

By Raman Singh
NFP President

"We will not do so with arrogance. We will not do so by lying about the past or the future for that matter". – Voreqe Bainimarama, 3rd February 2014, while speaking at Chinese New Year Celebrations

But the very opposite is the truth of what Voreqe Bainimarama described will be the conduct of his government in the lead-up to the elections.

Bainimarama and Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum are unashamedly misleading the people of Fiji by saying that the NFP is part of an election coalition with other parties of the United Front for Democratic Fiji. While there is obviously an act of desperation, it clearly shows their lack of political morality.

And the media, particularly, the Fiji Sun and Fiji Broadcasting Corporation are reporting these prominently despite knowing fully that the National Federation Party had made it abundantly clear in December last year that the Party would contest the elections alone.

The statement made by the Party President during NFP's 50th anniversary celebrations at Nadi on Saturday 7th December 2013 was extensively reported by every media organisation in the country, including Fiji Sun and FBC.

Furthermore, last Friday, Social Democratic Liberal Party President and Leader, Marama Roko Tui Dreketi Ro Teimumu Kepa, clarified that SODELPA and other parties will go into the elections as individual parties. Again, this has been deliberately ignored by Bainimarama, Sayed-Khaiyum, the Fiji Sun and FBC.

The NFP re-iterates what I announced during the 50th anniversary celebrations on 7th December 2013: -

" 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”.

Both Bainimarama and Sayed-Khaiyum’s platitudes about the values and principles of NFP’s founding leaders A D Patel, Siddiq Koya and James Madhavan, by claiming the stand of the Party’s current leadership is an affront to them. These men as well as all other leaders of NFP were giants amongst men whose understanding, ability and perception of the problems facing Fiji was unparalleled.

Both should provide even a shred of evidence as to where the NFP has opposed common roll, particularly when the process of formulating a new Constitution started in March 2012 with the announcement of the Ghai Commission and even later when the Government trashed that Commission’s report and imposed its 2013 Constitution.

The NFP had submitted for Common Roll as the mode of election to the Ghai Commission. Of course there was no Commission that formulated the 2013 Constitution, which was done unilaterally by Government, one which Bainimarama says is cast in stone. A Constitution is a living document that undergoes amendments due to the social, economic and political transformation of a nation.

The media, particularly, the Fiji Sun and FBC, risk losing altogether any semblance of ethics, objectivity and practicing factual journalism if they continue to turn a blind eye to such mis-information churned out by the Government.

However, Bainimarama and Sayed-Khaiyum's diatribe re-confirms the concerns that the NFP has over the impartiality of the media as the nation gears up for the elections. It also highlights the concerns of the NFP over the conduct of Government and its two principals (PM and A-G) who have placed themselves in an advantageous position due to the State Proceedings (Amendment) Decree and the Media Industry Development Authority Decree. The NFP had pointed out these concerns to the Electoral Commission through our submission on 24th February.

The lack of media freedom and their ability to act as an efficient watchdog, particularly in the absence of democracy stood out in the editions of the Fiji Sun on Sunday 9th March and Monday 10th March, as well as the *Aina* talkback show on Radio Fiji 2 on Tuesday 12th March.

On *Aina*, (RF 2 talkback) Syed-Khaiyum without any opposing view continued to mislead the nation. Worse still, the talkback show host was confirming what the A-G was saying, preaching to the listeners to learn the truth!! Ultimately, she allowed one single point of view to prevail. This is clearly a breach of accuracy and balance, which are basic ethics of journalism.

The Fiji Sun edition of Sunday 9th March published Bainimarama's response to SODELPA leader's speech of Friday 8th March, that contained his senseless and unfounded allegations against NFP. These were repeated in the i-taukei and Hindustani languages on Monday 11th March.

If the vernacular versions of Bainimarama's response was published as advertisements, then he is using taxpayers' funds for electioneering. If both vernacular responses were published as news articles, then the newspaper would be guilty of being blatantly biased, unless it accords the same privilege and freedom to other

parties.