

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 21ST MARCH, 2017

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 21ST MARCH, 2017

The Parliament met at 9.31 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Minister for National Security and Defence; the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; and the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 20th March, 2017 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

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

Meeting – Business Committee

Members of the Business Committee are kindly requested to take note of our meeting in the Small Committee Room at lunch time today.

Issues – Standing Committee on Natural Resources

At this juncture, I wish to inform Honourable Members that it has been brought to my attention that there are issues before the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. These issues are in respect of lease payments, promises of financial support and infrastructure upgrades, dissemination of payment of leases, recent developments affecting coastal reefs, breach of MOUs pertaining to retrieval of land ownership, the need for proper demarcation of land by iTLTB, requests for return of land, and so forth.

The Committee has submitted its reports on these issues to my office and I am of the view that these are pertinent issues need to be redirected to the respective line Ministry. Therefore, I will refer these matters to the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources for their necessary actions.

However, I wish to remind Parliament that although Standing Committees have the ability to self-initiate enquiries, these were on narrow grounds related to the broader oversight function and not on individual complaints received from the public. I reiterate that such issues should be referred to the relevant agency or Department to look into. When Parliament receives individual complaints and issues, these will be noted and referred to the relevant agency or Department to look into.

Standing Orders – Amended Version

And finally, for the information of Honourable Members, I received a letter from the Solicitor-General to state that the published Amended Standing Orders dated Monday, 20th February, 2017 had typographical errors and formatting amendments that were not approved by Parliament. The Secretariat has taken note of that and have republished the approved Amended Standing Orders last night.

Honourable Members, copies of the republished Orders have been placed on your desks and additional copies will be delivered to your caucuses. Thank you.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence - United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence (SCFAD), which was assigned to review and examine the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (UN Convention on CISG).

This Report provides a summary and examination of written and oral submissions received at the Committee public hearings here in Parliament, commencing from 14th February, 2017.

The Report is divided into four parts:

1. Part 1 covers the role and responsibilities of the Standing Committee and the inquiry process in undertaking the review of the Convention;
2. Part 2 provides a brief overview of the Convention;
3. Part 3 details the Standing Committee's observations and convention; and
4. Part 4 provides the conclusion of the report.

Section 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, Chapter 10 - Standing Orders 109(2)(e) and 111(1)(c) stipulate the role and functions of a Parliamentary Standing Committee.

The Committee has conducted its inquiry as required of it by Parliament and this included, hearing submissions from and consulting with a wide range of stakeholders, organisations and individuals from the private and public sectors.

The Committee is of the view that the Convention will provide benefits for traders in developing countries like Fiji, especially in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and also improve investors' confidence.

The Committee also noted concerns from private sector organisations that key Government agencies need to consult more with all the stakeholders in regard to this Convention.

The Committee recommends that Fiji ratifies the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I commend this Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General).

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(4) and Standing Order 130(4), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs -
Consolidated Review Report 1 for the 19 Annual Reports

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Consolidated Review Report 1 for the 19 Annual Reports that were scrutinised by the Committee. This Report covers 19 Annual Reports for the years ranging from 2009 to 2014 from 13 institutions. The 19 Annual Reports include:

1. Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL) 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports;
2. Public Rental Board (PRB) 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports;
3. Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) 2014 Annual Report;
4. Ministry of Health and Medical Services 2014 Annual Report;
5. Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport 2014 Annual Report;
6. Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) 2014 Annual Report;
7. The Fiji Public Trustees Corporation Limited (FPTCL) 2014 Annual Report;
8. Airports Fiji Limited 2012, 2013, and 2014 Annual Reports;
9. Fiji National University 2014 Annual Report;
10. Consumer Council of Fiji 2014 Annual Report;
11. Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment 2009, 2010 and 2011 Annual Reports;
12. Land Transport Authority 2013 Annual Report; and
13. Housing Authority 2013 Annual Report.

The reviews of these Annual Reports were done in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b), in which the Standing Committee on Social Affairs is mandated to look into issues relating to health, education, social services, labour, culture, media and their administration.

The Social Affairs Standing Committee had invited all these institutions to present their performance as highlighted in each Annual Report. The key areas of the review are the department's

financial performance, legislation, administration and organisational structure, major achievements and challenges.

This Committee's Review Report is a bipartisan one, which has the input of both sides of the Committee.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs had reviewed the 13 institutions' Annual Reports, which range from 2009 to 2014, and have noted the contents of the Reports and due to the time that had lapsed, the Committee anticipates that corrective actions have been taken by the respective line Departments and Ministries to address the challenges and issues that were faced during those business years.

I would like to thank all the institutions that provided oral and written submissions to the Committee and further in clarifying all other issues raised by Honourable Members in relation to their Annual Reports.

Also, I would like to acknowledge the Members of the Committee and all their substantial efforts in the formulation of the bipartisan report.

Finally, I would like to also thank the Secretariat team for their continuous support towards the compilation of this bipartisan report.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend this report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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. Thanks you.

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

Question put.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is:

That a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Member oppose?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs -
Consolidated Review Report on the 2015 Reports

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to have the floor.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I am pleased to present a Consolidated Review Report of the Committee on the review that was conducted on the following list of 2015 Reports, which were scrutinised by the Committee:

- 1) Ministry of iTaukei Affairs;
- 2) iTaukei Trust Fund Board;
- 3) Ministry of Youth and Sports;
- 4) The University of the South Pacific;
- 5) Ministry of Health and Medical Services;
- 6) Ministry of Education;
- 7) Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited;
- 8) Fiji National Sports Commission; and
- 9) Airports Fiji Limited.

The Annual Reports that were reviewed by the Committee was in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) in which the Standing Committee on Social Affairs was mandated to look into issues relating to health, education, social services, labour, culture, media and their administration.

In the last quarter of 2016 and beginning of this year, the Committee invited these institutions to present their overall performance in 2015. The key focus area of the review are: financial performance, legislation, administration and organisational structure, major achievements and challenges faced by them throughout 2015.

The Report is a bipartisan one, which has the input of all Members of the Committee. The Committee had thoroughly scrutinised and reviewed the contents of the 2015 Annual Reports and put forward some recommendations, which it hopes will be considered by the respective institutions.

Specifically, the Committee formulated some recommendations for Government Departments. Other issues raised with the other Departments have been addressed and resolved by respective institutions. However, one which I would like to highlight deals with the recommendations on the Fiji Public Trustees Corporation Limited's 2015 Annual Report:

1. The institution to conduct more awareness and outreach programmes across Fiji so that people in all Divisions are aware of the services that they provide; and
2. establish offices and services in all Divisions.

Upon justification, it was noted that the Fiji Public Trustees Corporation Limited has only one office that is exclusively based in Suva. If it establishes offices or branches in other Divisions, then people will be aware and able to access the services it provides.

I would like to thank all the other institutions that came forward to brief and provide submissions to the Committee on their 2015 performance. All their 2015 Annual Reports have been scrutinised by the Committee and we have taken note of all the information that were provided as per the issues raised.

At this juncture, I would like to extend my appreciation to all the Committee Members and Alternate Members for their sustained work and commitment to the task, until the finalisation of this bipartisan report.

Finally, I would also like to also thank the Secretariat team for their continuous support towards the formulation of this bipartisan report.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend this Report to Parliament.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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.

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

Question put.

HON. SPEAKER. The question is:

That the debate on the contents of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

Does any Honourable Member oppose?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I wish to raise a Point of Order and I hope that this will be considered by Parliament. This is under Standing Order 121 - Presentation of reports.

Standing Order 121(5) says, and I quote:

“Where a report of a standing committee -

- a) is not related to a Bill or an international treaty, and
- b) has been tabled in Parliament,

the member tabling the report must move a motion, without notice, to initiate a debate on the contents of the report at a future sitting.”

Standing Order 121(6), says and I quote:

“Where the motion noted in clause (5) is adopted -

- a) the report of the standing committee shall be delivered to the relevant government department by the Secretary-General within 14 days; and
- b) the Minister responsible for the relevant government department must table a substantive response to the standing committee’s report within 60 days of receiving the report.”

Madam Speaker, the concern I have is, there have been many reports presented to this Parliament since 2014. As far as I am concerned, we have not really debated any one of them, despite

the motion being adopted. So I just want to remind this august House that we need to follow the Standing Orders and initiate debate on the reports that come to this Parliament.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The issue is noted.

I now call upon the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights to have the floor.

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights –
Electricity Bill, 2017

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

Electricity has become not only a want but a need in the modern, domestic and commercial world. While it is highly desirable to have electricity connected to each and every home and business in Fiji, the generation and supply of electricity has its challenges and limitations.

The Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA) has been the sole state-owned entity, responsible for managing the electricity industry in Fiji. This monopolistic system of managing the industry, although effective, does lack certain development traits. Thus, the Fijian Government, through the Ministry of Public Enterprises, intends to carryout investment or divestment of the FEA to corporatise it and create a company. This then could ensure that development in all areas of the electricity industry could occur.

This proposed divestment and development of the electricity industry, however, would need to be carefully monitored, and this has led to the introduction of the Electricity Bill 2017. The Electricity Bill is a piece of legislation introduced by the Fijian Government that would introduce an independent regulatory authority that takes all the regulatory functions, thus ensuring proper check on the industry, is achieved.

The Bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights by this august House for review and scrutiny. Apart from its own deliberations on the Bill, the Standing Committee considered numerous submissions received by it that highlighted certain issues.

The Committee, through the Parliament Research Unit, looked into electricity industry jurisdictions that have similar setups to that which Fiji is aiming for through the introduction of this Bill.

The Committee, in its observations, also consulted the drafters of the Bill for certain amendments. Amendments were made to various Clauses and Subclauses of the Bill, and the amendments which were necessary have been made and marked red in the copies of the Bill provided with this Report.

This Report will cover the Standing Committee's role in reviewing the Electricity Bill to ensure that all due processes regarding the Bill have been followed and to also ensure that the provisions contained in the Bill would contribute to the achievement of the Bill's objectives.

Some of the pertinent areas which the Bill addresses are as follows:

- Encourage investors in generation of electricity;

- make electricity supply more consistent and dependable;
- make the electricity supply more accountable to the consumers;
- encourage investment in renewable energy;
- regulatory functions which were previously performed by FEA, such as licensing of electricians and inspection of apparatus will now vest with the independent regulator;
- rules will be in place to safeguard the consumer interest; and
- the right to appeal by the consumers against the actions of the public electricity supplier.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights for their deliberations and input; the alternate Members who made themselves available when the Substantive Members could not attend; the staff and officers of the Research Unit and the Secretariat; entities who accepted the invitation of the Committee and made themselves available to make submissions; and members of the public for taking an interest in the proceeding of the Committee and Parliament.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend the Electricity Bill 2017 to Parliament and seek support of all the Honourable Members of this august House for the Bill in its design, for the greater good of all Fijians.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU.- Madam Speaker, at this juncture, pursuant to the Resolution of Parliament on Friday 10th February, 2017, the Electricity Bill 2017 (Bill No. 7 of 2017) is now ready to be debated, voted upon and be passed.

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to the Resolution of Parliament on Friday 10th February, 2017, the Standing Committee has now reported back and the Electricity Bill 2017 (Bill No. 7 of 2017), is now ready to be debated, voted upon and be passed.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Chairs of the Standing Committees for the Reports that have been tabled today. We note that there have been numerous reports tabled and, of course, the issue that has been raised by the Honourable Leader of the NFP is noted, to enable the process to be followed.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Agreement of Lease – Clopcott Settlement in Ba
(Question No. 63/2017)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD asked the Government, upon notice:

There are several questions asked by residents of Clopcott Settlement in Ba and who have given agreement to lease in 2014. Would the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport inform Parliament if residents of Clopcott Settlement in Ba, who were given Agreement to Lease in December 2014, will be given proper lease titles as stated by him on 26th January, 2017?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Madam Speaker I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I also thank him for the question.

The Honourable Member is asking me if leases will be issued or not and the answer is a very straight forward one, yes. They will be given 99 years lease.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker; as I have said, there are lots of questions asked by these residents, such as the cost of surveying the land which they were not told when the lease agreement was issued, issues about drains getting into the farms, leases for religious places like the Marakaz Temple, so can the Honourable Minister tell these residents, because they are anxious, they want to know when these issues will be resolved?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I do not know which residents he is talking about. I have got an article here whereby the chairman of that subdivision committee stated that they are extremely happy with the development by the Government. The timeframe for that subdivision was given, five years, and in fact what we have done is, we have issued the Agreement to Lease in 2014.

By the end of this year, all residents of Clopcott, after the surveyor plan is registered, will be issued their 99 year lease. I really do not know which residents he is talking about. This is what the chairman of the subdivision committee is talking about, and this is not my doing.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Minister knows very, very well that in any town, you have to comply with planning requirements. With these 99 year leases, can he assure this august House that it will comply with all planning requirements?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- I have just said that without this survey plan being registered, we cannot issue the 99 year lease. As a lawyer, you must understand, and I have said that after the survey plan is registered with the Department of Lands, the issuance of the 99 year lease will be given. What are you talking about?

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. Madam Speaker, what the Government has been doing is just regularising the occupation of squatters in those areas. What it means is, it is encouraging people to squat, and that is what is happening. May I ask the Honourable Minister; does Government have any plans to resettle the squatters and develop the land that they occupy to their highest and best use?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, here we are talking about Clopcott but to respond to him, yes.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, in the process to reach a proper lease, it is quite a big process and probably not only in this particular case, but also at Nanuku Settlement where the Honourable Attorney-General had gone to in regards to Bhindi Subdivision relocation to somewhere at Nasinu Prison. Probably, the Honourable Minister could suggest that to the relevant authorities, the stakeholders that you know who will be doing this approval. Can there be a centralised body or community to look into this so that there is no delay in the process and you can meet your timeline as has been promised?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member. This planning comes under the Department of Town and Country Planning. They are talking about process, planning and timeline, but there are certain things to fast-track and the Minister has got powers to exempt.

For us, land tenure is very important and you will not believe, Madam Speaker, if you go to Clopcott Street now, you will see how they were living without any land security for the last 70 or 80 years. Politicians used to go before Elections, put numbers there - 100, 200 and 106, and that is it. After Election, everyone forgets about them.

We are in a serious business, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Let me finish!

We are in a serious business and I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that all processes had been followed and as I had mentioned in my earlier statement, the major road works have been left and that will be done in 2018.

HON. SPEAKER. -The last question, Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO. – Madam Speaker, I just wanted to ask the Honourable Minister as to whether proper consultations and consent have been obtained from landowners in regards to iTLTB leases?

HON. SPEAKER. –Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR. – Madam Speaker, that was the first thing that we did because without their consent, we would not have even entered that settlement. Thank you.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka to ask his question.

Handling of SME Scheme
(Question No. 64/2017)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources explain if there are other options being considered by Government to handle the SME Scheme, given that processing the grants creates a huge amount of unnecessary work for Fiji Development Bank?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources). – Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I would like to thank him for the question and for the opportunity to enlighten this august House on why we have engaged the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) in the Government's Micro and Small Business Grant (MSBG) Scheme. In doing so, Madam Speaker, I would also like to correct a number of misconceptions that may have been raised or inferred from this particular question.

Madam Speaker, as the Ministry responsible for the development of micro, small and medium enterprise sector, we considered a number of options to administer the MSBG Scheme. We narrowed it down to engaging with the FDB through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for a number of very solid reasons.

The MSBG initiative, Madam Speaker, was not intended to be confined to just those in the urban centres but to reach out to those who are genuinely in need of assistance, particularly for our farming and rural communities. This objective has been achieved.

In terms of the spread of the current distribution of assistance, the Central/Eastern Division makes up about 42 percent, the Northern Division about 34 percent, and the Western Division about 24 percent of the enterprises assisted today. Therefore, due to FDB's reach with its Centres nationwide, including rural areas, it was considered the most appropriate partner.

Madam Speaker, I need to explain this properly. For the information of Honourable Members of this House, the FDB was established under the Fiji Development Bank Act (Cap 214) on 1st July, 1967. Under section 6 of the FDB Act, it clearly outlines the functions of the Bank which is, and I quote:

“It shall be, to facilitate and stimulate the promotion and development of natural resources, transportation and other industries and enterprises in Fiji. And in the discharge of these functions, the Bank shall give consideration and priority to the economic development and the rural and agricultural sectors of the economy of Fiji.”

Madam Speaker, through the Ministry's partnership with FDB on the MSBG Scheme, the FDB is clearly delivering on its mandate by facilitating the promotion and development of enterprises in Fiji, and giving special consideration and priority to the economic development of the rural and agricultural sectors.

In our analysis, Madam Speaker, of the enterprises that we have assisted so far and which now totalled 7,171; 5,041 enterprises are rural-based which is a little over 70 per cent, and 4,634 projects or 65 percent of the total projects assisted are in the agricultural sector.

Madam Speaker, by partnering with the FDB and in administering the Scheme, we have jointly created a very useful database on the micro and small enterprises. This is very useful information for this House also.

The FDB now has an in-depth information on 44,660 potential clients. Of this, 19,532 are currently being assisted by the MSBG Scheme. The intention, Madam Speaker, is to assist these

recipients to further expand their businesses and this could be achieved through further financial support provided by the FDB.

The delivery of these types of programmes are not something that the FDB, Madam Speaker, is unaccustomed or new to, and I quote from the past Annual Report of the Bank:

“The government also uses the FDB as a financial instrument in its development projects and plans and special assistance programmes, but maybe necessary from time to time”

This is to be expected, Madam Speaker, because of the uniqueness of FDB’s role.

Whilst the FDB reports to the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) under their Banking Act as a non-bank financial institution, it comes under the Ministry of Economy. The Bank’s Board of Directors are appointed by the Minister of Economy and are accountable for the operations of the Bank. Consequently, Madam Speaker, the operations of FDB reflect to some extent, the policies and development aims of the Government.

Madam Speaker, another important aspect that the Honourable Member may have overlooked is the fact that in the course of administering the Scheme, it has provided the FDB a wonderful marketing opportunity. The FDB markets their products and services, and attends to general queries from the public, when we conduct the disbursements of grants around the country.

The latest disbursement last Saturday, Madam Speaker, was in Navua, which is predominantly a farming community, and the FDB Marketing Team was also present to provide advice to potential clients. Madam Speaker, I have provided the Honourable Member a number of justifications for partnering with the FDB on the MSBG Scheme.

I would now like to correct, as I had stated earlier, a number of anomalies in his question. Someone, not quite familiar with how the MSBG Scheme is administered, would infer from that question proposed by the Honourable Member that the FDB alone is responsible for processing the grants. The Ministry and the FDB are both responsible for processing the applications.

Madam Speaker, for this year alone, the FDB processed 11,143 applications, whilst my Ministry was responsible for processing 7,728 applications. This involved assessing the applications using a rating system, and I had mentioned this earlier on in the House, it was developed jointly by the FDB and the Ministry. Of the total number of applications received this year which was about 18,871, 7,000 applications were declined, with 11,871 applications been approved.

My Ministry and FDB, Madam Speaker, are also jointly responsible for carrying out validations and site visits after initial assessments are done using the rating system. The Ministry also assists the FDB in undertaking site visits in the Northern Division and parts of the Central and Western Divisions, and I am pleased of the fact that the Ministry and FDB have developed a very strong and cordial working relationship because both the Bank and the Ministry, understand the importance of fostering employment through the creation of micro and small enterprises.

This is something that the Honourable Member needs to understand, Madam Speaker, that capital injection may be a small amount to most of us sitting here in this august House, but it is a huge boost to the many who have been assisted, since they do not have the luxury to put aside savings to expand or to start their own businesses with, being preoccupied taking care of their daily and basic requirements and necessities.

This brings me again to another part of the question, Madam Speaker, which is grossly misleading the public and perhaps, intended to further one's political agenda. This may have stemmed from a statement done in a public space, questioning the role of the FDB and the MSBG Scheme.

Madam Speaker, to state that the MSBG Scheme is creating a huge amount of unnecessary work for the FDB is very unfair on the part of the hardworking officers of the FDB. And as I have stated earlier on, this Programme is an extension of what the FDB is mandated to do, which is to facilitate and stimulate the promotion and development of enterprises in Fiji and more so, giving special consideration and priority to the economic development of the rural and agricultural sectors of the economy.

I suggest that the Honourable Member carefully considers the implications of the types of questions that he asks or poses in this august House and may be, Madam Speaker, undertake some further research and before he does, maybe just politely write to me and I will provide him with an answer.

Madam Speaker, sometimes the Opposition develops a habit of posing questions that are about as sharp as marbles, which they exaggerate the political effects.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- That's correct!

Madam Speaker, to conclude, I would like to state that the merits of the Programme have been recognised by Honourable Members on the other side of the House, who have also approached the Ministry to facilitate and provide awareness on this particular Programme, unlike the Honourable Member who does not seem to appreciate the hard work and efforts put in by the FDB officials in partnering with the Ministry on this important national development initiative.

I take this opportunity also, Madam Speaker, to sincerely thank the FDB Team for their valuable contributions thus far in this particular Programme. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I would just like to inform Honourable Members that I do allow interjections in between presentations, and this is why I have allowed it, as long as it is to a responsible limit.

Not only that, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister that members of his management staff continue to attend Parliament sittings - today, yesterday and also other previous sittings. It is very important that Ministry staff are present to hear the debate on issues pertaining to their Ministry. If there are members of staff from other Ministries who are here as well, I thank you for your attendance.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement and also thank him for the reference to playing marbles. Maybe, you have been playing marbles with PNG and that is why they are halting trade with us.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the weight or load with FDB came from within FDB and it was articulated by the CEO himself. So maybe, instead of lecturing us on how it is done, liaise with the Ministry of Economy and make sure that FDB is well structured to do this work. Maybe, that is the way to do it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I give the floor to the Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- The Honourable Minister stated in the last sitting that the Lawaki Village Bakery in Tailevu was doing a thriving business when, in fact, it was not. The question is, can the Honourable Minister inform this House as to how do they monitor these SME businesses and how often?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, although that question is not related to the FDB issue that was raised, the main question...

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Hold on, please! Just refrain, please. Listen! Listen!

It is a very good question, Honourable Member, and this afternoon when I address you on my Ministerial Statement, I will address that specifically and tell you. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister will know that last month, they distributed \$760,000 in Savusavu, that was for all my supporters. So 760 of my supporters have gone. In Navua, \$550,000 was distributed, but what I am concerned with is this; there are people, including students, who are still living in tents. Can the Honourable Minister please advise us whether he is willing to redirect his priorities and allocate this money to those much needed in the *TC Winston* appeal?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Another question, that is about as 'sharp as marbles', I keep saying that.

First of all, if the Honourable Member is talking about people living in tents, that is a question that needs to be addressed to the relevant Minister. I do not think that the question he raised is relevant.

But in any event, Madam Speaker, maybe just for clarity's sake, they need to put this into perspective. There is a programme in place with respect to the housing issue. And let me tell you something; if you go back and do some research, you will find out the rate of recovery with respect to cyclones, and this particular government has had the fastest rate of recovery in respect of cyclones.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Let me tell you that!

You really need to go see an economist and find out and do your research. Get an economist my friend, do a research and find out with respect to the recovery rate after cyclones.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am entitled to correct him because there is only one house in the village of Qelekuro, for the whole year that was not completed.

HON. SPEAKER.- I am afraid the Speaker is not able to make a ruling to that point of order and, therefore, the point of order did not qualify.

Thank you, I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thought that was a long-winded answer to a very simple question about the options.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister has not, so far, clarified what the CEO of FDB said, and that is the concern we have.

