

NFP GOLDEN JUBILEE DINNER

San Bruno Hotel, Nadi

7 Dec 2013

Welcome Address by NFP President Raman Singh

Master of Ceremonies, Guest Speaker Professor Biman Prasad, NFP Youth and Women's coordinators, Party Officials, former officials, former MPs, Mayors and Councillors, party stalwarts and guests.

I am deeply honoured as NFP President to be able to welcome you all to this historic function today.

As I acknowledge and thank our founders, party leaders, members and activists over the years for all their contribution, I also acknowledge those present here tonight and who have served our party in various capacities. I want to particularly recognise the presence of

Please give them a warm applause as appreciation for their contribution and sacrifices.

To survive fifty years as an institution and more so as a political party is no mean feat. Tonight the National Federation Party joins the ranks of perhaps only a small number of similar organisations in the world who have achieved such a milestone.

To be able to do so requires a strong foundation, a basis in sound philosophy, principle and policy, and most importantly an abiding commitment from all of us. I am proud to say the NFP has all of that.

Ladies and gentlemen political parties and their behaviour are always the subject of intense scrutiny, analysis and recording by historians, academics, political analysts and the media. The NFP is no exception. Much has been written about our party and leaders past by distinguished historians and most notably by Professor Brij Lal who has chronicled and documented a large volume of our early and recent history.

I urge you all particularly the youth of today to read these to better understand the struggles and sacrifices that have shaped modern Fiji. It is often said and I also agree that it is only when we acknowledge and understand our past that we can deal with the present and prepare for the future.

Shortly tonight another distinguished contemporary academic and socio-political commentator Professor Biman Prasad will take us on a similar journey of our half century's existence.

But let me say that as we remember these past fifty years we must also focus on the challenges that lie ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen we have been in the grips of a military dictatorship for the past seven years. It appears to be in a hurry to impose what it claims as its own unique vision for Fiji. It is typical of such regimes to do what they do and to want to do so without the complexities of popular approval and accountability.

In our recent travels around the country we have found that most ordinary people hold the belief that an election will once again restore fully the rights, freedoms and democracy that they had known before. They have little or no appreciation that the 2013 Constitution will substitute the military dictatorship with a constitutional dictatorship and which entrenches even more deeply the restrictions on personal liberties, lack of accountability, an iron cloak of immunity and most seriously a perpetual prohibition on the peoples' ability to constitutionally change that constitution ever.

Ladies and gentlemen our immediate future will be hugely challenging and will require special skills and commitments from leaders.

Our Party has survived many challenges but perhaps the biggest was in any case for me personally early this year when as we prepared to celebrate our great achievement of 50 years, we also faced the real possibility of extinction.

You all know when the regime imposed the political parties registration decree early this year it seemed an impossible task for existing parties to be able to meet the requirements. In fact we are only party to have survived that challenge and remain intact.

For NFP the task was even more daunting as the decree outlawed two of our key personalities from holding office or even being members of the Party.

As we celebrate this occasion I wish to put on record the Party's sincere appreciation to the dozens of our supporters who rose to the challenge and the over 8000 who signed up their support for our registration within the space of a couple of weeks.

I expect from all of you here tonight as well as from all out there to commit the same level of support for the Party in the weeks and months ahead.

Finally, I want to clear the misconception or ill-information amongst some quarters about the NFP working with other political parties for next year's general elections. We have been part of the United Front for Democratic Fiji (UFDF) for the sole purpose of ensuring genuine democracy in Fiji, nothing else.

This is not a new trend as historically and even currently throughout the world, political parties have cooperated on national issues and common values that are universal.

However, I wish to make it clear that the NFP will contest the general elections on its own. We have not and will not form a coalition with the Fiji Labour Party, Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) or any other party yet to be hatched, for the purposes of contesting the general elections.

Please enjoy the rest of the evening and I look forward to sharing other experiences after the formalities are over.

Thank you.