

THURSDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY, 2016

The House met at 9.32 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

MADAM SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All the Honourable Members were present except the Hon. Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism; the Hon. Minister for Foreign Affairs; the Hon. Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources; the Hon. Ratu K. Kiliraki; the Hon. Ratu S.V. Nanovo; the Hon. Prof. B.C. Prasad; the Hon. Roko T.T.S. Draunidalo; the Hon. P. Singh and the Hon. Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu.

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 10th February, 2016 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Acknowledgement of Members and Visitors

MADAM SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to another sitting day. I also wish to warmly welcome the members of the public joining us in the gallery and those watching proceedings on television, in the internet and listening on the radio. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Business Committee Meeting

I wish to remind Honourable Members of the Business Committee that we will be meeting today during the suspension of proceedings for lunch. The meeting will be in the Small Committee Room (SCR).

Free Medical Checks

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services will have a team set up in the foyer to offer free medical checks today during the suspension of proceedings for lunch. I encourage Honourable Members to utilise this opportunity. I understand that the services will continue every sitting week.

Tabling of Committee Reports and Debate on
Bills not reflected on the Order Paper

For the information of Honourable Members, there are some items of business which will be dealt with today that are not on the Order Paper before you.

Firstly, I have been informed that there is a Committee Report by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, which will be tabled directly after Item 4 and before Item 5 on the Order Paper and secondly; the debates on three of the Bills tabled on Tuesday, 9th February, and the two Bills tabled yesterday, namely:

1. Civil Aviation (Montreal Convention, 1999) Bill 2016;
2. Revised Edition of the Laws (Amendment) Bill 2016;
3. Sea Ports Management (Amendment) Bill 2016;
4. Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations Bill, 2016; and
5. Registration of Skilled Professionals Bill 2016.

These insertions are necessitated by the respective resolutions of Parliament yesterday and on Tuesday when these Bills were tabled. They will be dealt with directly after the Ministerial Statements as pursuant to Standing Order 34(5) - Government business takes precedence from Monday to Thursday.

Motions by Opposition Members

I have been informed that Hon. Aseri Radrodro has withdrawn his motion. I have also received notice of a motion in the name of Hon. Mosese Bilitavu, copies of which should be before you. This will be dealt with after the motion in the name of the Hon. Attorney-General in Schedule 3.

Thank you.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Hon. Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport to table his reports.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the following Annual Reports to Parliament:

- (i) Water Authority of Fiji Consolidated Annual Report 2010-2012;
- (ii) Fiji Roads Authority Annual Report 2014; and
- (iii) Land Transport Authority Annual Report 2013.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Water Authority of Fiji Consolidated Annual Report 2010-2012 to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources; the Fiji

Roads Authority Annual Report 2014 and the Land Transport Authority Annual Report 2013 to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to take the floor.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Fiji's Higher Education Commission

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, it is indeed a great pleasure for me to present the Report of the Social Affairs Standing Committee on the review that was undertaken on Fiji's Higher Education Commission's 2013 Annual Report.

Last year, during the July Sitting, the Commission's 2013 Annual Report was tabled in Parliament and referred to the Committee to scrutinise. The Parliamentary Standing Committee, under the 2013 Constitution and Parliament's Standing Orders, aims to enhance transparency and accountability by public agencies and officials.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs is a Standing Committee of the Fijian Parliament and was established under Standing Order 109(2)(b) of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. The Social Affairs Standing Committee is mandated to examine matters related to health, education, social services, labour, culture, media and administration.

The Committee had consulted the Fiji Higher Education Commission and identified major areas of concern that affected the Commission. The review exercise was undertaken by the Committee and the Commission's 2013 Annual Report covers the areas of budget administration, policies, organisation structure, functions and programmes in 2013.

In conducting the review, the Committee identified that the Commission requires an increase in its budgetary allocation to support its plan in achieving its key output areas. It also identified that the Commission needs a review in its staff remuneration which was justified in the case of a high turnover rate of Commission staff in 2013 and in the past years. For these reasons, the Committee has compiled recommendations that would facilitate the area of concern which is identified in the review.

Lastly, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Honourable Members and the Secretariat Team, who were all involved in the review exercise and the finalisation of this Report. My Committee colleagues are:

1. Hon. Salote Radrodro, Deputy Chairperson;
2. Hon. Veena Bhatnagar;
3. Hon. Vijay Nath; and
4. Hon. Anare Vadei.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, it is an honour to commend this Committee Report to Parliament.

Madam Speaker, I hereby table the Committee's Report.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion, without notice, that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Government Workers and Christmas Island Veterans Payout (Question No. 21/2016)

HON. A. NABULIVOU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Hon. Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations advise the House on the amount paid to Government Workers and the Christmas Islands Veterans who participated in the *Operation Grapple*?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thought I should first make a comment and make a comparison of the developments that was happening in Parliament over the last two days and the waffle that is beginning to appear from the other side of the House, I compare that to the scene which we call 'inferiority war game' or simply fighting a war that you know you will never win. I think the Chief Opposition Whip will know this, but in the US Navy a saying goes like this, and I quote: "If you cannot dazzle them with brilliance, baffle them with bullshit". I wonder if this is the tactic deployed from the other side of the House.

(Laughter)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Order! Please withdraw the word 'bullshit'.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I have withdrawn the word 'bullshit'.

(Laughter)

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. On the issue of compensation payment for Government workers, \$2.5 million was allocated in 2015 to facilitate the payment made to injured workers and dependants of deceased workers, whose deaths were classified as work-related by medical opinion. A total of 211 cases amounting to \$2,053,724.36 was paid on 31st December, 2015. This comprises 145 injury cases totalling \$919,724, and 66 deaths, totalling \$1.584 million.

It is to be noted that the highest number of compensation cases paid were to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) where 96 cases were paid amounting to a total of \$927,650, and the Fiji Police Force where 36 cases were paid out amounting to \$499,806.28 which was 20 per cent of the total compensation paid to Government workers.

Madam Speaker, in relation to the Christmas Island payouts, the Bainimarama-led Government also recognises the sacrifices our soldiers and Service personnel endured while serving our beloved nation which could have exposed them to possible nuclear radiation during the testing of hydrogen bombs in Christmas Island. This operation was code named 'Operation Grapple', and the records provided by the nuclear veterans, with the assistance of the RFMF, stated that approximately 300 personnel were involved in this Operation.

In delivering social justice to our citizens, Cabinet Decision No. 339 approved a one-off *ex gratia* gratuitous payment as medical assistance to the remaining survivors and dependants of those who have passed on. Madam Speaker, the formula for calculating the payment was based on the number of Service personnel of 300 at a rate of 50 cents for 365 days for 54 years. Payout per individual was \$9,855. The total payout for the 300 personnel was \$2.95 million.

Madam Speaker, a budget of \$2.95 million was allocated as medical assistance to compensate survivors or their dependants for their exposure to possible nuclear radiation. The payment made to the veterans and the dependants of the deceased are done under three priority areas. These are:

1. Priority 1 - the payment of medical assistance to the 38 survivors, totalling \$374,490.
2. Priority 2 - includes the payment of medical assistance to the dependants of the deceased personnel whereby 219 deceased cases have been processed, and 1,174 dependants were paid a total of \$2,158,245.
3. Priority 3 – These are the non-travelling civilians who could have been exposed to radiation while servicing aircrafts at Nadi, and these aircrafts were used in the Christmas Island operation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- A supplementary question.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Supplementary question, Hon. Ratu Tikoca.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, when a Solicitor-General directs the Minister because he does not know his role in his Ministry, that is what I call 'coward and stupid.' My question is, do we have any support from abroad to support the Prime Minister's drive in funding the veterans of Christmas Island?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, this was totally funded locally.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, while we appreciate the resolution to this issue, I wonder if FijiFirst has also taken the trouble of educating our people on the sacrifices they made in

Christmas Island on the situation at that time, to test these weapons as part of the security umbrella that kept the free world safe?

They trivialise it by talking about it in dollars and cents, and not realising how serious it was. Is that part of the process, to appreciate the thinking of the powers that be at that time to include us, to make the free world safe? The way they are doing it, Madam Speaker, they are just trivialising it with dollars and cents.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, at least, the Fiji Government has acknowledged the efforts that have been made. There has never been any government that has taken the responsibility.

(Hon. Members interjected)

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

There being no other supplementary questions, and before we go on to the next item, I would like to extend a special welcome to Mr. Shiri Girig, a friend of Hon. Vunivalu from Uttar Pradesh in India.

(Applause)

He is in the public gallery, accompanied by Pundit Rajeshwar Sharma and his wife Sharmila from Nadi. Welcome to the Fijian Parliament.

I now give the floor to the Hon. Rika to ask his question.

2016 Vision – Ministry of Fisheries and Forests
(Question No. 22/2016)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Hon. Minister for Fisheries and Forests brief this august House of the areas of focus of his Ministry on its new vision for 2016?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Hon. Minister for Fisheries and Forests.

HON. O. NAIQAMU (Minister for Fisheries and Forests).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question raised by Hon. Rika.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries and Forests have allocated \$26.3 million to carry out its responsibilities, to promote the sustainable development and management of Fiji's fisheries and forest resources. First, let me read out my Ministry's new vision and elaborate on it.

Madam Speaker, our new vision states; "A leader in fisheries and forests sustainable innovation for small island economies". The vision builds upon and furthers the horizon of our former vision which states; "our future generation will inherit a sustainable fisheries and forestry sector." 'Sustainability' is the key word in both, the old and new vision, but the new words that broaden the horizon of the new vision are 'leader, innovation and small island economies'.

Madam Speaker, Fiji is already leading in many fronts; the pearl industry is an example, the successful establishment of mahogany plantations and the collaboration with communities on the establishment of pine plantations are only some examples.

Madam Speaker, for the sustainability component, we will be moving further from merely supporting livelihood in rural areas into empowering our resource owners and creating environments that will enable them to get wealthy from their own resources.

As for innovation, we are re-focussing the way we do our work to strengthen our research and development activities. In this regard, all our specialist Divisions now come under a Director for Research and Development. The focus on research will be centred in the areas of aquaculture, inshore fisheries, waste-wood utilisation, wood energy and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. This innovation will enable and empower our stakeholders to generate greater value for the same resources at an economical cost, satisfying both the needs and expectations of our customers.

Madam Speaker, we are also strengthening our Divisions by empowering them with policy and planning staff to work collaboratively with the respective Commissioners and Divisional Planners, to drive all developments in the Divisions. We are also strengthening our trade and manufacturing activity by having a more senior officer, totally responsible for looking after its accounts to realise our vision. My Ministry is currently reviewing its organisation structure to be able to align itself to better deliver against its new vision.

Madam Speaker, there is a considerable commitment towards aligning the Ministry's key policy objectives and outputs to global and national development priorities. Our activities under the 2016 Annual Corporate Plan is aligned with eight Sustainable Development Goals; six Pillars under the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Prosperity; the three Pillars – Social, Economic and Environmental under the Green Growth Framework for Fiji and seven Outcomes under the Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development.

Madam Speaker, the two recent Bills that were passed by Cabinet; the Forestry Bill and the Aquaculture Bill are both necessary legislation that will provide my Ministry with an enabling environment for implementing policies geared towards the vision, and foster the much needed economic growth.

Madam Speaker, these very changes are required to bring about the necessary development and innovation which would make our new vision consumable. This, in turn, will be fostering wealth creation that will lead to improved livelihoods in rural communities.

My Ministry will drive changes in both the fisheries and forests sectors, to continue providing a conducive environment for generation of wealth. On a broader scale, we will continue with our innovative research and development in order to achieve leadership status in Small Island Developing States.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Thank you. Supplementary question, Hon. Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Can the Hon. Minister be more specific in describing the new areas of focus in research and development to realise the Ministry's new vision?

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, as I have mentioned earlier, we will be strengthening research and development in both the fisheries and forests sectors. The major areas in innovative research

for forestry will be focussing on biomass energy and landowners compensation for conservation efforts under the REDD+ project.

My Ministry is further diversifying into a totally new area in forestry, such as growing wood biomass for wood energy. Generating energy from wood biomass using fast growing tree species, invasive tree species and wood waste has the benefits of reducing our fuel import bill. Currently, my Ministry is working with companies to collectively supply 27.8 megawatts of power annually to the national grid using energy from wood biomass.

Another innovative area is reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation through conservation and sustainable management of our forests. The new idea is to compensate forest owners for maintaining their trees instead of clearing them. A total of USD3.6 million was granted to Fiji under the World Bank to put in place a framework to develop this area further, with the target of having Fiji ready to go into carbon trading from 2019 onwards.

Madam Speaker, as for the fisheries sector, innovative research is now focussing on aquaculture development by creating economic opportunities for rural communities. The growth of *tilapia* and prawn farming is attributed to the Ministry's efforts in supporting research and developing the industry to improve cultivation. The recent commissioning of the new Multi-Species Hatchery in Ra by the Hon. Prime Minister will see an increase in production and further open up opportunities for employment and the establishment of aquaculture export markets.

On product development, Madam Speaker, my Ministry will assist communities through value adding programmes for commercially exploited fish species, seaweed products and ornamental entrepreneur designs for pearl shells. The Fisheries Department will provide technical training and advisory support to local fishermen in this regard.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Supplementary question, I will give the floor to the Hon. Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, we would rather this come as a ministerial statement as opposed to answers to questions because there is a lot in there that need to be dealt with. However, on this biomass initiative, where our people are going to grow this fast growing wood that would be used as fuel which is happening in Nadroga/Navosa, Madam Speaker; what kind of formula or structure are you putting in place to ensure the supply of this wood to the processor, that is, how are the landowners part of this? Are they going to have contracts to supply this wood to the supplier or will the processor lease vast swaths of land, grow it himself and process it himself? This is very contentious with us in Nadroga/Navosa, Madam, what is the formula? Are our people going to have contracts to supply or are they only going to give their land and the processor grows, harvests and processes?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, it will be the combination of both. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now will give the floor to the Hon. Mosese Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

I thank the Hon. Minister for his answer this morning, but my question will be very simple in regards to sustainability. What are the plans the Ministry has in regards to the need for logging and logging companies that are there and the need by landowners to harvest their logs and you are talking

about sustainability, at the same time focussing on REDD+ but there is no clear agreement on what kind of lease instrument will bind the REDD+ Agreement? What plans are there in the Ministry to see that there is no over logging?

MADAM SPEAKER.- Hon. Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, as I have already mentioned, it is clearly laid out in the plan the participation of the landowner, and my Ministry will ensure that they participate meaningfully in the utilisation of their resources.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Hon. Viam Pillay. Commonwealth Youth.

Commonwealth Secretariat for the Pacific Region
(Question No. 23/2016)

HON. V. PILLAY asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Hon. Minister for Youth and Sports please inform this House of its current negotiations with the Commonwealth Secretariat to host the Commonwealth Youth Secretariat for the Pacific region?

MADAM SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Minister for Youth and Sports.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU (Minister for Youth and Sports).- The Hon. Prime Minister, fellow Members of Cabinet, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of this Parliament: I must thank Hon. Viam Pillay for the question in today's Order Paper.

Madam Speaker, I am delighted that Fiji's stature and role as the hub of the Pacific continues to expand as the international community shows confidence in our continuing development. This example of the Commonwealth Secretariat's commitment to Fiji is indicative of the increasing esteem in which Fiji is held by the international community as a destination that is stable, prosperous and peaceful.

Last year, when we had the meeting of the Pacific Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Apia, Samoa, I was approached by the Commonwealth Secretariat to host the Commonwealth Youth Secretariat for the Pacific Region and for it to be moved back to Suva. So, Fiji will gain from these two positions as they will be chosen locally and employed by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Madam Speaker, the negotiations with the Commonwealth Secretariat to host its Pacific regional office in Fiji has now been finalised. Cabinet approved the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the associated budget at its meeting on Tuesday, 2nd February, 2016. Discussions are underway to have the MOU signed on Fiji's behalf either by the Fiji's new High Commissioner in London or when a senior Commonwealth official visits Fiji in the near future.

Madam Speaker, as the host on behalf of Government, the Ministry of Youth and Sports will provide a functional and convenient office space at no cost to the Commonwealth Secretariat and that will cover rent, water and electricity. The Ministry, under the terms of the MOU, will also provide an appropriately qualified local and young professional as Assistant Programme Officer to the Secretariat, as I have mentioned earlier.

Madam Speaker, the Commonwealth Secretariat will appoint a citizen of the Commonwealth as the regional representative and in terms of their policies, conservatively it will take about four months to

recruit a Commonwealth Youth Programme Regional Representative and all costs associated with this appointment will be covered by the Secretariat.

Further, to ensure support, cooperation and smooth resolution of any issues which may arise, a senior official from the Ministry of Youth and Sports will be the primary contact for the Commonwealth Youth Representative. The benefits of the Commonwealth Youth Regional Representative, Madam Speaker, being hosted in Fiji are significant. This includes the provision of onsite technical assistance regarding youth policy and practice, not only to the Ministry, but also to the youth work institutions and leaders throughout Fiji. This will help our current efforts to build stronger youth centred policies, framework and programmes.

Madam Speaker, as host Government of the Commonwealth Youth Programme Regional Office, Fiji has every opportunity to host Commonwealth Youth regional meetings. This again has immense benefits to Fiji in terms of our commitment to sports-related tourism.

For example, Madam Speaker, from the 13th to 16th June this year, Fiji will host 45 participants from the region in Nadi for the Regional Capacity Building Workshop funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Ministry of Youth and Sports will support this initiative by hosting a welcome function for our visitors.

Madam Speaker, I hope that Parliament, like the Government is greatly excited by the increasing recognition we are receiving from our international colleagues. This certainly bodes well for our region, foreign policy initiative and gives us greater input into the youth programme of the Commonwealth, including the important area of sports for development and peace.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Before I give the floor to the next Honourable Member to ask his question, pursuant to Standing Order 45(3), if a Minister does not table a written response within seven sitting days from the day a written question is tabled, the Secretary-General must place the question on the Order Paper for an oral answer, if the Member whose question stands so requests.

This Standing Order has been invoked, however, due to the nature of the questions and as agreed by the Business Committee, there will be no supplementary questions for the next three questions.

The Hon. Salote Radrodro is absent today, so I will give the floor to the Hon. Semesa Karavaki.

High Court Judges and High Court Pending Cases
(Question No. 25/2016)

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Hon. Attorney-General and Minister of Finance, Civil Service and Communications inform the House on the following:

- a) The total number of judges of the High Court appointed are presently sitting; and
- b) The total number of decisions pending for each of the judges and highlight the period lapsed since the conclusion of the hearing in regards to each case?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister of Finance, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question and the answers to his question are as follows:

- a) Currently, there is a total of 20 High Court Judges who have been appointed and are currently sitting; and
- b) One has to question the reason for the line of questioning as the Honourable Member would know as a practising legal professional that when we talk about decisions, there can be decisions in a range of multitude of cases or different types of cases. There can be employment matters, criminal matters, civil matters and family court matters. Also as the Honourable Member would know, decisions can be pertained to interlocutory matters, ex parte matters, full hearing matters and bail application matters. The question is, what are the decisions that are being referred to?

Madam Speaker, this second part of the question is very, very vague and indeed, one has to question the rationale behind asking such a question. If the Honourable Member has any issue pertaining to any outstanding decisions, it will be best if he writes to the Chief Justice, as you know the Judiciary is independent.

Madam Speaker, we have had complaints from some people who sometimes are awaiting for decisions. They write to our office and what we simply do is, we forward that complaint letter, address it to the Chief Justice or in his absence, we send it to the Chief Registrar and we get them to then liaise directly with the parties concerned, Madam Speaker.

So, in that respect also, Madam Speaker, it would be amiss of anyone to try and single out judges regarding any decisions that are pending. Apart from the fact that you have all these different types of decisions that can be pending, it is inappropriate to single them out because then you are interfering with the independence of the Judiciary.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua.

2011 Export Income Deduction Incentive
(Question No. 26/2016)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA asked the Government, upon notice:

In respect of the Government's 2011 export income deduction incentive, can the Honourable Minister for Finance, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications provide the following:

- a) The names of the exporters who were extended this relief from 2011 to 2015; and
- b) Of these exporters, outline the direct benefits and value-addition of their exports to the Fiji economy during that period?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Finance, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications). - Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and would like to thank him for this question. As you would know, the export

income deduction incentive, Madam Speaker, is a very important incentive to encourage exporters from Fiji to, of course, send their goods abroad.

Madam Speaker, this incentive, in fact, started way back in 2001 to again, spur the growth of our exports. Apart from the fact that we have the secrecy provision regarding FRCA's taxpayers, I cannot also give the Honourable Member and this House the number of companies because this change. So, in 2011, for example, Company A may have applied for their deduction but it may not do it in the following or two years later, so the period that the Honourable Member has asked for is for a five year period.

What I can give, Madam Speaker, is that, in 2011 the number of companies that received this incentive was 142, the EID rate or the rate of incentive at that time was 50 per cent. The export income deducted was \$22.79 million. The total export income was \$45 million from those cumulative companies with their amounts, but the total domestic exports in 2011 was \$1.02 billion.

You will see a trend, Madam Speaker, that in 2012, the number of companies that received the incentive was 162 as opposed to 142 in the previous year. However, the percentage of incentive has decreased from 50 per cent to 40 per cent. In fact, there are some WTO rules around that. WTO rules prefer that we do not have an export income tax deduction but the reason why we put it in place is because are a developing economy, we need to have this in place and the WTO requirement is that, we continue to reduce this. Nonetheless, we have maintained it at 40 per cent.

Export income deducted in 2012 was \$34.5 million. The total export income was \$86.4 million. The total domestic exports in 2012 was \$1.09 billion, which obviously increased from the previous year.

In 2013, Madam Speaker, the number of companies was 181, as opposed to 162 in the previous year. The EID rate was 40 per cent. The export income deducted was \$30 million, the total export income was \$76.6 million, and the total domestic exports was \$1.04 billion.

In 2014, Madam Speaker, the number of companies that applied for EID was 184. The EID rate was 40 per cent. The export income deducted was \$54 million. The total export income was \$137 million. The total value of the domestic exports grew to \$1.1 billion.

Unfortunately, we cannot have the figures for 2015, Madam Speaker, because they are still filing their returns. As we know, the year has just ended and we have the calendar year as our year.

Madam Speaker, overall in this period, total domestic exports have grown by 13.4 per cent, with the highest export noted in 2015 which we expect that the deductions will be done, amounting to \$1.16 billion.

Of course, Madam Speaker, the more exports you have, the more your foreign reserves grow because you are getting foreign reserves for the value of the goods that we send out. Madam Speaker, it does help us in terms of our balance of payments because at the same time, we do import a lot of goods. Many of the things that we have in front of us, the things that we are wearing are imported, so we have to pay for them. In order to pay for those, we need to ensure that we also have foreign reserves and foreign reserves come by way of, for example, tourism earnings, remittances which is the second highest level of foreign dollar that we get, and also at the same time, our exports. So, this is why the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Industry and Trade and various other Ministries are looking at increasing our exports to provide the various incentives for that.

