

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 14TH MARCH, 2018

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

| | <u>Pages</u> |
|--|--------------------|
| Minutes | 816 |
| Communications from the Chair | 816 |
| Presentation of Papers & Certain Documents... | 817 |
| Presentation of Reports of Committees | 817 |
| Questions | 818-849 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress of Reforestation – Northern Division (Q. No. 79/18) • Progress of Investigations – Temple Sacrilege (Q. No. 80/18) • Young Entrepreneurship Scheme – (Q. No. 81/18) • Update – Lakena Jetty Construction Works (Q. No. 82/18) • Gender Equality – Sustainable Fisheries Management & Dev (Q. No. 83/18) • Progress of the Extension of the Nausori Airport Runway (Q. No. 84/18) • MOA – Ministry of Agriculture & PCDF (Q. No. 85/18) • Garbage situation countryside (Q. No. 86/18) • Rental arrears accumulated by iTLTB & Recovery Action (Q. No. 87/18) • Breakdown by division & district – Free Medical Scheme (Q. No. 88/18) | |
| Ministerial Statements | 849-871 899-915 |
| Motions for Debate | 849-871 |
| Suspension of Standing Orders | 871-898 |
| Consideration of Bills | 916-918 |

WEDNESDAY, 14TH MARCH, 2018

The Parliament met at 9.32 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 Health and Medical Services; the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for i-Taukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs; the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport; the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; and the Honourable M.M.A. Dean.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 13th March, 2018 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament.

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

Welcome – Speaker from Cook Islands Parliament

At this juncture, I warmly welcome the Honourable Speaker of the Parliament of Cook Islands, Hon. Niki Rattle. Please stand, Hon. Niki Rattle, so we can all see you.

(Applause)

Welcome to the Fijian Parliament and I hope you will enjoy your stay in our beautiful Fiji. For the information of Honourable Members, Hon. Niki Rattle will be with us for the rest of this sitting week.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- I have been informed that there are no papers and documents for presentation.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

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

Standing Committee on Natural Resources - Department of Forestry 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports

HON. CDR. J. CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker, I stand to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources on the Department of Forests 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports.

The Standing Committee on Natural Resources is a Standing Committee established under Section 109(2)(c) of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Standing Orders (SO). The Committee is mandated to examine matters related to forestry, agriculture, mining, environment, fisheries, water and marine services.

The purpose of the review was to scrutinise the Annual Reports of the Department of Forests for the years 2014 and 2015; to compare and analyse the performance of the Department in terms of its administration, legislation, organisation structure, financial management, functions and programmes.

Madam Speaker, the Committee noted a number of inconsistencies and discrepancies in the figures tabled in the two Reports which could not be substantiated. According to the submission by the Ministry of Forests, it was revealed that they used two different measurement methodologies for the two different years. The 2014 Annual Report is based on Forest Functions, while the 2015 Annual Report is based on Forest Productions.

The Committee, therefore, recommends that due to these inconsistencies, the 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports for the Department of Forests be withdrawn from Parliament and returned to the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, I 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 Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. CDR. J. 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.- Honourable Chairman, are we going to be debating on the Report that you have withdrawn?

HON. CDR. J. CAWAKI.- The recommendation of the Committee was to withdraw the Reports and return it to the Ministry of Forests.

HON. SPEAKER.- And you still want Parliament to debate on it?

HON. CDR. J. CAWAKI.- For Parliament to make a decision on, because it was presented to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- I seek leave of Parliament. Do you think we should debate on this Report that has been withdrawn and returned to the Ministry?

HON. LT. COL. I. B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Government is of the view that, in all fairness, we thank the work of the Committee but if it can be returned to the Ministry, they tidy it up and then re-submit.

HON. SPEAKER.- It will be re-submitted for debate in Parliament at a later sitting.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Progress of Reforestation – Northern Division (Question 79/2018)

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- Madam Speaker, I rise to withdraw the question that is listed under my name in today's Order Paper. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, this is a question that had been agreed to by the Business Committee and it has been asked to be withdrawn. Shall we withdraw it?

(Chorus of interjection)

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Madam Speaker, it has gone through the Business Committee and

HON. SPEAKER.- But he still has the right to withdraw it even before that.

Thank you, the question is withdrawn.

I now invite the Honourable Prem Singh to ask his question.

Progress of Investigations – Temple Sacrilege (Question No. 80/2018)

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

Would the Honourable Minister update Parliament on the progress of investigations into incidents of temple sacrilege and places of worship?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA (Minister for Defence and National Security).- Madam Speaker, I thank that Honourable Member for that question. This question should also be withdrawn because a written question was put to Parliament last week and I tabled the answer, but if you wish me to respond, I will respond. But according to Standing Orders, it has just been tabled last week the answer to the written question.

HON. SPEAKER.- I think this withdrawal should have been made at the Committee stage but the Committee had agreed that the question be tabled.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Then I will now respond, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, there were 14 cases of sacrilege, not only temples but also churches. The progress on the investigation, is as follows:

| Places of Worship | Status of Case |
|---|--------------------------|
| Latter Day Saints Church | Case before Court |
| Vishnu Bhavan Temple | Case before Court |
| Gopal Sadu Mandir Temple | Case before the Court |
| Shiv Mandir, Namara Road, Nabua | Investigation continuing |
| Nadera Catholic Church | Investigation continuing |
| Caubati Mandir, Valelevu | Investigation continuing |
| Tagusu Assemblies of God, Natalau, Sabeto | Investigation continuing |
| Hope Assemblies of God, Natalau, Sabeto | Investigation continuing |
| Maharishi Triaath Dhaam Temple, Sabeto | Investigation continuing |
| Kalili Settlement Church, Lautoka | Investigation continuing |
| Kavanagasau Temple, Sigatoka | Investigation continuing |
| Shree Sathya Dharam Ramayan Mandali | Investigation continuing |
| Vunisinu Methodist Church | Investigation continuing |

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I invite supplementary questions, if any? Honourable Prem Singh?

