officially representing regional business and churches, to be present at the meeting to explain the PIDF proceedings to the public at large. But no.

Two well-known and experienced journalists, Samisoni Pareti (newly appointed Chief Editor of the influential Islands Business) and Netani Rika (an independent communications expert, a former Chief Editor of The Fiji Times driven out of his job, and more recently employed by the Fiji Conference of Churches) were refused “accreditation”.

Permanent Secretary for Information Sharon Smith-Johns lamely explained why: “In the case of Netani Rika, his application was lodged five days after the official deadline for accreditation.”

But what precisely was the purpose of setting official deadlines for accreditation? Were they expecting a flood of applications? Were they planning a red-carpet treatment for each and every journalist and so needed advance notice?
Or was it the case that Rika’s employer, the Fiji Conference of Churches, has been actively supporting the liberation movement for West Papua from Indonesian neocolonialism, and the Indonesian President had been invited to be the keynote speaker for the PIDF conference?

The Indonesian President naturally returned the favor by making a “small donation” of US$20 million to PIDF to add to the substantial aid given by China to the competitor of the Forum Secretariat.

In the case of Samisoni Pareti, Smith-Johns explained that “he was not registered as a journalist with the Media Industry Development Authority – as is required by law – at the time of his application”. But MIDA director Matai Akauola said that MIDA was not involved in the accreditation process of journalists for the PIDF.

But why would you need some “accreditation” process to be applied to a senior journalist from a respected regional business magazine, who would be expected to report authoritatively and responsibly on the PIDF proceedings to a region-wide audience?

Smith-Johns claimed that the Ministry of Information had told Islands Business it could send another journalist, but Pareti said no such offer was received.

Fijian Media Association president Ricardo Morris said: “Unless media workers are breaching the code of conduct and laws we work under, there is no reason why all journalists cannot be given equal and free access to events without prior restrictions or limitations.” Yes indeed.

**Police into the act**

But Fiji’s Ministry of Information did not think so, and Netani Rika was visited several times by the Police during the episode.

It is quite ominous that earlier this year the Police also warned prominent Fijian musician Seru Serevi against protesting against an Indonesian visit, after he had launched a song *(Let the Morning Star Rise)* celebrating the independence struggles of the West Papuan people. The launch was also attended by the Pacific Conference of Churches.

The Police again got into the act when an Indonesian delegation took part in a panel discussion at The University of the South Pacific, by getting USP security guards to warn students against wearing T shirts or displaying any banners protesting against the Indonesian occupation of West Papua.

For the record, Smith-Johns not too long ago pleaded with journalists at a USP media conference not to practice self-censorship.

But the University of the South Pacific itself has developed cast a pall of censorship over its own journalism academics.

**USP journalism educators under fire**

Symptomatic of the climate of fear in Fiji is that even journalism educators, already proven to be a threatened species at The University of the South Pacific (USP), are facing broadsides for alleged breaches of the university code of conduct from their employer.
Following the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) incident came the USP/Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA) uproar over statements by temporary USP journalism educators, Pat Craddock and Mathew Thompson.

The pair were recent replacements for two other journalism lecturers, one (Marc Edge) forced to resign after pressure from the Bainimarama Government, and another (Ian Weber) also leaving under unusual circumstances unrelated to national politics.

Craddock and Thompson had raised concerns about the refusal of the Ministry of Information to accredit Samisoni Pareti and Netani Rika at the PIDF meeting.

Following the ABC interview given by Brig. Gen. Mosese Tikoitoga, the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), Mathew Thompson also raised his personal concern that Fiji’s military and police went on peace-keeping missions globally when it was acknowledged by their commander that members had used violence against fellow citizens in Fiji.

Tikoitoga gave the usual justifications, which some members of the public were sympathetic to, and some not.

### USP management attacks Journalism Academics

But USP sent Craddock and Thompson an astonishing letter which alleged that their media statements were putting at risk the work permits of new staff and threatening the collective academic freedom of all staff. The USP letter implied that these two may have behaved in a manner “prejudicial to the peace, good order, good government or morale” in Fiji by publicly criticizing the unfair treatment of journalists by the Bainimarama Government, and criticizing the military for justifying torture of dissenters. They were told that their statements had damaged the University by association.

They were reminded that they “did not live in a normal democratic situation” and that “it would be in their interest to refrain from future statements”. It was not clarified whether the threat to “their interest” would come from the Bainimarama Government or from USP management.

Craddock and Thompson were informed that they must apologize to the University, must not reveal any of their discussions with USP management, and refrain from making any adverse comments about USP, very strangely, even after their contract ended.

Furthermore, any further public statements by them must beforehand be circulated to the Director of Marketing, so that the University “was made aware of their interactions with the public”.

While the letter stated that there was a complaint from outside USP, Heather Stadel of USP Human Resources said that that the complaint came from inside the University, but refused to name the complainant.

Somewhere along the way, MIDA Chairman Ashwin Raj (whose substantive work is as a USP staff member) became involved in the fracas, accusing the “reckless academics” of trying to “instill fear in the citizens of Fiji”, demanding that they should have contacted the Ministry of Information and MIDA before making their “gnomic pronouncements about freedom”.

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MIDA attacks foreign journalists and journalism educators

In a communication to the blog *Fijileaks*, Ashwin Raj also took a tilt at foreign media and journalists.

One well-known media educator (David Robie) was told that his “lucubration are mired in generalization. What substantive evidence does he have that we are tightening the noose or gagging media freedom”.

Raj demanded of ABC journalist Campbell Cooney “why should we treat foreign journalists as sacred?” and opined that “ABC reports remain anachronistic and ethnicist”. Raj has also jousted with other Pacific journalists such as Sean Dorney.

What is surprising to many is that Chairman Ashwin Raj demanded that Craddock and Thompson should have consulted MIDA before issuing any statements, on par with USP management’s demand that Craddock and Thompson should send their public statements to the USP Marketing Office before releasing them to the public.

The Orwellian ‘Big Brother’ is alive and well in Fiji and even in universities like USP.

Despite the pressure from USP management, Craddock and Thompson believe that their statements were made as their personal views and in the public interest, in keeping with the principle of academic freedom that USP should be fostering, not constraining.

University management did not agree. They also did all they could recently to prevent any protests against visiting Indonesian dignitaries for the oppression of Papuan human rights by Indonesia.

The RFMF Commander (Tikoitoga) also got into the act by making a personal phone call to Pat Craddock.

These events are all overt, happening very much in the public eye, with bloggers anonymously going to town.

But other subtle pressures on media censorship are not being publicly debated.

Continued threat to media

The Bainimarama Government announced a few weeks ago, with no public comments whatsoever, that the commercial license of Fiji TV was being renewed, but only for another six months, i.e. until after the September elections.

Fijian Holdings Limited, the owners of Fiji TV, made no comment on this limited license renewal, but at the same time announced a nice dividend for shareholders.

MIDA whose CEO Mr. Ashwin Raj has been in the news recently declaring again how MIDA was focused on the development of a free and robust media, made no comment on this move, which clearly limits Fiji TV’s critical developmental role.

Any responsible stakeholder interested in fostering a free media, whether the owner of Fiji TV, or MIDA, or the many journalists’ associations, should have been up in arms.

No one expects Fiji Sun or FBC TV (the competitor of Fiji TV), both ardent supporters of the Bainimarama Government, to give any fraternal media support to Fiji TV.

All businesses, including media, need to make long term plans for investment and enterprise development, so as to wisely use their capital and available human
resources. No management can plan properly if the enterprise is given only six monthly renewals.

The staff of Fiji TV are only too aware that one of their senior staff members (Anish Chand) was summarily dismissed recently, because of pressure from the Bainimarama Government.

The senior and junior employees of Fiji TV now know neither senior management nor shareholders will defend their employment, if their professional approach to their media work were to fall foul of the Bainimarama Government. They are all self-censoring.

It is no coincidence that Fiji TV no longer has the biting critical programs and reporting that it used to have (such as Close Up) before the Bainimarama Government flexed its muscles.

The silent censorship

With affected media persons all intimidated into silence, personal experience provides the evidence of necessity. Contrary to the experience of two decades, this economist has not been invited by Fiji TV for three years to comment on economic issues or programs that might remotely antagonize the Bainimarama Government.

When queried about this a few months ago, two senior Fiji TV managers (who both had to depart recently) informed me that I was persona non grata because Fiji TV had to “look after their employees’ jobs”, a sentiment I can easily understand.

What is also totally out of sight is that the journalists of Fiji Broadcasting Corporation, both radio and television, have never once contacted me on economic policy stories, as was the norm before the appointment to CEO of Riyaz Khaiyum, brother of the current Attorney General in the Bainimarama Government.

The one glimmer of hope is that The Fiji Times has requested and printed articles from me on elections issues in these last two months, subject to approval by their lawyers. The Fiji Times has also gone to town publishing hundreds of Letters to the Editor every week, while their competitor pro-Bainimarama daily publishes a few every day.

But, when all is said and done, the well-publicized media controversy generated over Samisoni Pareti, Netani Rika, Pat Craddock and Mathew Thompson merely gives Fiji journalists and journalism students a not so subtle reminder that there are strict limits to critical journalism in Fiji.

Neither will the Bainimarama Government, the Fiji Police, or the regional University of the South Pacific tolerate any critical media attention on their strengthening relationships with new donor Indonesia, despite West Papua having a prior claim to brotherhood with the MSG which includes Fiji.

The undermining of Australian and NZ influence seems to be a necessary corollary for the emergence of the new powers in the South Pacific.

The paradox is that Australia and NZ have not just maintained their aid to the Pacific but strengthened it in many ways, as genuine long term partners.
Mr. Ashwin Raj
Chairman MIDA

Dear Mr. Raj

I totally agree with, and support your constant reminder to the public, that MIDA should not be, and is not just concerned about media freedom and/or media censorship, but also the overall good development of the industry, as is clearly indicated by the name, Media Industry Development Authority. I would be grateful therefore if you would answer the following media development questions, which have been raised directly and indirectly in the public arena over the last year or so, some with you as well.

1. Earlier in the year, you gave a commitment at the World Press Freedom Day panel that you had written to the editors of the newspapers, seeking clarification of their policies on what letters to publish and not.

(a) Could you please tell the public what has been their response and whether MIDA is comfortable with their position.

(b) Could you also please ask all the television and radio stations what their policy is on interviewing experts on public policy issues in various fields (for example, the humble field of economics which all political parties, candidates and voters are focused on currently)?

2. As a “level playing field” is an essential part of the development of a free, fair, competitive and transparent media industry, could you please inform the public what is your position on:

(a) tax-payers advertisement funds being channeled by the Bainimarama Government only to Fiji Sun with The Fiji Times, the oldest Fijian newspaper, being totally denied

(b) outright subsidies given to FBC via government budget and government guarantees of loans from FDB, with no such subsidies given to either Fiji TV or the other radio broadcasters, Communications Fiji Ltd.

(c) the clearly intimidating renewal of the license for Fiji TV on a six monthly basis, while FBC TV suffers from no such restriction

(d) While Fiji TV’s accounts are available to the shareholders, FBC accounts are not available at all to the taxpayers who supposedly own FBC.

(e) Mai TV’s “scoop” at obtaining rights to the broadcast of FIFA World Cup (a legitimate entrepreneurial transaction admired in the business world) being forcibly shared by decree amongst the other broadcasters, on financial terms
dictated by the Bainimarama Government rather than negotiated amongst themselves as a market transaction.

3. Given that you (and the PS Ministry of Information Sharon Smith Johns) have often publicly admonished journalists to be “robust” and “boldly investigative” in their work, did you query Fiji TV and the owners Fijian Holdings Limited why respected senior journalist and administrator Mr. Anish Chand was sacked from Fiji TV on this year’s World Press Freedom day, because of complaints from the Bainimarama Government (as was related to you during the World Press Freedom Day panel at USP).

4. Can you inform the public what your reaction is to this obvious “intimidation” (to use a euphemism) of a senior experienced award winning journalist, which clearly encourages other journalists to “self-censor” in the interests of their jobs and family welfare? You might wish to know that well before you became Chairman of MIDA, Anish Chand had also been demoted in 2010 for having friends in the National Federation Party, while another colleague of his at Fiji TV, Merana Kitione, was also removed from her area of expertise and work, for similar reasons.

Yours sincerely
Professor Wadan Narsey

[Author’s note: Mr. Ashwin Raj did not reply].

42. MIDA refuses to reply (6/7/2014) (Cens)

[Letter to Editor, 6 July 2014. Censored]

Dear Mr. Ashwin Raj

I wrote a letter to the editors on the 4 July (and circulated to you also), requesting the Bainimarama Government to tell us what the ministers’ salaries were from 2010 to 2013, and to explain why they are not releasing the Auditor General’s Reports from 207 to 2013. Neither of the newspapers printed that letter, although they have printed other letters praising the Bainimarama Government Ministers for being paid such reasonable salaries for 2014.

Since then, on an FBC program (4 The Record) the program host asked Mr. Khaiyum the same questions that Labor Leader Mr. Chaudhry has, but Mr. Khaiyum beat about the bush and refused to answer.

You will agree that these are important questions that the Bainimarama Government should answer in the public interest, and it is important that the newspapers print my 4 July Letter to the Editor. Could you request the two newspapers to explain why they are not printing my 4 July Letter to the Editor, and what is their general policy on this matter, which you have previously also asked them.

