

NFP Address

Dr Brij LAL

(Dr Brij LAL, who is known to most of us here as a Commissioner on the Reeves Commission and as a longstanding friend of the National Federation Party, is a scholar honoured in many countries around the world for his distinguished scholarship. He was awarded the Centenary Medal of the Government of Australia for his contribution to the Humanities there, and he has just completed a term as an Elected Fellow of the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Advanced Studies in New Delhi. Despite vilification and banishment by the country of his birth, Brij's commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law here remains undimmed. He has sent this message for this occasion)

Dear Friends

Greetings from Canberra. I deeply regret not being with you on this historic occasion. You all know the reason. I regret nothing else, certainly not for standing up for the values I hold dear to my heart. I wish you all a happy 50th anniversary celebration.

Your invitation brought back memories of my very first address to the NFP convention at Nawai Secondary School in 1993. The country was passing through a period of darkness then. The memories of the wrenching coup of 1987 were vivid in most minds. We had all witnessed religious bigotry in the form of Sunday Ban and ethnic chauvinism under the banner of the Taukei Movement. The deeply flawed 1990 Constitution had, with a stroke of a pen, consigned an entire community to the realm of political irrelevance, on the outer fringes of the nation's affairs. Our best and the brightest were leaving our shores for distant lands. Hope was a commodity in short supply.

But the country was lucky in having leaders, and especially leaders of the National Federation Party, who put aside their own deep sense of despair and disappointment and engaged with the leaders of other political parties to rescue the country from complete ruin. Their patience and persistence won the day in the form of an inclusive, multiracial constitution: a document not set in stone but one marking the first essential step in a new journey. Sadly, the

promises of that document remained just that, promises, aborted, unfulfilled. We all now know the price the country has paid for all the missteps and miscalculations. Those busily re-inventing the wheel now will do well to learn the lesson of our recent history that hubris unchecked is a sure recipe for disaster which we all wish to avoid.

Your Party is once again being called upon now, as it has been called upon in the past, to contribute to the enormous task of nation building. Your responsibilities are grave but your party's record should be a source of inspiration. As your leaders said in the past, there are no shortcuts in public life; means are just as important as the ends you seek; any political culture built against the will of the people will be doomed to fail; violence as an instrument of public policy will never work; that dialogue and consensus are the only way forward for us. The odds are forbidding, I know, but they are no match for the resourcefulness and tenacity of our people. This age of vanity and vituperation will not last forever; it too shall pass. As the *Bhagvada Gita* says, 'Satya me Vijatey,' Truth Always Triumphs in the End. *Kali Raton ke Aage Savera Bhi Hai.*

With My Very Best Wishes

Brij V LAL