Our concern is whether the FDB and the Ministry, given what the CEO of FDB said about this whole programme being a hand-out, might I add to that Honourable Minister, that you are making it a political programme, not us. So he needs to tell this august House, whether the appropriate follow up support to those who receive these grants are provided by FDB, as well as his own Ministry?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I like this, I really like this. It is a great process of explanation.

Madam Speaker, it is not just the CEO that is responsible for FDB, there is a Board, Honourable Member, that is actually responsible. The Board....

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- You do not like it when you get corrected, I know that.

The Board is responsible and the Board is in agreement with what I had stated this morning, so thank you very much. The Board is quite in agreement, and with the way I spelt it out to you, just because someone has said something like that, I gave you a process of explanation.

For your information, Madam Speaker, and for the information of this House, the reason why the answer was long is that, they would be very well informed. This morning, I think they should be well informed after I have stated that.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Nanovo.

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I think when this issue was raised last year, the Ministry themselves came over and did some clarifications with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. After their explanations, they told us that the success rate at that time was only seven clients or even less than 10. So out of those 10, one has already been defunct, as was said by the Honourable Dulakiverata. How many more are left and what is the success rate on this one?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, if the Honourable Members on that side of the House paid attention to what was being said about the programmes that are undertaken by Government, we did actually say right at the outset that not all will be successful, there may be some.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Listen, listen! Just listen carefully.

In fact it is rather good, Madam Speaker, it is great because they think that all of Government's programmes will be 100 percent successful. That is awesome! That is really good!

However, Madam Speaker, we did spell this out and I remember quite firmly that when we did say this right at the beginning about this programme, we did say that there may be some that may not be successful, that may fall by the wayside. We accept that, that is a well-known fact of a just economy. Madam, it will happen, but there is a good success rate already. This is why the programme continued and let me also tell you this, "Please, go out to the recipients and ask them how happy they are." It was published in the newspapers. So go out to the recipients and see how happy they are with the programme that was initiated by the Honourable Prime Minister; and none of yours!

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Karavaki.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for the answer he had given. My concern is the application of the law. The provision that had been read out by the Honourable Minister, in my personal view, does not allow for the programme they are undertaking to be carried out.

Madam Speaker, my question is, if the Honourable Minister agrees that this project does not comply with the provision he had read, and also this is not under the economic development but vote buying, I would like the Honourable Minister to reply to that and whether he agrees that this is a vote-buying project and is not under economic development?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, a great coordination we have within Government!

Madam Speaker, this is a promise that was given after the Elections, not just prior to the Elections. This is most definitely not a vote-buying exercise, Madam Speaker, unlike the vote-giving exercise that was attended to two years ago.

Madam Speaker, this is about helping the grassroots people of this country. I had spelt out time and time again about the importance of this particular programme. We do not go around vote-buying.

Madam Speaker, for the information of this House, in fact, we do not even give them money, it is the actual equipment that they ask for. We encourage them to uplift themselves out of poverty,

et cetera, Madam Speaker. That is what the programme is all about. This is not a last minute exercise just before Elections to do so that we can buy votes!

Let me tell you, Madam Speaker, this programme is so good that the Indian Government had given its wholehearted support in the sum of \$10 million with respect to this particular programme. That answers your question, this is not a vote-buying exercise!

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Vote buying!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- That is what they think it is.

HON. SPEAKER.- I would like to remind Honourable Members that question time is one minute, so with interjections, while the one minute being taken is getting disruptive, please, just control that.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, the principal question is, whether there is any other option being considered by the Government to handle the SMEs? So I would ask the Honourable Minister whether he has considered adopting the SPBD (South Pacific Business Development) concept of poverty alleviation, which covers about 7,000 women to also address poverty all over Fiji? The lady who won the business award is from Nukubalavu, Savusavu. Whether you have considered that option to adopt SPBD in poverty alleviation which has also been adopted by Pacific Island countries?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, I think sometimes Honourable Members of the Opposition do not realise that it is not just one Ministry that exists in this Government, there are other Ministries as well. That is a question that ought to be addressed to the Ministry of Poverty Alleviation on that particular programme (SPBD). I am not sure what kind of programme it is but it is the Ministry responsible for poverty alleviation that is responsible for that.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, this particular Ministry has got programmes everywhere and it is not centralised. They have the Human Integrated Development Programme (IHRDP), the Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) and last year, they announced that there was a Committee called the NSME Council that was to be chaired by the Honourable Prime Minister. I do not know whether that Committee has met or not.

Madam Speaker, given that that FDB has not paid any service fees and FDB being a bank, they have got customers and they give out loans, and given that this is a problem to them and which can affect their daily business, can the Honourable Minister confirm if they are moving towards opening up in a particular area, they will do an assessment? Assessment is normally done by FDB and monitoring is also done by them. Will a Unit be considered to do the assessment?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, this is what happens when you do not attend class.

Madam Speaker, he was not here in the last Parliament session. I apologise, Honourable Member, but I know you were ill. The Honourable Member was not here and I did state the National SME Council that we were actually moving towards is chaired by our Honourable Prime Minister. I will gladly give you the document that is leading us towards that.

Madam Speaker, yes, we are moving towards the National SME Council but all these programmes are undertaken. They are not undertaken independently, Madam Speaker, it is all under

the Ministry. It is all being done carefully, and we are looking after the grassroots people. It is a very important subject, so yes, there is an SME Council and if you pick up the *Hansard*, my Honourable colleague, you will see the answer in that particular *Hansard*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodoro to ask her question.

Local Government Act – Progress of the Review
(Question No. 65/2017)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport inform the House on the progress of the review of the Local Government Act?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I also thank her for the question.

A Local Government Committee has commenced its work in respect of identifying areas that needed changes. The primary objective of this Committee is to provide proposed recommendations and its terms of reference to my office by the end of September, 2017.

Madam Speaker, this process is a follow-up to an earlier statement that I made that there are associated laws, and those are the Subdivision Lands Act and the Town Planning Act.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to announce and inform this Honourable House that those two laws are in their final stages. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, if I remember correctly, the Honourable Minister had mentioned in 2015 that the review was with the Attorney-General's Chambers.

Madam Speaker, the boundary determination of whether Tacirua Heights come under the Suva City Council or the Nasinu Town Council awaits the finalisation of the Local Government Act. My question is; can the Honourable Minister explain as to when will the temporary kitchen rubbish collection extend to the new Tacirua Heights Subdivision, and when will the White Goods Waste Collection be undertaken in both the existing and the new Tacirua Heights Subdivision?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, if I remember rightly, I have never ever said that the review or the report is sitting at the Attorney-General's Chambers or the Solicitor-General's Office, never! I do not know where she is coming from. Even in the last debate, she said that I had made a statement, but there is no truth in it.

I want to make it very clear, Honourable Member, that there is nothing sitting at the Solicitor-General's Office in regards to the review. Is it clear? Thank you.

Next, in terms of the collection of garbage, in fact that part of the area is out of the town boundary, but that does not mean that we are going to leave the area and she had so many discussions with me on that.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Now, you hear the truth, it is coming, so you got it.

(Laughter)

We had made an arrangement where collection is being carried out. I have also asked the Nasinu Town Council to consider if they can look after that area as well in terms of collection of garbage but in the interim, it is the Rural Authority that is supposed to collect the rubbish from that area. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. It appear that the Honourable Minister has a very long pipe line because this review has been going on since 2012-2013. The question is, can the Honourable Minister assure us as what is the timeline, will it be September, 2017 or are we going to wait?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The timeline that I have given is end of September, 2017 from the Department of Local Government, from within my Ministry. I did say that it is not the Review Committee, so at least I am giving a timeframe now and you should be happy. Every time you are coming up with the timeframe, I am giving you now, so that is also a problem for them. So we will stick to that, Madam Speaker, and I can assure that that report will be given to my office by the end of September. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Prem Singh.

(Laughter)

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will not ask the Minister the obvious question that I have asked him a couple of times in this House since 2014. Madam Speaker, the Local Government Act Review started in 2014 after October, that is according to the Honourable Minister.

Since then, developments have taken place, like for Nadi Town to become a city, it has to have a population of 20,000 and to get 20,000, we need to extend the boundaries. The Honourable Minister has in part of his response said that the Town Planning Act and the Subdivisions Act are complete, but initially the review was consequence to having a Town Council Elections. I will not ask the obvious question but as I said, let me ask the Honourable Minister, how long are we going to carry on with special administration? There have been no consultations with your Review Committee, and your In-house Committee is telling you to do this now.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. P. SINGH.- I understand that there is no Review Committee.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P. SINGH.- So how long do we wait for that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Excuse me.

However, in terms of relevancy, you were talking about an issue outside of the question and, therefore, I will not allow that question.

So, I will now give the floor to the Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The truth of the matter is that the Honourable Minister assured the House in his maiden speech that his first priority would be elections. Can he now tell us if he is using the review of the Local Government Act to defer the elections? It seems that we are not going to have a Local Government Elections until the next General Elections.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, the onus is on you to answer that question.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will reiterate what I said. I said that to have an election, what we need to do is to review the Local Government Act and earlier on, what I said

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Listen, listen!

At the outset I did say that the associated laws is in its final stage. They should be happy at least we have fast-tracked that process

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Of course, yes. What do you need to prove, you just want to have elections just for the sake of having it?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Or you want to test the ground, whether you have the support or not?

(Laughter)

But that is beside the point.

Madam Speaker, in terms of development, everyone is witnessing the great developments carried out in municipalities. Recently, the Honourable Prime Minister opened the new athletic tracks in Churchill Park, Lautoka. The Albert Part was done whereby one of the Opposition Members said during the allocation of the budget that it should be diverted and we should not do it. Now, when it is done, they are saying, "Oh, wow, it is nice."

(Laughter)

Having said that, Madam Speaker, we will stick to the timeline as I mentioned. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Lastly, I give the floor to the Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister is wrong! In his maiden speech, very specific he gave us a time. It was not dependent on the review or on anything. So, can you please, tell the House that you are wrong.

(Laughter)

You are wrong, you are wrong!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, as I have said and I will reiterate what I have said when I made that statement, I think this Honourable Member is very wrong in saying wrong things. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Anare Vadei.

Newborn Intensive Care Unit – CWM Hospital
(Question No. 66/2017)

HON. A.T. VADEI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update the House on the state of the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital following the *acinetobacter baumannii* bacterial infection outbreak?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for the question.

Madam Speaker, for the information of the House, the Newborn Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at CWM Hospital is fully functional and operating as normal. At this point, I would also like to provide the House with more details of the events that led to the infection within the unit.

Madam Speaker, health care-associated infections or infections acquired in health-care settings are among the most frequent adverse events in health-care delivery worldwide.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 7 percent of patients in developed countries and 10 percent of patients in developing countries will acquire at least one health care-associated infection during their stay in the hospital.

Intensive care units, like the NICU at CWM Hospital are particularly susceptible to health-care associated infections and, even in the world's best health systems, as many as three out of every ten patients who spend time in an Intensive Care Unit will acquire an infection during their stay.

Bacterial outbreaks, such as that recently experienced at CWM Hospital are, therefore, not that unusual across hospitals worldwide.

Madam Speaker, the decision to close the NICU at CWM Hospital was made after the presence of the *acinetobacter baumannii* bacterium that was detected in a number of new-born babies.

The bacterium was found after the babies underwent basic screening protocols, including blood cultures and cerebral spinal fluid tests, which are normally done on babies who are admitted with infections.

Madam Speaker, in total, seven patients in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) were confirmed to be carrying the bacterium. As a result, the hospital decided to close its Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and divert all outpatient services to nearby health centres.

Madam Speaker, the *acinetobacter baumannii* bacterium is widely found in soil, water and other parts of the environment. While it does not harm most healthy people with strong immune systems, the bacterium can lead to illnesses in individuals with severe health challenges, in this case newborn babies. The source of the latest outbreak is unknown at this stage and realistically it will take us some time.

At this point, I would like to convey my greatest appreciation towards the WHO for its commitment and assistance in endeavours to eliminate this bacterial infection. The WHO has assisted by providing us with infection control materials and we will continue to seek their technical expertise to support our investigations, to determine the actual cause of this outbreak by genotyping the bacteria, and this may take up to three months.

As I have explained, Madam Speaker, outbreaks such as these are not unusual and the staff at CWM Hospital are well prepared to respond. The Infection Control Committee at CWM Hospital acted promptly to control the infection by relocating all babies to other units and screening and treating those babies who were already infected. I would also like to put on record my sincere appreciation to the hospital staff and the Infection Control Team for their tremendous effort in ensuring that all appropriate measures were taken to curb the bacterial infection (*acinetobacter baumannii*).

I would also like to formally acknowledge the support provided by local staff from the WHO, who responded quickly and effectively to assist the local teams.

Madam Speaker, the CWM Hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit has now reopened to new admission and services are back to normal. It was important to ensure that bacterium had been fully eliminated before the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit was reopened, which is why it took us a total of 14 days from the time of the bacterial infection outbreak to get services back to normal. To re-open any sooner would have put more babies and other vulnerable patients at risk.

Madam Speaker, the CWM Hospital, like any tertiary hospital throughout the world, has in place infection control measures to monitor for bacterial infection outbreaks and to manage any such outbreaks with prudent actions.

The Ministry, through its clinical experts and facility managers and supervisors in the hospitals, worked diligently to ensure that infection control measures are maintained and strengthened. We are firmly committed to resourcing the implementation of universal precautionary measures that are needed to keep the risk of resistant bugs and infection outbreaks low. Furthermore, the Ministry also recognises that any process can always be improved and we are open to learning from experience. With that in mind, we had in the process of inviting THE WHO to conduct a formal review of the recent outbreak.

In the longer term, work is progressing to expand the CWM Maternity Unit as congestion is known as one of the factors that can increase the risk of infection outbreaks. A dedicated designated team is currently working out the final plans to accomplish this. This initiative will ease much of the congestion at the Maternity Unit and the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

Madam Speaker, we also look for patients and the public for support in following the advice of experts to reduce the risk of infections, to co-operate with any infection control measures that are put in place, and from time to time, understand that services may be needed to be put on hold while outbreaks are addressed, protecting patients and ensuring their safety will always be our priority.

Madam Speaker, one of the things that I did not mention is that any bacterial outbreak is further worsened through contact. Normally, when there is a break in the service, we try to put a stop on the visiting hours because we believe that entry in and out of these Intensive Care Units can also lead to the spread of the bacterial infections. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is alarming to note the Honourable Minister saying that the source of the outbreak is still unknown at this time. So I am interested to know if any babies died from this bacterial outbreak and how many?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, for the information of the House, it started over the weekend when two babies had the bacteria and they were tested for it. The team looked over the three months period and found out that there were five other babies with the same bacteria that occurred before that. So all in all, there were seven deaths and like I have mentioned, for a healthy person, a healthy person's immune system will be resistant to any bacterial infection. In this case, we had seven pre-mature babies who were infected with *acinetobacter baumannii* and we are still in the process to determine whether this bacteria actually caused the death of those babies. Like I said, we have invited WHO to come on board and further tests will be conducted to determine whether the deaths were related to this bacterial outbreak.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for the reply. You know, Madam Speaker, the Maternity Unit is very congested, has no parking space and the mothers are exposed to the pollution from the road. The car parks there are reserved for staff and the parents have to carry their new born babies across the road to take them home. Does the Government have any plans to relocate the Maternity Unit to a more conducive environment?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Yes, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. During my presentation I did mention that there are plans to extend the Maternity Unit at CWM. It is already in the initial design phase and we are looking at the completion of the project by 2020. So, hopefully when the project is completed, we will be able to erase all these issues that the Maternity Unit is currently facing.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Anare Vadei.

HON. A.T.VADEI.- My supplementary question is, whether the hospital have in terms of technical and professional capabilities the ability to detect at a faster pace some of these outbreaks?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Like I said, the team work and the efforts of the clinicians at the hospital, with their senior managers and the assistance of WHO, we are able to control the outbreak of this infection further. Yes, we are working with WHO and other agencies to build up capacity on our local staff.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know the Honourable Minister is trying and working very hard to improve the services in the hospitals. Just on this issue, I want to

ask the Honourable Minister if the Government or your Ministry is considering compensation for all those mothers who have lost their babies.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- I thank the Honourable Member for the question. Madam Speaker, as I have stated, at this point in time, we are trying to look at the causes which led to those seven deaths. And as I have also mentioned, it may take up to three months to do a genotyping on that bacterial infection and as such, we will determine what cause of action to take later on.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you for your action, very hardworking Minister. Can this bacterial outbreak be caused by unhygienic conditions at the hospital environment due to lack of cleanliness as seen from a mother and a baby lying elsewhere?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, there are many causes that led to such bacterial outcome. As I said, it could be carried in the soil, water and other environmental factors. One of the things that we emphasise and stress upon in our ICU Unit is best hand practises. Anyone who enters the ICU Unit must have best hand hygiene practises at bedside because it is very easy to contaminate facilities through unwashed hands, et cetera. So anyone entering our ICU Unit is required to wear a hygienic gown.

At our Outpatients, one of the things that we practise is best hand wash hygiene practices, which is where bacteria normally spreads. Bacteria is easily spread by touching someone, or touching equipment, anything within the facility that is touched by a person who has bacteria can lead to an outbreak. So one of the most important things that we stress upon in our facilities is the basic hand hygiene practises for the time being.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I know give the floor to the Honourable Niumataiwalu.

Significance of Wide Consultation – “Leave No-One Behind”
(Question No. 67/2017)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

In Government’s push to “leave no-one behind”, can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications explain why is it important to consult widely, especially with the younger generation regarding the future, like the nationwide Budget Consultation?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and would like to him for his question.

Madam Speaker, today in Fiji, 25 percent of the overall population are between the ages of 17 and 30; 69.4 percent of the entire population are below the age of 40. So our demographic statistics demonstrates that it is skewed very much towards those people below the age of 40. It is therefore critical, Madam Speaker, to ensure that nationwide consultations in particular, regarding the Budget is held in this particular demography.

Madam Speaker, prior to the implementation of the 2013 Constitution, those above the age of 18, until they reach 21, could enlist in the Military or enlist in the Police Force. They have to pay taxes. If they were convicted of a criminal offence, they would go to the adult prison. They could

get married but they could not vote. So, they treated everything, every single aspect of their life as an adult but they could not vote. They did not have a say in how their affairs would be run.

This scenario, Madam Speaker, has obviously changed. The 2013 Constitution has changed that. People now over the age of 18 have a right to vote and they can do all those other things that I have just stated. It is, therefore, very critical, Madam Speaker, to be able to involve them in this nationwide consultation process.

Last year, Madam Speaker, we also started consultations with the high schools. A lot of the students who were in Year 13 are 17 or 18 years old. In the same way, like it was unprecedented, previously no other government had also consulted people with disabilities. We, for the first time again last year started consultations with disabled persons and, of course, the individual associations. We had that in the Western Division and also in the Central Division. We also had other public consultations where people could come to.

Just in terms of the statistics, Madam Speaker, the last year's consultations, we had only in three schools; we had one at Labasa College for the Northern Division, we had one at Suva Grammar School for the Central Division and Natabua High School for the Western Division. We had 91 schools and with 783 students participating. In that process also, Madam Speaker, one of the key issues that did come out or in fact was adopted in the 2016/2017 Budget was the increase in the number of scholarships.

Madam Speaker, as you would recall, when the scholarship scheme started which is based on merit and on a needs basis for the country, we had 600 scholarships which were given out. After the consultations, we had 630 scholarships (it was increased to 630), and indeed many of the students actually said that whilst the needs basis was very much science focussed, they also wanted more scholarships in the areas of economics and financial services. Also, for example, accounting, and indeed that was taken on board.

This year, Madam Speaker, in our quest to essentially leave no one behind and in particular to hear from this group of people who are very energised, who are very positive as we have seen in many of our consultations and have a lot of bright ideas, we have in fact, Madam Speaker, expanded the consultations, and the consultations as was advertised in the *Fiji Sun* and also aired on the radio stations.

We are having, for example, starting on 10th April, Madam Speaker, at Vashist Muni College for Navua, Suva Grammar School in Suva for the Suva region, Vunimono High School for Nausori, Sigatoka Methodist College at Sigatoka, Swami Vivekananda College for Nadi, Natabua High School for Lautoka, Xavier College for Ba, Rakiraki is Penang Sangam High School, Tavua is Tavua College, Labasa is Labasa College and in Savusavu, we will be holding in at the Montfort Technical Institute.

Madam Speaker, this time also, we have sought permission from the various campuses at university campuses, so on 11th May we are having consultation in the morning at FNU Natabua Campus, in the afternoon at the University of Fiji, Lautoka Campus in Saweni. On 12th May at USP Laucala Campus, 12th May at FNU Samabula and again on the same day at FNU Nasinu.

One of the things, Madam Speaker, which is very interesting as we found in public consultations is that, we are able to also talk about how the Budget works; what are the things that we take into consideration, where the economy is at, how is our debt to GDP ratio, what is the economic output, what are the areas that contribute to the economy, so people do get a better understanding of it and how we actually prioritise.

Madam Speaker, all in all, these, of course, has been a very useful exercise. It does include all the people.

I would just like to digress and also talk about the fact that we had consultations with the Disabled Associations in the Central Division last Friday and also on Wednesday prior to that in Lautoka. It was very useful, Madam Speaker, a very large scale of participation and contribution and I see some of them are actually here in the public gallery today.

Madam Speaker, it is very useful for us because what we do actually get to hear also sometimes, they are very practical issues that people face on a day today basis. Not all of them necessarily can be solved through the budgetary process *per se* but also there are some implications with respective Ministries regarding implementation.

We are also able to, Madam Speaker highlight to them how they also need to be accountable. Some of the Disabled Associations, for example, that were supposed to be given money, they have not presented their audited accounts. One, in fact, is a police case, so we are able to highlight to them and say to them, "Look, we have not given you your budget because of these reasons." So, we hope that through this process, we involve everyone, and get people to be lot more informed. Many of these people will become husbands, wives, mothers and fathers very soon. They would have jobs, they will own assets, so it is important for them to be able to make a contribution in respect of this. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bilitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Previously, this particular exercise was conducted by civil servants. Can the Honourable Minister consider that he withdraws himself and if the civil servants at the Budget Division conduct this consultation (because his involvement could be a political interference), there could be other things, like brainstorming children without getting the consent from the parents? I think in the Commonwealth, he is the only Honourable Minister that is moving around. Can the Honourable Minister consider that, that he withdraws himself and let the civil servants do their job freely?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, when I was in India a few weeks ago, I remember reading on the internet the media monitor that we get that some politicians outside this Parliament, who have made similar comments to what the Honourable Bilitavu is saying. Maybe, he is just regurgitating, maybe he wrote that statement for him. The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that he has been to one of those consultations last year.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- But not the students.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I do not know, Madam Speaker, how much mind-boggling exercise did I do to convert his mind. Obviously, it did not work well if I was to do that. The reality is, Madam Speaker, they are again, in a way, insulting our youth. They think that these people have got no minds of their own.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- No!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They think that they are old and are vulnerable. In fact, Madam Speaker, last week when I was in Natabua High School for some other event, I had asked the students, "Do you think that you want to participate in this?", and they all overwhelmingly said "yes".

Madam Speaker, this side of the House has a lot more confidence in our youth than they do. They do not get brainwashed as you are telling them. Anyone who has been to those consultations will also realise that we present to them the facts and we actually hear from them what they want. We were actually there to answer their queries. On the one hand, they talked about democracy, this is live democracy at work, and this is the government of the day interacting with the Fijian people. Just earlier on, Madam Speaker, he is not selective at all you can attend but you will learn a lot more.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is this, they are actually in a quandary because they talk about democracy, et cetera, but when we actually go out to the grassroots people and participate, we encourage them, put in place initiatives, so they actually see the political future of this. They do not see it from our objective perspective.