HON. P. SINGH.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Could the Honourable Minister inform this House what proactive measures is the Government employing to combat this heinous crime of the desecration of our places of worship?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, the Police have found out from the youths around these place of worship, the motivating factor is money that these people are after. They feel that money is kept in these places of worship and they break into them.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other supplementary question, I will now give the floor to the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar to ask his question.

Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES)
(Question No. 81/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Minister elaborate to the House the new Government initiative in the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Madam Speaker, this initiative is targeted at our young Fijians. The Fijian Government has the true interest of our young people at heart, for example, obviously the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES), as it is commonly known.

Madam Speaker, this is an initiative of the FijiFirst Government which was announced in the 2017-2018 National Budget. We rolled out this initiative in September 2017 and soon after, it was announced in July 2017.

The roll out of this initiative involved, Madam Speaker, a number of key initiatives and one was the awareness and marketing campaign, the appointment of YES Selection Panel members and its chairperson, selection and confirmation of YES mentors and the development of the YES website and an online application system.

This culminated, Madam Speaker, with the official launch of the YES Programme by the Honourable Prime Minister on 11th January, 2018, where he also announced the first batch of successful applicants to be part of the YES Programme.

Madam Speaker, unlike the Opposition which adopts some unrealistic utopian and populist approach towards the delivering of socio-economic programmes, this Government strongly believes that the private sector should drive economic growth, in the interest of sustainability and the long-term prosperity of our country.

This initiative, Madam Speaker, is a very good example of Public Private Partnership (PPP). The YES Selection Panel is made up of highly accomplished and capable private sector individuals, and these individuals, Madam Speaker, bring to the YES Panel wealth of experience which is largely drawn from diverse sectors, such as pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, banking, finance, agriculture, retail, ICT, construction, mechanical and electronics.

The Fijian Government, Madam Speaker, understands the aspirations of all young Fijians and as such, to complement an innovative system like YES, the Ministry designed and implemented an online application and assessment system and the YES website interfaces back-end application system.

This allows the young budding entrepreneurs to submit their applications online with all the required documentation, and the assessment of the applications is also done online. Madam Speaker, you could be in a remote village in Vanua Levu or in one of the outer islands of Lau, you can still submit your application for YES.

As per the 2013 Constitution, Madam Speaker, the right to economic participation is accorded to all Fijians, and no matter where you actually reside. So we are breaking the geographic and the technological barriers and to-date, over a three-month period since the YES website was launched, we have recorded close to 1 million hits and visits and this is a remarkable achievement and demonstrates the desire of our young people, the entrepreneurs.

Madam Speaker, in recognising the need to protect the intellectual property of YES applicants, only officials dealing with the YES Programme are privy to the information and business ideas submitted in these applications, and the members of the Selection Panel members also sign a non-disclosure agreement which further enhances the integrity of YES.

Madam Speaker, as earlier alluded to, the interest generated by YES has been phenomenal. There are already plans to increase a number of training programmes delivered to our young people and a number of officers in the Ministry had also undertaken business development trainings as part of the Ministry's capacity building, to enhance the delivery of its programmes, including the YES.

In addition, Madam Speaker, and to internal capacity building initiatives, the Ministry has commenced specific mentoring and training programmes for the YES. The Ministry plans obviously to upgrade its current training facilities and we look to collaborate with the private sector in modernising our existing business incubating hubs.

I would like to conclude, Madam Speaker, by reiterating the words of our Honourable Prime Minister at the launch when he said, and I quote:

“Our youth should not only be job seekers but they also need to be job creators, that provide their fellow Fijians with new and exciting opportunities and we want our young people to think outside the box and make Fiji a hub of innovation for the Pacific, and for the world. We want them to be leaders in business, civil society and government, putting their ideas at the forefront of Fiji's development with their entrepreneurial spirit carrying our nation into the future.”

Madam Speaker, the harsh reality is that, when I look at the faces across the other side of the House, I am absolutely certain that they would not have come up with this idea.

(Laughter)

I will tell you why, because they are completely detached from the hopes and aspirations of a lot of young Fijians.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, again, this is a great initiative and no other government in the history of Fiji has ever designed and implemented a cutting-edge programme as the YES Programme, which is targeted at improving the livelihoods of our young people. This is the ultimate objective of the YES, and I thank you for the opportunity. I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

HON. SPEAKER.- I will give the first supplementary question to Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and may I also welcome Honourable Niki Rattle, the Speaker from Cook Islands.

I thank the Honourable Minister for the explanation on the YES Programme. Madam Speaker, the Youth Policy Programme stipulates the age group from 18 years to 35 years, but I note from the criteria as in the website is from 18 years to 30 years. So the question to the Honourable Minister; is there room for expanding your age criteria so it synchronises with the Youth Policy age cut-off, and also opens up the opportunity for more applications? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a good question and I thank the Honourable Member for her question.

Madam Speaker, people above the age of 30 years would have pretty much already accumulated enough capital. Please, you need to give credit where credit is due.

There are a lot of Fijians who work hard, who make decent money and when they get to the age of 30, they would have accumulated enough capital already to start their business and they are in a position, Madam Speaker, to secure loans from financial institutions to go into business and this is why the initiative is specifically stating 30 years.

