

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 22ND MARCH, 2017

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 22ND MARCH, 2017

The Parliament resumed at 9.35 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 Tuesday, 21st 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 and a special welcome to the Secretary-General of the Oceania National Olympic Committee (ONOC). Thank you for your presence here.

I also welcome the members of the public joining us in the gallery this morning and those who are watching proceedings on TV, listening to the radio and also in the internet. Thank you for taking interest in your Parliament.

Abolition of Indian Indenture System

Honourable Members, today marks the Commemoration of the Centennial of the Abolition of the Indian Indenture System. History confirms that after the end of slavery in 1833 a new form of slavery called the Indian Indenture System commenced in 1934. Under this system, over one million workers from India were taken to about 20 countries between 1834 and 1917, and this included Fiji, where about 60,965 people were brought between the years 1879 and 1916. In March 1917, the British Government in India formally suspended all movement of people to work outside of India.

March 2017, mark 100 years of the end of the Indenture System. Today, in Fiji we recognise this momentous event, and celebrate its ending a 100 years later. Let us continue to pray for Fiji and its people and for unity, peace and progress for years to come.

Daily Hansard – Tuesday 21st March 2017

For the information of Honourable Members, the *Daily Hansard* Report for yesterday will be circulated as soon as they complete printing this morning.

PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, it has been brought to my attention that aspects of the petition that was due to be moved by Honourable Prem Singh may overlap with the legislation that is currently being considered by Standing Committee and therefore I will seek further advice before deciding whether this petition can proceed.

I will return to Parliament on this matter at a future date.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order. Madam Speaker, we agreed in the Business Committee for the petition to be presented today and I do not believe that the petition has anything to do with the Bills before the Standing Committee. It is simply a petition from the sugar cane farmers in Rakiraki who want it to be presented to Parliament and for Parliament to consider it whether to forward it to the relevant committee to consider it. So, I really do not think that there is any overlap with the Bills before the Standing Committee.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Business Committee agreed to the Order Paper which includes the petition in general. The content of the petition or what the petition is all about was not presented in the Committee and this is why we are looking at it again as I have said and we will advise on this in future.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, just on that particular point of Order that was raised, I understand, Madam Speaker, that you will be making a ruling on that. I understand that you will be making a ruling whether to allow the petition or not just to get some clarification.

HON. SPEAKER.- The ruling on this particular petition, I have not made. What he is referring to is that the Committee agreed to the Order Paper which included Presentation of Petitions, Ministerial Statements, et cetera, but not on this specific petition. We have looked at it against some of my rulings previously and we will advise again on this.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, that is the reason why I asked that question because Honourable Prasad talked about the merits of the petition itself. So, if he wants to talk about the merits of the petition, I think you should also be allowed to talk about the demerits of the petition, so we would assume that when you are making a ruling that we would be allowed to speak to you in your Chambers.

They can also be allowed to speak to you in your Chambers about the merits and de-merits of the petition, and whether it does fall within the category of it being allowed or not giving the fact that there is some legislation or some Bills before the Committee that we believe has an impact on the content of the petition.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will take note of that.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, just a clarification. The petitions are referred to the Speaker and it is the sole discretion of the Speaker under Standing Order 37(5). This petition is in respect of growers of Rakiraki in respect of Penang Mill. It has nothing to do with the reforms of the Bill as alluded to by the Leader of NFP.

Madam Speaker, as the Honourable Attorney-General says the merit and de-merits of the petition – there would be no de-merits as far as the Bills before the Standing Committee are concerned.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. As I had mentioned, I am looking at this petition against some of the previous rulings that I had made. So, it is a technical issue. However, as has been mentioned that when I do bring it in, because of the technicality of it, I may also allow listening to the merits and de-merits of the petition when it does come to the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I think the provisions of the petition is very, very clear that the decision is yours alone and we should not hear views from this side or views from that side. That should never happen. I believe your decision today is that very well you have heard him but you make your decision and that is it. You should not allow this side or that side of the House into your Chambers to decide on the merit because that is a decision that is reserved for the Speaker alone.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I had made my ruling and my decision is that we will bring it again. It is still a living petition. We are not taking it out totally yet.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, a precedent has been set with the flag while we had a petition and was in Committee, Government went ahead as the executive doing what they did. So, the two can go together, it has been set in this House. Just remember that please, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, as I had mentioned, I am looking at this again. It is the technicality of it against some of my previous rulings and this particular petition is still living. We have not taken it out yet.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

Reserve Bank of Fiji - January to July 2016 Report

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to table his report.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I now would like to in accordance with Standing Order 38 present the Reserve Bank of Fiji, January and July 2016 Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I referred the Reserve Bank of Fiji - January to July 2016 Report to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

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

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker. Just seeking clarification on the submission of Committee Reports whether the report should be signed by all the Members or

just the Chairman. As for the Public Accounts Committee, we were expecting to submit two reports this week but so far it has not reached this august House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The tabling of the Reports of Committees is really on the Chair and it is the Chair to clear it with the Members of the Committee before it is tabled in Parliament. The decision is on the Chair in consultation with the Members of the Committee.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Madam Speaker, in regards to the comment that was just made by Honourable Nanovo, I have signed a letter and submitted it to the Secretary-General explaining the reason. The report has been done but the Honourable Chair needs to vet it because it is his authority to do so, so the Parliament was informed. I know he is away, but he is still the Honourable Chair.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I have made a ruling on that, I have actually answered Honourable Ratu Nanovo's point of order.

The Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, you still have the floor.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs –
Fiji Development Bank (FDB) 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I wish to report the following in relation to the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports.

The Committee was pleased to note that despite challenging economic conditions, the Bank was able to improve overall performance throughout 2014 and 2015 respectively and should be commended for this effort. It was noted that FDB's vision is "to be a dynamic financial service provider in the development of Fiji".

Also noted was one of FDB's functions which is to "provide development assistance to all Fijians wanting to start new ventures". The Bank has maintained economic viability and continues to position itself as the "Bank of Choice" in line with their Vision and Core Function.

The Committee thanks the Chairman of FDB and his team and also the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) and his team for their presentations and feedback.

I thank the Honourable Members involved in the presentation, preparation of this Report and also the Parliamentary staff who assisted. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, 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.- Honourable Lorna Eden, you still have the floor.

HON. L. EDEN.- 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. SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The question is that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

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

On the second item of the Agenda, Reports on Committee I now call on Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs –
Fiji Electricity Authority Annual Report 2015

HON. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs was tasked by Parliament to review FEA’s Annual Report 2015. Presentations by relative stakeholders which included the Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA), Fiji Sugar Corporation Limited (FSC), Department of Energy and Tropik Wood Industries Limited were discussed and deliberated on and the Committee was pleased to note FEA’s strong balance sheet and also their commitment to 90 percent renewable energy by 2025.

In line with this commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 7, the Committee made five recommendations to enhance sustainable, renewable and energy production in the areas of hydro, biomass, co-generation, solar, wind, waves and geothermal. We sincerely hope these recommendations will be useful and assisting FEA and Fiji as a whole reach their goal by 2025.

I thank the Honourable Members involved in the production of this Report and also the Parliamentary staff who assisted. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Report to the House.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- 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. SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion.

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.- (Chorus of “Noes”)

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

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs –
Fiji Intelligence Unit Annual Report 2015

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you again, Madam Speaker. The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs was tasked by Parliament to review the Fiji Intelligence Unit (FIU) Annual Report 2015. Upon completion of deliberations and consultation with relevant stakeholders such as the Ministry of Justice, Fiji Police Force, Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC), Fiji Revenue and Customs Authority and Reserve Bank of Fiji, the Committee was in agreement that FIU be commended for their work to-date.

To further strengthen their abilities to combat ever growing criminal activities taking place globally, the Committee has made recommendations which will enhance their efforts should they become a stand-alone entity in the future. Other recommendations include capacity building and the establishment of clear demarcations of inter-related agency roles.

The Committee commends the capacity building efforts being carried out by the Fiji Police Force in support of FIU and urge that this practice be continued.

I thank the Honourable Members and also the Parliamentary staff who assisted in the production of this Report. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend this Report to the House.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

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

Once again, I have much pleasure in calling on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs –
Fiji Meat Industry Board Annual Report 2013

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs was tasked by Parliament to review the Fiji Meat Industry Board Annual Report 2013.

The Committee received numerous submissions from relevant stakeholders that were inclusive of Fiji Meat Industry Board (FMIB), Ministry of Public Enterprises, Mr. Mosese Ratuki, Honourable Singh, Fiji Co-operative Dairy Company Limited and the Ministry of Agriculture, and

after thorough and lengthy deliberations came to the conclusion that much work and cost would be required to revitalise FMIB.

The Committee agrees with the direction suggested by the Ministry of Public Enterprises to divest and privatise FMIB as this will ultimately result in the establishment of more efficient and sustainable abattoirs throughout the country.

I thank the Honourable Members and the staff who assisted in the production of this Report and on behalf of the Standing on Economic Affairs, 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. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the contents of this Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

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

And I will again call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs –
Reserve Bank of Fiji’s Insurance Annual Report 2015

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Standing Committee on Economic Affairs was tasked by Parliament to review the Reserve Bank of Fiji’s Insurance Annual Report 2015. Oral and written submissions were received and deliberated upon by the Committee as per Standing Order 112 (1).

The stakeholders were inclusive of Reserve Bank of Fiji, BSP Life and Health Care, Life Insurance Corporation of India, Sun Insurance Company Limited, New India Assurance Company Limited, Dominion Insurance Company Limited and AON Insurance Brokers.

In light of the fact that Fiji continues to be faced with the adverse effects of Climate Change, the Committee felt that every citizen should be made more aware of the importance and benefits of being insured and also the types of packages that are available to them. In the area of general property insurance, Fiji’s penetration is less than 12 percent which is extremely low. More vigorous awareness and encouragement is suggested.

I thank the Honourable Members and staff who assisted in the production of this Report and on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs 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. L. EDEN.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the contents of the Report be initiated at a future sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Question is that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

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

Once again, I call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs -
Petition to Introduce a Service Fee Charged to all Guest Bills

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs who were tasked under Standing Order 37(5) to look into a Petition to Introduce a Service Fee to be charged to all Guest Bills for the purpose of supplementing the incomes of Tourism Industry Workers in Fiji, I wish to report the following:

- The Committee consulted and deliberated on presentations received from relevant stakeholders.
- Upon conclusion of deliberations, the Committee decided that there was no need for further consultations and that no further action would be necessary.

I take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Members involved in the production of this report and also the Parliamentary staff who assisted.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. L. EDEN.- 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. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question is that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

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

And again, I call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs -
Petition for TLTB to Review Distribution of Land

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Lastly, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs I wish to report the following pertaining to the Petition for iTLTB to Review the Distribution of Land to Personal Accounts and the Land Rent Premised on Unimproved Capital Value.

Following consultations with iTLTB and the Ministry of *iTaukei* Affairs and upon deliberations, the Committee was satisfied with the systems and functions that have been implemented and decided that no further action was necessary in relation to this petition.

I thank the Honourable Members involved in the production of this Report and also the Parliamentary staff who assisted.

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. L. EDEN.- 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. SPEAKER.- Do you have a seconder?

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The question is that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

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

I must thank the Committee for your hard work and also for the very substantive summary of the report that you have presented this morning. Thank you and I think on behalf of Parliament, I would like to also thank all the stakeholders that have been involved in the work of the Committee.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

Standing Committee on Natural Resources - Ministry of Rural and
Maritime Development and National Disaster Management 2014 Annual Report

HON. CDR. J.R. CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Review of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources on the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management 2014 Annual Report.

The purpose of the review was to scrutinize the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management's 2014 Annual Report, specifically on the areas of administration, legislation, organization structure, financial management, functions and their programmes for 2014.

The Ministry's Annual Report contains the coverage and work achieved by the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management in 2014.

It is worth noting that the Ministry achieved an "Excellent" SFCCO performance rating of about 92 percent, indicating timely implementation of targeted activities in accordance with the Ministry's 2014 Annual Corporate Plan.

A significant contribution towards the Ministry's achievement is the commitment of its senior leaders to ensure strong leadership and good governance are practised in everyday activities of the Ministry.

The four Divisional Commissioners are engaged in the management, coordination and implementation of all Government funded projects within their respective divisions under the Integrated Rural Development Framework mechanisms. They are also engaged in other line ministries not physically represented in the divisions and the districts.

The review exercise was made possible through consultations with the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management. The Committee identified areas of concern that addresses challenges to ensure that the Ministry effectively delivers its mandate.

Madam Speaker, I wish to extend my appreciation to the Honourable Members and the Secretariat who were involved in the production of this bipartisan report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I commend this Report to the Parliament

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. CDR. J.R. CAWAKI.- 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. SPEAKER.- Thank you, is there a seconder?

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, I beg second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The question is that a debate on the contents of the report is initiated at a future sitting. Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of "Noes")

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

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs -
National Employment Centre (Amendment) Bill 2016

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the National Employment Centre (Amendment) Bill, (Bill No. 31 of 2016).

The Bill seeks to amend the National Employment Centre Act 2009. In this regard, the Committee had invited submissions from the relevant stakeholders and are satisfied with the responses that were received. The Committee wish to acknowledge the assistance and the support of the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and the Office of the Solicitor-General during the consultation process of this Bill.

The Social Affairs Standing Committee after its careful examination of the Bill and taking into account the stakeholders' views, the Committee had resolved not to make any amendments to the proposed Bill.

The Committee had noted that all the issues and questions raised during the consultations on each clause of the Bill were able to be clarified by the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and the Office of the Solicitor-General.

Further, it was noted that the only amendments made by the Office of the Solicitor-General in the Bill were based on the recently launched revised edition of the Laws of Fiji in which all Decrees and Promulgations are now referred to as Acts as per the revised edition of the Laws Consequential Amendments Act 2016.

On this note, the Committee commended the proposed amendments and agreed to the changes that are required in the Bill. As this law will address the various administrative issues that were faced by the National Employment Centre in carrying out its mandated functions, we hope that the proposed amendment Bill would ensure the alignment of the provisions of the law with the current operational procedures of the National Employment Centre.

Further, the Committee is looking forward that this law would promote quality employment services to the unemployed persons and create a decent environment for sustainable employment to promote productivity, welfare and prosperity of all Fijians.

At this juncture, I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Honourable Members who were involved in the production of this bipartisan Report. With these words, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, 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. V. PILLAY.– Madam Speaker, at this juncture, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 86, I hereby table the Committee's report on the Employment Centre (Amendment) Bill (Bill No. 31, 2016), and that the Bill be set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament later today. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 86, the Standing Committee has now reported back on the Employment Centre (Amendment) Bill (Bill No. 31, 2016) is set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament later today.

QUESTIONSOral QuestionsFranchise – National 7's Team
(Question No. 71/2017)

HON. RO T.V. KEPÄ.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. This first oral question is a hot topic right now in Fiji as having won a Gold Medal in Rio in August of last year, the Fiji 7's Team has been playing in the World Series and we are now not number one but number three.

The question is directed at the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports. Are there any plans to franchise our National 7's team to make it the most marketable team in the world?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU (Minister for Youth and Sports).– Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for her question. Madam Speaker, the concept of franchise is linked to something like McDonald's or Hot Bread Kitchen in Fiji. I am sure that everyone in this House would like that by contrast. Our National Rugby 7's team is a jewel in our crown. There are currently no National 7s teams that operate as a franchise in the World Sevens Series.

Madam Speaker, however the issue which has been raised in the media by our former National 7's coach of a franchise is better described as ring-fencing or protecting the team, a super rugby team as a commercial property or brand in a company structure. This is a very different issue and one which would be an innovative step, so there are issues which other rugby nations have yet to consider such as revenue generated by the specific team which is then used to help fund the development of the club, province or sports as a whole.

In Fiji, we have a small economy. We have a great 7's Team. We need international sponsors to support our rugby because we do well on the international stage. This would re-affirm that we punch way above our weight against better resourced and professional teams. Madam Speaker, I believe that the first step is for the Fiji Rugby Union to continue to put in place its governance reforms and to ensure its financial sustainability as there are, as the question implies, significantly financial returns to be ahead with a right approach to sponsors.

We need to ensure that the brand is clean, successful and recognised across the world. Our men's 7's Team can tick those boxes and we hope that soon the men's and the women's 15's and 7's teams are able to do this. Madam Speaker through the Government and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, we can support the FRU in this approach but it is ultimately the decision of the FRU as to how it wants to manage its team. I believe this decision will be taken in consultation with us and with World Rugby but until then, the 7's Rugby Team will not become a franchise as it is currently not possible. Thank you, Madam Speaker for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.– Thank you. Supplementary question, Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA. – (Inaudible) Our team is the poorest team in the circuit. In Sydney they were begging for money, they were waiting for the crowd to come to give to them, in Las Vegas it was the same. They take photos and they give them their money and the Honourable Minister is saying that we cannot do this, we cannot afford it. What other alternatives do we have apart from this? The question is, what other alternatives do we have to raise money to give to them?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- I thank the Honourable Member for the question. We have a small economy and we will look into that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.— Honourable Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.— Madam Speaker, rather than rubbishing the idea from Peni Raiyani (Ryan), have you made an analysis of what Fiji Rugby can earn from a franchise as opposed to the sponsorship that you are getting today? Have you done that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- As I have mentioned, we will wait for FRU's decision to do that.

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA. – Madam Speaker, I know that the Honourable Minister loves eating at McDonald's so he really should not be rubbishing McDonald's because they are a worldwide chain of restaurants.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA. – You will have your turn.

Madam Speaker, I know that the Prime Minister is as sharp as marbles, maybe marbles from Papua New Guinea. We need big time sponsors. The two teams that are at the top of the HSBC Series are franchise teams, and we need money for our team. They have no money. From all over the world our people are very good in giving them money. So my question to the Honourable Minister is, in terms of FRU's money which we know is very limited, what other options does he have in raising the team's standing to be number one in the world? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU. – Madam Speaker, FRU has a Board and will look after that.

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo.

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO. – Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have all heard that two years now the Government has been sponsoring the Golf Tournament at Natadola.

(Laughter)

Can the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports advise this august House whether there is a plan in place by his Ministry to request the Government in the 2017 and 2018 Budget for a fixed sum, say \$2 million on an annual basis to meet the preparation, operational and management cost of our Sevens Team? Out of the \$18 million they give to golf.

HON. SPEAKER. – Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- I think that is a different portfolio altogether that looks after that, but we will leave it to FRU and the Board Members to come up with their plans.

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU. – Thank you, Madam Speaker. Probably once we franchise, we are able to attract investors and if the Minister can make a proposal to the FRU Board to take a franchise proposal on board in regards to the value of our players and setting up a Sevens Academy. At the moment the players are paid \$10,000 a year under their contract and that is not enough. They are Olympians and they bring in money for the tourism sector. Can the Minister table a proposal to FRU probably in this regard for a franchise to be set up separate from the current FRU structure that we have?

HON. SPEAKER. – Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- As I mentioned earlier on, we will leave it to the FRU Board. The National Sporting Organisation is responsible for their plans and they come up with their plans. *Vinaka.*

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO. – Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Minister is kind of contradicting himself, he says that Fiji has a small economy and this is a great opportunity in which rugby can contribute to our economy. The benefits are huge, Madam Speaker, so can the Honourable Minister explain why the Fiji Rugby Union cannot relinquish control over the Rugby Sevens to allow it to a franchise arrangement?

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- As I have mentioned earlier that the FRU has a Board and they will come up with a plan.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. Honourable Howard Politini, you have the floor.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI. – Thank you Madam Speaker. Just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports. Does the Fiji Rugby Union have a development plan from grassroot rugby through to the national team? *Vinaka.*

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Madam Speaker, yes, the FRU since 2015 has taken significant steps to improve the image of rugby from the grassroot to the national level and they have been looking at good governance and professional and financial sustainability. This includes exploring commercial opportunity to increase revenue for Fiji Rugby, so I must commend the current leadership for its commitment although there is still much to do and yes they have a plan.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Lastly Honourable Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his comments but as I look at this report which has been just given which had the Fiji Team on it. When the goal is as good as new, when they return to their communities, are there plans for our players to be absorbed into employment opportunities.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- FRU has their team plan. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Just before we move onto the second question, I would like to acknowledge the presence of some very important members of the public with us and they are members of the Fiji Disabled People's Federation, the Fiji Association of the Deaf, United Blind Persons of Fiji, Psychiatric Survivors Association of Fiji, Spinal Injury Association and the Fiji National Council of Disabled Persons. I thank you for your interest in Parliament and I apologise that I did not acknowledge you earlier.

I must also acknowledge some members of the public who continue to come just about every day of the sitting and you are very familiar to Parliament. Thank you very much for your continued interest in your Parliament.

We will move on to the next question and I now give the floor to Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

Fijiana Coach – Fixed Pay
(Question No. 72/2017)

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

Can the Minister for Youth and Sports explain the reason why the Fijiana Coach does not have a fixed pay?

I think they are talking about Iliesa Tanivula here, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU (Minister for Youth and Sports).- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank Honourable Gavoka, a former senior position holder in the FRU who should know better but thank you anyway for asking the question as it allows me to correct the situation. Perhaps in Fiji, Fiji too is subject to fake news or coconut wireless as locally termed.

Madam Speaker, I am delighted to confirm that the Fijian-a Team coach or Tanivula has an employment contract with FRU.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Does that mean that he is fully paid because it has been circulating through the media, there was a letter writer suggesting that he knows him very well and he has always been getting camp allowance and nothing else. So if you can just confirm to this House that he is on a fixed salary, that will satisfy us.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- Yes, it is according to the contract.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Samuela Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. Are the Fiji Women's National 7's Team contracted?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- I must thank the Honourable Member for the question. Madam Speaker, no, they are only paid allowances but I am sure that the FRU is actively seeking funding to pay them salaries as they do for the men.

Our Fiji Women's National 7s Team has just recently entered into the Women's World Sevens Series and is in the process of seriously establishing themselves as a winner of a leg of the Series. Like our men's team, once they do this, there is a good opportunity of FRU also contracting these players.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister advise the House how much does Tanivula get according to the terms of his contract and what are the benefits? How much?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- I think he is contracted and has some debtors.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Will the Government help setup a Sevens Academy?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. L.B. TUITUBOU.- As I have stated, FRU will come up with a plan but the Government already has a way to do it but it will wait for FRU to come up with a plan.