They will not complain about what happened in Navua. Last week, the Honourable Prime Minister gave out the grants to these people. The Honourable Member from Namosi was lamenting to me yesterday saying why he was not invited to Navua. The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, he was lamenting about that. He said that this person did not invite him.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is this, if you look at these initiatives objectively it is participatory. We are involving the Fijian people in respect of having consultations. There is nothing untoward about it, they are simply concerned about the fact that the ordinary Fijians will now be able to rely on facts and not the fiction that they are spreading.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, we also believe in not leaving anyone behind and indeed two years ago, we advocated last year that there should be free tuition at universities and technical colleges. This is a SODELPA position and they got hearing from the students on that last year. Can I just ask the Honourable Minister, is the FijiFirst Government also promoting this idea from SODELPA that there is no tuition for both, universities and technical colleges?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, there is actually tuition. Maybe, the Honourable Member is talking about tuition fees.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is this. This is, of course, a separate question, it is a budget question. We had addressed this question last year in the budget debate and as we explained in the budget debate is that, firstly, no other government has provided the type of assistance we provide to primary and secondary schools.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Honourable Leader of Opposition in Parliament was the Minister for Education, nothing like this happened under her. No other government, Madam Speaker, has provided scholarships based on merit and the needs of a country. No other government, Madam Speaker, has provided Tertiary Education Loans Scheme in which only some people pay a maximum interest rate of 1.5 percent. No other government has done that, and that is a fact.

Now, Madam Speaker, no other government has also provided up to \$21 million in subsidised bus fares and transportations. No other government, Madam Speaker, can provide that kind of textbooks material that we are doing at the moment. You can have the list here, I have actually got

a list and I am going to now read it out because the Honourable Member, I am going to answer his question.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-Madam Speaker, Government in its effort to nurture and develop the younger generation allocated close to \$300 million in last year's budget towards education and capacity building programmes. We have the school rehabilitation building, Tertiary Education Loan Scheme, \$143 million; Tertiary Educational Loan Scheme, \$42.5 million; Scholarships, \$16.3 million; which also includes the previous scholarships, the PSC Scholarships, the iTaukei Scholarship, Multi Ethnic Scholarship but still have not finished yet, subsidised bus fare, like I said, \$20 million; free school fees; \$66.5 million; free milk and Weet-Bix, \$3.6 million; the grant to FNU, operational, not capital - \$45 million; USP, \$30 million; University of Fiji, \$2.3 million; Centre for Appropriate Technology Development, \$736,000; Monfort Boys Town, Veisari, \$287,000; Monfort Boys Town Savusavu, \$387,000; Corpus Christi College, \$140,000; Sangam Institute of Technology, \$250,000; Fulton College, \$50,000; and Vivekanand Technical College, \$143,000.

Madam Speaker, again, if you take all of that into consideration, leadership and training of teachers, \$100,000; Implementation of New Assessment Framework Training, \$550,000; Teachers In-Service Training, \$700,000; Salary Grant for ECE Teachers, \$6.8 million; Incentive Allowance, \$50,000; Executive Teachers Allowance, \$986,000; Hostel Allowance, \$356,000; Location allowance, \$8.4 million, to get our teachers in the rural areas; Remote Rural Allowance also \$628,000; and Transfer Allowance, \$470,000.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- The explanation is irrelevant to the question, Madam Speaker.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- (Inaudible)

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Answer the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is the National Budget Consultation has been given as an example and therefore, the information been shared are really on the budget, part of the question, so it is relevant to the question.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. These are some of the areas in which money has been spent. Again, you will see, unfortunately with the Opposition, they probably woke up to the fact that substantial portion of our population are the younger people. So, then they say "Let us come up with this idea of giving them completely free tuition." So you see, because they woke up to the fact that the Government is doing this, but they forget in the process, Madam Speaker, that the budget is all about balancing. You have to be able to relocate or allocate limited resources. Every country has limited resources and it is a question of prioritisation. Usually the question, Madam Speaker, of giving and highlighting certain priority areas and giving them the leg-up to be able to do things that they were not able to do before, without neglecting other sectors in the economy.

So many times we have hear them say, "Take this money to FRA, take this from the Military, give it over here, huge amounts of money." How will it be implemented? As the capacity is there, what will you do to that particular sector from which you are taking out the money from? How will those areas be addressed, if there is shortage of funds in those areas? So, a good government, Madam

Speaker, is able to balance its priority. A good government, Madam Speaker, is able to provide a focus on a particular area. Why have we done TELS?

Madam Speaker, if we go out to members of the public, so many of them will tell you. They said they wished TELS was around when they were in high school. We only wish the scholarship allowance was there when we were in high schools, because today, I would have had a University Degree. Today, I would have got a scholarship. There were marginalised, they were left out; whether because they were poor, social economic background is not good, or if there is discrimination based on ethnicity, whatever the case was.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, the people, parents and the population are really happy with this. They also know, and in fact I would venture out to say, that there is sometimes a much better understanding of economics that must come in from the other side of the House. They recognise the household needs to balance its budget in terms of priorities. Similarly, a government needs to balance and the general population, Madam Speaker, is happy when a government is able to balance its monthly budget and be able to give assistance in different priority key sectors of the economy. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Aseri Radrodro - the last question.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I note the question is regarding consultations in younger generations and the Honourable Minister is seen to be conducting consultations in classrooms.

The question that I would like the Minister, in the previous consultations that he has conducted and the ones that he is about to conduct; whether he has obtained prior informed parental consent before conducting his budget consultations within schools?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, again, we have a lot of confidence in our youths, a lot of confidence in our high school students. We have different organisations that go out to from outside the schools to impart knowledge. We have people, for example, Madam Speaker, who go and talk about the environment; they may talk about sexual reproduction; they may talk about various other aspects of what our youths need to know about and is part of the school curriculum and part of the overall learning environment of that particular school.

Madam Speaker, the teachers are involved. The parents are the ones, if anyone wishes not to attend, they inform the teachers.

The reality, Madam Speaker, is, the teachers actually welcome this. The teachers actually encourage the students also, because it is a huge learning process. As I have highlighted to the Honourable Member and everyone else, if you are 17 and 18 years old, would you not want to know what is about to happen to you? How would your future be affected? How is government making policies and decisions in particular regarding the budget in respect of you as an individual and where do you want to see your future? Obviously, all these students, some of them are already over the age of 18. I just want to highlight to the Honourable Member, a few years ago, before we changed the law, a female could get married from the ages of 16 to 21 with parents' consent. After 21, they did not need the parents' consent. A male between the ages of 18 and 21 could get married with parents' consent and up to 21, they do not need consent.

We adhere now to the US standards. We amended the law because there is also abuse of process. Girls were being married off to people, in particular who come from overseas, at the age of 16 or 17 with some rich person arriving on our shores and parents consenting them to get married.

Madam Speaker, it used to happen. We stopped that because the fact of the matter is now girls cannot be married off at the age of 16 nor the age of 17. Anyone can get married from the age of 18 without getting parents' consent because that is when you become an adult and part and partial of this process, Madam Speaker, is to engage our young people and our youths, to be able to impart knowledge to them and if any student does not want to attend, they are free not to. No one forces no teacher forces them. They think that we are actually grabbing these people, tying them to a chair and somehow the other is enforcing knowledge to them. That is what they are trying to enforce them with all the complaints. And if you see, Madam Speaker, we actually advertise these in the papers. We make the announcements in the radio, and Madam Speaker, it is up to the individual schools to even participate. Some schools that do not want to participate - that is their choice.

You will see in the advertisement I think in yesterday newspapers, it says for the Lautoka region, it will be held here, and if you want to make arrangement to attend, contact this person. They do that. It is their choice to attend, but at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, all of these students gain a lot and they shall be very appreciative that we are having a budget consultation process. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you very much Honourable Members for the very healthy and interesting debate that we had this morning. We will now take a break and Parliament is adjourned until 11.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.11a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.33 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Brij Lal to ask his question.

Mediation - Resolving work-related conflicts in Fiji
(Question No. 68/2017)

HON. DR. B. LAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations explain to the House the importance of mediation in resolving work-related conflicts in Fiji?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for his question.

Madam Speaker, prior to 2008 when the Employment Relations Act came into being when it was enacted, this Employment Relations Act was enacted at that time, but before that Act came in place the experience has been in terms of our industrial relations front. There have always been a lot of strikes prior to that period. Our strikes and lockouts were very, very prevalent during this period. This was due basically because of the adversarial nature of industrial relations; the relationship between employers and the unions that represented them. In those early years, they were very adversarial and very confrontational in terms of the way they dealt with each other.

Between the period 2003 and 2007, there were a total of 60 strikes recorded within that short span of time. The highest number of strikes were recorded in 2005 when the country witnessed 17 strikes in just one year. So, that was prior to the time that this Employment Relations Act or the Employment Relations Promulgation came in, they brought in this idea of mediation.

The concept of mediation is one in which when two parties are in conflict, you put them in front of a mediator who tries to get them to discuss the issues that they face so that they can both come to a solution; a solution they can be both happy with, so it ends up in a win-win situation. Rather than a situation when two parties are in conflict, you put them in front of someone who decides what the decision will be on the case, on the thing that they are arguing about.

What we have seen since the inclusion of mediation, since we have set up the Mediation Centre within the Ministry of Labour that its biggest impact has been on the disputes that led to strikes aggressively declined and that has been a major impact in Fiji in terms of resolving worker-related conflicts.

Since the year 2008, after the mediation facility has been put in place, the Ministry has already received about 20 notices to conduct strike ballots to take strike action. So there was notice that the strike action will be taken, but by using this mediation service, by getting them to sit down with the parties that are on different opinions, the employers and union leaders on one hand, we have been able to invoke informal mediation and this has allowed us to avert potential strikes - about 20 potential strikes.

So, I think in terms of the impact on the country has allowed us to have a much more cordial industrial relations climate and that of course is very important in trying to grow the economy, trying to attract investors into the country, so that they can see that we have a type of industrial relations climate that is amenable to growth. So overall, since the use of the mediation services in the

Ministry of Labour, we have been able to create a much stronger industrial relations climate and a much better way of resolving conflicts between the parties that are in conflict. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Politini.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Supplementary question. Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations explain any recent amendments in the law relating to mediation and how many amendments have assisted Fijian workers?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The amendment to this Employment Relations Act, there are two amendments. The amendments took place in 2015 and again in 2016, in relation to mediation and that was in relation to grievances between a worker and an employer in essential services and industry. That is not a trade dispute and shall be dealt with in accordance and under the Employment Relations Act, provided that such employment grievance must be lodged or filed with the mediation service of the employment ministry within 21 days from the date when the employment grievance arose.

That has been the major thing in which this is affected, especially for those employees who have a grievance, they can now raise it and it is for those organisations, whether you come from an organisation that is part of the list of the essential service industries or not, for both of those groups of organisations, they can raise those grievances with the Ministry.

If an organisation raises a grievance, or if an employee raises a grievance that covers various issues like the disadvantaged duress or discrimination, dismissal or sexual harassment, those issues are taken immediately to the Mediation Unit, which then mediates between the person who has that particular grievance and the employer to try to come to a solution on those areas. And if mediation fails there, then it goes to the tribunal. So mediation has become very important in addressing these grievances.

If there are other grievances that are about the interpretation of the conditions and the benefits that are specified in the Employment Relations Act, those are not taken up with the Mediation Unit, but are dealt by our Labour standards people and if it is found that an employer is guilty of what is charged for, that can be taken up to prosecution.

So that, Madam Speaker, is how the amendments have assisted the workers in our country, just given them a way to try to address the grievances that they have, in the best interests of meeting what they need and at the same time dealing with the issues from their own employers. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the Honourable Minister talked about the mediation process, but can I ask him how effective has this mediation processes been and what in his views is the success rate?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. From the data that I have seen on some of the best Mediation Centres around the world, but here in Fiji, we tend to adhere and we have learnt from the Singaporean Mediation Centre which has a global reputation there. They have been

involved in training our own mediators within my Ministry and another, we have setup the National Mediation Centre, and are also being involved in that.

Their statistics in terms of what is good practice, in terms of resolving mediation they say that if you have something around 75 percent, which is very good globally. Here in Fiji, we exceed that. In terms of the mediation that is within the Ministry, the mediators that we have, they have been able to surpass 75 percent and I believe that it is now around more 80 percent of all issues that are brought up to our mediators, they are able to resolve it.

In other words, they are able to get the parties together, look at the issues and try to come up with a solution that both parties can live with, so that they can walk away not feeling aggrieved at the solution but it is something that they have participated in coming up with a solution and because of that, it has the ability, not only resolve the conflict, but also repair the relationship between the two parties. So the best stats that I have at the moment is above 80 percent the exact percentage, the Honourable Member can get that from me.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Balmindar Singh.

HON. B. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister explain the benefits that an individual worker can derive in utilising the mediation services under the Ministry? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Honourable Member, for that supplementary question.

Mediation is a way of resolving conflict that relies on one very important thing, and that is good-faith. If you do not have good-faith in a mediation solution, if one party comes for mediation and sees that there is something to turn up to rather than to wholeheartedly become engaged in the process, it will not be successful, so that is very important.

There must be good-faith from both parties, from the aggrieved party and from the party, that is, the employer in this case. If both come to a situation and both decide "I am going to this mediation to try to come up with a solution", then there are highly likelihood of solutions. If one party does not have that, then it is not going to work.

These are some of the distinct advantages or some of the benefits of mediation for an employee or a worker in this country before he/she goes to mediation.

It is a process of empowering the employee as empowered to have a situation where it can sit down with his or her employer and talk about the issues that face them. They have the possibility to participate in coming up with a solution. You have seen in a lot of times when you have a conflict, you take your case to someone and that someone decides what the solution should be. But in mediation, you have the opportunity to participate in coming up with a final solution. I think that is a great benefit for any worker that has a grievance. You are part of the decision-making process on what happens in your particular case and you have the ability to be able to develop a creative solution to this. In a normal court system, the way in which conflicts are resolved are more adversarial, but this is like both parties working together towards coming to a common solution that is useful for both of them.

The second distinct benefit of mediation is that, there is a distinct possibility of a win-win rather than a third party saying, "you win and you lose", both parties can come together to a decision

that both can live with, so that they both walk away from that conflict situation, feeling that they have got something that is of benefit to them, so there is a possibility of win-win for both parties.

I think the third very important benefit of mediation is because you do not have to pay anything. You do not have to pay for lawyers, the process is cheaper and people save money from going through mediation.

It is also cheaper in terms of time. Sometimes when you have issues that are taken to courts, they can drag out over years but if you are in a good mediation process, these things can be done very quickly. Within the Ministry of Labour, the timeline which we use to try to resolve mediation issues is within 30 days.

The other reason why it is of benefit is because the process is very confidential. A mediator is expected to be neutral. He/she is expected to listen to the concerns of both parties, not to take what he/she hears from one party and share it to the other. He/she is a confidential person, maintains and stands in between them, and tries to clarify any misunderstandings and through this process of confidentiality, they will be able to come up with solutions.

The seventh good reason is because you do not need a lawyer to represent you. You can represent yourself or you can get someone else to represent yourself. So as a result of this, the court costs or all the costs that are associated with taking your issue to court, are eliminated and the individual will also not have to worry about the uncertainty of the judges' decision as the individual himself/herself and the employer are in charge of the outcome. They have the opportunity to be able to contribute to the outcome.

I think the last one is that, the outcome of mediation gives the individual a sense of ownership and satisfaction. He/she does not walk away aggrieved but is happy and motivated to contribute positively to society.

So, Madam Speaker, I believe that there is a rise in the use of mediation. Mediation is now not being only used within the Ministry of Employment, it is also being used by, I think, in other places like Consumer Council of Fiji, is now being used in the Judiciary also. So the ongoing use of mediation allows us to have this alternative forms of dispute resolution that are not only very useful in terms of resolving conflict but at the same time, it is very important in repairing the relationships between the parties that are in conflict.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I note from the comments by the Honourable Minister that the unions are part of the mediation. We are getting reports from our people that employers are putting intense pressure on the workers not to join the union. Can the Honourable Minister give us an indication of what percentage now of the workers are union members?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I do not have the exact figures but I know that roughly in Fiji, our workforce would be around 350,000 or thereabouts. Sixty percent of that is in the informal sector or in subsistence.

Of our formal sector of around 120,000, it would be around one-quarter or about 25 percent to 27 percent that are members of the union. So the vast majority of those in the formal sector, that is out of the formal sector, the vast majority, maybe 75 percent are not members of unions.

The good thing about the legislation that we now have in place, in previous labour legislations, people had to go to a union to fight their case in the Ministry of Labour. Now, it is open. Anyone, whether you are a union member or not, you can bring your grievance to the Ministry and there are mechanisms and processes in place to try to address the grievance that you have.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Nabulivou.

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, the question has been answered.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Madam Speaker, I just want to ask the Honourable Minister, what if the mediation centre and the aggrieved party have agreed to go to mediation, and the other party does not want to come to the table for discussion to talk about the issue? What happens in a case because I have got a case here which I would like to highlight later? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, for that question, if mediation is mandated by the legislation, then both parties have to attend to the mediation but mediation will only be successful if there is good faith by both parties. If they genuinely come to the mediation, with the attitude of mind that they are there to try to come up with a solution. If one party comes just for the sake of attending, and that is not going to work because it is a situation in which they both have to agree to a solution.

Of course, if that fails and if you are in an essential industry, it goes to the arbitration court. If not, if you are from a non-essential industry, it goes to the Employment Relations Tribunal where someone will then impose a decision. But at least, if you go through mediation, it gives you an opportunity to decide what the solution should be, but both parties need to come in good faith.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Honourable Minister, for those informative comments. My question is on a 39 year-old gentleman, who suffered stroke while at work and the Ministry of Health Medical Board has ruled that the stroke is not related to the work. So what chances are there for this gentleman, who is now out of work to bring his case to the mediation table?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, that is a worker's compensation process which has its process. The essence of Workmen's Compensation is that, a medical doctor and now after the amendments that we had passed (I think) in the last session, that medical doctor had to go through the training of how to assess these occupational diseases and injuries. The medical doctor's opinion is paramount.

The medical doctor must be able to say, "This disease or this injury or this incapacity is because of work itself." If that condition is not met, then there is nothing else that can be done about it. There has to be a proven relationship between the injury or the death and work itself. So I think the Workmen's Compensation legislation is there.

The other option, if someone does not want to come through Workers' Compensation, they can go through the court system, so those two options are always open to people.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Ruveni Nadalo.

Progress of Implementation – Non-Formal Education Policy
(Question No. 69/2017)

HON. R. NADALO.- Madam Speaker, I rise to withdraw my question as listed in the Order Paper.

(Question was withdrawn)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Jilila Kumar.

Details of Boarding Policy Implementation in Schools
(Question No. 70/2017)

HON. J.N. KUMAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts provide details of the Boarding Policy implementation to schools this year?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I want to thank her for asking the question.

Madam Speaker, we have about 173 boarding facilities attached to schools in Fiji. This consists of 117 primary boarding schools, which is approximately 15.9 percent of the total primary schools. So 16 percent of the total primary schools have boarding facilities. And we have got 56 boarding facilities attached to secondary schools, which is 32 percent of the total number of secondary schools.

Madam Speaker, what we have noted, we have got different categories of ownership of boarding facilities. We have got Government boarding schools, faith-based boarding facilities attached to faith-based schools and we also have community-run boarding facilities attached to community primary and secondary schools.

Madam Speaker, what we noted is that, while we have hostel rules for Government boarding schools, we did not have a uniformed boarding policy for all boarding schools. This became an issue, Madam Speaker, when we came across certain incidents at our boarding schools, primary and secondary and that prompted us to have a uniform boarding policy to require minimum standards and requirements to be there for boarding facilities to operate, in order for us to provide a safe and secure environment for our children.

Madam Speaker, having said that, we then undertook a drafting of the Boarding Policy and sent it out for consultation with faith-based groups, to management of community-run schools with boarding facilities, and to principals and headteachers of some of the schools where boarding facility was there to get their feedback on the Draft Boarding Policy that we have.

Madam Speaker, the Boarding Policy contains underlying principles for enrolment and induction of schools. For example, the Policy provides guidance on boarders' weekend outs and leave, Madam Speaker.

Under this provision, all boarders are entitled to two weekends out per term from the boarding school, primarily for the purpose of replenishing their toiletries and other essential items. The school Head must put in reasonable procedures and measures to ensure that the child leaves the school, arrives home safely and when the child leaves home, the school must know that the child is leaving his/her home and the school Head must inform the parents that the child has arrived in school and is in the school's custody now.

Madam Speaker, the Policy provides for boarding school programmes. There are certain programmes that we want the school to have for boarding students.

All boarding schools shall have clearly displayed designated timings which must be known and communicated to all students for all boarding activities during the weekdays and weekends. We want to give an enriching experience to those students who are staying in boarding facilities.

Madam Speaker, the Policy has detailed provisions on student support services and care. For example, every boarding school shall take appropriate measures to ensure adequate student support services, such as counselling services or access to child helpline or provision of a sick bay.

Madam Speaker, some of these things were totally non-existent in faith-based or community-run boarding facility. There are minimal halls, beds, et cetera, but there was nothing to provide the basic support to the children.

Madam Speaker, boarding schools have designate school chaplain or school counsellor that boarders can turn to in times of distress, emotional trauma or depression or to assist students who encounter personal or family problems that may be too sensitive or serious and may warrant attention of qualified counsellors.

Madam Speaker, the Policy mandates that first aid equipment will always be available in all sports-related events. The first aid equipment should also be clearly located in the boarding facility.

The Policy is mindful of different needs of students and we have imposed duty on the school to ensure that all boarders, including those with special dietary or religious needs must be provided with meals which are adequate in nutrition, quantity and quality, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, under the Policy all boarding schools must employ a watchman or security officer, whose duty is to ensure the safety and security of students, staff and buildings from 10.00 p.m. to 7.00 a.m. The watchman is required to inspect the premises on an hourly basis and provide a report to the school Head the following morning.

Madam Speaker, the Head shall clearly inform all staff and students of the boarding school of the schedule and times for various activities, such as prep time, visiting hours, Saturday/Sunday programmes, as well as time allocated for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Madam Speaker, a student shall be removed from the hostel for committing really serious offences, and the Policy provides the details of these offences.

Madam Speaker, the Policy also makes strict provisions regarding visitation as a necessary safety measures. There have been some cases where people came in and took the child away, saying that the parents have given consent.

The school office must keep a visitor's log book and record names, dates and time of all incoming visitors. Madam Speaker, the visitor needs to find their own accommodation and cannot stay at the boarding facility because there were some issues regarding this.

Madam Speaker, visitors are strictly prohibited to visit students during class time, night studies or after the lights are off. The Policy makes it clear that visitors, even day scholars are strictly prohibited from entering the boarding dormitories or dining halls at any point in time.

Madam Speaker, the school Head has the discretion to refuse any visitor entering school compound if, in the opinion of the School Head, the security and safety of the students are compromised based on reasonable grounds.

Madam Speaker, this is the main crux of the Boarding Policy. When parents send their children to board, they entrust the authorities to look after them. It is our responsibility now, even though it is not a Government boarding facility, even though the boarding facility may be owned by a faith-based group or a community-run school, the fact of the matter is that, by virtue of the Education Act, that premise is now ours and we have a responsibility to ensure that our children are safe and secure, immaterial of who owns that boarding facility.