Professor Wadan Narsey
43. MIDA Chairman demands transparency (16/7/2014)
[NarseyOnFiji, 16 July 2014]

Possibly in response to my complaint to him (not published by the media) and other complaints, the Chairman of MIDA (Ashwin Raj) notified me that he did demand a response on mainstream media’s editorial policy (while giving a back-hander to some complainants). Mr. Ashwin Raj apparently wrote to Mr. Matai Akauola (CEO, MIDA) (19/7/2014):

Dear Matai,

You will attest to the fact that on several occasions, I have requested the mainstream media to disclose their in-house editorial policy.

In the interest of transparency, the public should know exactly the rationale behind the publishing of select articles, opinion pieces, letters to the editor to the exclusion of others.

There are some who have received unfettered access and prominence in select media outlets and still lamenting that their contributions are being heavily censored while there are those who are complaining that they have no access to mainstream media at all.

I had also suggested the idea of setting up a media monitoring unit which the mainstream media unequivocally rejected even though such an initiative has been undertaken in many advanced liberal democracies that are strong on freedom of expression.

So the onus is really on the media to substantiate their claim that they have in place an in house editorial policy that ensures that the media is balanced, that they are committed to ensuring access and equity and are transparent at all times.

This is an important issue about access and equity and must not be misconstrued as MIDA muzzling media freedom. How does the mainstream media ensure that there is balance? To date, I have received nothing from the media houses.

I am now requiring the media to disclose this.

Appreciate it if you can circulate this e-mail to the media.

Can we convene an editors roundtable soon please?

Regards,

Ashwin.

Author’s note: No response from the media was made public by MIDA.
Chairman (MIDA)

Dear Mr. Raj

I sent a Letter to you on the 3 July 2014, requesting your response to a number of matters concerning the development of the media industry but you responded to only one query - that you had requested the media to give you their general editorial policy. You have refused to respond to the other queries directed to you as Chairman of the Media Development Industry (MIDA).

Nor have you asked the media why they did not print my previous letter on the salaries for Bainimarama and Khaiyum for the years 2010 to 2013.

This question has been publicly raised by not just taxpayers and voters, but no less than Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry a former elected Prime Minister of Fiji, and also Bainimarama’s own former Minister of Finance who one would expect to have a clue or two, on this particular issue.

While we wait for the media to respond to what you had asked them, I wish to ask you again to respond publicly to the following questions which all media are still interested in despite your previous refusal to respond.

As a “level playing field” is an essential part of the development of a free, fair, competitive and transparent media industry, could you please inform the public what is your position on the continuing biases in the media industry itself:

(1) tax-payers advertisement funds being channeled by the Bainimarama Government only to Fiji Sun with The Fiji Times being totally denied.

(2) outright subsidies given to FBC via government budget and government guarantees of loans from FDB, with no such subsidies given to either Fiji TV or the other radio broadcasters, Communications Fiji Ltd.

(3) the clearly intimidating renewal of the license for Fiji TV on a six monthly basis, while FBC TV suffers from no such restriction

(4) While Fiji TV’s accounts are available to the shareholders, FBC accounts are not available at all to the taxpayers who supposedly own FBC.

(4) Mai TV’s “scoop” at obtaining rights to the broadcasters of FIFA World Cup (a legitimate entrepreneurial transaction admired in the business world) being forcibly shared by decree amongst the other broadcast, on financial terms dictated by the Bainimarama Government rather than negotiated amongst themselves as a market transaction.

(5) have you not queried Fiji TV and the owners Fijian Holdings Limited why respected senior journalist and administrator Mr. Anish Chand was sacked from
Fiji TV on this year’s World Press Freedom day (as was related to you during the World Press Freedom Day panel at USP).

Given that you have personally made many public pronouncements that you want MIDA to be accountable to the Fiji public, I would be grateful if

(a) you would request the media to print this Letter to the Editor,

(b) so that the public and the media can also note that these questions have been posed to you, and can wait eagerly for your usual interesting response.

Yours sincerely

Professor Wadan Narsey

[Author’s note: Mr. Raj did not respond, nor was the letter printed by the media].
Dear Mr. Raj,

With just a month to go to the elections, it is important that both the media journalists who are interviewing political candidates, and MIDA which is supposed to be regulating the media, are not just neutral, but seen to be neutral, so that political parties and candidates feel some confidence that at least on these media debates beamed to the voters, they are on a level playing field.

With our recent history of media censorship, that faith in the neutrality of the media has not been strong, and it has unfortunately been shaken further by the last minute announcement of two candidates for Fiji First Party.

One of them, Veena Bhatnagar, whose attitude when interviewing the Leader of the National Federation Party (Professor Biman Prasad) and Aiyaz Khaiyum on FBC’s Aina program, indicated that she adored the Fiji First Party, confirmed it a mere week later by appearing as a candidate for Fiji First Party.

The CEO of the supposedly neutral MIDA (Matai Akauola) also has been announced as a candidate for the Fiji First Party.

As the parties and candidates and perhaps some members of the public will be interested in the answers, may I request through your column, the neutral Chairman of MIDA to ask his former CEO (Matai Akauola) when exactly he began discussions with the FFP to stand as their candidate.

Can Mr. Ashwin Raj also ask the FBC CEO (Riyaz Khaiyum) when he was informed by his journalist Veena Bhatnagar that she was having discussions with Fiji First Party to stand as a candidate for them.

You will understand that the answers have a bearing on the ethics and professionalism of these two political candidates, also possibly of interest to some voters.

Mr. Ashwin Raj might also like to clarify why he has not replied to my well-publicized open letters to him (sent 27 July, 2014).

Professor Wadan Narsey

[Author’s note: Mr. Ashwin Raj did not reply].
There continues a pretense of national debates between Fiji First Party representatives and other party representatives, in which allegedly independent journalists from Fiji Sun, FBC and Fiji TV energetically grill opposition political party leaders and candidates, while sympathetically allowing Fiji First leaders all the leeway they want.

The latest was a one-sided grilling of Mahendra Chaudhry by Shammi Lochan, the latest compere for the Aina program, successor to Veena Bhatnagar who had previously grilled Professor Biman Prasad in a totally one-sided affair (she will go far in politics).

Two allegedly neutral media personalities, Matai Akaoula and Veena Bhatnagar revealed their true colors by standing as candidates for Fiji First Party.

Journalists seem not to be aware that Mr. Aiyaz Khaiyum (Attorney General and also Minister for Elections has publicly instructed them, nay exhorted them, “to go beyond the “he says this and he says that” type of superficial journalism, and ask more penetrating analytic questions.”

It seems that our journalists suffer strange memory losses and get stuck for questions on their programs, with none willing to emulate the tenaciousness of a certain Riyaz Sayed Khaiyum who did a hilarious but penetrating interview with Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, while both were trotting along the sea wall opposite the Pony Club in Laucala Bay.

Let me suggest some analytical questions that Peceli Rokotuvuna, Edwin Nand, Jo Tuwere, Nemani Delaibatiki, Jyoti Pratibha, Shammi Lochan, Mika Loga, Stanley Simpson can print and have before them, when Rear Admiral (retired) Bainimarama appears on their programs, to answer on his record since 2000, and particularly from 2006 as an un-elected self-imposed Prime Minister).

I also suggest that parties can print these questions, circulate it to their supporters who can ring in to ask questions of Fiji First Party and Commodore Bainimarama:

[“he says this and that” statements are in normal font, and the analytic questions that Khaiyum claims he would like to see but can be put to Bainimarama, are in italics]

1. There has been a lot of digging up of the dirt on Chaudhry’s past.

   Is it true that you were told by your intelligence about planning of the 2000 coup six months before, and also the exact date of the coup a week before, but you did nothing?

2. You say you did the 2006 coup on the grounds that there had been widespread corruption and electoral fraud under Qarase.

   a. Since you have not found any evidence after eight years in government, were you being less than truthful?

   b. Has there been any corruption in your government these last eight years and is that why you are not releasing any of the Auditor General’s Reports since 2006?
3. You said (in a Decree) that your own appointed Constituent Assembly would discuss and approve the Ghai Draft Constitution which followed all your decree requirements including immunity, yet you rejected the Yash Ghai Draft.

   a. What parts of your decrees did the Commission not follow?

   b. Since you could have asked for changes to the draft, did you not trust the People’s Constituent Assembly?

4. Your current Chief Justice, Anthony Gates had clearly ruled in 2001 that no person had the powers to abrogate a constitution

   a. Who gave you or Iloilo the power to abrogate the 2009 Constitution?

   b. So who gave you the powers to impose the 2013 Constitution?

   c. Why did you not set up a Constituent Assembly for your own 2013 Constitution?

5. You say you believe in the separation of the judiciary from the Executive and the independence of the judiciary.

   a. Why then did you throw out of court, the FNPF pensioners’ case which was challenging your unilateral reduction of pensions from 15% to 9%?

   b. Don’t you believe in the separation of the judiciary from the Executive?

   c. Do you not trust the judiciary you yourself appointed, to be independent and fair?

6. You say that your government is transparent and accountable.

   a. Why then have you adamantly refused to release the Auditor General Reports since 2007?

   b. Are you hiding serious corruption of your own?

7. You say your government is transparent and accountable.

   a. Why then have you refused to reveal what salaries you were paid from 2010 to 2013, and why through a private accounting company?

   b. Is it because your salaries then were much higher than what you have reported for the elections?

8. You say that you are fully accountable to the tax-payers.

   a. Why then do you refuse to make public all the reports on the FNPF and large contracts involving tax-payers’ funds?

   b. Why do you and your PS Finance refuse to answer public queries as to who is auditing the one billion dollar expenditure of the Fiji Roads Authority
c. What are the salaries of the top executives of the FRA

d. What are the profits being made by the companies contracting to the FRA?

9. You say that you are financially responsible.

a. Why then have you significantly escalated the Public Debt without the approval of an elected parliament?

b. Why do you present misleading statistics on Net Deficit as Perc. Of GDP which excludes the revenues from asset sales?

c. Can you tell us why Debt per Household has increased by more than 30% under your government?

10. You say often that you are here to help the poor.

a. Why then have you significantly worsened social justice and income distribution by reducing corporate tax and income tax at the higher levels by 33% (thereby giving more than $100 million extra to the rich)

b. while increasing VAT (which is now the most important source of government revenue and which hurts the poor and the middle classes more)

11. You say that MIDA will independently protect the media.

a. But why do you still practice media censorship

b. Why do you extend the license for Fiji TV only on a six-monthly basis and

c. Why is the MIDA Chairman not responding to public questions about the refusal of newspapers to print critical letters?

12. You say that you will always protect the indigenous people, their land and qoliqoli rights, and their culture.

a. Why do you then undermine the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?

b. Who gave you the authority to abolish the Great Council of Chiefs which has always been part of Fiji’s Constitutions?

13. You often give speeches that say you believe in green sustainable growth.

a. Why is it then that large areas of mangroves have been cut all over Fiji and reclaimed, breaking all our environment laws and commitments?

b. Who exactly gave the approvals and why is no civil servant giving any answers?
14. You say that everyone is equal under your government.
   
   a. Why do you then practice gross nepotism for your close family members
   
   b. Why do you force civil servants to retire at age 55 but you and your brother stay on,
   
   c. Why do you have differential treatment for convicted criminals
   
   d. Why are you sending targeted persons to jail for misdemeanors while demanding and amnesty for yourself from 2000 to 2014 elections?

15. You say that the people of Fiji will know the value of your government by your deeds around the country.

   Why then do you spend more than a million dollars a year on a foreign company Qorvis, when you have a Ministry of Information there to do your communication work?

16. You accused the Qarase Government of using the Agricultural Scam to buy votes just before the 2001 and 2006 elections.

   Why are you yourself still using tax-payers funds in handouts just weeks before the elections to woo voters?

17. You have said that the elections will be free and fair.

   Why then have you used ad hoc decrees at the last minute, to disqualify opposition party candidates from standing (merely because they have tried to educate themselves overseas), but you do not apply the same restrictions to your civil servants?

18. You proudly boast that your military government is the “first ever to do this and the first ever to do that” BUT

   a. is it not true that the military did a coup in 1987 and stopped the NFP/Fiji Labor Party government of Dr. Bavadra, Jai Ram Ram Reddy and Mahendra Chaudhry after just one month in government?

   b. is it not true that military soldiers did a coup in 2000 and stopped the FLP government of Mahendra Chaudhry from completing their term after just one year in government?

   c. is it not true that in 2006, you and the military did a coup and stopped the SDL/FLP government of Qarase of completing their term after just 1 year?

   d. is it not true that you have now had eight years in government, and in the first five years GDP was totally stagnant, employment went down, real incomes reduced by 30%, poverty increased by 50% and the sugar output collapsed by 50%?

   e. is it not true that the good economic growth of the last three years is due almost entirely to the extraordinary increase of one billion dollars of capital expenditure being spent on roads etc. in
just 2 years (2013 and 2014), and some private investment encouraged by the elections about to be held and a return to an accountable parliamentary government?

19. You say that you don’t want the “old politicians” to take the country backwards to the coup culture.

*Why then do you have in your government, “bad old politicians” like Inoke Kubuabola and Filipe Bole who supported the 1987 and 2000 coups, as well as your 2006 and 2009 coups?*
PART 3: THE AFTERMATH of the 2014 ELECTIONS
47. The Results of the Fiji 2014 Elections (23/9/2014)

(The Fiji Times, 23 September 2014)

By the morning of Monday 22 September 2014, the Elections Office put out the final counts of the September 17 Fiji Elections (as well as the detailed results from each of the polling stations).