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

Outbreak of Dengue
(Question No. 73/2017)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services brief this House what the Ministry had done on the outbreak of dengue?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I would like to thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of the House, dengue is one of the several mosquito borne diseases that exist in our region. It is endemic to Fiji and many other nearby countries. Even countries that are recognised as having excellent mosquito control programmes such as French Polynesia and New Caledonia have reported recent outbreaks of dengue which could suggest that the dengue virus and its mosquito carriers have evolved and continue to challenge even the best disease control programmes.

Madam Speaker, over the last 40 years, the Ministry has recorded dengue fever outbreaks on a 10-year cycle. However, in the last 15 years this has been reduced to a 5-year cycle. Outbreaks are recurring twice as often as they used to. In a typical year, around 400 confirmed cases of dengue is normally identified by the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, given the current weather conditions, the Ministry has noticed a surge in dengue-like and influenza-like illnesses. The classical symptoms of dengue include high fever, pain behind the eye balls, rashes on the chest and back, headache, muscle and joint pains and a general feeling of being unwell. The warning signs of severe dengue are restlessness, fast breathing, persistent vomiting, and unexplained bleeding from the gums.

Madam Speaker, there is no cure for dengue, but its impacts on individuals can be managed with appropriate treatment. People with symptoms are advised to visit their nearest health centre or any health facilities at the earliest possible opportunity.

The key to effective dengue control lies with prevention. Control of the mosquito population and avoiding bites from mosquitos that may be carrying the dengue virus are fundamental to the prevention of dengue fever infection amongst the population. Source reduction, chemical spraying, biological control, the use of barriers (mosquito nettings) and mosquito repellents are strategies used to control dengue where the disease is endemic.

Having said this, Madam Speaker, it is important to note that dengue prevention and control is a shared responsibility. Unless everyone plays their role, dengue will not be controlled. Individuals have a key role in keeping their surroundings larvae-free, reducing and removing places where mosquitos can lay their eggs and seeking early treatment should signs and symptoms of dengue occur. Individuals, communities, private sector and government agencies need to work together to control dengue.

Madam Speaker, last week the Ministry re-launched 'The Fight the Bite Campaign' at Tamavua Primary School, and this campaign will roll out across the country to intensify our efforts on a National Clean-up Campaign. Communication and messaging on dengue prevention has intensified through media campaigns in the past few weeks. Families and communities are strongly urged and advised to take heed of the precautionary measures provided by the Ministry at this point in time.

The Ministry's Vector Control Unit together with the local authorities are carrying out joint chemical spraying activities against mosquitoes and clean up campaigns in high risk geographical pockets in the city and some towns and this will be an ongoing process. The Ministry has also organised divisional clean-up campaigns in the West, East, North and Central Divisions. We have organised those in partnership with other Ministries and Departments as well as the municipal councils.

The clean-up campaign will progress for the next four to five weeks around the country. Weekly updates on the campaign will be circulated by the Vector Control Unit. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I ask for each Fijian's support, attention, action and collaboration in our 'Fight the Bite Campaign'. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Can I just, Madam Speaker ask a very quick and simple question. Would the Minister give us an idea of how many cases you have had since January just to understand the nature of the spread of dengue?

HON. SPEAKER.- Since this is statistical in nature, would you like to respond now?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- No, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That is statistical in nature and she can respond to this later on.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Lorna Eden.

HON. L. EDEN.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister advise this House how long the 'fight the bite' campaign will go on for and how can the general public be of assistance?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker as mentioned, the 'fight the bite' campaign has no time frame to it. We will continue to carry out this campaign like I said with our other partners especially with the local town councils until we are able to reach out to communities and eventually decline the number of cases that are mostly reported to us.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, supplementary question. How long does it take to carry out tests to determine whether a person has dengue or not?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. Basically dengue is detected with the signs and symptoms that I have mentioned and if I can go back, dengue symptoms include very high fever, it is not like a normal fever and when patients present themselves to the facilities, the medical personnel at the facilities will be able to differentiate between a normal fever and fever-like symptoms or dengue-like symptoms that the patients present.

One of the most common things that normally doctors do with the patients who present dengue-like symptoms to facilities is to try to reduce the high fever that our patients normally present and that is done with simple paracetamol and sponge bathing patients so that we are able to reduce the high fevers that they have. It is preventable, like I said, so far we have not received any cases of death as being related to dengue. We would like people to present themselves should they have any dengue or influenza-like symptoms.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is alarming to hear that there is no cure for dengue. It is not a laughing matter, Honourable Prime Minister that is what the Honourable Minister had mentioned.

Can the Honourable Minister explain if the medical institutions particularly the sub-divisional hospitals, health centres and nursing stations are fully resourced with drugs and medicines and equipment's and even staff to ensure early detection and treatment? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do understand it is not a laughing matter, I still stand by it saying that there is no cure for dengue but its impact on individuals are manageable and we request every....

(Inaudible interjections)

Madam Speaker, we have been able to contain the outbreak of dengue through the campaign that I have said but when they have present themselves at the health centres, yes, our medical professionals based at health centres are fully equipped to treat the patients showing signs and symptoms of dengue. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Parmod Chand?

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister mentioned about clean surroundings. I would just like to ask how many times municipal councils and rural local authorities carry out spraying? How long does it take to determine whether someone has dengue fever?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I would like to thank the Honourable Member for the question. This is an on-going process but when the Ministry receives incidences or surge in cases which are like mosquito borne diseases especially in this case with dengue, we try to organise our Vector Control Unit, we have a Vector Control Unit that continuously works with the municipal councils to see when and where these spraying campaigns are needed.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you and lastly Honourable Vadei.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- My question to the Minister, what sort of technical and professional capability do our medical hospitals and staff have in preparation for this outbreak?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. I think our medical facilities and staff are fully equipped in terms of knowledge and resources to counter endemics like dengue in Fiji.

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

Fiji Airways - Annual Report
(Question No. 74/2017)

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

Would the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications clarify why Parliament has not received Annual Reports of Fiji Airways for the past two years given that taxpayer funds of \$18 million per year has been granted to Fiji Airways for marketing?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Prasad for this question. Unfortunately the premise of this question is very digressive. The question actually assumes that the annual reports used to be tabled and they are now no longer tabled, that is what you are trying to drive at.

What essentially, Madam Speaker, the point is Fiji Airways or Air Pacific as it was known has not tabled any reports previously. In fact we have gone way back to 2001 and even before that, when you all used to love all the governments before that and Air Pacific and thought everything was hunky dory, none of them tabled their reports.

Under the Public Enterprise Act, Madam Speaker, it is not a Government Commercial Company, but let me also tell you that the annual accounts of Fiji Airways, if they knew the law, available in the company's office. Go and pick it up from there. It is there. It does not get tabled in Parliament. It also, Madam Speaker, has the audited accounts. The point, Madam Speaker, is that they are missing, is that there are many other entities in Fiji that actually gets grants. This is a marketing partnership.

Northern Air, Madam Speaker, he is familiar with Northern Air gets money from the Fijian Government. Do they get Northern Air to table their financial accounts in Parliament?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is a separate issue.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-

It is not a separate issue.

Madam Speaker, the University of Fiji gets a grant. Do they table their annual report in Parliament? Corpus Christi, Sangam, Montfort, Swami Vivekananda College, Fulton, all of these people get grants from Government. They do not table their annual reports here. Madam Speaker, what is more to the point is this, if anyone understands auditing and knows about financial systems is that when you have Government giving a grant by way of an agreement, by way of some demarcations, then the Auditor-General will go and check to see whether the money has been disbursed in accordance with the stated objectives, principles and agreement through which the money was going to be given.

So, for example, in the case of Northern Air. If, for example, Government has called four people to supply air services to parts of Lau, I know Honourable Radrodoro is concerned about that always and various other parts. Now, it is commercially not viable for any of these airlines to fly there, so what the Fijian Government has done and in fact has increased the subsidy in the past couple of years, we then say, "Ok Northern Air you fly there and we will then supplement the cost of you to fly there."

The Auditor-General then comes and will check, "Okay, Government advertised. How was the money disbursed? Is the agreement done or not? Were the actual invoices given to Government or not, did they disburse it or not? Are the invoices valid?" That is what the Auditor-General checks and that is how we get the report on it. So the fact to come here and to say why it has not given its annual report over the past two years is actually misleading Madam Speaker.

The fact is, the audited accounts signed off by PricewaterhouseCoopers is actually available at the company's office as you know. Members of this House also know that the company's office has been as approved by this Parliament. The old Companies Act was repealed, we have now with a Companies Act and Madam Speaker that is a lot more onerous in terms of making disclosure, a lot more onerous in respect of giving all the financial reports that need to be made available.

Madam Speaker, let me also then talk about Fiji Airways in respect of the financials. As far as the \$18 million allocation was allowed for in the 2016 Budget, \$18 million was allocated but only \$9.16 million was dispersed because of the fact that it was a shorter financial year given the fact that we changed our financial year. To-date, Madam Speaker, with the financial year beginning on 1st August, to-date, \$9.15 million has actually been dispersed but the reality also is, and I would like to take this opportunity because I know there has been a lot of talk about Fiji Airways and initially there were a lot of articles being written by his fellow colleagues about FNPF and why FNPF should not be lending to Fiji Airways. Today, FNPF, Madam Speaker, is receiving payments way ahead of what

Fiji Airways should be doing or should be paying; way ahead. FNPf actually, Madam Speaker, has made a very healthy, neat little profit from lending to Fiji Airways.

The reality, Madam Speaker, is if you look at countries like Singapore, et cetera, you always have the superannuation funds participating in very strategic key economic areas to uplift the well-being of that country. To be strategic like Singapore, they had their superannuation investing in Singapore Airlines and Singapore Changi Airport. Now, they are able to stand on their feet, they gave them that support; that is precisely what FNPf did.

Today, Madam Speaker, as you know Fiji Airways is the only company in Fiji that has some State interest in it, that actually has profit-sharing for its staff. What a wonderful thing, Madam Speaker, it is unprecedented.

In 2013, Madam Speaker, the profit-sharing with the staff received was \$1.3 million. In 2014, it was \$3.5 million; 2015 was \$5 million and just recently another \$6.5 million. This is apart from their salaries, this is apart from their individual bonuses, this is actually a stake in the company itself in getting profit-sharing.

Madam Speaker, what this has also meant that Fiji Airways has to be a lot more transparent because the staff actually get to know about it. They actually get to know what the financials are and they have a stake in it. So, Madam Speaker, the reality is that this question is in somewhat an obfuscation of the greater transparency that has taken place and the financials, the audited accounts.

Annual reports can be very nice, you can give annual reports, nice, glossy, that is what used to happen in the past, all the glossy pictures, they have all been taken out. What we are concerned about is, Madam Speaker, the actual dollars and cents and how well they are doing and this is all available in the company's office. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. A very highly, unsatisfactory answer to a very simple question. Two wrongs do not make a right, I mean, if the Annual Reports of Fiji Airways was not presented before, it does not mean that it should not.

Government holds 51 percent share in Fiji Airways and the examples that the Attorney-General gave, that is not where the Government holds majority share. The idea of annual reports in this Parliament, Madam Speaker, is for the Committees and the public to know what is going on. So it is a very simple question and a very simple answer, could have been "Yes, annual reports will be presented" and I would like to ask the Attorney-General, what is the problem in presenting the annual reports to the Parliament? We do not own USP but we still have their annual reports here.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, this is the problem, little bit of information, little bit of knowledge creates a lot of problems. They simply like to pick at something, Fiji Airways is doing well, profit-sharing, good news, everyone likes it so they want to pick up on it.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- USP is created by statutes, you know that, you worked there for decades, probably too long.

The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, it was created by statutes. The reality, Madam Speaker, is suddenly they have a problem with Fiji Airways because Fiji Airways is doing well. Suddenly, they could not go and get these accounts available in the company's office that any Tom,

Dick and Mary can go and get. Anyone from that gallery can go to the company's office today, he can go at lunch time today and get a copy of it. Any public can get it. What is there to be scared about? I want you to say that outside this Parliament so he can take PricewaterhouseCoopers on? I want you to take PricewaterhouseCoopers on. You are making a mountain out of nothing.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Please we want to hear the answer, the response has been given and viewers want to hear a response.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, from the debate from Monday, Tuesday and today, it is quite apparent that the Opposition is finding itself into political oblivion. They are becoming irrelevant, that is the reality.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker. The Standing Orders is very clear that the Ministers must answer the question in a concise and precise manner. I think the Attorney-General has gone way way beyond to a very very simple question: why the Annual Report is not presented to Parliament when Government owns 51 percent share? That is a simple question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Biman Prasad, you asked a question to the Honourable Minister and the Minister provided you with his response.

Honourable Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is 51 percent-owned, it should be scrutinised by this House, can you assure us when will you table it?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I have already answered the question.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I think the concern here is the scale of the grant that is given to Air Pacific compared to the other organisations that were mentioned by the Honourable Minister. It simply means, Madam Speaker, how can a country that cannot provide kidney dialysis to its people and send them home to die spend \$18 million to support a company that is making more than \$80 million a year. That is basically the issue here. It is sinful spending that kind of money on a company that is doing almost better than anyone in this country.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, again they are digging themselves a bigger hole. They asked these questions, demonstrating a fundamental lack of economics, fundamental lack of the commercial realities that exist in the world. Again, in the same way they said, "We will pay for all the fees for you at university," they will take the money out from somewhere." Now they are saying, "Take the money from golf and give it there, take the money from Fiji Airways and do not give it to them but give it there." Do they understand?

Madam Speaker, this kind of fills into the next question by Honourable Niumataiwalu. Royal Tongan Airlines does not exist anymore; Polynesian Airlines does not exist anymore as an international carrier; Solomon Islands is a one-aircraft international company. The reality is this, they go on about the tourism sector which contributes nearly 37 percent alone towards the GDP.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- That is not news to us.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the reality is this. Nearly 70 percent of all those tourists who come to Fiji need to come by or do come by Fiji Airways. The comparative world of tourism is enhancing itself. Fiji needs to connect itself to greater markets. They talk about Australia, we must increase our numbers from Australia. Yes, we agree, we must increase our numbers from Australia, that is why Fiji Airways is going to fly to Adelaide also but, Madam Speaker, we need to reduce our percentage of dependency on Australia. Anyone that understands business will tell you that you should not put all your eggs in one basket or in their case, do not put all your marbles in one basket, Madam Speaker.

The reality is this, we need to increase the numbers but we need our source market to increase from other countries, why? Let me explain, very simple. If the Australian economy does not do well, there will be less people inclined to go on a holiday. If we have a greater percentage of people coming from Australia for a holiday, it will severely impact us but if we increase the numbers but decrease the percentage, in other words, we get 25 percent from Australia, maybe 20 percent from New Zealand, 25 percent from North America and the balance from China and India then we are spreading our risks. When there is a cyclone in Fiji or when there is some other event in Fiji, all international airlines withdraw from Fiji and they do not want to fly. Which is the only airline that flies? Fiji Airways. And we as Fijians need to support Fiji Airways because it is our national carrier.

It is creating jobs, it is creating new destinations and Madam Speaker there is a proper accountability, read the Auditor-General's Report when it comes out.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you and lastly, Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo.

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. One of our concerns too regarding the operation of Air Pacific that they do take a loan....

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Not Air Pacific?

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Sorry, Fiji Airways.

(Laughter)

Vinaka, sorry for that.

They do take up a loan from the Fiji National Provident Fund and that money belongs to all the workers in Fiji. When institutions such as that give out finance, one of their conditions is not to declare dividends or pay out any bonuses to their directors or employees.

In this case for Fiji Airways, we just heard that this month they paid out a huge bonus to their staff and employees. How can the Minister overlook that condition of the bank? They can only allow that once the debt is paid off, not when the debt is still current.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I hate to say this. The Honourable Member is from Kadavu, I am from Nadroga so we have this *tauvu* relationship. But I have to say this, Honourable Member, you are again displaying a lack of commercial and financial knowledge notwithstanding the fact that you worked for FDB.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is this, banks lend money to all companies, FNPF has lent money to other institutions and other companies. They lent to Natadola, the development of

InterContinental Hotel, they lent money to other private companies before. There is no such condition as you must pay all the money first than only you can have profits declared, then you must share profits.

As I have said earlier on, Madam Speaker, Fiji Airways is ahead in its payments to FNPF. Has he looked at the interest rate that they have charged? It is more than what some of the commercial banks are offering. Therefore, FNPF has made a windfall and the members of FNPF have benefited from it. That is what we want. When we collect superannuation, we do not let us sit in the bank because money lying idle does not make money; money lying idle actually decreases in value - you should know that.

So FNPF goes and buys buildings, invest in buildings, buys properties, buys shares, put money offshore and then they get an interest from that and that is how you build your money, that is how you increase the value of the asset base and that is how the percentages that FNPF members have been significantly increasing.

I do not want to go into the failures of FNPF from the past, but Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, the Honourable Member is now saying to all the staff of Fiji Airways, you should not receive this profit-sharing until you pay off all your debts; that is what he is saying.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is what he is saying.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And I wish all the staff of Fiji Airways are listening and watching television today to say to the Opposition side “do not want them to get a share of the profits.”

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- (Inaudible) Madam Speaker, that was the implication. This unfortunately again demonstrates the lack of understanding of commercial reality. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

Codeshare Partnership – Fiji Airways and Jet Airways
(Question No. 75/2017)

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

Can the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications explain how and in what ways will the new codeshare partnership between Fiji Airways and Jet Airways of India benefits Fijians? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the

Honourable Member for this questions, it is a very important agreement that has been signed between Fiji Airways and Jet Airways but just for those Members might not necessarily understand what a codeshare is, Madam Speaker.

A codeshare agreement is between two airlines where the airline operating a given flight which is called the “operating carrier” allows the other airline to market the flight and issue tickets for it as if the marketing carrier was itself operating the flight. So, in other words, you get a footprint.

So, now because we signed a codeshare agreement with Jet Airways, Madam Speaker, it means also they can carry their code. So, for example, when you go to Nadi Airport now, you will see the flight that goes to Singapore it will also have FJ and they will have the code for Jet Airways. When someone goes to Mumbai, Delhi or Chennai, they will see the Jet Airways code and also see the FJ. So, you are in the same way, for example, we have at the moment when you buy a ticket, you are going on a Fiji Airways aeroplane aircraft, but you will have a FJ or QF because we have a code-sharing agreement with Qantas.

So, it gives you a bigger footprint and then if they have similar arrangements onwards, we also get FJ going onwards for us. So FJ which is Fiji Airways is marketing itself a lot more, but from a practical perspective also, it allows for the seamless carriage of your luggage. So everyone knows, you check it in there in Chennai, check it in Mumbai, check it in New Delhi and you go all the way through to Fiji, if you are travelling all that way, they will make sure all those arrangements are done.

Madam Speaker, that is the advantage and it also then gives you a distribution network. So if for example someone is flying from Fiji to Mumbai but they want to go to Hyderabad or they want to go a city in Gujarat. When they get off in Mumbai, their bags will go automatically to the domestic carrier and onwards to their last destination.

Madam Speaker, Jet Airways is at the moment 24 percent owned by Etihad Airways. So that strategic relationship of Jet Airways also gives us a footprint into wherever Etihad flies. So the footprint of FJ increases.

I have got some statistics here. Jet Airways serves 68 destinations including 48 domestic and 20 international destinations in 17 countries across Asia, Europe and North America. So, what it does now, Madam Speaker, is gives us connectivity not with the second largest airline in India but also gives us connectivity with one of the other larger international airline carriages like Etihad.

Madam Speaker, India is very important for us in respect of as an outbound market for us. India, I know someone mentioned a couple of days ago about India being a very large market. Madam Speaker, it will become the largest outbound market in the next 4 to 5 years, the middle class is growing phenomenally. Unfortunately, in Fiji we do have to do a lot of work because there is a lot of pre-conceived ideas about the Indian traveller. We do not think that they will do destination or adventurous sports, we do not think that they want to do diving, we do not think they want to go and feed the sharks because we have a pre-conceived idea of the Indians. But if you see the market that recently view in India, they are going off and climbing mountains, going to Iceland and going through traverses and ridges, et cetera - they want that.

At the moment Fiji is only being marketed in India as a honeymoon destination. Fiji is more than a honeymoon destination. In the same way we wanted to tap into the Chinese market. The Chinese also have their different demands. They may not necessarily like the Australians and Kiwis like to sunbathe for two weeks on the beach, they have different demands.

So, our tourism sector needs to evolve also, our tourism operators also need to start thinking outside the box. They also need to be able to know in terms of language issues, for example, the

Chinese, the dietary requirements for example of the Indians. These are the kinds of changes we need to make but it is a strategic goal and objective both of Government through Tourism Fiji and they obviously need to do a lot more work in that area. But also now through Fiji Airways to ensure that we place ourselves a lot better into a market that will be the largest outbound market.

This codeshare with Jet Airways, Madam Speaker, actually is very important for us. We are very grateful and I would like to put on record, Madam Speaker, the Indian Government actually has been extremely helpful. We had an air services agreement that was signed way back (I stand to be corrected on the exact year) but it was around about 1974. So, our air services agreement was completely outdated and the Indians actually bent over backwards to help us develop a new air services agreement. Air services agreement is the agreement that a bilateral basis between countries that actually governs the number of seats between each of the countries. We are currently looking at other air services agreement on a bilateral basis between countries that actually governs the number of seats between each of the countries. We are currently looking at other air services agreement and they are very critical. I know there was a point that was raised about liberalising the airways.

Madam Speaker, for a small country like Fiji, let me give you an example, if tomorrow we allow Etihad or Emirates for example. Emirates at the moment flies on a daily, sometimes twice a day from Dubai to Brisbane, to Melbourne and to Sydney. If they add on Fiji via Sydney, Fiji Airways can kiss their route to Sydney goodbye within six months because what will they do, they will cannibalise and you can shut down Fiji Airways. It has actually already happened as I gave the example of Polynesian Airlines and all of that. In Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Aruba and all of these countries, large numbers of American tourists go there. When they actually opened up the skies, the national carriers all shut down - six months or one year's time. I have got an article here which I can also share with you - how the Ministries of Tourism in those countries are actually lamenting the fact that the bulk of the tourism spend in those countries now actually all go out because nearly everything that they have or that is sold to the tourist is ultimately owned by a foreigner. So, the Fijian Government under the Bainimarama Government and later on the FijiFirst Government for example, the Minister for Agriculture, we are targeting the selling of local produce. Reserve Bank of Fiji now gives an award if the chef uses local fruits, local vegetables and local root crops. We want the tourist to eat that so our people has some benefit from it.