At the same time, Madam Speaker, we also have the 'Fijian Made - Buy Fiji Campaign' because if more Fijians buy more Fijian products, the dollar stays in the country. We do not buy imports, therefore, our foreign reserves do not deplete. We are happy to say, Madam Speaker, that as a result of the combination of these policies, we now have the highest level of foreign reserves in Fiji that we have.

As for the Honourable Member's question, of course, this means that there is a lot of value addition that is taking place and the Fijian economy is growing. There are, of course, certain areas where exports have dropped but in other areas exports have increased. The overall level of exports in Fiji has grown by 13.4 per cent over the number of years that I have highlighted.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Thank you.

Question time is now over. We will move on to the next item on the Agenda.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

National Employment Centre Programmes and Initiatives

MADAM SPEAKER.– The Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations has informed me that he wishes to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 34. The Minister may speak up to 20 minutes. I will then invite the Leader of Opposition or her nominee to speak on the statement for no more than five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations to deliver his statement.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.– Madam Speaker, before I make my Ministerial Statement, I would like to comment on the statement made by the Hon. Opposition Whip that the Hon. Attorney-General took over my job in the negotiations.

The Hon. Opposition Whip is leaving now so I would not make any comment. Anyway, for the record that is the attitude, if you cannot stand up to the heat, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker I rise this morning to inform the House on the programmes and initiatives undertaken by the National Employment Centre (NEC) under the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations to address unemployment in Fiji. The NEC was established in 2010 under the NEC Decree of 2009 to basically address two main issues; first, to enhance the employability of the unemployed; and second, to create employment for the unemployed.

Madam Speaker for the first time, the Fijian Government through NEC, has captured the real time data of the unemployed population in Fiji and through this important data, the Fijian Government is formulating a strategy to address the issues of unemployment.

Madam Speaker, this year, the Ministry is developing and formulating an overarching National Employment Policy to map out and enhance policies and institutions with the view to better understand the evolving dynamics of employment and the labour markets, and to develop policy prescriptions to improve policy labour market outcomes in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, this policy allows the unemployed to freely choose their employment preferences, whether to join the formal employment service or self-employment service or foreign-employment service or to become a volunteer, including being a professional sportsperson.

Madam Speaker, the Foreign Employment Service is reviewing its selection criteria to target the most disadvantaged, unemployed people living in isolated rural settings of Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and

the Maritime Islands such as the Lau Group, Rotuma, Kadavu, Beqa, Lomaiiviti Group, Cikobia Island, Qamea, Yacata and Yasawa Islands.

Madam Speaker, the Foreign Employment Service, under NEC, is facilitating the New Zealand Regional Seasonal Employers Programme (RSE) and the Australian Seasonal Workers Programme (SWP) for unemployed Fijians to work in seasonal horticulture and viticulture industries for seven months and six months respectively. The Australian Seasonal Worker Programme has included four other sectors namely, cotton, sugar, aquaculture and accommodation.

Madam Speaker, on 8th February (this week), the Australian Government further announced the expansion of a scope of the Seasonal Worker Programme to cover all unskilled agricultural work. Under this expansion, our seasonal workers can now do the following work:

1. Dairy;
2. Hatchery work;
3. Sowing, raising or harvesting of crops grown as part of a crop or mixed farming enterprises;
4. Assisting with livestock management or handling;
5. Treatment of land crops or livestock; and
6. Clearing, fencing or assisting with well sinking, dam sinking and trenching on properties.

As part of this expansion, seasonal workers can undertake a range of tasks on the farm including:

1. Feeding and watering;
2. Assisting with animal husbandry, such as drenching and needling;
3. Operating basic farm machinery with appropriate training as required;
4. Fencing;
5. Cleaning; and
6. Weed and pest control.

Madam Speaker, for New Zealand, the pilot phase has been lifted and we are expecting more Fijians to be absorbed into this Programme in 2016.

Madam Speaker, Foreign Employment Service has sent 323 seasonal workers under this Policy which includes 97 seasonal workers to New Zealand and 226 seasonal workers to Australia respectively in February 2016.

Madam Speaker, given the expansion in the scope of the Australian Seasonal Worker Programme, we will sign a revised Seasonal Worker Programme Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Australia next week, and that will supersede the earlier MOU signed on 2nd April, 2015. The revised MOU will open employment opportunities in Australia and we anticipate that more seasonal workers will leave our shores for these increased employment opportunities in 2016 and beyond.

NEC is also increasing awareness to the local employers to employ unemployed Fijian graduates registered in the NEC for work attachment and permanent employment.

Madam Speaker, further, the Fiji Volunteer Service is in place to address the employment needs of retirees and graduate volunteers in terms of assisting and identifying local and regional opportunities available to them. The Fiji Volunteer Service sends retiree teachers to Nauru, Tuvalu and the the Marshall Islands.

Madam Speaker, the Fiji Volunteer Service will be signing an MOU with Vanuatu and Kiribati in the near future. We also anticipate sending other retired professionals to Papua New Guinea and other

Pacific Islands. The Fiji Volunteer Service also assists employers to find suitable candidates for their organisation, and also set the platform for the NEC registered clients.

Madam Speaker, our teams are also involved in the negotiation of labour mobility with the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), the Holiday Work Visa and PACER Plus Framework, to enable Fijians to seek employment in New Zealand, Australia and the Melanesian countries.

Madam Speaker, NEC continues to sign MOU with potential employers in Fiji that allow the absorption of unemployed graduands into decent workplace attachment for six months to build their capacity, skills and competencies. The unemployed individuals registered with NEC undergo professional counselling, aptitude test and value based life skills training to enhance their competency to be marketable for the labour market nationally and internationally.

Madam Speaker, NEC has also increased its networking with foreign embassies and negotiations on labour mobility through the existing framework to benefit our unemployed graduates in finding sustainable employment overseas.

Madam Speaker, we are also expanding our partnership across Government through the Ministry of Education and we hope to sign an MOU soon on the training of unemployed workers who are registered with NEC. Under the MOU, those individuals will be trained through the newly established Technical Colleges across the nation in trade and technical areas such welding, fabrication, cabinet making, automotive, metal work, plumbing, spray painting, baking and patisserie, horticulture, carpentry and other construction and civil works. Further, young graduates are encouraged to pursue entrepreneurship opportunities and utilise our natural resources to create employment and network with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism to establish Small and Medium Micro-Enterprises (SMEs).

Madam Speaker, closer networking is developed with the Ministry of Rural Development, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture to identify potential areas of farming, to encourage young individuals to take up farming as employment opportunities and aspire to become effective employers and employees. In my capacity as the Minister for Employment, I have also initiated talks with interested stakeholders from the United States on the possibility of engaging Fijian workers in seasonal employment in California in the agricultural sector.

Madam Speaker, in addition, the Ministry of Employment has initiated discussions with other ministries to develop and assist seasonal workers on their return. These workers can utilise their knowledge and experience, and develop their own small farms and businesses in their rural settings and employ others, especially within the communities that they live in.

Madam Speaker, the seasonal workers employed on farms will learn new techniques which can be developed and used locally. We plan to talk to the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development to seek their contribution in the provision of assistance to help these workers to start small commercial farms.

Madam Speaker, seasonal workers would normally return with good savings and will have the ability to start a small business project that can be developed to employ others and create a multiplier effect. We are discussing these opportunities on probable ways and means to provide assistance. I am waiting for the Honourable Minister for Trade to return from abroad to discuss this further.

Madam Speaker, starting from this year, the Ministry of Employment, will encourage recruiting unskilled farm workers from rural and isolated areas in Fiji. This is our contribution to the Government's overall initiative of providing equal opportunities and the widest distribution of wealth. We hope that these rural workers will return to their villages and settlements, and initiate economic activities.

Madam Speaker, we also envisage that this will be the Ministry's contribution to the reduction of rural to urban drift. We hope that unemployed urban dwellers will be attracted to return to their rural villages to qualify for this sector as seasonal workers, and to be employed on overseas farms. Returning to the villages will be now be an attractive choice.

Madam Speaker, overall, the NEC is implementing a holistic approach in addressing unemployment in Fiji and the Ministry is vigorously pushing its programmes which are aimed at increasing employment opportunities for Fijians while at the same time, building the capacities and capabilities of the unemployed.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

I now call upon the nominee of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to provide a response.

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

I rise on behalf of the Opposition to comment on the ministerial statement by my colleague.

Madam Speaker, just on the seasonal workers into Australia, I was in county New South Wales once and I saw all these Islanders, the Tongans, Vanuatus and Solomons, working on farms and I asked the question; "What about Fiji?" They said: "This was the deal negotiated between Prime Minister Qarase and Prime Minister John Howard, but because of the *coup* in Fiji, Fijians were not brought in to work on this farm."

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- I mean, that is the reality of it. Let us be careful on how we manage our relationship with these important partners of ours. Let us not pick fights with them.

However, let me just go from there to the case of the seasonal workers in Australia, Madam Speaker. There are two types of worker schemes in Australia and one is the Backpacker Scheme. These are people from the Northern Hemisphere who go on holidays to Australia and can earn money while on holiday. The others are the islanders or the people from the subcontinent of India and the likes, who go and also work in Australia. What the farmers in Australia are now saying is that, they prefer the island people because a backpacker holiday maker is only there for a holiday and is not really committed to the work at hand. So really, there is now debate in Australia to make it easy for our people to gain employment there.

The rules are weighted against ours. It is easier for a backpacker to get employment than an Islander, but I believe my colleague, the Hon. Minister is staying on top of this because it is now being debated in the Parliament in Canberra. Maybe it has been passed, but when this happens, it will benefit us in a great way. Madam Speaker, thank you.

We are amazed, Madam Speaker, that there are 45,000 or 50,000 people who are unemployed in this country. If you listen to my colleague from the Ministry of Fisheries, all the programmes that he has outlined should employ 40,000 or 50,000 people. If you listen to my colleague, the Hon. Minister for Agriculture and all his programmes and that of the Minister of Employment, this country should be under-employed.

We should be looking for workers, but the problem, Madam Speaker is that the execution is very poor. Let me give an example. My colleague from the Ministry of Agriculture said to me once that for milk production in Fiji, we can just follow the Indian moral, “one home - one cow”. That is how India fixed its milk production. In Fiji, we consume about what, 80 million litres of milk? Yet, we only produced about 8 million litres in this country. We used to produce 15 litres but under FijiFirst, it went down to 8 million litres.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- So, let us not just talk, if the answer is there Hon. Minister of Agriculture, bring it out, make every house in Fiji have one cow and we produce milk for this whole country.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- These are the simple things but they go on with all their corporate plans and corporate talk, we will continue to sit here and maybe by next year, there will be 60,000 or 70,000 unemployed people.

Madam Speaker, the answer to this is education and SODELPA wants free university tuition, free technical colleges, cut back on the budget you are over supplying to the Fiji Roads Authority, cut back on the budget you are supplying to the water supply, they can work with ...

(Hon. Member interjected)

... \$150 million and make everyone in this country go to university for free. That, Madam Speaker, will fix all the problems.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Hon. Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, who has informed me that she wishes to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 34. I will ask the Hon. Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation to deliver her statement.

Set up of Barefoot College in Fiji

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

The Hon. Prime Minister; Hon. Cabinet Ministers; Hon. Members of Parliament; our friends in the gallery; a special welcome to the members of the Fiji National Council for Disabled People; friends from India and our respective guests in the gallery; please allow me to add to the humour that was just presented this morning. On one side, we heard that animal milk is not for human consumption and on the other side, Madam Speaker, we have a proposition that every household should have a cow.

(Laughter)

Where is the confusion? I am only adding to the humour. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, I rise this morning to provide a ministerial statement to this august House on a project that will significantly benefit rural communities in Fiji and other Pacific Island countries, especially in terms of the training of solar grandmothers from rural communities across Fiji. I would call this as a 'Dream Project' because as we travel across the country, we meet up with many communities that do not have electricity and I see this as a solution to the problems that these communities are facing. Of course, the intention of this project is to replicate the internationally renowned Barefoot College in India and other countries, and bring the services down to Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I am well informed of your start-up collaborations and achievements with this institution in your former role, may I commend you on that.

Madam Speaker, the replication of Barefoot College in Fiji has been mooted through the strengthened bilateral ties and friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Fiji. This opportunity was further enhanced through the timely visit of the Hon. Prime Minister of India, His Excellency Narendra Modi to Fiji, and was at the backdrop of the visit to India by our own Hon. Prime Minister, accompanied by myself and his high level delegation last year.

Madam Speaker, the concept of Barefoot and to understand what Barefoot College actually means, 'barefoot' stems from the Gandhian principles of 'simplicity in service'. Please allow me to elaborate on the objectives of the Barefoot College.

The Barefoot College, of course, is a non-governmental organisation from Tilonia, Rajasthan in India and was founded in 1972 by Professor Bunker Roy, to provide basic services and solutions to problems in the rural areas for more than 40 years with the objective of making them self-sufficient and sustainable. The programmes are influenced, again as mentioned, by the Gandhian philosophy that each village becomes self-reliant through simple programmes.

The policy of the Barefoot College is to take students, primarily women, from the poorest of the villages and teach them skills such as installation, building and repairing of solar lamps and water pumps, without requiring them to have a high level of literacy. In extreme cases, these colleges have students without verbal fluency in the language of their teachers. All in all, I believe this is a very inclusive approach to empower our women and girls in rural areas. Of course, the main qualification should be a deep desire to learn and make a difference in your communities.

Madam Speaker, for the last 40 years, the Barefoot College has demonstrated great impacts of demystifying and introducing modern technologies in the rural areas, through provision of rainwater harvesting, solar electrification and livelihood development. Since 2008, the Barefoot College in India has provided training to over 74 countries around the world, with over 754 women being trained as solar engineers, thus reaching over 550,000 people worldwide. It encompasses a localised approach to buildings/facilities using local expertise in construction to add a local touch to the facility. Of course, the facility will be fully using solar energy as an example.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that Fiji is one of the 10 Pacific Island Countries with the highest number of rural women trained as solar engineers. This has transpired through Fiji's strengthened high level co-operation with the Government of India.

The Barefoot Solar Initiative was initiated in Fiji in 2012, and it aimed at analysing the viability of solar home systems in Fiji with the Barefoot Approach by making its application available to poor families, particularly those in remote, rural and maritime communities.

In 2012, 10 rural grandmothers aged from 35 years to 50 years were selected from Fiji to take part in a six months solar engineering course at Barefoot College, Tilonia in India. I am sad to say that one of our grandmothers has passed away, but the beauty of this Programme, Madam Speaker, is that,

there is a lot of transfer of knowledge. So, even though one of our solar grandmothers has passed away, she has transferred the knowledge for the Programme to continue.

Madam Speaker, this was again achieved through the Government's strong partnership with the Indian Government, with the support from UNDP's Small Grants, UN Women and together with the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas Network (FLMMA) and five NGO, who supported the solar electrification of more than 350 households across 12 villages in Fiji by its first 10 solar grandmothers.

Training was conducted early in 2013 at the time of the arrival of the tools and equipment from India via shipment. The equipment was taken to communities where these solar grandmothers resided, and they were equipped with tools for assembling these solar electrification panels in their respective villages.

All the communities are now using solar lanterns and solar lights. The 10 women solar engineers trained by Barefoot College in India, carried out the installation works in their communities by installing the solar workshops and solar lights. These are the trained solar engineers with four more to come, who will run this college when it is established.

Madam Speaker, these 12 rural communities that were solar electrified are as follows:

1. Waikubukubu in Ba;
2. Dama in Ra;
3. Baidamudamu, Naioti, Lawaki and Nabouwalu in Kadavu;
4. Vuniqalotu and Nakorovou in Bua;
5. Vunidogoloa in Cakaudrove;
6. Lutukina and Nabouono in Macuata ; and
7. Yasawa Village in Cakaudrove

It has been three years since the project has been commissioned in these few villages.

From the findings, it is evident that this project has positively impacted and improved the living standards of families in these non-electrified rural communities. Of course, in order for this project to be sustained, the commitment from communities is equally very vital as women to be trained are recommended by the villages themselves, so as to take the full ownership of this project to benefit the community.

Madam Speaker, it was clearly demonstrated that there are savings on lighting expenses, the quality of light has improved (the children in these communities have more study hours, thus there is expected improvement in their educational achievements), increased accessibility to mobile communication, increased activities for income generation during night hours, and increase in knowledge transfer of solar engineers to women and youths in their communities.

The total projected savings after the installation of solar lights in these three rural communities amounted to \$473,760. These were the savings from kerosene for lighting, buying of dry battery cells for lanterns and torches. To add on, a total of \$15,000 todate has been deposited into the bank accounts for the village solar communities.

Madam Speaker, the project is managed at community level and a levy is placed on households on a monthly basis. This levy is to provide monthly payments that ranges from \$85 to \$285 to the women solar engineers as per the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that is held between the Barefoot College, the Ministry and the villages.

The communities that have been mentioned, have signed an MOA with the Barefoot College and the Ministry, to ensure the sustainability of this project. The Agreement covers the establishment of a solar workshop, payments to the solar engineers and the maintenance costs to the village solar communities.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that we had a high level preparatory discussion last week with Mr. Bunker Roy and the key local stakeholders, to discuss the way forward on building Fiji's or the Region's first Barefoot College. Also present, Madam Speaker, in this meeting was the Acting High Commissioner to Fiji, Mr. Rana, and representatives from UNDP and UN Women.

Madam Speaker, the plans for the establishment of Fiji's Barefoot College is progressing well. The hardware and consumables for the development of the facility are manufactured in India and they will be shipped into the country with full installation from the Barefoot College engineers.

Fiji's Barefoot College is expected to house the solar electrification training and accommodation facilities. This initiative has been found to be successful in Zanzibar and other developing countries, and the benefits are remarkable. Of course, the spin-offs from the project are immediate and address social and economic empowerment of our women in rural areas.

Madam Speaker, a suitable site for the construction of the Fiji's Barefoot College has been identified in Wainikoro, Nadogo, and I would like to thank Tui Nadogo, who has come on board with us and has agreed to gift us with 10 acres of his land to establish the first Barefoot College. Site survey has been done with iTLTB and the Ministry will progress on the formal acquisition of the land to progress with this project.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation will lead this important project within which will be the submission of a project concept note through the diplomatic channels. The multi-stakeholder meeting has been set out to project implementation plan, which includes the signing of MOA between the Government of Fiji and the Barefoot College International to formalise our partnership soon.

Madam Speaker, there will be funding implications for Barefoot College in Fiji. A stakeholder consultation on the project will be convened to bring together funding options before presenting the project designs and implementation plans to Cabinet for their approval.

Madam Speaker, establishing Barefoot College in Fiji is a significant development project for us. This project will create a range of vocational training opportunities for the regional countries as well as it will train to serve solar engineers in the Pacific. This is, of course, aligned with the Indian Government's commitment to contribute to renewable energy for rural communities in Fiji and the entire Pacific Region.

A Regional Barefoot Vocational Training Centre will approximately cost us \$1.1 million or USD518,507. The facility will house the following:

1. Training Centre with classroom and office;
2. Living quarters for the trainees; and
3. Living quarters for the staff.

There is also an agreement, Madam Speaker, between the Barefoot College in Rajasthan, India; the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas Network (FLMMA), our NGO partner; and the Ministry of Women in Fiji, to train another five solar engineers this year, and they should be done well before September. They will all be women from Nadogo, Macuata, as they will be prepared to manage the centre that we have planned to establish in Macuata. Madam Speaker, I see some Honourable Members from Macuata, smiling. Thank you, Hon. Bulitavu.

Madam Speaker, furthermore, by September this year, Barefoot College, in partnership with local NGOs and my Ministry, will convene a regional refresher solar workshop in Fiji to upgrade the knowledge and skills of the already trained solar grandmothers here and throughout the Region, and this workshop will be fully funded by the Government of India. More than 30 Pacific Islands' solar engineers will come together for the first time for this refresher workshop and it will provide an opportunity for them to be able to share their knowledge, experiences and best practices for the development within their communities.

Madam Speaker, some of the other programmes that are associated with the establishment of the Barefoot College will include not only solar engineering, there will be mosquito net manufacturing, reverse osmosis water purification, rainwater harvesting and, of course, sanitary napkin production for the rural communities.

As I had mentioned, these projects will not be successful should we not get commitment from the villagers who will be identified for these projects. We will be working, Madam Speaker, with villages, communities, women, the Ministry of Environment especially in terms of Department of Energy, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, UNDP, UN Women and of course we are trying to work with the regional Ministers of other Pacific Island countries.

Madam Speaker, by teaching the people how to better themselves and giving them an opportunity to become literate and further their knowledge in practical areas, Barefoot College will not only fix the problem of poverty and inequality, it will bring the citizens into a solution so their community would feel that they were also doing their part to help themselves and their members. They will be more efficient, effective, resourceful and knowledgeable citizens, who are fighting to have a productive and a profitable society.

Madam Speaker, the roll-out plan for the Barefoot College has been reset in motion and, of course, there are great domestic and regional benefits, and Fiji will build the first centre and it will be the first initiative of its kind.

Madam Speaker, allow me to share a small experience that I had when I was in Labasa. We met up with this rural community that had not had electricity for as long as they knew. The sentiments expressed by the elders was that, their grandparents had come and gone without electricity, they are there and they do not want that future for their children. A social problem that they mentioned which really caught my attention (some Members might find it humorous) they were saying that it is very difficult now to get their sons get married because none of the girls in the urban centres or in area that have electricity wishes to get married to them. That is a real problem, so this initiative will sort of try to address that.

As I have said, some of us might find it funny, but this is a real problem that we have and I think initiatives like this will assist when we are able to reach out to those communities and see that they are accessible to solar energy.

On that note, Madam Speaker, thank you very much and this information is put to the House.

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call on the nominee of the Leader of the Opposition to make his response.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I stand to respond to the Ministerial Statement according to Standing Orders, but before I begin, I think the Hon. Minister for Women fell short of recommending the best milk that should be consumed in the House.

Madam Speaker, we hear a lot about the Barefoot Programme and we appreciate the assistance that has been rendered by the Ministry in terms of empowering our women. However, there are a lot of questions and drawbacks that need to be highlighted to the Minister. The first question is, whether the trainees or women who have been trained, are called 'engineers' or 'technicians' and what qualification do they hold when go into entrepreneurship?

We hear that there is an increase in unemployment, as has been highlighted by the National Employment Centre, so what assistance will this Programme offer in trying to curb unemployment? We also hear that the graduates of this Barefoot College only assist in the rural community, but they do not participate or assist in the intended rural electrification that has been highlighted by the Minister, in terms of getting into entrepreneurship and be engaged in the 2016 rural electrification programme.