Fijians between the ages of 18 years to 30 years are at an exciting phase of their lives, Madam Speaker, where their desire, (now this is quite important), they have a desire to learn more, to broaden their minds and explore and experiment, et cetera, and they are also very inquisitive, Madam Speaker, such an important, we must not forget the little things. They are inquisitive, they are curious, they are daring and they are bold enough to take on these new challenges so that is the age group that we have actually looked at, which this is targeted to. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Howard Politini.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister give an indication on the level of interest generated so far on the YES initiative?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, to-date, we have received 270 applications, and as I said earlier, the number of hits on the website is already a million. A number of organisations, Madam Speaker, have approached the Ministry to offer training for the young entrepreneurs:

- an international agency, the Global Green Growth Institute;
- a regional organisation, Asian Development Bank;
- an Australian-based training provider, Project Everest; and
- a local training provider, Loving Islands.

Interest received from mentoring, consultancy and the number of applications received for training to assist young people in preparing the submissions is actually 65, Madam Speaker. One local university has designed a compulsory programme specifically to prepare young people for the YES.

A number of invitations also, Madam Speaker, have been received for speaking engagements and presentations on YES, from the APTC, FNU, USP, Young Entrepreneurs Council; and “For the Record”, “Talk Business”, “FBC Talkback Shows“ and the National Financial Inclusion Taskforce. That is the status at the moment, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, what we want is result, we do not want ideals.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Could the Honourable Minister give us some examples, like yesterday, of successful stories of this programme or have you only just started it?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, the answer to that very simple question, you see this light up here, it started with an idea.

(Laughter)

The results, I just launched it, Madam Speaker. It has just been launched, the Programme that will....

HON. N. NAWAKULA.- Yes, you're just about to launch!

(Chorus of interjections)

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You are just doing it now!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, it is wonderful how they have this fear about going out.

(Laughter)

The only one going out is that part of the House, Madam Speaker, this part is staying. I tell you firmly, Madam Speaker, we are staying, and we are staying on this side of the House.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Alvick Maharaj.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Madam Speaker, before I ask my supplementary question, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister and the Government for helping and having faith in the youth, and empowering young people through such policies and schemes.

Madam Speaker, my supplementary question would be; what has the Ministry put in place to ensure the sustainability of the YES Programme? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- You should apply.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, the training programmes, it is called 'Start and Improve Your Business', have started this week in the Central Division, and the Western and the Northern Divisions will commence in the subsequent weeks. These trainings, Madam Speaker, are actually not a one-off, but an integral component of the YES initiative as a whole.

The mentoring programme is also in place for the first lot and actually will be ongoing. The PPP, Madam Speaker, a collaboration is in the areas of training, mentoring and business incubation. Now, for example, the ANZ Bank has offered Financial Literacy Training for YES and that is a substantial thing, Madam Speaker.

We have got targeted awareness and commercial marketing campaign to generate interest and track the applications from the various sectors of the economy, Madam Speaker, and we are talking about billboard, television, radio, sports and digital screens, cinema advertising and social media, which they love, Madam Speaker. So go into the social media scene, you will see all that you want about YES, and obviously the website. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, there are young Fijians in this age bracket, Honourable Minister, in villages and settlements who may be disqualified due to stringent eligibility criteria because I think one of the criteria is that an applicant must have vocational technical diploma or degree from a recognised university. Are there any plans to accommodate them? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, I think when I did actually mention this, there is a lot of research that went into establishing this particular programme. The criteria that we have established now is safe. But like anything in Government, and I always say this continuously, it has just been launched and if there is a review to go on, we will let you know, but right now, the criteria that exist, stands. As I said, maybe or there may not be, we do not know, we will review it later.

HON. SPEAKER.- I think another Member from Government stood up. Honourable Sudhakar?

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, a supplementary question. I would like to ask the Honourable Minister if the Scheme is open to all young people, including the disabled people?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, the initiative, like any other initiative that belongs to Government, is open to all. The only restrictions are the criteria that had been established with respect to the age. Your ability, whether you are a disabled person or an able person, it does not matter, Madam Speaker, it is open to all.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. I beg your indulgence but this is an issue in connection with young persons, so I will allow more questions. I now give the floor to the Honourable Bilitavu, the last question.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, just a question to the Honourable Minister in regards to the programme that he is alluding to. The Programme falls into three parts; full payment, partial and also loan equity. What are the criteria for loan in regards to the funding for YES Programme and whether this programme will only be limited to certain industry or would it be open to all types of business that this age group would like to set up as their ventures?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. The YES Programme is not restrictive in terms of the applicants only, it is not saying that it will only can apply if you are interested in agriculture or ICT, it is not, it is across the board. That is the reason why we have the mentoring programme, that is the reason why we have the PPP, that is the reason why we have people from all different sectors of business in the commercial world that were involved in this. There is no restriction in respect to that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Semesa Karavaki to ask his question.

Update on the Lakeba Jetty Construction Works
(Question No. 82/2018)

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

Can the Acting Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport explain to the House the progress of construction works for the new Lakeba Jetty as announced by the Honourable Prime Minister in the last Budget session?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Acting Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Thank you. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Madam Speaker, as Parliament has been informed on a number of occasions that FRA does not only look after roads, the budget that has been allocated to FRA is also to do with bridges and jetties.

Madam Speaker, the upgrading of jetties and building of new jetties comes within the budget. The works in Lakeba will be undertaken in two phases, as has been informed previously. The rehabilitation of the current Tubou Village Jetty and the relocation of the Tubou Village Jetty to the new Wainiyabia site.

Madam Speaker, the first phase involves the repairing of the existing Tubou Village Jetty. These repair at the Tubou Village jetty are part of the jetty maintenance package that includes jetties in Cicia, Kavala, Rotuma and Bau Landing.

The total cost of the jetty maintenance package is estimated to be approximately FJ\$4.1 million for all these areas. The maintenance works at Tubou Village Jetty are expected to start on or around April 2018, which is next month. As part of FRA's maintenance programme, the anticipated completion date is by July 2018.