Similarly, air travel is a major component of that. If the national carrier no longer is a national carrier, but it is simply the tourists are brought in by foreign carriers, all that money will go out of the country. So, this is why it is critically important, Madam Speaker, for Fiji Airways to be strategically based, develop partnerships, we have a codeshare agreement with American Airlines and many other airlines that we hope to have developed codeshare agreements with and this is a very, very good move on the part of Fiji Airways. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just to put things in perspective, it is not only FijiFirst who looked after Fiji Airways; Alliance, SVT and SDL all looked after Air Pacific to what it is today. In terms of airline profitability, it is all over the world. The cheap oil has made airline profitability the highest in years except for Africa. Every other region is making profit. So, we congratulate our national airline but it is a trend that is global with the world drowning in cheap oil and airline profits soaring.

A question to the Minister, in terms of a partner for codeshare, where does Air India rate together with this one because Air India has a bigger network in India, very well established. Was Air India ever part of the dialogue?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the reality is that Fiji Airways is in a much better position today because of many of the changes that have taken place today instead of harping on about Alliance, SVT and SDL. No, Madam Speaker. The Bainimarama Government and this Government, let us get the facts right are the ones that made all the strategic changes. Yes, that was said yesterday. They said, “You know electricity connections took place before” yes, but at what rate? Honourable Bala was admonished away by Honourable Prasad to say, “Why you want to tell us those people were crying and all these?” It is a reality. Many of these people had paid their 10 percent deposit, there were 20 houses there, only five paid and the other 15 could not pay so they did not get electricity for years, and this is before the Bainimarama’s Government’s time; a whole list of places. That did not happen, it is happening now through his Ministry and through FEA. This is a reality.

Madam Speaker, I can go into the accounts of the Air Pacific. Let me give you some examples because they brought it up. So, it opens the door for me actually.

Madam Speaker, they were leasing a 767, those of you who were travel on 767, guess how much lease they were paying? US\$1 million a month, it is a fact. The 747, that was 24 years and 26 years old respectively, they were paying US\$650,000 a month. We got rid of that. We brought in the A330, we had the financial gumption to do so. The Government and FNPF supported it, today we do not pay those kind of ridiculous rates. Today we in a position where we are refitting the 737, we are getting 737 MAX (5 of them). All of these, Madam Speaker, has been done through the Bainimarama Government, through this Government, let us get the facts right.

Air India, we have no problem with Air India and in fact we wanted to do a codeshare with both of them but Air India wanted exclusivity. They said, “You do a codeshare with us, do not do a codeshare with Jet Airways or any other Indian carrier. We do not want to do that.” In fact we told this to the Honourable Minister of Civil Aviation in New Delhi and his officials were actually quite astounded and that and in fact in front of us, they rang up their Air India officials and they said “why are you doing this, why don’t you go ahead and do codeshare agreement?” Quite happy to do that. We love to do it Air India. The Honourable Member is correct. Air India has a lot wider spread in particular within India itself. Domestically, it is a well-known brand. Some may argue it is not necessarily run as well, but in fact it is very large and the fact that it has got good connections, so we want to do that and we are quite open to do that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Samuela Vunivalu, you have the floor.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Supplementary question. Is there any new partnership arrangement or any new route or flight destinations in the pipeline?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, flying to completely new destinations always cost a lot of money in marketing, landing fees, for example, Changi Airport has offered a discounted landing fee for Fiji Airways to land at Singapore Airport. San Francisco has also offered a similar arrangement but as you know that San Francisco we used to fly their seasonally. Now, we will fly permanently to San Francisco, for the time being it will be twice a week. So, we will be flying twice a week to San Francisco. We fly nearly six to seven times a week to LA, in the peak period we fly seven times, and in off-peak we fly six times a week to LA. We fly five times a week to Hong Kong and we fly twice a week to Singapore. In June, Fiji Airways will be flying for the first time to South Australia because our tourism catch has always been from the eastern seaboard of Australia and now we are going to expand to the middle of Australia and hopefully will make people from Perth also attracted to come to Fiji. Adelaide is a new route, but there is also constantly assessment and sometimes the frequency of flights are also increased.

So, in fact we would love to fly to Beijing to be frank. In fact the A330 series can take us to Beijing but we need to sort out the Air Services Agreement with China. At the moment, the Air Services Agreement, Madam Speaker, what the Chinese are demanding is not something that we are agreeable to because they want 5th or 6th onward rights. What that essentially means is this, they want to do Guangdong, Hong Kong, Fiji and New Zealand, Guangdong, Singapore, Sydney and Fiji; these are the things that does not suit us because it could also then cannibalise. I mean the Indians were actually quite good about that, they did not do that, but we are also hoping that we are very positive with our negotiations with the Chinese too. Once that is sorted out, we would love to fly to Beijing because Air China also gives very good connectivity out of Beijing to other destinations in particular in Northern Europe and other parts of Europe too.

HON. SPEAKER.- Time has caught up with us and we will now break for refreshments. The Parliament is suspended until 11.30 a.m. Thank you, Honourable Members

The Parliament adjourned at 11.05 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.31 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. We will continue from where we have left off and now I invite the Honourable Netani Rika to ask his question.

Zero Tolerance Policy – Child Abuse in Schools
(Question No. 76/2017)

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

The Ministry has a zero tolerance on child abuse, child labour, trafficking and exploitation in schools. Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts inform the House of the Ministry's strategies to eradicate such notorious behaviours in schools?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Member for asking this question. It gives me an opportunity to highlight what we are doing in this area.

Madam Speaker, our Government has joined the global movement to protect our children and ensure that there is no obstacle in regards to their development in education.

Madam Speaker, our Ministry over the last two years has evaluated the child protection and welfare policies and streamlined it to suit the needs of contemporary students; contemporary challenges that they are facing.

Madam Speaker, you and Members of this House are aware of the kinds of challenges, kinds of issues, kinds of problems our children are facing now which never used to exist during our time when were in school. It is in this regard that over time new policies need to be brought in or existing policies need to be revised. I am going to shed some light on that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we have put policies and strategies in place to eliminate child abuse issues, there is national monitoring on absence, academic results, indiscipline cases and children's health which assist us to track the student and intervene, observance of key events actively involving students up-skilling and professional development of Educators, strengthening rights of children such as zero tolerance to corporal punishment and through greater parental involvement and educational awareness of students on their privileges and rights.

Madam Speaker, you would have noted that at the beginning of last year we launched our Pillar 4 on Parental Engagement.

Madam Speaker, we have given clear indication of our stance in eradicating child abuse and exploitation in schools through various written policies. Let me highlight and list down these five policies:

- Policy in Drugs and Substances Abuse which came into effect in 2012. This was then revised last year.
- Child Protection Policy that came into effect in January last year.
- Behaviour Management Policy that came into effect in January 2015. Basically as a result of rise in student indiscipline issues in schools, we decided to develop a policy on behaviour management to assist our school teachers to deal with those cases
- Yesterday, I spoke at length about the Boarding Policy in Schools which also deals with how we look after our children in boarding facilities.
- The boarding policy came in January this year along with a policy on School Counselling.

Madam Speaker, the Child Protection Policy is in line with Fiji's commitment under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under this policy, bullying in any form whether physical, verbal, emotional, sexual or spiritual is prohibited. Child labour, child trafficking and child abuse (whether physical or emotional) are also prohibited under the Policy of Child Protection.

Madam Speaker, as a strategy, we have deployed Child Protection Officers, trained teachers in all our primary and secondary schools. These officers are teachers and have received training by our Policy Section. These officers are very well versed with the policy and the obligations to report matters. So these officers know very well what will happen when cases comes up, what kind of reports needs to be done, who needs to be called up, at what particular point in time the parents needs to be invited over, what kind of documentation needs to be done, when do we call in the counsellors, when do we call in the Ministry of Social Welfare to deal with that particular issue.

Madam Speaker, there is the requirement of mandatory reporting of any suspected or known cases of child abuse or exploitation to the Ministry under our Child Protection Policy as well as the Child Welfare Act which is under the purview of the Ministry of Social Welfare.

Madam Speaker, the strategy of having a Child Protection Officer in every school has proved successful because we have received increased incidences of cases that were being reported through various means, for example, Police as well as Ministry of Social Welfare.

In addition, we have zero tolerance on corporal punishment, Madam Speaker. As I have made it very clear to our stakeholders, to teachers and heads of schools that the Ministry does not tolerate any form of abuse or zero tolerance to corporal punishment also encompasses children's right not to belittled or verbally abused in front of others or other teachers as well.

Madam Speaker, the Behaviour Management Policy ensures that student discipline issues and behaviour is managed through a consistent and acceptable manner. Sometimes it is not the teachers or stakeholders that engage in child abuse or exploitation. It is sometimes the students themselves who engage in bullying, cyber bullying, harassment, glue sniffing, truancy, drug problems, et cetera. These things are small in numbers but the trend demonstrates does increase and therefore we need to be vigilant, we need to take decisive steps to ensure that we nip these things in the bud.

Madam Speaker, yesterday I spoke about the Boarding Policy and how we have inserted clauses to deal with the issue of child abuse and student bullying. Apart from the strategies laid out in the policies, our Ministry has also signed the Interagency Guidelines on Child Abuse and Neglect on 17th December, 2015 with the Ministry of Social Welfare, jointly with Fiji Police Force, Ministry of Employment and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services as well.

The guideline ensures that key ministries will work together in sharing data and bring justice to the victims of child abuse, neglect, exploitation, child labour and child trafficking. Prior to that, Madam Speaker, we did not have a national data though. There were some data reported to the Police, some data reported to the Ministry of Social Welfare and some data reported to the Ministry of Education, so if anyone wanted to know what is the gravity of that matter then it was difficult because we did not pull the data. So it is in this regard that this joint Interagency Guideline and a Joint Committee was established where they meet monthly and share the data, remove duplication and come up with a true data on child abuse or relative to child at the national level.

Madam Speaker, all secondary schools engage in the Blue light programme whereby the police officers come in schools and create awareness on child labour, child abuse and various forms of exploitation.

Madam Speaker, for this year, this has begun from last year in the Western Division, where members of the Fiji Police Force are visiting schools to talk to children and explain to them about their responsibilities, about their rights and what is expected of them as well, given that now we do not have corporal punishment, the kind of behaviour conduct that is expected of them as well and the possible consequences, Madam Speaker.

Similar training programmes taken to the school by other stakeholders such as the Department of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health as well as Fiji Women's Rights Movement.

Madam Speaker, last year we launched our Pillar 4, which was compulsory, "Parental Engagement in the Children's Education". We gave out the framework, we insert in the papers and this year, we have again printed and sent out over 200,000 copies of two-page back to back Parental Engagement Framework and we gave that to the schools (coloured one) to pass it to every child to take at home with the note that the parents must read that and pick up some of the strategies we have outlined on how you should engage with a child. It is a guideline, Madam Speaker, to encourage parents to know what the child is doing, whom the child is talking to and engaging, what kind of problems the child may be facing and how the child wants the parents to deal with those.

Madam Speaker, another strategy that the Ministry focuses on and is actively involved in Observances Celebration of International Awareness Day. It allows us to mobilise the entire country on that particular day to look after our child, Madam Speaker, for example, World Day against Child Labour Campaign on International Day against Drug Abuse and Trafficking, World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse, Constitution Day, Children's Day, and National Anti-Suicide Awareness.

Yesterday, Madam Speaker, during lunch time, I visited Suva Special School, where we observed World Down-Syndrome Day, a syndrome where a normal child who has two chromosomes (these children who are in special schools) they have a ... chromosome which affect their performance and makes them slightly abnormal. So we observed the day yesterday and I gave the message out that these children who are in special schools, with all their special children are given special treatment but they are ours and we want them to grow normally, we want them to be part of society, Madam Speaker.

That was an assurance we gave on behalf of Government that if we look at last year's Budget, we have allocated a special grant, raised a per capita grant for special schools because we want them to get special treatment and social excellence.

Madam Speaker, awareness on the right to children and values through curriculum include another strategy, the rights of a child are specified and included in the Year 10 Social Science Curriculum.

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights is also very well covered and now, Madam Speaker, we are working very closely with human rights permission to develop supporting resource material which we will provide to the teachers to use it in their education and training of the children about human rights.

Madam Speaker, this in brief about some of the things that we are doing to ensure that our child are protected, looked after and ultimately we allow them to realise their dreams and allow parents to ensure that their dreams about their children are also realised.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Child Protection Policy ensures the wellbeing, safety, respect and dignity of children are respected and also that conducive learning

environment is provided. Can the Honourable Minister explain how or what strategies are in place to address the emotional abuse of children who are still learning in tents from after *Cyclone Winston* until now?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member does not realise that our first step was to ensure that the children's education is not affected. Madam Speaker, there was a great danger, if you look at Vanuatu's case, the week after *Cyclone Pam*, for months the children were staying at home and when they came back, they found a 20 percent dropout rate because they were used to their home condition, they did not feel like coming back to school.

Madam Speaker, what we did, at a certain point in time, this was not normal times that she is saying. I think the Honourable Member should utilise the right technology. These are temporary learning space, Madam Speaker, these are not tents. Secondly, we do acknowledge that there is no such treat for a normal classroom; a temporary learning room but it is a learning space not a tent, so the first thing we did, we want to get them back to school.

Madam Speaker, in the entire world, this is a record time within two weeks of such a massive cyclone, we are able to motivate them and get them back to school. I want to thank all stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, they are peddling incorrect data. They do not even know what proportion of students are studying in tents, Madam Speaker. What we wanted, Madam Speaker, is to ensure that the children's dream about education, better future is not affected that is why we ensured that we get organised and give them space.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Honourable Member to show me the evidence that she has said that they are emotionally disturbed, what is this? Always we see those branding distorted facts without any factual evidence.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his explanation but in this newspaper article you are saying about the "naughty students to face expulsion" and he is telling us about all the programmes that are in place at the Ministry of Education. It is quite a dangerous trend to look at it and give authority to schools to expel students. This is the way, Madam Speaker, that the Ministry will adopt an advice and want the schools to carry out in order to eradicate the problems in schools with respect to the newspaper article.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, the latter part of this statement is true but there are lot of things that need to be done leading up to the expulsion of a child. Madam Speaker, you asked a question, it is my turn to explain.

Madam Speaker, a school is a place for teaching and learning. The students would come with dreams, to learn, to educate and become responsible citizens of this country, as well as have a better future and our government is investing a lot of money. There are 226,000 students in our school system, bundled with them are parents' dreams as well.

Madam Speaker, our children need to be protected. That is what I am also talking about, the Child Protection Policy. Our teachers need to be protected. When you find that students, children despite repeated counselling, despite being given warning letters, despite calling up the parents to

look after their children and advise them, mentor them, you still find that they are engaged in harassment of other students, harassment of teachers, bullying, despite knowing very well that we do not have any corporal punishment now, we need to protect other children, we need to protect our teachers, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we cannot convert a school into a rehabilitation centre. A school is a place for teaching and learning. Madam Speaker, if the student cannot behave and conduct himself or herself as a child, want to behave like an adult, take the child home, rehabilitate then come back to us, we will undertake some tests then we will admit the child. Thank you.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Madam Speaker, I just note that while the Honourable Minister was delivering his ministerial statement, probably other Honourable Members are looking at their mobile phones or uninterested so I stand on the points that were raised here yesterday about the overcrowding at QVS.

I did check and that old dormitory that has been converted into a classroom, there are 31 students that have been shifted to the recreation room that is used for recreation, ironing and storage of suitcases, and if you place two ping pong tables, where two kids can play only in that room and it accommodates 31 students. So the students they shifted to this old classroom or old dormitory for their classes. They sleep on the floor and you will imagine the hygiene and the position. My question is

HON. SPEAKER.- Your time is over, I am sorry. In the absence of a question, would you like to make a response?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, when people talk about overcrowding, what causes overcrowding? It is because people deliberately want to send their child to that particular school. We have schools which has got only 19-20 students in a classroom. Despite us telling them that "Look, we will give you a place for your child, they force themselves, they go all over the place to get a place in QVS or RKS. Now they come around, they sneak into the schools, take photos and come and say "Oh, it is overcrowded, oh, it is leaking, et cetera." Madam Speaker, I think they need to get reasonable with what they say.

(Honourable Members interject)

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

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let us come back to the original question. Who is responsible for taking injured children to hospital from school? I know of a case two weeks ago, where a child was injured and he went home on his own and later on the x-ray result showed that he had a cracked thigh or femur.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, normally in a high school, it is the Assistant Principal who is tasked to look after the children's disciplinary issues and if there is an issue. If there is any medical issue then the Assistant Principal is allowed to take the child to the hospital and bring them back but there are certain procedures that needs to be followed. For example, immediately inform the parents that the child is having this condition and we are taking the child to the hospital et cetera. In a primary school it is the Assistant Head Teacher or the Executive Teacher.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Minister is advising here if children continue to behave mischievously send them home and you should admit that the problem here is that we do not have professional counsellors. I have not seen in any of the school I go to, people who are fully trained and qualified counsellors. So can he inform this House, how many counsellors are there and how will you address that problem of ensuring that each school has a professional counsellor, not just anyone, but one who is qualified?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I think some time back I alluded to this issue of having full time counsellors in schools.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What about now?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Let me explain. You have asked the question and let me explain.

Madam Speaker, it is not about having a professional counsellor in school, it is about motivating the child to come and share the issue with the counsellor. So really, Madam Speaker, the problem is, children are not coming up with their problems.

What happens is when you have a full time counsellor in every little school, that is a waste of money because the counsellor does not have any work to do. What we are doing, Madam Speaker, is that we are appointing counsellors to look after cluster of schools. For example, one counsellor will look after 10 schools and if there is a problem in a particular school, then the counsellor will spend the next two weeks in that school.

(Interjection by Honourable Nawaikula)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Wait! Wait!

Madam Speaker, then what we are doing, we are undertaking counselling training skills for all our teachers to have basic counsellors skills so that when a child comes up with any problem or the teacher observes any particular problem with the child, the teacher does not run away to the head teacher or the principal, saying "I cannot handle it, I do not have the skills." No! What we want to do is that every teacher must have some basic counselling skills. They cannot get it, it is beyond them. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I would like to remind the Honourable Members, please though interjections are allowed and accommodated within Parliament, you need to be more restrictive about it because you are actually disrupting and disturbing the responses that are being given.

We will now give the last question to the Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, my question was already asked by another Honourable Member.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. In that case, I will give the last question to the Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, when one sends his/her child to school they expect them to have a fully developed child when he finishes. Madam Speaker, there are some of the policies that have stopped children from doing extra-curricular activities like weeding, gardening

et cetera, these are life time skills, if these things are stopped in schools, where else Honourable Minister would these people learn of these skills.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, over the last decade or so, parents have passed on their responsibility and obligation to the school system and putting unnecessary pressure on our teachers to teach everything, moral values et cetera, Madam Speaker, I think parents must take ownership of the child's growth and development as well as equally as our teachers are doing.

The other thing, Madam Speaker, we need to understand that we cannot divert teaching time away to all the other issues including discipline, student management et cetera. Thank you.

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

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I withdraw the question since the Honourable Minister will be making a Ministerial Statement on that.

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

Aquaculture Sector Conducive to Investment
(Question No. 78/2017)

HON. R.N. NADALO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries explain to this House how is the Ministry making the Aquaculture Sector conducive to investment?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Nadalo for his question.

Madam Speaker, Fiji still imports around \$20 million worth of aquaculture products into the country and through the years, the Ministry has attempted to reduce these imports through incentives to farmers and specific projects to boost products.

However, Madam Speaker, further studies have revealed the attempt to uplift standards and the scale of production from subsistence to commercial to be able to meet local demands in the sector, farmers need capital to sustain these operations.

A means to bring about sources of capital into the country rather than borrowing from lending institutions has been identified to be a good investment in this sector. Therefore, the Ministry is working to make the sector conducive to investment.

Madam Speaker, in addition to the stable political environment we are enjoying presently in Fiji, the Ministry is promoting good governance as a key ingredient to attracting investors, to commercial aquaculture and influencing long- term economic growth. Good governance re-assures investors that their capital is secure and offers an incentive to further investment.

The new Aquaculture Policy, Madam Speaker, which is almost completed in the National Business Policy cover these areas in which Government regulates a development of the industry with the aquaculture strategy and this operationalises the principle of good governance in this sector.

Madam Speaker, the legislative framework compatible with monitoring and enforcement regulations which will ensure environmental sustainability and further support an investment is enshrined in the Aquaculture Bill of 2016 which is currently with Parliament after its first reading

which is under the legislative framework for the regulation and development of aquaculture in Fiji. Therefore, Madam Speaker, the passing of this Bill will mean a lot to the sector.

Madam Speaker, apart from this, the Ministry is currently working with Investment Fiji, Ministry of Environment, FRCA, and Biosecurity of Fiji in providing the right advice and assistance to potential investors.

We also facilitate request for VAT and duty exemption too for registered companies that are investing in commercial aquaculture in Fiji,

Madam Speaker, continuously search on strain improvement needs for marine shrimp *p. vannamei* and tilapia is ongoing. We have already introduced better performing strain and currently in the crab company in Naitata and Raviravi farms. We have plans to introduce the newer strain of Genetically Improved Farmed Tilapia (GIFT), tilapia from WorldFish later in the year to improve hatcheries seed supply.

An Australian investor, Pacific Ocean Culture Limited is currently in the process of importing red tilapia to be grown out in Navua farms with the support of the ministry.

Madam Speaker, we continue to work closely with developing partners like the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) on capacity building for farmers in the hatchery and draw out techniques for culture species. Such incentives Madam Speaker, for the supporting environment for investment. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ro Kiliraki

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you Madam Speaker, pearl farming is a very important part of the aquaculture industry since after *Tropical Cyclone Winston* in Savusavu, the Hunter Pearl Farm was devastated because of the anchorages by the fishing boats that are coming to anchor. My question is, is there any provision in the policy to safeguard these private investors in terms of the usage of base and areas to give confidence to investment? Thank you Madam.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary questions. Yes, in fact we have brought in technical expertise, tomorrow there will be a technical expert from Hawaii on tilapia prawns flying in, he will be spending a month here to try and assist our local expertise and also investors sector.

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

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, supplementary question. Can the Honourable Minister brief the House on how is the Ministry planning to sustain this development for long-term? Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. The sustainable development aquaculture programme is necessary to the recent interest in the sector.

The Ministry will continue its capacity building programme both for men and women who are interested in this programme with our technical staff and overseas training that we are basically carrying out at this point.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Dulakiverata you have the floor.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you Madam Speaker, it is quite unfortunate that given the climatic and environmental conditions that we have in Fiji, we still have our \$20 million import bill on aquaculture products. I asked the Honourable Minister, what programme do you have in place to reduce this bill over time? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his supplementary question. During the previous few months we have examined the institution and we found that we have been recently sending a lot of our technical experts from our training institutions here to go abroad for three to four weeks.