The other issue, Madam Speaker, is that, this sort of assistance is nothing new and one of the assistance that was also initiated by the Ministry is the micro-enterprises assistance offered to women. This is in assisting them in setting up businesses in the villages, like sewing machines, or starting up a bakery. The feedback coming from the people on the ground, Madam Speaker, when it is time for collection, when the Ministry comes in for collection on a certain day, say the Department of Co-operative comes to collect the dues from the women, most of the time when the van comes to collect, the women run away from their villages. They even miss the Soqosoqo Vakamarama meetings. That is the reality on the ground.

(Chorus of interjections)

That is the news from the people. This, you will have to find out if you actually do your homework.

What I am trying to say here, Madam Speaker, is, there are a lot of initiatives but the implementation and monitoring is something that is missing. There is no review, even from the Statement of the Minister, there is no report on how effective this programme was undertaken. We only hear of the savings; savings from the kerosene and the like. That is normal. When you go into electricity, then we will not spend the kerosene to provide the electricity.

The story by the Hon. Minister, Madam Speaker, regarding the women not willing to get married, I would just like to say that sometimes it is good to have no lights.

(Laughter)

Well, if they are providing the light, well and good. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much.

On that note, we will suspend the sitting for morning tea and refreshments, and the guests from the gallery are also invited. I can assure you that with the refreshments, we also have milk, but cow's milk.

(Laughter)

The Parliament adjourned at 10.57 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.30 a.m.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will resume from where we left off.

The Hon. Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts has informed me that he wishes to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 34. I now call on the Hon. Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts to have the floor.

Parental Engagement

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the Hon. Prime Minister, Honourable Members of this House: first of all I wish to thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to share to this House Pillar 4 of the Reforms in Education, that is on parental engagement.

Madam Speaker, earlier this morning, we have circulated to all Honourable Members of this House a copy of the Parental Engagement Framework Strategy, which should be on your table.

Madam Speaker, in 2015, the reforms implemented by the Ministry of Education based on the three key pillars, are:

1. Content Review;
2. Teacher Delivery; and
3. Infrastructural Development.

Madam Speaker, these three pillars are focussed on improving the services we provide to students and teachers and to also develop the learning environment for students to better enhance their uptake of education from the school premises.

Madam Speaker, the education sector has also identified that schools need to recognise the primary role of parents in education and advocate for them to work in partnership with the stakeholders in education.

Madam Speaker, of all the factors affecting a child's education, the home influence in terms of parental support and intervention ranks amongst the highest.

Madam Speaker, the emergence shift to a more child-centred learning also supports the importance of parental engagement in a child's learning. Studies have shown that parental engagement has had enduring and positive impacts on many indicators of a child's achievement and realising his or her full potential.

Madam Speaker, in this framework, we want parents to take ownership of the child's education growth development.

Madam Speaker, education in the current era demands parents to work together with other stakeholders in order to achieve the desired outcome for their children. As such, our ministry intends to identify and adopt effective strategies to attain parental engagement in schools of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, Pillar 4 of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts Reform highlights parental engagement in education as a key aspect of the education system.

Madam Speaker, over the last four decades, we have noted that parents have pushed the responsibility of their children's education more and more to the school system and have withdrawn themselves from actively engaging and contributing towards child's education and development.

Madam Speaker, policymakers in the past have accepted and acknowledge that parental engagement is important for students learning, but little have been done to identify strategies which can assist to improve this in schools.

Madam Speaker, some of the other countries also have this particular pillar, particularly Australia. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, none of the countries who have this framework have gone down to the details that we have done in this case.

Madam Speaker, this new policy on parental engagement aims to ascertain that children are academically progressive, actively engaged in skill-based activities, aspire to further their educational achievements and skills from institutions of higher learning as well and contribute positively towards the notion of building a smarter Fiji.

Madam Speaker, this initiative will give schools and parents the opportunity to work in collaboration, to enhance the development of positive attitudes in their children towards learning. The ultimate goal is to ascertain that they reach their full potential.

Madam Speaker, the parental engagement framework is a cutting edge framework, developed by our ministry and is the first globally to have clearly defined strategies of parental engagement in advancing holistic education of our children.

Madam Speaker, Fiji takes the lead role in this initiative globally and is leading a new era of collaborative education for our children.

Madam Speaker, it is evident that children nowadays are establishing patterns of behaviour that is affecting the overall performance at school. Some of these children are engaged in risky behaviour, for instance, failing to attend primary school regularly, late arrival to school and classes, truancy, disruptive behaviour in class, bullying, consumption of alcohol, kava, tobacco and other drugs, engaging in sexual activities, teenage pregnancies and showing disrespect to parents, teachers, elders, as well as to some extent, engaging in vandalism.

Madam Speaker, according to the *2015 National Substance Abuse and Advisory Council Report*, which undertook a study of 400 primary and secondary schools in Fiji, they found a total of 1,796 offences were committed by secondary and primary school students.

Madam Speaker, again, also very interestingly, last year's statistics further highlight an alarming rate of absenteeism in our schools on a daily basis. Approximately, we have noted that 5 per cent of the students are absent on a daily basis from our schools, which is about 200,000 students, which is equivalent to 10,000 students per day.

Madam Speaker, let me give you an example. Recently when the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Josaia Bainimarama was taking a tour of the Nausori Highland School, we also accompanied him. We took lead early in the morning and we visited Magodro Primary School on our way to the Nausori highlands. We also visited Ratu Nalewavada Primary School on our way to Magodro Primary School.

We were there at this particular school, Ratu Nalewavada Primary School at around 8.30 a.m. We were speaking to the teachers and they told us "this school has a total of 54 students." There were about five students who were absent that day, that is 9 per cent of the student absent out of the 54, Madam

Speaker. When we were speaking to the teachers, they were saying that this is abnormal that every day four or five or six students are absent.

Madam Speaker, we asked “where are the students coming from to this school?” They said “across the road, that’s the village, the largest village.” Almost 50 students out of the 54 come from that village. It is about 200 metres away from the school, just from the other side of the road.

Madam Speaker, this is not acceptable, what is the reason, why are students not coming on time? As we were speaking to the teacher, we saw students, (this was around 8.45 now) two students were coming to school. We spoke to the children, there was no other reason except that they woke up late, they said that they were tired of playing around and they decided to come to school at that particular time.

Madam Speaker, a Government led by the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Bainimarama has devoted himself to relieve the financial burden on parents by providing free education, contrary to what some on the other side are saying: transport assistance, free textbooks, to ensure that our children attend school regularly.

Madam Speaker, this will ensure that they achieve their dreams and aims in life. We have also provided free milk and Weet-Bix for Year One students to stimulate their interests to attend school daily and also to ensure that they are able to fully concentrate on their school work and are not distracted by some other factors within and outside themselves.

Madam Speaker, now, more than ever, the schools and the Ministry of Education must work in tandem with the parents and other stakeholders by establishing a stronger and enduring partnership, by enhancing protective factors in the lives of our children, which will help them to avoid getting into risky behaviour that will be detrimental to their educational progress, personal, social and mental health.

Madam Speaker, we need to understand that these children who are in our custody from Year 5, to let say 18 in the primary and high schools, they are very vulnerable and emotional. They tend to make a lot decisions based on emotions because at that particular age, their minds are not that fully developed and henceforth, they will make impulsive decisions and react more emotional, Madam Speaker.

They are hungry for knowledge at that particular age group, Madam Speaker, that whatever we give, give them, they will take it as gospel truth. We need to take advantage of that era of their lives and give them the right information, Madam Speaker, in a way, they will accept it as palatable and block other information which will be detrimental to their growth development.

Madam Speaker, these protective factors must be inclusive of engaging the first teacher, which are the parents, in as many school activities as possible and must prompt better student behaviour, higher academic achievements and improved social skills.

Madam Speaker, we need to understand what we are after; are we just after giving them a qualification or are we educating them to build a better, smarter Fiji and to secure a better future Fiji which provides for nation building?

Madam Speaker, no matter how effective our teachers are, Fiji cannot succeed unless our students take responsibility for their own education and unless our parents take ownership of their children’s education. That means, Madam Speaker, showing up for classes on time, paying attention in class and staying out of trouble, with support from parents.

Madam Speaker, the bottom line is that, no government policies will make any difference unless we also hold ourselves more accountable as parents. Madam Speaker, no matter how wise or efficient

we are, we cannot turn off the TV or put away the video decks. Teachers, no matter how dedicated or effective they may be, they cannot make sure our children leave for school on time and do their homework when they get back in the afternoon. Only a parent can ensure that these things happen at home.

Madam Speaker, there is a need to encourage parents to take ownership of their children's education and ensure that they get all the attention they need to excel in their academic behaviour. It is crucial for parents to spend time with their children, ensure that they at least spend half-an-hour per day talking to their child and win their trust, so that their child can have the confidence to share their problems and issues with their parents.

Madam Speaker, I would like to add that this Pillar 4 on Parental Engagement will prepare and empower our young children to reach their full potential as productive members of our society, and help create the next generation of responsible citizens to continue and progress as we have made as a nation.

Madam Speaker, in this engagement framework, we have detailed what a parent must do and the kind of questions they are to ask in the morning before their child leaves home and when the child comes back home. For example, questions like:

1. How do you prepare your child in the morning?
2. What do you say to the child before the child leaves home?

Madam Speaker, when the child comes back home, what kind of questions should you ask your child. For example, questions like:

1. What was your day like today?
2. Did your teacher come today?
3. What did you do today?
4. Did you talk to the teacher today?
5. What did the teacher say?
6. What were some of the interesting things that you learnt today?
7. Who is your friend?
8. What did your friend say? You need to know what kind of peer group your child is with during the daytime.
9. Did you meet anyone new today?
10. Did you play today?
11. What did you like about your friends?
12. Can I see your lunch box?
13. Did you eat and enjoy your lunch today?
14. Did your friends bring lunch today?
15. Did you share your lunch with them?
16. Can I see your homework?
17. Can I help you with your homework?

Those are some of the questions that we have listed, the generic questions that a parent should ask a child when the child comes back home.

Madam Speaker, the framework talks about the type of questions a parent must ask a school head or a class teacher when he or she goes to school. For example, the school head should ask the parent the following:

1. Is your child comfortable studying in our school?
2. Does he/she face any concerns or difficulties that the child came and told you or confided with you?

3. Does your child have any medical problems that I should know as a school head, so that we can give some attention or take care of your child?
4. Does your child communicate on school experience, comes home and tells you about what happens in school? Some of the issues that he/she does not want to confide with the teachers but would confide with mum or dad.
5. Are we able to provide adequate meals and resources to your child?
6. Are you finding any problem in providing lunch box every day? Probably, the school head can pick that and then try to assist the parents.

Those are some of the questions that we have listed in the framework.

Madam Speaker, some of the questions that parents should ask the school head, for example:

1. Does the school have adequate resources to facilitate a proper learning experience for my child?
2. What are the general expectations of me as a parent by yourself as school head?
3. Is my child actively involved in the school?
4. Is my child withdrawn in the classroom?
5. Does my child participate in class discussions?

Some of the questions that the class teacher should ask the parent and guardian, Madam Speaker, which are as follows:

1. What is the expected arrival time at home and departure from home? The teacher should know because the teacher might see that the child is coming in at 8.30 a.m. every day but the parent is dropping the child at 6.30 a.m. or 7.30 a.m.
2. Who accompanies your child to the bus stop?
3. How much time do you spend with your children with respect to their school work?
4. What are the activities that your child is engaged in at home; sports, religion or other activities, et cetera?
5. Does your child have ample time, space and facilities at home to study? Probably, there is no adequate study area in school. The school teacher can facilitate by opening the school in the late hours on Saturday, et cetera, so that the children can come and study in the school premises.
6. Do you sit with your child when they study at home?

Those are some of the questions that the class teacher should ask the parents.

Madam Speaker, there are certain questions that the parents and guardians should ask the teacher, like:

1. How is my child performing in their study and extra-curricular activities?
2. How is her behaviour as a student in class participation?
3. Do you check whether the homework is completed or not every morning when the child comes?
4. Do you check every child's homework?
5. How is the child's punctuality or attendance in class, et cetera?"

Madam Speaker, this framework lists in detail the role and kind of activities a parent must undertake to ensure that the parent has full ownership of their child's education, growth and development.

Madam Speaker, we now intend to roll this out to all parts of Fiji so that parents and stakeholders fully know their responsibilities. We have also launched our new Careers Resource Book last week, which ties in well with this new policy. The Careers Resource Book is intended to set the platform for every child, parent and teacher to work together for the benefit of the child's future and ultimately, develop a robust economy for Fiji.

Madam Speaker, this Careers Book will also guide and discipline the child to focus on school work and be encouraged to discuss their school work with parents and teachers to improve performance. Through the book, students will explore and extend their corporate and social responsibilities to work with others and to participate in the voluntary and community work, and to record them.

Madam Speaker, we often see that parents try to push their child to study in areas that the child does not have an interest or aptitude in. We want the child to be nurtured by the school teacher from an early age or early years of their school system, so that by the time the child comes to Year 12 or Year 13 and is about to make a decision of their future studies or career, the child fully understands the various opportunities, the various financial opportunities and all the institutions available and also understand the local, regional and global labour market and is able to make a decision based on that, rather than being forced by someone to get into an area and later on the child fails and then it is too late.

Madam Speaker, through such affiliations, students identify and record their abilities and the untapped skills, and confidently show case that fullest potentials.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I plead with all stakeholders - the parents, guardians, members of the communities, social groups as well to get on board and promote this new strategy, so that we can actively engage with our parents in this partnership to pave the way for a better Fiji, a secure future Fiji and for nation building. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of the Opposition's nominee to speak in response.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- *Ni sa bula vinaka*, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- *Bula vinaka*.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, from the outset, allow me to contribute to what has been raised in the statement made by the Hon. Minister for Education. I would like to say this from the outset, Madam Speaker, that this is nothing new and it is a good initiative made by the Ministry for Education in terms of getting parents involved. However, there are a few issues that I would like to raise, for his information as well and the information of the House.

Parents have been at the forefront of education, in terms of their involvement in schools, and past governments have introduced incentives. For example, in the 1990s, and Hon. Dr. Brij Lal will vouch for this as well, I remember we had the Basic Education Life Skills (BELS) programme where parents were involved, with the assistance of USP (where we had Dr. Gurmeet Singh and Mr. Henry Elder), and it was good. I think the Hon. Minister has taken a leaf out of that and we hope that this programme will continue to thrive in this country.

Here we are hearing the Hon. Minister, Madam Speaker, saying that these initiatives were part of the reform and I hope this is not going to be shoved down the throats of parents or the teachers. But in the school situation, Madam Speaker, we have a three-legged stool; one is for the parents, one is for the committee, and one is for the teachers, and sitting on top is the school support. We hope that with this new reform, these two components of the three legged stool are also taken into consideration in terms of their contributions to education in this country.

Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister, Dr. Mahendra Reddy himself is an educator and we ought to be aware that most good primary and secondary schools in Fiji have been built from colonial days and the communities themselves were engaged in terms of building these classrooms and therefore, parents have been involved with education; their support in building schools, providing meals and uniforms. I would just like to ask the Hon. Minister if any initiative or any thought is being made to subsidise school uniforms to help parents. The cost of CEBO sandals nowadays is about \$100 plus, and most go for the low-priced sandals, so those kinds of initiative will assist parents. If we want good education for our children, we need to do that. Some parents come from low-income brackets and they cannot afford some of these educational costs.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Buy Fiji made.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Yes, Fiji-made, of course and Fiji-made should be made free for the parents of this country.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, parents are still engaged in independent fundraising activities in schools. We hope that the Hon. Minister of Education will also take that into consideration and give them the right to also fundraise because they cannot afford whatever is being laid out by the schools. That gives a strong community spirit and commitment amongst the parents themselves and also the schools.

Some parents are already complaining that they are being asked to pay voluntary levies by schools, why? It shows that parents are finding the cost of living high, especially with the 9 per cent being levied on basic food items that were exempted before. The issue that I would also like to ask the Hon. Minister of Education to note is - why not bring this new initiative into the Education Commission that you are going to conduct this year, I believe?

Impact of Climate Change on the Health of People

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Hon. Minister for Health and Medical Services has informed me that he wishes to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 34. I invite the Hon. Minister for Health and Medical Services to have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, the Hon. Prime Minister, Hon. Members of the House, I intend to make a statement this morning on the very important relationship that we have; an issue that is affecting a lot of countries in the Pacific and around the world, and that is the impact of climate change on the health of people in our country.

There are two great challenges that face us in small island nations and places around the world, which are not going to just plague us in the future but are plaguing us now. These are the two problems of non-communicable diseases that have been rising steadily this past few decades and also the issue of climate change. These two things, we believe, are the greatest health challenges currently facing us, not only today but it will also face generations that will follow after us.

Climate change is something that we have discussed for a long time and people are very familiar with it. I would just like to establish some of the basic background behind it. Long-term climate change is something that happens over decades, it happens over centuries and some might even say that it can even happen over millions of years. It involves a shift in the climate, a change in the climate of a specific location, a region or even the planet itself. You are very familiar that this is something that is happening in the world.

Climate change is all about variations in climate, variations in terms of average climate. It also involves variations in the variation. When the variations that we are used to happening begin to change themselves, that in itself is an element of climate change, so in summary, climate change can be regarded as changes in average weather conditions and also changes in how much the weather varies itself. These things are having an impact on all of us.

What causes climate change? In the past, climate change has been primarily caused by nature itself, where you have volcanic eruptions, that dust that goes into the atmosphere affects the quality of the rainfall that you have, it affects the volume of sunlight that is able to reach the earth. All of these natural things have had an impact on us; variations in the sun's intensity, very slow changes in ocean circulation or land surface which occurs for decades, centuries or longer.

For thousands of years the earth's atmosphere has changed very little. It was perfect for human habitation but that is changing now. That is beginning to change now. The world is changing.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Getting old.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Yes, the world is getting old and we are also getting old.

Today, we are having problems keeping this balance because humans also are causing climate change by releasing greenhouse gases and aerosols into the atmosphere. We burn fossil fuels, we run our cars, we produce electricity and manufacture all sorts of products that are increasing the amount of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. This has a direct impact on the health of the people that live in our country.

Increasing temperatures will lead to changes in many aspects of weather such as wind patterns, the amount and type of rainfall that we get and the types and frequency of severe weather events. Such climate change has far-reaching and unpredictable environmental, social, economic and very importantly, from my view point, health consequences for the people of this country.

The global sea level could rise due to several factors. In fact, it is estimated that by the time we get to 2100, it could have risen by one metre in the Pacific Ocean, and if that happens, some countries will be inundated and could possibly be lost forever, unless things change.

The climate of various regions could change too quickly for many plant and animal species to adjust, and this is very important for us because we are continuously talking about people eating healthy food, eating a lot of plants. If climates change, then it is possible that a lot of those plants that we eat could find it difficult to survive. That means that when that happens we turn to processed foods which leads to more problems in terms of NCDs and so forth. Climate change therefore affects health and well-being.

Many large cities over the past few years, as we have heard, are experiencing significant dry weather in the number of very hot days, heat waves that are affecting the lives of people. I think in Fiji, we had one such heat wave last week and it affected a lot of people in our country. It also needs to increase in moulds and pollens; as there are warmer temperatures, there is more pollen and that affects those who have asthma, so they can get a lot of respiratory problems that affects people.

The number of natural disasters per year has been increasing in Fiji since 1950. They have become more and more frequent and they become more severe in their impact on all of us. More natural disasters mean people are getting injured, more people dying, more people are getting sick because of water and sanitation issues, mental health issues also arise as people become depressed and worried about the impact of these things on their lives.

Here in Fiji, Government has identified more than 40 communities that need to be relocated as a result of climate change and a further 800 that are at risk as a result of climate change. This is a huge economic, social, cultural and also a health issue that Government and society needs to grapple with it.

Climate is affecting humanity right now. It is a health issue and right now, it is not something that will have an impact on health in the future. It is impacting health right now so it is something that we need to pay serious attention to.

Climate change will inevitably affect the basic requirements for maintaining health, it includes clear, clean air and good water for all of us, sufficient food and adequate shelter. These are the basic determinants of things that sustain life. The present warming of the earth and climate variability could increase levels of atmospheric pollutants and a growth in disease transmission due to unclean water and contaminated food.

Fiji data shows that over the last 50 years, Fiji has been recording higher temperatures both in the day and at night. That is being shown consistently in the data that has been collected.

Around the world: Every year, air pollution problems contribute to about 1.2 million deaths and another 2.2 million deaths due to diarrhoea caused by insufficient clean water supply and sanitation. This is something that Government is targeting very strongly.

Madam Speaker, about 3.5 million globally die from malnutrition each year and approximately 60,000 from natural disasters.

Health impacts of climate change include:

1. More cases of malnutrition as people go towards poorer food options;
2. Increased mortality (people passing), morbidity and injuries attributed to extreme weather events;
3. Higher burden of diarrheal-related diseases;
4. Advanced rate of cardio and respiratory ailments due to pollution; and
5. Emergence of infectious diseases in new locations.

As the climate becomes warmer, mosquitoes that did not use to live in a part of the continent or country are able to migrate and they take diseases with them, not just mosquitoes, but other vectors that carry disease.

The health impacts of climate change can be separated into three major groupings.

The first category includes those direct impacts caused by weather or climate extremes, which entail injuries and illness during or after floods, droughts, windstorms and heat waves.

The second category includes the impacts of environmental and ecological change that occurs in response to climate change. These include the alternations in the geographical distribution and intensity of communicable disease that is spread by vectors, rodents, food and/or water.

The third category relates to the diverse health impacts like trauma and stress that affects people who are subject to climate change. These leads to social disruption to communities, such as the loss of homeland or important resources.

These three health consequences form a complex 'cause and effect' chain from climate change to changing patterns of health determinants and outcome, which include:

1. Wealth;
2. Status of the Public Health Infrastructure;
3. Access to health care;
4. Accessibility to sufficient and safe water supply;
5. Nutrition; and
6. Sanitation.

When all of these things are affected by climate change, it will lead to poorer health outcomes, but I must say that all of these areas that I have outlined are areas that the FijiFirst Government pays a lot of attention to and is focussing a lot of its resources.

Wealth: Earlier this week, you heard the Hon. Attorney-General and Minister of Finance in his ministerial statement, where he just talked about the fact that poverty levels have been decreasing in our country.

There are certain parts of the country where poverty has increased, but overall poverty has decreased. We have noticed also the impressive economic results that have been achieved these past few years, with consistent economic growth that is shown, because this economic growth is not a fluke. It is not something that happens just out of a vacuum. It is a result of the policies that have been put in place initially by the Bainimarama-led Government and now increasingly by the FijiFirst Government.

Public Health Infrastructure: There is a continued emphasis to improve our public health infrastructure. This year, funds have been set aside for making improvements to hospitals, health centres and nursing stations. We also have an emphasis on building health facilities that are both safe and which can use renewable energy, thus having an impact on reducing our carbon footprint.

Access to Health Care: Over the past few years, there has been an emphasis on decentralising healthcare so that it is more accessible to people, so that they do not have to travel longer distances to get access to the care. Outpatient services have been moved out of major hospitals, like CWM and made more accessible in health centres, hospitals and nursing stations in the Central and Eastern Divisions.