Madam Speaker, the relocation to the Wainiyabia site will be part of Phase 2. There is considerable environmental due diligence, as the Honourable Member would know, the process in the planning of new jetties in this particular area. Accordingly, a consultancy contract tender for the investigation and design is planned for award in May 2018, which is in two months' time. The expected date for the completion of the investigation and design is December 2018.

The construction of Wainiyabia is part of the Eastern Islands package for new jetties. The package includes; Koro, Lomaloma, Moala, Makogai and Nabukeru in Serua. The total cost of the package is worth approximately in Fijian dollars for all these areas.

The construction phase for the Wainiyabia Jetty is expected to commence in July 2019, which is next year, and the anticipated completion date is late 2019. So within six months, it should be done from the time it commences. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I invite questions, if any.

There being no questions, I will now give the floor to Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou to ask his question.

Gender Equality - Sustainable Fisheries Management and Development
(Question No. 83/2018)

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

Can the Minister for Fisheries explain what the Ministry is doing to promote Gender Equality in Sustainable Fisheries Management and Development in Fiji?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I thank him for the question.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is very proactive in promoting gender equality in the fisheries sector. This is evident with our Ministry's Senior Management Team as our head of division has an equal representations of male and female.

Additionally, the Ministry has commendable representations of female involved in the fisheries sector. Equal opportunities are given to both genders to participate in any of the task of fieldwork that males would usually undertake in the past.

The Ministry, through different projects, also encourage and fully support the training needs of all women in this sector. Women groups are assisted through our food security initiative, which includes aquaculture programmes. There are also a growing number of women involved in the pearl industry through spat farm developments.

Moreover, women in local communities are also undergoing training on financial or business management through the literacy training workshop, where they are encouraged to grasp the essence and importance of keeping daily financial records.

Under this training, women are taught to be cognizant of the merits of understanding why they need to keep financial and business records, and be able to track all expenditures on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, the Ministry is also working closely with its non-government partners and line ministry to document the participation of women in the sector, and the assistance that can be provided to them.

The Ministry's Annual Corporate Plan further reflects the recognition and commitment that the Ministry has to promote gender equality in the fisheries sector. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now open the floor for questions, if any. Honourable Samuela Vunivalu?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, Supplementary question.

In light of Fiji's gender commitment, can the Honourable Minister explain the current policy and legislative support within the Ministry that addresses gender equality in regards to projects under the Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question.

Madam Speaker, when discussing projects and activities undertaken by the Ministry of Fisheries, it is important to know that there are no barriers in terms of gender. Inclusive of fisheries workforce, the existing fishers legislation policies are clear that it is inclusive of women.

While having said that, it is important to recognise that there are different limits and barriers that need to be considered when discussing gender issues. Only by recognising these limitations, we will be able to address issues of gender equality in fisheries.

Madam Speaker, allow me to elaborate more on the implementation of gender equality in fisheries.

Through the Women in Fisheries Programme, the empowerment of rural women is one of the initiatives. This has allowed women to participate in the following areas:

1. In aquaculture, women participation has grown over the years. This is evident when taking note of their 25 percent ownership involvement in tilapia and prawn farms.
2. Within the mariculture activity, women group holds 70 percent participation in spat collection for pearls. This is a substantial figure, noting that the other 30 percent is held by youth groups. Additionally, crab farming which is a new initiative, has welcomed women's participation.
3. To reduce effort posed on Coastal Fisheries, the introduction of Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) have been used to reduce efforts in coastal areas while introducing a more sufficient fishing technique in the offshore areas. Women have been included in FAD training, and have shown results of being sufficiently trained in FAD fisheries.

Moreover, in activities of coastal surveillance, the involvement of women as Fish Wardens under training have indicated the growth of equality within this sector. Known for being male dominated, the continuous growth recorded from national training is an addition to gender equality.

Madam Speaker, last but not least, the role of women in fisheries management and enforcement is important. Women are the first point of contact to illegal fishers. Their ability in providing information to enforcement officers have allowed us to undertake enforcement within high risk areas. This is expected to grow in the coming months and the involvement of women in fisheries continues.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Like I said, we want results. As a result of all that, how many women currently are employed by your Ministry and how many women percentage are part of your programme? Just give us the percentage, how many and is that an increase or decrease?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, that is a question on statistics, but I can tell the Honourable Member, in Levuka alone, 1,000 are employed in PAFCO and about 95 percent are women.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Jilila Kumar?

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, before I ask my supplementary question, I also wish to welcome the Honourable Speaker of the Cook Islands.

Supplementary question, Madam Speaker; can the Honourable Minister elaborate more on the objective of Fiji's voluntary commitment, announced at the UN Ocean Conference, promoting gender equality?

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- This is a result, Honourable Nawaikula.

Madam Speaker, when discussing projects and activities undertaken by the Ministry of Fisheries, it is important to note that there are no barriers in terms of gender. Inclusive of the fisheries workforce, the existing fisheries legislation policies are clear, that it is inclusive of women.

While having said that, it is important to recognise that there are different limits and barriers to the participation of women in fisheries, but as I have said before in answering the main question, women participation in fisheries is quite extensive in every sector and every level of the fisheries industry as a whole. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dr. Mere Samisoni, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M.T. SAMISONI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question is to follow up on that measuring policies. Now, if I could just quote: "The figures of the labour force in Fiji is 625,000 approximately; 49.53 percent are women and out of those, that comes to 309,000 women

just over and out of those, 16,000 are unemployed. The labour force participation rate of women is only 37 percent in this country.”