Now, we have changed our tactics by actually bringing in technical expertise from overseas to be on the ground and actually see the local conditions and teach our technical people here so they are able to accommodate the necessary work within the local environment and conditions. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, before I ask this question I want to acknowledge one person, Mr. Justin Hunter, who has single-handedly progress on the prawn farming industry and this gets started a long time ago.

Could the Honourable Minister please advise this House what programmes are there for those who want to invest in the prawn farming industry?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, we are carrying out a lot of extension work at the very moment and we are coordinating with overseas and local investors here in the production of pearls and we are investing the farmers to actually coordinate and invest the local marine protected areas so that they can actually participate in pearl farming.

The investors here will actually give up the pearls to the pearl farmers who have had theirs and then they will buy the pearls back from them.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, just want to determine from the Honourable Minister, what area of land would you consider suitable for a village to allocate for this type of scheme? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, the sector has two;

1. Freshwater and
2. Mixture of fresh and sea water

The main requirement is the source of water for aquaculture farming. If a village has a good source of water either fresh water or brackish then that is the main issue that we look into first. The water is the main issue in trying to establish aquaculture farming.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That brings us to the end of the oral questions and I will go on to the written questions and I invite Honourable Prem Singh to ask his written question.

Written Question

LTA – Statistics on PSV permits over the last 4 years
(Question No. 79/2017)

HON. P. SINGH asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport table the statistics of PSV permits granted by the Land Transport Authority over the last 4 years?

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Madam Speaker, I will table my response at a later sitting as provided under the Standing Orders.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, question time is now over. We move on to the next item on the Order Paper.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- The following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40.

1. The Minister for Forestry
2. The Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources.

Each Minister may speak up to 20 minutes. After each Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition, or her designate to speak on the statement for no more than 5 minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the NFP to also speak for 5 minutes. There will be no other debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Forestry.

International Day of Forests – “*Forests for Energy*”

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Cabinet colleagues, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of the House, ladies and gentlemen

Madam Speaker, yesterday, 21st March marked the International Day of Forests with the theme “Forests for Energy”. My statement today is about how my Ministry is strengthening collaboration with our international partners to deliver the Fiji First’s economic philosophy through innovative and inclusive initiatives for landowners to realise the true potential of their resource base and achieve sustained economic growth.

Furthermore Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Forests is working towards wood energy development programme in Fiji and since 2014, the Ministry has been collaborating with GIMCO a private investor from the Republic of Korea, to set up wood biomass processing plant for energy production in Fiji. The pilot plant is currently shaping up well in Navutu, Nadroga along the Queen's Highway with the capacity to provide 10.5 megawatt power to the national grid from May this year. This is an investment worth \$FJ92 million through a consortium of investors from Korea and represented by GIMCO that has a joint venture partnership with Tropik Wood Industries Limited, a subsidiary of Fiji Pine Limited.

So, basically it is a joint venture between Korea and Fiji. The power plant will convert wood fiber and other waste to produce steam for power generation. This venture is offering the opportunity for the utilization of residual wood wastes that has been accumulating in most local sawmills and wood processing plants especially in Viti Levu, as well as off-cuts and residues from logging sites that can be mobilized now to meet the biomass need of the company at least in the short term.

The company is currently scaling-up the development of short rotation plantation of fast growing wood energy species such as *Gliricidia* or *Bainicagi* as we know in Fiji that can be harvested within 18 to 36 months rotation, as future fuel wood sources.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is also venturing discussion on the utilization of the invasive African tulip species or Pasi as it is known in the *iTaukei* language, for power generation and wood pellet production. Pasi as we know is a highly invasive tree species that is growing profusely over unutilized agriculture land.

My Ministry has been receiving a lot of questions and complaints over the years regarding African tulips. Attempt to eradicate using chemical has proven to be successful; however most of our local small scale farmers are finding it expensive. Biological control measure was also explored by the South Pacific Commission earlier with limited success. Obviously for Government, the priority is to free up the prime agriculture land for food production in terms of food security and livelihoods development purpose.

However, given the fact that African tulips can easily grow back after felling from the stumps as well as from the branches, it is only appropriate that all biomass are accumulated for further processing to avoid further invasion in the future and this is why the interest by ELTECH to utilize the biomass for pellet production will be beneficial for Fiji.

Madam Speaker, this will be a mammoth task to undertake and in order to attract private sector investment, Government support and partnership is crucial. ELTECH, which is a local subsidiary of the Korean based GIMCO power generating company, is interested to build a massive \$400 million wood pellet processing plants in the Dawasamu area and targeting to utilize all the African tulips biomass that will be removed through Government support.

At the same time, the company will be expanding short rotation energy wood plantations of its own, as well as support in partnership with Government the development of community-based short rotation energy woodlots to complement the future fuel wood sources for the plant. Fiji's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) under the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is specific to the energy sector while further accounting will be needed to incorporate the mitigation potential from the Forest sector in the future. This is understandable given the higher percentage of fossil fuel import especially for the energy sector.

Already, the national energy strategy has set a highly ambitious target of 100percent renewable energy by 2030. This target can only be realized through strong government intervention,

which Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government has already intervened in through the implementation of various incentives under the Foreign Investment Act and not only that, Madam Speaker, the Government continues to add more incentives to attract investment and help grow our economy.

This Government, through an attractive taxation regime and investor friendly and consistent policies, has enabled a conducive environment for foreign investors, especially with positive incentive mechanism for private sector investments to enable the expansion of a much broader energy mix that complement hydro power sources in the future. This is an opportune time to diversify the use of the national forest assets and expand the forest sector contribution towards renewable energy and green economy.

Madam Speaker, this wood energy programme will create multiple benefits to the socio-economic development of the country. The targeted export volume of 500,000 m³ of wood pellets is worth around \$F160 million. It will create direct and indirect employment opportunity to around 1,000 people. Diesel import savings is estimated to around \$F30 million from the 5.7 million gallon per year that will be replaced through the 12 megawatts excess powers that can be further supplied into the national grid and this will contribute to emission reduction offset of 120,000 tCO₂, annually.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, the Ministry of Forests has established a multiple sectoral taskforce that includes the Ministry for Agriculture, the Ministry for Rural and Maritime, the Ministry for *iTaukei* Affairs, and the Ministry of Environment to oversee the utilization by eradication of the African tulip species for wood pellet processing, for export to power generation plants in Korea. This wood energy programme augurs well with the theme of the 2017 International day of the Forests which is “Forests and Energy”.

International day of the Forests as declared by the UN Generally Assembly is celebrated on the 21st of March. It signifies the importance of forests as sources for renewable energy, especially fuel wood for cooking and heating as prevalent in most of our communities. While fossil fuels will remain as an important source of energy, renewable energy is gaining momentum, as a result of the growing concerns over climate change, especially the increasing build-up of greenhouse gas emissions that causes unprecedented warming in the atmosphere that ultimately causes sea level rise. The forest sector has a broader role to play in fostering a sustainable and climate smart development aspiration for Fiji into the future.

Vinaka, Madam Speaker.

(Acclamation)

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honorable Minister for his statement regarding the development of biomass especially in the Nadroga region in the village of Navutu.

Biomass, Madam Speaker, based on the way the Department of Energy is viewing Fiji is advance to green energy are saying that this is a gain changer. And we would like to see more of this in other parts of Fiji to be emulated.

I congratulate the Korean company and the Ministry for facilitating this, making it possible. As a starter on what to be a new industry that can help Fiji in a big way. But in favourable to this, Madam Speaker, is the partnership with the resource owners. As we know, Madam Speaker, we

keep saying in Fiji the resource owners are resource rich but cash poor. Through a formula that we can set up across the country for similar businesses, we can bring in the resource owners in a big way to be part of these types of undertaking. For instance, Madam Speaker, for this one in Nabou, GIMCO, 25 percent of the shares is hold by Tropik Wood. Tropik Wood has not put any money into this, but only by virtue of laying the ground the work for the investor to come and setup.

Now, I propose, Madam Speaker, that the landowners who have leased above 5,000 hectares for growing these plants to grow the field should be given that share of 25 percent. They are the people of Nalolo, the villages of Navutu, Lomawai, Kubuna, Korokula, Tau and Bavu. These are the people, Madam Speaker, who gave their land for Fiji Pine. There was a time when you drove towards Nadi, there was this beautiful greenery all over those mountains, but Madam Speaker, 40 or 50 years later, the impact on their lives through pine has been virtually negligible.

Now is the opportunity for us to ratify that, make them become part of this company, take it away from Tropik Wood, Tropik Wood is doing a wonderful job, I give them that, but this is something that can help grow the wealth of the resource owners who are giving so much away but very little return. I would suggest that, that happens in Nabou and whatever you setup similar mills of this nature the resource owners are major part of the equation.

Madam Speaker, additional to that, they will need to grow this in a big way to supply wood it will be like supplying cane to a mill. Now I do not know what the formula on who is going to grow these plants, whether it is a company or grown by individual landowners. Whichever way it goes, it must have the support to enable the farmers to harvest their crops, whatever he plants and deliver to the mill and paid for at a reasonable rate and the support system, to enable them to acquire seedlings to grow, to manage, must be very similar to the support system we have for sugar.

It is huge dollars, Madam Speaker, huge dollar if you are going to harness it properly and to have in mind that Fiji will benefit in a big way I mean this Navutu Scheme put about 10 or 12 megawatts into the national grid. It is huge dollars, \$92 million is the investment but integral to that, let us lift, uplift the well-being of our resource owners who have given so much through the pine and now through this scheme. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the NFP or his designate to speak in response.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement.

Madam Speaker, indeed this is a positive development and one which is in line with the trend towards sustainable development, addressing climate change mitigation and moving away from the reliance on fossil fuels. As I have said this morning, we still rely quite a lot on fossil fuel, in fact 112 megawatts of diesel capacity through the 14 stations around the country, still a very much feature of our fuel and energy supply.

Madam Speaker, overall research has shown that the impact of biomass energy has contributed towards carbon sinking and in some ways, it has been effective and efficient. I note the capacity of this new facility for wood biomass energy, contributing about 10.5 megawatts towards the total energy supply.

In fact, Madam Speaker, it is a timely contribution because if you look at the Monasavu Hydro Scheme, which contributes about 80 megawatts and it has been there for a while and I am not sure whether it is actually producing 80 megawatts because of the time and in terms of the actual generators, so I am assuming that the amount that the Monasavu Hydro is producing is technically

less than the 80 megawatts. So this is going to contribute towards the renewable energy portion of the total consumption.

I want to add some cautionary notes to biomass production and especially based on the supply of wood. Madam Speaker, some research around the world had also shown that if not properly regulated and properly managed and properly incentivised, there could be a rush towards setting more of these operations and therefore you could see a negative impact on the destruction of forest, people and entities which want to supply this may not necessarily do so in the proper manner. So all I want to say is that this is a positive development and we should all support this and promote it, but also we need to be careful about some of the negative consequences that can arise if the supply of wood and the way the forest are managed in the process can also have negative impact. So that is all I want to say with respect to this particular statement. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Given the time we will not have enough time for the next item on the agenda and therefore at this point, we will adjourn proceedings for lunch. Please note that lunch is provided for Honourable Members in the Big Committee Room.

Honourable Members of the House Committee, I remind you of our meeting in the Small Committee Room during lunch break. Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.27 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.34 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have some students from the Western Side who are bringing a lot of sunshine to Suva, and I really would like to welcome them. They are the Year 6 students of Nadi International School and they are in the gallery this afternoon; a very warm welcome.

Honourable Members, we move on to the next item on the Agenda. We still have one Ministerial Statement to go and I now call on the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources to deliver his statement.

Provision of Clean and Safe Drinking Water

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members of the Parliament and a special *bula vinaka* and a welcome to my friends from the West, from Nadi International School. I hope you have a wonderful day in Parliament today. Madam Speaker, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to deliberate on my Ministerial Statement in my capacity as Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry through the Department of Mineral Resources manages the effective development of groundwater resources and the provision of clean safe drinking water to households. Today, Madam Speaker, we mark the “World Water Day” and I would like to wish this august House a Happy World Water Day.

Also at this juncture, it might be an opportune moment, Madam Speaker, to say thank you to all those people who export our lovely water to the world, and that includes the small companies and the big ones, and pretty much have put Fiji as one of the best waters in the world.

World Water Day is about taking action to tackle the water crisis and today, there are about 663 million people living without a safe water supply close to home, spending countless hours, queuing or trekking to distant sources, and coping with the healthy impacts of using contaminated water.

Globally the vast majority of all the wastewater from our homes and cities, industry and agriculture flows back to nature without being treated or reused. Reducing and safely treating and reusing wastewater, for example, in agriculture and aquaculture, in fact protects workers, farmers and consumers and promotes food security, health and wellbeing.

Last month, Madam Speaker, the Ministry, in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister, Water Authority of Fiji and the Department of Energy commissioned the reticulated water sources, which now provides safe and clean drinking water to 274 households with a population of about 1,197 people in the villages of Navakawau in Taveuni and three villages in Kubulau, Bua, namely Kiobo, Raviravi and Namalata, including Kubulau District School in Bua.

These groundwater sources will supplement the existing water sources to ensure more sustainable supply. Additionally, Madam Speaker, work on water supply connection has also been completed at Ra High School, which provides water to 635 students.

Madam Speaker, furthermore the Fijian Government is working towards ensuring that every person has access to efficient supply of clean and safe water in the most of the remote areas in Fiji and the Ministry is targeting to assess 35 groundwater sources, drill 25 and reticulate 15 boreholes in various remote areas around Fiji.

Reticulation works are currently being carried out in Navatu Village and also the Government Station in Kubulau, Bua. This will benefit an additional 38-odd households.

Madam Speaker, the FijiFirst Government will continue to assist the people of Fiji in meeting one of the fundamental human needs which was not addressed by previous governments, especially the service right now, especially in the Northern Division.

Madam Speaker, in addition to providing access to clean, safe and consistent water supply and especially the rural community, the Ministry is also responsible for early warning systems in terms of disaster because we all know, Madam Speaker, Fiji lies along circum Pacific, commonly known as the “Ring of Fire”, an area of very high seismic and volcanic activity.

Records indicate that the daily occurrences of earthquakes within the Fiji region signifying that the region is geologically active and this causes a major concern to the country in terms of earthquakes, regional or local that can generate *tsunamis*. The Ministry will continuously initiate proactive measures in partnering with other stakeholders in enhancing our detections and also in the dissemination of warnings and the early warning systems.

Madam Speaker, there have been questions from the opposite side of the House, specifically earlier on with respect to foreshore leases and the benefits to resource owners. Allow me to enlighten this august House on that particular subject.

Madam Speaker, of all foreshore leases administered and issued by the Ministry provides the highest benefit to the traditional fishing rights’ owners and of course, it is in accordance with Section 29 of our Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the foreshore developments provide subsequent benefits to the *iTaukei ni Qoliqoli*, or resource owners, and they are such as:

1. Compensation for loss of Fishing Rights. This compensation, Madam Speaker, is determined by the Department of Fisheries through the Fisheries Impact Assessment;
2. Investors obviously enter into an agreement with the traditional fishing rights owners for other incentives and benefits; and
3. Provides employment to local coastal communities that help provide and improve livelihoods.

Madam Speaker, in addition the Government has put in place a plan and policy to better manage foreshore developments, in particular the revisitation of Fisheries Impact Assessments. This policy, Madam Speaker, is far-reaching, where Government is considering the full economic perspective beyond the current generation.

The existing mode is in the form of lump sum payment to the fishing rights owners at the commencement of the foreshore lease. That particular issue is being looked at the moment and it should be revised and the fishing rights compensation is being recommended to be an annual payment. This is to ensure, Madam Speaker, (this is quite an important issue) that not only that current generation of the fishing rights owners will benefit but there are future generations which also benefit from this particular mode of payment. No previous government, but the FijiFirst Government has had the vision to implement this mode of payment to cover the full-term of the 1999 year lease.

Madam Speaker, there was also a question from the opposite side of the House on the formula calculation to compensate those in Yatu Malolo who have been denied an access by film-makers of the *Survivor Fiji* series.

I would like to confirm to this Honourable House, Madam Speaker, that the traditional fishing rights owners had consented to waive their fishing rights during the 12 months period that their fishing ground was used for the shooting of the *Survivor* series.

Madam Speaker, by way of background, the audio-visual sectors' contribution to the GDP is increasing annually. And 2016 alone has been one of the busiest year for film productions to be shot in Fiji. A total of 56 film productions were hosted in Fiji and out of this were 8 major productions that were budgeted at an estimated \$135 million. The productions brought an estimate of \$43 million directly into the Fijian economy and generated about \$120 million in new economic activity.

The interest, Madam Speaker, for filming in Fiji has grown significantly over the past few years due to the film tax rebate being offered and of course due to our stunning locations.

During filming on location, certain restrictions are put in place to avoid disruption of the production, however this is not done, Madam Speaker, without proper consent from land and resource owners.

Therefore during the filming on location at the Yatu Malolo, the Traditional Fishing Rights Owners (TFROs) were approached to provide consent and the TFRO had provided consent to waive their fishing rights during the 12 months' period that their fishing ground is used for the shooting of the *Survivor* series. It should also be noted that the appropriate compensation was negotiated between the production house and the TFRO for forgoing their rights for that particular period.

This negotiation was conducted by the Nadroga Provincial Office and as a result, Madam Speaker, the TFROs at the Yatu Malolo received a total amount of Fijian \$140,000 for 12 months. That tantamount to roughly about \$11,000 per month.

Furthermore as a result of the filming in Yatu Malolo, the benefits of the people was not limited to compensation but included the creation of employment for 200 people in the surrounding area, hiring of fibre boats and the procurement of meals for the entire production.

In addition to the benefits just mentioned, the landowners also received compensation for their dry land, which amounted to FJD\$403,000 and was paid through the iTLTB. So there is no issue of the landowners and the traditional fishing right owners not paid compensated or not being compensated enough.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is also tasked with regularizing tenancy for informal settlements on State Land. Not only are we in line with the Bainimarama Government's targets for regularization of informal settlements but also we are contributing towards the Sustainable Goal 1 of "No Poverty – End Poverty in all its form everywhere" and through the provision of basic services such as land for living.

To-date, Madam Speaker, the Ministry have issued a total of 217 approval notices: 72 for the Western Division; 77 for the Northern Division; and 68 for the Central Division and we are working towards the issuance of a 135 approval notices in the not too distant future and this will benefit an estimated 135 families in the Western, Northern and the Central Divisions.

Madam Speaker, allow me to draw your attention also to Honourable Dulakiverata's comments that by regularizing informal settlements, this Government is encouraging squatters. In

fact, let me confirm to the Honourable Member that we are not encouraging squatters. We are acting in compliance with the provisions of Section 35(1) of the 2013 Constitution in promoting the “right to housing and sanitation”. Let me reiterate in the last statement, and may I quote:

“The regularization of these informal settlements strengthens Government’s commitment to the Fijian people to have access to land, essential services and infrastructures. Issuance of these lease notices brings security and freedom to participate in community life; creates a legacy to the next generation; provide much longer planning horizon for business and resource entrepreneurship; and enable the people to be financially independent.”

Madam Speaker with reference to the televised news bulletin last night, about the eviction of nine families in Bilo, Veisari. I would like to inform this House that Government efficiently moved in to their rescue and assisted them in being resettled in Wainadoi.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is also progressively working towards the renewal of all expired agriculture leases. These expired leases dated back from as far as 1992 and the Ministry is vigorously ensuring that expired leases are renewed. We will ensure that the lessees have been cultivating the leases according to their lease conditions, and all the lessees are therefore encouraged to cultivate their leases accordingly.

Madam Speaker, as mentioned in my previous statement and I reiterate that the new technologies also are changing the way we actually do things and sharing information and data. The Geospatial Division within the Ministry has embarked on the awareness programmes for stakeholders on this interactive Web-GIS product.

The objective of the Vanua-GIS awareness is to familiarize Government Departments on this new WebMap Application. With the inclusion of new features and tools plus integration of all the collated data from various Government Departments and stakeholders, it is important to demonstrate how this different Map Layers have combined to make faster decisions in regards to Geospatial information. Most stakeholders have been using the old system which is now been replaced by the VanuaGIS, which is accessible, Madam Speaker, 24/7.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, may I reiterate the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources will continue to fulfil its roles for the benefit of all the communities in Fiji. I thank you Madam Speaker.

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

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. Madam Speaker, I would like to reiterate my comments that regularization of people living in squatter areas is encouraging squatting in vacant Crown Lands. Why I said this, Madam Speaker, is there is a system whereby people that want to lease State Lands to follow. So people that follow that system do not get the application approved in time, so the people that squat are given priority over these people and that is why we are experiencing a lot of squatters in vacant State Lands.

Also Madam Speaker the Government is issuing leases to these people and with Agreement for Lease and this Agreement for Lease are not acceptable in many lending institutions for their security. And the renewal of agricultural leases, this is an ongoing process. If they have a lot of backlog in the renewal of agricultural leases, it shows the laxity in the Department in processing these renewals, because leases have a definite time, starting time and a definite ending time. So everyone

knows when the lease is going to expire, so the process should start before the lease expires and there should not be any backlog.

The core role of the Ministry of Lands, Madam Speaker, is to administer State Lands so they properly administer State Lands so that the people that reside or lease State Lands should pay their rent in time. Madam Speaker, and the Government should get the revenue from leasing its properties.

From the record, Madam Speaker, the Crown Lease arrears, this is during the 2010 to 2013, at the moment it stands at \$24,700. This is the highest arrears that has been recorded by the Department. The premium arrears is \$282,000: taxi base arrears, \$40,000; Narere Barracks rental arrears, \$60,000; Surveyors' Registration arrears \$26,800; Valuers' Registration arrears \$35,000. These are the core functions of the Department that they should be doing, Madam Speaker. There is a scheme in the Ministry which is called the "Buy Back Scheme" which was introduced by previous governments. Most of these properties that were bought under this scheme, Madam Speaker, did not see the light of the day. Some failed to pay their payments in time and all these lands have been administered by the Land Bank. Some have already paid, Madam Speaker, but have not been transferred to the respective *mataqali*.

One case on hand is Nawaidau Land Purchase Cooperative in Buresala, Ovalau. They had already paid but the title had not been transferred to them, Madam Speaker.

With the VanuaGIS, Madam Speaker, this is an ongoing process and they should develop this thing fully to be more accessible to the business people and the ordinary citizens.