In this regard, we decided to have a uniformed Boarding Policy so that every school who wants to have a boarding facility, must have those bare minimum requirements to fulfil before we give permission for students to board. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Mohammed Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; it will be interesting to see how the boarding students are spread by district, so I am requesting if the Honourable Minister can provide data on this?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, and I thank Honourable Dean for asking that question.

Yes, it will be interesting because given the geographical layout where we got schools in islands and not all islands have schools, we would tend to see more students boarding in those particular Divisions. Rightfully so, the Eastern Division has the largest number of boarders.

Madam Speaker, the Eastern Division has the largest number of schools - 26. Of the 7,334 boarders, we have 818 students in secondary schools and 762 in primary schools in the Eastern Division.

In other areas, in:

- Ba/Tavua, we have 81 schools and 229 in the secondary and primary respectively;
- Cakaudrove, we have 502, and 347 in the secondary and primary respectively;
- Lautoka/Yasawa, 354 and 139 students in the secondary and primary respectively;
- Macuata/Bua, we have 326 students in secondary boarding and 789 in primary school boarding;
- Nadroga/Navosa, we have 163 in secondary, 622 in primary;
- Nausori, we have 394 in secondary school and 323 in the primary school;
- Ra, we have 235 in secondary and 497 in primary; and
- Suva, we have 548 in secondary and 205 in primary.

Madam Speaker, this is the breakdown with respect to students in different Divisions in primary and secondary boarding facility. So, a total of 7,304 boarders in various primary and secondary schools around Fiji. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- I am looking at the boarding school programmes, boarding schools operate from as early as 5.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m., to 5.30 a.m. in terms of teachers, getting to the hostel, then getting the students out of the bed and they end up probably after prep time which is about 7 p.m. in the evening. That is quite a span of time where teachers are engaged with students in boarding institutions.

The question I want to oppose to the Honourable Minister is, are there plans to increase boarding allowance for teachers taking part in these boarding assistance, apart from what they are getting now?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the boarding schools are given one grade up that a normal school without a boarding facility gets, which means that the principal of the school will be getting a different salary than such schools with the same number of students without boarding facilities.

Then there are dedicated teachers who are given time off from teaching time, for example, a normal ED3 teacher, the assistant teacher, works 22 hours. If the teacher is given boarding responsibility, then the teacher is provided with a quarters on the campus free and secondly, the teacher is given a time off. Instead of 22 hours, the teacher is given just 16 hours of face to face teaching and he/she is required to undertake boarding rounds in the evening or in the morning.

It is not only one or two teachers, it is spread out, Madam Speaker, so normally you would find that boarding schools will have a larger number of teachers in those schools because the loads are less and, therefore, they are required to do additional work in terms of boarding supervision. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Alvik Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, given the importance of boarding facilities for education, can the Honourable Minister update if any new boarding facilities were opened this year?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Maharaj for asking this question.

Madam Speaker, yes, there were five new boarding facilities that were opened this year, as follows:

1. one in Wainimakutu Primary School, a new boarding facility to cater for children who are traveling from far out crossing rivers, and that was opened earlier this year in January;
2. the Uluinakorovatu Primary School, there was another new boarding facility opened there from the Government grant;
3. Nakauvadra High School, we provided a new boarding facility there;
4. Naseuseuvia Secondary School up in Yasawa, to cater for children coming from far different villages; and
5. Yasawa North Secondary School, to cater for children from different islands and are coming to the secondary school there.

There are few other boarding facilities under construction now, Madam Speaker, and also there are number of boarding facilities where we gave grants to renovate them to make them more hygienic and provide additional capacity to these boarding facilities this year, Madam Speaker. So, construction is underway and definitely, I will provide an update to this House once this is completed.

We also have plans to look at establishing some new boarding facilities to cater for children in the urban areas, who would want to come from islands and study here, instead of staying with relatives and would want to stay in a proper boarding facility in secondary schools here.

There are plans as well to look at construction of boarding facilities around Technical Colleges Campuses. So, these will be part of our submission to the upcoming National Budget.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his response.

Madam Speaker, Queen Victoria School (QVS) is overcrowded. Two of the dormitories are used as classrooms during the day and for sleeping at night. The total number of students at the moment is more than 900, and this has caused the regular spilling of the septic tank. With due respect to the Government of Indonesia, some of the defects have been exposed. My question to the Honourable Minister is, when can these problems be rectified?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, part of his comment is correct, there were defects. These t defects was noted late last year after the Indonesian Team left, particularly to piping, as well as the reinforcement.

The Construction Implementation Unit has given out tender to a construction company which started work in December last year to undertake the reinforcement of all the buildings that was done by the Indonesian army personnel. The plumbing issue came to our notice in January and that was dealt with at that particular point in time. There were some other issues that came up about two weeks ago and those have been rectified as well. There is no leakage of sewage, et cetera, I think that is an overstatement.

On the issue of overcrowding, Madam Speaker, Honourable Dulakiverata mentioned about the students studying in the dormitory in the day time and sleeping there in the night time, that is not correct. Honourable Member, I think the information that you got, you did not get it correctly. There is one old dormitory that was converted into a classroom, I think that is where you got it wrong.

Madam Speaker, we have two brand new double storey dormitories. What we did, instead of demolishing the old dormitory, we spent close to a quarter million dollars last year to upgrade those old dormitories, so that gave us extra capacity. So, what is overcrowding?

Overcrowding in the dormitory, absolutely not! We have got excess capacity by renovating and pushing in the old dormitories for occupation. What is overcrowding in classroom?

There is no shortage of classrooms because we have got one additional stream of classrooms - Year 9, Year 10, Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13. Is there overcrowding in the dining hall?

Not in the breakfast time because we have got timed it out that this group of students will come at that particular time, let us say, 6.00 a.m. and another group will come at 7.00 a.m., et cetera. Not during dinner time, Madam Speaker. We have lunch time, we are providing packed lunch. But the issue of student numbers, Honourable Dulakiverata, should go and ask his own people, who bypass the Principal to get extra students there. He should not talk about the student numbers now in this august House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, SDG 4 mentions about quality education and education has to be addressed holistically in terms of boarding schools. The involvement of stakeholders, that is, the board of governors, parents and teachers association, old boys association or old students association for the Government schools, and as far as QVS, they have contributed since 2010. They have built a \$140,000 computer laboratory, the Old Boys have built \$70,000 worth of classrooms and provision for extra-curricular activities, like transportation. My question is, whether the Honourable Minister in this Policy, will keep all these stakeholders to be directly involved with the boarding schools, especially the Government schools?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I had said that I met with the Old Boys and the PTAs of all the three schools and I have said to them, “This is a Government school and this needs to be a model school to set a benchmark for other schools to follow through.”

The Honourable Member is talking about providing funding, there is nothing stopping them from providing funding to the school. I said that we can establish a trust account and ask people to contribute. I said to the PTA that all along what has been happening there, Madam Speaker, they were using our bursar and school principal to levy on children or collect fees and give it to a third party.

Madam Speaker, there was no accountability. Why should Government collect money from students and give it a third party and say, “You now give it back to the school for sports activity”. Madam Speaker, that does not make any sense. For example, Madam Speaker, someone from the Yasawas, having three children in one school had to pay \$450 per year. That is not on.

Madam Speaker, I said to them, that there may be some wealthy parents, who would want to contribute \$1,000 to the trust account. There may be some parents who would want to contribute \$2,000. Why are we saying that everyone should contribute \$50 per term, \$150 per year? Why should our school collect money from students, mandate it and give it to a third party, Madam Speaker, without any accountability? It would not happen.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, it is very sad indeed that this Honourable Minister was told by the Honourable Prime Minister that the kitchen facilities in QVS were not up to standard. He should know that. Did you inform this House whether the kitchen has been fixed?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, they have been there for so long, what did they do to the kitchen facility?

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, I took over the Ministry two years ago. When you have a baby, the baby needs to crawl, then walk, then run.

(Laughter)

The renovation is underway, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Question time is now over, and I thank you for your participation.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- The following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40, the:

1. Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts;
2. Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism, Land and Mineral Resources;
3. Minister for Youth and Sports; and
4. Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport.

Each Minister may speak up to 20 minutes. After each Minister has spoken, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or her designate, to speak on the statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the leader of the NFP or his designate, who will also speak for not more than five minutes. There will be no debate.

I now call on the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts to deliver his statement.

Progress Report on Climate Change Education in Schools

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, the Honourable Leader of NFP and Honourable Members of the House; I rise to inform the Honourable Members about the progress of climate change education in schools.

Madam Speaker, as Honourable Members may or may not know, climate change is being addressed in the National Curriculum as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

Madam Speaker, in our region, the simple truth is this, climate change is a reality. Two years ago, our neighbours in Vanuatu have had to keep their schools closed for extended periods of time in the aftermath of *TC Pam*, leaving 14,000 students without access to education for months.

We, in Fiji, know all too well the horror of recent cyclones with wrath of *TC Winston* still fresh in our minds. We need to start thinking of how we can protect our communities and families, and especially our children. Earlier this month, while opening a new classroom block at Wainikeli District School in Taveuni, the Honourable Prime Minister reminded everyone to take initiatives when they are being threatened by climate change. He urged that all Fijians needed to modify their perceptions to that of a person susceptible to climate change.

Madam Speaker, in this brief and valuable moment, I wish to help the Honourable Members realise the importance of acting now, to ensure that all our children and youth across the nation act on the knowledge, comprehension and application of our ever-improving climate change curriculum. We, in the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, do this day in and day out across our 942 Early Childhood Education (ECE) Centres and 907 Primary and Secondary Schools with 225 plus students. Since 2015, we had prioritised this curriculum perspective, not only to our most vulnerable schools but across the nation, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Fiji has been successful in its bid to Chair the next United Nations Climate Change Meeting, the Conference of Parties (COP) 23, with our Honourable Prime Minister heading

this campaign. It is imperative that our education system appropriately reflects and accords the due importance of climate change throughout the national curriculum, so that while our Honourable Prime Minister leads the discourse at the international level, back home, we have one of the best curriculums to train and upskill our children.

Madam Speaker, let me take a moment to explain the importance of Education for Sustainable Development Curriculum perspective to our children's future. We all want to better prepare our nation's children and youth to respond to the impacts and effects of climate change. There are already visible environmental changes taking place in our communities and across our nation.

You are all aware of the Vunidogoloa Village relocation in Cakaudrove, Vanua Levu in 2014, and express warning by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that not only are sea level expected to rise between 28 centimetres to 61centimetres by 2100, but there will be an increase in the frequency and intensities of tropical storms and cyclones. We are already seeing evidences of this weather change, such as flooding, coastal erosion and drought.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, we are striving to ensure that our students are the most informed generation in Fiji's history on the subject of climate change and all its aspects. We are not leaving it to chance and luck to navigate our nation into an unknown future. We will raise students who are knowledgeable about this Education for Sustainable Development Curriculum perspective, who will make informed decisions, not only at local and national level, but as individuals about adapting or mitigating climate change situations globally.

Madam Speaker, we are reforming our education perspective, that is, moving away from seeing sustainability as just one of many curriculum perspectives. Instead, we are advancing curriculum to integrate sustainability across all curriculum perspectives, and indeed, in the formal curriculum. The three ways in integrating sustainability are as follows.

Firstly, education ensures continuity of our culture and traditions, guaranteeing their transfer from one generation to another. Across the globe, indigenous communities have used their knowledge about their natural surroundings to adjust to differing changes of weather patterns. In the Pacific, our natural resources, terrestrial and aquatic, still play a significant role in sustaining livelihoods. In villages, the older generations are knowledgeable about what crops to plant on which months and for what reason, or what types of fish and invertebrates are abundant at a certain month or during a certain lunar phase. It is no different in Fiji. Thus, Madam Speaker, traditional knowledge continues to play an important role in our societies and increasingly, this knowledge is being recognised as a critical component in community-based climate change adaptation planning. We are, as such, inculcating this knowledge in the new curriculum.

Secondly, there is an increasing probability that with the dynamic environmental changes we currently encounter, the knowledge, comprehension and application skills we teach today, need continuous updating, adding to and apprising.

Madam Speaker, I am mandated by the National Curriculum to further the goal so that our children have the rights skills and competencies to take on challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, especially through the curriculum perspectives which are cross-cutting themes that add to the quality of education that we provide for our children from Early Childhood to Year 13. There are eight curriculum perspectives which act collaboratively to bring cohesion across the formal subjects. These include education for:

1. Citizenship;
2. Literacy;

3. Numeracy;
4. Financial Education;
5. Special and Inclusive Education;
6. Spiritual and Values Education;
7. Careers; and
8. lastly but central to the above seven curriculum perspectives is Education for Sustainable Development.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, we are implementing programmes in schools which affect the greater scope of environmental protection and climate change. School initiatives such as, the 3R's or 4R's that is Recycling, Reducing, Recovering/Recreating or Responding or Rehabilitating; school-based compost initiatives; no burning programmes; save energy programmes; renewable energy competitions; Go Green Programmes; Lunch Box instead of Lunch Wrapper Initiatives; Arbour Day; Walk to School Initiative; et cetera, have been highly successful.

Madam Speaker, it is by no coincidence that Education for Sustainable Development is central to other perspectives. Since the United Nations highlighted and adopted the Resolution to establish 2005 to 2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts had continued to run with this theme. And rightly so, Madam Speaker, especially now that Fiji is the signatory for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Education for Sustainable Development perspective projects three key pillars to sustainability:

1. Economy;
2. Society; and
3. Environment.

These are covered in the various approaches advocated in the National Curriculum Framework, linking all the perspectives.

Madam Speaker, today I am focussing on our Environmental Pillar of Education of which climate change is mandated. I can list many of our Ministry's past climate awareness activities, but the time remaining is valuable. I want to focus on how we may cooperate in a whole of Government approach to make our nation's youth sustainable leaders.

First, Madam Speaker, let me go more into the foundational work our youth have received todate. In this way, Honourable Members may realise the qualifications of our soon-to-be employed youth. Let us review how our climate change curriculum works today.

Currently our education curriculum integrates climate change in two key methods, that is, progressive education and cross-cutting sustainable development education. What I mean by progressive education is, curriculum starts from the youngest age to introduce the basics, for example, knowledge and activities about weather and climate change. Then as students move to later primary, they will learn the relationship between extreme weather events versus historical climate patterns. Upon entering secondary school, students progress with their knowledge of climate change to understand the important distinction between natural greenhouse effect versus our currently enhanced manmade greenhouse effect.

Madam Speaker, by the time our students reach upper secondary, they will understand the scientific facts around climate change. Additionally, upper secondary school students will learn how to be resilient to climate change effects through mitigation and adaptation curriculum, for example,

performing mitigating activities around a student's carbon footprint, as well as mapping his or her own adaptation as a responsible citizen.

Quickly, Madam Speaker, taking you through from the ECE to Year 1, basic environmental friendly practices in science syllabi is as follows:

Year Level	Current Science Syllabi
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inculcate respects for plants and animals in local environment. ▪ Highlighting the importance and ways of conserving energy.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Important relationships between living things and their environment.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introducing specific environmental ecosystems like forests, mangroves, grassland, et cetera, to our children
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introducing the importance of biodiversity and sustaining on ecosystem
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explaining effects of loss of biodiversity
9 & 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Changes in ecosystems and the human activities
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impacts on enhanced Green House Effects
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contemporary environmental issues
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Carbon footprint ▪ Mitigation and adaptation – local, regional and global level, et cetera

So, this is how we have covered in the science curriculum.

Similarly, we also have sustainable education and climate change covered in Social Science Syllabi, Madam Speaker, from Years 3 to 13.

Madam Speaker, let me now move on to our cross-cutting approach. By this, I mean, we incorporate Education for Sustainable Development into all of our other curriculum perspectives. We do this because all subjects must play a very proactive role in mitigating and adaptation.

We do climate change curriculum in line with the mandate of Education for Sustainable Development. Without the foresight of our national curriculum, our students would not be learning about climate change. This is how we are able to integrate climate change into all key aspects.

Madam Speaker, let us now move on to how our climate change professional development has improved teachers' skills in 2016. I will address professional development of all our teachers in three methods:

1. Geographically based workshops;
2. Teacher resource kits; and
3. Universal self-education.

Madam Speaker, regarding our first method - geographically-based workshops, in 2016 the Ministry of Education leveraged our existing Memorandum of Understanding with SPC, which includes support of integration of climate change in school curriculum and development of resources on climate change to increase workshops on climate change education. Together, we have moved quickly to introduce the Train of Trainers' Workshop across the country on climate change education. Those qualified teachers then returned to upskill their fellow teachers in their respective schools.

Todate under this first partnership with funding from SPC, 517 primary teachers and 150 teachers at FNU have been trained through Climate Change Education Workshops. Madam Speaker, with the existing teachers, 517 teachers from these different schools have already undergone specialised workshops funded by SPC.

Madam Speaker, another 55 primary school teachers have been trained through similar workshops funded through a second partnership with UNESCO and Malaysia Funds-in-Trust, bringing our total of Climate Change Education trained teachers for 2016 to 572.

Madam Speaker, in 2017, we are continuing to expand our reach and cover all the remaining primary schools and begin with secondary level teachers through geographically-based workshops. Thereafter, we anticipate that with additional resources, all teachers will then be supported to teach climate change.

Madam Speaker, this is the details in terms of how we are going to upskill our teachers. In addition to this, we have also provided resource kits on climate change to our teachers. These kits have already been distributed to 631 schools, out of the 900 schools. The Climate Change Information Kits were developed in collaboration with the SPC/GIZ and several international organisations. Importantly, these resources reflect the unified knowledge of the world's key stakeholders, the SPC/GIZ.

Madam Speaker, the dedication of the Ministry of Education towards climate change Education is long-standing and of international repute. The Ministry has committed in printing and disseminating these kits to schools through our climate change trained teachers. It should be noted that these kits function as a supplemental resource to the textbooks with existing climate change content.

Madam Speaker, we have also included questions in the examination to test out our children's climate change knowledge. For example, the Biology Exam Paper for Year 12 in 2015, 11 percent of the exam addressed issues of sustainability. For Year 13, 15 percent of the examination addressed issues of sustainability. Gradually, exams across various subjects are increasing the climate change weighting in assessment. A second conclusion that may be drawn is that more subjects are tackling climate change through assessment.

Madam Speaker, I have details of the other subjects, for example, Chemistry, Geography and Basic Science on how these subjects reflected climate change questions and testing.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education is taking fundamental steps to address progressive integration of sustainability in our nation's curriculum and assessment. While our Honourable Prime Minister is leading the charge on collective action against climate change at the global level, we all have to do at our own level, demonstrate that Fiji is on top of this agenda at the national level. Madam Speaker, what I have presented to you today reveals our education agenda on climate change.

Madam Speaker, if we are to have a responsible seat at the global table, then our students must be prepared to speak with wisdom that comes from deep experimental understanding. Our shared future faces change. What makes a great change, climate change, unprecedented is its vast disparity on what we have taught versus what we must teach.

Madam Speaker, we owe it to our children's future, otherwise inaction will bury us. Our Honourable Prime Minister has paved the way, not only for Fiji but for the entire Pacific region and those other smaller island States to have a more strong say on climate change at the global level. His inspirational leadership is acknowledged regionally, with the highly successful deliberations last week at the Conference. It is our duty now to support his course by preparing our children for this challenge via our education system with vigour and robustness that it deserves. We seek support of all stakeholders in this endeavour, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. I seek your indulgence to hear the two responses from the Opposition before we break for lunch. Do we have any opposition?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being none, thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for his statement on climate change under Education for Sustainable Development.

Madam Speaker, we all agree that students as well as citizens of Fiji need to be fully aware of the effects of climate change on their lives, especially if something happens and I applaud the Honourable Minister for this initiative.

I also understand, Madam Speaker, that students are taught science subjects in schools, which inform them about the consequences of their actions to the environment, if they are not careful or cautious. However, making changes to the school curriculum needs proper consultation with all stakeholders so that they would understand the reasons behind the change, and also come up with their contributions.

I wonder whether the Honourable Minister for Education has consulted with the Fiji Teachers' Confederation – FTA and FTU, universities, NGOs, Principals' Association, Head Teachers' Association, school managements, parents and also the Education Forum. An Education Summit, Madam Speaker, as the Honourable Minister promised in his maiden speech, will be the best forum to address all these.

Madam Speaker, what I am trying to say here is that, more heads together will come up with a broader and clearer vision on this issue.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Our heads are much better than those on the other side.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, by bringing stakeholders on board for consultation and discussion will enable them to take ownership of the initiative, and they would ensure that it is carried out. Therefore, I urge the Honourable Minister to widely discuss the changes needed in the curriculum with education stakeholders, especially in the integration of climate change - Education for Sustainable Development before this change is fully implemented. It is a valuable topic, Madam Speaker, and should not be rushed, so be reactive rather than being pro-active.

Madam Speaker, band-aid solutions such as this will not last long as it does not have the base to make it last. From our angle, I believe students should be taught more on the importance of conservation and sustainable development in order to protect our environment. Students just like any other ordinary citizen, must fully understand the importance of looking after the environment and seriously take action to protect it.

They need to be fully aware, Madam Speaker, that when they are more responsible in protecting the environment, they are also protecting themselves from the effects of climate change and we need to be more preventative. This, Madam Speaker, I believe is a more proactive approach other than being reactive. Prevention is better than cure.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, I advise the Honourable Minister for Education that for any changes he wishes to make, he must consult all education stakeholders for the betterment of education in this country because a collective view is better than boasting about his own initiative which will not last long, and will not be fully accepted by the people concerned. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Leader of NFP or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. I think the whole issue of climate change is important and understood. The Honourable Minister made reference to COP 23 and I just want to make some comments on that as well.

In the last session of the Parliament, the Honourable Prime Minister quite earnestly suggested that NFP was not in support of Fiji's Presidency of COP 23, but on the contrary we support both, the Honourable Prime Minister and his leadership in spearheading COP 23. I think it is indeed an honour for Fiji and the Honourable Prime Minister to do so.

However, Madam Speaker, we did say several things about the preparation of COP 23 and what needs to be done. COP 23, Madam Speaker, is not just about making the world hear this time, it is actually going to be about making the world understand and adhere to the Paris Agreement. So I think in Fiji's leadership as a member of the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), it would be very, very important that we work together, and the Opposition's offer of a bipartisan approach in taking this matter to the world is still on the table.

Let me come back to the issue of curriculum, Madam Speaker, I think it is important. We do not dispute the fact that we need to review the curriculum. I agree with the Honourable Minister that we need to include this in the curriculum, but I also agree with our colleague from the Opposition, the Honourable Leawere, who made some pertinent points and indeed I have always called this issue with the Honourable Minister and said that curriculum is very important.

Madam Speaker, you can have the facilities, you can have the teachers, but if the curriculum is not aligned to the objectives of what we are trying to achieve as a country, as an education system and the quality that we are going to produce out of that curriculum in terms of the outcome, whether it be the results, whether it be the competency of students who go into tertiary institutions, all those, Madam Speaker, will emanate from the way in which the curriculum is devised.

Writing curriculum, Madam Speaker, as an educationist, I know it is not a very simple matter. It is not something that you can bring in experts from here and there, and put out issues that students will try and understand. And I also do not agree that putting the climate change or environment agenda in the curriculum in the way that you can deal with as a separate issue, is not going to be helpful because climate change, Madam Speaker, is an inter-disciplinary issue.