We are now beginning to put together the plans to make Valelevu into a larger hospital that will bring a greater range of services to people in the most highly population density part of Fiji. This year, we intend to complete the Rotuma Hospital, Keiyasi, Votua Levu facilities and also improve small facilities. We will also consider Serua.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- *Vinaka vakalevu!*

HON. J. USAMATE.- Availability of sufficient and safe water supply: You will have heard from the Budget and the kind of work that is being done by Hon. Minister Bala and the Regional Development, the emphasis on trying to make sure that we have good water supply all across our country. This is a major aim of Government. There are major investments taking place all across the country to ensure that our people have access to good clean and safe water.

Nutrition: There is a strong emphasis on teaching better nutrition and helping our communities to eat better food, to develop more resilient crops that can withstand climatic variability, so that when our food supplies are affected by changes in climate that we refrain from moving directly to processed food that brings its own problems to our health, which is what is happening right now. When our crops die out, we turn to noodles and that leads to hypertension.

Sanitation: The Ministry stresses good sanitation through the work of its Environmental Division that works closely with Local Government and *iTaukei* Affairs to ensure sanitation is maintained. We work closely with communities to encourage better sanitation.

Climate Change: Fiji's climate is expected to encounter extreme dry seasons to become drier, wet seasons to become wetter, so the extremes will be high right across the board. We also expect that the intensity of tropical cyclones to increase.

The summary of climate predictions for Fiji shows that temperature will continue to rise and the projection is more very hot days and warm nights and a decline in cooler weather. We expect that there will be an increase in both the dry season and wet season and also that there will be significant impact of sea level that this will continue to rise.

We also expect the acidity level of the sea will begin to increase. As you put more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, it gets into the sea, so the acidity rises. When the acidity rises, it impacts on your coral reefs. Coral reefs we need for fish, and if fish is affected, it affects the food that we eat every day. So the acidity of the ocean is going to affect us also. We need to start to mitigate on these things.

It makes it harder for corals to build skeletons and affects our food supply and this in turn leads to nutrition issues.

Fiji, a small island developing State, is therefore very vulnerable to these extreme events and it will impact on health. Together, these will cause health impacts to increase and threaten the wellness to Fiji's population.

Climate variability and change in Fiji is already causing disasters because of the droughts, the floods or the tropical cyclones and a major impact from these disasters that we have seen from the studies that have been carried out is that there is an observed increase, this is being seeing right now.

An observed increase in hospital administrations and treatments from injuries and infectious diseases such as diarrhoea, typhoid, dengue and leptospirosis.

There is also an increase in malnutrition and stress-related elements as people worry about these things.

Our health facilities are also damaged during extreme weather conditions. Water safety and availability at the facilities are compromised and populations are stranded from reaching medical treatment when the infrastructure that supports mobility is affected negatively.

There are strong calls for health concerns in forums such as the UNFCCC that was held in Paris late last year and Fiji's 2015 Suva Declaration and also the *Kaila* Call to Action that was put together by the Pacific Health Ministers, where we have called for increased support for adaptation measures that address all vulnerable sectors including health, water and sanitation.

In summary, climate sensitive diseases include:

1. heat-related diseases;
2. vector-borne diseases that are born by mosquitoes or rodents or other animals that carry these diseases;
3. waterborne diseases;
4. diseases from urban-air pollution; and
5. diseases related to extreme weather conditions, such as floods, droughts, windstorms and fires.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services has been working closely with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other development partners in developing and piloting adaptation arrangements. These include:

1. General awareness and capacity building to vulnerable communities, where we know that communicable diseases are likely to rise as a result of climate change.
2. Providing information on climate sensitive diseases, as I have mentioned, diarrhoea, typhoid, dengue and leptospirosis that have been proof to be enhanced as a result of this and prevention protocols for the communities.

We have identified where these disease hotspots are. We know that as the climate conditions change, it is likely that these diseases may flare up, so our staff are prepared to be able to address it.

There has been a good programme also organised with the Fiji Red Cross Society, with a number of components in two pilot subdivisions. This involved:

1. an intensive vulnerability and capacity assessment survey, covering nearly 1,500 households in the pilot subdivisions;
2. using the results of this survey, a Train-the-Trainers manual was developed for Red Cross volunteers;
3. development of community change tools, including posters and flash cards, are used now by the Red Cross volunteers to train communities on the link between climate variables and climate sensitive diseases, disease prevention methods and the importance of early presentation to clinics which is a major problem also in Fiji; and
4. future activities will include implementation of the above materials in communities, enabling communities to develop their own health adaptation plans so that they do not just rely on Government but start doing it themselves. They start adapting their own communities so that they can minimise the effects of climate change on to their health and the evaluation of results, for example, to the “most significant change” stories.

The adaptation activities being carried out by the Ministry, WHO and other partners include institutional strengthening and capacity-building:

1. Streamlining and improving the timeliness of disease reporting systems, including the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System;
2. Computerisation of disease notification and investigation systems for faster case detection and effective disease control, which includes revision of pathology forms to include date of onset of symptoms, patient address and other contact details.
3. Mainstreaming health adaptation through the inclusion of specific outputs in the Ministry of Health’s 2016 Annual Corporate Plan and the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan. Development of a Climate Change and Health Strategic Action Plan 2016- 2020.
4. Training of key Ministry staff including, epidemiologists, surveillance officers and IT staff on statistical analysis.
5. Training of the various staff and also the establishment of linkages between the Ministry of Health and the Fiji Meteorological Services.

6. Conducting further capacity building through disaster risk reduction and management training.
7. Negotiating with academic institutions to include climate change and health in relevant curriculum.
8. Encouraging and facilitating publication and documentation of climate change and Government will continue to work across the different sectors to address the climate change.

As a Government, we will continue to focus on sectoral and inter-sectoral adaptation measures such as:

1. Ensuring that we have clean drinking water;
2. improving social indicators such as education, women's empowerment because women have a very significant role to play; housing and equitable access development opportunities; and
3. to improve economic indicators such as employment rate, alternative livelihoods and access to markets.

At the end of the day, climate change is ultimately a matter that impacts on human health. Fiji is a small country, our carbon footprint is small, but I think we are still beholden to try to improve on that and Government has very strong commitments on these.

We need to continue to fight for the reduction in the kinds of things that lead to climate change in the first place, but we as a nation must also learn to adapt and this is something that Government and my Ministry as a whole will continue to focus on.

Before I resume my seat, I would like to address one thing - some of the data that had been expressed in this House about unemployment. A figure has been shown here, about 40,000 people being unemployed. There is no such data on 40,000 people being unemployed. People are referring to the people that are registered in NEC, that is not a measure of unemployment.

(Chorus of interjections)

If you do look at the unemployment statistics consistently from 2009 to 2014, it has been declining. The number of people who had registered under NEC is not an indication of unemployment, they register under NEC and find jobs but their names are still in the register. So, before you quote a figure like 40,000, go and check your facts first.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of Opposition's nominee to deliver the response.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise to make a response to the Hon. Minister for Health and Medical Services' statement on the rising impact of climate change on health. We do not have to look far.

Firstly, this week, I have been receiving calls from hospitals and health centres that there has been an increase of patients with breathing problems diagnosed in those various centres as a result of climate change.

Secondly, there is flooding in Rakiraki Town at the moment which needs to be addressed, as a result of climate change or is it a joke in this august House?

Madam Speaker, what the Honourable Minister has done in this House is basically to save face for the increasing instances of tropical diseases and deaths to severe illnesses.

Madam Speaker, I start by saying something extraordinary, not all Fiji citizens have access to quality health care. The health and wellbeing of Fiji's human population depended on and this is the outcome from the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; "We belong to an oceanic tropical climate and the livelihood of the citizens of Fiji depends on the health of our waters."

In the Report, qualitative risk assessment of the effects of climate change on selected causes of death in the 2030s and 2050s by the World Health Organisation 2014, that in 15 years' time approximately 250,000 additional deaths are projected to occur every year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress attributable to climate change in the Pacific. Pacific Island countries are confronted with a triple burden of non-communicable diseases, infectious diseases and climate change impacts in some Pacific Island States.

Mortality rates from non-communicable diseases are already among the highest in the world. Since 2012, there have been over 40 large infectious disease outbreaks in the region. Most were caused by climate sensitive diseases such as Dengue, *Chikungunya* and *Zika Virus* infections.

Madam Speaker, in the Fiji Climate Change and Health Adaptation proceedings of the symposium on 9th February, 2015 in Suva by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in 2015, Fiji detailed that the recent outbreak of dengue fever affected over 20,000 people with Dengue, Leptospirosis, Typhoid Fever and Diarrhoea were tagged as priority climate sensitive diseases.

Fiji has since produced a Strategic Action Plan for Climate Change and Health 2016-2020, including the development of early warning and responses in vulnerable communities. However, as for other Small Island Developing States, implementation will be a huge challenge. The health sector has received less than 1.5 per cent of the multilateral funds for climate change adaptation distributed today.

Madam Speaker, the health sector in itself does not look like a sector that is adapting to climate change. Many persons throughout this nation are still limited to mediocre health services and facilities. Madam Speaker, let us talk about the wellness sessions and precautions done to ensure these challenges are met. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Pursuant to the three resolutions of Parliament on Tuesday and the two resolutions yesterday, five Bills will be debated today and with the time limitation of one hour for each Bill. The first Bill is the Civil Aviation (Montreal Convention 1999) Bill 2016, and I now call upon the Hon. Attorney-General to move his motion.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON
CIVIL AVIATION (MONTREAL CONVENTION 1999) BILL 2016**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 9th February, 2016 I move:

That the Civil Aviation (Montreal Convention 1999) Bill 2016 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Hon. Attorney-General to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker as highlighted when this motion was introduced from 9th January, 2016 (earlier last month), the Convention for Unification of Certain Rules for International Carriage by Air 1999 otherwise known as the Montreal Convention 1999 came into force in Fiji. Given that Fiji is now a state party to the Convention, there needs to be an enabling law to incorporate the Convention into national law. Accordingly, this Bill sets out, Madam Speaker, the text of the Convention by way of a Schedule to the Bill.

Madam Speaker, as we know, this Parliament in fact had approved the ratification of the Convention last year and of course now Fiji is a State party to the Convention. The Convention addresses a number of issues and will provide a number of benefits for passengers, for example, for modern compensatory regime for passengers who suffer death or injury in the course of an accident during international air carriage.

Air travellers and international flights can get enhanced compensation for passengers suffering injury or death as a result of an accident, entitling them to claim up to a special drawings of what is called under the Convention or SDR of approximately FJD345,000 of proven damages, without having to prove negligence or fault of the airline. This avoids the situation where passengers tend to pursue long and onerous legal claims and compares favourably to the very low limits of liabilities established under the current laws in Fiji, and of course stops them from having to go to very expensive lawyers. Better consumer friendly provisions such as the liability for passengers to claims involving injury or death to be brought in the wider choice of jurisdictions, and the possibility of advance payments by airlines to victims of accidents and enhance compensation in the event of the delay and loss of damage to baggage.

Regarding air cargo shipments, Madam Speaker, the provision of the Convention facilitates the use of electronic documentation on global air cargo. Air cargo of course, Madam Speaker, is an essential facilitator of international trade. The Convention creates a solid framework for the use of electronic airway bills to replace paper in the air cargo supply chain, promoting to improve air cargo security, better customs compliance and faster shipment times.

Madam Speaker, the Convention also offers a simplified legal liability regime for cargo carriers, thus it creates certainty and predictability of its potential cargo liability which should make it easier to obtain appropriate insurance cover which is always good for international trade, avoid protracted litigation and simplify the claims handling processes. In other words, Madam Speaker, the Convention provides a simplified regime for the carriage of cargo by established predictable limits of liability.

Madam Speaker, Clause 1 of the Bill provides the commencement and short title of provision.

Clause 2 of the Bill provides for the interpretation section for certain terms within the Bill.

Clause 3 of the Bill provides that the Act shall bind the Government.

Clause 4 of the Bill makes provision for the Convention to have the force of law in Fiji in relation to any carriage by air which the provision of the Convention applies to, irrespective of nationality of the aircraft.

Clause 5 of the Bill defines what a State Party is in relation to the Convention in its application to such State Parties or declared territorial units.

Clause 6 of the Bill provides a revised limits of liability under Article 24 of the Convention.

Clause 7 of the Bill provides that any further revision to the limit of liability in Article 24 of the Convention shall be specified by the Minister by order published in the Gazette.

Clause 8 of the Bill provides the Minister the power to make such regulations as necessary to give effect to the Convention.

The Schedule to the Bill, Madam Speaker, which is the bulk of the Bill, when all these clauses that I have just read out is actually on two pages, in fact a page and a half. The rest of the Bill, Madam Speaker, is the Convention itself which comprises of from pages 3 to 23 and this Convention of course has already been given the approval by this honourable House.

With this background, Madam Speaker, I would like to open up the debate on this Bill. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Parliament is now open for debate.

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As of yesterday, this is one of the only Bills that we had actually supported the Government in and we support the Bill. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Does the Hon. Attorney-General wish to speak in reply to the one statement?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I think a lot has been said about this and we would like to now get Parliamentary approval for this Bill. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Therefore, I take it that there is unanimous approval of this motion and the motion is agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

A Bill for an Act to give effect to the provisions of the Montreal Convention 1999 concerning international carriage by air and for purposes connected therewith (Bill No. 1 of 2016) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2016)

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much Honourable Members. At this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch since we have only five more minutes to 12.30 and Honourable Members of the Business Committee are reminded to make their way to the Small Committee Room.

Lunch is provided for all other Honourable Members in the Big Committee Room.

Please also be reminded that there is a team from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services conducting free medical checks in the foyer.

We will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.26 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will resume from where we left off before lunch. We will now debate the Sea Ports Management (Amendment) Bill 2016. Pursuant to Tuesday's resolution this debate will be limited to one hour. I now call upon the Hon. Attorney-General to move his motion.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON
SEA PORTS MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 9th February, 2016, I move:

That the Sea Ports Management (Amendment) Bill 2016 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

MADAM SPEAKER.-. I now call on the Hon. Attorney-General to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in the motion that was presented to Parliament two days ago, we had highlighted the necessity to do this. It is a very small Bill which has three clauses.

The first clause essentially sets out the appointment time and the date in which this particular Bill will come into effect, when it becomes law.

Clause 2 of the Bill amends Section 18 by, in fact, inserting a new paragraph in the existing law, and that is to say in Clause 18, which says,

“A Port management company may by order in the gazette levy rates...”, et cetera, for now “the provision of pilotage services.”

The ports company already provides these pilotage services. What we are doing specifically is inserting this now to specifically state that it can charge services for providing this service. They have been providing the service but they have been charging under the general powers to charge a levy.

The second amendment, Madam Speaker, is on Clause 18 or Section 18 of the existing law where we are emphatically saying that a port management company must allocate a pilot to provide pilotage services at each port managed by the port management company under this Act. That is all this Act seeks to do.

Clause 18(a) essentially is putting out the types of services that this pilotage company can provide. Of course, Madam Speaker, all of the charges of the Fiji Ports Company are subject to the review by the Commerce Commission because it is a monopoly company and as provided by the relevant law in question, that in any monopolistic situation or any situation there could be anti-competitive behaviour,

the charges or the levies imposed always has to be referred to and indeed approved by the Commerce Commission of Fiji.

So, with those few words, Madam Speaker, I would like to say that we debate on the Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the House is now open for debate on this motion. Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we go back to what we have been saying all along, the control of assets such as this must be in the hands of the people of Fiji. We went as far as to advance the thinking that it must be held in private hands to form a conglomerate, that is, to be headed by the Fijian Holdings and to be floated on the stock exchange where other companies or the people of Fiji can buy shares in a company that manages all the ports in the country. It is a huge organisation and it can add to the creation of wealth of the people of this country, spearheaded by Fijian Holdings.

On the stock exchange side, Madam Speaker, the activities are not as high as we expected, to the extent that we offered incentives for private companies to list their companies, and reducing the corporate tax to 10 per cent. That is for the initiative to create activities in the Fiji Stock Exchange, but we all know, Madam Speaker, that takers are not there. A lot of the private companies, family companies are not keen to list, hence the reduced level of activities in the stock exchange. Programmes or initiatives like this to give the ports or other government enterprises to the private sector and list on the stock exchange will activate activities or trading of shares in the stock exchange and create wealth for the people of Fiji.

I know this can be seen to be favouring only Fijian Holdings, but Madam Speaker, it is a sense of balance. Fijian Holdings was set up to encourage the indigenous people to participate in commerce and they were given a grant of \$20 million and today, I believe the assets of the companies are about \$0.5 billion. That was a great initiative, set up by the Great Councils of Chiefs during those years and has helped in growing the participation of our indigenous people in business. It has proven itself to be a performer, to honour the objectives that was given from the early days, today it has partnership with R.B. Patel, Punjas, Fiji Television and Vinod Patel. So, it is a company that has cut across the community and also advancing the participation of the indigenous people in commerce, in a big way.

Many of us here have served in the boards or understand how it works, but this is one way of facilitating that and, Madam Speaker, ports are very important to us: point of entry, security of a country, the sovereignty of a country, it must always be in the hands of the owners of the country. I know that they are trying to sell some shares to foreigners but we would like to change that. We can own it, but give management to foreigners who are experts in these things.

In the same way, Madam Speaker, we own Holiday Inn, owned by members of FNPF, but managed by experts which is the Intercontinental Group, same as Natadola. We own Natadola, but the ownership remains with us and the beneficiary, the majority of the profits goes to the people of Fiji. I would urge the Government to look into this seriously, Madam Speaker, we can pass these laws, but if it means the people of Fiji not having ownership of this, we would hesitate to support this Bill, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, talking about wealth creation, that has to be paramount in the work of this Government, the people in leadership. When I talk about wealth creation, Madam Speaker, yesterday I raised the issue about the subdivision in Cuvu and I questioned whether it was homes for my people there who are the squatters or for creating wealth. I begrudge no one, if they start creating wealth for themselves, but I think that kind of initiative should have gone through a proper thought process.

As you know, Madam Speaker, Cuvu Bay is one of the most naturally beautiful in this country. It is like giving a title to someone and say; "Look, you now have land in Denarau." That is what it is going to be like, Madam Speaker. There will come a time in the not too distant future where Cuvu Bay will be a millionaires' row. People who build homes there will become very, very wealthy. You can build a nice home on a 99 year lease, raise money, build a nice home, put it out as a homestay and you go and live elsewhere. It will become a millionaire's row. So, what they should have done, Madam Speaker, was have proper dialogue about this. The people of Hanahana, Vunahauwira, Voua, Rukurukulevu have land in that areas. They could have given 100 acres of their land for our squatters to live in and develop Cuvu Bay for a four or five star resort where everyone benefits.

FijiFirst can start looking at things differently, Madam Speaker, and make it like a rising tide where every boat floats on the top. Right now, everyone goes to the top, a lot of people are still at the bottom, mostly, the indigenous people.

Madam Speaker, we would urge the Government, whenever it looks at something like this, have a broader view of things.

HON. MEMBER.- We do.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Be inclusive. They say; "we do" Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, today we were told there is no unemployment in Fiji. I would like them to stand up and say; "there is no unemployment in Fiji".

(Chorus of interjections)

Then I realised, Madam Speaker, they are right because they sent everyone to go and plant cassava in the village, remember? So, everyone is planting cassava and there is no employment in Fiji. That was their policy, "go and plant cassava". I would like them to say "there is no poverty in Fiji". It is almost like, we live in one planet and they are living in another planet. We see unemployment every day, we see poverty every day, but the way they come up with all their statistics, wow!

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, all I can say is; wow! Who is writing all these statistics?

(Chorus of interjections)

Madam Speaker, I know I am regressing a bit, but when it comes to this, be inclusive, thought process will go into it, bring in people in Fiji to own these assets, wealth can be created for the benefit of a broader section of the community.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Hon. Minister for Education.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, this is classic. The response today, Madam Speaker, demonstrates that the Opposition is in total disarray. You can see gaps there, gaps there, gaps all over.

(Laughter)

Let me demonstrate, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, a half page Bill - the Bill on seaports management, they are talking about Cuvu settlement; they are talking about foreign ownership; and they are talking about wealth creation, nothing to do with seaport management. However, let me tell them, Madam Speaker, at our wharves when the ships come in, there is this pilotage, the small boats that will guide the ships to the wharf. Madam Speaker, I was in Commerce Commission sometime back, these companies used to come to us with their disputes about one, pilotage allocation and two, about rates.

Madam Speaker, what this Bill tries to do is to ensure that we give that allocation of pilotage as well as the levying of fees to the ports management, so that there will be no more disputes as such. This is nothing to do with Cuvu settlement, landownership, Denarau, et cetera, Madam Speaker. It is about fixing the legislation and fixing the problem that exists there, that we used to encounter at the Commerce Commission, Madam Speaker. I told them that if they are not ready and not prepared, then they should come and *kerekere*, we can then defer the Bill, but they should not come and give some kind of response that makes no sense and demonstrates how weak they are, Madam Speaker.

We support the Bill. Thank you.

(Hon. Member interjected)

MADAM SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Hon. Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, some of the comments that have been made by the Honourable Member, he talked about the sales of assets. There is no mention of any sales of assets here. We are only talking about the management of the ports; all the assets that are in the ports still belong to the people of Fiji. There is total confusion in terms of what he said.

One of the most important assets that we have in this country is our ports and all of our ports compete with one another. Our ports here compete with the ports in New Zealand; they compete with the ports in Samoa; and they compete with the ports in Papua New Guinea. We want to be a hub, we need to make sure that our ports are effective. How do you do that?

(Hon. Member interjected)

No! The assets still belong to the people of Fiji, the physical assets belong to us. All we are doing is, finding a partner that has the knowledge of the management of the ports. We bring in that partner, bring in their knowledge and now, if you read the reports of the ports, they have become much more efficient. That is all we are trying to do here.

There is no mention at all in this Bill about selling assets, all the assets in the ports still belong to the people of Fiji. What we have brought in is partnership. You partner with someone who can bring in someone else to your business; bring their knowledge, their expertise, their linkages to other places where we can get best practices and their benefits are already being seen. So, I do not think we should be detracting by talking about things that are not part of this Bill.

The Honourable Member talked about the fact that I mentioned that there is no unemployment, I never said that. I questioned the figure of 40,000 but that figure they are talking about is the number of

people registered at the National Employment Centre and that is not a measure of unemployment. That is the point, so we need to get our facts straight.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Hon. Netani Rika.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I rise before this august House to declare my support for the Sea Port Management (Amendment) Bill 2016. This is a short Bill with a very pointed amendment and so I will also keep my comments short and sweet.

I believe it is quite apparent to all of us who are sitting in this House today that our nation is undergoing significant development in a variety of ways. Even though some Honourable Members of this House are determined to turn a blind eye to it, I am sure they see it. Sight is not selective and when a road forms around you or a bridge before you or a building rises to tower above you, you do not have the luxury of simply closing your eyes and leaving them shut indefinitely.