Column (1) of Table 1, gives the aggregated party and Independents' votes, totaling 496,364 votes, representing an 84% turnout of the registered 590 thousand voters.

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This is not a particularly high percentage, given the massive (probably record) amount of funds and publicity devoted to this elections.

Column (2) gives the percentages of the votes cast received by the Parties and Independents.

Those in grey did not make the threshold and are all eliminated, and their votes discarded. Four small parties and the two Independents did not make the 5% threshold cut.

Column (3) then gives only the votes of the qualifying parties with above the 5% threshold votes.

Column (4) then calculates, the percentage of seats they are entitled to, according to the share of the votes for qualifying parties (now only a total of 460,637).

These percentages in (4) are all higher than the percentages in column (2) because the votes of the smaller parties and Independents have been eliminated.

Column (5) then estimates the number of seats which the parties will be entitled to, based on the provisional votes, as follows (similar to results by the D'Hondt method):

- Fiji First Party: 32
- SODELPA: 15
- National Federation Party: 3.
There is little doubt that Fiji First Party will be able to form government without coalition with any of the other parties, given that they have well over 25 seats in the 50 seats parliament.

Who will be elected?

The detailed candidate lists put out by the Elections Office with candidates all ranked by the numbers of votes they have received, therefore tell you who have been elected to Parliament. Select the first 32 from Fiji First Party, the first 15 from SODELPA, and the first 3 from National Federation Party.

Some immediate lessons:

a) Had the small parties and Independents amalgamated they would have won 4 seats, which would have been denied to the other parties.

b) Even if FLP and PDP had amalgamated, they would have been entitled to 3 seats, the same as NFP

c) Had Roshika Deo (1055 votes) stood for Fiji First Party and retained her votes (no guarantee of that), she would have been elected.

d) The mantra of 1 person = 1 vote = 1 value does not have any meaning for 35,727 persons who voted for the disqualified small parties and Independents, as their votes became worth nothing. The 4 seats that should have gone to them were by decree, reallocated to the larger parties.

e) While the system gives the appearance of selecting candidates, in reality, the votes to Party Leaders end up pulling into parliament, their party candidates who have far fewer votes than candidates who lost because they belonged to small parties. It pays to belong to large parties, and especially to those with popular leaders and populist election strategies.

f) Rough estimates from these final voting figures suggest that Fiji First Party obtained some 80% of all Indo-Fijian votes and 41% of indigenous Fijian votes. SODELPA obtained roughly 50% of all indigenous Fijian votes.

g) Note that with an average of 9927 votes cast per parliamentarian, only 2 from FFP, and 1 from SODELPA got higher votes.

h) For the remaining 30 successful candidates in FFP, Bainimarama obtained the necessary votes to get them elected. The others did not, and most received a pittance.

i) And emphasizing the team effort for SODELPA and NFP, it was also the votes of all the unsuccessful candidates which accumulated to win the next 14 for SODELPA and all 3 for NFP.
The Voting Behavior in the Fiji 2014 Elections
(The Fiji Times, 21 Sep. 2014)

After eight years of running an unelected military government, and seemingly against the odds, Voreqe Bainimarama (Leader of the Fiji First Party) has now become an elected Prime Minister, and by a large margin.

Based on 73% of the provisional votes counted, FFP has won some 33 seats out of a 50 seat parliament, with SODELPA only receiving 14 seats, and National Federation Party (NFP) with only 3 seats.

Four small parties, including the once powerful Fiji Labor Party (FLP) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), and 2 Independents did not make the 5% threshold, and hence they and their votes were all discarded.

While the usual cliché is “the people have spoken” the real question is, why did they speak thus?

The result is astonishing to the opposition voices who have been highlighting the many negative aspects in the eight year record of the Bainimarama Government: it started with an illegal coup, it issued numerous decrees reducing the basic human rights of people in freedom of speech, muzzled the freedom of media, freedom of assembly, the right to go to court for perceived grievances, abolished Fijian institutions recognized by the 1997 Constitution, refused to release the Auditor General Reports, unilaterally reduced pensions, broke many environmental laws, stifled wage increases by the Wages Councils, etc.

Perhaps these factors had very little impact on the outcome of the elections because of the abject failure of the educated leaders of both Fijians and Indo-Fijians to enlighten the less educated voters. But I suggest that it not useful to blame “liumuri” (betrayal) factor for both indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, as some in the Opposition parties may be inclined to do.

I suggest that “bread and butter” issues had a most powerful impact on the poorer voters (who comprise the majority of all voters of all ethnic groups) while emotional and physical security were also additionally important to Indo-Fijian voters, afraid of Fijian ethno-nationalism and SODELPA’s campaign strategy.

The rich of course were in total support of FFP in many concrete ways, not the least through their influence on the media, the propaganda and the financing of the FFP election campaigns (another article).

The ethnic components of FFP support

I roughly estimate that Fiji First Party received about 80% of Indo-Fijian votes, about what FLP had in 2006.

Undoubtedly, a powerful factor was the Bainimarama Government’s repetition of the mantra, that under them, “all races are equal in Fiji”. This otherwise nebulous claim was given substance by the freeing up of scholarships and loans for education, which Indo-Fijians value most highly, and in which Indo-Fijians have been the largest beneficiaries.

Then there was the “fear factor”: most Indo-Fijians were afraid that a SODELPA government would unleash the same forces that had led to the 1987 and 2000 coups against Indo-Fijians. These Indo-Fijians felt that Bainimarama and Fiji First Party,
with clear control and support of the military, whatever their roles in 1987 and 2000, were today the only ones capable of protecting Indo-Fijians, not the alternative parties NFP, FLP or PDP.

But Bainimarama could not have won by this majority had it not been of the support of a large proportion of indigenous Fijian voters. I estimate, by working backwards from the mostly indigenous Fijian votes received by SODELPA and that going to the small parties, that around 41% of indigenous Fijian voters also voted for FFP (almost as many as the 50% who voted for SODELPA).

“Freebies” were probably the most powerful factor for them, and may have led to the alleged “liumuri” of SODELPA who expected to win far more than 25 seats based on what indigenous Fijians had told them before the election.

“Freebies” or “vote buying”?

It can be difficult to know when a “freebie” is “vote buying” and not just a good policy by any good government, although the timing of the freebie can be a good indicator. But for the majority of ordinary Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians, a massive factor in their vote for Bainimarama was undoubtedly the benefits of free education already delivered, and the promise of many further benefits to come.

Released in the FFP Manifesto a mere ten days before the main polling on 17 September, Bainimarama promised voters from low income families free electricity, water, medicines, and milk for Class 1 children throughout Fiji, as well as “first home” grants.

There was $10 million dollars promised to indigenous Fijians to help develop their lands.

There have also been roads, water, and sewerage developments in many rural areas that indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians have also been grateful for (whatever the costs in Public Debt).

Some think that the equalization of lease money between commoners and chiefs has been important for Fijian land-owners (but I doubt it).

In summary, the ordinary “bread and butter” issues were far more important to voters of all ethnicity, and emotional and physical security to Indo-Fijian voters, than issues of “law and constitutionality” and “basic human rights” which had been eroded for eight years, but “out of sight”.

This was also the case in the 1999 elections when Indo-Fijians voted for the FLP rather than the NFP which delivered to them the theoretical benefits of the 1997 Constitution and the “multi-party government provision”, and which the FLP campaigned against: “this piece of paper will not fill people’s stomachs”.

Perhaps Fiji’s choice is also not too different from the choice being currently made in Scotland between the importance of “bread and butter” issues as opposed to the dignity of independent nationhood after centuries of colonization by England.

A step forward, with headaches to come

The people have spoken, provided there is no significant evidence of vote rigging (which some parties are alleging), and whatever one may say about the manipulative impact of the electoral system, the electioneering strategies, and the powerful impact of the media propaganda and campaigns (which deserve another article).
There is now an elected Government, which may be made more accountable through an elected Parliament, where questions may be raised by the Opposition members and answers demanded of the government.

The Opposition can now call for all the Auditor General’s Reports since 2006, to be tabled in Parliament, so that the public can see how the tax-payers’ funds have been utilized (and how some Ministers’ salaries and how much have been paid since 2006).

The Opposition can also call for further debates and judicial reviews of Fiji’s constitution, including the reconciliation of the current imposed own with the 1997 Constitution which was ruled by the Fiji Court of Appeal to be still extant.

It is going to be a major struggle for the Opposition to call for a fresh look at a range of decrees which have restricted the basic human rights of Fiji people, listed at the beginning of this article.

The proceedings of parliament may also enable the media and journalists to highlight issues and be a better “watch-dog” on government and society at large.

One light at the end of the tunnel is that with all international sanctions removed and external relations with Australia, NZ, EU and US normalized, there should also be a resurgence of investor confidence, and renewed economic growth.

Healthy rates of growth of over 6% per year could make management of Fiji’s significantly increased Public Debt a little bit easier, create new jobs, and perhaps help improve standards of living which have taken a battering since 2006.

While the naïve may proclaim that this is “the dawn of a new era”, the responsible civil society organizations and social leaders know that this is just the beginning of a long and painful struggle to re-establish a just society which our people deserve.

[Author’s note: Whether “the people have spoken” is addressed in other articles below.]
[Author’s note: Horrified by the pronouncement of the Fiji Electoral Commission that the 2014 Elections were “free and fair” this article is for the record, explaining why the 2014 Elections were not “free and fair” but horrendously biased, managed, and yes, “rigged”. It explains what the Opposition parties and Independence candidates were up against, gives credit and moral support to those brave candidates who fought the elections on principles of good governance, truth and justice, while embracing the genuine equality of all citizens, with full respect for all religions, cultures, and institutions. This battle may be lost for now on one important front, but the war will go on, as it always does.]

There can be little doubt that Bainimarama, Khaiyum and a cabal of secret advisers on decrees, electoral systems, budgets, elections manifesto, and spin doctors, have waged a brilliant and highly successful campaign, for at least three years, prior to winning this 2014 Elections.

The Chairman of the subservient Electoral Commission (Chen Bunn Young), as expected, pronounced the September 2014 Elections as “free and fair”.

But the knowledgeable Multinational Observer Group (MOG), here to largely observe the “casting and counting of votes”, stated only that the election results “broadly represented the will of the people” (barring any proof of substantial irregularities alleged by some political parties).

The good governance organizations know too well that elections are far more than just the “casting and counting” of votes, especially in a Fiji where draconian military decrees and total media control have restricted and shaped public opinion over the last eight years.

Books will now be written about this second Fiji case study (the first being Rabuka) on how a military commander, treasonously deposed a lawfully elected government, and managed to become legitimized as an elected Prime Minister, solemnly swearing oaths of allegiance he had not kept before in 2000, 2006 and 2009.

There are two extreme interpretations of this metamorphosis, with the truth perhaps somewhere in between. At one extreme is Graham Davis’ euphoric and populist interpretation of the Bainimarama journey as a glorious revolution and an unparalleled triumph of leadership creating a modern Fiji of equal citizenry (22 September 2014 post on his blog, Grubsheet). At the other extreme is the dark underbelly of the Bainimarama “revolution” that civil society organizations and opposition parties have struggled against for the last eight years.

With society failing to draw any kind of a line at a long series of seemingly small restrictions on their basic freedoms, Bainimarama’s step by step systemic imposition of military decrees and media policies, unfettered and unopposed, eventually

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12 Graham Davis previously declared his interest that he is employed by US lobbying company Qorvis which has been hired by the Bainimarama Government at great tax-payer expense, precisely to improve the public image that Davis admiringly highlights, and is no doubt also part of his KPI.
accumulated into the all-powerful propaganda machine that handed him a landslide electoral victory, easily hailed as “the people have spoken”.

These astute steps include Bainimarama’s rejection a full two years ago, of the Draft Constitution formulated by Bainimarama’s own Yash Ghai Commission, the unilateral imposition of their own constitution giving themselves immunity, their total control and censorship of the media, their control of the Electoral Commission, the Supervisor of Elections, MIDA, their restrictions on NGOs for voter education and elections monitoring, their last minute vote-buying manifesto release, the shady role of the business houses, all accompanied by the thunderous silence of the good people of Fiji.

Without all these systemic biases, the Fiji First Party margin of victory might be significantly reduced, or even become negative.

Why reject the Ghai Draft?

Bainimarama’s election strategy finally clarified some important reasons for his rejection of the Ghai Draft Constitution despite it granting full immunity to all the coup collaborators. First, the Ghai Draft electoral system had four constituencies (the divisions), apparently a trivial difference, but it would have limited Bainimarama to appear on the ballot paper for only one constituency and hence strictly limited his personal vote appeal. All other FFP candidates on the other three constituencies would have had to struggle for votes against other competitors, instead of riding on Bainimarama’s coat-tails.

Second, the Bainimarama Government would have had to resign six month before the election. This would have prevented Bainimarama and his Ministers from using tax-payers funds and donor funded projects, right up to polling day, in blatant and very successful vote buying.

Third, Bainimarama would not have had the complete control over the media through their restrictive media decrees (including MIDA) to obtain maximum political mileage for themselves, while criticizing and ruthlessly suppressing opposition parties.

Fourth, to obtain immunity, Bainimarama and his coup collaborators would have had to express remorse for specific actions for which they wanted immunity, with clearly negative consequence for their image with voters.