When you talk about climate change, you talk about the signs of climate change, the signs of climate change is kind of established already, but we have other issues. We have to look at the social issues, we have to look at the political issues, we have to look at many other issues within the area of climate change and the impact of climate change goes beyond or cuts across many sectors of our society and of our economy. That is why I think it is important and I would urge the Honourable Minister to use this opportunity because we are trying to introduce new things, Madam Speaker.

And as I said to him earlier, there has been a lot of time lapse and a lot of changes made in the last 10 years. Maybe, it is time to consolidate all that, appoint an Education Commission or a Review Committee to look at the whole curriculum and see how we can bring all those things together

in a way that will help us achieve the outcome that we intend to achieve. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now break for lunch. We will adjourn this sitting until 2.30 p.m. Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.40 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.32 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, are we ready to start? Thank you.

I now call on the Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources to deliver his statement.

Exceptional Performance of the Fijian Tourism Industry

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, of course, the Honourable Prime Minister is not here, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament, firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere apologies to the Turaga na Tui Namosi, Ratu Matanitobua, for the oversight on the part of my Ministry during the MSBG disbursement in Navua last Saturday.

Madam Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to deliver my Ministerial Statement on the exceptional performance of the Fijian Tourism Industry and the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism in ensuring the industry's sustainability and its development and contribution in uplifting the lives of all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, before delivering my statement on the tourism industry, I wish to clarify certain concerns that were raised in Parliament yesterday on the trade relations with respect to Fiji and Papua New Guinea, and I hope this clears the air.

First and foremost, Fiji and PNG have had a cordial and healthy trade relations which is actually governed by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the MSG Trade Agreement. The PNG Minister for Trade, Hon. Richard Maru, had asked Fiji to consider opening pathway for PNG-made products, such as Ox and Palm Corned Beef, Trukai Rice and Lae Biscuits. As per the processes and procedure, the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism requested the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF), as the competent authority to undertake an Import Risk Assessment.

This, Madam Speaker, is part of the process that needs to be followed for any new plant or animal product that is being considered for import. This is in line with Article 2 of the WTO Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) Agreement relating to the rights and obligations, and is also consistent with Article 15 of the MSG Trade Agreement.

Madam Speaker, all imports of animals and plants need to comply with BAF requirements and procedures. This is the same process Fijian exports need to undertake when an importing country requires it. For example, agricultural exports to New Zealand require BAF certification that the exports are complying with the biosecurity requirements set by New Zealand's competent authority.

As per the initial assessment report from BAF, the Ministry advised PNG that the pathway was immediately opened for personal consignment. This was done to allow PNG nationals to bring in personal consignments, whilst BAF and the National Agriculture Quarantine and Inspection Authority of PNG, commonly known and NAQIA, worked on the documentations and certificates required to process commercial imports.

Madam Speaker, the issue now is an administrative one and what this means technically is that, having conducted the overseas import risk assessment to PNG between 24th September and 2nd October 2016, commercial imports of Ox and Palm Corned Beef, Trukai Rice and Lae Biscuits can still be facilitated into Fiji, as the two competent border agencies are working to finalise the certification requirements for the pathway for commercial imports, for the mentioned PNG products.

Madam Speaker, again, and I said this in the public space, in true Melanesian spirit, Fiji has been open for dialogue and following the statement by the Honourable Prime Minister for Papua New Guinea, Peter O'Neill, on Friday, the Ministry Officials who also liaised with the PNG Trade Officials and my Office is also preparing to undertake consultations with Hon. Maru's Office to complete the task.

Madam Speaker, having completed the technical import risk assessment process, the two countries will clarify and smoothen out the administrative issues in the next couple of days. Be rest assured, we value PNG, we will always value PNG as we have done earlier.

PNG is a very important market for Fiji and we will not let any form of miscommunication tarnish that important trade relation between the two countries, contrary to the belief on the other side. In the recently signed Melanesian Free Trade Agreement (MFTA) by Fiji this year, our cooperation with PNG will now extend to trade-in services, investment and labour mobility. Madam Speaker, I hope that clears the air for the Honourable Member who did raise that question earlier on.

Now, moving on to the tourism industry and other Government initiatives that are contributing to the improvement of livelihoods of all Fijians, Madam Speaker, following the devastation of *TC Winston* over a year ago, the nation bounced back faster than anyone expected. A lot of this was attributed to the resilience of the tourism sector. Amidst the destruction, the tourism industry stepped up and ensured that they kept the economy going. The industry, Tourism Fiji and Fiji Airways, joined forces to tell the world that Fiji was open for business.

Madam Speaker, this is a very important point, this is not mere words. The annual figures recorded a 5 percent growth in visitor arrival or a total 792,320 visitors for 2016 and in comparison to 754,835 in 2015. The growth trajectory for visitor arrivals is expected to continue and without a doubt, we will surpass the forecasted visitor arrivals of 831,936 for this year. It should also be noted that there has been a strong increase in visitor arrivals from the Chinese market, totalling about 40,174 for last year, which is a 7 percent increase compared to the previous year.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry recognises the need to make Fiji "China ready" and through strategies, such as facilitating the first Chinese Tour Guide Training for our local tour guides, we are preparing our industry well. This training was done in partnership with the Guangdong Tourism Bureau in February this year.

In addition to all that, Madam Speaker, the Indian market was also growing at a fast rate, now being the second largest outbound market in the world. India, like China, is an emerging market for Fiji and is a high yielding one, with a higher than average spend by some of our average travellers.

With the recent signing of the code sharing agreement between Fiji Airways and Jet Airways, it is anticipated that there would be a significant increase in the volume of travel, as it would be easier for Indian nationals to book tickets directly from a number of destinations from India to Fiji.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the tourism sector is still the highest foreign income earner. In 2015, tourism earnings were recorded at around \$1.56 billion, a 10.3 percent increase from \$1.40 billion recorded in 2014. This also included the high spender nationals of Japan, UK and Canada.

The Fijian Government, Madam Speaker, is confident that tourism will maintain its status as Fiji's largest economic sector, contributing about 30 percent towards Fiji's national Gross Domestic Product.

Madam Speaker, Foreign Direct Investments have contributed towards the expansion of the tourism industry. Some of the major investments include; Kokomo Resort, Wyndham Silkroad Ark Hotel, Marriot Momi Bay Resort and Pullman Nadi Bay. In 2016, tourism investment projects comprised 60 percent of the total Foreign Direct Investments registered, which were valued at \$933.38 million.

Madam Speaker, whilst we welcome foreign investments, the Government is ensuring that developments are carried out in a sustainable manner, which follows stringent standards and practices. In this regard, the Ministry has embarked on the development of Fiji's National Tourism Development Plan also known as the Fijian Tourism 2021, the objectives of which are to:

- Support development of a sustainable and inclusive tourism sector;
- Catalyse visitor expenditure and tourism yield; and
- Create a conducive environment for sustainable increase in visitor arrivals.

For the past few weeks, the Ministry has been conducting consultations with stakeholders on this Plan, which will guide the tourism industry in achieving the target of FJD\$2.2 billion by 2021.

In the realisation of this target, Madam Speaker, the Ministry through an integrated multi-pronged approach will work in a coordinated and concerted manner with all relevant Government, Non-Government Organizations and private sector stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, in my recent visit to Madrid, Spain for the launch of the 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, I was given the opportunity to address a gathering of tourism leaders which included Ministers of Tourism from 57 different member countries of the United Nations World Tourism Organization.

Madam Speaker, it was an opportunity to reiterate Fiji's position, as the President of COP 23, on mitigation of climate change and our efforts in the promotion of sustainable development policies and practices. As the first Pacific Island nation to hold this position, a fact that we should be very proud of, Madam Speaker, Fiji will be championing the suppressed voices of the oceanic region, to be audible on the global front.

In this regard, the Ministry is ensuring that the principles of sustainable tourism is embedded in the Tourism Plan. Furthermore, the Ministry will spearhead key activities to mark the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

Madam Speaker, Fiji has a strong reputation of a "sun, sea and surf" destination. However, the sector has tremendous opportunities in niche and high-end products that needs to be explored to be able to maximise the returns.

We will continue to develop and value-add to our current tourism products, to build an industry that is resilient, productive and focuses on quality. Therefore, the Tourism Plan identifies a number of key products such as the MICE segment and Sports Tourism, which contributes to the social, cultural, economic and infrastructural development of the country.

Sports tourism, Madam Speaker, is regarded as the high value market, given its potential to increase visitor numbers and spend, especially during off-peak season. It is for this reason that we will continue to invest in this market as the benefits derived are both, measurable and incalculable in terms of:

- International marketing mileage;

- Raising Fiji's profile and ability to host such events of international standards;
- Attracting interest and investment from international sporting institutions;
- Attracting sports tourists;
- Boosting economic activity;
- Benefiting local communities; and
- Providing a platform to incorporate social and cultural features of Fiji into the overall tourist experience.

Madam Speaker, some international events hosted in the country include, World Surfing League, Super Rugby and Stand-up Paddleboard. We have also won the bid to host the Interhash in 2018, which is expected to bring in more than 5,000 people into the country at the same time, and of course, the Netball World Youth Cup in 2021.

Madam Speaker, as identified in the Tourism Plan, having the right infrastructure, connectivity and accessibility are crucial in attracting new segments of visitors. For example, the \$105 million investment in the refurbishment of Nadi Airport, has modernised our international gateway and will lift the standards of our airport services and aviation industry, making it globally competitive.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry, through Investment Fiji, will also strengthen engagement with all the stakeholders to facilitate and fast-track foreign direct investments. The Honourable Prime Minister has taken a special interest in this particular area.

Madam Speaker, in order to attract high yield in business, Fiji needs to also provide world-class shopping experience. In this regard, the new proposed Services and Manufacturing Zone in Lautoka will potentially cater for such investments.

Furthermore, the community awareness programmes and skills training for our local tourism operators have been organised by Government and key stakeholders, to encourage participation of local communities in tourism development.

Madam Speaker, recently, a training for local chefs was held in the Yasawas by an internationally renowned chef, Colin Chung. This training was special as it promoted contemporary island cuisine, using only our Fijian-grown produce.

Madam Speaker, this ensures that the benefits of the tourism dollar is spread widely throughout the Fijian economy and we are able to retain more of the tourism revenue and strengthen linkages with other sectors, such as agriculture.

Madam Speaker, to complement this, the Government is also looking at strengthening the support mechanisms for Micro, Small and Medium tourism operators, to ensure their continued contribution and competitive presence in the Fijian tourism industry.

Madam Speaker, the development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) is also an integral part of the Fijian Tourism 2021. Through the MSBG scheme, the Ministry has been able to provide support to micro and small businesses in the tourism sector. Since 2015, Madam Speaker, MSBG has attracted 44,660 applications throughout the country. This demonstrates that around 6 percent of our population have interest in doing business.

The applications received were from projects in all sectors, including tourism and related services such as, beach massages and horseback riding businesses. A total of 19,532 applications have been approved to-date.

For this year, the Ministry so far, has given out grants to 769 recipients in the North, once a very neglected part of Fiji. Further to the earlier mentioned, an additional 549 recipients received their grants from the Honourable Prime Minister last Saturday in Navua.

Madam Speaker, there were couple of issues that also need to be raised regarding some comments earlier this morning. In response to the allegations made by the Honourable Nawaikula (who is not present) that the MSBG is a vote buying technique of the Government, let me reiterate what I said this morning, Madam Speaker. This particular Programme was initiated way back in 2014 because it was a promise that the FijiFirst Government had made to all Fijians prior to Elections in September. The Ministry has merely continued to implement this promise on a non-partial basis and applications are approved only on merit.

Madam Speaker, we do not, and I categorically state that we do not use our programmes for political mileage. We do it for the betterment of the entire nation.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- We do not. Read it, hear it and listen to it carefully.

This Programme, Madam Speaker, is achieving the desired results of improving the livelihoods of all Fijians. Madam Speaker, I really hope they listen because it has taken me three years to get it through to them.

This initiative has impacted the lives of 35,855 ordinary Fijians, people who we care and this is a feat that has never been achieved by any previous government, Madam Speaker.

Let me say this again, Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government is for all Fijians.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- We are not selective, Madam Speaker, in our approach to the people of Fiji, absolutely not at all.

Our Honourable Prime Minister who is sitting here before me, and who is also your Prime Minister had visited villages in the North, Madam Speaker, an area that Honourable Nawaikula pointed out this morning and said that it is his stronghold. Perfect! For years, Madam Speaker, these areas have been forgotten and neglected by previous governments. It is the FijiFirst Government that has addressed their needs and has enabled them to have a decent livelihood and this, Madam Speaker, is not a vote buying exercise, not at all.

Madam Speaker, as I said earlier on, we do not go on a vote buying exercise. It is quite a shame that we actually hear it because these are grassroots people. It is quite a shame that they actually think of that. You should really think about the fact that they are grassroots people that you are talking about, which you may think that we should not help.

Madam Speaker, the preliminary results of the monitoring and evaluation of the recipients indicate a 60 percent success rate so far, and to respond to Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo, that is a 60 percent success rate. This is based on the assessment conducted in parts of the Western and Central Divisions, prior to *TC Winston*. And I wish to emphasise here that the Ministry will continue with this exercise.

Again, Madam Speaker, I want to clear the confusion of the Opposition with regards to the MSBG Scheme and where the Honourable Dulakiverata has referenced this morning that the Lawaki Village Bakery is part of the MSBG Scheme and a failed project, is what he called it.

Firstly, let me point this out, Honourable Dulakiverata. The Lawaki Village Bakery is not part of the MSBG Scheme.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Get your facts correct! Honourable Member, the Lawaki Village Bakery is not part of the MSBG Scheme, but is a project funded by the Integrated Human Resources Development Programme (IHRDP), so get your facts correct!

Secondly, I would like to reaffirm Honourable Dulakiverata this morning, and this is a slap in the face to the people of Lawaki Village and the Vanua of Dere, I kindly suggest that he visit the Mata ki Verata at Lawaki Village to do his *matanigasau* and buy some bread.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, the operations of the Bakery has picked up after a temporary closure due to *Cyclone Winston* of Queen Victoria School, which is one of its main customers. In fact, within three months of operations, the Bakery had generated an income of \$25,000 and has deposited \$14,000 in the IHRDP Trust Fund. The funds are still being held in trust, this is evidence of how well this Bakery is doing, Madam Speaker, in his own backyard.

It is amazing, Madam Speaker, how the Opposition pours scorn on all the activities that Government undertakes to help our grassroots people. Maybe, they are exacerbating their very decreasing popularity but that is alright, please go ahead and exercise as much exacerbations as you want.

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to take the floor and deliver my statement. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to reply to the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources. At the outset, it is very comforting that the situation in Papua New Guinea is stable, given his assurance, but can he just make sure that he and his counterpart in Papua New Guinea are on the phone regularly on things like this?

We do not want to hear statements in the press made by the Honourable Minister in Papua New Guinea saying; “We are determined to halt trade with Fiji.” He is an Honourable Member of Parliament in Papua New Guinea and for him to make that statement would indicate that maybe the phone lines are not working. And at that level, Madam Speaker, we would ask the Honourable Minister, who speaks about the Melanesian spirit, to be a bit more accommodating. Perhaps, the way he handles things are not in the Melanesian spirit, hence the statement that was made yesterday.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Just imagine the level of anxiety with our traders when they read that statement by this gentleman from Papua New Guinea saying, “I am determined to halt trade with Fiji”, and that is US\$31 million a year, not so much change. So thank you, Honourable Minister for reassuring the House that everything is alright but maybe in the Melanesian spirit, pick up the phone and talk to him, instead of having these spats out in public. Thank you.

Madam Speaker, on tourism; yes, it is a number one industry in the country and we applaud that, and it has been there since the late 1950s. Of course, my colleagues in FijiFirst just wanted to have all the *kudos* for all the record numbers, but let me just remind them that in 2006, Fiji had 560,000 visitors, Maldives had 600,000. In 2016, Maldives had 1.3 million and Fiji had 792,000. Somewhere along the line, Fiji dropped the ball and we knew exactly what happened in 2006 and what has hampered the growth in tourism.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister speaks about strict guidelines on development and let me just plead with this Parliament that in my area, Nadroga/Navosa in the Western Division, huge swathe of land and *qoliqoli* are being earmarked for development and they are confused to the extent of being frightened at the scale of development that is happening and that is one of the reasons I have been very active in encouraging them to call on the Committee in Parliament to come and sit in the villages or wherever, so that they can air their concerns to their Parliamentarians so that they can understand the extent of what is happening to their resources.

We are talking about *qoliqoli* that will go for 99 years. We are talking about land that will go for 99 years. Surely, the least we can do as leaders of this country is to take our Parliament to them or for them to come to Parliament and let them air their views. It is a free country and they have their Parliament, we should not deny them the opportunity to talk to their Parliament.

We tend to believe that because the executive is driving this process, that it is all acceptable to them. The executive have a top down approach in the way they do things. In this manner, it comes from the bottom up, somewhere along the line the two will merge. We are not saying that we do not want development, but all we want to have is for our people to understand fully what is at stake.

Madam Speaker, I know the ruling has been made, but please, if we can re-look at that. We are talking about huge resources. We are *iTaukei*, we do not have cash, we are poor, and all we have is our resources. Just give us that opportunity, those windows or those platforms where we can speak freely about our *qoliqoli*, land and everything that we surrender for the development of this country.

That is all I ask, Madam Speaker. We now have a Parliament and we tell them, “Use your Parliament”. So please, for us, I speak for Nadroga/Navosa and I speak for the West, whenever there is a huge development, please enable or allow them to air their views, allow them the opportunity to speak freely and to understand what will happen to them. If you do not, it will still be like in the days of old, where land was given over a pipe, over something insignificant, if we do not. So, here we have a Parliament, Madam Speaker, I would like us to allow them to continue to have their lovely Parliament. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Now I call upon the leader of NFP or his designate to speak in response.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I am actually amazed with the level of arrogance and egoistic grandstanding from some of the Honourable Ministers on the other side, that I keep wondering whether you know

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, he just referred to me as egoistic. I think he should retract that statement.

Madam Speaker, any time, I raise something, I do not venture into that particular terrain. You cannot call me that kind of name, I think he should retract that, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Member, your intent was very clear, I would like you to withdraw those words.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- I withdraw that, Madam Speaker, as directed by you.

Let me also say, with respect to the Minister's Statement on the trade issue with Papua New Guinea and obviously, he did not talk about them because the PNG Foreign Minister said that they were actually dealing with a dishonourable government, so he may want to correct that as well.

Madam Speaker, the issue of tourism growth, yes, we acknowledge the numbers and we acknowledge the fact that the tourism industry is very, very important, close to about 35 percent of our GDP. But, Madam Speaker, the signals for the future do not look as promising as the Government would like to believe or the Government would like others to believe or for us to believe in this House. We still have to understand the impact of the \$200 Departure Tax, we have to understand the impact of the 10 percent STT, the 6 percent Environmental Levy with 9 percent VAT. I think the full impact of that on the tourism industry in terms of our pricing competitiveness will be determined later.

The other point that I want to make, Madam Speaker, with respect to the tourism numbers and I have said this in Parliament before, I think we already have an over-protected national carrier, that is another issue and we may want to have some debate on it later. But with respect to tourism numbers from Australia which comprises close to about 50 per cent, the declining trend is a worry because it comprises 50 percent of our total numbers. I note that we have an Air Services Agreements (ASAs) with India now but we also need to have one with China because I think the number of Chinese tourists has the potential to grow even further.

On the Nadi/LA route, we have co-shares with the American airlines, we have Air New Zealand, Qantas and all of them seem to be doing well so it is not an issue for us to engage with more ASAs and open up because ultimately, it is the airline connectivity that is going to determine whether we actually have a billion tourist in the future.

So, those are issues that we need to consider and talking to industry players, I mean the industry players are pretty concerned about it Madam Speaker, they may not be saying it to the Government to the Ministers obviously, but they are talking to people like us, they are talking to others, and they are concerned about the impact of this in the future. I mean we can laugh about it but it is not a laughing matter, it is an issue that you and others do not understand and the industry players do that.

On the Micro and Small Enterprise grants, Madam Speaker, and I note the Minister quite emphatically said "we are not campaigning". I think if they are true to their word, then they would not go around and break themselves in every distribution centres but let the civil servants do the job and take over these activities.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If they were not going to campaign then they should leave it to the civil servants to deliver that, otherwise, you see the Honourable Prime Minister, the Minister for Trade everywhere, breaking themselves, taking every job, that is vote buying.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- They had to put their money where their mouth is, if they are saying that it is not a campaign, let the civil servants and the permanent secretaries do the job. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Now I call on the Minister for Youth and Sports to deliver his statement.

Implementation of the Non-Formal Education Policy

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of the House; I am grateful for this opportunity to update the House on the implementation of the Non-Formal education Policy and my Ministry's focussed delivery to meet the needs of our youth.

Madam Speaker, this Policy is for those who have dropped out from the formal education, from Forms 1 to Form 7 and the three Universities, and this Government is giving another chance to them so that they can gain economic power and earn a window of opportunity.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry, in close cooperation with our colleagues from the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, is the custodian of the Non-Formal Education Policy, following a Cabinet decision on 4th November, 2014. Following this decision, the Ministry of Youth and Sports shall be the lead agency responsible for coordinating the Policy and programme implementations among other Government Ministries involved in non-formal education service delivery.

The Ministry shall also work in partnership with institutions and non-governmental organisations responsible for non-formal education service delivery. This encourages school leavers or dropouts and adults to be involved in the informal economic sector to develop their full potential through non-formal education, and enhance their skills through training for gainful employment. The Policy encourages all stakeholders in non-formal education to network and collaborate to maximise effective use of resources and reduce possible duplication.

Madam Speaker, a consultative workshop was convened on 10th March, 2017 by the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, with non-formal education providers to discuss the Policy and its implementation as a way forward. Stakeholders from Ministries, NGOs and of course our tertiary institutions attended the forum.

In the next week, for the first time, a Non-Formal Education interim council will meet to review and finalise strategies for the way forward as we formulate the means to establish a national Non-Formal Education Council within three months. I look forward to addressing the Council at its first meeting, together with my colleague, the Honourable Minister for Education.

Madam Speaker, during the consultation held earlier this month, the non-formal education providers focused on the implementation of the Non-Formal Education Policy and the various skills training the non-formal education providers currently implement. I am pleased to report that areas also put on the agenda were:

- Accreditation of Non-Formal Education training access across the board;

- How to identify and support those who have dropped out of university as well as schools;
- How to address the numerous social ills confronting our country through Non-Formal Education training;
- How to promote Non-Formal Education training so that it is not seen as a second class form of education;
- Complementing the work of organisations rather than duplicating through improved coordination and networking;
- Non-Formal Education courses online to maximise the use of technology;
- Addressing under-employment as well as unemployment; and
- Involving our national sports organisations as Non-Formal Education providers.

Madam Speaker, our five training centres located around Fiji offer basic and organic agriculture training, carpentry training, training in fibre glass boats and small-engine repairs, as well as music and contemporary performance. Our carpentry training is accredited by the Fiji National University and we continue to work with the Fiji Higher Education Commission to ensure all our training courses are accredited for the benefit of our young people. The Ministry now uses accredited training providers and trainers to conduct training in our communities.

Madam Speaker, as one who has undertaken the Duke of Edinburgh International Award (DEIA), I am delighted that the Ministry of Youth and Sports is building the international Non-Formal Education programme across the country. Both the Ministry of Education and my Ministry administered and promoted the Non-Formal Education programme through schools and youth clubs.