Madam Speaker, our ports are an example of developments which cannot be ignored, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. This initiative serves as a catalyst for trade and has the effect of boosting surrounding industries and localities.

This amendment establishes a requirement for the enforcement of necessary safety standards in ports all over the country. A pilot serves to aid in manoeuvring of vessels into a harbour or port. It is a profession as old as sea travel and a necessary component for safe berthing or un-berthing, especially in a highly advanced era where cargo ships and other vessels sail our waters. Pilotage services are also staple in the ports of many developed countries. By making it a necessary service at our ports, we elevate our domestic port condition to an international standard of safety.

Madam Speaker, Sea Port Management (Amendment) Bill 2016 is long overdue, an amendment to the Act that clearly allows the port management company to levy rates and charges, fees for pilotage services it provides. This is a modern way of providing service known as the user pay concept, and the Bill confirms that.

With that Madam Speaker, I conclude and commend this Bill to the House. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, again, I wish to clarify the issue of ownership that needs to be made clear to the Honourable Members and also to all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, before lunch, we talked a lot about climate change and so many things that are happening around Fiji, particularly the heat wave, and I think the heat wave as a result of the debate in this House, the Opposition has taken the full brunt of it and you would see the gaps on the other side. Probably, it is because of age factor as well and they are finding it hard to cope with the debates that are happening in the House.

Ownership, Madam Speaker; if we had been attentive to the previous addresses made in this House, the Hon. Minister for Finance and Attorney-General did state in one of his statements in this Honourable House last year, responding to questions raised from the other side of the House, that Assets Fiji Limited was established by Government and it takes ownership of all the assets that we would find in the ports.

Assets Fiji Limited, Madam Speaker, is 100 per cent owned by the Government of Fiji and because not all assets in the ports are used for port operations, however, it leases out to Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL). Again when it comes to ownership, FPCL is 41 per cent owned by the Government of Fiji, 39 per cent by the FNPF, and that gives us a total of 80 per cent ownership, apart from the rest of the 20 per cent. So, assets are still safe, it is 100 per cent owned by the Fijian Government and, of course, FPCL has 80 per cent ownership as well.

I support the Bill, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, we must understand the chronology of this Bill. Yesterday, a motion was moved in this House under Standing Order 51, to deny the public as well as this House, deliberations that are normal and required under Standing Order 85. That is the reason why we are here, we are now debating on the contents of that Bill and we were told yesterday that it is very simple. No, it is not simple!

If you look at Clause 3 of the Bill, it says, "A port management company must allocate a pilot to provide pilotage services." Now, this begs the question, what is happening to the pilotage services that are here? We all know that there are companies that are doing this, what will happen to their interest? What will happen to them? Maybe, this will take their business out, and these are issues that we in this House are not experts in. These are issues that we need to consult with those from outside. These are issues that we need to use what the Constitution tells us in Section 72, to engage the public. That is the very reason why we have been engaged in this and the public needs to know what the Government is doing, which is trying to get the public, get the Opposition and to stop everyone from contributing so that they can do their way with their dictatorial kind of attitude.

I oppose the motion.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, there being no other input, I will now invite the Hon. Attorney-General to give his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, as we stated on the day before yesterday, this Bill essentially, which is only a two-clause amendment, regularises a practice that is already on foot.

Hon. Nawaikula raised the issue; will it affect the ability of other pilotage services? Madam Speaker, it does not. The reality is that, even with their pilotage services, FPCL at times outsources it. So, the reality is that, there is a growth in the number of vessels that are now coming into Fiji, there is a growth in the turnaround times. This does not, in any way, stop, Madam Speaker, pilotage companies from offering their services.

The reality is that, all it says is that a port management company should have pilotage services available because when shipping lines look at Fiji as a transshipment hub, they actually look at our laws. Then they say; "Can we go to this port? By the way, does this port management company have the ability to provide us with pilotage services?" They do not necessarily have to then call up individuals in Fiji to provide that service. Big shipping lines are not going to call someone locally here, they will get in touch with the port management company. This is very simple, Madam Speaker. These are very simple matters which they are trying to over complicate.

I would like to thank the other Honourable Members from this side of the House as well as Members on the other side for clarifying many of the issues that have been raised by the other side and

not worth repeating in terms of doing a rebuttal for them, but as highlighted by the Hon. Leader of the Government, the Government's position as far as divestment of shares are concerned is done as a national strategic policy. We are looking at getting good partners, yes, we also understand in terms of the sensitivity around public assets sales. This is a classic example, the physical assets of Fiji Ports Corporation Limited still remains in Fijian hands. They are trying to purport this fear that they are all being sold to foreigners, no, Madam Speaker! Assets Fiji Limited, to reiterate what the Hon. Leader of the House said, leases these properties wherever necessary to Fiji Ports Corporation Limited.

Now, the whole argument and they do not seem to have an understanding of commerce, because if you, for example, bring in an outside company simply to manage and they do not actually have a stake in the company itself, their sense of responsibility and loyalty to the company is very much just like a manager. They do not really care, as long as they get their fees paid. So, this is precisely the model that we have used, where 80 per cent of this company, which is a company that does not own any assets but actually owns the operations is still owned by Fijians and 20 per cent is owned by foreigners who have actually put money in, have brought foreign reserves in and now will actually provide the management expertise but if something goes wrong with the company because they have to take the heat too, that is the model to do.

For the information of the Hon. Members on the other side, when we call for expressions of interest, it is open to everyone. Madam Speaker, at the moment, Fijian Holdings has put in a bid for another company, they are working with an overseas partner and hopefully we will be able to see that deal very soon. So wherever appropriate, Fijian Holdings has put in applications. You do not go and select any company and say, "Please come, you are the only saviour to be able to do divestment companies," they need to be willing to do it also. You cannot force people to bring them to the table, just because of one or two Members on the other side believe it should be done.

The reality is, Madam Speaker, you need to get the best value for the assets that we have and need to be able to ensure what is there for the future. Unfortunately, the Honourable Members on the other side always look to the past or they only think about the here and now. They do not think about the long term goal and this is to strategically place Fiji. Aitken Spence, in fact, Madam Speaker, has relationships with many shipping companies throughout the world, so they can divert ships to Fiji. However, this is not the point of debate here today. Madam Speaker, it is a two clause Bill, it simply regularises the practice and puts that into law.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The question is, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on the 9th February, 2016 that the Sea Ports Management (Amendment) Bill 2016 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Hon. Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of yes and noes)

MADAM SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes : 29

Noes : 9
Not Voted : 12

Motion agreed to.

A Bill for an Act to amend the Sea Ports Management Act 2005 (Bill No. 3 of 2016) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. 5 of 2016)

(Applause)

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE REVISED EDITION OF THE
LAWS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016**

MADAM SPEAKER.- We will now debate the Revised Edition of the Laws (Amendment) Bill 2016 pursuant to Tuesday's resolution. This debate will be limited to one hour. I now call upon the Hon. Attorney-General to move his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 9th February, 2016, I move:

That the Revised Edition of the Laws (Amendment) Bill 2016 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call on the Hon. Attorney-General to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Madam Speaker, this Bill seeks to amend a law that came into effect in 1971 and then that law was slightly amended in 1986. So it is a few decades old, Madam Speaker, and as we had highlighted in the motion which was presented to Parliament, we have been working on this particular area of the law to consolidate all the laws in Fiji.

As you know that post-1986, we had five years of Decree-led governance, from 1987 to 1992, and a number of Decrees were made then. Of course, then we had parliamentary governance, then we had Decrees that were made in 2007 and again now with Parliamentary governance. There are a number of laws that had been made but many of them have not been consolidated.

As the laws exist at the moment, Madam Speaker, this is how the laws are presented.

(Pointing at the black book)

What we are going to have is this.

(Pointing at the red book)

As I had highlighted earlier on with a proper indexation, it will be available online and indeed when these laws were done previously, nothing was available online. It did not have indexation, you had not the ability to have it stationary as you have now. So essentially, Madam Speaker, what this Bill does is, it addresses these very archaic provisions and as was highlighted previously, one of the reasons why we are bringing this is because we hope to table the full set of consolidated laws of Fiji in the April session of Parliament.

We have been working with LexisNexis for nearly over a year. They are currently consolidating all the laws, doing their proper indexation to make easier and hopefully a lot easier for the Honourable Members on the other side to understand what laws have been published, what is relevant and what is not relevant.

Madam Speaker, if you look at the actual clauses itself that are being amended, as I highlighted yesterday, has things like deleting the reference to booklets, substituting with the word “binders”, deleting for example the “may” in that. This is presented (Pointing at the black book) so for example, you have the coat of arms here and then you do not necessarily have an indexation card in here.

So essentially what these amendments does is allow us to be able to do this so we can come up with this, which makes it easier to be able to know what is actually happening.

We also have, for example, Madam Speaker, the timeline in which it was changed, it gives you instructions on how to use this actual binder and it has then the laws in different subject areas, so it makes it easier. If someone wants to go and look at the agricultural laws, they simply go to that and anything to do with agriculture is in that particular section, all the laws are there. It makes it easier for everyone, Madam Speaker, unfortunately we cannot do that at the moment unless the law is changed. That is all the law seeks to do.

Madam Speaker, if you look at it again, it says for example, Section 8 of the principal Act is amended by deleting the word “heading” and substituting the word “binder” because we are no longer going to have binders. For example, booklets which have been compiled and substituting with the word “binders”, deleting the word “booklets” shall be bound to binder must be bound - those types of things that are now being put in this revised edition.

It is very simple, Madam Speaker, it is just a functionary piece and the reason why it has been done is because we can have these laws tabled in Parliament in April for the full benefit of all the Honourable Members, and all the Honourable Members in this House can actually have a full set of these laws and it will also be available online.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. The House is now open for debate.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, we have explained that this is also a law that has come in through Standing Order 51 to deny public consultation, to deny contribution of others...

(Chorus of interjections)

Now, you listen.

(Hon. Member interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I know that in 1967, we had a consolidated one; 1978 we had another one; 1985, which is that current one and now 20 or 30 so years after we are coming out of the nest. Now, the need to have public consultations or, at least, to forward it to the Standing Committee is this, if you look at the content, even the 1985 version has some laws missing and we can only know that if we publicise it and invite the public to come and have a look at it.

The Rivers and Streams Act was missing from there, you might come into the same problem as well because you are denying the public what they should, as we are obliged to do under Section 72. Simple! We understand the need to have a revised edition of this, the need that it is being long overdue but once you take this away, you are liable to commit the same mistakes like you did - 38 mistakes in the Companies Act and will be back here again.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, let me add to the debate. This excuse about public consultation, public consultation and public consultation.

(Hon. Member interjected)

We are not robots, Madam Speaker, to be programmed. There needs to be flexibility. This is a matter of priority. There is no such thing as a perfect law but, at least, we have a platform, let us build from that.

(Hon. Member interjected)

If there are errors or mistakes, of course, we can bring it back to the House, but we must understand the urgency behind this.

(Hon Member interjected)

Of course, we need to consult the public as well, but not in every situation, Madam Speaker, in the absence of hearing the voices of the public, that is why we are here. To the Honourable Members of the House, there is always an opportunity to come back, review and amend, but let us move on, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

(Hon. Member interjected)

MADAM SPEAKER.- You may speak twice if you like. Thank you very much, I now give the floor to the Hon. Attorney-General for his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would like to remind Hon. Nawaikula that this Bill is not about whether we have laws in place or not, this Bill will allow us to present the consolidated laws in Fiji in a modern way. That is all the Bill is about. All the law consolidation means all the laws, of course.

(Hon. Members interjected)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, he is really going outside the scope. He is trying to create opposition for the sake of it. As a lawyer, he needs to understand that this Bill is only about the law in presentation of the consolidation, not about specific laws, Madam Speaker.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I thought he is suspended.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Hon. Prime Minister is asking whether you are still suspended or not, but no, that is not relevant for this purpose.

(Hon. Member interjected)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the point is this. This law, I mean, are we going to call for public consultations to ask them, shall we remain with the word “booklet” and not substitute with the word “binder”? Is that why we have public consultation because that is all you can consult on. Are we going to say that we do not delete the words “removed from and replaced in a volume”, and substitute it with “updated with the insertion or removal of pages...”?

Now, what Hon. Nawaikula stated was that in 1985, if something was missed out, they did not have the ability to very readily insert it. This, Honourable Member, will give you the ability to readily insert if something he misses; if something is amended; if something has changed with rectification of errors, this will allow you to do that.

It brings us into the 21st century, that is what this does, Madam Speaker. It is a very simple matter and we know we were expecting something a bit more concrete from the Honourable Member, but Madam Speaker, what this law does is, it just says, “look this is the modern way of presenting the laws, we will have it in April and everyone will benefit from it.” Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question put.

(Chorus of yes and noes)

Votes cast:

Ayes:	28
Noes:	9
Not Voted:	13

Motion is agreed to.

A Bill for an Act to amend the revised edition of the Laws Act, Cap.6, (Bill No. 8 of 2016) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. 6 of 2016).

(Applause)

MADAM SPEAKER.- We will now debate the Diplomatic Missions and International Organisation Bill 2016, pursuant to yesterday’s resolution. This debate will be limited to one hour and I now call upon the Hon. Attorney General to move his motion.

DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS & INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION BILL 2016

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 10th February 2016, I move:

That the Diplomatic Missions and International Organisation Bill 2016 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call on the Hon. Attorney General to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, as highlighted when the motion was presented yesterday, there is a need to have a separate law in Fiji that will deal with all international organisations, diplomatic missions and other international bodies in an expeditious and efficient manner, and a law that will give these organisations confidence in coming to Fiji and setting up their Mission's office and headquarters here. Madam Speaker, the laws envisage to address the above-mentioned issues by also showing the states of diplomatic missions, international organisations and other international bodies intending to be based in Fiji that the Fijian Government recognised and uphold their privileges and immunities, including those of the employees and members of the families of the employees. It is also to fast-track these applications, for example, regarding work permits and various others like spouses, et cetera, and family members who come along with them.

Madam Speaker, the responsibility of this new Bill, once it becomes an Act will also lie with the Prime Minister's Office because we also need to send a message out to the diplomatic missions that it is being held by the highest office in the land. Madam Speaker, as highlighted in the Bill itself, you will note that it does refer to, and again it is relatively a minor Bill with only 11 clauses. The substantive clauses, of course, are relating from clause 3, relating to for example, exemption for an organisation from taxes. As highlighted before, there are certain exemptions that we automatically have to put in place because of the fact that we have ratified various conventions. Then there are certain exemptions that are given because agreements are negotiated between our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and their missions or the international organisation that is going to come into Fiji.

Then, of course, Madam Speaker, there are certain agreements that we had entered into by previous governments as I had highlighted yesterday, during the Alliance Government days, the then Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, had given various undertakings to the UN regarding tax exemption. Indeed in that particular case, saying that we will even assist with their operational costs. Of course, some of those things have not been fulfilled and we need to be able to ensure that we have some uniformity across those undertakings that had been given.

Madam Speaker, it also very clearly sets out the methodology and the manner in which, for example, how these intended employees of these organisations can they apply for residency permit, et cetera, in Fiji. They have to sign statutory declarations now and they essentially state who their family members are and then the visas are given accordingly without the salient questions asked because that is the form they have to fill out. However, should they fill out the form that is incorrect or give out incorrect information, then of course, there are various consequences for that, should they do that.

Madam Speaker, it also allows the Hon. Prime Minister, for example, if there is a statutory declaration that is not being filled out correctly or untruthfully or deliberately misleading, that gives the Hon. Prime Minister the ability to direct the Director of Immigration and any relevant organisation in Fiji to revoke the relevant exemption that are granted to them.

Madam Speaker, the Act also gives the ability for the Hon. Prime Minister to make various regulations in respect of this Act. As the explanatory notes explained, Madam Speaker, it does bring about uniformity, it brings about not just a sense but in fact in practice, a very streamlined process of addressing issues faced by these organisations.

So with those introductory remarks, Madam Speaker, I now put it to the floor.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. The House is now open for debate, and I give the floor to the Hon. Ratu Isoa Tikoca.

HON. RATU. I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, the Bill that we are discussing today is important to actually open our gates abroad and bring about the best expertise in a lot of industries and then mending our relationships with people abroad. However, there is a fear when you see the global world and what is happening, you will see that ISIS threatening the Americans and also French.

In France, majority of extremists in there are actually threatening the governance of France and in England, Australia, et cetera. Is there a screen established by the Government to see and vet that these people are, of course, genuine in coming in to build our nation rather than what we have witnessed?

We, in Fiji, have witnessed that for some years now, we have generated our relationship (massive) with China. We see our relationship with the Arabs increased. We moved the Fiji Embassy in South Africa down to Ethiopia. These changes are amazing. When we see those changes, it is affecting us. Recently, with the movements of arms and ammunitions and men from the Russian Defence Force moving into Fiji, these are communists at the extreme level.

We, the people of Fiji, are brought up in a different template and we need to work ourselves slowly as we develop ourselves. We are very careful on pressures imposed to our country by these forces that are coming from abroad. If we do not vet that properly, then we will be expecting problems in our nation that will affect the people of Fiji and also affect the residents of the Polynesians, the Melanesians and the Micronesians in our territory.

So, I am requesting if there is a good reason of establishing this for the good and betterment of our relationship to bring better things, then let us, the people of Fiji, be told about the detailed reason why this is established and why the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be telling us what is happening under its responsibility. That is the concern and being that it is not covert in nature to us and we are not being briefed in detail and if this case is not taken to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defence to do some work and actually seek views from all other people to partake in, making sure that your decisions are going to be good for Fiji because if that is not done, this side of the House do not support this Bill.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Hon. Niumataiwalu.

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- Madam Speaker, I rise to speak in support of the Bill before the House, especially from the international bodies' perspective. Happening to be a member of the Oceania National Olympic Committee, we have been trying as an international body to bring our setup to Fiji and this allows us to do so. This will allow us to build our headquarters in Fiji as the regional body

that looks after Olympic perspectives in the region and it is based here in Suva. For us, that is a proud thing where you go over to 17 countries, including Australia and New Zealand, the headquarters is in Suva.

It is amazing, as we build up to the Rio Olympics, all of them are focussing on Suva because the headquarters is here and we will move on from here, having seen this Bill to build the headquarters. We are currently renting and also there is a different perspective when we really have a land and a house that is based in Fiji and the family of the Olympic Committee comprise 204 nations. Whilst we have the regional headquarters in Suva, 204 nations look to Fiji whenever we put something up on the network of the Olympic Committee, so this is a top priority for us.

I stand to support this Bill because last year, we had the owner of the General Assembly in Suva and the International President of the IOC, Mr. Thomas Bach. He visited the Hon. Prime Minister and I also know that he invited the Hon. Prime Minister at one time or the others to visit the IOC Headquarters in Lausanne. So, for us, seeing this Bill, is very important. Fiji is internationally recognised, having the headquarters because in the world today, we have five continental areas where Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Oceania headquarters is in Suva.

Madam Speaker, I stand to support this Bill because it opens up a whole range of perspectives and opportunities for a country like Fiji. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Hon. Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

In listening to the debate for the last two Bills, I have a very short contribution to the Bill that is before the House. In Clause 4, I think exemption may be granted to members who are engaged by this organisation. However, in Clause 4(2), exemption will be disallowed once they are no longer engaged by the trade mission that engages them. However, there is a very important component here, when you come to revocation of an exemption.

In Clause 8(1) where the Hon. Prime Minister has the reason to believe, Madam Speaker, in normal circumstances when someone comes to complain about a particular person who gave false declaration, that will need to be investigated. Can the Hon. Attorney-General please further enlighten us on whether a taskforce or an investigation team will also be at the Prime Minister's Office to conduct investigations, bring in evidence, et cetera? That will also provide the Prime Minister a position, where he could believe without reason that, that particular declaration is outdated or false. That is one of the most important things there, given that we have a society in Fiji, where people normally complained on others. They go around the back and normally the culture that is here within the past eight years, it was part of the government system.

Madam Speaker, now, that we have moved towards democracy, there is an exercise by government to bring back the culture of the Civil Service but we had a system that was there which was very short; a military system, where people who wanted to come and see a Minister or the Prime Minister could come directly. The transformation that we are in, whether that particular system could be used by people who may disagree or may bring an allegation on a particular individual to the Prime Minister's Office and that power has to be properly looked into and who is going to investigate because there should not be any conflict of interest or whether the investigators or people are targeting a particular person. Those could be some of the areas that could be abused, Madam Speaker.

With that in mind, those are some of the areas which I think needs proper tightening. The Hon. Attorney-General could actually enlighten us on how this exercise will be carried out, to allow Section 8 to be implemented in cases where exemptions have to be revoked at the discretion of the Hon. Prime Minister. It does not go back to what it used to be before, it even goes to the consequences of this, that was the Immigration Act of 2003. If that is clarified, that could make this Bill more comprehensive but as it is, Madam Speaker, we will not support, given that there are some loopholes in the Bill itself.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Hon. Minister for Health.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would just like to raise a fact that I support the Bill, and I am a bit appalled too that in the debate on the Bill, we started talking about ISIS. We are talking about United Nations international organisations. ISIS is not an international organisation. It is almost as if we are trying to create fear amongst the population that through the use of this Bill, it provides access to people who will become terrorists in this country. There is no such indication.

I think it is a blatant attempt to paint a picture that is totally at odds with what is in this Bill. We need to talk about what is in the Bill. It is about creating efficiency in the way in which we deal with international agencies and that is it, because we need to be able to compete with other countries. We need to focus on the things that are in the Bill itself, not to create all kinds of pictures of making alarm bells ring; there are no such things happening. Everyone keeps harping back to say that we should stick with our old friends. We have moved on in our foreign affairs now.

We have a policy that we are “friends to all, enemies to none” and we have reaped the benefits. You have seen the economic growth that has happened in consecutive years. You have seen the poverty declining, you cannot keep looking backwards. If you keep looking at the rear vision mirror, you will crash, you need to look ahead so that we can progress. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. CAPT. T.L. NATUVA.- Madam Speaker, I just want to make a small contribution and to comment on what Honourable Ratu Tikoca mentioned, that it was pressure from abroad. It was not pressure from abroad, it was an initiative by Government to make it easier for other diplomats in order to engage on what they want to have, and if you had looked at the Bill properly, all the things that he had wanted to stress is all covered; we have a system to scrutinise the people applying through this.

Hon. Bulitavu said that there are loopholes. There are no more loopholes over here. We had consultations on this Bill with the Department of Immigration. With my Ministry, everything is covered, but if they read the Bill properly, they would be able to understand what we are talking about rather than commenting on something that is already there just for the sake of negative comments.

(Chorus of interjections)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other input, I now give the floor to the Hon. Attorney-General for his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I think quite a lot has been said about this, just a point of clarification.

