

ROAD MAP FOR THE RETURN TO PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY

(Speech by Interim Prime Minister Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks on Tuesday February 20, 2007)

Cabinet today approved the 'Road Map' for the return to parliamentary democracy.

Under this 'Road Map', Fiji will be ready for a general election and full restoration of parliamentary democracy as early as 2010.

The 'Road Map' takes into account the need to move the country forward through rapid economic recovery, stabilisation of Government finances and meeting the aspirations of the military and the Interim Government in terms of accountability and good governance.

The Interim Government will introduce measures to kick-start the national economy on a path to sustained growth and prosperity through the restructure in the sugar industry, proper land use planning, and the revival of the tourist sector.

The precarious state of the nation's finance will be improved and an alternative Budget will be implemented from March 2007.

This Budget will be aimed at stabilising the nation's finances and ensuring that the national deficit stays within 2% of GDP, in order for the national debt to remain sustainable.

We will resolve the land-lease issue. We will also expand the economy in order to create more jobs for our people, provide them with better income and opportunities, and reduce poverty.

As part of the 'Road Map', the Boundary's Commission will be tasked to draw up new open seat constituency boundaries and to ensure that the number of voters is, as far as reasonably practicable, the same.

This will entail the holding of a population census in 2007 to ensure that the Boundary's Commission works with the correct figures, in a geographical location, before determining the constituencies and their boundaries.

Fiji's last census was in 1996 and there has been a lot of internal as well as external migration in Fiji's population.

The Bureau of Statistics will take 12-15 months to complete a Census Report before the Boundary's Commission can gainfully use it. This process will take place in 2007 and 2008.

The Boundary's Commission will need 6 months to prepare the new Constituency Boundaries to be used in the next election.

The preparation of the new Boundaries is likely to be completed in 2009.

The Elections Office will need up to 12 months to prepare for a General Election. The preparatory work will be done between 2008 and 2009.

There will also need to be a new system of polling, voting, vote counting and declaration of results, which would take 9-12 months to complete.

Under the 'Road Map', the return to parliamentary democracy for Fiji may become possible after three years.

Within that timeframe, all the required tasks to be performed by the Interim Government would have been successfully completed, as part of the requirements of the Presidential mandate.

After three years, the country's economy and Government finance would have recovered fully, to be able to fund and sustain the required cost of a general election in Fiji.

The 'Road Map' will be subject to a mid-term review in late 2009.

The review of the 1997 Constitution and the fight against corruption will be carried out in tandem with the 'Road Map' for the return to parliamentary democracy.

We intend to do the necessary preparatory work for the review of the Constitution Amendment Act of 1997.

In particular, we want to rid the Constitution of provisions that facilitate and exacerbate the politics of race.

This is embedded in such areas as the registration of voters and the election of representatives to the House of Representatives through separate racial electoral rolls.

This will also necessitate the abolition of voting in terms of racial classifications. Henceforth, each voter should vote for a candidate of his/her choice in a common roll, with each vote having equal value.

In proposing the amendments to the Constitution, we are mindful of the requirements of Section 191, which says that any amendment can only be introduced by way of a Bill to the House of Representatives through the procedures spelt out in that section.

The review of the Constitution is expected to take two years to complete.

In that regard, a three-member Constitution Review Team will be appointed to undertake the review.

The Review Team will scrutinise the consequential and non-controversial amendments to the Constitution as proposed by the SVT, Peoples Coalition and SDL Governments, and decide whether those changes are to be effected on the amended Fiji Constitution.

It will review the current Electoral System in the Constitution and recommend ways in which the electoral process can be altered to remove communal-based elections to the House of Representatives.

It will also review relevant provisions of the Constitution relating to the role of the armed Forces and their reporting relationship, and determine any other changes to the provisions of the Constitution deemed necessary to ensure transparent, accountable and good governance in Fiji.

As you know, the Interim Government is in the process of setting up an Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

Preparatory work for this has commenced with the setting up of an Investigation Unit.

The Interim Government has pursued the clean-up campaign in a number of avenues to rid the country of corruption. Chief amongst these is the reconstitution of Board members in statutory bodies and government owned companies.

The clean-up campaign will continue in Government Departments, semi-government entities, in the business community and wherever corruption rears its ugly head.

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