Last, under the Ghai Draft, and perhaps less important, the Bainimarama Government would not have had the total control over the Electoral Commission, the Elections Office, and MIDA, as they did.

The Electoral System

Bainimarama’s electoral system and constitution were not discussed or approved by the other political parties, and the electoral system in hindsight seems designed specifically to suit Bainimarama’s planned elections strategy. Despite political parties’ recommendations for local constituencies (so that local communities could elect their “own” Member of Parliament to represent their local interests), Bainimarama insisted on one national constituency, with each voter voting for just one candidate (as was the FFP strategy).

While the electoral system has the advantage of proportionality (which also benefited NFP in Parliament for the first time), it imposed the 5% threshold rule
which eliminated small parties and Independents, unduly harsh, given that each parliamentarian roughly represents 2% of the votes. Their lost equivalent of 4 seats went to the largest parties in proportion (if you took away 3 seats from FFP they would be left with 29).

Candidates were rejected with large numbers of votes, while many with fewer votes, but belonging to larger parties, have been elected making a mockery of the years of relentless propaganda “1 person = 1 vote = 1 value”. But that applied to most candidates, not just to FFP.

The Manipulated Ballot Paper and Candidates List

The pliant Elections Office and Electoral Commission then enforced the outrageous Electoral Decree requirement that the ballot paper only have numbers (all 248 of them), with no names, no photos and no party symbols which could have helped illiterate voters identify the candidate of their choice.

The Electoral Commission and Elections Office refused to accede to requests that the ballot paper could still group the candidate numbers together under their party symbol (with their names and photos) so that even if voters ticked an adjacent number by mistake, the vote would still go to their chosen party.

The Electoral Decree unreasonably banned the voters from taking any material (such as voting cards) into the polling booth, which could have assisted illiterate voters to tick the number they wanted.

The pliant Electoral Commission went along with the Candidates List in which candidates were all deliberately mixed up randomly, with no party grouping or party symbols.

This clearly worked against the interests of opposition parties who took seriously the task of supporting all their candidates and numbers, not just the Party Leader.

The FFP strategy of asking voters to vote for just the one number representing Bainimarama, resulted in him receiving a massive number of votes, which dragged into parliament a large number of his colleagues, so with minimal votes.

This was the “democratic” electoral system that electoral missionary and foreigner David Arms, also a member of the Electoral Commission, fought tooth and nail to impose on Fiji’s political parties and voters.

The proud boasts of the Elections Office about the record low percentage of invalid votes are hollow, given that with the existing ballot paper, no one can find out if there were “invalid votes” caused by voters wrongly ticking a number which was not of their intended candidate. A “perverse proof” is that a relatively unknown candidate, Ilaijia Tavia, received the highest votes of all the PDP candidates, because many voters probably confused his number (297) with that of Bainimarama (279).

Bainimarama’s Electoral Decree also banned “exit polls”, which are a regular part of democratic elections, useful the world over as a check against the rigging of the counting process.

It is abundantly clear now that the entire electoral system and electoral decree was cunningly designed to suit the Bainimarama campaign for voters to remember only one number (279) while ignoring all other candidates.

The Elections Office and the media have dutifully played along with the game by comparing Bainimarama’s personal vote with that of Ro Temumu Kepa and Professor Biman Prasad, totally ignoring that opposition parties’ elections strategies
gave broad exposure to all the candidates, and not just the Party Leader as did the FFP.

**The Pliant Election Authorities**

By decree, the Bainimarama Government ensured that the ultimate authority over the elections, the Minister of Elections was their own Attorney General (Aiyaz Khaiyum) also unashamedly the Secretary General of Fiji First Party.

They appointed their own Supervisor of Elections, as well as their own choice of Electoral Commission members, and the Media Industry Development Authority Chairman, most being open or closet Bainimarama sympathizers.

Academics will no doubt try to clarify exactly how much effort the Supervisor of Elections, the Electoral Commission and the MIDA Chairman put in, to try and make the elections genuinely “free and fair”, despite the restrictive Electoral Decree and other media laws.

What the public did see was that while the Elections Office spent millions encouraging the voter registration of Fiji citizens living overseas to have a say in electing some candidate for the Fiji parliament, a last minute Bainimarama Decree unfairly disqualified some opposition party candidates because they had been overseas for more than 18 months out of the last two years, some for legitimate reasons such as higher education. Did the Electoral Commission protest?

Then when the Electoral Commission issued a ruling that a FLP candidate was eligible to stand for elections (because he did not have a conviction as previously claimed) and a FFP candidate was ineligible to stand because he was facing a criminal charge of causing death by dangerous driving, the Supervisor of Elections refused to abide by the ruling.

The technical justification was that the ruling had been received by the Elections Office a few hours after the due time, duly backed up by the courts who adjudicated the case by defining what was mean strictly by “three days”, not what “natural justice” and common sense required. There is no public evidence that the Electoral Commission protested.

Early in the campaign, scholarship authorities under the control of the Bainimarama Regime terminated the scholarship of one of the party workers of young Independent candidate Roshika Deo, on totally ridiculous grounds. While the scholarship was eventually reinstated after a public outcry and much buck-passing between the USP management and scholarship authorities, the message was given to young voters- don’t support the opponents of the Bainimarama Regime, if you want your scholarships to continue. Did the Electoral Commission protest?

**The restricted education of voters**

Months before polling day, the Bainimarama Regime warned NGOs that under Section 115 (1) of the Electoral Decree “it shall be unlawful for any person, entity or organization .. that receives any funding or assistance from a foreign government, inter-governmental or non-governmental organization or multilateral agency to engage in, participate in or conduct any campaign (including organizing debates, public forum, meetings, interviews, panel discussions, or publishing any material) that is related to the election or any election issue or matter.”

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Totally against the spirit of free and fair elections, organizations like CCF, FWRM, WCC, and other NGOs were banned from all such educational activities, which is the norm in democratic societies, and indeed has been the practice in all previous elections. Did the Electoral Commission protest?

While universities were apparently allowed to have such education campaigns and organize debates, panel discussions, none did so, a reflection of the often demonstrated pro-Bainimarama biases of their managements and their previously demonstrated willingness to suppress academic freedom.

The restricted monitoring

Outrageously, the Attorney General and SG of the Fiji First Party also decided that while international observers and party scrutineers would be allowed to monitor the activities at the polling stations, he would not allow 300 independent local observers from the Civil Society-Domestic Elections Observation Group (CSO-DEOG)?

The CSO-DEOG plaintively and futilely argued that “local community observers are often able to understand the nuances that international observers cannot, and their absence will leave a hole in the process.”

Common sense would also suggest that while international observers would be gone after the elections, and while party scrutineers can always be accused of bias should they observe any irregularities, the local NGOs/CSOs could be relied upon firstly, to be truly independent and secondly, to maintain institutional memory and ongoing sustainability in good governance practices in elections.

Did the Electoral Commission protest?

The flood of vote-buying

The Bainimarama Government used their ministerial positions to keep distributing tax-payer and donor funded benefits right up to polling day, justifiably construed as “vote-buying”, given the timing of these benefits. This was contrary to the recommendation of the Ghai Draft Constitution which had required that Ministers must resign six months before polling so that the other parties were given a fair deal.

Then Fiji First Party deliberately issued their Manifesto of vote-buying goodies a mere ten days before the actual polling day. It promised families earning below $20,000 per year, free electricity, water, medicines, milk for all Class 1 students throughout the length and breadth of Fiji (more profits for CJ Patel who owns Rewa Dairy), first home grants, a $10 million grant for indigenous Fijian landowners, a wide range of subsidies in agriculture, and the reinstatement of Dr. Mahendra Reddy’s initial Minimum Wage of $2.32 per hour (which Bainimarama and Usamate had last year unilaterally reduced to $2 per hour after pressure from employers).

Opposition parties and candidates were given no time to challenge the FFP on the practical viability of these promises (eg. how identify “poor” families throughout Fiji), least of all on how all these vote-buying promises would be financed. In contrast, for months, FFP and their sympathetic journalists had freely attacked the Opposition parties on their policies.

No one in the media asked why the FFP Manifesto was virtually a hundred percent “freebies” and “handouts” when Bainimarama in 2008 had promised that his government would not pander to Fijians’ “hand-out” mentality.
Far from free and fair: a victory for treason, lies, and money.

No one in the media or the MIDA Chairman questioned Bainimarama’s blatant use of the racial fear tactic when he advised Indo-Fijian voters, that if they voted for him there would be no more coups.

Did the Electoral Commission or the MIDA Chairman protest at any of these unfair electioneering tactics?

The media biases

It will not be difficult for even journalism students to establish that the content of the *Fiji Sun* and the broadcasts by Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (both radio and television) have been sheer propaganda on behalf of the Bainimarama Government.

Nor to prove that the media journalists who were the hosts of so-called “debates” between parties, were blatantly biased in favor of FFP candidates and antagonistic towards Opposition candidates and parties.

Nor that most debate hosts played along with the FFP strategy of focusing on non-issue of calling all citizens “Fijians” while giving opposition candidates little room to raise their own arguably weightier concerns.

None of the journalists persevered in asking Bainimarama or Khaiyum why they refused to release Auditor General Reports since 2006 or the Minister’s salaries before 2014; why they refused to release reports on the FNPF losses at Natadola and Momi; why their Manifesto promised all the “goodies” just 10 days before polling; why they had not kept their promise in 2007 that no military personnel would ever benefit from his coup, or that none of his ministers including himself, would ever stand for elections; nor the alleged equality of citizens when his government prosecuted and jailed political opponents, while giving himself and his collaborators total immunity from 2000 to 2014 for crimes still unstipulated.

An extraordinary development in the days prior to polling day was the refusal of FBC to take paid advertisements from one of the Opposition parties, while freely giving exposure to FFP and its candidates.

MIDA

The public also waited in vain for the Media Industry Development Authority Chairman (Ashwin Raj) to exercise an independent regulatory impact on the media in the run-up to the election.

*The Fiji Times* was perpetually on notice have already been fined a massive four hundred thousand dollars and its editor (Fred Wesley) given a suspended six month sentence for what some might call a trivial offence, while the owner remained overseas with a bench warrant out on another charge.

Three months before the elections, the MIDA Chairman refused to respond to very specific questions addressing the very core of a free and fair media industry relating to

- millions of tax-payers advertisement funds being channeled by the Bainimarama Government only to *Fiji Sun* with *The Fiji Times* being denied;
• outright massive subsidies given to FBC (whose CEO was the brother of the Attorney General) via government budget and government guarantees of loans from FDB;

• the intimidating renewal of the license for Fiji TV on a six monthly basis;

• the sacking of a senior Fiji TV journalist (Anish Chand) who wanted more critical programs covering the elections, because of complaints from the Bainimarama Government.

A month before the election, the MIDA Chairman refused to respond when complaints were made about the biased role of the media and some media journalists in the coverage of the elections and the debates between parties and candidates.

The MIDA Chairman refused to respond when it was pointed out that Veena Bhatnagar, who had been a clearly pro-Bainimarama media host of the FBC’s *Aina* program during a debate between Biman Prasad (Leader of NFP) and Aiyaz Khaiyum (Secretary of FFP), a mere week later appeared as a candidate for FFP. So also did the MIDA CEO (Matai Akauola).

None of these were apparently of concern to the MIDA Chairman, who now applauds the media for their conduct during the elections, a supine media being clearly to his liking.

**The Business Community**

When the facts eventually come out on the factors that influenced the outcome of the 2014 Elections, the most important but shadiest one will be the massive campaign funds donated to the FFP by Fiji’s business houses, most unlikely to be ever revealed to the public as required by the laws.

This massive corporate support of FFP was to be expected given that the Bainimarama Government in the 2012 Budget had reduced corporate tax from 28% to 20% and the highest marginal income tax from 30% to 20%, and immediately put more than $150 million annually into the pockets of the wealthy in Fiji.

Against this huge benefit (and other special ones unknown), collectively giving ten to twenty million dollars to the FFP campaign would have been an easy to justify “cost of doing business” in Fiji, unlikely to ever enter into any WB or ADB Index on “ease of doing business” in Fiji.

Deserving special mention is the recipient of several valuable financial benefits from the Bainimarama Government, CJ Patel, whose ownership and control of the *Fiji Sun* has enabled them to wage a propaganda campaign whose success can only be guessed at, given the final outcome.

But this is nothing new. Since 1970, the business community (of all ethnic groups) have funded all powerful politicians and those controlling government, promptly switching the support ever so easily from Mara to Chaudhry to Rabuka to Qarase and now to Bainimarama.

But the 2014 Elections is unusual in that Bainimarama, through his vote buying, has simultaneously been able to win a large proportion of the votes of the poor, while enjoying the financial support of the rich.
It should be interesting for economics students to follow how long this honeymoon threesome between Bainimarama’s Minister of Finance, the rich and the poor, will last, especially when revenues must be eventually increased to meet both the promised “goodies” and the vastly increased Public Debt.

**Another victory for treason, lies, deceit, money and the “culture of silence”**.

The ordinary public, understandably weary of eight years of social conflict and uncertainty, just want “to move on”, lulled by the cliché “the people have spoken”.

The international community, donor partners, regional and international organizations, relations with Fiji now normalized, will also be relieved to move on, understandably, as it is not for them to solve Fiji fundamental and systemic political problems.

But it must be terribly depressing for the many candidates and parties who fought the election on decent principles of good governance, truth and justice, as it must be for hard-working civil society organizations, only to find that treason, lies, deceit and astute propaganda have prevailed.