The assessment of compensation on the foreshore development, Madam Speaker. Now with the absence of the agricultural tribunal, the Government should be formulating policies on how this should be looked at. With the compensation for the use of fishing rights for the filming of films in the Mamanuca, Madam Speaker, the consultation with the Nadroga Provincial Council should be done by the iTLTB. Thank you Madam Speaker, should learn something.

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

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I thank the Minister, a pledge for his statement. Madam Speaker, we all acknowledge that water is essential for life and we must ensure at all times that we have clean and affordable drinking water available to every Fijian. Madam Speaker, a walk in this direction must not be ad hoc but should continue consistently to sustain the programmes that we have.

Madam Speaker, on the fishing rights that the Honourable Minister alluded to, there needs to be more consultation with the owners of the fishing rights and *qoliqoli* and many times we see problems that come about is just because either they say that they have not been consulted or there is lack of consultation. So this an area where the Honourable Minister would be asked to give more prominence to.

Madam Speaker, as for the weather reporting, yes we agree but we must also invest in early warning systems. These early warning systems, as you know, Fiji's is prone to natural disasters, we have had the second largest cyclone in Fiji, *Tropical Cyclone Winston* and from that experience we have learnt bad lessons and the good lessons. One of the good lessons would be to improve our warning systems.

Madam Speaker, non-formal settlements, we must ensure that not only as parliamentarians but every initiative must come from every Fijian towards regularising the settlements. We cannot afford to have one set of people leaving in informal settlements and who are denied the basic rights.

(Interjection from Government Members)

HON. P. SINGH.- We are in different parties.

Madam Speaker, one of the concerns and challenges that I have is still the renewal of leases which we did talk about in the last session of Parliament and unfortunately the Honourable Minister has not alluded to that. I thought he was going to talk on the progress of this, the renewal of leases and the issuance of leases. They remain a challenge for your department.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister had instituted earlier the quality standards which require every request to be resolved in a timely manner. A non-compliance triggers alert at the Honourable Ministers office as well as that of the Permanent Secretary. In some cases where staff do not carry out instructions as requested, they are dealt with, so the question is, are we administratively empowering our staff to deal with these situations? In particularly when we had a case of backlog of leases to be renewed.

Madam Speaker, the other one is the ad-hock subdivision of lands and I will give you an example. The proposed tenants who acquire land on the semi-purchase with a lessee, sometimes this takes years, it even takes 12-20 years to formalise. In the event they do a subdivision and obtain a survey plan.

What actually happens, Madam Speaker, is that Lands Department, this one I want to bring to the attention of the Honourable Minister, is that the leases of the subdivided lots are issued in the name of the original lessee and the original lessee and the tenants they have to run around to get these leases transferred onto their own names. In some cases these unscrupulous lessees they even ask for or demand for higher consideration from what they have been agreed at the original price.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is the lessor.

HON. P. SINGH.- The lessee in this case being the head lessee,.

So the head lessees what they do, Madam Speaker, is to the tenants they are showing unscrupulous as I said, there is one case and I can quote the reference to the Honourable Minister for his information (LD 4/10/1657 in Malolo) and he subdivided this land where Lands Department made a grave mistake of issuing the leases to the head lessee and now he is giving a run around to these people by not transferring it and asking for more money. I believe this is within your department and please have a look at that.

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

Pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Friday 10th February, 2017, the Electricity Bill 2017 will now be debated, voted upon and be passed. Debate will be limited to one hour. I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Just a clarification before the Honourable Attorney-General starts. Last time I was a bit confused. Remember we had a debate on one of the motions and are not sure whether the one hour actually included the presentation by the mover of the motion as well as the response because I remember last time on sugar, some members from the Government side were

not able to take part. So we need some clarification otherwise people miss out because they wait and then the time is over, that is why I wanted to make that clarification.

HON. SPEAKER.- Within the one hour the mover is given 20 minutes and the right of reply is also 20 minutes that is 40 minutes within the hour.

Thank you. Honourable Attorney-General you may continue.

ELECTRICITY BILL 2017

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 10th February, 2017, I move that Electricity Bill 2017 be debated, voted upon and be passed. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Electricity Bill 2017 being debated today is a result of Government's intention to corporatize Fiji Electricity Authority (FEA) and create a company or corporate entity that will be registered under Companies Act and this company will subsequently be harshly divested.

Under the Fiji Electricity Act, FEA is currently enjoying a position in the market for retail, transmission and distribution of electricity in Fiji. FEA also, Madam Speaker, at the same time whilst performing these functions of generation, transmission and distribution and retail, FEA also performs the regulatory functions of approval of licences and compliance with safety standards. A key feature of this Bill, Madam Speaker, is focused on the regulatory reforms in the electricity industry in Fiji.

As we know, Madam Speaker, that is similarly been done for the telecommunications industry, which is now the Telecommunication Authority of Fiji that deals with the regulatory aspects of telecommunications in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, of course, given the partial divestment and in fact having being corporatized, it is not appropriate for the company to regulate the electricity industry or to issue electricity related licenses. Indeed, Madam Speaker, a number of times because FEA is the generator of electricity and the transmitter and the retailer and at the same time it is also the one that regulates itself, sometimes also consumers' rights are somehow or the other swept to the side because you are actually complaining to an organisation that is fulfilling both roles.

Madam Speaker, the objective of course as we said to establish an independent regulator to deregulate the electricity industry and further enhance the Government's policy for good governance, transparency and accountability. The primary roles and responsibility of the regulator will be too, with the consent of the Minister issue licences in relation to generation, transmission and supply of electricity, to determine tariffs and price methodology of electricity, to protect the interest of consumers which is specifically stated in the law itself and the administration enforcement and regulation of electricity industry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Bill also includes consequential amendments to the Commerce Commission Act 2010 to give effect to the proposed role of regulator to the Fiji Commerce Commission in the event of that happening.

Madam Speaker, the Bill was first tabled in Parliament on 10th February, the Bill is referred to the Standing Committee for Justice, Law and Human Rights for public consultations. The Standing Committee has heard numerous submissions from members of the public, Consumer Council and following the public consultations, some amendments were made to the Bill which is what we are also agreeing to as at when it has been tabled. These amendments have been highlighted in pink in the Bill itself, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I know there is a lot of talk, there is a lot of misinformation about the divestment. We have always said from day one that energy, electricity is very important to a small country like Fiji which is actually a price taker, it is not a price setter, as far as fossil fuel is concerned. But of course for a country like Fiji, we need to ensure that we have sources of energy that are non-dependent on fossil fuels, which means renewable energy.

Monasavu, of course, Madam Speaker, was the first non-renewable energy infrastructure that was put up in Fiji back in the 1970s and of course since then we have had Nadarivatu, we have the raising up of the weir, further down the track from Monasavu, and we have had the Butoni Wind Pump which of course has had its own challenges that was put up in a very strenuous circumstances to be diplomatic about it and there are other projects that have come on stream.

We have also seen that the world has shifted in particular given the discourse and indeed the implementation of various policies pertaining to climate change, a focus on mitigation as far as target for prints is concerned. Mitigation has led to the advent of new technology in the world. As you saw our Honourable Prime Minister, for example, was in Marrakesh recently, last year, and he signed an agreement with the Indian Government initiative regarding users of solar energy.

FEA has signed an MOU with the Reunion Islands which is down in the Indian Ocean with respect to using solar energy combining with agriculture. So, a number of these initiatives, number of new technologies have come to the fore which of course the Fijian Government must be able to take advantage of through Fiji Electricity Authority, but also to be able to bring in a number of partners that are strategic partners to be able to not just provide the capital for that. It is also at the same time to reduce the number of Government guarantees that it has put in place because obviously with the divestment, Madam Speaker, if we are to divest say 45 percent of our shares in FEA, we expect our guarantee portfolio to also reduce by 45 percent. So these are some of the positive things that will be put in place with the divestment of our shares, Madam Speaker.

Again, Madam Speaker, there has also been a lot of kerfuffle about various other groups probably with some political motivations have not necessarily carried out the objective analysis of what actually will be precipitated by the divestment of these shares of Fiji Electricity Authority.

But, of course, it enhances private sector participation in respect of renewable energy companies coming in to the fore, supplying to the grid. The Honourable Minister for Forest earlier spoke about the initiative regarding the pine and how this Korean company is now set-up, they will of course be supplying to the grid.

A few years ago, Madam Speaker, renewable energy companies were only being offered very minimum amounts of money as cost recovery and indeed as payments for them to be able to supply to the grid. They are only being offered about 10 or 11 cents. Now, as we know that renewable energy it always has a much higher end input as far as capital investment is concerned. So capital investment is very high in the initial stages but of course your source of energy is much cheaper. A lot of people shy away from capital investment renewable energy because of the upfront cost in the commitment you need to make.

Now many of them will actually do that if they know that the return on investment will actually be steady, will be guaranteed, will not be manipulated with and this actually will give them a good rate of return. So this is why with the changes brought about firstly by the Bainimarama Government in respect of some of the tariff changes that took place and also ensuring that those who are high-end users actually do pay more than commercial users but reduce the burden for low-income earners or ordinary Fijians.

So, Madam Speaker, we also intend to with the divestment, list FEA on the South Pacific Stock Exchange to develop the capital markets. We are also currently looking at, Madam Speaker, while not directly related to the Bill, we are also looking at how we can provide a demutualised process whereby ordinary Fijians who are currently account holders of FEA, I am talking about domestic account holders, they could also be given shares in the company. That currently is being worked out and as to what percentage of the shares that they will get.

We have a number of what we call “prepaid users” of electricity in Fiji. Many people, for example, at the moment you know they go and load it up and then they get the electricity. Those people also, Madam Speaker, at the moment are the beneficiaries of Government subsidised scheme for electricity. As you know that we have made an announcement that those people who earn below \$30,000 a year, Government will actually subsidise half of their tariff rates. So we pay at the moment Madam Speaker, 33.4 cents, we pay actually 17 cents and contribute towards the tariff.

So, in this way, Madam Speaker, rather than having a blanket approach to the tariff structure, it is better to have targeted assistance because when you have a blanket approach to tariff structure even the rich will benefit from it. So Government’s funds are better utilized and in targeted assistance and this is precisely what we are going to do, it is precisely what we intend to do in respect of the demutualisation of the shares.

Madam Speaker, I have covered a lot of this and of course I can come back and answer any questions that may come from the floor. But, Madam Speaker, just by very quickly to highlight again to the Honourable Members of the House that there is a number of significant changes that of course have taken place and the Bill seeks to address them. Just to allay the fears and there has been a lot of talk about it, I saw some comments in the Letters to the Editor in the *Fiji Times*, where they are saying that we are selling off our assets. Madam Speaker that is not the case. The proposal, of course, as being done with Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, even though we have got FNPF and Aitken Spence as shareholders in the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, all the assets have actually been transferred to a Government company called Assets Fiji Limited or AFL for want of a better acronym and they still reside with Government.

Certainly, with FEA, Madam Speaker, we have actually, as far as all the freehold properties are concerned, they will be put into the Assets Fiji Limited asset base but as far as all the leased properties are concerned, they will continue as they are. The landowners, whoever, it is have been receiving the benefits will continue to receive those benefits, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, just to put it into perspective in respect of some of the challenges of FEA, in 2000, FEA had 117,315 customers. Today, FEA has 174,530 customers; an increase of about 60,000 customers within that period. I also would like to highlight the capital expenditure of FEA from 2000 to 2006 was \$32 million. From 2007 to 2016 it was around \$77 million, an increase of nearly \$50 million. What essentially it shows that more connections, more homes being connected, more investments being made.

So between the period of 2000 and 2006, FEA was connecting an average of around 3,000 new customers. This does not make a distinction between domestic or commercial, but there are 3,000 new customers between 2000 and 2006. Today, Madam Speaker, we are connecting 5,500 new

customers; on a yearly basis I am talking about. So it has increased exponentially. There is obviously a lot of demands being in place on FEA. Of course, Madam Speaker, the customers to employer have increased by 89 percent. Electricity generation output per employee has increased by 127 percent. The root length of power lines and underground cables per employee has increased by 77 percent. An asset value per employee has increased by 229 percent.

The cash position, Madam Speaker, is obviously much better than what it was, it was making losses and I can give those facts and figures later on if any of the Members are interested in that. There is also to put into perspective, Madam Speaker, in 2005 land lease money that was paid out to landowners on an annual basis was \$160,000. In 2016, they are now paying \$380,000 per annum.

The royalty and generation, Madam Speaker, was paid out to landowners in Monasavu. This was done by FEA. It was paid 50 cents per megawatt per hour. Today, they are getting paid 60 cents. From 2017 it was increased from 50 cents to 60 cents. Obviously, Madam Speaker, if the company does do well, there is lot more opportunity if there is less burden on turning the cash flow, the company can be able to develop a lot more partnerships, in particular with the landowners and various other stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, one of the major challenges of FEA is the aging assets. As you know that recently last year and the year before last, major trenches were dug up all the way up to the city, right up to Kinoya because of the old cables that have not been replaced for about 50 or 60 years. They are now of course being replaced but the poor cash position, Madam Speaker, in 2006 and prior to that actually stopped them from doing so.

Since the last three years, Madam Speaker, FEA has commenced replacement of these aging assets, we anticipate to spend more than \$150 million in the next five to seven years.

Madam Speaker, in respect of Monasavu, there has been a huge amount of work that needs to be done, in fact after 2010, some \$15 million has been spent in refurbishing Monasavu and we expect a lot more refurbishing to be done. As we have said on numerous times, Madam Speaker, in Fiji we have always been very good at building things, when we do build things, but we are not very good at looking after it. We need to go back and make sure that the assets actually have maintained the same value. A lot more money needs to be set aside for the maintenance of those assets and indeed that is what we intend to do and Monasavu, of course will go through that phase too.

We have in recent times, Madam Speaker, the Nadarivatu Hydro Power Project, I know a lot of people have said to us on this side of the House, they say, "Oh, you have been in power since 2007, right till now it has been 10 years", but the trials and tribulations we went through, Madam Speaker, from 2007 in particular, up to 2014 was quite horrendous.

Many of the people on that side of the House were courting overseas governments to work against us. We had travel bans, loans that were offered to us were withdrawn. Despite that, Madam Speaker, we have made enormous growth. One such example, Madam Speaker, is the Nadarivatu Hydro Power Project - FJ\$300 million, we are going to get funding from World Bank. That was withdrawn. Many people we know went and lobbied for it – "withdraw the loans, withdraw the loans", ADB stopped giving us money.

Despite all the withdrawal of those loans, we still went ahead with these projects, some of them did cost a bit more money, now they are costing a lot more less. We went ahead and built the Nadarivatu Hydro Dam which now contributes about 40 megawatts which was highlighted earlier on. All of these, Madam Speaker, had been done in that period where there was a lot of strenuous pressure on us, but we are very much focussed on development, and FEA, Madam Speaker, of course was able to go ahead with this project, with Government guarantees being offered to be able to ensure

that FEA goes ahead, borrows money from the market, because we recognise as a strategy, that energy is critically important.

On energy, Madam Speaker, the cost of the tariffs in fact, if we were able to go through this divestment and have a focus on getting renewable energy sources, we could even very soon be able to bring down energy cost and the cost of production of energy, in particular this is going to come from newer sources.

Notwithstanding that, Madam Speaker, we have at the moment, for example, a new 35 megawatt diesel generated power generators were actually put in Kinoya, which is actually yet to be commissioned but is actually opening its cost about \$70 million to be able to meet the demands. So, there is always a lot of opportunity in respect of renewable energy companies to come into that space.

As I have highlighted, Madam Speaker, that we have also increased the subsidies up to 95 kilowatts. Any household that earns less than \$30,000 a year, we pay up to 17 cents a unit, to help those low-income earners. Schools of course are subsidised for the first 200 units, consumer again per month and at the moment, Madam Speaker, some 69,000 domestic customers have enjoyed this subsidy in the past to the tune of around \$3 million and this of course applies to the prepaid units.

Madam Speaker, FEA has won a number of awards (I do not want to go into all of that, but in the past few years) but also let me highlight, what had actually happened in the past, in particular regarding FEA assets. There is a lot song and dance being made about that. Under one of the former chairman who no longer resides in Fiji, I understand lives in some very classy suburb in Melbourne called Toorak, under him, Madam Speaker, we have some very expensive FEA assets that were sold off for peanuts.

That Head office of FEA that FEA is headquartered in, was in 2005 sold for a mere \$5.5 million VIP, then we came in, we said to FEA “that is your head office, that is your key infrastructure, you need to buy it back,” They bought it back for \$6.5 million.

In Lautoka, right next to Jasper High School, a vast area with property was sold off, Namoli House in Lautoka which was prime property worth a few million dollars was sold for \$500,000.

Madam Speaker, the irony is this, when they sold it for \$500,000, they went and rented a space in that same property and invested \$350,000 to upgrade that building for their new customer care office. These are the kind of shenanigans that went on, properties right up to near Fiji Club, all were sold off. Madam Speaker, of course we all know about Butoni, most wind farms, the benchmark is that it should actually operate 15 percent of the time on average. Wind farm generally operate that way. Butoni, Madam Speaker, rarely makes it up to 7 percent. It has got two blades instead of the normal three blades. I can go into all of them, but the point of this is this. FEA now is being run in a professional manner. People are appointed on merit, people were not appointed on merit previously, it was who you knew. There is huge asset wastage, Madam Speaker. We now are in a very good space. There is a lot of interest in respect of investing in Fiji Electricity Authority.

The Fijian Government will still own 51 percent. Let me reiterate, the Fijian Government will still own 51 percent of FEA, the Fijian Government, Madam Speaker, will still continue with the subsidy to low-income earners, this is part of the deal. This law is critical to ensure that we give confidence to would-be participants.

There would be people who want to actually invest, they range from Fijian Holdings to FNPF, to electricity companies from offshore and various other industrial companies. So, Madam Speaker, I will stop there if I can respond to other questions. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The floor is open for debate. Honourable Aseri Radrodoro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you Madam Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to this Bill. Before I start, I would like to state that there are a lot of petitions being received against this Bill that did not make its way to the Committee because of the shortness of time. Madam Speaker, this Bill is perhaps one of the most important ones that will come before this House because it essentially deals with critical State assets.

I will just pick out on some issues while the rest of my colleagues can work on the other issues. I begin with the corporatisation of FEA which will enable the company to float shares through the Suva Stock Exchange, subsequently opening the way for the privatisation of FEA at some future dates.

For such sensitive national assets, Madam Speaker, I fear the eventual loss of this entity from the hands of the ordinary Fijian people. We have just heard about Fiji Airways this morning and the logistical arrangements that it cannot make its way in the presentation to Parliament, the annual report.

I may be alarmed, Madam Speaker, that it seems the Bill is proposing for the relevant Minister to be given allowance to enter into agreements as maybe required to manage the divestment transactions.

Madam Speaker, who is going to provide transparent oversight over this process and will the general public be given an opportunity to have the final say over who becomes part-owner or eventual owner of FEA when its shares have been bought?

Madam Speaker, what will happen to the Government guarantee? In my previous Budget Address in 2015 and last year, I had highlighted the fact that Government revenues were featuring the sale of Government assets, including the divestment of FEA shares. My concerns then were on the imbalance of the budget books and the sale failed to materialise in the two years it appeared to be on sale. I had also highlighted the importance of separating the operations and the regulatory functions of power supply. I had in fact suggested that the FEA be left alone to carry out its mandated operational role in providing Fiji with energy supply and to leave the task of regulating the energy sector to government or even an independent regulator.

This is crucial because it allows government to provide oversight over FEA, without the threat of influencing the operations with political policies as was done in 2008 and again in 2014 when the consumer rural electrification contribution was reduced from 10 percent to 5 percent, and again consumers below the \$30,000 salary bracket were given subsidies by Government.

In fact, Madam Speaker, FEA revised electricity tariff, I think in 2010 or 2013, the Minister can confirm that to us.

We can argue till the cows come home, Madam Speaker, that consumers are benefiting from the reductions, but if you are going to look at the issue in the long-term, selling of shares of FEA in stock exchange is not only a display of desperate Government measures but also reflects Government's inability to safeguard the national crucial assets, which can be vulnerable for manipulation, ultimately costing consumers more in bills to pay when the new co-owners of FEA begin to demand maximum returns on their investment.

In fact, I had a petition here requesting, Madam Speaker, if the Government had a privatisation consultation report to be also tabled in this honourable House.

Madam Speaker, whoever decides to buy in these shares will be expected to make profit and not simply engage in a community service.

So, whilst consumer are being assisted and made happy for Elections and a rosy picture is painted of the Government image subsequently, this nation will be under a threat of escalating living cost, Madam Speaker, made worse by the Reserve Bank's forecast of 6.8 percent inflation cost revealed about three weeks ago to add to our woes.

Let me end, Madam Speaker, by suggesting that Government looks within Fiji's domestic market if it is really serious about divesting FEA shares. By doing that, they maintain these crucial assets within our nation and the assistance of Consumer Council, to name a few, we can control the cost of our bills.

I urge Government to look at the resource owners as partners for the business entrepreneurship, for example, those in Naitasiri and assist them to become core owners of FEA. They have been asking the Honourable Prime Minister for this, in fact, on a number of occasions when he had visited the province, because they know they can benefit more than just earning this money on a commodity, which has been derived through the use their natural resources.

Perhaps, Madam Speaker the Naitasiri Province shares in Fijian Holdings could be used to purchase their shares in FEA and similarly, other provinces could be encouraged to partner the Naitasiri Province in this regard. For me, Madam Speaker, that would be a more beneficial investment for our FHL shares, instead of Government just deciding to sell off or buy entities using our FHL shares without our provinces' consent.

On that note, Madam Speaker, I end my contribution and I register my reservation and objections to this Bill. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON.SPEAKER.- Honourable Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. One is looking at partial divestment, there are always advantages and disadvantages of doing that, and if you look at how this is done, the experiences of partial divestment corporatisation leading to partial divestment, it is always the timing and it is always the objective.

Madam Speaker, I am not sure and perhaps the Honourable Attorney-General in some ways putting out the figures and the progress that FEA has made with respect to its financial performance, and indeed I agree with him in fact, I tend to say that the wisdom of appointing some very smart business people on some of the boards to run commercial entities, such as FEA and others makes sense and I think FEA right now is probably in a much stronger position than what it was before. That itself suggests that it is probably not a good idea for Government to think about partial divestment now.