The reason why our Embassy or our Mission from South Africa has moved to Ethiopia is not because Ethiopia is an Arab country. Ethiopia, Madam Speaker, is very much an African country so much so that the African Union is based in Ethiopia. The Head Office is in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and also all the UN agencies that work in the continent of Africa are based in Addis Ababa. So that is the

reason why our embassy has moved from South Africa right down south, up to the North East of Africa because it can then liaise directly with all these agencies. It makes sense, it is expeditious, it has got nothing to do with what ethnic group these people are of.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister for National Security and Defence has already highlighted, nothing changes in terms of screening of people, nothing changes in terms of our national security assessment. All of these things, in fact, continue. This Bill does not, in any way, undermine any of the terrorism laws we already have in place. Talking about ISIS, the Honourable Minister for Health has highlighted that it has got nothing to do with this Bill. ISIS, by any definition of this Bill, is not an organisation. They want to call themselves an organisation but there is no organisation under this, that is silly, it is preposterous actually to even suggest that it is an insult to our intelligence, but Madam Speaker, the point is that, what this does is that it in fact places these missions in terms of the declaration at the highest office in the land, as far as executive is concerned.

The Prime Minister's Office will deal with that and you can bet your bottom dollar that a lot more rigorous screening will take place at the Prime Minister's Office, and you can also bet your bottom dollar, Madam Speaker, that it will be done in an efficient manner, and it sends out a message to all the diplomatic missions that it will be done in an efficient manner and streamlined process because as the Hon. Minister also highlighted, we want to attract people. Of course, we will attract the right people, people who are not wanted by Fiji will not be included through this particular Act and all the other undesirables through the normal process will be also excluded, but this is simply to streamline the applications of Missions that fall under this definition, and to be able to fast-track that to get them to do the declaration.

Hon. Bulitavu has spoken about the Prime Minister under Clause 8, he says, "following an inquiry". Hon. Bulitavu, an inquiry means that the Prime Minister will call an inquiry. The Prime Minister is a very very fair man, everyone knows him that is why he received over 50 per cent of all the votes in this House. The reality is that natural justice will be provided but normally when you have an inquiry, it means that he will call all the relevant stakeholders, call for whatever submissions required and then he will make the decision, Madam Speaker. It would be amiss of us to deny anyone of natural justice otherwise it defeats the purpose of this Bill. If this Bill is to create efficiency and transparency, then to go against it will obviously be ludicrous.

Madam Speaker, with those few words, we recommend that we now put this Bill to vote.

Question put.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote and the question is pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 10th February, 2016 that the Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations Bill 2016 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of yes and noes)

MADAM SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes:	29
Noes:	10
Not Voted:	11

Motion agreed to.

A Bill for an Act to exempt taxes and provide efficient entry assistance for diplomatic missions, international organisations and international bodies and for other related matters, (Bill No. 17 of 2016) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. 7 of 2016)

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE REGISTRATION OF SKILLED PROFESSIONALS BILL 2016

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now debate on the Registration of Skilled Professionals Bill 2016 pursuant to yesterday's Resolution. This debate will be limited to one hour. I will now call upon the Hon. Attorney-General to move his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 10th February, 2016, I move:

That the Registration of Skilled Professionals Bill 2016 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As highlighted yesterday, this Bill seeks to allow or create an avenue through which the required professional skills that Fiji requires to be fast-tracked and also be given a separate application process. Given in particular are a couple of reasons, one of them being that some of these professionals who fall under the respective local councils that administer these organisations are in fact having a 'closed shop' approach to the approval of these professionals practising in Fiji.

That is the fundamental gist of this Bill and it sets out in a very clear and transparent manner as to how this will operate and again, Madam Speaker, given the seriousness of the nature and of course the fact that you have foreigners who will be able to apply under this particular Bill, again the responsibility of this particular law will sit with the Prime Minister's Office.

The Bill sets out, Madam Speaker, that the Committee will do the assessment and then of course their recommendations, and should there be an appeal process, it goes to the Hon. Prime Minister. He can call for experts, et cetera, who can then give him the opinion and be able to then rule on the appeal itself.

Madam Speaker, I had highlighted yesterday about how some of this 'closed shop' approach, in fact, had impacted one NGO in Ba.

I would like to, Madam Speaker, by way of introduction (and this is not the only organisation that has been affected), I had highlighted about Ba Vision. Let me read out, Madam Speaker, excerpts from an e-mail from a gentleman who actually carries out cataract surgeries. Madam Speaker, he is from the Hawaiian Eye Foundation, Mr. John Corboy, and he sent an e-mail to me and I will leave out the introductions about our exchanges:

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum reads excerpts of the e-mail)

"Today I write with an urgent reason. Our beloved clinic has been closed...."

(This is 10th February, 2016)

You may recall, we discussed the problem of laws restricting access of our arriving Health Care professional, which in turn has occasionally limited our ability to provide services in our Clinic.

Well, now the worst has happened. The Clinic's only professional eye care provider, the optometrist whom you met, left the Clinic shortly after our team's departure. Fortunately, the administrator, Ms. Luck was able to contract the services of two highly qualified experienced optometrists to move to Ba to work in the clinic.

Unfortunately, the very regulation that we discussed had prevented the registration of these optometrists. For whatever reason, registration has been pending since November, with no date promised for completion. This is the Council, the independent council.

Apparently, no exceptions can be made and Ms. Luck has been told there is no remedy, but to change the law.

Without a professional to provide services to the Clinic, there is no one to care for poor patients needing eye glasses, medical treatments, prescriptions, acute care of eye injuries, et cetera, so the Clinic must send away all who seek its services.

Furthermore, Ba Vision is relying on the small income received from its services, for without income, they cannot compensate the few paid workers, or even keep the lights on.

So, with a heavy heart, Ms. Luck has had to close Ba Vision.

This is simply a disastrous situation.

Sir, and I implore you to see if something can be done quickly to remedy this situation. Our Foundation is volunteer, it has recruited two or more missions scheduled for this year, but at the moment, there is simply no Ba Vision Clinic for us to provide the care and the need of Fijians.

We are all hoping and praying that these onerous restrictions will be removed with the change in the law, but we all understand such change can be exceedingly slow. In the meantime, there is no eye care for the poor in Ba – none”

It goes on, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I think this quite succinctly captures the essence of what this Bill tries to address. I have had two text messages; firstly from one of the owners of Suva Private Hospital saying that their ability to bring a cardiologist has been actually stopped by the actual Council that oversees the registration of medical practitioners to come into Fiji. The first wrote about a cardiologist, the second wrote about the ability to bring in various medical personnel.

Madam Speaker, what this Bill does, it actually says that the Hon. Prime Minister will put in place a regulation that will identify the areas in which we need professional skill sets and should any of those be rejected through the normal process, of course, they can come through to this Committee and the Committee can then assess and make recommendations, Madam Speaker. If a decision is made which someone is not happy about it, they can appeal and the Hon. Prime Minister then gets involved directly by appointing someone to give him advice on that.

Madam Speaker, what the Bill also does is, once the Committee approves, then it has the legal effect of overriding the decision of the Council. It also then gives the ability for them to tell the Director of Immigration to issue that person or group of persons with a work permit.

Madam Speaker, with this, we will also be able to complement the very attractive budgetary concessions that we made, as announced in the 2016 Budget.

You will recall, Madam Speaker, that we had said that anyone can invest in ancillary medical services. So, if tomorrow someone wants to set up a clinic, say in Labasa, with an MRI machine, X-ray machine or scanners, they will get tax exemptions, but you obviously need specialist people to run these machines so that will give them this comfort that they can actually go through a process and have the right people to run those machines.

Similarly, we have given tax exemptions for anyone or any company that invests in the private hospitals in excess of \$7 million and get various tax concessions.

Again, they need to have that level of comfort to say, 'Yes, alright, we can build these hospitals. We can have these machines, but by the way, we will also be able to get the people in case there is no one available locally to run those machines.' It is all complementing the various policy initiatives of Government, together with the budgetary initiatives that will be put in place and it will be good for all Fijians, Madam Speaker, and hopefully with this Bill being passed, Ba Vision can open. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. The House is now open for debate.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, in summary, what the Hon. Attorney-General has said, this Bill will allow another pathway. Once you are rejected by the independent Council, you can use this Committee to have your certificate, but it is always safe for us to consult the independent committee for them to at least give us the reason why an application was rejected, and why it was not allowed. The Hon. Minister of Health can also elaborate on this.

Their machines that are here in our hospitals in Fiji, but for Ba Medical, our technicians normally go and get training overseas for them to be able to operate those machines here. However, if we are opening up a new Council, a Committee, that has to come directly under the Prime Minister's Office, that will in a way not allow those who are going for overseas training to have the knowledge and for them to come and operate those machines here because only these particular individuals who will come through this 'the back door' that is now legalised through this Bill, will be able to operate those machines. That is another interpretation you can derive out of this.

I do not see anywhere in the Bill where it will allow our locals to gain knowledge and if the Government had put it somewhere in this Bill that whoever will be applying for this, from the committee, comes into a joint partnership with the local and they enjoy tax holiday or concessions, in that way that human resource capacity can be built on how they can also benefit from a partnership of any individual who is coming this way.

The letters and the two text messages that the Hon. Attorney-General has read clearly show that people are coming directly to give their conscience on how this regulation is not in their favour, but we have to consider the views of the Independent Commission, why are they rejecting this, or whether they have ample people here in Fiji who are able to do that, or the machines that are here can be operated by those who are going overseas to be trained, and in the meantime to operate those machines. In this way, we are opening up as we have seen here.

One of the aims of this is to promote Fiji, that is in clause 5(b) "...to promote Fiji as a destination for skilled professionals." So, we are going to create a market for those people who are coming from overseas, whereas we should be creating our own markets for our skilled professionals who have their training from overseas, but this Bill falls short, and if this Bill can only include partnership of a person that will be allowed a certificate from the committee under the Prime Minister's Office; a joint partnership with a local and they will also enjoy tax concessions and holidays that will be better for our locals.

With that, Madam Speaker, I stand to object the motion because I do not see it in a way that it will help our locals in Fiji.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Hon. Bala.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I think my good friend lost the plot because it is not an issue of another pathway. It is an issue of getting the volunteers in this country and I am going to tell you of what is happening in Ba.

Madam Speaker, I rise to lend my support on the debate on the Registration of Skilled Professionals Bill 2016.

Madam Speaker, I wish to add on to what the Hon. Attorney-General said yesterday and today about this institution in Ba. Until todate, they have been coming to this so called board for the registration of doctors. Unfortunately, no one is prepared to listen to this group from Ba. They are volunteer doctors from USA, India, and Hawaii ready to come and serve our people here. That Centre is not only for the people of Ba, it is for the people of Fiji, and that Centre has served around 8,000 people, and out of those 8,000 people, 800 had cataract treatment.

That has taken place, but you have a group of people who say, 'No, you can come, but only for three months, not beyond.'

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Why?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- That is the existing law.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Closed shop.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Yes, closed shop. This is what we are saying, the problem is you people are not reading the Bill that was given to you.

(Laughter)

We need some positive and constructive suggestions from the Opposition but until today, I have not heard anything from you people.

Madam Speaker, I do not have any interest in that Centre but I do assist them. Let me say, Madam Speaker, that this Bill is designed to assist organisations such as Ba Vision. If we have this Bill passed today, I can tell you there will be more people coming in and opening up Centres like this, do you not like that?

(Laughter)

HON. P. KUMAR.- Every time you are talking about medical issues, and here when a group of people are trying to form set up a Centre, create an organisation and assist the people, you are saying, “there is another pathway”. So, Madam Speaker, all in all, I support the Bill before the House.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Hon. Vadei.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, I would like to contribute to the Bill before the House. I would like to commend the Council for the work in protecting our citizens of Fiji.

Now, we have heard in this new Bill that the Government is expanding its arms to the liabilities that will incur in bringing international professionals to carry out some of the work that can be done by the Council. I feel sorry for those who have not been paid the compensation for the last few years by the Government in various hospitals, delivering those professional services, as being promised to the communities. Now, they are spreading their wings to bring in professionals from abroad. The question is, who is going to pay for the liabilities for all the patients being serviced by these professionals? That is what I would like to add on to contribute to this Bill and I do not lend my support. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to Hon. Veena Bhatnagar.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, I believe a negative thinking person will always perceive this Bill in the negative way, so you cannot do much about it. The citizens of Fiji are not protected but they are deprived of the services right now.

I rise in support of Bill No. 18, Registration of Skilled Professionals and since the Hon. Attorney-General had tabled the Bill along with other organisations, Madam Speaker, the pharmacy owners are looking forward to the enactment of this Bill.

I would like to read out an email from a pharmacy owner, Mr Nand, he wrote and I quote:

“We are facing a great shortage of pharmacists in Fiji, and that is affecting our daily operations. I have been in the pharmacy business in Fiji for more than 40 years, and have been supportive of all FijiFirst Government initiatives for health sector, including Free Medicine Scheme. We employ about 20 pharmacists in our group, and provide best pharmacy services equally, good and compatible to Australia and New Zealand.

We also provide extra services likes blood measuring, blood pressure, sugar testing and weight management, thus assisting with reducing NCDs. Our major and oldest pharmacy Superdrug Nabua has been the only pharmacy opening 7 days and public holidays until 9.00 p.m. in Suva, and we have been trying very very hard to open for 24 hours but shortage of pharmacists is preventing our effort.

However, with family members, they have managed to do weekends and public holidays, as employee pharmacists they refuse odd hours. We have opened our pharmacy in Nabua at late nights and early morning to give medications to very serious patients, foreign embassies, hotel guests, overseas ships, tourists, accident victims and hospitals at times. We have our young pharmacists, and either they get married and migrate or do not want to do late hours, and odd shifts, and issues of maternity leave, bereavement leave, family commitments also takes priority. Neither, do they want to work in remote areas as mostly preferred areas of work is Suva city.

So, other countries like Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu, they have allowed pharmacists from Philippines to register and work there, and they blend very well with locals and speak English too and are ready to work odd hours.

I am very passionate about this pharmacy industry, and seek the Government's urgent attention to this shortage. I can foresee an industry that needs government assistance urgently."

Madam Speaker, they also has been unfailing communication and request from the owner of the Quest Pharmacy in Rakiraki in this regards as well, and the owner wrote his frustrations and was on the verge of closing his business due to unavailability of local pharmacists and, of course, restrictions and conditions on importation of pharmacists from Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and other countries.

So, smaller towns like Rakiraki also need pharmacy services and, of course, we cannot deny the fact that we, at our Ministry, also need pharmacists at our health facilities. So, Madam Speaker, as we can see with the passing of this Bill, our service providers will be assisted and ultimately who will benefit? Our fellow Fijians will benefit from these services.

So, Madam Speaker, I fully support the Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to Hon. Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA:- Madam Speaker, I would like to contribute to the discussions on the Bill before the House. Unfortunately, the Hon. Attorney-General has brought in the health issues and because we all know that health is important, I think that we should look at the broader picture of all the professionals in Fiji.

As you know, Madam Speaker, it took a long time of at least five years to train a professional and to practice. They have to adhere to various strict rules and regulations, and they have to pay enormous amount of money for indemnity insurance which is not available locally and we have to get it offshore.

To all these Bills to go through, Madam Speaker, you are allowing fly by night operators to come here and steal jobs from locals, and it is very hard to scrutinise them and to check the standards they come in. So, Madam Speaker, I would request the Hon. Minister to again relook at this Bill, and resubmit in the future after consulting with all the professionals in the country. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Hon. Alvick Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, I would like to add my views to the Bill before us to show my support.

Madam Speaker, I as an owner of a pharmacy, understand the importance that this Bill has and the impact of it on our industry. As mentioned yesterday, we have a shortage of health professionals in our country. Any health professional going into a business venture has to ensure that the health professional is present in the premises in order to operate. For example, a doctor's surgery cannot operate without a doctor; dental surgery cannot operate without a dentist; and likewise, a pharmacy cannot operate without a pharmacist.

The Pharmacy Professional Board only recognises pharmacists from Australia, New Zealand, USA, UK and South Africa. These restrictions never allowed us with the flexibility to get professionals

from other countries as pharmacists in these far countries are much highly paid, and why in the world they would want to come and work in Fiji.

The Bill will allow us to get suitably qualified pharmacist to come to Fiji and thus allowing us to extend our service beyond 12 hours per day and also branch out to other places in Fiji where there is a need for a pharmacy and a pharmacist, as our local graduates do not prefer working in rural environments.

The Bill, Madam Speaker, will also answer questions raised by our industries. One of the example, Madam Speaker, is we have professionals in all fields from Philippines working in Fiji, but the Pharmacy Board never allowed a pharmacist graduate from Philippines to work in Fiji. Why, Madam Speaker? If these pharmacists can practice in their own country, then why can they not work in Fiji? This Bill will waive away this discrepancy.

Further on, Madam Speaker, it is not that we do not want to provide services to rural areas such as Taveuni, Ovalau, Kadavu, Rotuma, Lau Group and Pacific Harbour, but the factor that has hindered this service is shortage of qualified professionals. This Bill will allow this. This will also allow flexibility as a majority of pharmacists do not get their lunch hour or work during their lunch breaks because as mentioned earlier, a pharmacy cannot operate without a pharmacist. That means you need to provide professional service to every customer entering the pharmacy. This has happened as a practice for the very reason, shortage of pharmacists and it is difficult to get a replacement pharmacist just to work for an hour during lunch to replace the current pharmacist.

This Bill will allow us to have more than one pharmacist and also adhere to the labour law. For this reason Madam Speaker, I totally support the Bill. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you I now give the floor to the Hon. Karavaki.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Hon. Minister for introducing this Bill, but I have some comments to make. This Bill appears, if it is passed, it will supersede any other law that is found to be inconsistent with it. I believe the proper way that would have been handled is to list down the number of laws that are going to be affected instead of putting Section 16 there as a blanket section. So, this Bill, becoming a law, is like a Constitution. All other laws that are consistent with it are superseded by this Bill when it becomes an Act. So, I would suggest if the Government could look at that because there are going to be numerous number of laws that are going to be affected and also by bringing this in has brought to nought the functions of all those other boards that are there.

The proper way probably that this could be handled is to subject those decisions to this Commission that this Bill is trying to set up. To subject the decision of those boards to an appellant body, if that is the one that is set up over here, then that would be the proper way to handle it. Otherwise, you are just bringing to nought all the other functions of all other boards because this one will take over. So, I am suggesting, Madam Speaker, that this needs to be relooked at properly rather than just to dispel or push away the functions of those other boards.

I also have not heard, Madam Speaker, the reason why the Council that had been referred to in Ba did not approve the application over there in Ba, I have not heard it. I do not know why it has not been disclosed but I believe it should have been handled in a proper way. If this Bill brings a continuation of that, and if the people are aggrieved by the decision of the Council and the Board, there is a place to take it up to and if that is the one created over here, it would be the best way to do it. For that reason, I think this Bill should be restructured back. Thank you Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Hon. Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to support what the Hon. Karavaki said. This is going to be a very funny Bill. Why? It is because of the manner it has been brought here. First and foremost, had we followed the due process, that Council in Ba as well as other people would have an opportunity to come and explain.

With this Bill, you do not respect the work that has been done by the Ministry, especially the Department of Immigration that grants all these permits. What is the implication of this Bill to the work that it is doing?

The second point on Section 16 is, you really need a transitional provision to take into account other bodies that are issuing the same licences and this one sorts of puts it separately into a separate committee for approval. What about those who are issuing licences for doctors? What about those who are issuing licences and permits for lawyers? That needs to be looked at.

The other point, Madam Speaker is the extent. The Hon. Dulakiverata had said that we are opening the Pandora's box for people to come in and take on jobs. Now what he said is true. It is because of the definition. You look at the definition, the definition is not limiting. The definition does not limit who are professionals, especially (c) "those whose experience or qualifications are recognised and accepted by the committee." So anyone can just apply and they will accept. Here, you are a professional and we will give you a work permit, we will give you a residential permit as well as other permits that are required here".

So, there is a need for this to be scrutinised in the normal way. It is not an amendment or incidental, it is totally a new thing that will affect, compromise and mitigate or overcome what has already been existing. So, we need to hear their views, there needs to be a transitional provision to look into that and for that reason I oppose it.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Hon. Sudhakar.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I almost fell asleep at the back here until I was startled by the comments made by the Hon. Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Because I am right.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- No, you are not. Madam Speaker, 45 years since Independence and in Fiji, we do not have a specialised open heart surgery facility, we do not have a kidney transplant facility, we do not have an eye transplant facility and we do not have specialised medical facilities here to treat people who are in dire need.

Madam Speaker, people in this country are dying because of the lack of specialists and there are people on the other side who are worried about what is written on a piece of paper. They are talking about definitions, they are talking about referring matters to a committee which might last for months. If it comes to my committee, it is probably quicker but then people are in need of medical assistance now, they need it today. There are people who are suffering, there are questions of dialysis.

Last year when the Budget debate was going on, there were people on the other side talking about more funds for dialysis. Dialysis is the short-term cure, my Honourable friend's father is also on dialysis and these are short-term measures to prolong life.

Now, we need the specialist to come to this country and to assist these people who will obviously not see probably the New Year if we do not have any urgency in bringing this law. As the

Hon. Attorney-General has rightly pointed out, there have been applications that have been pending for three years before the current board. Now, do we want more applications to be pending there when people are dying in our own backyard who would benefit from these services?

We need help today and we need help now and that is the reason why it is very startling to see that the Opposition, that was last year, so much for the idea of having at least more funds for kidney dialysis but today objecting to an Honourable Government's move to allow to open the doorway for specialists to come in here and provide these facilities, it is very startling.

(Hon Member interjected)

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- It is a known fact that we do not have these facilities and specialists here. There are people who come in ships, there are people who also come in boats and they spend a few weeks here, they do treatments for us and then they go away. They were given temporary licences to operate on people and lots of people are in their queues and by the time the next team arrives, half of the crowd are dead.

Our people are dying here and it is sort of a shame that Hon. Members on the other side are taking pieces of paper in their hands and talking about definitions; talking about referring matters to the Committee when the urgency is here.

(Hon. Members interjected)

Madam Speaker, this is the reason why I am saying that if you look at the whole picture, there are some people who are genuinely concerned about the health of the people of this country. There are people who are concerned about the women (like the Hon. Minister for Women here), who are in need of medical assistance. We have our Hon. Prime Minister here who always advocates for the needy, he goes to the villages and sees to the need of the people.

Now, if Government like that brings a Bill that is going to benefit everyone, including some Honourable Members of the Opposition who I saw having their pressure and diabetes check outside this afternoon, probably they have got some diseases too, with the specialists who will cure for them. So there is no need to stop this, this is an honourable piece of Bill, please support it.

With those words, Madam Speaker, I support this Bill and I will support any other Bill that is in line with this Bill. Thank you very much.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I will now give the floor to the Hon. Aseri Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to make a brief contribution, a clarification from the Hon. Attorney-General. It says here on Clause 1.3 "with the shortage of professionals in the country." It is very scared to read this background, to see that this is being used as a reason why this Bill has been brought into the House.