But they must not hold themselves responsible.

Despite this age of limitless and virtually free national and global communications through the Internet and social media such as Facebook, Twitter and the blogs, ultimately, morally right decisions must still be made by human beings at the ends of the communication networks, and such decisions depend profoundly on our educated social leaders.

Unfortunately, for eight years now, Fiji’s social leaders have been afflicted by the “culture of silence” which some attribute not just to material self-interest, but also a lack of moral courage and integrity.

Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi gives a nuanced cultural rationalization that the silence of indigenous Fijians should not be interpreted to mean consent, and this may be comforting to some. But that remains at odds with the cacophony of frequently violent, sometimes well-reasoned dissent engaged in by bloggers on the internet, where the virtually 100 percent anonymity reduces the social responsibility and impact of the contributors virtually to zero. Are they going to get the Fiji they deserve? The truth may be somewhere in between these two extreme views, but Fiji is ultimately left to ponder Edmund Burke’s observation, that all that is needed for evil to prosper is for good men and women to remain silent.

And silent indeed have been our legions of senior accountants, lawyers, university academics, principals, teachers, professionals, bankers, and businessmen, for eight long years, giving no guidance whatsoever to the hundreds of thousands of first-time voters in the 2014 elections.

Some in SODELPA will rue that what the ethno-nationalists sowed in 1987 and 2000, they have reaped in 2014. The military genie they let out of the bottle then, has refused to go back into the bottle and they will remain a debilitating drain on tax payers’ funds for the foreseeable future, to ensure their continued loyalty.

This article can conclude with a forgotten and ironical trivia, that the chief strategist for coup-maker Bainimarama has been Aiyaz Khaiyum, who in 1988 was my cell-mate, part of the Group of 18 jailed briefly for protesting the Rabuka coup.
Rabuka ruefully observed, in his own words, that in no time at all, he went from “Hero to Zero” and his sycophants and business parasites, as swiftly switched their allegiance to the next Great Leader.

You can be sure that the current Two Great Heroic Leaders (and their astute strategists), will try to postpone that day of reckoning for as long as possible, having already had a brilliant eight years of practice, albeit against virtually zero resistance.

Civil society has a long struggle ahead before the 2018 Elections.
Email to Professor Vijay Naidu (23 October 2014)

Dear Vijay

Did the Electoral Commission do any independent sample verification of the counts of polling stations and the final result published by the Elections Office? Please pass on this query to all the Commission members and please cc me so I can communicate with them directly if need be.

Regards

Wadan

Email from Vijay Naidu (24 October 2014)

Thanks Wadan.
I’ll forward your message to EC members.
Cheers,
Vijay

Letter to Editor (sent 27 October 2014)
(Fiji Times, Fiji Sun, MIDA, Ashwin Raj
(published 5 Nov. 2014 on NarseyOnFiji)

Is the Electoral Commission reluctant to conduct an independent audit of polling station results?

Dear Sir,

This last week I have been in futile communication with members of the Electoral Commission on concerns held by some political parties and candidates that their votes at some polling stations were not reflected in the final results issued by the Elections Office and that the results may have been “rigged” in some way, between the polling station votes and the final results issued.

These concerns are understandable, given the iron fisted control of the elections by the Bainimarama Government, with the banning of NGOs, pen and paper and electronic recording devices from the polling stations.

I have suggested to the Electoral Commission that these suspicions can be and should be put to rest by an easy audit of the votes of say 20 to 50 polling stations, chosen by the political parties themselves.
The Chairman of the Electoral Commission (Chen Bunn Young) apparently advised one of its members to “hold on” to this request. He has yet to respond to my request, although one member has, but not in writing.

I call on the political parties and concerned members of the public to request the Electoral Commission to conduct the independent audit that I am suggesting, in order to put these suspicions to rest.

It might also put to rest a public perception that the Electoral Commission members are “lackeys” of the Bainimarama Government who choose not to be professional with respect to their responsibilities to the voters of this country. The term “lackey” has been cogently used by a prolific writer of Letters to the Editor, Rajen Naidu.

Professor Wadan Narsey

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**Email to Fiji Electoral Commission (3 November 2014)**

To:  
Chen Bun Young (Chairman)  
Professor Vijay Naidu  
Jenny Seeto  
David Arms  
Alisi Daurew  
James Sowane  

Dear Electoral Commission members

I have written previously to Vijay and Jenny about the need for a sample audit by the Electoral Commission (not the Elections Office) of some polling stations results. All that would be needed would be

(a) For NGOs and political parties to be invited to witness this exercise  
(b) for some 20 to 50 polling stations to be randomly selected (you could let the observers choose the stations)  
(c) and the votes to be recounted in their presence  
(d) and checked/verified against the official results from the Elections Office.

I would have expected the Electoral Commission to do this in any case as part of their responsibilities and to allay any fears that the political parties may have had about your independence. One can expect discrepancies of a few votes here and there, but not on a systematic basis towards any particular party, as some political parties and candidates are claiming. It is essential that this be done as soon as possible.

I am sure that the Electoral Commission would be acting within its powers and responsibilities to conduct this exercise, without any permission being sought.

Sincerely

Professor Wadan Narsey
Letter, Fijian Electoral Commission to Narsey (5 November 2014)

Chairman (Chen B. Young) wrote:

“No ballot boxes may be opened unless a court order to that effect is made.

..... the Electoral Decree also contains provision for political parties and candidates to file proceedings in the court of disputed returns to seek certain reliefs including

(i) request for recount of ballot papers in one or more polling stations or a recount of all ballot papers in the election

(ii) request for the invalidation of the protocol of results in one or more polling stations, invalidation of the election of one or more candidates, or invalidation of the entire election; and

(iii) request for repeat polling in one or more polling stations or request for a repeat election

(Section 122(c) of the Electoral Decree 2014)

We are informed that no petition has been filed in the court of disputed returns.

Chen B. Young
Chairperson- Electoral Commission

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The Fijian Electoral Commission listed all the supposed checks and balances that were in place to ensure that counting and recording was done accurately. They refused to do any independent audit themselves.

Effectively, the FEC refused to proactively verify the counts and passed the buck to the political parties and candidates.

What did the political parties and candidates do? See below. Nothing apparently.

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Email Narsey to Political Parties (9 November 2014)

To: Pio Tabaiwalu (SODELPA), Professor Biman Prasad (NFP), Tupou Draunidalo (NFP), Jese Sikivou (SODELPA)

Please note the letter from the Electoral Commission. Political parties have to apply through the courts. I think it is important for you to tackle this once and for all, and put it to rest.

Regards

Wadan
Before the September 2014 Fiji elections, the Opposition parties and candidates were extremely worried about the possibilities of vote rigging by the Bainimarama Government, especially at the counting and electronic recording stages. Some substance to their fears was given by a number of unilateral and dictatorial decisions by the Bainimarama Government which appeared quite unreasonable and unfair to Opposition Parties:

a) the appointment of all the key officials in the Elections Office;
b) the appointment of all the Electoral Commission Members, suspected by the Opposition to be Bainimarama Government sympathizers;
c) the electoral system with a single national constituency;
d) the deliberate design of an “unfriendly” ballot paper without candidate names, photos or party name and symbols- only numbers;
e) the banning of independent NGOs from monitoring the counting at the polling stations;
f) the banning of pens and paper, and recording media from the polling stations;
g) and many other decisions, such as the last minute unfair disqualification of Opposition candidates on residential grounds while disallowing a credible opposition challenge to a FFP candidate.

h) An Electoral Commission whose views were ignored by the Bainimarama Government

Some of these restrictions appeared to be designed to ensure that Opposition Parties would have difficulty checking the results.

Then, during the counting process while results were being phoned in from the polling stations to the Elections Office, there was also a strange decision to stop the provisional counting in the middle, when FFP support appeared to have declined to 50% or below, and the Elections Office then going into the “final counting”.

The final results were then issued a couple of days later, with an apparently decisive victory for Fiji First Party and Bainimarama.

The real concern of Opposition parties was that actual counts of votes at polling stations might be changed in the reporting and recording processes to the Elections Office in favor of the Bainimarama Government candidates.
The political parties had been strongly advised that while they could not cover all the polling stations, they must endeavor to cover at least 20 to 50 polling stations accurately, against which they could assess the final counts issued by the Elections Office. Statisticians know that even this small sample would have given them a good indicator of any vote rigging.

Sadly, it seems that none of the Opposition political parties managed to get any accurate independent results of the counts at a reasonable sample of the polling stations.

But the Opposition parties and many of their candidates claimed that at certain polling stations where they and their family members and close friends said that they had voted for them, the results indicated implausibly low votes for them, even zero. Was this evidence of vote rigging, or simply evidence that even family members had not voted for them but for Fiji First Party candidates (whatever they told the candidates)?

When the party worker for one political party went to the Elections Office to query a particular polling station result, he was chased away with the threat that the Elections Office would be calling the police if he did not leave.

**My request to the Electoral Commission**

In October 2014 I wrote to two members of the Electoral Commission (Professor Vijay Naidu and Mrs. Jenny Seeto) asking if they had done any independent verification of the counts of a small sample of polling stations and the final results published by the Elections Office for those polling stations.

They had not and I was advised to make my specific recommendation to the Electoral Commission. I then wrote formally to the Electoral Commission on the 3rd Nov. 2014 pointing out that all that would be needed for an independent sample verification would be (quoting my letter, in red italics):

* For NGOs and political parties to be invited to witness this exercise

* for some 20 to 50 polling stations to be randomly selected (you could let the observers choose the stations)

* the votes to be recounted in their presence

* and checked/verified against the official results from the Elections Office.

I would have expected the Electoral Commission to do this in any case as part of their responsibilities and to allay any fears that the political parties may have had about your independence.

One can expect discrepancies of a few votes here and there, but not on a systematic basis towards any particular party, as some political parties and candidates are claiming. It is essential that this be done as soon as possible. I am sure that the Electoral Commission would be acting within its powers and responsibilities to conduct this exercise, without any permission being sought.”

All very reasonable, I thought, which Electoral Commission Member Mrs. Jenny Seeto would understand from her own professional work as an accountant and auditor.
But Electoral Commission refuses

The Chairman of the Electoral Commission (Chen B. Young) replied (5th of November) informing that they had not conducted any independent sample verification of the counts of the polling stations, and did not intend to do so. He advised that there were ample checks and balances in place (which they listed) to ensure that there were no discrepancies, that there were legislative restraints that prevented the Electoral Commission from carrying out an independent count of a sample of polling stations as I had requested.

However the Chairman advised that the Opposition Parties and candidates could apply to file a petition at the court of disputed returns, to request a recount at any of the polling stations. The letter also pointed to other remedies available to them through the courts, should they doubt the counts.

The Chairman of the Electoral Commission informed me that no Party or candidate had filed any petition.

I then forwarded this letter from the Chairman of the Electoral Commission to the Opposition political parties who apparently took no action.

Opposition inertia in the face of FFP energy

I find it quite dismaying and an extraordinary symptom of the inertia and lack of initiative on the part of the Opposition parties that despite their complaints of alleged “vote rigging” via electronic manipulation, and despite having a plethora of lawyers in their midst both as candidates and supporters, none of the Opposition Parties or candidates have filed any petitions to have recounts at the polling stations where they had doubts about the final results.

This inertia does not bode well for their performance in Parliament as an effective opposition and watchdog of a FFP Government which is not only able to draw on all the state resources to bolster their image as an effective government, but they also have at least two energetic and glib leaders who seem to be able to run rings around the Opposition in Parliament.

The refusal of the Electoral Commission to conduct an independent verification of a sample of polling stations, illustrates clearly, that Government appointed bodies even after the restoration of parliamentary democracy, are unlikely to be proactive and take the initiative to safeguard the public interest, especially when the covering legislation has been deliberately designed to emasculate their powers in line with the Bainimarama Government agenda. Go to the courts, as they say.

I am told that at least one member of the Electoral Commission is resigning on principle, disinclined to monitor and supervise the election of trade unionists, as apparently now required of the Electoral Commission by legislation.

A similar process is also at work with the Media Industry Development Authority, whose Chairman (Ashwin Raj) shows a ready inclination to vociferously and energetically defend the Bainimarama Government at each and every turn, often being quite proactive. But he refuses to address a number of complaints which have been specifically addressed to him, about the lack of a “level playing field” in the media industry in Fiji and continuing media censorship that this economist faces from the Fiji Sun, Fiji TV and FBC TV and radio stations. Make a “formal complaint” he says,
despite the fact that complaints have already been made to him and the facts are obvious to the public.

With the membership of the boards of all regulatory bodies (and their senior management) hand-picked by the Bainimarama Government, the Opposition can expect no independent professional assistance from them.

The Opposition faces a hard uphill battle for the next four years of parliament, with little likelihood of any significant success at eroding the FFP support with a public beguiled by Government propaganda through a tightly controlled media.

Post-script (2018):

Expect more of the same from the current members of the Fijian Electoral Commission and MIDA.

Will the Opposition Parties and candidates have the same inertia as in 2014?
Fiji tax-payers have received an absolute bombshell regarding the use of their money by the Bainimarama Regime, with the simultaneous release of the Auditor General Reports for the years 2007 to 2013, all 28 volumes of them. (very much in keeping with the Diwali fireworks and in anticipation of the now forgotten Guy Fawkes night).

These reports are detailed audits of government incomes, expenditures and borrowings, usually tabled annually in Parliament by the Minister of Finance, as a “report on the performance of the government” for the previous year.