We are working with the Fiji Correctional Services, as I have stated before, hoping to have it introduced to the largest proportion of people in our correctional facilities, the youth across all facilities in Fiji. Further, through funding received from DEIA, we are working with the Fiji Police Force to implement the programme in an identified red zone in Natokowaqa Housing Division. This we are doing with the Pygmies Youth Club as they, the Fiji Police Force and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, work to regenerate the youth and the Housing Division in a positive direction. Madam Speaker, as you know, the Pygmies Youth Club is focused on, "Providing Young Generations Movement in Every Situation." This is testament to my Ministry, commitment towards the Non-Formal Education sector and our increasing focus on youths at risk.

Madam Speaker, our mobile skills and empowerment training are popular programmes in urban, rural and maritime communities. We offer training on leadership, management, boat masters' training, financial literacy, small engine repairs, setting up SMEs, and more in collaboration with our stakeholders. This is demand-driven, the training that provides young people the necessary skills to help create viable sources of revenue and promote small or micro-enterprise activities.

Madam Speaker, last year, in 2016, in collaboration with the Technical College of Fiji, we conducted two carpentry training courses in Koro Island as we saw the need for more skilled carpenters to speed up the rebuilding programme on the island. There were 98 young people who attended the two courses, who received certificates of attainment. This also provides the platform for these youths to pursue for further courses with Technical of Fiji or other recognised training providers. As indicated during the last sitting, seven women took part in the training and qualified. A similar training was closed last Friday by the Assistant Minister for Youth and Sports, Hon. Ilesa Delana in Bemana, Nadroga.

We also coordinated other skills training on tourism in Dakuni in Beqa and Sawani in Naitasiri in collaboration with a training provider accredited by the Fiji Higher Education Commission. The training conducted ranges from food and beverage, pottery and security, beauty therapy, customer services and tour guiding, with a total of 70 youths graduating with a certificate of

completion from the three courses conducted. This certificate allows the participants to further their training with the service provider on a much deeper level to attain the certificate of attainment.

Three weeks ago, I was in the Tikina of Tokaimalo in Ra and Nokonoko, a total of 10 villages in the Ra Province, and saw that many were still living in tents since *TC Winston* hit. Although they have all building materials, from the 'Help for Homes' Programme, there is still a shortage of carpenters and builders. I am delighted to say that through our partnership with the Technical College, we will be offering a basic carpentry course from this weekend for the people of Tokaimalo so that they can rebuild their houses. Some have received basic carpentry equipment from Habitat for Humanity, in addition to the building materials. The training will assist the communities to rebuild their homes and their lives. This is the power of Non-Formal Education as training can be offered anywhere at any time for the betterment of our communities.

Madam Speaker, last Thursday, the Ministry in collaboration with the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation announced and launched nominations for the inaugural Fiji National Youth Entrepreneurs Awards, which will be held in May this year. The Ministry's commitment to host the event stemmed from our efforts to encourage and reward entrepreneurship among youths in Fiji. The Awards will strengthen all partners in the Non-Formal Education sector and raise awareness among the nation's youth populace of the critical role that private enterprise and entrepreneurship play in economic growth and nation building. This, no doubt, will recognise the work done by many Non-Formal Education providers behind the scenes in the area of entrepreneurship.

Madam Speaker, Ministry of Youth and Sports mission also is to promote and educate young Fijians to be knowledgeable and understand our 2013 Constitution and basic Human Rights. I believe that this is essential for young Fijians to take ownership of our nation's Constitution, respect our diversity, and help foster tolerance within our communities.

Last Friday, I officiated the closing of a Human Rights and Gender-Based Violence Training on Women and Children in Suva for more than 50 youth representatives from the maritime islands of the Eastern Division. I emphasised to our young people that violence against vulnerable groups is not acceptable in our country, and that we must all work together to stop it in its tracks.

Again Madam Speaker, we are utilising a non-formal education setting to expedite an important and timely message to our young people and to break the silence that exists about this unacceptable behaviour. The Ministry is a strong advocate of unity under our Constitution, and for youths to appreciate that our diversity is our strength. Our nation has succeeded culturally, politically and economically because of our diversity, and not in spite of it.

Fiji's history has proven that intolerance can sometimes rear its ugly head in our communities. Through our programmes and commitment, we want to empower youths and prove clearly and unflinchingly that together, we can and will create a better future for us all.

Madam Speaker, I wish to end by saying that we need to recognise and support non-formal education. Regardless of its name, it is for sure an essential instrument of a life-long learning and a significant contributor to our economy.

Madam Speaker, I thank you again for giving me this opportunity to update the House on the implementation of the Non-Formal Education Policy.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement this afternoon.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Youth is an important ministry because the youths are the future leaders of our country. It is important to nurture the youths as they are assets that spearhead the workforce of this nation.

The drawing of policy should be agrarian-based, so that it maintains the youth in their provinces and help develop their own resources.

Non-formal education, as we understand, is the translation of learnt knowledge with what is available on land and sea, and translate them to productive measures. This process has to undergo training and this has to be vigorous in nature and meets the need and the target of the goal. We still need to utilise the vast land and ocean in our nation.

Madam Speaker, the implementation of dropouts in the non-formal education has to be geared to venture in rural and maritime areas, and especially in urban areas. We have seen the number of people who commit criminal activities and we do not want youths to be in this category, and if this could be taken into account by the ministry.

The review of strategies in the Non-formal Education Council has to take on board the need to marry the needs of youth into the equation. This is vital because of the use of taxpayers' money as it should be accountable.

On non-formal education policy, the Ministry has to ensure that a broad approach has to be taken and we have girls and underprivileged ones taken care of. The training centres in Fiji should be tailor-made with what is needed at various provinces.

Madam Speaker, can we have a National Referendum in the 2013 Constitution for the youths? Youths have to be taught self-discipline, they have to be taught virtues of life from the Bible and other holy books. It is not about having a degree, it is about using skills learnt and put to best use for the national development.

Madam Speaker, this morning, I was saddened to see a truck from the Corrections Services parked outside opposite our Parliament with 15 youths getting out and proceeded to the cell down below, to await their court cases. The implementation of these non-formal education policies should have been done earlier, not now. It should have been done in 2014, 2015, and 2016. The question I ask myself is, why now?

Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, the Honourable Minister, for implementing this Policy this year. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Leader of NFP or his designate to speak in response.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement on non-formal education policy implementation. It is good to see that the Ministry is partnering with line Ministries, such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health in promoting this non-competitive and non-formal education policy implementation.

Madam Speaker, most of our youth in correctional facilities are between the ages of 18 years to 30 years and whilst the programme's primary target is students and continues to be, I urge the Honourable Minister to take into account the non-student areas. I believe that the new entrants into

this programme will be target-based and needless to say, most of our youths who are in correctional facilities need this more than anyone else, together with youths with disabilities, street kids, drug addicts, sex workers, unemployed youths and youths in general, who are disadvantaged.

So, whilst we are talking about this on the one side, any training or any programme that is implemented or initiated need to be focused-based and must have relevance. So, relevance as we are talking about in this circumstance, Madam Speaker, is what has been alluded to by my colleague, the Honourable Ratu Matanitobua, the sad thing that truckloads of our youths are being brought to court to answer to charges. So this Non-Formal Education Implementation Policy must be geared towards youths, whom I had mentioned in these various sectors, and the partnership that the Ministry is working with, particularly with the Duke of Edinburg's International Award (DEIA). This is a good scheme.

The target should not only remain with those advantaged people but also with youths who have had training. And the wisdom would be to ask the Honourable Minister, as there are some older people who have had leadership training and are gathered together in clusters around the country to supplement the programme and to complement the initiatives of the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, as I said, this is a non-competitive work. The Non-Formal Education Implementation Policy must also target the Ministry of Health because of the ever-increasing NCDs in the country. Youths must be taught not only to engage in economic activities but cultural, traditional and other aspects of their lives because in the end, youths of today are the leaders of tomorrow.

Finally, Madam Speaker, we welcome this Programme but as I had said, it must be targeted, focussed and with relevancy in the entire aspects of the Programme.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call upon the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport to deliver his statement.

Government Rural Electrification Programme – 2015 To date

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I rise to make a Ministerial Statement in this august House on the Government Rural Electrification Programme from 2015 to date. I wish to thank your generosity in allowing me to speak.

Madam Speaker, while we in the urban centres enjoy the comforts of having electricity, the FijiFirst Government is committed to extend the same to those in the rural areas.

In this regard, Government through the Rural Electrification Programme has implemented projects under the following areas:

1. FEA Grid Extension and House Wiring;
2. Rural Government Station Grid Extension and House Wiring;
3. Diesel Schemes;
4. Minor House Wiring; and
5. Renewable Energy which includes solar, hydro and hybrid system.

Madam Speaker, the Rural Electrification Programme undertaken by the FijiFirst Government covers all these areas.

1. This programme is to connect our rural communities close to the FEA Grid; and

2. We have the Solar Home System Programme for those who fall outside the Grid.

Madam Speaker, on this point, let me add that it is encouraging to note that many residents within the grid have also expressed their preference for solar power electricity.

Madam Speaker, spreading our electricity grid at an accelerated pace to make up for the years of neglect in this area since Independence is no easy task. We all know of this neglect of our rural communities under successive governments since 1970.

The story that best express this neglect is that, despite the much publicised benefits of the Monasavu Hydro Scheme, immediate villages and residents in and around the project were without electricity for generations. That is until, Madam Speaker, the Bainimarama-led Government provided electricity to them. We have taken it upon ourselves as we approached the 50th year of Fiji's Independence in 2020 to provide the gift of life to all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, this is no easy task but if we do not set ourselves such targets, we will not achieve anything. We will turn to more sustainable energy sources to meet this commitment, such as harvesting energy from solar, hybrid, wind and water. Given the advance in technology, Madam Speaker, we will be expanding greater energy in looking at options in these areas for both, the Rural Electrification and Solar Home System Programmes.

Madam Speaker, electricity is no longer a luxury but a need. It impacts on all aspects of our lives and those in the past who were neglected and deprived of this energy of light to light up their lives, we are now having their needs addressed.

We have greatly eased the financial burden by removing the deposit requirement from each household for the Programme, and in our effort for an equitable roll out of the Programme, we do not believe in the size of the Programme, Madam Speaker, and I will give you one example.

It was a very emotional occasion for us in Ba last Saturday when I commissioned the Rural Electrification Programme for the people in Nasolo. It is a very small community, a settlement of 12 households and we took this Programme there, irrespective of the size and location. The residents there were grateful for the roll out, as they had been in the past, denied electricity, only because those in power during in those times deemed that they were too small a community to come under this Programme. Madam Speaker, I want to say that they were at peace.

You may laugh, you can laugh, no problem, but I tell you that it was an emotional and tearful occasion. As soon as it was commissioned, we can see the smiles on the small children's faces.

Madam Speaker, I was also privileged to be part of the Northern Tour a fortnight ago with my colleagues from the Ministry and our Honourable Prime Minister. Wherever we went the people came out in numbers, firstly in Cakaudrove, to thank the FijiFirst Government for its development achievements and in particular, for bringing electricity to their lives, that will no doubt be a game-changer for them. Their children will have light for their education.

Madam Speaker, electricity access is a key driver for productivity, especially given the push for greater co-operation in the agriculture sector.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister and fellow Ministers were humbled by their gratitude and moved by the fact that each school we went to in the Northern Division, the children sang the national anthem in our three major languages, irrespective of their racial background. As we light up their lives through the electricity roll-out programme under both REP and SHS, they lit

up our lives by showing pride in our nation and its achievement under the Bainimarama-led Government.

Madam Speaker, it is in this context of bringing electricity into the lives of once deprived communities that I highlight to this august House the achievements of the Rural Electrification Programme, as follows.

FEA Grid extension and house wiring: Madam Speaker, in 2015, a total of 1,109 rural households which is equivalent to 5,545 persons were connected to FEA power network in the Central, Western and Northern Divisions. For the period of 2016 to 2017, a total of 51 Rural Electrification Projects were commissioned and completed, providing power connection to 692 homes and in terms of persons, it is around 3,460 in the rural and remote communities in Fiji. They did not have electricity, Madam Speaker.

I am just talking about 2015, and here we have Honourable Members telling us that we went there and promised in 2014. But I want to ask them and this is what I said yesterday, what about all these past Governments, past political leaders, those who have been residing there for 80 years or 100 years, where were they?

(Laughter)

Let them laugh! Let them laugh! People are watching, hearing about them.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- And they were waiting for them in those respective areas.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry, through the Fiji Electricity Authority will continue with the Rural Electrification Programme in 2017.

Madam Speaker, the Department of Energy will also continue work in the provision of electricity services to the remote and rural areas in doing its major achievements for 2016 which include house wiring and connection to the FEA Grid for a total of 1,406 houses and in terms of persons, it is around 7,030 with the total budget of around \$2.3 million.

Madam Speaker, the breakdown of 1,406 as per Divisions are as follows:

- Central/Eastern Division – 517;
- Western Division – 467; and
- Northern Division – 42.

Rural Government Station, Grid Extension and House Wiring: Madam Speaker, the Ministry through the Department of Works continues to supply power to Government Stations with a total of 143 households and in terms of persons, it is 715 and 16 classroom blocks benefiting during the 2015 to 2017 period, with a total cost of \$900,000. In doing so, Madam Speaker, we were able to bring light to 640 students, including 340 boarders. They did not have these facilities, Madam Speaker, before 2015.

Diesel Scheme: Madam Speaker, Government continues to provide technical assistance to communities with around 400 operational diesel schemes. We intend to introduce hybrid system to these same communities. In this regard, the integrating of these existing diesel schemes, Madam

Speaker, and its reticulation system with a large solar system will increase hours of electricity supply with very minimum use of diesel.

Among renewable and alternative energy programmes, Madam Speaker, Solar Home System is an important scheme which takes electricity in a sustainable manner to those who are remote from the existing electricity grid. Madam Speaker, there is a lot of potential in this scheme, as we commit to a greener and smarter Fiji in respect of its carbon footprint.

As international ambassadors for climate change, Madam Speaker, Fiji under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister is heading and hosting the COP23 later this year in November. Every small reduction we make to our carbon footprint, is an important step towards mitigation against global warming and climate change which greatly impact on smaller island nations in the Pacific, and the SHS Programme is one such contributor to a reduced carbon footprint in Fiji.

Renewable energy, which includes solar, hydro and hybrid system: Madam Speaker, the total of 3,200 Solar Home System that were rolled over from 2015 to 2016 and an additional 500 Solar Home now is part of the 2016- 2017 Work Programme. This brings our Solar Home System Programme to a total of 3,700 so in terms of persons, it will be around 18,500. You can imagine, Madam Speaker, it is huge. These poor people in our communities and remote areas were without these facilities. The total cost of this project is around \$12.5 million.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, another 600 Solar Home Systems will be reinstalled for the houses that were damaged (an Honourable Member from the other side raised this) during the *TC Winston*. Government has already called the tender for the supply of the equipment.

Madam Speaker, under Renewable and Sustainable Rural Electrification Programme, we also have the following programmes.

Mini Hydro: Madam Speaker, during the 2015-2017 period, three hydro projects were recommissioned in the Northern, Eastern and Western Divisions to a total cost of \$2.2 million, benefitting 501 households.

Madam Speaker, Somosomo Hydro was a new major project in the Rural Electrification Programme, benefitting 400 homes, schools and businesses, including the Government Station. Further connection will take place in the settlements and villages by the end of the 1st Quarter next year. Government contributed \$7.5 million for this project.

Hybrid System: Madam Speaker, in terms of producing electricity through the Hybrid System, a total of 183 households had benefitted from the three locations in the two Divisions; namely, Eastern and Northern Divisions to be at a total cost of \$4.9 million. The additional benefits of this Hybrid System is that, they have the capability to supply electricity 24/7, save on fuel consumption and are environmentally friendly.

Madam Speaker, there has been a degree of slowdown in our rollout, and unfortunately, we have had no favours from the weather. Post-*TC Winston* recovery priority, and the long and wet season has impacted on the projections we had in place. Nevertheless, Madam Speaker, we have moved on and as we look forward to a cooler drier cyclone-free months ahead, we have in place plans to make up for lost time, and achieved the projected projects come end of 2017.

Madam Speaker, as outlined earlier in my address to this august House, the Rural Electrification Programme and the Solar Home System, among other alternative and renewable energy initiatives are major drivers of taking electricity to our people. We cannot afford to keep any

Fijians in the dark. I have no illusion about the path for providing electricity like any other utility, and infrastructure programme requires time to explore the best options, and allow for a time to use best practices in its implementation.

Madam Speaker, as I also emphasised earlier, this is not a task to be left on a drawing board. The accelerated implementation of the two Programmes - REP and SHS has only happened because of the vision and commitment of the FijiFirst Government to provide this basic need TO as many Fijians as possible in the shortest period of time.

There are no 'ifs' and 'buts' about it, Madam Speaker. The general wellness of all Fijians and important drivers like education and productivity are tied in providing this energy source to all Fijians. And under this twin Programmes, we have the structure to which we have added flexibility to make great strides in meeting our stated aim of 'power to all', Madam Speaker, put by our Honourable Prime Minister in respect of providing electricity for all Fijians.

Madam Speaker, on this note, I conclude my statement by reiterating that the FijiFirst Government is focussed on the service delivery, and we will reach out to all those who do not have access to electricity.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak in response.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for the very comprehensive update on the rural electrification works carried out by Government through the Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA), Department of Energy and the contractors, and to say that electricity is a basic commodity is an understatement. We all know that in this modern era of technology, irrespective of where one lives, electricity becomes a lifeline upon in which communities can bring themselves up to par with the rest of the world.

I applaud all the work that have been carried out by the Ministry for the rural electrification and I thank the Honourable Minister for his oversight of those works. Let me say as my response, Madam Speaker, that more could have been achieved. More remains to be done, many homes still await the provision of electricity, despite having been on the waiting list to the Department of Rural Electrification since 2007. You can correct on me this, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let me suggest to the Honourable Minister, who has all the habit of saying that people have been waiting without infrastructure since 1970 to grasp the basic fact that the FijiFirst Government has been running this country now for 11 long years, that makes them the second longest running Government after the Alliance Government. Therefore, they have more than enough time to carry out their work, and stop shuffling the blame to others like little children.

Madam Speaker, our villages and settlements in Drauleba Settlement, Waisa, Navutu, Naterumai, Naqaraivi, Vatudavila, are still waiting for their electricity connection, as well as Nairevurevunicagi, Sasawira and Veiraisi Settlements. Roma Village, Madam Speaker, they have requested and was promised to have solar by the Office of the Prime Minister two years ago but todate, it remains a dream for them.

Madam Speaker, let me just say that the report by the Honourable Minister today is flawed because in some areas, the provision of power supply simply does not make sense. I say this because in some instances, electricity grid was constructed to cater for certain areas, like in Tailevu North

electricity was connected up to Wailotua Village and then start again in Nayavu, in between the villages of Malabe, Nasautoka, Naveicovatu, Nabouva, Naibita, Naveiveiwali up to Tobu Village, they are still waiting for their electricity connection. They were promised to have electricity connection by Christmas 2014 by the former Minister for Works, Mr. Pio Tikoduadua. To-date, all these villages are patiently waiting for connections.

Similar sentiments were raised from the villagers of Mataso in Ra, Batinikia in Serua, *Tikina* of Wainikoroiluva and *Tikina* of Naqarawai in Namosi, Wauosi Village and Nasivikoso in Navosa.

For solar, Madam Speaker, I just like to give the Honourable Minister one example. In Vunisea, Kadavu, Government installed a new solar energy power station there, however this has not been fully operational and the villages of Namalata, Namuana, Wailevu, Mokoisa and Tavuki as originally planned have yet to receive their supply of electricity.

Madam Speaker, in Vanua Levu, the Nabouwalu Hybrid Power Project was first initiated in 1995 to include utilisation of wind and solar energy to diesel generators as backup to the system. The system was established with the view to demonstrate the applicability of wind, solar, diesel generator hybrid system for remote power areas. The system was to provide power to the whole of the Nabouwalu Government Station and Nabouwalu Village.

I am made to understand, Madam Speaker, that todate, power is still provided to the people of Nabouwalu on an intermittent supply from 4.00 a.m. to 12 midday, then from 2.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m. daily. In fact, Madam Speaker, last week there was no power supply from Friday 10th to Friday 17th March, 2017. Government officers in Nabouwalu had to rely on the generator power from the PA's office, imagine then the villagers and the school children.

Let me now highlight some challenges faced by the current rural electrification consumers in some Rewa River Delta villages. Power poles are tilting dangerously due to rotting, corroded cross-arms which sit on power lines. Cross-arms's life-span is ten years and yet most cross-arms are now over 20 years plus on power poles in Rewa. Cross-arms are needed to be maintained at a certain height because they carry the conductor which supports the insulator enabling power supply through. What is the Government's plan for 2017 for the renewal of these cross-arms on power poles? I hope the Government realises that it is an accident waiting to happen with villagers and pedestrians.

Also to the black wire lines, Madam Speaker, I had earlier requested Government assistance on this matter, following disasters like *Tropical Cyclone Winston* and struggling villagers being asked to reinstall them at their own cost as advised by FEA.

Madam Speaker, I suggest for Government to stop hoodwinking people and take a real hard look at itself. Have they reduced consumer's contribution from 10 percent to 5 percent in 2008, refund all deposits without any interest earned and reduced subsidies to consumers? Consumers may have benefited but Government may have taken more than they could chew and as a result are now looking to divesting shares of FEA in order for the entity to be a truly independent, viable and commercial entity in the long run. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- You really gained because I thought that was the first bell. I now call on the Leader of the NFP or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I share the sentiments of the Honourable Member before me. I think this Government would do better, Madam Speaker, if they stopped berating past governments and Parliaments and look at what they have done over the last 11 years.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If they have done something good, do not come and brag here, just do it, that is your job. Do not come and brag here about a little community that you helped, that is your job, and you are supposed to do that.

Let me just come back to this idea, I think the Honourable Minister went to the 1970s and 1980s. Let me just give him some examples of why he is so wrong.

Installed generation capacity, Madam Speaker, today is roughly about 237 megawatts, comprising of 80 megawatts from the Monasavu Hydro Scheme, 40 megawatts from Nadarivatu Hydro Scheme in Viti Levu and about 112 megawatts of diesel capacity in 14 stations around the country, but that 80 megawatts the Hydro Scheme, when was that conceived? In the late 1970s, completed in the early 1980s by the then Government, by the then Parliament?

Of course, Madam Speaker, not everything could have been done in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and we acknowledge what this Government is doing in terms of extending some of the infrastructure projects, but for them to come and keep bragging here, keep berating the leaders of the past, leaders of Parliaments, it makes no sense. They need to spend some time thinking seriously about where the pitfalls are and what should be done.

I will give another example, Madam Speaker. In my area, if you go from Seaqqa right up to Dreketi, they put these poles and power lines and they are supposed to go from one settlement to another and lo behold they left one settlement. When I went there, I found out that they were all my close relatives. They still have not got it, I do not know why it was not done but if you are going from this end to the other end, Madam Speaker, you would have that completed and I have raised this with the Minister.