That is a very big concern, Madam Speaker, especially when you do not even know the details, conditions, what these professionals will be given, whether they will be treated with similar conditions as the locals. When the Board rejects an applications there is a reason, they probably want to save the human resource capacity and capability that we have locally. They probably want to save the businesses that are in, but do we have to follow this process, to try and deregulate the same business that these people are trying to protect? This is not the correct way.

The other concern, Madam Speaker, when these foreigners in particular come through this Committee, what rules will they follow? Will they be following separate rules? There should be one rule for all in this particular profession. One rule for all, Madam Speaker, you cannot have two separate rules. Firstly, the locals who have gone through the Committees and secondly, those expatriates who had come through this Committee through the Prime Minister's Office.

Madam Speaker, I am also concerned that the Honourable friend on this side have even gone to the fact to highlight that we cannot hire locals even for one hour for replacement during lunch. That is because of the law that has been created, we cannot cheapen our labour

(Hon. Members interjected)

Madam Speaker, to engage a professional pharmacist for one hour. You have to pay at the local rate, not at a cheap rate like he has been highlighting from Philippines, you cannot get cheaper rate and replace our locals who are now migrating overseas because there is no opportunity available here. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I stand to disagree with this motion, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I will now give the floor the Hon. Minister for Health.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to support the Bill that is before the House. I think when you establish all the councils that we have, the Medical Council, whether it is the Institute of Valuers, the Institute of Engineers, they are set up for a very specific purpose, to screen people coming in so that they meet certain conditions. However, if you look at this particular Bill, it is not about changing those requirements, but sometimes when you establish a Council, you have a very pure purpose in mind, but the way that they carry out their role, they begin to lose focus of that.

For instance, if you have a group that is supposed to decide which eye doctors are supposed to operate in the country and you feel that the council (and they are full of eye doctors), the fact that every time that they approve a new certificate, they are actually losing business themselves. So sometimes these sort of things are taken into consideration, sometimes these things drag on, so the whole intent of this is to make sure at the end of the day, what is most important as has been highlighted by the Whip from this side, the most important thing is the health of the people or the people that we serve.

If there are things that are happening with the way in which we operate, the Council is restricting itself from being able to carry out its role, Government sees that it is important to provide this particular avenue. It does not reduce the requirements that will be needed for screening because the permanent secretaries for the respective ministries will still be in that Committee. In as much as health is concerned, the Chairperson of this Council is the permanent secretary, he will bring those requirements to this Committee but the Committee will meet and it will make sure that these things are expedited for the interests of all the people of this country and for that reason, Madam Speaker, I support the Bill before the House.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Hon. Attorney-General, on time allocation, we are keeping 20 minutes for your right of reply. Are you taking the 20 minutes?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, it depends on how many more Members will speak, I will need to respond to what are they going to say.

MADAM SPEAKER.- You will take your turn, thank you. I now give the floor to the Hon. Attorney-General to give his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- My apology. Madam Speaker, I thought you asked me how long will my right of reply take.

MADAM SPEAKER.- That is right.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I said it depends of how many other Members are going to speak, so I have to respond to their queries that they have raised.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Yes, the thing is that I will not be able to give you more than the 20 minutes time.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, but I will now give the floor to the person that stood up first and that is the Hon. Mohammed Abe Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Honourable Members, I received a call last night and my wife was asking, why are you not speaking in the Parliament?

(Laughter)

Because by profession, if you are a teacher, your occupation is to speak. Now, before we speak, Madam Speaker, we have to know what we are talking about.

(Hon. Members interjected)

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Of course, see they are agreeing, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Please do not respond to interjections since you just have about two minutes.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, they are debating on the fact that we are bringing foreign professionals here, that will jeopardise the employment of the professionals who are already here. Now one of the reasons why this Bill is being implemented is because we want to reduce the conflict of interest also, that was there when societies like the Fiji Law Society was in place. The peer lawyers were investigating their peer lawyers. So where is transparency in that? They are talking about public consultation, public consultation, public consultation, when we make these Bills what do they think, we do not consider the public?

(Hon. Member interjected)

We are alive here, the whole nation is seeing us, definitely the public knows what we are talking about and, Madam Speaker...

Madam Speaker, I support this Bill for the fact that we have been mandated by the people of Fiji to express our views, which are the views of the people of Fiji. I support this Bill because of the independence of the Bill. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Hon. Minister Agriculture.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU. – Madam Speaker, very quickly, to clarify some of the issues raised from the other side of the House.

Hon. Radrodro raised about the professionals. Clause 17 of the Bill clearly states that there will be regulations that will be under the Prime Minister’s Office. Every now and then, they are to make regulations that will probably clarify some of the issues that are grey in this Bill.

Of course, when we are looking at the Vetting Committee as well under Clause 4 (2) - the Permanent Secretary responsible for Industry & Trade, the Permanent Secretary responsible for Civil Service, Permanent Secretary responsible for Employment, one is about the services, Madam Speaker, and two, is about development issues as well and economic issues particularly.

We have talked a lot about health in this debate, let me now talk about agriculture, Madam Speaker. There is no local veterinary officer available in Fiji right now, none at all. I was with one of the big dairy farmers in Fiji just before Christmas. He said to me, “You know, the Veterinary Officer came and told me this and that.” He was frustrated because of the Tuberculosis and other issues. I told him, Madam Speaker, *Tamana*, please, sorry, there is no local Vet in Fiji right now because of the archaic laws that we have. A veterinary officer who needs to be registered in Fiji has to be a graduate from only one, two or three institutes.”

We are living in a globalized competitive world. We need to be competitive as well, and that is why we need to source professionals, who can help us lift the industries so that we can solve unemployment issues, so that the economy can do better. That is the situation in agriculture right now, Madam Speaker. I have only talked about Vet. We also have shortages of plant breeders, animal breeders. They have all gone because of the political situation in Fiji.

(Hon. Members interjected)

Madam Speaker, in 1987, we lost all our top scientists. Again in 2000, we lost most of our sons, now they want to come because the environment is right, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

The environment is right. We hope that with this Bill, things will be speeded up and it will be good for Fiji and for the economy. I strongly support this Bill, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEKAER. – I now give the floor to the Hon. Vunivalu.

HON. S.B.VUNIVALU. – Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to support the Bill with all the people of Fiji, who are listening now. I think all the lawyers in this House should know the meaning of professional very well. We know that in Fiji, there are also Fijian doctors. In one of the seminars I attended at the Warwick Hotel, one of the doctors was telling us not to believe in Fijian herbal medicine. We believe in these professionals who are coming to Fiji. The people who are watching this debate are saying that the Opposition is very poor.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU. – This is what we want. Firstly, people who are sick in the interior and in the maritime areas want professional doctors to come here. Secondly, we have seen that some doctors and nurses who are qualified in Fiji go overseas. When these professional doctors come to Fiji, they will work there, and there will be job opportunities. You are saying that when they come to Fiji it will be like unsafe, as my colleague, the Hon. Bulitavu said. They will be screened by Immigration Officials and they will be carrying their certificates. If they are really professionals, they can then practice here.

I support the Bill, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Thank you.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.– Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to complete the Government business in today's Order Paper.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR. – Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Votes Cast:

Ayes	:	29
Noes	:	8
Not Voted	:	13

Motion agreed to.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Thank you. The Standing Orders is suspended and we are extending our time. However, we have a very little time left for this Bill. Would you like to take your right of reply now?

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE REGISTRATION OF SKILLED PROFESSIONALS BILL, 2016

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, given the fact that the Standing Orders have been suspended to allow Government business, there are other speakers who do want to speak, I am quite happy for that to happen unless the time limit is nearly over.

MADAM SPEAKER.– The time limit that was agreed to yesterday was one hour.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-So, it is almost an hour, maybe Hon. Eden wants to make a two minutes speech, I am quite happy for her to make one.

MADAM SPEAKER. – Alright, a two-minute speech has been given to you, Hon. Eden, so you have the floor.

HON. L. EDEN. – Thank you Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, listening to all the tos and fros that have been going on for the last one hour, I would like to say that I support this Bill, and I also would like to say that the other side of House cannot have it both ways. They cannot keep pointing fingers at this side of the House saying, “what are you doing? Why have you not done this?”

(Chorus of interjections)

We are trying to do something, and this is one of them, so you should support it. We are trying to fix the problem, and just to allay Hon. Radrodro's fears, he obviously did not read this Bill properly.

Under Section 10 Part 4, it says, "If an applicant is issued with a permit under Subsection 1A and he/she is duly registered under Subsection 1B, he/she is subject to and must comply with such disciplinary rules, guidelines and procedures as may be prescribed by written law for the profession or as maybe issued by the relevant professional body."

Madam Speaker, I support the Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER. – I now give the floor to the Hon. Attorney General for his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the number of issues that have been brought about, but I would very quickly summarise that. The reality is that, whenever we bring these kind of Bills and also as we see with the previous Bills, there seems to be some kind of xenophobic approach by the other side of the House. They are very very xenophobic.

The other thing also, Madam Speaker, is unfortunately they have not actually read the Bill properly itself. The provision for regulations under Section 17 states that the Prime Minister can make to give effect to this Act and that is obviously with the forms, et cetera, with the various guidelines.

The reality is, Madam Speaker, if the locals were so good at doing all these things, why were they not carrying out cataract surgeries in Ba? Why were they not doing that? Did they have the expertise to carry out these cataract surgeries? I suspect most of them cannot do that. The reality is, Madam Speaker, most of the people who actually apply to come to Fiji, some of them are even professors with 10, 15 and 20 years' experience in numerous other countries. There are people coming into this Ba Vision with decades of experience. The American doctors who come and carry out cardiac surgeries are not going to allow quacks to come with them to assist them. That is the reality, Madam Speaker.

So, this door is not to allow people who are not qualified to come in. This is a recognition of a shortage of professionals in Fiji and I completely agree with Hon. Dulakiverata. It is not only about the medical profession, numerous other professions and the law does provide the ability, through the regulations, to be able to list. If you read, Madam Speaker, in the clause, it says 'the function of committee are to identify the need for skilled professional in specialised fields.' It is not going to bring in labourers, it is not going to bring in other people who are already able to do this job.

Madam Speaker, the reality is when the Hon. Minister for Agriculture highlighted the fact that there is not a single Vet in Fiji, someone yelled out from the other side, "Train them". What do we do for the next 6 or 7 years? And even with veterinary science, Madam Speaker, their world only starts from 5th December, 2006. They do not think about what happened previously, they do not think about the enormous impact 1987 had on this country. Some of them were, of course, involved in the events of 1987. They do not think about the enormous impact that 2000 had. The reality is that, it is a legacy issue, so stop doing this "5 December, 2006" going "he he he", that now we caught you out.

The Hon. Minister for Agriculture was truthful in what he said. The reality is, Madam Speaker, we have a professional gap in many specialised areas, even with Vet Science as the Hon. Minister will tell you. It is not just about having a Vet, there are Vets and there are specialised Vets. There are Vets for training dairy, there are Vets for training, for example, other types of areas of animal husbandry. So it is not just a question of having a Vet. In the same way it is like saying, "well whoever is qualified to

be a doctor can cut you open and have an open heart surgery”, of course not. There are different specialised skills sets. We may have, for example, accountants in Fiji, that is enough but we may not have enough Forensic Accountants in Fiji. Why do you think whenever we have forensic accounting skills as required, we hire people from overseas? Is it not better that they setup a shop in Fiji, they pay taxes in Fiji rather than remitting funds offshore; they come here for one month and take the money away?

These are the long-term effects that we are looking at. It would be stupidity on anyone’s part to say that this is designed to take away Fijian jobs, of course not. Many business people will tell you (and again it is a reflection of their inability to understand commerce) that when you hire an expatriate, you have to pay for their homes, probably overseas trips - return trip home every year. They actually are not necessarily cheap, so they do it only when the necessity arises.

The point that Hon. Alvick Maharaj raised, he does not want to hire a person just for one hour, they probably have shifts, that is what they want to do but if he has only one pharmacist, obviously he is not going to say, “I want to hire someone for one hour”, he may have a shift from seven in the morning till two in the afternoon, and from two in the afternoon to probably nine at night. You will find more pharmacies opening late. You will find Government dispensaries opening late, you have some times Government doctors working but the pharmacy is closed in the Government Dispensary because the pharmacist has gone home, there is only one pharmacist. They can only work an eight-hour day. These are the hard core realities that this Bill seeks to address, Madam Speaker.

As I highlighted, Madam Speaker, just one more point the Hon. Karavaki said that this law supersedes all laws, therefore it supersedes the Constitution, how can that be? Any lawyer will tell you, Madam Speaker, the Constitution is the supreme law of the land. Any lawyer would know that. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land. So, Madam Speaker, these are the realities.

What we would urge everyone and as all the Honourable Members in this side of the House have highlighted, the reality to address a gap in the professional skill sets, unfortunately as the Honourable Minister for Health has highlighted, whilst the rationale for setting up that Council is a good intention, but as we found in Fiji, generally they tend to work as closed shops.

The Hon. Bulitavu says, “Why not get them to form a partnership?” These are individual professionals, and he said “get businesses to form with individuals” you cannot do that, Madam Speaker. The reality is that, this is to do with individual professionals. There is already those kind of joint ventures of starting, you do not need this law for that to happen. But the reality is that for that overseas person to come and operate, they need to be approved, and that is what we are trying to do, Madam Speaker.

So, the law in fact, Madam Speaker, is a very enabling law, it does not take away the jobs of Fijians. In fact, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture highlighted a very important point, by having the right people with the right professional skill sets, you are actually encouraging more commerce. If you have for an example, the right vet, you will be able to do more milk production, if you cut the hooves of the cows, you will produce more milk.

(Laughter)

Apologies, Hon. Karavaki, but that, Madam Speaker, is the reality.

This law is an enabling law, it allows Fijians to have access to professionals that they currently do not have the services too. Also, the reality is, Madam Speaker, if in 10 years’ time we have enough locally trained Vets in Fiji, then that can come off as special skill sets that will allow foreigners to come in.

Madam Speaker, with those few words, we would like to urge Parliament to vote for this because it does provide the ultimate services required by Fijians. It helps to expedite and leap frog into those areas of services that does create in the Ministry of Commerce and Trade, and then it also does not compromise as Hon. Eden very aptly highlighted, that once they get registered in Fiji, they still face the same disciplinary processes. For example a doctor comes into Fiji, if there is negligence on his part, he still has to go through the same disciplinary process that another doctor in Fiji would have to go through. So, the standards are still the same, Madam Speaker. It is only the ability to gain entry into Fiji and the recognition of the skill sets.

So, thank you Madam Speaker, I urge that this Bill be voted upon in the positive. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you, the Parliament will now vote.

The question is, pursuant to the Resolution of Parliament on 10th February, 2016 that the Registration of Skilled Professionals Bill 2016 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “yes” and “no”)

MADAM SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will vote on the motion.

Votes cast:

Ayes	:	29
Noes	:	9
Not voted	:	12

Motion agreed to.

A Bill for an Act to provide for the Establishment of a Committee to evaluate the need for professionals in Fiji and to provide for special registration of the professionals and for related matters (Bill No. 18 of 2016) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. 8 of 2016)

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

(Applause)

ADOPTION OF AMENDED STANDING ORDERS

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Hon. Attorney-General to move his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I move:

- a) that the amended Standing Orders adopted by Parliament on 1st December, 2014 be amended as per the tabled amendments to the Standing Orders; and
- b) that Parliament vote and adopt the amendment to the Standing Orders.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

MADAM SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Hon. Attorney-General and Minister for Finance, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, Standing Orders 128(3) states that “it is the ongoing duty of the (Standing Orders) Committee to consider and review the practices and procedures of Parliament and to make recommendations for their improvement or change or for the development of new practices and procedures.” In 2015, as we are all aware, the Standing Orders met only on two occasions. On 2nd November the Standing Orders Committee met and discussed amendments to the Standing Orders, these were amendments proposed by representatives of both sides of the House including for administrative purposes the Secretariat of the Secretary-General to Parliament.

The Standing Orders Committee met again on the 9th December but this meeting was adjourned shortly after it commenced, to allow the secretariat to finalise the verbatim, minutes of the previous meeting.

In January, Madam Speaker, the Chairperson of the Standing Orders Committee and that is your good self, Madam Speaker, scheduled not one meeting but two meetings on 13th and 27th of January, to discuss and finalise necessary amendments to the Standing Orders before the first sitting of Parliament this year.

Madam Speaker there was also another meeting scheduled for the 3rd February. Unfortunately, the Opposition Members of the Standing Orders Committee failed to attend this scheduled meeting and since there was no quorum, the meeting could not go ahead.

Madam Speaker, we do not know if this was a deliberate ploy on their part, but as a result, in any case, the Standing Orders Committee was not able to review and finalise their amendments to the Standing Orders on time. In other words, it was not able to function.

The proposed amendments to the Standing Orders, Madam Speaker, which have been circulated to all Member of Parliament (I understand the day before yesterday) are necessary because they impact the way Parliament conducts itself.

Madam Speaker, as I have already mentioned, the amendments were not only proposed by this side of the House, some of the amendments were proposed by the Secretariat also.

Under Section 71(1) of the Constitution, the Parliament may make Standing Orders and rules for the order and conduct of business and proceedings in Parliament and its committees and for the way in which its powers, privileges and immunities may be exercised and upheld. This is why, Madam Speaker, the Government has taken the initiative of bringing these amendments to the House for the House itself to deliberate on these amendments, Madam Speaker. If we keep waiting around for the Opposition Members to show up to the meetings of the Standing Orders Committee, we would be waiting for a very long time.

HON. RATU I. D TIKOCA.- Point of Order.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. RATU I.D TIKOCA.-Madam Speaker, this is not true. You understand very well that we appeared. We have never missed one of the Standing Orders Committee meeting, only when we arrived when you decided to call off the meeting, but on the second meeting when it was called, we have already written to you, Madam Speaker, and we were awaiting the response from your office and that did not

come. So we cannot attend that until we heard the response from you. That is the reason and I categorically deny that we did not attend for whatever reasons that you are implying, but Madam Speaker, we were there. The reasons why we did not attend the second meeting was because of that, we waited for your response, it did not come.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you for your statement. We will record the corrections that you have made Hon. Attorney- General, please continue.

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, nonetheless, the fact is that the Committee was not able to hold a meeting. Madam Speaker, the tabled provision is amended to reflect the changes to the headings, and if I go into the amendments now, Madam Speaker.

In Standing Orders 35 and 130, 'weekly adjournment motion' is now amended to change, to be called 'end of week statements'. There used to be a lot of confusion, so the words 'weekly adjournment motion' is now to be changed to the 'end of week statements' which is, of course, by the Opposition.

'An approval of the international treaties and conventions', Madam Speaker, is changed to 'Approval of International Treaties' which is an all-encompassing phrase.

In the definition of 'gazette', Madam Speaker, in Standing Orders 94 and 136, the term 'Gazette' is not italicised. This was an amendment put forward by the Secretariat to align the change in the drafting style of our laws, which has been italicised.

The definition of 'Private Bill' is amended for the purpose of clarity. A Private Bill is one introduced by Members of Parliament other than Ministers. This is to provide the clarification.

Amendments to Standing Orders 24 allows the Madam Speaker to make specific orders for closed sittings of Parliament, including any of the Committee meetings. Essentially as you know, Madam Speaker, we had some closed sittings earlier on, and now this enunciates a lot better way as to what we do mean by close sittings and the procedures around them.

Madam Speaker the amendments to Standing Orders 34 changes the first reading of Bills under Order of Parliament business to Consideration of Bills. This is to get rid of the confusion that may exists. This is to allow for these Bill under Standing Order 51. This was unanimously agreed to at the November meeting.

The amendments to Standing Order 35 is changed from 'Weekly Adjournment Motions' to 'End of Week Statements' that is Standing Order 35. There is no debate on the motion for the adjournment of Parliament but Members of Parliament may make statements. The Secretariat also puts forward minor amendments to Clauses 2-4 in this particular Standing Order, which was accepted.

The amendment to Standing Order 36, Madam Speaker, requires a Member of Parliament to provide a written summary of the matter for urgent consideration by Parliament to the Secretary-General.

The amendments to Standing Order 37 allow Parliament to decide on whether a petition should be referred to a Standing Committee. The Member presenting the petition must move a motion that Parliament vote on whether the petition is to be referred to a Standing Committee. Forty percent approval of the total number of Members of Parliament is required in order for the vote to be carried. This is to allow petitions, Madam Speaker, which has merit to proceed further for review by a Standing Committee.

Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 40, the topic of a Ministerial Statement must be provided to the Speaker. The Speaker will then give a copy of the topic of the Statement to the Whips of each Party. This, Madam Speaker, is to articulate the current practice, whilst it is there. It is not so standardised, so we are now putting it in the Standing Orders and that is a requirement by all the Ministers to ensure that they actually give that to the Speaker before time.

Under Standing Orders 41, Madam Speaker, questions may also be submitted to the Secretary-General through email. This will be convenient for Members of Parliament. At the moment, there is no specific provision to say that “you may submit the question by email.” Although, it is being done, this is to capture the practice.

Also, on Standing Order 42, Madam Speaker, the number of questions for oral answers has increased from six to eight questions. We had agreed to this and the Members of the Opposition wanted this. So we had agreed that the questions can increase from six to eight, and that generally means four-four, but depending because whenever there has been less questions from Government, they have allowed the Opposition if they have more questions to fill in the gap of the balance of the 8. This obviously provides for even greater opportunity for transparency and accountability.

Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 43, an urgent oral question if asked becomes the first question for the day and oral question previously set down for the party asking this oral question is omitted from the Order Paper. This, Madam Speaker, merely articulates the current practise. So everyone knows what the rules are and it is in writing.

The amendments to Standing Order 74 relate to points of order. In order to prevent the unnecessary interruption of the proceedings of Parliament, the amendment provides for raising of point of order and that is in Standing Order 74, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker the amendment to Standing Order 75 is to rectify a typographical error and that is quite straight-forward.

Under Standing Order 83, a Member may only introduce a private bill if it complies with Standing Order 94. Also, before the sitting day on which the Bill is intended to be read, a Member must give at least two days’ notice to the Secretary-General and the copy of the Bill as published in the gazette. This again, is to get it all enunciated properly in the Standing Orders.

Madam Speaker, the amendments to Standing Order 99 are related to the national Budget, the Appropriation Bill may be accompanied by supplementary on the set of documents that the Minister of Finance wishes to include.

So this is again to allow various other documentations as you know, Madam Speaker, we have being putting in various documents, ancillary to the actual appropriation documents that we put in, Appropriation Bills, so these actually captures the practice that is already on foot.

Standing order 101 deals with the procedure and the Appropriation Bill during the Committee of Supply.

Currently, an amendment to a clause or a Schedule in the Appropriation Bill, Madam Speaker, may only be carried out if there is an amendment to an amount of any Head during the Consideration of the Estimates and if the amendment is moved by the Minister for Finance, the proposed amendment to Standing Order 101 is to allow the Minister for Finance to move a motion for the amendment to a clause or schedule in the Appropriation Bill.