All taxpayers must understand what is in these reports, given that annually at least 25% (or more than a billion dollars) of their total incomes is forcibly taken from them by the government as taxes, hundreds of millions further are borrowed by the same government to be paid by the current and future tax payers, and the entire revenue is then spent allegedly on tax-payers’ behalf.

The Auditor General Reports try to verify whether the taxes are being collected according to the law, whether loans are being borrowed responsibly and as planned, and whether the revenues are being spent the way that parliament approved or as stated in the Annual Budget documents, or whether there are deficiencies in the above.

Upon tabling in parliament and with the elected parliamentarians, the Auditor General Reports are usually released to the media, and hence to the public to monitor and act if they see fit. That is what used to happen annually for forty six years after independence in 1970.

Then the cycle was broken by Commodore Bainimarama who seized power through a coup in December 2006.

Principles of a sound audit

It is useful to first outline the basic principles which the owners of all organizations, private or public, expect from a good audit whether in accounting, economics or management:

a) The Auditor General must be totally independent of the Fiji Government (reasonably so) and must be adequately resourced (not so, according to his reports);

b) The government ministries must give the Auditor General every information that they ask for (they refused in a number of cases);

c) The audit must clearly point out the major faults (done pretty well), as well as the remedies to the owners, the people of Fiji (not so good);

d) The owners must be able to make the organizational changes that are necessary to eliminate the faults pointed out (little chance of that);
e) The next audit must check to see if the faults pointed out the previous year have been rectified (often not rectified) and the public notified of these failures (not done).

Despite the Auditor General’s best efforts, some of these principles have been significantly compromised by the Bainimarama Government (as given in the brackets above), the most obvious being the complete failure to report annually.

**No AG Reports from 2007 to 2013**

For seven years, the Auditor General Reports have been prepared and submitted to the Bainimarama Cabinet by a very brave group of civil servants in the Auditor General’s Office ([read here my appreciation of them](#)).

But the Bainimarama Government and Minister of Finance refused to release any of the AG Reports, despite the many requests from the public and international condemnation. Read here one of my last critical articles to appear in The Fiji Times, 28 October 2008: “When security guards rob the bank and the surveillance report goes to the robbers”.

The flimsy excuse was that the law required Bainimarama to table the reports in Parliament and because there was no parliament (which he himself had removed), he did not have to table the reports, totally ignoring that the fundamental objective was for the Bainimarama Government to report to the people, not some empty hall in the Parliamentary complex at Veiuto or Government buildings.

For eight years, the unelected illegal Bainimarama Government completely controlled the raising of taxes and loans, and the spending of all revenues, without any accountability whatsoever to the people.

Then, after becoming an elected Prime Minister in September 2014 (promising “equality for all” and “if you don’t want another coup, vote for me”), he released all seven sets of Auditor General Reports, totalling 28 reports altogether.

They are now being read by the curious media and the public, many understandably searching for evidence of abuse and misuse of tax-payers’ funds.

**The revelations in the reports**

Professor Biman Prasad, the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee which is charged with examining the AG Reports, has already stated that “it has become abundantly clear there has been widespread abuse of public funds and blatant disregard of fundamental financial procedures (as well as) … pilferage, wastage and abuse of public funds”.

Professor Prasad noted that there had been “continuous disregard of recommendations by the Auditor-General” indicating that the Bainimarama Government carried on “business as usual” year after year for eight years, making no attempt at correcting the mistakes being pointed out by the Auditor General.

These conclusions are quite damming of Bainimarama’s performance as Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and also of the two most important Permanent Secretaries – of Finance and Public Service.
They also explain why Bainimarama and Khaiyum were adamant in not releasing the reports before the September 2014 elections, given that they would have inevitably influenced the outcome and certainly Bainimarama’s support.

With Bainimarama’s Fiji First Party campaign claiming great honesty, transparency, accountability and opposition to corruption, the Opposition parliamentarians can now legitimately state that the evidence in the Auditor General’s Reports suggest that the 2014 elections were won by Bainimarama and Khaiyum using lies and deceit.

Of relevance to this claim is the personal integrity of Prime Minister and Finance Minister Bainimarama and Attorney General Khaiyum, with respect to the salaries that they paid themselves during 2010 and 2013, and the blatant abuse of process of payment.

Ministers’ salaries

While the Public Accounts Committee will no doubt investigate the many revelations of costly abuse of public funds and lack of transparency and accountability, the public will be especially interested in the revelations about ministerial salaries between 2010 and 2013, and what is still not being revealed.

The public already know that in November 2011, Regime supporters John Samy and the late Archbishop Mataca (Co-Chairman of the National Council for Building a Better Fiji) wrote a letter to Bainimarama, complaining about the increasing lack of transparency and accountability of his Government (on my website NarseyOnFiji).

Samy and Mataca noted that there were rumors that Bainimarama and Khaiyum “both were being paid exorbitant salaries, not through the Ministry of Finance but a close relative of the AG, through a high-fees based contractual arrangement”.

The leader of the Fiji Labor Party (Mahendra Chaudhry) who had also been the Minister of Finance in the Bainimarama Government in 2007, is also on record accusing Bainimarama and Khaiyum of paying themselves multiple salaries from 2010 to 2012, before reverting them to the lower ones revealed after the elections.

Sure enough, the AG Report for 2010 (Vol. 2, Section 4, p11) reveals that as a result of a Cabinet instruction of 4 Jan 2010, the Prime Minister’s Office issued invoices to the Ministry of Finance to pay salaries through Alizpacific, (an accounting firm associated with Dr. Nur Bano Ali, an aunt of Attorney General Aiyaz Khaiyum).

The Report noted that the $1.8 million paid (listed on a monthly basis) had no supporting documents, and was intended to “alter the terms and conditions of engagement of all Ministers”. The AG Report stated that this “compromises the transparency of payments being made”.

The Public Accounts Committee must investigate serious breach of process that the AG’s Report did not raise.

a) First, why should Ministers’ salaries be increased by the Ministers themselves, when there have always been proper independent avenues available to do so?

b) Second, why should Ministers’ salaries be paid through a private accounting firm when that has always been the prerogative of the Ministry of Finance?

c) Third, what were individual Ministers being paid in totality in 2010?
d) Fourth, why was the Prime Minister’s Office refusing to reveal the information to both the Auditor General and the Ministry of Finance?

That is still not the whole story.

The public should note that the AG Report for 2010 and for other years, had complained that there is a Head 50 under which many undocumented payroll expenditures in other Ministries were partly paid, and whose own payroll expenditures were being understated.

For example, Table 4.9 in Volume 2 of the 2010 Report, noted that there was an unexplained $247,200 in emoluments paid to the Prime Minister’s Office, as well as $1,253,625 paid to the Royal Fiji Military Forces. Who exactly received these payments?

Fast forward to the AG Report for 2013, Vol. 2. Section O4, pp.13 and 14. The Report stated their review of the Head 50 Expenditure revealed that the Ministry paid a total of $1,860,947 as Cabinet Ministers’ salaries in 2013, based on the amounts provided by Alizpacific Chartered Accountants & Business Advisers) associated with the same Nur Bano Ali.

This time, individual payments vouchers (but not the names of the Cabinet Ministers) were documented including one for $278,750 (presumably paid to Prime Minister Bainimarama, and which was still way above what had been paid previously to Prime Ministers).

In addition it was noted that Bainimarama received a “gratuity” payment of $57,500 from a different vote, bringing his total recorded salary for 2013 to $366,250 which is way above what Prime Ministers had been paid before 2006. Again, there were large undocumented payments for emoluments from the Head 50.

Despite repeated requests for the associated documents from both the Auditor General’s Office and Ministry of Finance, the Prime Minister’s Office refused to make the details available, according to the Auditor General.

What an extraordinary and serious breach of PSC rules by the PS in the Prime Minister’s Office (now an elected Minister in parliament) and the Prime Minister himself. Did the PSC take any action?

The 2013 AG Report on Ministers’ salaries also documented that there was another unexplained “additional Ministers payroll expenditure” of $137,150. Did this item include the “commission” charged by Alizpacific as had been questioned by John Samy, Archbishop Mataca and Mahendra Chaudhry?

The Public Accounts Committee will no doubt investigate further the Bainimarama Government’s practice of paying ministers’ undeclared salaries through a private accounting company, if necessary subpoenaing the AlizPacific, Ministry of Finance, FRCA and Fiji National Provident Fund officials.

The Public Accounts Committee will no doubt also want to investigate the back pay of $185 thousands that Bainimarama was paid in 2008, supposedly for accumulated leave from 1978, completely against all PSC regulations.

They might also want to investigate the irregular massive increase of some Permanent Secretaries’ salaries just before the 2014 Budget, supposedly recommended by another private accounting company.
I personally believe that salaries of $300,000 or so for a Minister of Finance or a Permanent Secretary of Finance can be justified IF they are qualified and competent, given that they effectively manage “a billion dollar enterprise” with potentially massive benefits or costs because of their decisions.

But the sad evidence before Fiji is that in 2011, an incompetent Minister of Finance and Permanent Secretary of Finance, and the Attorney General (why him?) with the avaricious assistance of ANZ Bank, borrowed $500 million internationally at 9% interest, when IMF was willing to lend the same sum at 2% interest, thereby costing Fiji taxpayers an unnecessary interest repayment of $40 million annually (which we are still paying). (on my website NarseyOnFiji).

More reports to come

The public should note that these 28 Auditor General Reports are only for the Central Government accounts. They do not cover the dozens of public enterprises and semi-commercial organizations which Government either wholly or partly owns, or for which government and taxpayers have contingent liability for. The Auditor General is also required to audit them and he apparently has already done so for a number of them.

Some of these public enterprises, such as Fiji Roads Authority, Ports Authority, AFL and others spend hundreds of millions of dollars of tax-payers money, with an equally great capacity to misuse large amounts of tax-payer funds.

Some, such as Fiji National Provident Fund, have already written down $300 million in members funds at its investments in Natadola and Momi, and their associated audit reports have been suppressed as well.

We can therefore expect that there will be perhaps another hundred reports coming out of the Auditor General’s Office in the next year or so, to be also examined by the Public Accounts Committee, parliament, the media and the general public. Academics will have a field day.

While today Rear Admiral (ret) Voreqe Bainimarama is reminding Fiji that the terrible National Bank of Fiji disaster that cost taxpayers a massive $220 million should never be forgotten or repeated, the next generation will be crying about the Bainimarama/Khaiyum disaster which has already cost Fiji more than a billion dollars over the last eight years, and they have another four more years to add to that.

Consequences of eight year delay

The purpose of issuing the AG reports annually is that the elected representatives of the people can call on wrong-doers to be suitably disciplined and surcharged if necessary. The public can then see whether there is any improvement taking place at all in the way government is managing tax payers’ money.

Not issuing the report for eight years is therefore a horrendous indictment of the unelected illegal Bainimarama Government’s arrogant refusal to account for tax payers’ money, especially when every year, the Auditor General has refused to give unqualified audits to most of the financial agencies they have audited.

It is as if a school refuses to give the annual report on a student for Forms 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Then it gives all the reports together with the Form 7 Report, which tells
the student (and the parents) that he has been failing every year, and is now ineligible to enter university. What remedial action can the parents and the student take now?

That is exactly the daunting situation faced by the Public Accounts Committee, whose scope for disciplinary action will be totally undermined for two reasons. First, the guilty civil servants or Ministers will have moved on (except for a prominent few).

Secondly, the Bainimarama Government has supposedly given itself “immunity” in the 2013 Constitution, for undefined actions between 2000 and 2014, although this ought to be tested in the courts, using the wonderful 2001 judgment by Justice Anthony Gates, that no tyrant has the power to change a constitution, regardless of how long he rules and how popular he may be.

Who should the Auditor General report to?

It is surely ridiculous that the Auditor General reports to the very Government Ministers whose financial performance is being audited, and who allegedly become responsible for making it available to Parliament or the public. It is equivalent to an examinations report for a student being given to the student himself, who can then decide whether to give the report to his parents or not.

Parliament needs to consider placing the Auditor General’s Office under the Secretary to Parliament, rather than the Ministry of Finance, who has a vested interest or conflict of interest, in the audit.

Better still, given our coup culture and the continuing possibility of lawful governments being removed and parliament being closed down, the Public Accounts Committee ought to consider changing the legislation (what legislation, you might well ask?) to ensure that the Auditor General’s Reports are launched publicly and put on their website, without having to go through any Minister or Parliament.

That is the least that tax-payers can expect for the use of their money by elected or unelected government ministers.

Lessons for parliament and the Public Accounts Committee

For seven years, Bainimarama and Khaiyum have repeated over and over that they did the coup to remove corruption and give the people of Fiji a government that was more transparent and accountable.

The evidence in the Auditor General Reports indicates that the people and voters of Fiji have been grossly and deliberately misled by the current elected Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, through their suppression of the damaging Auditor General Reports, and their refusal to provide the Auditor General and the Ministry of Finance with the information that they asked for and were entitled to receive.

The evidence of the Auditor General Reports clearly indicates that these two government ministers obtained significant personal financial advantage by paying themselves large increases in salary, decided by themselves.