The other reason why I think the timing is perhaps not right, I mean Fiji is the Presidency of COP23 and the commitment that we are going to make in terms of moving ourselves towards renewable energy. More renewable in the future itself makes a case that perhaps FEA should remain fully in the hands of the Government, so that we can make this transition and Madam Speaker, I want to quote the figures again. We will still need 112 megawatts of diesel capacity and we were just told in the morning that we will probably have another 14.5 megawatts of power from the biomass production that the Honourable Minister referred to earlier.

In some ways, the task of the FEA right now is to ensure that we have continued energy security, that we continue to make the investments and the Honourable Attorney-General himself pointed out the investment that needs to be made in the Monasavu Hydro Scheme, and I think he is right because that 80 megawatts capacity, Madam Speaker, is no longer there, it is less than 80 megawatts.

So in some sense, the best thing for Government to do now is to not go into parts of divestment and the FEA grid can be fed by independent power producers. For example, if we have investor A, B, or C, the Government can provide other kinds of incentive for those power producers to feed into the FEA grid and contribute to the overall energy supply.

Madam Speaker, I think it does not make sense. I know the budget had a provision in 2015, 2016 and 2017 as well for partial divestment of FEA, so I do not want to assume that this is being done to sought-out the budget. I hope it is not, because the important thing, Madam Speaker, is that we are making an important transition, not only in terms of the demand for energy. More and more people, if we look at the objective of Government and what we want as legislators, we want to provide as many people as possible with power. So the demand is going to rise as we move into the future and that is why it is absolutely vital that the Government keeps a handle on FEA for a much longer period than divesting the partial or the partial divestment at the moment.

Madam Speaker, those are more general points, in fact it would have been very good if we had more time because this is such an important Bill and we are making such an important decision. It is rather unfortunate that we do not have the time and I have many issues with respect to each of the clauses and I do not want to go through all of them because I want to leave some time for my colleagues to make their contributions as well.

But, Madam Speaker, the Government could still keep FEA 100 percent shares, have an independent regulator, provide incentives to independent power suppliers and all of them can feed into the FEA grid and the incentives can be used because FEA seems to be doing well and has been investing in the infrastructure. To me, it does not make sense right now to go the way that we are trying go through this Bill.

Madam Speaker, as I said, and I want to repeat this because this is very important. For important Bills such as this, Madam Speaker, we need a lot of time, people need to speak on this, raise their issues because the people of this country want to hear. In the end they make up their mind whether the Government is doing the right thing or not but at least we should be given the opportunity in this House to have a thorough debate on each aspect of the Bill and if I had time, I would have gone through each of the clauses and made my comments and suggestions. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Viliame Gavoka

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, at the outset, we do not think we should sell 49 percent of FEA. The organisation is doing very well, it has a very strong balance sheet with net assets of about \$700 million and assets of about \$2 billion. It is doing well, it is serving the people of Fiji very well, and there really is no call to go this way, unless there is a need to raise some funds immediately.

We had two years ago, Madam Speaker, in this House when we learnt about the plan by Government to divest or to sell off some State enterprises, Ratu Naiqama and I had put together a motion to say that, "Let that be done locally", and we mentioned that maybe Fijian Holdings should be the lead company to bring together a conglomerate of companies to buy these local companies for the reason that:

- 1) to keep it local; and
- 2) Fijian Holdings belonging to the *iTaukei*, would help pay back to the *iTaukei* what they have given to Fiji in terms of freeing up their resources for developments of where we are today.

Madam Speaker, when I look at Clause 30, I come across this State Acquisition of Lands Act 1940. It takes me back to the beginning of Fiji that in 1940 they passed this Act to enable Government to acquire land or resources for the development of this country.

To me, that history is very similar to that of FEA. It has grown today to be a \$2 billion company and to treat it in this manner, to use Standing Order 51 to have one hour debate to diversify it is quite sad. It deserves better than that.

Our people should have had the opportunity to contribute to this Bill. It is very, very radical, and you ask the question; is Fiji ready to privatise something this huge? It is going to be on the stock exchange, it is going to be like Fiji Airways. Sometimes a developing country needs to take it slowly. Australia and New Zealand sold off their enterprises after 100 years. Here, we are rushing into this, a nation that is still very, very young and getting ourselves into this kind of situation.

Madam Speaker, if I can go back to what my colleague the Honourable Aseri Radrodro had said, the resource owners of Naitasiri should have a share in this. It is a way of saying, “thank you” to them for all these years that we used their resources to bring electricity across the country.

The other side has often spoke of Monasavu, of how they were neglected but forgetting that the chiefs of Fiji agreed with the people of Naitasiri to generate electricity in there and bring it to the urban centres for the majority of people in this country. That is something that we need to remember, the generosity needs to be appreciated and needs to be factored into the new formula for the economic growth and development of those people.

This is not unique to Fiji. In Malaysia for the Bumiputeras, any State enterprise that is privatised, the first opportunity is given the Bumiputeras or even given the funding by government for them to buy shares.

I believe, Madam Speaker, the way we should go forward is 51 percent of Government of Fiji, 30 percent of the people of Naitasiri and 19 percent to whoever you want to give it to. That, Madam Speaker, is the way forward, it is a way of repaying the generosity of the people who have been giving their resources since the 1940s.

I live in a country where electricity shortage is not a way of life. We have countries in the world where it is experienced every day, two or three hours a day you do not have electricity. In Fiji, we do not have that, and it is because people are being generous, they are giving their resources which we enjoy today. So, it is time, at this juncture, to recognise the generosity and give back to the resource owners something to say, “Thank you, you are part of economic progress of this country.” Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- There is only two more minutes. I will give it to the Government, so I call on the Honourable Faiyaz Koya.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, just two more minutes, I will take one minute for something to respond to Honourable Gavoka.

It is amazing on how they are so selective in their approach with what they say. What about those people in Somosomo, they provided us with their land for the electricity? What about someone who may establish the hydro plant in Namosi? What about those? When we do things, we look at it collectively for people right around the country, we are not selective.

Madam Speaker, there are a couple of benefits that I really need to raise. There is a benefit in having an independent regulator with respect to FEA, and having an independent regulator which is part of the system in their overcoming the problem of flow of information between the regulated industry, that is, FEA and its regulator. In Fiji's case, FEA under the current Act has the role of a regulator for approval of licences and compliance with safety standards.

Madam Speaker, the Bill provides that the Minister or the regulator has a duty to protect the interest of the consumers, and this is in respect to Clause 6(3), which has to do with electricity prices charged, continuity of supply and quality of electricity supply.

Madam Speaker, just a quick thing that probably is quite important with respect to business development and the cost of doing business. The Bill will lead to a conducive environment for business and investments in the payments of the regulation of the electricity industry, and instils confidence in the investors. With the separation of functions proposed under the Bill, the FEA focusses on generation, supply and transmission. It will improve their efficiency in the Bill and will enable competitors to enter the market on certain terms and conditions and I think that is relative in Clause 6(1).

It will provide an equal opportunity, Madam Speaker, to the private sector to participate in the production and supply of electricity. This will facilitate competition and improve efficiency and provide new and improved techniques for the supply of electricity. And since we have an independent regulator, it will implement that the law, the actions are taken within the framework. The business community looks for a constant set of regulations and guidelines upon which the investment decisions are done, depends on their viability.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, with those, we support the Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- Are you willing to give him a few minutes?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No!

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to give his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, Fiji did not commence in 1940 and 1942, that was not the beginning of Fiji.

Madam Speaker, I would like to very quickly say that again, like yesterday and again this morning, whenever the Opposition talk about such matters, they again, demonstrate their lack of knowledge regarding finance and commercial arrangements, regarding how companies work and regarding the economy.

There was a suggestion by the Opposition - pick 30 percent give it to this group of people, pick 20 percent give it to those people, are they going to guarantee the \$700 million loans? Where will they get money to guarantee the \$700 million loans? We just pick up shares and give it away? Is that how it works? It does not work that way.

Madam Speaker, they said that listing on the South Pacific Stock Exchange is a sign of desperation. Of course, not! Fijian Holdings is listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange, is it desperate? When those people who enjoy Class A and Class B shares, in particularly Class A shares, were they desperate or was it a win for all for them?

The SVT Government listed ATH, were they desperate? Yes, they were at that time, I think. That is the only time they got to balance their books. Were they desperate?

Madam Speaker, this is a level of contradiction that is coming from the other side. They talk about inflation. They say our inflation has gone up by 6 percent. Anyone who knows about economics knows that after a cyclone, inflation does increase. Kava in the Western Division, last weekend I was told was being sold for \$120 a kilogramme. Kava contributes 2.5 percent to the basket of goods that we used to measure Consumer Price Index (CPI). CPI has a huge bearing too.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Listen, listen, please!

Madam Speaker, 2.5 percent towards the basket, obviously, if it is going to increase, the \$120 is going to have a huge impact.

Fruits and vegetables, Madam Speaker, I will present facts and figures to this Parliament regarding that.

Madam Speaker, the other point is this, they said that if Fijian Holdings is going to buy shares in FEA, why are they not consulting the shareholders?

When Fijian Holdings goes and forms a joint venture with Vinod Patel, they go and form a joint venture with a New Zealand Company, when they buy shares in RB Patel, when they buy shares everywhere else, do they go and consult the shareholders? Of course not! That is not how companies run! A company has a Board. The Board has management, they make decisions and that is how they make decisions.

Suddenly, Madam Speaker, they want them to go to the shareholders just for FEA. This, again demonstrates that they do not understand how companies are run. And this is why their contribution is quite minimalist towards this particular debate.

Madam Speaker, the other is also is that they had talked about how in 2014 and 2015 we had listed to sell. Yes, we had. Madam Speaker, what that demonstrates to them, if we were desperate, we would have simply sold it off if we had just wanted the money. We want strategic partners, we want the right valuation, and we want the right people to come into FEA. Therefore, the whole purpose of this is to be strategic.

I completely agree with Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, that the demand for electricity will grow. This is why any good government thinks ahead, we do not think up to our noses only. We have to strategically place ourselves to know which is the best way to deal with that demand.

We all talk about Singapore; the Singaporean leadership fought 20 years down the track. It is like the same example that I have used. The airstrip that they built in Wailevu, Labasa many years ago, they built it between the bend of one river so you cannot extend it. They did not think that aircrafts will get bigger than 12-seater planes. Today a full load of 72ATR cannot take-off full load. But if they had thought and used their vision and thought ahead, they would have selected an area

where you could extend the runway easily. Today, we cannot do that. This is a legacy cost of what we are doing.

The same thing with Savusavu, Madam Speaker, so in the same way we are today strategically placing ourselves without comprising our national strategy by able to invite investors (local and foreign), to be able to ensure that FEA moves up to the next step ahead.

As we have seen previously, Madam Speaker, a utility company like FEA can get affected by world market prices. An airline does get affected by world market prices. Your profit level in one year may be good, but if the price of fuel goes up exponentially, that can be wiped off overnight and we have seen that happen. So these are assets that are vulnerable, their operating costs are vulnerable to circumstances beyond our control. This is why we need to be able to position ourselves a lot better, this is why we need to think ahead. They are only saying; "Oh, you made \$69 million; that is good. You do not need to do anything. Just sit on that". Then we run as soon as we have problems, when you do not want that situation, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I can give numerous examples. We had the SVT Government selling Fiji Ship and Heavy Industries to a \$2 New Zealand company. Then they bought it back at a much higher price. There are numerous examples of what happened, Madam Speaker, and we are not doing that. We are actually positioning ourselves, and they said that it took Australia and New Zealand a 100 years to go into private divestment. Does that mean that Australia and New Zealand did that, then we have to wait for 100 years?

Australia and New Zealand, their indigenous people were raped and pillaged, their land was taken away, *terra nullius* was declared. Does that mean we go down that path too? Of course, not! We want to leapfrog into modality, we want to leapfrog into positioning ourselves a lot better. We are not going to follow a linear pattern of development. That is what they are saying, "Let us follow a linear pattern of development because someone else took 100 years to do it; let us do it." That is ridiculous, Madam Speaker.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Your time is up.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I still have got 20 minutes.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matters is this, the intention of Government at the end of the day is to ensure that ordinary Fijians, who are at the lower end of the socio-economic scale need to be looked after. The Government has already declared its interest in respect of providing subsidies directly to them. We provide assistance to schools.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, a person who has a swimming pool in their house, has a number of lights, has a number of facilities, they should not pay the same rate as a person who simply has a television set and a TV. If you want to have more appliances, if you want to live the high life, you pay for it. That is a user-pay system. But if you are at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, then Government will look after you or in fact I should say, the FijiFirst Government will look after you, Madam Speaker.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Because we have a focussed attention of those people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we want to tell the people of Fiji who are watching and listening that this divestment is actually good for us. It is a good investment, it is a strategic move, it will not affect

your rights as a consumer of Fiji, and it will not affect you if you are at the lower end of the socio-economic scale because Government will step in and provide you with assistance, just as we have done with education, water and various other areas. It is targeted assistance but that targeted assistance, Madam Speaker, should not deter us from inviting other investors into Fiji, from allowing companies like Fijian Holdings, like our banks, life insurance companies and other local private investors from partnering and becoming partners with other people who have a lot more professional skill sets. That is what it is all about. Fijian Holdings never ran a supermarket, they never went and sold any flour or anything, but they went and partnered with RB Patel and today, that is making them lots of money. It is very simple.

In the same way, Fijian Holdings can partner with an energy company from overseas. They can partner with FNPF, and they can make more money. At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, it is not about who we are going to put up there, it is about putting the right people there because a company's main objective is not to appoint a set of people who look good or you may have cocktails together, but your idea is to appoint people who will provide a return to the shareholders. Ultimately, that is what matters.

The shareholders matter, the shareholders for Fijian Holdings, Madam Speaker, are the provinces, are the people living in the provinces. If you go and to tell them, "Oh, we have appointed these people", maybe one ethnic group or maybe we all know them, and they all say, "Great" but next year when they do not have the returns and the profits, they will say to you, "Why did you appoint them?"

We have to appoint the right people so they will make the right strategic decisions, and then the shareholders will benefit. At the end of the day, that is what matters. In the same way they have acknowledged that in some of the Boards, we have changed Board membership. We put the right people there. Guess, what is happening? Those State-Owned enterprises that were not doing well before are now getting decisions that are made well, decisions made by people who actually have some experience, who have some technical and commercial competency levels. That did not happen before, Madam Speaker.

So we have, kind of, digressed with the responses that they have given into a completely different new area but I have to clarify that, Madam Speaker. I think we have addressed all the points that they have raised. We have a good set of professional staff, FEA is one of the very few companies in Fiji that has a very high level of Fijian employees. We would like to maintain it that way; very few expatriates, if any.

Madam Speaker, I was just looking for someone who could give me some indication of the one or two numbers. Generally, Madam Speaker, it is a good run company, we need to be able to get it to tie up with good professional investors, so we can take it up to the next level and we are building capacity. People are being appointed on merit, the right decisions are being made and we have been quite strategic about it.

At the end of the day, Madam Speaker, Government's undertaking has been that we will, as we have seen, for example, in the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL). The FPCL, when we had the new investors come in, the turnaround time at FPCL increased by 33 percent. In other words, the ships at Suva Port could turn around within 33 percent times quicker.

The cost, the use of tug and the additional levy on each container that came to Suva because the turnaround times at Suva Port was not good, so shipping companies said, "You make us wait, we have to burn our fuel, we are going to charge you a levy on each container." Today, that levy is gone, that levy is no longer applicable, so Suva Port becomes more attractive for shipping companies to say, "Look, you guys are efficient, why do we not send the container that we wanted to send to

Samoa, let us put it in Fiji, it becomes the transshipment hub, and we will take it from here.” That is the strategic difference. It creates more employment, a lot more people are now getting more bonuses. Two lots of bonuses were being paid twice in a year.

If you go and talk to those dockworkers, they will tell you how happy they are. No jobs have been lost, in fact, jobs have increased. They are now getting bonuses. This is the strategic thinking. Yes, Aitken Spence is a foreign company. Yes, FNPF has invested in it. Yes, the Fijian Government still owns 41 percent, but look at the overall impact on the economy.

So, Madam Speaker, it is with that purpose that this partial divestment of 49 percent of which a certain percentage will be given to ordinary consumers in Fiji. And that will also include, Madam Speaker, the landowners from Monasavu, who for decades, use to see the electricity wire. That is how they paid them back - the Alliance Government, SVT Government and the SDL Government. That was how they paid them back for their generosity. They said, “We will put the electricity wires over your villages but you will not get the electricity.” That was how they paid them back.

The Bainimarama Government, under the Honourable Prime Minister’s leadership, gave them electricity, that is the generosity. That is how we paid them back. You do pay that back with practical matters, not making grand statements about shareholdings of which you do not know about or do not understand about or do not know how it will be implemented.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I am not pointing at you individually, I am pointing in a general direction. There you go! That is what we do.

Madam Speaker, I have already done that, I do not know why he suddenly finds it offensive, maybe because I am talking about the facts. I am not pointing at him directly.

Madam Speaker, the reality is that this Bill provides a fantastic opportunity for investors to come into Fiji, for us to be able to lift up the standards of FEA and ultimately, for the consumers of Fiji to benefit from a very strategic position. .

With those few words, Madam Speaker, I submit that we support this Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote.

The question is, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 10th February, 2017, that the Electricity Bill 2017 be debated, voted upon and be passed. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Ayes” and “Noes”)

There being opposition, Parliament will now vote.

Votes Cast:

Ayes	:	29
Noes	:	15
Not Voted	:	6

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being 29 Ayes, 15 Noes and 6 Not Voted, the motion is agreed to.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- A Bill for an Act to promote the development of the Electricity Industry by the appointment of an independent regulator to licence the generation, transmission and supply of electricity and for related matters, Bill No. 7 of 2017, enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No.)]

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- We will now move onto the next item on the Order Paper.

NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT CENTRE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2016In Committee:

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- Committee of the Whole Parliament on a Bill for an Act to amend the National Employment Centre Act 2009, (Bill No. 31 of 2016).

Clause 1:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Member want to speak on Clause 1?

Parliament will now vote on Clause 1. The question is that Clause 1 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- The clause is, therefore, agreed to unanimously.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Honourable Member wish to speak on Clause 2?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote on Clause 2. The question is that Clause 2 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Clause 2 is, therefore, agreed to unanimously.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Member wish to speak on Clause 3?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will now vote on Clause 3. The question is that Clause 3 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- There being no opposition, the clause is, therefore, agreed to.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Member want to speak on Clause 4?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will now vote on Clause 4. The question is that Clause 4 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- The clause is, therefore, agreed to unanimously.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Member wish to speak on Clause 5?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will now vote on Clause 5. The question is that Clause 5 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- The clause is, therefore, agreed to unanimously.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Member want to speak on Clause 6?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will now vote on Clause 6. The question is that Clause 6 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBER.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- There being no opposition, Clause 6 is agreed to.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clause 7:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Member want to speak on Clause 7?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will now vote on Clause 7. The question is that Clause 7 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- The clause is, therefore, agreed to unanimously.

Clause 7 agreed to.

Clause 8:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Member want to speak on Clause 8?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will now vote on Clause 8. The question is that Clause 8 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- There being no opposition, the clause is agreed to unanimously.

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clause 9:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Member want to speak on Clause 9?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will now vote on Clause 9. The question is that Clause 9 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- There being no opposition, the clause is agreed to unanimously.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10:

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Does any Member wish to speak on Clause 10?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- Parliament will now vote on Clause 10. The question is that Clause 10 stands part of the Bill. Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- There being no opposition, the Clause is agreed to unanimously.

Clause 10 agreed to.

HON. CHAIRPERSON.- That brings us to the end of the Committee of the Whole Parliament, the Parliament will now resume its sitting and I shall now resume the Chair.

The House resumed:

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- The Committee of the Whole Parliament has agreed to a Bill for an Act to amend the National Employment Centre Act 2009 (Bill No. 31 of 2016) without amendment by the Committee of the Whole Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move onto the next item on the Order Paper.

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- Committee of the Whole Parliament has agreed to a Bill for an Act to amend the National Employment Centre Act 2009 (Bill No. 31 of 2016) without amendment.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to move the Third Reading.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 88, I move:

That the National Employment Centre (Amendment) Bill 2016 be read a third time and do pass.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

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

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

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

Madam Speaker, I will be very brief. As we know that this Bill went through the Committee and the Committee has actually approved the amendments to the National Employment Centre Act.

Madam Speaker, just in short and I am sure everyone is in agreement with that, part of the rationale behind this amendment is to ensure that the National Employment Centre (NEC) becomes lot more responsive and inclusive, and giving it a lot more freedom to be able to consult civil society groups, religious organisations, international organisations, Ministry of Employment, Productivity

and Industrial Relations and various other organisations to be consulted with NEC and, of course, to be able to ensure that it demarcates this change of responsibility between PSC, what used to be the Public Service Commission responsibilities and of course the National Employment Centre.

Madam Speaker, this will obviously be good for those people who are actually seeking jobs with the NEC and we hope to of course by streamlining this process and by including more partners with NEC, will be able to offer more opportunities for its clients which are those people who are looking for work. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite comments from the floor. The debate must only be on whether the Bill should pass and not on content.

There being no input, I ask the Honourable Attorney-General if he wishes to make concluding remarks.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I would simply like to say, let us move the Bill to a vote. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote.

The question is that the National Employment Centre (Amendment) Bill 2016 be read a third time, and do pass. Does any Honourable Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

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

SECRETARY-GENERAL.- A Bill for an Act to amend the National Employment Centre Act 2009, (Bill No. 31 of 2016) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No.)]

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next item on the Order Paper. I call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

RATIFICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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

That Parliament approves that Fiji ratifies the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, this is a very momentous occasion. For the first time, any Fijian Constitution actually included a specific right for persons with disabilities.

For the first time, Madam Speaker, we have had the largest amount of money being allocated for persons with disabilities or organisations and associations. For the first time last year, we started consultations directly for the budget with persons with disabilities.

A number of them are here today with us in the gallery, a lot of them you would have seen, Madam Speaker, over the past couple of sessions in Parliament, they have been waiting there quite patiently and they have been very keen to ensure that this Parliament makes a ground-breaking approach by actually ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities.

Madam Speaker, disabled persons have for generations in Fiji in dribs and drabs, sometimes more than other times and, of course, not just something peculiar to Fiji but other parts of the world where persons with disabilities have actually not being treated or accorded the same rights as people who are deemed to be not disabled. It is therefore, Madam Speaker, to show our commitment and the commitment as being given by the Fijian Constitution that persons with disabilities must also be accorded the same rights.