I come from a maritime area and I was a fisherwoman, my mother too was a fisherwoman, and for your figures not to include women on this and your policy is not touching women or including women. I believe, Madam Speaker, that the policy needs to be looked at very carefully because you are probably not picking up as many, and you should be. Thank you.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- I did not hear the question, so I give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last year, the Honourable Minister put in place a ban for *beche-de-mer* in the country.

Madam Speaker, *beche-de-mer* is a very lucrative commodity, a huge market in China. Now, that we have women here, can I ask the Honourable Minister if he can conduct a progress evaluation of the *beche-de-mer* in all the *i qoliqoli* in Fiji? There are about 410 altogether in this country. It is a huge source of wealth. If we can be told on a 12 months basis how much stock is in each *i qoliqoli*, it could really lead to a huge economic contribution to our economy. How many are women who are Fish Wardens? I know it is a huge task, but if you can do that, I think we are on to something big here, in terms of harnessing the value of our *beche-de-mer*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- As I understand, Madam Speaker, he is asking about women's participation in *beche-de-mer*.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- No, the valuation of *beche-de-mer*.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, the valuation has been carried out three times; the last time was in 2014. I can present a report on that in Parliament with a Ministerial Speech tomorrow, if that is required.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Mikaele Leawere, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for empowering women, as laid out in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). My question is; are rural women subsidised in terms of boats and engines, in order to carry out their function as Fish Wardens? That is the question I would like to ask the Honourable Minister.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I have already stated in my initial explanation that women are participating as Fish Wardens and we are carrying out training for more women to join the Fish Warden activities.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodro?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for supporting women in fisheries. The question is; what is the Ministry doing to be able to upgrade our women who are in small businesses in fisheries, say from micro level to small or even medium, in regards to provision of assistance, like fishing boats and engines, not fishing nets?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. We are doing a lot and we have the capacity to be able to assist women in our rural areas in carrying out fishing activities. But we are not an agency for giving out boats and engines, because we do not have the actual budget to buy boats and engines for fishing activities. They can go to the Ministry of Rural Development, where they can put in their one-third: two-third contribution by Government. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The last question, Honourable Ratu Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, more or less on the same line of the previous question is in regards to the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the involvement of women in fishing. If a lady wants to do aquaculture fish pond, what is the requirement in terms of financial assistance, whether it is available for \$1,000 or any other assistance to be able to go into small business ventures, in terms of fisheries aquaculture or tilapia farming?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question but we have an allocation as food security and any women organisation can ask for assistance. We will come and develop the areas that are required and also provide the fish fingerlings and the initial feed. All they have to do is put in an application for such assistance. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Since Fiji has more ocean than land, I will accommodate two more questions.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- They just attack me, Madam Speaker.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, since the suspensions of the processing of *bech-de-mers* and its exportation, and due to the fact that there were a lot of women who work in that industry, I would like to ask the Honourable Minister, what has the Government done to assist those women who had been made redundant from their work in that industry? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, we have carried out public consultations on alternatives that Fisheries can provide. If they can come up to the Ministry and ask us to provide them with alternatives to the collection of *bech-de-mer*, we will provide that alternative. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- And lastly, Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; the challenges that are currently faced in terms of the gender mainstreaming of fisherwomen in terms of financial and human resources, can the Honourable Minister provide an update and whether there is enough support system, what is the Ministry is doing in terms of the support system that is provided to these fisher women?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Madam Speaker, as I have already alluded to, all the organisations and individuals that the women would like to ask for assistance from the Ministry of Fisheries, they can come up with an application, we will look at it, and we have enough capacity to be able to assist.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki to ask his question.

Progress of the Extension of the Nausori Airport Runway
(Question No. 84/2018)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications inform this House on the progress of the extension of the Nausori Airport runway?

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 his question.

Madam Speaker, the current constraints at Nausori Airport is fundamentally the length of the runway at Nadi Airport. Nausori Airport, Madam Speaker, like all the other airports in Fiji, apart from Nadi, does not make a profit, essentially because of the economies of scale in these airports. Now, the Nausori Airport, Madam Speaker, currently, for example, the largest aircraft that lands there, it is the 737-800 that has the direct flights to Sydney and also to Auckland. However, Madam Speaker, this aircraft actually flies also not a full load because of the length of the runway.

The current runway length is about 1,868 metres and 30 metres wide. The ideal length for the 737 operational on full load capacity is 2,100 metres, so this is why all these years when it has been flying, it does not take the full load because it needs the longer runway.

Madam Speaker, the AFL, in conjunction with Government (and we have been talking about this for the past couple of years), the idea is to in fact increase the length of the runway to get full capacity. Indeed, if we are able to acquire enough land, we can get even the A330 at some point in time in the future to land.

The current projection, Madam Speaker, by Fiji Airways and Air New Zealand is that by 2023, we will possibly have about eight international flights using such aircraft, which is the 727, landing into Nausori with maximum capacity because of the traffic. As we know, most of the air traffic in Fiji arises because of our tourism which is fundamentally in the Western side of Fiji, but of course, we

have to also recognise the fact that the major proportion of the Fijian population actually is between the Nausori-Lami corridor, some estimates with approximately about 300,000 Fijians live in this area.

Madam Speaker, the negotiations for the extension of the runway means the negotiations for the *iTaukei* lease of land required for the expansion of the Nausori Airport. It began actually a few years back, Madam Speaker, and from the Village of Naselai and three of the landowning units from Natogadravu, the negotiations are still going on. Some of the leases will need to be leased through the *iTaukei* Lands Trust Board, and the others of course, through the Ministry of Lands, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can I ask the Honourable Minister why the Government paid \$1 million for the acquisition of the leases from the native owners, as opposed to the \$5 million valuation conducted by the native owners?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the entire acquisition is not completed. The Honourable Nawaikula does know that because if the entire acquisition had been completed and enough land had been acquired, we would have actually started the works on the runway, so there are certain negotiations that are going on.