As you may remember, Madam Speaker, in the last budget that was presented, there was an error about the Public Service versus Civil Service and whilst the House actually approved it, there was no actual specific powers to do that, so this now allows that to take place.

Under Standing Order 109, Madam Speaker, the Standing Committee must not examine the merits of underlying policy. The Standing Committees, of course, Madam Speaker, are there to look at what has actually been happening and if I can refer to Standing Order 109, in the amendments, this is to look at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The reality, Madam Speaker, is that the Public Accounts Committee is there to scrutinise Government's spending, it is there to scrutinise the Auditor-General's observations. The Committee is not there however, Madam Speaker, to question policy. This has always been the convention.

Madam Speaker, the amendments to Standing Order 110 are linked to the amendments under Standing Order 109. The amendment to Standing Order 115 is to rectify a grammatical error, 'satisfy' is changed to 'satisfies.'

The amendment to Standing Order 117 relate to the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee. The amendment proposed is that Members must elect a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson at any meeting of a Committee by majority vote, replace the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson but only after every 12 months if they wish to do so. So, it is not any time, every 12 months they can change the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson if they wish to do so during the four year term of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, the amendments to Standing Order 118 are for the purposes of clarity. The amendment to Standing Order 119 is to rectify a typographical error again. The amendment to Standing Order 121 includes International Treaty because the report relates to Bills and International Treaties as well.

Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 124, an Alternative Member may attend the meeting of the Business Committee during the absence of a Member but the Chairperson must be satisfied that the Member is unable to attend the meeting as a result of circumstances beyond the control of the Member.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 130 because International Treaties have legal implications on the State, they will now be introduced by the Attorney-General. It is just simply to table it and then it goes to the Committee that deals with International Treaties, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, these are the amendments that had been moved by this side of the House. I think the fact is that, it creates a lot smoother approach to the running of Parliament with the amendments, as you know that some of the amendments have also been proposed, Madam Speaker, by the Secretariat. We understand that the Opposition may have reservations about the Committees, et cetera, but we now table these amendments for debate.

Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- The floor is now open for debate.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, a Point of Order.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In this point of order, I am asking you to exercise your discretion which I submit is available to you, Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 18 to throw this motion out.

Standing Order 18, Madam Speaker, says you can bring a motion without notice, you can bring in a motion under Standing Order 45 in which you file a two days' notice, and that allows the registry to scrutinise it. Once it fulfils those requirements, then it can come in, and I submit this one has come in. However, Madam Speaker, you have an overall power, even so, to dismiss a motion under Standing Order 18 if the motion fails to honour and secure the dignity of Parliament and I feel this motion will demean Parliament in its role in guaranteeing democracy, proper debates and guaranteeing accountabilities and transparencies.

If you allow me to say why this is so, I am referring especially not with the others but with the amendments to Standing Orders 35, 37 and 117. If you look at Standing Order 35, this allows by tradition or custom that the Friday of the last day of business is given to the Opposition to ventilate their issues because the Government has a mandate and we must understand them. Anything can pass through but to allow the public to know whatever is happening, Standing Order 35 states that. This one will be removed and replaced by 'statements by the minister'.

The other point on Standing Order 36....

MADAM SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you are going outside of your original point of order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am explaining the reason why.

Standing Order 36 is petitions. You made a ruling here, Madam Speaker, that Standing Order 37 is fundamental, that is the right of every citizen and this House guarantees that right to hear petitions from anyone. That petition does not have any power, only recommendations.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Therefore, what you are saying really is you are contributing to the debate, it is really not a point of order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, I am not contributing, I am asking for a ruling. I am asking you to throw this out.

The third one is the changes in the Public Accounts chairmanship. Now, that does not allow us to scrutinise it. It allows the Government to have its way, it does not allow proper debate. Madam Speaker, I feel that you have powers under Standing Order 18 to throw this out on that basis and I seek your ruling on that.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Point of Order, Madam.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Can I just make a ruling on the first point of order?

(Pause)

The motion has now been moved and this will be debated. After the debate, we will vote on whether to accept or not to accept the motion.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am entitled to a ruling on a point of order. I am asking for a ruling, well you can do that if you overrule me. Could you please, first say that I am overruled, then we can go to that?

MADAM SPEAKER.- That is the ruling that I have made, that the motion is on the floor, and I am not throwing out the motion. We will debate and vote for it.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, Point of Order.

Madam Speaker, our Standing Order provides for the process that we are to follow and it would be a sad day if we make the rules while we do not follow it. I am referring to Standing Order 128, Madam Speaker. We understand all that had happened about the Standing Order being reviewed, brought to Parliament and then the Standing Orders Committee still has the power to continuously review their role and bring it to Parliament for the development of practices and procedures.

I am referring, Madam Speaker, to Section 128(3). It is the only vehicle that a change in the Standing Order can come through. Clause 2 talks about the changes that was done earlier but Clause 3(3) says, "Despite Clause 2 it is the ongoing duty of the Committee to consider and review the practices and procedures of Parliament, and to make recommendation for their improvement or change or for the development of new practices and procedures."

It is the only door, Madam Speaker, that any change can come in into this House through the Committee's recommendation. We had jumped the gun here, Madam Speaker. It has been brought by another way which is not what is prescribed here in the rules.

Madam Speaker, we cannot continue like this, it has been the practice of the government in the past before we became a democracy. It is the dignity of this House. I am saying Madam Speaker, that that is the only vehicle, it cannot come through any other door or on any other vehicle. We cannot use the doctrine of necessity in here for them to say, "oh, because the Opposition did not play their part".

Explanation has been given here, Madam Speaker, and no one else is privy to that more clearly than Madam Speaker herself. I cannot explain that more clearly. Madam Speaker, is the one who is privy to that and I am saying, Madam Speaker, that this is premature, it cannot be done in this way. The Government must learn to follow the rules. You made the rules and I am saying that we cannot do it this way, it has to come through the Committee; convene the Committee and the Committee will put through their recommendation and we can talk about it in this House, and we develop the procedures.

Now, we are overriding it, we are following another rule and another process which is not even in here. That is why, Madam Speaker, it is under your power under Standing Order 18 to actually refer this back to the Committee; stop its discussion here; and let us go back to the Committee. That is the only door, Madam Speaker, let us go back to the Committee. Madam Speaker can convene the Committee immediately. I have not at all heard any difficulties on the Opposition side for them to come and attend the Committee meeting, Madam Speaker.

I request you, Madam Speaker, this section is very clear. If you want, Madam Speaker, you can obtain a legal opinion on this. I am sincere in raising this because this is very important in the dignity of this House. That is my point of order, Madam Speaker, if you can look it up, I need a ruling on that before we can proceed.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Before I make my ruling, can I give the floor to the Hon. Attorney-General?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, firstly, this motion was brought to the attention of the Business Committee on Friday last week. I have been asked to provide a clarification.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Just clarification, yes.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This was brought to the attention of the Opposition. Again when the Leader of the Opposition attended the meeting earlier this week, she did ask about what was the motion. We told her again that it was about bringing an amendment. Now, Madam Speaker, the Hon. Karavaki refers to the Standing Orders Committee. He reads into it. He says that Standing Order 128 (3) says that it is the only way through which it can be brought. No, it is not. The word “only” is not there. In any case, Madam Speaker, he needs to refer to this, which is the supreme law of the land. Let me read this, Madam Speaker. It says, “Parliament may make standing orders and rules for the order and conduct of business and proceedings in Parliament and its committees. And for the way in which powers, privileges and immunities may be exercised and upheld.”

This is the Parliament. This is the Parliament, Madam Speaker, and this Parliament has brought before it a motion that has been given due notice in compliance with the Standing Orders and the motion says that we need to look at the amendments to the Standing Orders.

Now, the point is, Madam Speaker, we have gone through the Standing Orders Committee, the provision in Standing Order 128 (3) does not say that this is the only way through which it can be brought about. In any case, that is superseded by the provision under Section 70 of the Fijian Constitution that says that the Parliament can make Standing Orders. Therefore, Madam Speaker, the reality is, that we should be able to, now, it says from time to time. It does not say only in the beginning.

(Hon. Member interjected)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Constitution says from time to time, Madam Speaker. The Constitution says from time to time and other functions as are specified from time to time in the rules and orders in Parliament. So, Madam Speaker, even if you were to accept the argument which does not hold any water by Hon. Karavaki that the Standing Orders Committee is the only way through which you can bring about amendments, it is overridden by Section 71 of the Constitution. Thank you.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, for the sake of relevance here on Standing Order 60, I plead with you to have a legal opinion because the amendments here are major in regard to our voice that should be heard here in Parliament. We have the Government side for four days a week, they have the mandate to do that, Madam Speaker, but on the fifth day, that is our day and we ask for the petitions to be brought forward. The Government knows very well, the Attorney-General knows that we do not have 40 per cent here in Parliament, that is why they have put that figure down and the petitions that come from the public are to be heard by Parliament. But if you are shutting down that door, then they have no voice to come through us, Madam Speaker. So, I am asking you to give a legal opinion because of all these amendments that are here, brought here by the Attorney-General, it is designed to shut down the voices of the people and there is no democracy as we see it. There is no democracy and is non-negotiable. Legal opinion please, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. What we are doing is, we are debating on a motion and I really do not need a legal opinion on either to say “yes” or “no” to that debate. However, I am

allowing more input to this and allow speakers to also speak before I make my final ruling. We had someone from Government that stood up just now. I give the floor to Hon. Dr. Reddy.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, we are ready for debate. As outlined by the Attorney-General, this document has gone through the process that it should have gone through to get to the Parliament, this House. We are around 15 to 16 months in Parliament and the existing Standing Orders has gone through the test of time for the last 15 to 16 months. We have now found out, Madam Speaker, some of the loopholes there that we need to fix.

All these documents evolve over time. Unfortunately, they do not look at the merit of the changes in this. They have not been talking about the merits of the changes. They have been given this document. They were not given this document this morning, this morning or last night. They have seen this document in the Committee, they have seen this document earlier this week, what we need to do is for them to stand up and say which ones they have a problem with and we will respond to that. That is what we want, Madam Speaker. Thank you and I support this motion.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Hon. Bulitavu?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a small contribution to that which might help you, Madam Speaker to make a decision. When this Standing Orders first came for adoption, according to Standing Order 128 (2) (b), I think that was the first sitting after the Elections. If you see Standing Order 128 (2), Madam, there is a process specifically stating that you are to put the question on the adoption and that is how you will put the question that the amendments recommended by the Standing Orders Committee, in (*name of report*) is adopted.

In Standing Order 128 (3), there is no process, the manner in which you will put the question for the adoption. The way the Attorney-General is coming around is through a motion. Bear in mind, that the test for you at the moment Madam, is whether the changes that will be passed through a vote will we still maintain the independence of the floor, and for this side of the House, will our rights and privileges be ensured that this august House can be protected from the Chairman? That is the test.

(Hon. Member interjected)

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- That is a more respectful way of addressing the Speaker. I learnt that.

Madam, if you allow this to go to the vote, as in numerous occasions that you have done, we already know what will happen. They have already got the process and this has become the usual manner in which the Attorney-General normally introduces something that is not specifically recognized here. If there was a line, Madam, at (3), if there was a sub-section (4) in 128, that even after the adoption and if the Committee from time to time has an ongoing duty to review, if there is a line that you, Madam Speaker, can always bring a question to put to the floor the adoption of the amendments. There is no pathway for you, Madam Speaker, to follow here. The Government is using a path of a motion to come in to and win this particular motion through simple majority and this will be a test, Madam Speaker, for the House.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Are there any more inputs to the debate? Hon. Isoa Tikoca?

HON. RATU I.D. TIKOCA.- Madam Speaker, this is like a slaughterhouse; the final demise of democracy in this country. This part of the House, on the other side, has been using this system all

the time to impose their dictatorial will and this is happening all the time and even at your cost when you are supposed to tell what is right and what is wrong. They are using your Office.

Let me clarify, Madam Speaker, that this is a very sad day for this Parliament. The Parliament democracy, when Parliament has completely ignored procedures and brought before us amendments to the Standing Orders adopted by Parliament on 6th December, 2014. And worse still, Madam Speaker, Parliament under your stewardship has allowed this to happen. When the Standing Orders Committee of which I am a Member and you Madam Speaker as the Chairperson, did not endorse the amendments required by our Standing Orders. And you know that very well and I know and all those people know, but this is forced upon your goodself. Section 128 of the Standing Orders defines the composition and the role of Standing Orders Committee. I would like to read that:

- 1) The Standing Orders Committee shall consist of the following members—
 - (a) Speaker, who shall be the Chairperson of the Committee;
 - (b) Leader of the Government in Parliament; and
 - (c) Whip of each party.
- 2) Immediately following the first sitting of Parliament after each election, the Standing Orders Committee shall be automatically convened to—
 - (a) review the Standing Orders; and
 - (b) report to Parliament within 14 sitting days with recommended amendments to the Standing Orders, if any, in which case, on the third sitting day after the tabling of the report, the Speaker must put the question that the amendments recommended by the Standing Orders Committee by the name of that submission to be adopted by Parliament".
- 3) Despite clause (2), it is the ongoing duty of the committee to consider and review the practices and procedures of Parliament and to make recommendations for their improvement or change or for the development of new practices and procedures.

Now, Madam Speaker, the report of the amendments was tabled on Tuesday 9th February. Might I ask, when in the last 14 days before the report was tabled, did the Standing Orders Committee meet and adopt the recommendation as seen in this submission? The simple answer is, there was no meeting. We only had one full day's meeting on 2nd November last year, the Hon. Attorney-General tried to convince to, Madam Speaker, to table the changes during the budget session, this did not happen.

During the second meeting, the verbatim of the first meeting was disputed by the Opposition Members on the Committee and that is where the matter basically ended. Every other meeting was called off including one, two weeks ago. So, where is the agreement or disagreement of all Honourable Members and the contents of the Report reposing amendments? To put it simply Madam Speaker, the highest court of the land, which is Parliament, is violating its own rules by telling us to debate and approve changes to the Standing Orders which Government so desperately wants.

The two most serious issues here are the 40 per cent approval requirement in Parliament for petitions to be referred to a Standing Committee thereby nullifying the voice of our ordinary citizens to raise issues of concern through their Member of Parliament. FijiFirst knows very well that the Opposition comprises only of 40 per cent of Parliamentary numbers.

The second, Madam Speaker, is more serious which even surprised you after it came from Government from the Hon. Attorney-General during our meeting on the 2nd of November, 2015, you refused it Madam, but this is now, not into this Parliament. This is to change the procedures of election of Chairperson of Public Accounts Committee, a position held by the Opposition since the start of Parliamentary Democracy

The Government wants the provision that the PAC may chair. They commit, used the funds and chaired a Committee that is supposed to be digging into the money of the taxpayers of this country, but they are now refusing to have the Opposition Leader, the Opposition representative there and they are taking it, this is no more democratic. It is totalitarian approach that you are introducing in this honourable House.

There is no use highlighting the rationale, particularly of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association by having the Opposition as chair of this important Committee because Government has already made up its mind and this is to quote the Hon. Attorney-General when he said on 2nd November 2015, “that the Chairman of PAC was politicising issues.” Had there been a facility to play audio recording in this Parliament, Madam Speaker, I would have madly replayed the importance that the Attorney-General was giving to PAC and the fact that the Opposition would always chair PAC during the 2014 General Election Campaign while addressing voters on the *FBC Hindi Talkback Show Aina*, in August and September of that year respectively. Then again, Madam Speaker, what is the use when the “die has been cast” thereby blatantly ignoring the illegality of this process and thrashing accountability, transparency and good governance.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, we on this side of Parliament are unable to participate in the process legitimising illegality and further eroding the last remnants of democracy, virtually entrenching Parliamentary dictatorship. We will not be part of this farce.

Madam Speaker, I request my Members to get out of this August House, we withdraw.

(Chorus of interjection)

(Honourable Opposition Members walked out of the Chamber)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Can I just provide clarification, they can leave. I want to provide clarification

MADAM SPEAKER.- We will continue.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, they referred to Standing Order 128(2) just for their reference Standing Order 128(2), Madam Speaker says “immediately following the first sitting of Parliament after each election..”

Clause 2 of Standing 128 is only relevant after each election, not an ongoing issue. So if you read Standing Order 128, it says, “The Standing Orders Committees shall consists of the following ...”

Section 128(2) says, “Immediately following the first sitting of Parliament after each election, the Standing Orders Committee shall automatically convene to review the Standing Order”

This is reason why subsection (3) says, “Despite clause (2), it is an ongoing duty of the Committee to consider and review the practices and procedures.”

The reason, Madam Speaker, why you have the provision in the Constitution that I had just read out in Section 71 is because the Constitution obviously envisages that the Parliament at the end of the day should be able to make its own rules. If we have for whatever reason it was that the Opposition did not attend and for the record, Madam Speaker, they said that “the first day when they attended, you had then called it off” No. In fact, Madam Speaker, for the record and for this House and for the people at home to know that you had in fact called off the meeting first. They turned up late, you had given them 15 minutes, Madam Speaker. It is an insult to you, Madam Speaker, in your position for you to wait for the Opposition. You had given them, Madam Speaker, 15 minutes and then they walked in, you had already said “15 minutes, now I call off this meeting because we do not have quorum.” That I am sure the minutes will reflect that. After you said that, then they walked into the room and that was when you told them, “Sorry the meeting is called off because there is no quorum” and then they walked out, Hon. Tikoca and Hon. Draunidalo who is suspended because of NFP being suspended.

Madam Speaker, the point is, that is the reality, and the point is, neither are we privy to the letter that they had apparently written, nor are we aware of the issues raised in that, but the point is, Madam Speaker, we had discussed this last year.

Now, you cannot have a few members in any Committee holding the entire Parliament to ransom by their attendance or non-attendance or inability to cooperate. The reality is that, we have Standing Order 128(2) put out of context - it is only after elections.

Section 128(3) says; “... ongoing duty of the Committee” it is the duty of the Committee, not when half of the Committee feels like it. It is the duty of the committee to consider, review the practices, and procedures of Parliament, and then overriding all of that, Madam Speaker.

Section 71(1) says; “Parliament may make standing orders and rules for the order and conduct of business and proceedings in Parliament and its committees and for the way in which its powers, privileges immunities may be exercised and upheld.”

Madam Speaker, as we are aware, they only spoke about two issues. One of them was the petition, the other one was they talked about the PAC. We had the PAC of Australia in Fiji. They also quoted Australia and how we should follow Australia. The Australian Public Accounts Committee Chairperson is from the Government side. Do they say that the Public Accounts Committee of Australia is compromised because the Chair is from the government side? No.

The rules are very clear. The rules are extremely clear in respect of what the Public Accounts shall do, and we have not said that the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee should be from the Government side. The amendment says; “The Committee shall vote.” The Committee shall decide, the Committee may choose someone from the Opposition, they may choose someone from the Government side, that is the choice of the Committee. We are not dictated as to who the Chair should be or which side of the House he should come from.

So, Madam Speaker, it is not dictatorial, it is in fact fixing up the procedures, and Madam Speaker, the rationale behind Standing Orders being amended from time to time is also to take cognizance of what is happening in Parliament. If for example certain procedures or certain issues are happening in Parliament for practical perspective, and the Standing Orders do not address that, then Parliament has the ability to change the Standing Orders to capture the circumstances on the ground.

In the same way, Madam Speaker, it is extremely unconventional and it has been set down before. Yes, we did say after the Elections that if the Opposition loses, then obviously they have the Public Accounts Committee Chair. However, we did not know that they would not follow the convention of what the previous Public Accounts Committee used to do. If you look at the history of Public Accounts Committee in Fiji, Madam Speaker, no Chair of the Public Accounts Committee used to give a running commentary to the media on a daily basis. They talked about due process, Madam Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee's job is to review, assess, investigate and then come up with a report, as the Hon. Pillay's Committee and Hon. Cawaki's Committee have tabled their Reports. They made suggestions, recommendations and then Parliament votes for it; not to give arbitrary decisions and rulings on a daily basis. That is not due process.

(Hon. Members interjected)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- How can you hear two civil servants and then you come up with a ruling, "\$100 million has gone missing. We do not even hear from the right people". That is what has been happening, Madam Speaker, in the way the Public Accounts Committee operated. We have been trying to bring some sanity into the way in which Parliament is conducting itself and also the committees. That, Madam Speaker, is a reality. We need to be focussed on what is the actual specific mandate of the various committees.

Also on the other day, Madam Speaker, in one of the Business Committee meetings when Hon. Sudhakar wanted to bring a motion (now that we are speaking freely) to look at the side effects of the vaccine that we are now giving to girls through their choice to stop cervical cancer, they said that we must have a review of that because the whole connotation was, that the side effects were negative. When we argued about it and the Hon. Minister for Health said, "It is sanctioned by WHO", they said, "Oh, it is the perception". Hon. Sudhakar then said, "Maybe, if you want to review it for it to be done, you can bring it to the relevant committee by way of a petition." The Hon. Gavoka said, "Well, you need only one signature for a petition, do you not?" It is an abuse of the petition system.

A petition by its very definition, normally does not need one signature, a petition by its general definition means, "A large group of people being able to present a petition" nor does it, in anyway, by having the 40 per cent cut off as being proposed, stop anyone from talking to any of the individual members, nor does it stop any of the individual members either from the Opposition or Government side to bring up issues with the Ministers or with various people, or for them to bring it in their weekly statements, or to bring it by way of a motion. They can do that by way of a motion, they can do it by way of questioning, not everything is done through petitions. Are we trying to create some work for the committees?

Madam Speaker, it is not, in anyway, trying to throttle or gaggle or strangle democracy, as they claimed. It is trying to bring efficiency, it is trying to bring some form of standardisation and some form of discipline in Parliament so that we are focussed on the job and the job is, to deliver better services and delivery of services to ordinary Fijians and improve the economy of Fiji, create jobs and sustain jobs.

Madam Speaker, those are some of the comments we would like to make in response to the now absent Opposition. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you very much, Hon. Attorney-General, for those clarifications.

Now, my role as Chair of the Standing Committee is to go by the voice of the majority. The Standing Committee had sat and we have made the amendments, and the amendments that are tabled before the House now are the amendments that have been approved by the Committee.

Also, being Chair of the Business Committee, the amendments, as you have before you had gone through the Business Committee and it had agreed that this motion be tabled here in Parliament. The contents of the amendments that is now outside of what we are debating now. Also the Standing Orders does not prevent a motion to amend the Standing Orders in the absence of a report from the Committee.

That being cleared, we are now going back to the motions that we have before us. We would like to complete this motion. We have had the debate that have been made and Hon. Attorney-General, I take it that your reply to all the comments that have been made by the Opposition has been made. Therefore, the Parliament will now vote on this motion.

Question put.

The question is:

- (a) that the amended Standing Orders adopted by Parliament on 1st December, 2014 be amended as per the tabled amendments to the Standing Orders; and
- (b) that Parliament vote and adopt the amendments to the Standing Orders.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. GOVT MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is passed.

(Applause)

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, the Parliament is now adjourned until 9.30 tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.21 p.m.