In fact, Madam Speaker, a person with disabilities need to be also taken care of in a lot more significant manner. It is not just to say that persons with disabilities have the rights, there needs to be practical application of those rights, and the Fijian Constitution is quite specific about that.

Madam Speaker, the Convention has currently 160 countries which are signatories to the Convention, with 172 State parties to the Convention. Fiji is a signatory to the Convention and signed the Convention on 2nd June, 2010 when Cabinet decided that we need to actually sign up to this Convention.

Simultaneously, Madam Speaker, we held a number of consultations to develop a Bill for Parliament to consider which will give practical application, not just to the Convention but in fact, the provisions in the Constitution.

Madam Speaker, this Bill actually is before the Committee, and we hope that the Committee will present their findings of the Bill in the next sitting of Parliament. It is critical, Madam Speaker, that whilst this Convention obligates us on the international forum, it must ensure that it translates into domestic law too. And the only way that it can translate into domestic law is by the specific enactment in Parliament of a law that deals specifically with those provisions of the Convention that needs to be translated into its specific local and domestic provisions, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I can very briefly go into the details of the Convention. The Convention has 50 Articles. Article 1 defines the purpose of the Convention which is to protect and ensure that full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. I think that is something that is very, very critical.

Madam Speaker, in the consultations that we have been having, it is very critical that persons with disabilities, they want first and foremost to have and maintain their sense of dignity. And we as all human beings must respect that, and we must ensure that that happens. Just because a person is in a wheel chair or just because a person is a blind, you should not somehow or the other put them to the back of the room or forget about them.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister is very insistent. When we held consultations on the 2013 Fijian Constitution, we drafted it and when it was finally formalised and assented to by His Excellency the then President, he said, "We must have it translated into the Braille language." Very few constitutions in the world, Madam Speaker, where their constitution gets translated into the Braille language. So far the Fijian Constitution has been translated into the Braille language in the English Braille and the *iTaukei* Braille and it is available. We gave a number of copies to the Fiji Society for the Blind, and it is available there for people to read, Madam Speaker.

Articles 2 and 3 provide definitions and general principles, such as defining the terms, communications, language, discrimination on the basis of disability, reasonable accommodation and universal design.

Madam Speaker, as we have said, we need to now and Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) is already doing that, when we now build new footpaths, we need to ensure that they all have ramps. So a person on a wheelchair when he wants to cross the road, at the moment, if you go to all the footpaths, they do not have the ramps, a simple decline. They have a lot of problems when crossing the road and that, people like us, who are not on wheelchairs, take that for granted. For them, crossing the road becomes a chore in itself, a momentous chore.

Madam Speaker, Articles 4 to 31 define the rights of persons with disabilities and the obligations of State parties towards these rights. Many of these rights, Madam Speaker, also mirror-rights reaffirmed in other international conventions to which Fiji is a party to, such as the Convention against Torture or specific obligations in order to ensure that these rights are fully realised by persons with disabilities.

Articles 32 to 39 of the Convention, Madam Speaker, governs the reporting and monitoring of the Convention by National Human Rights institutions and implementation steps taken by the State party which in this case is Fiji. These Articles, Madam Speaker, also establishes the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Further, each State Party must submit a comprehensive report on the measures taken to give effect of its obligations under the Convention and on the progress made within that regard, within two years after verification and thereafter, after four years.

Essentially, Madam Speaker, if Parliament today approves that we ratify the Convention, within two years, we must file a report to the Committee. Of course, the various NGOs will also be able to give their input into this report that will be filed before the Committee and thereafter every four years.

Madam Speaker, Articles 40 to 50 of the Convention govern the ratification, the entering into force and the amendment of the Convention itself.

Madam Speaker, just to very quickly highlight to put into perspective, Section 42 of the Fijian Constitution guarantees the rights of persons with disabilities for the first time, as I have said. Under Section 42(1) of the Constitution which states, and I quote:

“A person with disability has the right-

(a) to reasonable access to all places, public transport and information;...”

I mean, we have to do a lot of that.

In fact, this is very interesting. Only today we came to know that if you go to the website of the Fijian Elections Office, if you click on the right hand corner of the website and you can only do this at the moment from personal computers and not from phone Apps, if you go there through your PC, you actually click on that, whatever area you are focused on, you click on that, a voice will come and actually reads it out to you. So, this is also for persons who may not be able to see well, a person who may not be able to read well, they can actually now have voice activated website of the Fijian Elections Office.

So, a number of changes are taking place, Madam Speaker. Again, like I said about footpaths and also now at the Department of Town and Country Planning, various municipal councils will now be obligated to ensure that any future buildings in particular, public buildings, where you have members of the public having access to, there must at least be a ramp. So, if I am going off and I am on a wheelchair or on crutches or maybe blind, there are rails, at least. I can access those places because they are built to be able to cater for persons who have these specific requirements. They have the right, of course, Madam Speaker, to use sign language, Braille or other appropriate means of communication, and to reasonable access the necessary material, substances and devices relating to persons with disability.

As you know, Madam Speaker, whilst VAT now is applicable across the board, the one set of products in Fiji where there is no VAT applicable is devices that are related to disability. So, if you bring in wheelchairs, crutches or other products, then there is no VAT applicable on that. The Government has already started doing that.

Madam Speaker, of course, it is very interesting in the consultations last Friday, we had a number of discussions with a group regarding how there is not that many people with sign language and, in fact, the Honourable Prime Minister is saying how we should start getting the news to have sign language and some countries have already started doing that. For at least an hour, you can have people doing sign language whilst the news is on the screen or on television, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, under Section 42(2) of the Fijian Constitution, and I quote:

“A person with any disability has the right to reasonable adaption of buildings, infrastructure, vehicles, working arrangements, rules, practices or procedures, to enable their full participation in society and the effective realisation of those rights.”

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, Madam Speaker, I do not want to dwell on that, because that will come before Parliament, hopefully, in the next sitting and we can discuss that too.

Madam Speaker, you may recall that we also made an amendment in 2015 to the Land Transport Public Service Vehicles Regulations that now ensures that Public Service Vehicles (PSV) drivers must not refuse to carry in the vehicle any person with a disability. In the consultations we had, Madam Speaker, we received a lot of complaints that sometimes the PSV drivers, the bus drivers, the mini-bus drivers and some taxis were refusing to take people with disabilities. So now, Madam Speaker, it is actually mandatory for them to do so.

The PSV drivers must take reasonable steps to assist persons with physical disabilities when boarding and disembarking the vehicle. So, they are obligated to provide some assistance in particular if they are on their own, and ensure that the vehicle is disability-friendly. Many of them, of course are not, many buses as Honourable Parmod Chand will tell you are not, and we need to work towards that as to how we can get that done.

Madam Speaker, of course, we have the national policy on persons living with disabilities and we also have in place a number of community-based consultation sessions that we have been holding to ensure that people do have access and they are able to have their input.

Last but not least, of course, Madam Speaker, in the Budget that was announced last year, we gave a 300 percent tax deduction. So persons for example, we heard a submission last year in the Budget consultations that there were couple of people in Lautoka who were, in fact, being employed by a printing company, where this person who could not speak, he actually used sign language, but it was not required for him to speak for him to carry out the job. Because he was disabled, they were

not necessarily paying the right worker rates, when he wanted to get sick leave, they said; "We are not going to pay you for your sick leave" and they would not give him annual leave.

As a result of that, Madam Speaker, we brought about the amendment in the tax reforms so if an employer now employs a person with disability, they can get a 300 percent tax deduction. So, whatever amount of money they do pay them, they can pay that as an expense to the tune of 300 percent. They must, at least, employ the person for three years and that, of course, incentivize people to recruit them.

Madam Speaker, one of the things personally that I also found, that many persons with disabilities have a fantastic level of intellect, have a fantastic level of ability to contribute whether they are good with their hands, whether they are good with their feet, whatever that may be, but they are very productive members of our society. Unfortunately, we have also neglected them.

We are also very happy, Madam Speaker, that amongst us today we have our Assistant Minister, Honourable Iliesa Delana, who not only won the first Gold Medal but is also an Assistant Minister. This would have been completely unheard of. There are many people who used to make fun of people like them as if they have any contribution. So, we must ensure, Madam Speaker, that we are able to not just ratify the Convention and I am sure both sides of the House will support the ratification of this Convention.

However, Madam Speaker, it is the change in our attitude, the change in our value system, of course, Government has to do its part as far as public areas are concerned but overall as a society and as a country, we need to ensure that we include persons with disabilities into the mainstream of society.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to inform Parliament too with the concurrence of the Honourable Prime Minister, Fiji has one of the very high rates of albinism. As a result of that, we had a request from the Special Rapporteur on Albinism, and we have already sent our invitation and we hope that this year the Special Rapporteur on the Protection of Rights of people with Albinism will be able to come to Fiji as well. They are all part and parcel of what we are doing and to be able to take a holistic approach to bring those people for decades who have been left in the margin of our society to bring them into the inner circle. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I invite comments from the floor, if any. I give the floor to the Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his motion. I do stand in support of the motion and as I do support the motion, I would want to say that as the President of the Fiji Bus Operators Association, the bus industry in Fiji provides free transport to all disabled people who are listed with the Social Welfare Department.

Madam Speaker, we do understand that in order to bring about this Convention to fruition, it is very important to note some points. First of all, when we are going to do this physical infrastructure, it needs to be attuned to a custom to allow these people to go and I believe the Honourable Attorney-General has spoken on that, like building footpaths, roads, transport facilities all these have to be made to comply with this Convention.

It is very important that there has to be transition period. I am not going to be too long, I will be brief because I know we will have an opportunity when the Bill comes in, but I would like to declare my interest because I am a bus operator, I want to speak on something on the bus industry.

In Fiji, we have almost 2,000 buses and as I have already alluded to, we provide free transport to all the disabled people in Fiji. I believe that there is no other place where our disabled people have any benefit like that, and it is at free cost at the cost of the bus operators in Fiji. I believe the bus operators are also giving back to our people who really need this help.

One of the things that will come in, if we do have to change those 2,000 buses into complying with this need, then it could become very difficult because the bus industry is a very heavily regulated industry. For the last seven years, we have not had a bus fare increase, because of fuel prices and other things, but the Government was kind enough to give us zero-rated VAT which is a good thing that has happened for the bus industry. We also see that the bus companies in Fiji are modernising their bus fleets to come into the system where we can provide better services to the people of Fiji, and services on time. So, this will be very, very important for us. Like I said, we contribute a lot to the economy, we contribute a lot to our poor people, as well as our disabled.

We, as bus operators in Fiji, give 50 percent discount to senior citizens travelling, that is only 50 percent bus fare. School children pay only 50 percent bus fare and the other 50 percent, I believe the Government is paying that. So, we as an industry, would like to see that things move into better ways.

(Honourable Member interjects)

It is not the Government, it is the contribution of the bus industry, Honourable Minister, and you must remember that. It comes from our pocket, we subsidise that.

So, the Government should thank the bus industry for subsidising the senior citizen's 50 percent bus fares, school children's 50 percent bus fare and the disabled free of charge. I would like to see that also in the Fiji Airways. It should give airfares free of charge.

(Laughter)

They will make a big profit, and will be really good.

I know that we have an inclusive government and the government is very happy about helping people and giving its share to the people. I would love to see the Honourable Attorney-General announce it tomorrow that all disabled people registered with the Social Welfare will get free travelling on the planes of Fiji Airways. That will be very interesting and it will be encouraging to our people.

Madam Speaker, I would love to support this Bill. We love our disabled people and I believe that they need to be treated with dignity and we, the bus operators, were the first to start this, so we would like the rest of the people to follow suit and help our disabled people in Fiji. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Before I call on the next Honourable Member, it looks like we will be going beyond 4.30 p.m and therefore at this stage, I would like to call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to have the floor.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT .- My apologies, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 6, I move:

That so much of Standing Order 23(1) be suspended so as to allow Government to complete the motion and other business in the Order Paper.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of Government to speak on his motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Madam Speaker, this is straightforward and we still have quite an important motion before the House and we ask the indulgence of the Honourable Members so that we can complete it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Does any Member want to comment on this motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being none. Parliament will vote. The question is under Standing Order 6, so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended to actually allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. in order to complete the Government business in the Order Paper.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

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

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON RATIFICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

HON. SPEAKER.- We will continue with the debate. I now invite the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, I would just like to congratulate the bus operators for the great initiative that they have taken in terms of giving free transport to people with disabilities. I know the Honourable Attorney-General has already spoken out about public transport in terms of taxis that are also taking people with disabilities on board.

Just a few points, Madam Speaker, in terms of visually impaired people, using voice recognition which you have said that the Fijian Elections Office is using, what about Apps such as Instagram that have onscreen text and command real voices to enable the users to use the service. Perhaps, the Government might be able to give a tax waiver on Apps.

We have more autism coming up in the country. Perhaps, iPads and other tablets to assist these children with autism to practice eye and hand co-ordination. So, that is something that is going to be more the need for that.

In terms of affordable housing, Madam Speaker, people with special needs should be assisted also, to be able to rent decent safe and sanitary housing.

Affordable health care, Madam Speaker, the rate of disability is increasing due to population ageing and increase in chronic health conditions. People with disabilities, Madam Speaker, have less access. Those who are able-bodied do not realise the needs that people with disabilities have, and it is good that we have their representatives here in Parliament. We are seeing them on a daily basis and bringing their consideration into the House.

These people with disabilities, Madam Speaker, have less access to health care services and, therefore, experience more unmet health care needs. For example, Madam Speaker, women with disabilities receive less screening for breast and cervical cancer and men receive less screening for prostate cancer than those who do not have disabilities. So, those are some of the current issues that are affecting able-bodied people and more so people with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, lastly, on decent employment, this came out in the Tebbutt-Times Poll in which the highest item that is of concern is that 32 percent of those who polled were looking for decent employment. So, the law should forbid discrimination when it comes to any aspect of employment, including, hiring, firing, pay, job assignments, promotion, et cetera. It is not easy, Madam Speaker, because they have more needs but they are humans just the same as us, and they need to be considered as having equal rights as we do.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General alluded to the funding for the 2016/2017 Budget, that is good but we hope you make the allocation more timely, rather than allocating last week for them to utilise it before the end of June. They have disabilities, Madam Speaker, so it takes longer for them to utilise their budgetary allocation. So, I hope in supporting this motion, Madam Speaker, that this ratification ensures proper annual budgetary allocation rather than just a domestic exercise for just this year. We hope that it will be a yearly exercise for them.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, first of all, from the outset, I would like to see that this side of the House supports the motion that Fiji ratifies the Convention without reservation. That is the first I would like to put across.

Given that we have obligations under the Convention, probably the Government will make domestic changes to realign its domestic legislations with the Convention. And with that, the responsibility that comes from Section 42 of the Constitution, I think probably the implementation of what is listed in Section 42, all measures must be put in place. With that, Madam Speaker, I think the old Parliament, if you go to Veiuto it was already accommodative to persons with disability. It had wheelchair ramps, et cetera. Madam Speaker, probably this is an idea that was already there and probably I think at this time, we come to realise the importance of this particular Convention.

The other thing, Madam Speaker, is for Government to consider, after ratification, a particular Ministry that should accommodate a portfolio that look after persons with disability. That will be very important. Secondly, the establishment of focal points in regards to our Fiji Human Rights and Discrimination Commission, plus the National Council for Persons with Disabilities. These focal points, Madam Speaker, must engage with Government, particularly important with the Disability Persons Association. These are very important in the review and formulation of policies and legislation to give effect to the Convention.

The other issue, Madam Speaker, is that there needs to be an establishment or framework to implement the Convention. The Government should review its existing National Policy on Persons Living with Disabilities 2008-2018 through appropriate Ministry to ensure that the framework is fully aligned with the Convention, Madam Speaker.

Given the National Framework, I think there has to be a proper collection of desegregated data which will enable reporting, as the Honourable Attorney-General had alluded to. I think Fiji will have to report in after two years and full ratification every four years thereafter. In an inclusive consultative and transparent manner, I think the proper framework has to be put in place to allow this particular Convention to fulfil its desired outcome.

With that, Madam Speaker, as I have said, this side of House we accept the ratification without any reservations and hope that the domestication of this particular Convention will be carried out to allow the full realisation of Section 42 of the Constitution. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Labour.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, I just rise to support the motion before the House, the motion that we ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I think the fact that we are standing here and we seem to be unanimous in our feeling and thinking about this motion will bring to light some of the things that are in the Constitution. The Honourable Attorney-General has talked about Section 42 and the rights that it has there, and we are bringing to light those rights. Also in the preamble of the Constitution, we notice here that one of the lines there says, "We commit ourselves to the recognition and protection of human rights and respect for human dignity". What we are doing here is we are actually doing this as we ratify this Convention.

It has always been the vision of the Government to build a better Fiji for everyone, those who have all the faculties that God designed them to have and those who may not have all those things. So, through the ratification of this, they will be progress towards this.

As we think about persons with disabilities, we should not just limit it just too physical disabilities, but it is also people with mental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, sensory impairments, all those different kinds of people who need to be covered. It will also include woman with disabilities and children with disabilities, and all the persons with disabilities.

Ratifying this Convention also means that we, as a country, are offering ourselves up for inspection so that others can come and see what we have done about the people in our country, who do not have all the things that God desired them to have. So as has been already mentioned, it would require a need to amend laws and policies, to provide funding and we have talked about the development of frameworks, et cetera.

But I think one of the important things that we need to consider is that, all of us whether we are employers or members of the community, we also need to think about what we can do to make sure that we can demonstrate what we are doing for those who are challenged.

I appreciate the comment that have been made by the bus owners but I think it is not just enough to make sure that we can have the people with disabilities get on to public transport for free. One of the important things that we need and this is related also to SDG8 which talks about the need for economic growth and decent work, we need to provide decent work opportunities for those who are disabled and that I think is a challenge for all employers.

Under the Employment Relations Act, there is a provision there that suggests that all employers should consider allocating a portion of their workforce to those who are challenged and disabled. So we also encourage all employers in Fiji to consider that. Can you set aside a portion of your workforce and dedicated to those who have these challenges so that they can do something for

their own lives and can have a sustainable future into the future? That, Madam Speaker, as I have said, I fully support the motion that is before the House.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I also echo the support to support the ratification of this Convention. I have two points that I would like to highlight in terms of the implementation of the CRPD. It calls for a high level of commitment, particularly so with all our keys stakeholders in terms of transport, the building owners, the employers and it requires a very well-coordinated and concerted effort particularly so in terms of the resources and also in terms of harmonising existing legislation with our local legislation on the Bill that may come up in future.

Also, Madam Speaker, Fiji should ratify the CRPD without any reservation and this should also be reflected in our local legislation, particularly so in terms of the reporting clause. In that, we have to comply with, as alluded to by the Honourable Attorney-General that we are to report two years after ratification and four years thereafter because that reporting clause must be reflected in our local legislation because it will monitor our compliance with CRPD requirements.

Madam Speaker, we look forward to the localisation of the CRPD into our own legislation which we trust will include all the clauses under the CRPD, and also call on the Government to ensure that adequate resources and the harmonisation of the existing legislations that will, sort of, involve all the stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the CRPD.

On that note, Madam Speaker, we look forward and as a saying goes; “the proof of the pudding is in the eating”, and we look forward to the local legislation. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, in my short contribution, I wish to acknowledge most sincerely the effort of the Fiji Disabled Peoples Association in their advocacy that has resulted in this. This Association I must say, Madam Speaker, is much unlike most associations because it is very, very active within the whole country. They had seminars and programmes even in Labasa and even in rural areas and even in my village. That shows the extent of the work that they put into this.

I am sure that this motion is also a result of their advocacy, not only locally, they are also very active even in the international fora where I can remember that we shared a table, together with their representative in New York in the Permanent Forum some years ago. I know as well that there is also a legislation that will follow or complement this and surely, this is the result of their work, their effort and their hard work in fighting for and advocating the rights of the disabled people.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to Honourable Netani Rika.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, let me make my contribution to the Convention. The Convention features eight general principles which underpin all the rights contained within the Disability convention. They are:

1. Respect for inherent dignity;
2. Individual autonomy, including the freedom to make one's own choices;
3. Non-discrimination;
4. Full and effective participation and inclusive in society;
5. Equality of opportunity;
6. Accessibility;
7. Equality between men and women;

8. Respect involving capacities of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

Madam Speaker, this Convention facilitates the empowerment of people with disability. I thank the disability group who are with us this afternoon for being here with us right from the morning until now, and we thank them for that.

Madam Speaker, to ratify this Convention, is a way forward for Fiji and I greatly appreciate the Government for taking the initiative for Parliament to approve that Fiji ratifies the Convention.

Madam Speaker, I fully support the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other input, I now invite the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to have his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, when I introduced the motion, you would have heard that I did not make any politically motivated statements. Unfortunately, it kind of deteriorated by Honourable Chand's contribution.

The fact of the matter, Madam Speaker is, and I have to say this unfortunately, the Fiji Bus Operators Association only started taking on this initiative after we insisted that we put into the agreement, he knows that. Only after Government said that the Bus Operators Association, all bus operators, no longer have to pay VAT, you can keep the VAT component. That is when we insisted that it goes into the agreement, he knows that.

Madam Speaker, I think he is very rich to come and make this kind of stance here when the entire focus was actually on the Convention itself. That is not correct because disabled people have been around in Fiji for a long time. Similarly, Honourable Nawaikula, his trying to take some kind of credit away or not recognise the fact that it was this Government, the Bainimarama Government firstly decided that we need to ratify the Convention. It was this Government that said that we need to ratify the Convention. The Convention has been there for a long time. How come the previous governments did not do it?

The Disabled Association has been there for a long time, how come they did not listen to them then. Because they did not, that is the reality. So let us not try and obfuscate the issues. We are here to discuss the actual Convention itself, and the merits and the demerits of it, not to score political points in trying to outdo each other. But unfortunately they have raised it, so I am trying to address that because people need to know the facts.

Similarly, Madam Speaker, the reason why the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure introduced these regulations in the LTA because we did get complaints from the disabled persons that the bus drivers were not treating them well. This is why, for example, Madam Speaker, the regulations were amended by the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure in June 2016 to say that the persons with disabilities must be given first priority when boarding an omnibus which is a bus, as we call it, minibus or carrier. In subsection 5, "person with disabilities must be allowed to sit in the first two rows of seats in an omnibus or in the seats closest to the driver of a vehicle." We had to do it because it was not being done.

Similarly, we had a regulation that was put in, Madam Speaker, to allow, for example, disabled people to bring in any sort of animal. Genuinely, some blind people have guide dogs, so they should be allowed to be brought in.