These are the examples and Honourable Radrodro actually talked about areas where things needs to be done, so we needed the Honourable Minister to come out here and say, "Look, we have done things here, that's fine, these are areas that needs to be done. This is the kind of thing we need", not talking about someone who did not have power in the 1970s. Of course, a lot of people did not have power in the 1970s and in the 1980s.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- No, I mean basically it has become a habit of Ministers on the other side to rubbish everything that was done in the past and I take exception to that because our Party's leaders were sitting in this Parliament and other Parliaments and many of them contributed towards the development of this country over the last 30 or 40 years. Let us get real. Let us talk about what we did in the last 11 years and then talk about what needs to be done because for the first seven years, there was no Opposition. Some of you people were in Government so you need to understand that, so let us talk about the last 11 years instead of the last 30 or 40 years.

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Of course, some people would be very grateful and I will say this to the Ministers who go there, but do not come and brag about it here and talk about how they were crying and what they were saying to you. This is the kind of bragging that they do and then when they get told that there are so many areas in the country where there is no power and where they have been promising things over the last several years, then they start jumping upside down, Madam Speaker.

Let us get real and electricity, Madam Speaker, is very important. We support any effort that extends the availability of electricity to people in the rural communities. We fully support that and we are saying that it has to be done systematically and at an appropriate time when the Government puts out a particular budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will now move on to the next item in the Order Paper.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

The Vision

HON. SPEAKER.- Before we move on to the next item on the Agenda, I will allow Honourable Viliame Gavoka to make a personal explanation. Pursuant to Standing Order 80, the matter to be explained must be personal to the Member seeking permission to make a personal explanation.

The procedure cannot be used to make a personal explanation on behalf of another Member. This process is used to explain to Parliament, matters of a personal nature that may reflect on the honour or integrity of a Member. It can be used to correct an earlier answer or statement, for example, by a Minister or by a Member to correct an earlier statement or explain something that has occurred outside the Parliament, but it is not another channel for taking issue with or debating a statement made in debate or outside the Parliament on the grounds that it is mistaken or wrong.

In the past, I had allowed the Member to make a personal statement and the same requirements will apply here as well. The Honourable Gavoka will read out his personal explanation to which I have a copy. If the Honourable Member deviates from the script, I will ask him to take his seat. There is no debate on the statement. Thank you and I now give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. On 30th September, 2016, *Hansard* has reported that an Honourable Member had said this about me during the debate on His Excellency the President's speech, and I quote:

“Prophecies are not our foretell, Madam Speaker, for that we go to Nadroga and maybe closer to home like Honourable Viliame Gavoka who knows a lot about false prophecies, something that happened two years ago.”

And if I may, I shall put title to this personal statement as the “vision”.

Madam Speaker, a pastor was shown a vision in November 2009 about a tsunami that would devastate Fiji occurring in June 2010. The pastor, Madam Speaker, is the title we give to a man of God, also known as a padre, a minister, man of the cloth or *talatala* or a priest. The pastor had served with his pastoral duties for many years in one of the Pentecostal denominations and was very well respected. At one time he had served as Dean of a Bible College. He shared his vision widely throughout Fiji both in the mainstream and Pentecostal churches and the vast majority believed his vision. He based what he saw on the Book of Amos, Chapter 3 verse 7 and I quote, “Surely the sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plans to his servants the prophets.”

Into the months of May and June, 2010, prayers and fastings were intense throughout most of Fiji. A prayer mountain in Sigatoka operated 24/7 with varieties of prayer groups; in Suva and other major city centres groups got together in prayer; an Indo-Fijian pastor in Lautoka had his church fast for 42 days; outer islands such as Vatulele had reportedly fasted for weeks, et cetera. It became

widely known throughout Fiji, gripping the country and the pastor came under intense scrutiny to the point of harassment by the authorities. Outside of the churches, the authorities, including the media did not know how to handle the situation.

As for me, I was CEO of the Fiji Visitors Bureau (now Tourism Fiji) when the Asian tsunami hit on Boxing Day 2004 killing some 200,000 people including tourists from the UK and Europe. I am sure most of us will still remember images of tourists on the beaches in countries such as Thailand trying to flee the huge waves invading the coast lines.

The pastor came to our church in Sigatoka and shared his vision (I was not there), and everyone was convinced that the vision was true. I also spoke with pastors from other denominations who also advocated prayer. Knowing the vulnerability of the resorts, I decided to alert the hoteliers by e-mail about the vision by the pastor. I knew many would scoff and that I would be ridiculed, but silence was not an option. Somehow my e-mail was seen as an attempt to destabilize Government and I got arrested, spending 4 days in CPS and prosecuted, which eventually became a *nolle prosequi* exonerating me after some months of hearing.

I was then Chairman of Fiji Rugby Union at that time, a high profile position, and the publicity surrounding the case was intense. While the churches believed that prayers had saved Fiji and that I had done what any caring Christian would do; others had a field day, scoffing and ridiculing which continue to this day.

On 11th February, 2011, eight months later, an earthquake had struck Christchurch in New Zealand killing some 185 people and devastating the city. A month later on 11th March, 2011, a tsunami triggered by the Great Sendai Earthquake had hit Japan which killed more than 18,000 people and created a swathe of devastation for some 90 kilometres of coastline. It also damaged a power plant compounding a tragedy in Japan. We all saw that wall of water on TV, unstoppable and horrifying, destroying everything in its path; roads, buildings, airports, lives, et cetera.

Some people began to wonder if perhaps Fiji was indeed saved by prayers, or someone in Japan or New Zealand was shown a vision which he/she was reluctant, afraid or too ashamed to share. Perhaps in both NZ and Japan they did not have a crazy Chairman of Rugby, stupid enough to give profile to a vision of impending disaster like we did in Fiji.

Sometime later, Madam Speaker, I became Chairman of Fijian Holdings Property and as part of accessing risks, we were briefed by some insurance assessors about Suva and I was amazed when they highlighted Suva's vulnerability to tsunamis, and what would happen if a tsunami struck. What the risk assessors shared with us had similarities with what the pastor had seen in his vision. I will not go into details, but suffice to say, that engineers have established that the undersea foundation at Kings Wharf is very soft. Any violent movement, such as an earthquake would collapse that foundation into Suva Harbour, creating a wall of water through the process of displacement and driving into Suva.

You may know, Madam Speaker, that in 1954 a tsunami came into Suva

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of Order.

We have never had a personal explanation in this respect. I am just thinking about what the stratosphere, demographics, water, tidal waves, insurance companies, et cetera has that got to do by way of a personal explanation. I just want some clarification, Madam Speaker, because this obviously can open up a Pandora's Box. We are now going back into time, we are talking about criminal offences.

We understand that personal explanation can be by way of clarifying an explanation, something that is written in the *Hansard* per se and maybe there is some mis-communication in the manner in which it may have come across in the *Hansard* but this is now giving us a whole time frame and the justification regarding for example, visions et cetera. I just want to know, Madam Speaker, we are setting a precedent here because we have lots of personal explanations on the front.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Actually he was relating to a statement that was made against him and it talked about false prophecies and I think this is why he is highlighting all these false prophecies to justify that point.

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

We all remember the tsunami that came into Suva in 1954 which was a result of part of a reef in Kadavu that collapsed, I mean that is scientifically proven. It is a fact that a lot of companies and embassies wanted to relocate to higher grounds in Suva.

Madam Speaker, as majority of Fijians in Fiji are Christians, who believe in biblically inspired visions, perhaps the Government should ask the heads of the main churches (mainstream and Pentecostals) to look into any vision, and advise Government if it is truly inspired. The churches have their own ways through scriptures to discern if a vision is from God or not. Government can then act accordingly and assure the populace as opposed to panic reigning in our midst. Anyone who is shown a vision must not be afraid to share it, we must let those qualified, like the heads of the churches vet it and advice.

Madam Speaker, most sceptics ask, why God said nothing about *TC Winston*, but we must remember that cyclones and floods are known in advance and we are warned, whereas earthquakes and tsunamis are sudden and without warning.

TC Winston caused 44 lives which we all regret and should not happen, *Typhoon Haiyan* of the Philippines, the strongest in history caused 6,300 lives. Both *TC Winston* and *Typhoon Haiyan* were known days in advance and struck over many hours with the death toll at 6,344 combined. By comparison, the tsunami in Japan travelled at 800 kilometres an hour from its epicentre which was 130 kilometres from land, meaning that within 9.75 minutes it had caused immeasurable devastation and took more than 18,000 lives.

There is very little time to prepare for earthquakes and tsunamis, and as we live in the 'ring of fire', we must, as a God fearing people rely on God and not instil fear in those he has shown a vision. I admire the pastor and his courage as he did not let up with his determination to share his vision widely over many months while being ridiculed and harassed. I met him for the first time when we were in detention and he apologized to me profusely, but I said, "No, don't apologize to me, I'm a nobody, you are a courageous person and you did what was right."

I was not shown that vision, but I warned people about it; people who mocked me and continue to do so to this day, but given the same set of circumstances, I will do it again tomorrow. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now call upon the Honourable Attorney General to move his motion.

LAND TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2017

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move that:

- a) The Land Transport (Amendment) Bill 2017 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) The Bill must pass through one stage of a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) The Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament and the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament today, Tuesday, 21st March, 2017; and
- d) One hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as a Member moving this motion.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. In 2013 the Land Transport Authority (LTA) introduced the photographic detection devices or speed cameras to better monitor and safeguard road users and in 2016 an additional 6 speed cameras were added to the existing 5 that were already in operation.

Madam Speaker, the advent of photographic detection devices has brought to light the inability of the Authority to issue Traffic Infringement Notices (TINs) in accordance with the current legislative timeframes. This inability of the Authority or LTA to comply with the legal provisions has led to recent complaints by members of the public at large regarding the manner in which the notifications are developed and the actual despatch of it.

As a result, Madam Speaker, there is an urgent need for the review of the current TIN processes. This is very urgent and let me put it into perspective because this amendment seeks not only to amend the provisions in reference to the speed cameras but also in respect of all LTA Infringement Notices.

To put it into perspective, Madam Speaker, currently there are 99,686 Traffic Infringement Notices before the courts in Fiji. In the Central Division there are 77,489 pending court matters regarding TINs. They have only disposed 3,121 apart from the 77,000 and there are 2,056 that have been initiated. In the Western Division, there is 362 that has been disposed of separately and there are 2,304 that has been initiated and 21,236 is still pending. Similarly in the Northern Division, 961 is pending, only 330 separate to that has been dealt with and 151 has been initiated.

Madam Speaker, the laws were then drafted back in the 1990s obviously assumed a number of things which are no longer relevant today. As a result of the inability of the LTA to be able to despatch these notices, we have a huge level of absence of natural justice. As has been highlighted by the Honourable Minister and as has also been highlighted in the media, these inconsistencies relate to timeframes.

Let me take you through that, Madam Speaker, for most TIN offences, a TIN must be issued within 14 days of the commission of an offence and placed before a Magistrate within seven days from the issuance of the TIN. A person to whom the TIN is issued then has only 21 days to either make a statutory declaration stating that the vehicle was not driven by that person, or driven by another person, the vehicle was in charge of another person or the person did not own the vehicle or of course to pay the fixed penalty.

For a TIN issued where the offence is captured by a photographic detection device speed camera, the Authority has 14 days from the commission of the offence to process the image and an additional 14 days to issue a TIN by mail to the owner of the vehicle. The person then has 21 days to select the options also that I have just read out.

Madam Speaker, what actually has happened recently is that the persons have in fact received the TINs 21 days over and above within which they are supposed to pay. Some have received it 6 weeks later and some received it two months later. So, there is obviously a huge problem.

The other issue, of course is, Madam Speaker, these are Traffic Infringement Notices, and even if a person were, if we were to assume that they got the TIN in time, if for example they go past the 21 days for some reason or the other, they actually have to appear in court; there is no way out of it. For example if you are driving your car and you get booked in Maui Bay and you live in Nausori, when you have to appear before the court, you actually have to go all the way to Sigatoka Court or vice versa if you are from Lautoka, you get booked somewhere in Pacific Harbour, you have to come all the way to Navua Court.

These are some of the current regulatory provisions that actually make it very inefficient for modern day traffic regulatory framework. It is very inconvenient to members of the public, Madam Speaker. It also means that we are treating Traffic Infringement Notices as automatically a criminal offence. Most of the people who do get booked are law abiding citizens, they may have missed the date by somewhat reason or the other, and they do not necessarily want to appear before the courts. And some of them because they have never appeared before the court, they go and hire a lawyer, an additional cost to it too. A lot of people are quite weary of the court system. So, again it adds an additional burden to ordinary members of the public.

Madam Speaker, what the amendment seeks to do is actually quite simple and it is obviously this amendment is quite urgent because as we speak, people are actually getting booked. It is not just for speed camera offences, but other offences and you will see, Madam Speaker, why it is important to do that. The actual Bill has a transitional provision that relates to people that have already been booked and have not appeared before the court system, it also relates to people who are currently being booked as we speak, as we are talking about this and how we are going to deal with them.

So, Madam Speaker, what the amendment seeks to do is this, is that it now gives the LTA 21 days to prepare the TIN and to despatch the TIN. Of course some TINs are issued on the spot so, for example, if you have a failed tail light and they issue a notice on the spot saying, "pay this fine"; that is issued on the spot.

There are certain offences where they need to go and process the TIN and they may need to go back or for example with the speed cameras the photographic images are sent to LTA, they review the images, they get the picture, they see the number plate, they identify who the owner is and then they are able to issue the TIN itself. So, they are given 21 days to do that, then the person against whom the TIN has been issued will now have as proposed in the amendment 90 days to pay.

They are given 3 months to pay the penalty. They also, Madam Speaker, as proposed in the amendment, will be allowed and can now, after this amendment, pay the penalty in instalments. So, for example, if the penalty may be \$80, the fine is \$80, they can actually pay this over a period of three months. So, because some people may be wage-earners, some people may find it worrisome to pay a lump sum of \$80. At the moment, LTA does not accept non lump sum payments, you cannot do instalments. Other jurisdictions allow that, in Australia and various state government actually allow instalment payments. So, maybe now, it is convenient to pay, say \$25 a fortnight, and that should be allowed.

Now, we have 90 days to pay. In that period, Madam Speaker, of course I can challenge that, for example, I say, "yes, the vehicle is mine but my cousin was actually driving it, it is allowed at the moment and you file a declaration it goes off to LTA. So, you actually get off that.

Now the other issue, Madam Speaker, of course is that if given that we now we have three months to pay, if for example I do not pay, the penalty will then increase after 90 days, because I have been given three months to pay. I have not made any arrangements, I have done no instalments and not paid the amount, I will then have an additional penalty. That penalty will be decided by the Honourable Minister for Land Transport by way of regulations.

Now, also, if I do not pay and I want to travel, there will be a Stop Departure Order because I have been given three months to pay, so please pay your fine before you leave the country. In France and other jurisdictions, you cannot even leave the country, even if you do not pay a parking metre fine. You have to pay that. So, arrangement, of course will be made for them to be able to pay on the day itself and they can leave. This is an incentive for people to pay and now they have been given 90 days.

If for example, and at the moment the practice will be adhered to, I have an outstanding fine, it is more than 90 days, I then go to renew my licence, assuming it is expired or about to be expired, they will not renew it until I pay my fine.

Madam Speaker, you are then given an additional nine months to pay, assuming that I cannot pay within 90 days, I do not pay. So, the Minister will, through regulation impose the penalty on it, and issue a fine. I may not be travelling overseas and it does not affect me, but I will still be given three months to pay. If after that period has exhausted, I still do not pay, then LTA can take further action against me. For example, then they can say to the court, "look that person has been given actually effectively 12 months to pay. We actually want to cancel his licence altogether or we want to move some form of demerit points." So, that is now the main provision in the amendment.

So, Madam Speaker, what it does is that, it gives the customer of LTA the opportunity now to pay the fine over a longer period of time, it gives them the ability to pay the fine in instalments and also at the same time it incentivises the customer of LTA to pay within the three months or the 90 days because if they do not, there is an additional penalty that will be imposed on top of that fixed penalty that is imposed by the regulation in any case.

Madam Speaker, we also have, as I mentioned, the transitional provision. So, the transitional provision Madam Speaker, does this. At the commence of the Act, a new framework for TINS will be established if they discuss necessary to set out how current processes will be transitioned to the new framework.

Clause 6 of the Bill provides for transitional provision to cater for the current TINS issued or the proceedings currently before the courts in relation to TINS. At the date of the commencement of the new Act, the Minister will decide. All the proceedings currently underway will be deemed to have been withdrawn legally. So, there are lot of people who are appear before the Courts at the moment because they received it way out of time. So, there will be deemed to be withdrawn.

Furthermore, all current TINS issued before the new Act or a new amendment commences will be deemed to be issued on the date that the new Act commences and will be subject to the new TIN processes. So, in other words, Madam Speaker, if for example I received the TIN three weeks ago or one month ago, as soon as this new amendment comes into effect, my 90 days starts then, forget the two or three weeks that passed before. It is only fair that everyone starts in a level playing field. It will give a lot of people a lot of relief to ensure that everyone is in the same level playing field.

This basically means, Madam Speaker, that even individuals who have owners proceedings already instituted, and are having difficulty to seeing them through will be subject to the new and the

fair processes. For this person, Madam Speaker, it is important to note that they have 90 days to pay before the commencement of the Act as I have just stated to pay the fixed penalties without incurring any additional fee or being subjected to other enforcement measures.

Madam Speaker, I have highlighted the gist of what is going to happen. If you look at the amendment itself, the transitional provision is in Clause 6 which relates to Section 93, Section 92 of course talks about infringement notice and the time period in respect of that and the fixed penalties that will be charged after the 90 days.

Madam Speaker, I would like to oppose the respond to any other issues that may arise in the discussions regarding this debate, but at the moment you know in my hand, there is here a list of all the TINS that are issued, it is a whole plethora of TINS that get issued by LTA. This will now ensure that everyone will be treated equally and fairly. This will also make and send the message to the LTA first and foremost, Madam Speaker, is about ensuring the safety of people on our roads. The reason why we have speed camera, not to make money from the Infringement Notices, but to tell the people "please drive at a particular speed so you do not cause accidents." Will rather that no one has an accident that they actually collect \$100 or \$80. That \$180 in overall scheme of things does not matter. Fijian lives matter to us, people have leg imputations, people lose their sight, people becoming incapacitated because of accidents, we do not want that.

This, at the same time, however, Madam Speaker, provides a fair process so that the LTA has enough time but also members of the public against whom a particular offence has been noted against. They will be given enough time to pay. We also recognise the fact that some people would have actually, not for example worn a seat belt, would have carried out some things against the regulatory provisions at any timeframe. This also will be happening too and I understand also we have been having discussions with the Minister and the LTA board. They are also looking at improving the services by having, for example some of their offices open on Saturdays too, to make it convenient for members of the public to be able to make these payments.

Also, Madam Speaker, it will take away all of these the very basic issues out of the court system and the court system then can deal with family law matters, criminal matters, civil matters and be able to get much quicker hearing dates.

Imagine, Madam Speaker, we have at the moment in the Nasinu Court alone has 64,777 cases; Navua has 10,102 cases, and even Tailevu has 1,399 cases, Vunidawa has 87 cases, Nausori has 1,100 cases. All of these Madam Speaker, will go when these amendments are actually put into effect. The reason why this is an urgent matter is because we have been consulting also and of course by a lot of people. The Honourable Minister has been talking to the board because we need to address this because it is a real life issue. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Now I invite comments from the floor if any? There being been no comments from the floor and there will be no speech in reply. Honourable Bulitavu you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, may I just comment on the Bill that is before the House. Probably, we on this side of the House totally agree of the ideas that are there of what the people or the current cases that are the backlog within our traffic infringements. But again, probably will query the process given, it is supposed to go through the normal procedure, where the public can also verify the statements that have been told to us by the Honourable Minister for Economy and Honourable Attorney-General. I also note that, Madam Speaker, it would be unfair too for those who have already paid, taking into account those who are in the Court system and their

cases will be withdrawn, but also those who have already paid, should you consider them, probably their views too can be heard within the Committee.

The other thing probably that needs to be inserted somewhere there, a warning notice that is supposed to say 100 or 200 metres before the speed cameras to warn drivers, given that is what you have alluded to. The whole idea is not to make money but to prevent over speeding. So we can have warning signs for speed cameras like what we have in overseas, to warn drivers if they are coming at a speed which is over the limit. These are issues that probably could be properly ventilated when it comes to the Committee and also we can check the consultation done by the Honourable Minister. Although we have a list of cases that are there from all the courts around here in Fiji but for those who will have opposing views can come to the Standing Committees to give their views on what should be included or any other amendments they would like to be included in this particular Bill.

That is my comment at the moment, Madam Speaker. We support the content and the idea but it has to go through the normal process.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, the motion that is before the House is a Motion under Section 51 that is seeking to amend the Land Transport (Amendment) Bill through the process of Standing Order 51, which is trying to do away with the usual process of bringing a Bill here.

So the first problem that we have is notice. It is a notice that you bring in a motion under Standing Order 51 without notice. So I and a few from this side of the House are not aware of what is happening until it is being explained. It has been explained to us in the sense that we are to do away with the process and also, unlike as we used to have before, where we have one hour or two hours that will give us time to digest what is intended in the process. This is to be debated straight-away and that has been done and I assume that the Honourable Attorney-General has already spoken and that is it, and after this, it will be put to a vote.

So we are totally unaware fully of what is happening. From listening I can assess that there is a lacuna in the laws and there is a need for this. But the question that I ask, why is the need here at this moment in time when it should have been discovered from 2016, so we can afford to follow the process. We do not need to put it to the Standing Committee to go through the whole process of inviting comments, but at least to make the public aware so that the public should know that we are being inclusive that they are not being forgotten in the process of making law which is the role of this House.

Understanding of course that they may be experts, fair enough. They have looked at the law, they are familiar with the law everyday but we should not forget the remainder of the people or the public and it is the role of this House to be always inclusive in making laws and that is the real point that I wish to raise and the reason why I am opposing the motion.

I can understand the need but I ask, what is the urgency now? It was urgent the last time the Parliament sat because it was urgent too even in January or even December because that amendment has been there for 2016. The amount of cases has now been left to reach 64,000 cases; why did they leave it until 64,000 and 10,000 in Navua and 1,000 for them to discover this urgency? So it is not our fault, it is possibly the fault of the very people that are administering this for bringing this late and they are asking us to sacrifice the whole process. So I can understand the need but I am saying that we should not do away the process under Standing Order 51 we can still afford to be inclusive and for those reasons, I oppose the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now invite the Honourable Koya to have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will not be long. Madam Speaker, just hearing the two submissions made by the Honourable Members, just quickly, even a cursory glance on this particular Bill will tell you that the way that it has been sounded up on the other side is that, it is a wholesale change to the Land Transport Act, it is not, Madam Speaker.

The cursory glance of this particular document will tell you it really is just the facilitating exercise with respect to a couple of things that need to be addressed rather urgently. This is why it has been brought under Standing Order 51, I am sure the Honourable Attorney-General will address that. It really clears the time in Court for a lot of cases which is actually good, sufficient and especially affects those in rural areas who suffers from this. In certain cases, Madam Speaker, these are honest people that get affected by and they really do not have to be spending a whole day in Court.

So those are the small things and one of the most important things that need to be said, Madam Speaker, that it is just this particular one measure of the small amendment to the Act, it actually adds to or makes it even better, makes the LTA a little bit more efficient in their duties when they are actually doing this. One is the provisions that are being spelt out in this, it refers to section 92 (2), it says the traffic infringement notice and I quote:

“It must be issued and despatched by the authority within 21 days from the date the offence is committed and any traffic infringement notice issued or despatched beyond this period is deemed invalid.”