Madam Speaker, what is also very interesting is that we discovered and we have informed AFL that as part of this overall acquisition, we need to also correct the ills of the past. The current Nausori Airport site was acquired during the Colonial Government days on 1st January, 1951. The lease issued was for 99 years and 66 pounds per annum with no right of reassessment, and no Government has actually corrected that during the colonial days; nor the Alliance Government, nor the Rabuka Government, nor the SDL Government.

We are actually going to correct that, Madam Speaker, so what we are going to do, apart from this peppercorn rent that has been paid as was paid for the mahogany leases also, Madam Speaker, we need to correct this.

The Honourable Nawaikula and I am sure the Honourable Ratu Kiliraki also knows the different parcels of land. Currently there are negotiations going on in respect of the different parcels of land that are actually held by the different landowning units, and we hope to get some compensation that is amenable to both parties actually done on the ground and some agreements on that.

Madam Speaker, it is also quite disturbing to note that some lawyers, as we have seen not just in Nausori and in other parts whenever we have land acquisitions and negotiations, turn up and give huge skewed levels of compensation through the landowning units that needs to be paid.

In one of the instances, Madam Speaker, we had a claim of \$50 million in negotiations. Obviously, no developer, including AFL, can come up-front with \$50 million. What we have said, Madam Speaker, and many of these lawyers who go around putting wrong ideas into people's heads

should not be looking at a lump sum up-front and an astronomical amount. What they should be thinking about is, you get a reasonable market assessment done and to see how you can get reassessment done every three or five years, based on the market value of the land, it will increase. We would rather have more money paid over the years as opposed to a lump sum now and that small piddly amount for the next 99 years.

That is what they need to understand, Madam Speaker. They are just living for the moment. We want to think about the future generations. We have to look at the markets rentals too, Madam Speaker, and the market assessments on the rentals to be paid in the future. That has been one of the problems, Madam Speaker, it is not just to do with Nausori, other parts of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu and all those lawyers come around and all of them actually operate their office from the boot of their cars, some of them operate from their suitcases, some of them sit around in Dolphins and they operate from there. Madam Speaker, this has been an issue. We want to ensure that we pay the right market value to the landowners.

The other point that also needs to be noted, many of these people who have become advisers of the landowners do not actually tell them that once you, for example, get full international sized airport at Nausori, it automatically increases the value of the land around that airport, in Tailevu and Rewa, more people will want to live there. If we have international flights coming in, more people will want to live near the airport, there will be commercial transactions, more freight companies will come in; enormous opportunities for the landowning unit and members.

Madam Speaker, we need to look at this holistically. We are very keen, as part of the National Development Plan also, we are urging AFL to finalise it of course as you have seen in the case that many of the airports in Fiji that actually have been leased have been leased with the Ministry of Lands and then they sublease it to AFL, we are looking at that relationship too.

The other point, of course, Madam Speaker, is that we need to be able to position Nausori Airport very quickly. As we mentioned earlier on, we have got a four lane road that goes all the way to Nausori, we want to, of course position Suva as not just a capital of Fiji, but as the capital hub of the Pacific. This is very important for us to be able to get more international flights coming through. Notwithstanding the fact that there may not be enough traffic to drive up profits at Nausori Airport on a standalone basis, but the fact of the matter is that we actually will be building for the future. We hope that all the parties involved will be able to look at the future and how we can actually provide more benefits, not just for the landowners there, but also for the entire economy and for those people living in that delta area. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply. Again, the Nausori Airport extension is long overdue. From the explanation by the Honourable Minister, can the Honourable Minister clarify if the land required for the extension will be leased since they are native land, *i-Taukei* land, or acquire, and given that the land is finalised, what will be the timeline for the construction of the airport?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, we will be leasing the land, some parts of the land will be leased directly through iTLTB and some parts of the land is being through the Ministry of Lands. Madam Speaker, I can also give you the information in respect of the works that will be carried out.

AFL has appointed GHD as an Engineering Consultant, which has completed the concept design for the project. The additional public consultation on Environment Impact Assessment has also been completed.

In 2017, AFL advertised for Expression of Interest for civil works contractor and short listed contractors would request for proposal or RFP documents, which were issued to shortlisted civil work contractors in February 2018 (the last one) and the deadline for the submission is 4th April 2018. Notwithstanding any further delays, it is anticipated that construction will commence in mid-July, 2018, a lot of civil work that needs to be done. The construction period will be a period of 70 weeks, which will take us up to the end of 2019, then we expect the extension of the runway to be completed.

Madam Speaker, also further information, of course this is just the runway, we also expect to upgrade the terminal itself, as you know that Nausori Terminal is not exactly very attractive. We need to upgrade it to international standards if we are going to have international flights coming through. It also involves things like doing the sewer main, it is not just about the airport, we are getting sewer systems right, getting the piping right, getting the water right, the right pressure of water and sewer system, and we need to acquire things like the aerobridge. At the moment, there is no aerobridge at Nausori Airport, we have to actually physically get down to the tarmac and then go down and of course there is a car park area, we have to build the aprons for the runway. There is quite a lot of work that needs to be done, Madam Speaker.

We are looking at a total cost for Nausori Runway apron and the land consultants of \$36.9 million, and Nausori Terminal Services, aerobridge, car park and land acquisition at \$10.07 million, and Nausori sewer main is about \$880,000. The total cost approximately to fix up Nausori Airport to bring it up to that international standard, at least to get the 737 cargo on full load will be about \$47.85 million, which will be expanded over a period of 70 weeks.