Some taxi drivers were refusing to put disabled persons' chairs in the boot. It is a fact, and we actually made an agreement with them to do it. We are the ones who put an agreement with the Fiji Taxi Association also. So, Madam Speaker, the reality is, yes, the compliance with making sure that Public Service Vehicles do become standardised and compliant and be user-friendly for disabled persons will take some time. And there is provision in the Bill that should allow for transitional phase.

In the same way, Madam Speaker, not all footpaths overnight can have a ramp. There will be a transitional phase. In many countries, there are replete examples of how other countries went through a transitional stage, but anything new that is built, Madam Speaker, will have to have compliance.

Madam Speaker, again, someone said, "Do not do cosmetic exercise." *Areh*, , this is not cosmetic exercise, this is actual practical issue. The translation of the Constitution in Braille is actually a practical issue. What we are doing in respect of the Bill itself is a practical issue. If it is given the legal enforcement, it is therefore enforceable against the State. Section 42 of the Constitution gives persons with disabilities the right to sue the Government if we do not comply with it. It gives them the right to go to the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission and take us to task if we do not comply with it. That is a practical application, it is not cosmetic. Please, let us not get into those kind of spaces where we should not be.

I agree with the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, disbursements must also be given much quicker. We need to improve on efficiency but as I highlighted the other day in Parliament, sometimes disbursements are held back because of non-accountability by those organisations receiving the grant. There is one particular disabled association where there is a police case because monies have gone missing, so we simply cannot go and put money into that association if there is no accountability with the finances.

We have suggested to the Disabled Association last Friday when we met with them, if they had a much bigger umbrella body with their different groupings but they had one financial controller, one administrator or two, makes it a lot easier for them. At the moment, all of them have to have those accountabilities. With one association, it will probably make it easier.

Madam Speaker, from a practical perspective, we, at the moment are procuring a bus for disabled persons in the Western Division. The "okay" has already been issued for them to have a bus because we received a complaint that disabled persons from Tavua, Rakiraki, Ba, Lautoka and Nadi were not be able to be transported to Lautoka for various activities. We are currently, through the generosity of FSC, they have given us a building as announced in the Budget, so it is now being retrofitted to ensure that they can actually access the building. So all of their work is being done. Yes, there are certain areas, of course, we can speed up, and we accept that, everyone accepts that.

However, the fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, it has started. The fact of the matter is that, it is in our Constitution. The fact of the matter is that we hopefully will pass a law in the next sitting of Parliament that will give further rights and give the meat to the substance.

Madam Speaker, I again, would like to urge Parliament, let us, please, vote to have this Convention ratified. I am sure and I hope that we will get a unanimous decision on this, and that we look forward to working with all the various organisations and improving the quality of the livelihoods of disabled persons, their dignity but also for us as a society and as an economy to tap into what they have to offer to us too, and we can learn a lot from them too. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote. The question is that Parliament approves that Fiji ratifies the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next Item in the Order Paper. I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

SUBMISSION OF REPORT - AUDIT OF THE WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL REPORT

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

That Parliament approves that:

- 1) Pursuant to Section 12(1) of the Audit Act 1969 and Section 152(13) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, the Auditor-General submit the report on the Audit of the Whole of Government Financial Statements for the financial year ending 31 December 2015 to the Speaker of Parliament and a copy to the Minister responsible for finance within 15 months of the end of that financial year to enable a report to be tabled at this sitting of Parliament; and
- 2) Pursuant to Section 45 of the Financial Management Act 2004 and Section 152(14) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, the Minister responsible for Finance table the Annual Report for the Whole of Government for the financial year ending 31 December 2015 within 15 months of the end of the financial year to enable the report to be tabled at this sitting of Parliament.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON .SPEAKER.- Do we have a seconder?

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, Section 152 of the Constitution deals with the Auditor-General and Reports of the Auditor-General. Section 152(1) of the Constitution states, and I quote:

“At least once in every year, the Auditor-General shall inspect, audit and report to Parliament on –

- a) the public accounts of the State;
- b) the control of public money and public property of the State; and
- c) all transactions with or concerning the public money or public property of the State.”

Madam Speaker, Section 152(13) of the Constitution states, and I quote:

“The Auditor-General must submit a report made by him or her to the Speaker of Parliament and must submit a copy to the Minister responsible for finance.”

Section 152(14), the next subsection, then provides, and I quote:

“Within 30 days of receipt, or if Parliament is not sitting, on the first day after the end of that period, the Minister responsible for finance must lay the report before Parliament.”

Section 12(1) of the Audit Act 1969, Madam Speaker, and in this particular provision was inserted in May of 2006 states that:

“A report of the Auditor-General to Parliament about an audit must be submitted to the Speaker of Parliament within 9 months after the financial year to which the audit was submitted or within a longer period appointed by a resolution of Parliament.”

Such, Madam Speaker, the report for the 2015 financial year should have been submitted by 30th September, 2016, given the first part of the particular provision in the Audit Act or should be submitted to the Speaker within such longer period as approved or appointed by a resolution of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, the 2015 financial year report has not yet been submitted to the Minister or to the Speaker, but we are informed by the Office of the Auditor-General that it is ready for submission to both, the Speaker and myself as the Minister responsible for finance under the purview of the Ministry of Economy. Once I have received a copy of the audited financial statements from the Auditor-General, I will then be able to table the 2015 Annual Report to Parliament in accordance with the requirements of the Financial Management Act 2004, as the Annual Report must include the financial statements as audited by the Auditor-General.

Madam Speaker accordingly, this motion seeks the approval from Parliament as allowed for in the law for the submission of the Auditor-General's Report on the Audit of the Whole of Government Financial Statements for financial year ending 31st December, 2015 and the tabling of the Annual Report in Parliament within 15 months of the end of that financial year.

Madam Speaker, once Parliament has approved the motion, the Office of the Auditor-General will deliver the report to the Speaker and myself, and in accordance with Section 152(14) of the Constitution, the report will be tabled in Parliament tomorrow.

Madam Speaker, the claim by Honourable Professor Prasad, I think, through the media that the delay is, and I quote “a gross breach of the Constitution” is legally not correct. The Constitution as cited above, Madam Speaker, does not provide any time limits as to when the Auditor-General should provide the report to the Minister. All the Constitution says, Madam Speaker, is that once the Minister receives it, once I receive the report, the Minister must then table the report within 30 days, or at the next sitting of Parliament. So that is where the specific time is stated.

The allegation further also, Madam Speaker, as I think it was in *Fiji Times* or what we call FT or OT, Opposition Times, the allegation that the delay is a breach of the Audit Act is also legally flawed. Given that whilst the Act states that the report must be submitted within 9 months, it expressly allows Parliament by resolution to approve a longer period, if obviously the Auditor-General is now got it ready. If he has not got it ready, then we cannot submit to Parliament. Therefore, the Act quite wisely envisages a situation where the Auditor-General may not be able to get it ready and, therefore, there is a provision that allows Parliament for it to be tabled later.

The allegation that the Minister should have sought approval in September 2016, that is, before the expiry of the 9 months is for a longer period for the tabling of the 2015 report is also legally flawed. The Audit Act does not say anything about when the resolution of Parliament must be sought. It does not say that it must be sought out before the 15 months expires. It is more practical, obviously, for the Minister to seek the resolution of Parliament, only when the Minister actually knows when that report is ready. If I came here and said, "Let us get an extension till tomorrow" and if it is not ready till tomorrow then the motion is not valid.

Madam Speaker, there is also some absurd allegations that were also made, that the delay is causing grave doubts on the authenticity of the report. It ignores the independence of the Auditor-General. Madam Speaker, the Auditor-General, his or her independence is enshrined in the Constitution. It states, Madam Speaker, and let me read out Section 152(5) of the Constitution states that, and I quote:

"In the performance of his or her functions or the exercise of his or her authority and powers, the Auditor-General shall be independent and shall not be subject to the direction or control of any person or authority, except by a court of law or as otherwise prescribed by written law."

This casting aspersion on an independent body is like saying, "Oh, the judge did not deliver his judgment on time, therefore the judge must be doing something funny." That is what they are saying.

Madam Speaker, indeed the effect of Section 152(5) is that, even the Minister cannot direct the Auditor-General on anything with respect to the report, including demanding that the report be submitted any time. I cannot go and say to him, "Hey, it is nearly 15 months, bring the report now." He will tell me to bugger off". I cannot even do that.

Madam Speaker, the constitutional independence of the Auditor-General ensures that the Auditor-General is free to report as he wishes, and the Minister must table that report in Parliament once a copy is submitted to the Minister. If the report is submitted to the Minister after 9 months, the Minister must upon receipt of the report, then seek a resolution of Parliament to approve the tabling of the report, and then table the report as approved by Parliament.

Madam Speaker, the key reason from what we are being told by the Auditor-General's Office for the delay in the release of the report was mainly due to the realignment and validation of financials based on the cash basis or IPSAS, given that Government is in the transition phase of adopting International Public Sector Accounting as part of its Financial Management Reform. So obviously, Madam Speaker, the Auditor-General needs to ensure that when they carry out the audit and when they give their report, it is in conformity with these international standards that we are trying to adopt. And, therefore, we will on a practical basis carry out our accounting on that basis.

Madam Speaker, the initial step is to adopt cash basis or IPSAS reporting. In this regard, Madam Speaker, the statements of Budget and Actual Comparison is prepared based on cash basis as per the IPSAS requirement. Advice, Madam Speaker, we understand was also sought from the Pacific Financial Technical Assistant Centre (PFTAC) as most people know it, which is the IMF Regional Technical Assistance Centre on the same issues.

Madam Speaker, with that background, we would like to get Parliament to support this motion which is a fairly straightforward motion, so at least the Auditor-General's Report can be tabled. We understand that if this is approved by Parliament today, they can submit it to us tomorrow. We can

table it tomorrow and Madam Speaker, as you normally do, you direct it to the Public Accounts Committee. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The floor is open for debate. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, this motion is asking that we give an extra 15 months. The Government cannot deny the fact that it has not followed what the law requires initially. It has delayed the submission of this report, like many things that the law requires of the Government and the Government has failed, like even their that they have done and they have not done so. This is a clear example of the delay of an inaction by the Government, and there are many examples here in this House, even promises.

HON. MEMBER.- Like what?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I will give you examples. Even the Honourable Prime Minister was supposed to table in this House the report on the Constitutional Offices Commission and he has not done so. The Honourable Attorney-General, National Development Plan, the second stage but he has not done so. The Annual Report for Fiji Airways, has not been done so. The Honourable Minister for Education, simple things, like the kitchen in QVS. They have to take the Honourable Prime Minister to show him what to do.

HON. GOVT MEMBER.- Show who?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Minister for Education. The Honourable Minister for Housing and Planning, he promised elections in August 2014, but had not done so. These are examples of what the Government is supposed to do and they have not done it.

It is the same in here, the law says nine months and if you want an extension, you do not have it as of right, no! You must come here and give your explanations here. You must tell us the reasons for the delay. Why were you sitting on this? He has not given an explanation. The explanation given by the Honourable Attorney-General gives the impression that they have a right to this. You do not have any right to this. You must observe what the law says which is within eight months, you must submit this report. If not, you come here and you do not get it out of right but you give your explanation as to the reason for the delay. Why were you sitting on the job?

HON. V. PILLAY.- Like what?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Like many things - sleeping, doing nothing and this is the reason, Madam Speaker, why they will be going out next year.

(Laughter)

You ask every single person on the street, they have had enough of you. You will not be here. No, you will be here, but you will be on this side.

(Laughter)

Simple things, Madam Speaker, they should not come here and get this out of right. You should give your explanation and you should convince this House why were you sitting on the job? Why did you not submit these things within eight months? You have to come here by motion and get the House to agree, not as of right, but you should convince us, why we should say "yes" to the extension. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I was surprisingly listening to the Honourable Attorney-General on the explanation and then I looked at the analysis in one of the newspapers it sounded very familiar.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Maybe, you should start reading it.

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I do, because I know it is the taxpayer's exclusive advertising newspaper.

Madam Speaker, the fact that the Honourable Attorney-General has brought this motion seeking the resolution of the House, actually suggests that there was a breach of the Constitution and in a way, he agrees with what I said. Obviously, Madam Speaker, this resolution is necessary for him to table the report tomorrow and obviously it is going to be approved.

However, we on this side of the House, Madam Speaker, believe that the accountability and transparency is the responsibility of this Parliament. This Parliament is a supreme oversight body. This is where we make legislations, this is where people send us to ensure that we maintain at all times the intention and the objective of provisions in the Constitution and other legislations.

It may well be, Madam Speaker, that there is a different interpretation and my understanding of what the Honourable Attorney-General was saying is that there is a different interpretation of the Constitution because we need to go to the court to test that whether you are right or whether we are right.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Get a better lawyer.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes, we will.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Get a better lawyer.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We will.

But the fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that this Government is not owning up to the fact that the Auditor-General's Report should have been tabled, at least, if not in the September sitting because that was a special session, there was no session of Parliament after September until February, the Report should have been tabled in February. I do not buy the Honourable Attorney-General's and the new Auditor-General's excuses that there was no Auditor-General, there was an acting Auditor-General.

Madam Speaker, Auditor-General's Reports are very important reports. On the one hand, it can provide the confidence to the people, it can be helpful to the Government but the Government over a period of a year has been able to run its financial systems, expenditure, and the taxpayers funds used properly. And this is why it is very important that the Auditor-General Office, if we are hearing today that there is an excuse, whatever the excuse, whether it was the inability of the Constitutional Offices Commission since 2014 to appoint a new Auditor-General or that the Acting Auditor-General did not have the resources to produce the reports. These are all questions that the people would be asking. I mean, we can argue about the interpretation of the Constitution.

But the fact of the matter is that, there is an issue about transparency, accountability and oversight, and I think it is the responsibility of any Government or any Parliament to ensure that, that central oversight process is understood and done in a timely manner at an appropriate time as stipulated in the Constitution.

I know, Madam Speaker, the Government changed the Standing Orders to remove me as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. I am not complaining, I am fine, Madam Speaker, and I hope that the Government understands because we are not talking about this Government or another Government tomorrow. They may be there in the next elections, they may not be there. The important thing is, Madam Speaker, that we need to put in practice. Sometimes you can have very strict technical interpretation of the Constitution, but that is not the point.

The point is that the understanding always was, and that is why the Act says that and also the Constitution followed that as well of nine months. It is not about the Attorney-General not receiving the report. Alright, I can understand he did not receive the report. Madam Speaker, you did not receive the report but there is no blame game here about you or the Attorney-General. It is about the Office of the Auditor-General and I think as a Parliament, and the Attorney-General himself as the chief legal advisor to Government and perhaps, to this Parliament on many occasions, he needs to interpret that provision as requiring Parliament to receive the Auditor-General's Report within a stipulated time.

If the Attorney-General cannot, if he says that the Auditor-General's Office is independent, it is the Chairman of the Constitutional Offices Commission which is the appointing authority.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is why I am saying, I am referring to the Chairman of the Constitutional Offices Commission.

They also have a responsibility. The Honourable Prime Minister has a responsibility to ensure that those responsible for ensuring that we adhere to the norms, the requirements of the oversight process, that they do their work.

Madam Speaker, I would have expected the Honourable Attorney-General to frame this motion in a slightly different way to say, "Look, there was a lapse, the report was not presented in nine months, I seek Parliament's resolution to table this report tomorrow." I would have supported that motion but this motion about 15 months is applying to the 2015 Report, but I hope that it does not become a precedent for all future reports. I hope that it will be done within the nine months after the end of the financial year. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I just want to speak on this motion in support of my two colleagues, on the question of timing of this motion as already being alluded to.

The question, Madam Speaker, is, why 15 months? Maybe, because it will be presented tomorrow. I also heard the Honourable Minister for Economy saying that they have no control. Unfortunately, I say that he has control.

If he goes back one section from the Audit Act, Section 11 requires there that the Ministry is supposed to present to the Auditor-General six months after the end of the financial year. So, that is a reasoning that we did not hear him saying, so whether the reports were presented on time to the

Auditor-General for them to conduct their audit or did they actually present it late, thus resulting in the request for a 15 month's period for submission. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other input, I invite the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, sometimes when the Opposition respond to a speech, we are actually left quite stunned because of the quality of the confusion. It is really quite out of this world.

Honourable Nawaikula, unfortunately, Madam Speaker sometimes he borders on not being taken seriously all the time.

Madam Speaker, he is saying to this Parliament that we want 15 months. It is from the 15 months from the end of the financial year, so that 15 months, Madam Speaker, ends this month. It is 15 months from the end of December 2015, not 15 months from today.

(Hon. Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He did not say that. You said it? He did not say it.

Madam Speaker, secondly, he said that I was sitting on the job, *areh*, but I do not do the audit. It is done by the Auditor-General. How can I be sitting on the job for something that I am not supposed to be doing in the first place? This is kind of, really frivolous comments coming from the other side because they just really want to pick on things for the sake of it.

Honourable Professor Prasad, may be an economist which we sometimes doubt, but Madam Speaker again, he is talking about legal aspects. Let me read this out, he said it is subject to interpretation.

Section 152(13) of the Constitution says, and I quote:

“The Auditor-General must submit a report made by him or her to the Speaker of Parliament and must submit a copy to the Minister responsible for finance.”

That is it. It does not give a timeframe. So, he must submit to the Minister responsible for finance, then the Audit Act kicks in.

The Audit Act says and this is mind you, Madam Speaker, inserted in May 2006, maybe the Government at that point in time inserted these amendments because they were actually late too, the Auditor-General. Think about why these amendments were made then.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition may know better than us because she was the only one there. It says, Madam Speaker, I quote:

“A report of the Auditor-General to Parliament about an audit must be submitted to the Speaker of Parliament within nine months after the financial year to which the audit relates or within a longer period appointed by a resolution of Parliament.”

So, if it is still with 2015, the Constitution says that, I quote: “The Auditor-General must submit a report made by him or her, and must submit a copy to the Minister responsible for finance.” They have to do that and to you, Madam Speaker.

Then the Audit Act (not the Constitution) describes a timeframe. The Audit Act says, I quote: "Within nine months of the end of the financial year." For the end of financial year of December 2015 by September last year; nine months, or if they obviously do not do it, then you must have a resolution appointed by Parliament. Madam Speaker, then the Constitution kicks in because he is going on about the breach of the Constitution. The Constitution then kicks in, again.

Subsection 14 says,

"Within 30 days of receipt, or if Parliament is not sitting, on the first day after the end of that period...."

So once Madam Speaker, you get the report, I get the report, within 30 days, the Minister responsible for finance must lay that report in Parliament because as has been highlighted by everyone from this side of the House and that side of the House, the Parliament is the one that will scrutinise the Auditor-General's Report.

That is the only timeframe the Constitution gives and that timeframe relates to, once the report is received then we must table it within 30 days or if Parliament is not going to meet within that 30 days, the next sitting date. That is the timeframe, Madam Speaker. So Honourable Prasad is legally incorrect by saying that what we are doing today is a Constitutional breach. It is not a Constitutional breach.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, the Audit Act says that if there is a longer period required, then we file a motion, we get a resolution by way of a motion through Parliament and Parliament approves it, and this is precisely what we are doing.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Again, Madam Speaker, he is reading things which he is not seeing. That is the problem because, again, like I said this morning and yesterday, they want to pluck things away. They have the *Fiji Times* or whatever available to them, they go and make these grand statements, and they run the stories for them, they feel good about it, they want to create this ruckus about Government, the

(Hon. Professor Biman Prasad interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, we gave it to them, they asked us. Absolutely! It is legally correct.

(Hon. Professor Biman Prasad interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is legally correct! I am not here to answer your media criticisms.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is this, they are caught with their pants down, figuratively speaking.

(Laughter)

(Hon. Professor Biman Prasad interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They are caught with their pants down because Honourable Prasad loves to go out and make these statements which are legally flawed, his voice is now being

raised because he is again caught with this pants down. He is now yelling because he knows he is wrong.

Madam Speaker, the point of the matter is this, this is a very simple matter, at the end of the day what is the objective? At the end of the day the objective is, Madam Speaker, to get the Auditor-General's Report to this Parliament so that the Public Accounts Committee can view it.

Madam Speaker, we have given the reasons that were given to us by the Auditor-General. They have read into it. He went and made grandeur statements to the media, "Just because the COC did not meet, just because there was no Auditor-General for a long period of time, there was an inactive Auditor-General that is why it has been delayed." He obviously seems to know what is going on at the Auditor-General's Office more than us.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is a fact.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- He seems to know more than what is going on. Maybe, you have inside information in the Auditor-General's Office which we do not.

Maybe, there are people talking to you. Maybe you are compromising the Auditor-General's independence. Maybe, you are compromising, you do not even know that!

Regarding resources, Madam Speaker, we gave the Auditor-General's budget an increase. So, Madam Speaker, we...

(Hon. Professor Biman Prasad interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We understand your embarrassment, it is alright. We understand, but the fact of the matter is, by having this motion before the House, we will be able to then allow the Auditor-General's Report to be tabled in Parliament.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, that this matter again is being obfuscated. It is a very simple matter. The Auditor-General has given his reasons. He is a new Auditor-General, he needs to be supported and, Madam Speaker, he has given his reasons and we need to move along.

The Auditor-General has given his report. The Public Accounts Committee which the Honourable Aseri Radrodro seems to be very active on, he can scrutinise as much as he likes. He can ask as many questions as he likes. If the Auditor-General is fraud, you can pick it up because you are very steward people. So, Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this motion is here to ensure that we get the Auditor General's Report tabled. So you can receive it tomorrow, Madam Speaker, and we can receive it so we can table it, and we look forward to this motion being agreed to. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

The question is that Parliament approves that –

- 1) Pursuant to Section 12(1) of the Audit Act 1969 and Section 152(13) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, the Auditor-General submit the report on the audit of the Whole of Government Financial Statements for financial year ending 31 December 2015 to the Speaker of Parliament and a copy to the Minister responsible for finance within 15 months

of the end of that financial year to enable the report to be tabled at this sitting of Parliament; and

- 2) Pursuant to section 45 of the Financial Management Act 2004 and section 152(14) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, the Minister responsible for finance table the annual report for the Whole of Government for financial year ending 31 December 2015 within 15 months of the end of that financial year to enable the report to be tabled at this sitting of Parliament.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of "Ayes" and "Noes")

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

Votes Cast:

Ayes	:	29
Noes	:	15
Not Voted	:	6

There being 29 Ayes, 15 Noes and 6 Not Voted the motion is agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. I thank you very much for your patience in the healthy debate that we have had today. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.30 p.m.