It is an exercise that it actually makes it more efficient if someone at LTA is not doing their job, then infringement notice becomes invalid. So, it is actually not something that whole-heartedly changes the law with respect to the Land Transport Act, Madam Speaker. With those few words, Madam Speaker, I support the Bill wholeheartedly.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the Bill that is before us. Madam Speaker there is an urgency to this Bill. The reason being, it had been very well explained by the mover of this motion and one has to understand the manner in which this Bill has been designed. The whole objective of this Bill is to assist all Fijians. There have been a lot of issues, Madam Speaker, in regards to these 21 days, there have been a lot of sessions that we attended to and there was a request from our Fijians and this is what exactly we are doing because they found a lot of difficulties. So many Opposition Members called me about this. So I hope you are all on the same page and that is to support this Bill and just to make comment to our Honourable Member on the signage.

I wish to inform this House, Madam Speaker, that definitely we are going to have signage before all these big cameras. We are also going to allow our Fijians to pay their fines in all LTA Offices. Before, if you are fined in Suva, then if you are residing in Lautoka you have to come to Suva and pay, but now you can pay these fees in any LTA office. So these are all changes that we are doing for the benefit of all Fijians, Madam Speaker, and therefore I request all Honourable Members to support this Bill that is before us. And also, Madam Speaker, the beauty of this Bill that I sees is the time that has now been given, 90 days and also the instalment, this was never ever before in the LTA Act but now this Bill will allow those who are not in a position, to pay in full to pay in instalment. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Inia Seruiratu.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23 (1) is suspended, so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m., in order to complete the Government business in the Order Paper.

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you and now I invite comments from the floor, if any. I now call on the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE LAND TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2017

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, you know that this side of the House would like to work with the Government in Parliament. The only Bill we knew about this morning was Bill No. 7, which is the Electricity Bill. We did not know that this other Bill on the LTA was coming to us until the AG stood up to.....

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition, we are now talking on the motion by the Leader of Government to suspend the Standing Orders in order for us to allow to continue with this, the Order Paper for the day, and I am now calling on any further comments before the Honourable Attorney-General will give his right of reply.

Thank you. There is no opposition to the extension of time?

(Chorus of “noes”)

Thank you, we will continue with the debate on the motion.

I will now call on the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to continue.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker as I was saying earlier on, we would like to work with Government in Parliament but the only Bill that we knew about was the Electricity Bill and we did not know about this Bill until the AG stood up to speak about it under Standing Order 51. I think the Attorney-General has sometimes very good intentions, but right now we feel a bit ambushed in terms of this Bill coming before us, which I think have some very good points in it, in terms of the extension period that has been provided. But the fact that you have 64,000 cases, it seems to me that they did not really think about how effectively the cameras would work, or is it working, so they needed to have worked this out before they implemented the Bill.

So they are now looking to us to support this motion before the House and that is what I would like to bring to the AG's attention that previously he had given us one hour or sometimes, you know over lunch, where we could have a look at the Bills, even though you might not think it is important but that is what I am asking him to consider, Madam Speaker, is to give us time instead of just bringing it in front of us and sometimes we feel that he is trying to ambush his way in terms of the motions and the Bills.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There is provision in the Standing Orders for motions or Bills to proceed without delay under Standing Order 51 and that is the procedure that we are using now. Therefore, we will continue with the debate and I ask the Honourable Politini to have the floor.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I rise to support the amendment to the Bill. Just speaking from experience myself ever since I was inducted in September last year my total mileage, I have been running from Nadi to Suva and return is about 9,120 kilometres. Out of the 9,120 kilometres I have clocked, I have actually hooked up seven speeding fines. And by mid-February this year when I went to the LTA to renew one of my driver's licence, I found out through them that there was a speeding fine sitting there but it was the dispatching to my box was a bit late. So this particular Bill that has been put before us now, like every other vehicle owner, and I am sure some of them are sitting across the House will totally agree and would support the amendment to the Bill. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Veena Bhatnagar.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I rise in support of the Land Transport (Amendment) Bill. Madam Speaker, time and again, concerns have been raised by drivers and vehicle owners of receiving late traffic infringement notices from LTA and this, Madam Speaker, has put the people through much hassle in appearing in courts to settle their fines. And on the other hand, some drivers were denied the right to provide statutory declarations on time as well, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it is a very small contribution. There have been instances where drivers did not receive TINs but were notified of pending fines when they actually had taken their vehicles for passing and considerable lapse of time that increased the fines, sometimes three times more than what they would originally pay.

So Madam Speaker, these a very few but few unnecessary hurdles the drivers and vehicle owners go through because of late notifications. Madam Speaker, to make life easy for our drivers and not to complicate simple things like payment of fines or providing statutory declarations on time, this Act needs to be amended and justice given to our Fijians. And of course, Honourable Nawaikula who is not here, he keeps on asking why now? I mean there has to be a starting point somewhere. Why now if not now, then when? That is the question if not now than when? So it has to be now and justice needs to be given to all the Fijians and Madam Speaker, 28 days preparing for dispatch of TINs, 90 days to pay, paying in instalments. These are the good changes and small minor amendments and I heartfully and hopefully support the Bill. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you I give the floor to the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I rise to support the Bill. Madam Speaker, if I was sitting this side, I would have told all the Opposition to support this Bill because I think the people of this nation are listening to us right now and...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU. Listen!

(Laughter)

They are watching TV from their homes and I know they are supporting this Bill. And for the Opposition not supporting, do not think of yourselves, please think of other drivers. They have

a family budget for their children's education and they do not have much money, but for certain fines to be like this at certain times, how do they budget their money? So in the Bill, we can pay the bills in instalments which is very good and there are hundreds and thousands of people who are being fined and I know that most of them are not getting good pay or earning good money like us here, so do think of other drivers around the country. So for this, I support the Bill, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Aseri Radrodro you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you Madam Speaker, I will just make a brief contribution to this Bill.

First of all, I would like to commend the Honourable Attorney-General for bringing this Bill to the House. I think this is a better option than directing LTA to withdraw these cases, the TIN cases from the court. This Bill was introduced in 2013 and when it got introduced, there were loopholes and these loopholes have now been addressed through this House. Sometimes it is better not to put the cart before the horse, by bringing this Bill here regularizes the directive that was provided to the LTA.

However, Madam Speaker, there are some clarifications that needed to be clarified should it go to the Committee. I take your attention to 2.6 of the Explanatory Notes. Clause 5 of the Bill also provide that upon been issued a TIN, a person has 90 days within which that person can pay the fixed penalty, make a statutory declaration or elect to dispute the fixed penalty in court."

I am more worried about the statutory declaration. Maybe, we can get more clarity in terms of a statutory declaration that is meant or intended to be reflected in this Bill.

On 2.7, there is a provision of 90 days for LTA to issue the TIN, if I am reading it correct. So what happens, if within those 90 days, the vehicle being driven by another person gets booked again because the vehicle owner, as being highlighted here, is the one that is responsible for the TIN? What happens in those instances? Can the Honourable Attorney-General also clarify situations as such?

Also, Madam Speaker, on 2.11, the effectiveness of this Bill. What happens to those who have been booked through the camera and have paid? How will they be treated as compared to the TINs that have yet to be paid and are still in the system? Those are a few things that are needed clarification on in terms of this particular Bill.

In addition to the Honourable Prem Singh's request for a physical sign of locations where the cameras are, sometimes. I think there are some people who are driving below 60 kilometres and some roads are without signs of 80km, so those are things that need to be taken care of before these things are taken into consideration, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other comments, I will now invite the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank all Honourable Members for their contribution, in particular those who stood up in support of these amendments which as the Honourable Minister for Transport has highlighted, it is very critically important to ensure that we have them replaced soon as possible.

Just a point of clarification to the Honourable Leader of Opposition who is not here, she seems to think that the 90,000 odd cases that I read, only relate to speed camera offences. No, these are what we call Traffic Infringement Notices that have been issued for all offences.

As I highlighted earlier on in the introduction, there are a number of offences. Honourable Parmod Chand would know about failed tail light or driving public service vehicle without a licence, all those kind of things, driving out of time there are various offences that relate to that. Therefore, this is a whole plethora of TINs which relate to all people on the road and all drivers and all vehicles, so it is no just to do with that.

The Honourable Minister has highlighted that the signages will be there. Of course, I did not address it because it has nothing to do with the Bill but he has already given an undertaking, the LTA Board has already given that undertaking.

Madam Speaker, it is absolutely right to also state what actual speed limit that is being monitored. In some places it could actually be 60, in some places it could be 80. The interesting thing though, Madam Speaker, is that, we have had speed cameras in Fiji before, the speed cameras that they are talking about are the permanent ones that are installed by the roadside. We still have speed cameras that are handheld, that are held by the police officers. For that, we have never had signages, no one puts a signage to say, "Just around the hill there, there is a police officer with a car and there is a speed camera ahead." We do not do that. This is obviously for the permanent ones. So, Madam Speaker, we need to put that into context.

The other issue is, of course, that Honourable Radrodro, I know has issued a number of public statements. In clarification, he said it again. I did not direct LTA. If he reads the letter, he would know that we do not give a direction when we do not have the legal authority to do so but I wrote the first letter in my capacity as Minister for responsible for Anti-Corruption, and the other one, was as Minister responsible for Justice, because of the huge levels of injustice and how we can address those issues.

Honourable Minister Bala would know and he tried create a scene in the public space which is absolutely not correct. Indeed, Madam Speaker, we were told by one of the media organisations that because they did not run his media statement, someone, I do not know who but I am sure it was not him, but someone maybe from the SODELPA Office, rang up the media organisation and said; "Why are you running up his story. You should run our story first."

These are the kinds of things that have gone out, they are so desperate. The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that this amendment is actually a good amendment. The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, if we were going to introduce new offences, if we were to delete offences, if we were going to increase the penalty in offences for the substantive offences, yes, then we need to go out. We need to hear from members of the public, if we, for example, make a new offence altogether.

But, Madam Speaker, what this amendment does, in fact, is actually reducing the burden of members of the public. And the reduction of that burden is an urgent matter because people are actually suffering on a daily basis. This is not anything specifically to do with the fact that because only on speed cameras, that this is being done. The speed camera issue has brought it to the fore that there is a systematic issue.

Now, the LTA Act was not brought about by this Government or the Bainimarama-led Government, it was brought about by the previous Government and we will have to say that. Maybe, they should have looked at it then, but we do not want to live in the past. If we recognise a problem, let us fix it up. In the same way, if we find that there are various processes in other departments and other ministries that are not conducive to the 21st century, then we need to fix them up.

If it is not conducive to providing natural justice to members of the public, let us fix it up. But to stand there and object to it because it is brought under Standing Order 51, and as I read in my motion that one hour be given, I have said that.

So, Madam Speaker, the other clarification that has been raised about those people, for example, who have paid, what will happen to them? Madam Speaker, again they miss the point.

The amendment is not that there is something wrong with the speed cameras and somehow or the other, the issuance of the TIN notice is therefore faulty. The fault is, the timing within which the TIN is issued, the timing within which a person is expected to pay, and the timing within which they appear before the courts. That is the issue, not the actual commissioning of the offence, so they are confusing that. The point of the matter is that people will still have to pay the penalty. Those who have paid, they have paid because they actually did infringe the regulations.

These people now going forward, will be given more time to pay. In the same way, those people who used to go to university before had to pay fees. They no longer now have to pay fees if they want a loan. We cannot go back in time and say, "Oh, those people now finished their University Degrees, we should give them a loan." The moment has gone, but we are improving going forward. It is very logical.

Madam Speaker, the other issue as highlighted by Honourable Koya in addressing the question raised by Honourable Radrodro is that, now LTA must issue and dispatch within 21 days of the commissioning of the offence. They must do that. They must issue the TIN, they must dispatch it within the 21 days. If they do not, that TIN notice is deemed to be invalid.

So, this is to also ensure that LTA actually becomes efficient, that some person in LTA, does not simply write the TIN notice, they put it in the envelope and then leave it in the drawer or they send it to some postal agency out in Valelevu and it sits there for two weeks, then by the time it goes from there to Ba or whatever it is, it has gone past time. It also requires LTA to become efficient and it is obviously a good thing too.

Again, Madam Speaker, as highlighted by Honourable Politini and Honourable Vunivalu, this affects ordinary people in a very positive manner. It also will help people to say, "Well, look, the LTA is being reasonable. Let us try and stick to the speed limit, let us do the right thing. Yes, if we do the wrong thing, we have 90 days to pay, they have given us time to pay it in instalments, it is within my means to do that." So it also reduces corruption, because a lot of people, for example, if you earn \$200 a week and you get lumped with an \$80 fine, guess what happens? The person booking and the person being booked know that they probably cannot pay so, "By the way, it is Christmas here is \$20 for the grog." It does happen but when people know that they have the opportunity to be able to pay that in instalments, it is not going to be a burden to them and it also minimises corruption. People become a lot more transparent.

This is the reason, Madam Speaker, why this amendment is actually good. This amendment will provide immediate relief to members of the public and, therefore, Madam Speaker, we hope that all Honourable Members on both sides of this Parliament actually support this.

Actually, I am telling them, "If you support this Amendment Bill, you will get a lot more people being conducive towards to you, it is political mileage for you if you support this." Although we instigated it but the political mileage for you so, Madam Speaker, with those few words I would like to suggest that we all support this Bill for the betterment of all Fijians.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will now vote. The question is that:

- a) The Land, Transport (Amendment) Bill 2017 be considered by Parliament without delay;
 - b) The Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
 - c) The Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- and
- d) The Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament today, Tuesday, 21st March, 2017 but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the Bill is agreed to unanimously.

Thank you, Honourable Members. There will be no further discussion on the Bill, it is already done.

We will now break for refreshments because there is still a bit more to do after this. We will take a break and return in 30 minutes.

HON. MEMBERS.- We just finish it.

HON. SPEAKER.- You want to finish it?

HON. MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. SPEAKER.- Does anyone oppose that we should not break?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, we will continue.

We will move on to the next item on the agenda.

ENDANGERED AND PROTECTED SPECIES (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016

In Committee:

Clause 1:

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Before I open the floor for comments on Clause 1, I have been informed that the Secretariat received communication from the Office of the Solicitor-General to be mindful of the naming convention of Acts of Parliament.

Subclause 1 deals with the Short Title of the Act and currently reads, and I quote: "Endangered and Protected Species (Amendment) Act 2016."

Whilst this is not an issue for the Short Title of the Bill, it will need amendment should the Bill be enacted this year, therefore if there are no objections, I seek leave of Parliament to amend Clause 1(1) by deleting the year "2016" and substituting it with the year "2017". Can I take it that this necessary amendment is agreed to unanimously?

HON. MEMBERS.- Yes.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2:

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I now call on any Member to speak on this clause.

There being no speeches, I take it that the clause is agreed to.

HON. MEMBERS.- Yes.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- The clause is therefore agreed to unanimously.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3:

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I call on any Member to speak on Clause 3, if any?

There being no comments on Clause 3, I take it that the clause is agreed to unanimously.

HON. MEMBERS.- Yes.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4:

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Members want to speak on Clause 4?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being no comments on Clause 4, I take it that the clause is agreed to unanimously?

HON. MEMBERS.- Yes.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5:

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- We will move on to Clause 5. Does anyone want to speak on Clause 5?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being no input, I take it that Parliament has agreed to Clause 5 unanimously.

HON. MEMBERS.- Yes.

Clause 5 agreed to.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, that brings to the end Committee of the Whole Parliament.

The House resumed:

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- The Committee of the Whole Parliament has agreed to a Bill for an Act to amend the Endangered and Protected Species Act 20002 (Bill No. 6 of 2016) with amendment by the Committee of the Whole Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next item on the agenda.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- The Committee of the Whole Parliament has agreed to a Bill for an Act to amend the Endangered and Protected Species Act 2002 (Bill No. 6 of 2016) with amendment.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, we like to have the Endangered and Protected Species (Amendment) Bill 2016, be read a third time and do pass.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Do we have a seconder?

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, given the fact that this Bill actually has been pending before Parliament for quite some time and has gone through the Committee stage, I think all Honourable Members of Parliament are fully aware of this particular amendment that has been sought for the endangered and protected species. It updates our laws and of course a bulk of the law is about de-listing of the species as provided for under Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and I would like to thank the Parliament for now agreeing to the amendment. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I invite input from Members of the House, if any?

There being no input, do you want to give some concluding remarks, Honourable Attorney-General?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I take it that no one opposes the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, the motion is therefore agreed to unanimously.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- A Bill for an Act to amend the Endangered and Protected Species Act 2002 (Bill No. 6 of 2016) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No.)]

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The next item on the Agenda, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament earlier today, the Land Transport (Amendment) Bill 2017 will be debated and voted upon today. Debate will be limited to one hour and now I call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE LAND TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2017

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would like to once again reiterate the points that we have already discussed when I tabled the motion and I am sure we have elucidated and addressed those issues that have been raised in Parliament, and there is probably no need to say anything further but to say that these amendments actually seek to improve the services of LTA but also to ensure that ordinary citizens that do actually get issued a TIN notice do get it issued on time and also that they are given enough time to pay. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Does any Member oppose? I would like to invite Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad to have the floor.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. We support the Bill and I think as most of the Members on this side and on the other side agreed that this was an issue for the people, but I would also like to whilst supporting this Bill urge the Government to review all other fines because it is now apparent from the issue that people bring to us that the range of fines is not commensurate with the kind of income and people who get caught into it. So, I think we need to look at the fines in totality and work out what is the best way to ensure that there is more prevention rather than prosecution and fines in the end. So, while this is going to bring a lot of relief to those who are affected, I think we need to review other fines as well and ensure that the fines which are implemented at the moment are reasonable and also applied with efficiency and flexibility. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Do we have any other input?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just a comment, we have already shown our support in regards to this particular Bill. Probably, we just queried the process but again having said that, probably there are few other issues that the Minister who will take on board what has been heard by this side of the House in regards to the improvements in LTA's operation.

The other issue in regards to LTA Appeals Board, they need to sit more frequent given that drivers in Taveuni and Labasa, it takes them three months for the notices to come to them. The Honourable Prime Minister came to Taveuni last few weeks where some drivers had approached him in regards to their licence that was seized by LTA. Some have received theirs, but someone, who had applied for an appeal still have their licence with LTA and probably that could be facilitated by LTA for them to take back their license given that it is their source of income. Those are few things that probably could be improved as we go on given that this particular Bill has gone through and should help our public transporters not to be harassed by LTA.

Some blame that they are victimised by LTA in regards to being targeted. LTA needs to organise more awareness programs in regards to the clauses.

The 90 days, all the rules that are involved, a country wide consultation and awareness for drivers to know their rights under this particular Act. At the moment they are not aware of anything in the Bill and unless LTA holds a roadshow to increase awareness in our community, people will not become informed in regards of this particular Act. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I give the floor to the Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I rise to support this Bill but before I do that, I would like to declare my interest because I deal with LTA almost everyday as I am also a bus operator, so that everyone knows that I am not coming here for personnel interest.

I do support the Bill and looking at what has been happening. We also have had a lot of complaints from drivers who are poor and while driving, they get booked, they do get their fines and when they want to renew their driving licence or their vehicle Certificate of Fitness, they are not allowed. Even recently, a lot of bus operators had that problem and the bus industry is an essential industry, operators need to have buses on the road. This was really bad but I am grateful that this came about in a very timely manner, so that it eases the problem that we have.

However, given the road carnage that we have in Fiji, I firmly believe that a lot of problems arise because the road markings in many places are missing, and if you go on the roads we have in today's day and age the Honourable Minister for Transport talked about drainage, a lot of roads are clogged up with weeds on the side, there are more blind bends and a lot of people get involved in accidents, so these are the kind of things that need to be looked at very thoroughly.

I do not know about the Western Division because I have not been there for last two months, but if you come to the Northern Division and look at the roads, it is really dangerous and the roads are very bad. Buses, trucks, cars that come in damage their mud flaps, et cetera, and they get booked and you have to go and pay the fine without no reason.

In today's day and age as the Honourable Attorney-General had rightly mentioned about the bulbs in the lights, et cetera, the filaments are very weak because of the damaged roads. So this condition just spoils the vehicles and that is so much expense for the taxi drivers, the carrier operators and others.

While supporting this motion, I would put it to the Government that it is very important to look at everything together because what if you just put the speed camera and the road markings are not right, I believe in Fiji the road markings, in my opinion, we have messed our highways.

I believe in many places the speed limits need to be raised. A lot of people are thinking that it should be brought down, like the Suva/Nausori corridor, but it is the Kings Road. It is a highway and it is very important that we go to look at that because when people get frustrated that they cannot get through the road congestion, then they start to drive fast. They will then have problems. They will get involved in accidents, they will veer off the road and many other things happen. And I think progressively everything should be looked into, so that we can fix up this land transport system here in Fiji.

I am really grateful with this kind of amendments coming and bringing about relief to the poor people and relief to the drivers. But it was rightly said about the wages, for example, someone just earns \$150 dollars a week and then will end up with a fine, such as \$80. You would go to court, you keep running around and the other thing would be that, if your vehicle is booked in Sigatoka you

will have to go to the Sigatoka Court or even to the Ba Court. So, these are all very expensive exercises and I believe this is a very timely thing that this Bill has come in, and I sincerely support this Bill. I look forward to the rest of the things that I had mentioned and that things will improve so that we can have a better land transport system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, just for the record, in fact, in post-2007 one of the first thing we did also do was, we reduce the penalties for an infringement, such as not wearing your seat belts and also the speed fines.

So, if you do not wear a seat belt, normally you are fined \$20 dollars or \$80, and it was brought down to \$40.

In the late 1990s when they brought the LTA Act, most of the LTA Act provisions actually came from Queensland. It got its genesis from there and they have a whole hook, line and sinker, borrowed a lot of the penalties in from also Australia.

So in Australian \$80 dollars compared to Fijian 80 dollars is obviously not the same thing because if your average salary is about \$200 and average salary in Australia is going to be \$1,000, \$80 is not a large amount in the whole scheme of things.

In fact we had halved those penalties so we have actually done that previously. As the Honourable Minister for Local Government has already said on a number of occasions that he is, through his Ministry reviewing a lot of the provisions pertaining to LTA and we completely concur with what he is doing. There was a report that was put out, his got a team at the moment that is holistically looking at the various provisions of LTA, in particular PSV licences as we know there is a lot of issues pertaining to taxi bases, rental cars, omnibuses and Honourable Chand would know this. So there is a holistic approach to it and indeed we do need to look at a whole heap of other areas pertaining to the way that the land transportation system is been done, Madam Speaker.

However, Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is that we need to ensure that these offence provisions or TIN notices actually get addressed very quickly. So this is why it has been done. It does not mean that other areas are being neglected, it does not mean that the roads are not being fixed up, the drainage are not being fixed up, it is all been done simultaneously. It is not a linear pattern of development, it is actually all being done at the same time, it is simultaneous parallel output. So again we are saying that we have instigated these changes, we want these changes to be addressed very quickly so ordinary Fijians can benefit from it and just from the discussions we have obviously heard from the floor, apart from Honourable Nawaikula who is not here, everyone from the other side seems to be in agreement with what is being proposed which will be good for everyone. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Parliament will now vote. The question is, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament earlier today that the Land Transport (Amendment) Bill 2017 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Honourable Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of Noes)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- A Bill for an Act to amend the Land Transport Act 1998, (Bill No. 8 of 2017) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. You will recall that the Suspension of the Standing Orders to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. was only to complete the Government Business on the Order Paper. Therefore, the motions by the Opposition, we are not able to accommodate at this time.

Thank you very much, Honourable Members, we will now adjourn until 9.30 a.m. tomorrow.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.17 p.m.