These irregular salaries were then improperly paid through a private sector company associated with a relative of the former Attorney General and current Minister of Finance. The Auditor General Reports also revealed that this same company has received extremely favorable treatment on business consultancies awarded without tender, and this will no doubt be another focal point for the Public Accounts Committee.
In civilized countries, government ministers and even Prime Ministers resign over improper benefits of a few thousand dollars or allegations of vote buying, as happens regularly in Australia or Japan or NZ. Here we are talking of hundreds of thousands of dollars obtained from the taxpayers of a much poorer country through irregular processes.

It would be perfectly legitimate for the Opposition in Fiji Parliament, following the debate on the Auditor General Reports, to file a motion calling on Bainimarama and Khaiyum to resign, if they genuinely believed that all are equal before the law.

The Opposition could call on other Fiji First Party parliamentarians to support their motion if they believed in the principles of good governance, or to at least abstain on the vote.

**Lessons for the media**

For several years now, some journalists at the Fiji Sun, Fiji Broadcasting Corporation and Communications Fiji Ltd, have waged blatant propaganda campaigns on behalf of Bainimarama and Khaiyum. During the elections campaigns, some journalists have been viciously unfair towards Opposition candidates and parties who questioned the Bainimarama Government’s record on issues revealed by the Auditor General Reports to have substance after all.

If these journalists had any ethics at all, they would apologize to the public and now present the public with critical analyses based on the unpleasant facts which have been revealed by the Auditor General’s Reports. What they do or not do over the next few weeks will reveal whether they were simply misguided naive ignorant journalists or they were and continue to be media prostitutes for their employers, whose financial interests, biases and objectives are well known.

Whatever they do, the media coverage of the Auditor General’s Reports will be visible to the world, and will give journalism students and academics excellent material for case studies on the role of the media and journalists in subverting or defending good governance and accountability in Fiji.

The public and the media might want to seek statements from the Fiji Institute of Accountants and Auditors, the Law Society, Transparency International Fiji or the several departments and professors of governance and law at USP, FNU and FU, but I suggest that given their record over the last eight years, the public would be well advised not to hold their breath waiting for a response.

**The record of the Bainimarama Regime on accountability**

Readers may wish to read my many articles on the Bainimarama Government budgets on NarseyOnFiji, including in my forthcoming book Volume 1, *Fiji Developing Growing Fiji.*
I would certainly agree with Nemani Delaibatiki, senior writer for the Fiji Sun, when he reminds the public of the need to protect and strengthen our “fledgling democracy”. Unfortunately for Nemani, “true democracy” seems to have been born on September 2014 when national elections were held in Fiji and the voting public put pieces of paper in ballot boxes to elect their government, totally according to an electoral system and processes decided by the Bainimarama Government.

It is doubly remarkable that Nemani does not discuss at all, major inconsistencies in the Bainimarama’s practice of “democracy”, in just the last two years alone, visible for all to see.

While the Bainimarama Government tried some semblance of stuttering democracy in the relatively unimportant choice of a new flag, there has been no democracy in the far more important things for Fiji: the Bainimarama Government has simply imposed on us the 2013 Constitution, the electoral system, the President and even a new organization purporting to represent school authorities.

The public need to look beyond the rhetoric of the Bainimarama Government’s “democracy”.

**Choosing the flag**

Remember how much publicity was given to choosing our new national flag and the associated effusive rhetoric of Mr. Aiyaz Khaiyum, the leading intellectual light of the Bainimarama Government? Every Tom, Dick and Harry were invited to submit the designs; a supposedly representative committee was set up to make a short list, with the help of a foreign expert; then to allegedly ensure genuine democratic involvement, a national voting system with mobile phone numbers was organized at great expense, for people to have “their say”.

It all fizzled out, and I have written elsewhere on it. But note that the “flag” is a mere piece of cloth, with some designs and colors; it flies on flag-poles, a totally inanimate object; it gives no speeches nationally or internationally. The flag is never asked to decide any matter of any importance, and I suspect, that despite all the hyperbole about the importance of a flag, it would remain quiet if questioned.

**Whereas the constitution and electoral system?**

In contrast, the “Fiji Constitution” is a massively powerful document, which the courts must use to decided contentious disagreements in our society, in every field of activity of our citizens. Everyone understands how important the electoral system is in determining our government for the next four years: oh yes, even appointing ministers who obtained a mere thousand votes in the 2014 elections! Just list all the areas in which courts are asked to adjudicate, and according to the 2013 Constitution.

But remember how Fiji “adopted” the constitution” and “electoral system”?

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Remember how the Bainimarama Government originally set up a democratic process, with overseas and local experts flown in as part of the Yash Ghai Commission, which carried out massive nation-wide consultations and received 7,000 submissions, then collectively wrote a draft constitution, which was intended to be verified by a “People’s Assembly”?

Remember how that democratically constructed Draft Constitution was then thrown out the window by the Bainimarama Government.

Remember how a new 2013 Constitution was imposed on the people of Fiji, by people who also gave themselves immunity for certain unspecified events between 2000 and the 2014 Elections?

Who in their right minds would grant immunity to themselves through a constitution they themselves draft and impose on the country, without any parliamentary or popular approval process?

Just remember, sleeping Fiji public, the Vanuatu judiciary recently jailed a number of persons in positions of authority who tried to grant themselves “pardons” for crimes committed.

Appointing the President

The Bainimarama Government recently went through some process of “appointing a President”. The pro-Government newspaper sounded out a few names including Nazhat Shameem and Ro Mataitini. Nowhere on that list was Jioji Konrote, sitting Member of Parliament and Minister in the Bainimarama Government, who was nominated by the Bainimarama Government. SODELPA strangely nominated Ratu Epeli Ganilau, a former Minister in the Bainimarama Government. There were no calls by the Bainimarama Government for public nomination of possible candidates. There were no schemes set up for voting by mobile phones.

Parliament had a vote, but it was not declared to be a conscience vote. MPs voted along party lines, with the NFP abstaining, because of the lack of consultation by the Bainimarama Government.

There are many who might think that the President has no significant role given in the 2013 Constitution. But unlike a flag, a President does open his or her mouth nationally, and can bring great credit to Fiji internationally or just be another figure adorned with medals, passing anonymously through the world stage.

For those who value the support of constitutionality and the rule of law at all times, there may not be much to choose between Jioji Konrote, Ratu Epeli Ganilau and Madam Nazhat Shameem. But most intelligent people in the country have a reasonable idea about these individuals’ various contributions to public life and their potential for the world stage.

I suspect that had a truly democratic choice been made between these three individuals, Fiji would probably have elected its first Indo-Fijian woman President, a genuine historical first. This President would have been eminently articulate nationally and internationally in all matters that a President can expound forth on, including such matters as gender equality, or climate change, or issues of governance. There are few such articulate Pacific women with the potential for a comparable international presence.
The public can ask themselves, why did the Bainimarama Government not have a democratic process in the appointment of a President?

**Reddy’s “democracy”**

Just a few days ago, the Minister for Education (Dr. Mahendra Reddy) refused to recognize the Schools Management Association of Fiji (SMAF) whose President Govind Singh had legitimately criticized some MoE policies, asking for more consultation with school authorities. What could be more reasonable?

But the Minister pronounced that he did not want his reforms to be derailed by people who allegedly were failed Labor politicians and supporters, who had personal agenda and who had been sleeping on the job for the last five years (apparently tolerated by the equally sleeping Bainimarama Government?).

The President of the SMAF is democratically elected by the school authorities who are financial members, as pointed out by Kamlesh Arya, the new president, and representative of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji, a major education stakeholder.

But now, the peripatetic Dr. Mahendra Reddy will nominate and work with his own choice of a National Council for School Managers, 2 reps chosen by him, from the 17 districts. Dr. Reddy ridiculed the idea of a “talanoa” with school authorities, and asserted that he had done “extensive consultation”. Apparently, Dr. Reddy thinks that his “consultation” is not a “talanoa”.

The Bainimarama Government (and Dr. Reddy) will not be asking the Elections Office to conduct elections to appoint the school authorities’ representatives, the way they are enforcing with union elections.

**Manipulating democracy**

For the Bainimarama Government, voting was fine for 2014 National Elections (which were themselves highly manipulated and controlled) and for choosing the national flag. But voting and true democracy is not fine for choosing the constitution, the electoral system, the President of Fiji, or even the President of SMAF.

Nemani Delaibatiki and the *Fiji Sun* can spout forth as much as they like about the need to protect and strengthen our “fledgling democracy”. But the public just needs to understand that just one individual in the Bainimarama Government is deciding what kind of “democracy” Fiji people can “enjoy”.

We might as well redefine Fiji’s democracy as “government of the people, for the Bainimarama Government, by the power of one”.

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54. Erosion of USP Academic Integrity

[NarseyOnFiji, 9 November 2017]

Author’s note:

Globally, academics and academic institutions are called upon by society to offer neutral objective commentary and policy guidance on matters of national concern. This often requires the objective analysis of the policies of the government of the day, or national elections which lead to the formation of governments who rule for the required number of years. For decades, Fiji has had the benefit of such commentary from The University of the South Pacific. Sadly, this stopped with the appointment of a new local Vice Chancellor who clearly demonstrated support of the Bainimarama Government. Sadly, this support appears to have also strongly undermined the academic integrity of academic outputs from USP, such as the Journal of Pacific Studies, as this article below argues.

Why no changes for the 2018 Elections?

It seems that Khaiyum and Company have dug themselves in and will not bring about any significant changes to the electoral system and elections processes that enabled them to "win" the 2014 Elections. There is indeed little public pressure on them, beyond Opposition parties referring to the Multinational Observer Group Report and Recommendations, which Khaiyum and Bainimarama Government could not care about. What is also surprising is that absence of informed and expert opinion supporting the Opposition calls for a fairer system.

Why aren't there any "expert" calls for change, especially given that Fiji now has three universities full of learned people lecturing the students of Fiji and the region?

Why MOGs and not USP?

In countries like Australia, neutral university academics are often called upon by governments, media and society to shed light on contentious policy issues and offer constructive policy recommendations.

It is therefore extremely strange that in Fiji, calls by the Opposition Parties for changes to the electoral system do not refer to the local university academics, but to the findings and recommendations of the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) that came to observe the 2014 Elections. Why are prominent USP academics expert in politics not to be heard at all on the current weaknesses of the electoral system and processes which were unilaterally imposed on Fiji by the Bainimarama Government?

This omission is extraordinary given that USP’s flagship Journal of Pacific Studies devoted an entire edition to the 2014 Election (Special Issue on the Fiji General Election of 2014 (Volume 35, Issue No.2), edited by senior USP academics Professor Vijay Naidu and Dr. Sandra Tarte.

Sadly and unfortunately, however, this JPS Special Issue demonstrates all too well, how USP’s academic integrity has been compromised in recent years. This JPS Special Issue shows all too clearly how the senior academics refused to systematically analyze
the evidence that they themselves present, but marginalized in footnotes and endnotes, which taken together establishes so conclusively that the 2014 elections were NOT “free and fair” and that the system MUST be changed as the Opposition Parities are demanding if there is to be electoral justice.

This failure is more pronounced when one notes that Professor Naidu and another JPS contributor (Catholic priest Father David Arms) were both members of the Fiji Electoral Commission and would have seen at first hand virtually all the unfair aspects of the 2014 Elections.

The senior academic editors (Naidu and Tarte) showed an abysmal lack of judgement in the design of the cover which had the word “ENDORSED” accompanied by photos of smiling Bainimarama and Khaiyum, suggesting that the voters had fairly elected the FFP to government.

To rub salt into the academic wound, the Special Edition was launched with great praise by the prominent and very effective head of Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre (Shamima Ali), who once was a courageous defender of human rights in Fiji.

MOGs and banana republics

Developed civilized countries like Australia or NZ don’t have foreign Multinational Observer Groups flying in to observe if elections are free and fair. It is only backward Third World countries where there is no faith in governments, public institutions and civil society that that MOGs comprising international organizations like United Nations or Donors, come to do the verification that all was “hunky dory”.

Some may do their work well or badly. Most certainly, government are never accountable to them nor are MOGs accountable to the people concerned. Any criticisms and recommendations made by the MOG can be safely ignored, just as the Bainimarama Government is currently doing.

Which is why it is important to ask why our university academics are not providing the public the guidance that they deserve and instead, why they produce an academic journal which at best fails to enlighten the public on the fundamentally flawed nature of 2014 Elections, and at worst gives an overall impression that the 2014 Elections “endorsed” (i.e. fairly elected) the Bainimarama Government.

Overall JPS impression?

Guest Editor Dr. Sandra Tarte reported (USP News Bulletin, 19th October 2015) that the Special Edition of the JPS aimed to provide “impartial, scholarly analysis” of the 2014 Elections, and that this was “reinforced by our Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Rajesh Chandra at a meeting with him last year”.

Father David Arms (Member of the Fiji Electoral Commission) wrote in his article in the JPS “The general verdict on Fiji’s 2014 September elections is certainly positive … the basic job got done”.

The front cover of the Special Edition of the JPS had a photo of smiling Bainimarama and Aiyaz Khaiyum and emblazoned with the word “ENDORSED”, giving the clear impression to readers that the 2014 Elections had endorsed the Bainimarama Government.
That was all reinforced when the *Special Edition* of the JPS was launched in glowing terms by Shamima Ali (Coordinator of the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre and powerful advocate against domestic violence). Ali pronounced that the 2014 General Election was discussed “in a relatively impartial way” and concluded that it would be “a crucial resource for people interested in Fiji’s electoral politics and politics in general, as well as for Fiji scholars, students and observers”. Ali even recommended that the JPS Special Edition should be read by “political leaders and aspirant leaders, scholars, journalists, NGOs, feminists and the wider community”.