Madam Speaker, the other point of course is that Government, at the moment, given the financial capacity and indeed the very strong financial position of AFL, the Government is not actually putting any money directly to AFL because AFL, as a limited liability company, is able to stand on its two feet. Let me remind Parliament again, it is the only 100 percent Government owned entity that has actually been giving dividends in excess of \$40 million, it is unprecedented. Of course, as we have said that the current renovations in Nadi Airport, which I think everyone will agree, is quite spectacular, given the state it was in. In fact, not a single cent of Government money actually has been put in towards the funding of that.

AFL has actually gone out on its own, it has gone out and borrowed from the market at very attractive rates from the commercial sectors. This is the kind of position that we want to be and indeed there was no Government guarantees given for that loan, Madam Speaker. This is the position that we want Government-owned entities to be in or wherever there are strategic paths to be able to stand on its own two feet without being a burden on Government coffers or Government guarantee provisions, Madam Speaker. This is a testimony of the current Board, the Executive Chair and his team, they have done a fantastic job and we look forward to more of the similar type of modernisation taking place at

Nausori Airport which will be beneficial to everyone, including the landowners in that area. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Members, time has caught up with us, thank you very much for the robust debate we had this morning and thank you for your input.

The Parliament is now adjournment for refreshments and we will resume at 11 o'clock. Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.33 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 10.59 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will now continue from where we left off and I give the floor to the Honourable Dr Brij Lal to ask his question.

MOA - Ministry of Agriculture and PCDF
(Question No. 85/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services explain to the House the Memorandum of Agreement signed on Fiji Agricultural Partnership Project with the Partners in Community Development Fiji?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, and Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question this morning.

Madam Speaker, the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Partners in Community Development Fiji (PCDF) was signed on 19th January, 2018. Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, a brief background on the project. Prior to 2014, the International Funding for Agriculture Development (IFAD) based in Rome provided funds directly to PCDF, to pilot a project which they have also done in other countries, particularly in the Asia Pacific region, where the majority of our farmers are subsistence small holder farmers, these small holder farmers to participate in farming as a business.

The name of the project then, Madam Speaker, was Partnership for High Value Agriculture (PHVA). So, prior to 2014, as I have stated, it was piloted in the Nadarivatu area. Of course, not only specifically for Nadarivatu, but I will talk about it later on, the neighbouring *tikina* as well within the three provinces of Nadroga and Navosa, Ba and of course Naitasiri as well.

The project PHVA targeted high value commodities and of course it was very successful, Madam Speaker, and of course PCDF was the implementer of the project, together with the Ministry of Agriculture. I stated, Madam Speaker, that it was quite successful despite a few challenges and some that did not do well but the majority of the farmers.

In one of the visits that we did in the area, Madam Speaker, speaking to some of the farmers, I think the highest had about \$12,000 within one season, just on these high value vegetables. But this, Madam Speaker, in the absence of cold storage systems, which I every now and then bring in this House the value chain, but just through the programme and of course with the markets available without any storage facility, they did quite well.

So, that led to the concept behind this, where we would go into a serious agreement and of course partnership as well. This is again a good example of partnership within finances like

International Funding for Agriculture Development, the Government of Fiji and the Non-Government Organisation, which is PCDF in this case.

We did the negotiations, Madam Speaker, on 3rd December, 2015, the Agreement was signed in Rome. Basically the project is about \$11 million. This was in the current year's budget, Madam Speaker, \$9 million as loan from IFAD and \$2 million from Fiji, but mostly from the private sectors that will participate in the project as well, Madam Speaker.

The overall goal of Fiji Agriculture Partnership Project (FAPP) is to reduce hardship in remote rural communities with the project development objective of engaging small scale producers in sustainable farming and business partnerships in remote areas, particularly in the highlands. Sorry, Madam Speaker, I also forgot to mention that during that period as we were doing the trials, we also shifted the Republic of China Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM), which I know most of the Honourable Members of this honourable House are familiar with, from the Sigatoka Valley to Nadarivatu.

The TTM as it is well known in Fiji has been in Fiji since 1987 but unfortunately they have not extended their services to other parts of Fiji. So, during this partnership, because of the high value vegetable project in Nadarivatu, we allocated a house in Nadarivatu and we also shifted one of the staff to assist our technical people, and of course partner with PCDF as well on the project, Madam Speaker.

As I have stated, it is about addressing the challenges faced by our rural communities, consistent with Government's objectives on development, "leaving no one behind" and they would recall, Madam Speaker, that there is also a project in which the Reserve Bank of Fiji is the key agency in Fiji on reaching out to the un-bankables, and of course consistent with the poverty reports for Fiji as well, particularly the incidents of poverty in rural Fiji, this is why this area was chosen, Madam Speaker. Not only that, it is also common knowledge in Fiji, Madam Speaker, that unfortunately some of these communities for various reasons have gone into drug cultivation as well. So this is part of the eradication campaign, and of course the empowerment of our rural communities as well.

But very briefly on the core component of the farming as a business target area, Madam Speaker, as I have alluded to earlier, it is within the three provinces of Nadroga/Navosa, Ba and Naitasiri and the seven target districts or *tikina* are Naboubuco, Mokusavatu, Magodro, Nadrau, Navatusila, and Noikoro. These will involve about 41 villages, Madam Speaker, and about 2000 household farmers.

Let me just highlight very quickly some of the activities that have already been undertaken by PCDF based on the MOA that has been signed, Madam Speaker. We have completed village awareness on what the Fiji Agriculture Partnership Project is about, carried out on 41 villages within the seven districts and of course the targeted communities have also selected their community facilitators who had undergone training last week in Bukuya Village in Magodro in Ba. The PCDF staff, together with the community facilitators, are currently doing farmer profiling exercise. This is just again to revisit the profiling that was done previously under the PHVA project, Madam Speaker. It is just about updating and of course looking at new farmers who wish to join the project as well, Madam Speaker.