Ali also “appreciated the chapter on women candidates and how women fared better in the latest election”, a debatable conclusion. However, it is far more useful for readers to judge the JPS Special Issue by its contents and more specifically on the endnotes and footnotes in some articles.

I emphasize that I find no fault with most of the JPS articles by the other academics examining narrower issues in the 2014 Elections, as no doubt assigned to them by the editors.

**The damning footnotes and endnotes**

The Introduction by the Editors bluntly stated “Formerly influential institutions and entities such as the Great Council of Chiefs, the Methodist Church, trade unions, the media and even NGOs were either eliminated or so hobbled by years of repressive decrees that they became largely ineffective... accompanied by a constitution that entrenches several hundred decrees which cannot be challenged in any court of law, and a social environment that constrain fundamental freedoms.” But that was where the brave analysis ended.

From then on, the objective observations and analyses are to be found mostly in the endnotes and footnotes, as for instance by Professor Naidu who noted the following, without spelling out the critically important wider ramifications for the fairness of the election:

1. the Bainimarama Government rejected the Report and Electoral System recommended by its own appointed Yash Ghai Commission (we note of genuine experts);

2. following the 2009 Court of Appeal decision, members of the judiciary such as magistrates and judges were dismissed or resigned;

3. the Bainimarama Government rejected electoral options recommended by the NCBBF Working Group 1;

4. *The Fiji Times* has been denied government advertisements altogether;

5. *The Fiji Times* was fined $300,000 and its editor sentenced to six months imprisonment (suspended for 2 years) for republishing a story about the Fiji judiciary appearing in a NZ newspaper;

6. FICAC questioned the Chairman of the Fijian Electoral Commission about his role in the holding of a panel discussion on the elections;
7. threats by Bainimarama against the Leader of SODELPA were recorded by media;

8. All major NGOs complained against the Bainimarama Government’s refusal to abide by all the principles of democracy, freedom of the media, and basic human rights.

The article by Liku and Slatter stated in Endnote 8 “Unprecedented decreed restrictions on the commencement of political party campaigning, on media reporting, and on civil society organizations’ involvement in the elections, together with close relations between the incumbent government and the military, made for a very controlled election climate”. What a euphemism, “controlled”.

This article, despite claiming to focus on gender issues, did not discuss the fact that the Bainimarama Government had rejected the Ghai recommendation for a “Closed List” which would have given a guaranteed representation of women in parliament, depending on the ratio of women required in the Closed Lists, almost certainly far more than actually achieved in the 2014 Elections so praised by Shamima Ali.

**The unfair biases not systematically discussed**

Absolutely extraordinary is that neither the Senior Editors nor the other authors in the Special Edition of the JPS have any systematic and sustained discussion on all the important mechanisms through which the Bainimarama Government “controlled” (some would say “manipulated” or “rigged”) the entire elections resulting in a totally unfair outcome:

1. the suppression of trade unions and unionists, the GCC and the Methodist Church;

2. the massive financial support given to Bainimarama by the capitalist classes (whose fundraiser is now sitting on multiple government boards);

3. the suppression of the enormously damaging Auditor General’s Reports from 2007 to 2013, released only after the elections were held;

4. the suppression of an important FBS Employment and Unemployment Report which clearly showed that the negative economic impact of the Bainimarama Government on employment and incomes;

5. the pro-Bainimarama Government bias of the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA) and its Chairman (Ashwin Raj);

6. the draconian Media Decrees, the media censorship, biased media ownership and management, and overall suppression of the free media by the Bainimarama Government;
7. the clearly biased Supervisor of Elections who refused to comply with legitimate instructions given by the Fiji Electoral Commission (approving an inappropriate candidate while eliminating one approved by the FEC);

8. the legislative demand that new parties must have the names and signatures of 5000 voters, all openly published in the Fiji Sun (while ninety percent of FFP Members of Parliament had less than 1000 votes each) making a farce of the principle that elections must be a “secret ballot”;

9. the prosecution and jailing of political opponents to disqualify them from standing as candidates;

10. the exclusion of photos, names and party symbols of candidates, leaving only 250 numbers out of which one had to be ticked, giving clear advantage to Bainimarama;

11. the tight control of the polling stations, the voting, the counting and the final reporting processes

12. the banning of voter education by NGOs;

13. the massive vote buying using taxpayer funds prior to polling day and promises of more.

14. Bainimarama’s advice to Indo-Fijians that there would be no further coups if he was returned to power.

15. the impact of an extremely biased media, including the government-owned FBC TV and radio stations whose CEO was the brother of the Attorney General, the preferential financial support of the owners of the pro-government Fiji Sun (while Fiji TV was on six month license extensions), the biased media journalists of these two media organizations

16. a former MIDA CEO and FBC employee who late in the day became FFP candidates

17. the banning of exit polls at any of the polling stations, the norm in other countries.

18. the fact that not a single polling station result was independently verified by the FEC, despite requests from concerned members of the public.

19. the significant disqualification of votes because small political parties and Independents could not get the massive 5% minimum threshold, or 27,000 votes (which even twenty of the FFP Members of Parliament could not obtain in aggregate).
a final result which was so incredibly lop-sided (some twenty FFP MPs have less than 1000 votes each) making a total mockery of the idea that voters were democratically electing their Members of Parliament.

While some individual articles in the Special Edition do a reasonable job of analyzing the particular aspect aimed at, the analysis of the totality of the 2014 Elections is pathetically poor.

Indeed, any good junior academic could use merely the authors’ endnotes/footnotes and at least the salient facts listed above (there are more), to credibly establish the proposition that the 2014 Elections were NOT free and fair but “rigged”, and that the entire system and restrictive legislation need to change as the Opposition Parties are demanding.

The failure of the editors themselves to do this is extremely disappointing especially given that senior editor Naidu has long been an active exponent of “leftist class analysis” of Fiji’s history and political economy as clearly seen in his own PhD. Of course, editors themselves do not have to write all the different views about the elections themselves- they are free to choose from all the available views, some written and some that can be commissioned. This is where the editors’ choice of contributors becomes critical.

Sadly, the senior Editors’ choice of contributors just happened to exclude critical views of the 2014 Elections, while a recent attempt to change the management structure of the JPS suggests that the hand of USP management was not far away.

Biased choice of contributors

The back cover of the JPacS informs the world that it “welcomes scholarly contributions “ on topics relevant to the development problems of the Pacific islands, and that submissions would be judged by the usual academic criteria, including relevance, contribution to the literature and current debates.

Why then did the JPS Special Edition not approach two of the foremost writers on Fiji’s electoral systems, Professor Jonathan Fraenkel and Professor Wadan Narsey to contribute to their Special Edition on the 2014 Elections?

Both Naidu and Tarte are personally aware that Narsey for more than a decade been involved in community education alongside both of them including as part of initiatives by the Citizen Constitution Forum (CCF) on electoral systems, including that in the 1970, 1990, 1997 and especially the imposed 2013 Constitution under which the 2014 Elections have been held. Narsey was also part of the Yash Ghai Commission deliberations and conducted electoral workshops at USP.

Narsey has published more than twenty articles in The Fiji Times, on the “2014 Election Issues” in the 2014 Elections; spoken to gatherings of three Opposition parties (SODELPA, NFP and PDP) prior to the election; and prepared a rather prophetic Voter Education Kit for the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement and run workshops for the 2014 Elections even though the NGO’s voter education was banned by Bainimarama. All his writings have been on his personal website NarseyOnFiji read throughout Fiji.

When the Senior Editors were asked why I was omitted, Dr. Tarte said “she did not know”, while Professor Naidu said “We did not go outside of the university schools to seek...”
Wadan Narsey  
USP Compromise of academic integrity

contributors”. But in the same breath Naidu admitted that “the exceptions to this were Fr David Arms, and Chantelle Khan”. Why would Naidu and Tarte have made these particular exceptions? The mind boggles with Chantelle Khan.

Naidu later wrote to me (17 April 2016) “on hindsight I am sorry for what now appears to me as a silly oversight”.

But Naidu also added “I am very sorry that USP senior management actively prevented you from participating as a panelist and key note speaker on a number of occasions. This was not right and violated the principle of academic freedom, and the fundamental role of the university to promote debate and critical thinking. You correctly criticize the media situation in Fiji—it is pretty bad.”

I would argue that it was no oversight to exclude critical views of the 2014 Elections. Naidu and Tarte were not interested in paying any attention to the need to have objective scholarly contributions in the JPS Special Edition devoted to the 2014 Elections, which would not only have enhanced the literature but encouraged the “debate” that the JPS claims to have as a central objective of their publication.

Censoring the JPS Board

The nature of the JPS Special Issue on the 2014 Elections is given another dimension given that Professor Vijay Naidu himself wrote to two senior economics professors trying to remove them from the Editorial Board of the JPS.

Without any meeting of the JPacS Editorial Board, it was announced that the Editor-in-Chief (Professor Biman Prasad) had been replaced by Professor Vijay Naidu and also excluded from the JPacS Board. Professor Narsey was also informed by Naidu, in writing, that he was no longer a member of the JPacS Board. Upon protest, both Professors Prasad and Narsey were soon reinstated on the Board, again without any explanation.

The question remains: who gave the orders to exclude Professor Biman Prasad and Professor Wadan Narsey from the JPS Board? A mere Board Member himself, Naidu had no authority to exclude Professor Biman Prasad as Board Chairman and appoint himself; nor to exclude Professor Narsey, one of the most prolific academics writing on Fiji and Pacific issues. It is more likely that the initiative came from USP Vice Chancellor Rajesh Chandra, a Bainimarama supporter, with Professor Vijay Naidu merely signing his name to the orders, paying little heed to principles of fairness or academic integrity.

Of course, both Naidu and Tarte are well aware that the USP Vice Chancellor (Professor Rajesh Chandra) has interfered with the academic freedoms of USP staff and students, pressured senior academics and managers to resign, cancelled academic panel discussions, prevented guest speakers from speaking at World Press Freedom Day, and even stopped students protesting against the Indonesian Government’s suppression and genocide of the West Papuan people.

Perhaps the editors were merely following the “second best” solution that “something is better than nothing” even if watered down?

Or perhaps they were simply closet supporters of the Bainimarama Government sympathetic to its mantra “we are all Fijians”?

But they also would have known that the USP Vice Chancellor would not have been happy with a critical analysis “which called a spade a spade” nor would he have
been keen to renew contracts of some academics who he could claim had “gone past the retirement age”.¹³

The Silent Fiji Electoral Commission

It is pertinent that none of the former Fiji Electoral Commission (Chairman Chen Bun Young, Professor Naidu, Larry Thomas, James Sowane, Alisi Daurewa, or Jenny Seeto) have publicly criticized the clearly unfair elements of the 2014 Elections and none have publicly supported the calls by the Opposition Parties for changes to the systems.

The implicit message that has gone out to the voting public and the media is that all these former members of the FEC, labelled by the Bainimarama Government as “experts of one sort or another”, endorsed the 2014 elections processes and outcomes and that there was no need for change as the Opposition parties and candidates were demanding.

The JPS Special Edition on the 2014 Elections and the involvement of Professor Vijay Naidu, Dr. Sandra Tarte, David Arms and Shamima Ali can all be viewed as part of the civil society “legitimation” of the repressive military Bainimarama Government and their legislation, rules and regulations manipulating the 2014 Elections, and eventually enabling them to claim that they had been democratically elected by the voters of Fiji.

It just as well that Fiji’s Opposition Parties are referring to the mild Report of the foreign Multinational Observer Group rather than the writings or views of USP’s local “experts”.

It is extremely sad that there are no university academics in Fiji who are prepared to point out the horrible erosion of academic integrity that has taken place at The University of the South Pacific, the once premier tertiary institution in the Pacific, under the management of Professor Rajesh Chandra, a mediocre academic/manager relying on the patronage of the Bainimarama Government to obtain and protect his job at USP.

Post-script 1

The involvement of Australian Catholic priest, Father David Arms, in Fiji’s election processes deserves special treatment within a broader analysis of the competing support of Fiji’s religious institutions for military coups and the ability of unqualified but white expatriates to fill vacuums in leadership in a morally bankrupt former colonial and mentally colonized country like Fiji.

Post-script 2

The involvement of prominent citizens (like Jenny Seeto, Larry Thomas, etc) in accepting appointments to the Fiji Electoral Commission also deserve separate analysis. There is of course now a new lot being paraded as part of the Khaiyum

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¹³ At least one of the editors has had his contract renewed on a six monthly basis allegedly because of the 65 year retirement “rule” which is selectively applied by the Vice Chancellor.
Machinery for Elections, about some of whom (e.g. fishing capitalist Graham Southwick) one can already make some interesting conjectures merely from recent news items about them.

Post-script 3

Also needing separate analysis is the decline in activity of NGOs like the Citizens’ Constitutional Forum which used to be in the forefront of advocating constitutional and electoral changes for making elections fair and is now reduced to calling on voters to be brave in voting. Or of once human rights battlers like the CEO of Women's Crisis Center.

Post-script 4

It was also unfortunate that academics abroad in Australia and NZ were also not prepared to point out all the unfair aspects of the 2014 Elections and how the system ought to be changed. This is addressed in the next article.
Wadan Narsey  Are NZ and Australian academia compromising on Fiji?

55. **NZ and Australian academic double standards on Fiji election?**

[To come]

Unfortunately, I have run out of time.

The first half this article I publish separately.