For future activities, if I may, Madam Speaker, very briefly, these are the forecasted activities. Now we are currently undertaking the profiling around the period from 16th March, 2018 (this Friday) and we will start with:

- Strengthening of governance and understanding of gender and agriculture;
- Resources management;
- Promotion of open pollinated seed technic;
- Promotion of expanded use of vegetable seedlings, compared to traditional methods;
- Promotion of pests and diseases control technic;
- Promote soil conservation and traditional horticultural knowledge;
- Training on appropriate nursery enterprises for fruits and vegetables; and
- Promote the improvement of postharvest handling of vegetables.

I wish to emphasise the fact, Madam Speaker, and I have mentioned this every now and again in this honourable House for development to be sustainable, we need to cultivate the people. This is exactly what this project is doing; empowering the people, so that it is not only economically-viable but sustainable in the long-term, and the chunk of this programme, Madam Speaker, is about capacity building on our famers so that they are not only subsistence farmers but with a market-oriented approach. They will be able to have a consistent income and of course address the challenges that we have in agriculture. So, hopefully and we are optimistic that this will be a good project for Fiji, and particularly the rural communities in the seven districts that I have highlighted. Thank you Madam Speaker.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Minister for the answer this morning. Just in regards to linking up the seven districts and the pilot projects under this partnership; linked up to the market and the traders locally and overseas, given that they are also combating the issue of cultivation of *marijuana* in that area specifically, and this is an option for them to move into, what is the security of the markets and those products that will be coming out from the pilot projects?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I thank the Honourable Member for the question. Again, this is about farming as a business and that is exactly where we started off, Madam Speaker, we start from the markets. We go and identify the markets, the demands and then come back and work out the production plans.

As I have alluded to, Honourable Member, this is about a Public Private Partnership and of course we are already engaging the private sector, Madam Speaker. Let me mention here that we have a small committee, headed by British American Tobacco (BAT) from the private sector and it involves some of the key stakeholders in agriculture and of course tourism is a big component of this.

I have spoken about high value agriculture and most of this high value agriculture commodities that are imported, these are the ones that we are targeting. I did mention about BAT because it is perhaps the best state of art nursery in Fiji, but they only use that nursery for about three to four months, after that, Madam Speaker, the nursery is idle for the rest of the year. They have given this facility to

the Ministry of Agriculture without any cost to utilise that facility, generate the seeds from there, and then distribute to our farmers.

But definitely the hotel industry, the market vendors and of course other processes like farm boys and the others, we have a list, Madam Speaker, of those that will be linked to buy from the farmers. But let me also add, Madam Speaker, that in the PHBA, and this is something that we need to address, because small holder farmers only produce certain volumes. What we are intending to do now and that is where the loan package comes in for the private sector is hopefully they can build the storage systems there at their cost, so that farmers will just produce and we bring it to the cold storage facility, and then we have the volumes to be collected by them so that they can take it to their clients, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to Honourable Aseri Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I thank the Honourable Minister for the explanations. Just a follow-up questions in terms of engaging in such partnership projects, there is always limitations in terms of funding, in terms of human capital and machines. How has the Ministry ensured that these sort of challenges, these sort of limitations that is there for the farmer to continue as and when you finish assisting them? How involved are these individual farmers in the whole PPP projects? Are they part of the decision-making or they are just part of the ground work people?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.-- I thank the Honourable Member for that question. One, definitely yes, farmers are involved and as I have alluded to, farmers will be in clusters; whether they want to call them as groups or clusters or cooperative, they are organised and they have also chosen the leadership, who are known as the “community facilitators” for each of the groups within the seven *tikina*., Madam Speaker.

We have a few separate programmes in agriculture, one is for Nadarivatu; one is for Sigatoka Valley; and one is for Sigavou area in Ra as well, Madam Speaker. These three programmes have separate allocations, based on the demand, and of course, the potentials in these areas. Nadarivatu already has its allocated machinery but we hope that under this partnership, and this is where TTM comes in, and of course the other private sector players comes in as well.

We should be able to adjust all the other needs in the value chain, particularly who is going to supply the annual inputs; who is going to buy the commodities; who is going to provide the packing sheds; who is going to provide the cold storage and transportation to the markets. These are all the things that we are looking at and I wish to assure this Honourable House that we will ensure that there are dedicated staff, of course the equipment and of course the technology as well, so that this project will achieve its aims and of course be successful as well and address the needs of the rural communities.

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

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply. My question is; does the Ministry encourage organic farming in these farming activities? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Yes, Madam Speaker, definitely I have already stated in this Honourable House, we are currently and jointly developing the Fiji Organic Standard with the Ministry for Trade and that is about to come to Cabinet for endorsement, in partnership with the Pacific Community (POETCom), the agency that deals with organic farming. But, Madam Speaker, I also missed out that in these activities, the organic farming practices are also one of the future activities listed in here, in which farmers will be trained on as well, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Kiliraki, you have the floor.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. As mentioned by the Honourable Minister, that this programme targets high value commodity, especially in that region. My question is; whether there is any opportunity to diversify into other commodities - livestock, dairy farming, and other crops in the same concept? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I must admit the fact that although it may be confidential that there is an investor who is interested in that area, and as we speak, they are currently in negotiations with the Ministry for Lands. Why that area? Because the environmental conditions is perfect for dairy and of course, we are looking at all the opportunities, and hopefully, Madam Speaker, this will not only be restricted to the seven districts, if this becomes very successful, again, we will see and negotiate with the International Funding for Agriculture Development for the possibility of diversifying and of course spreading into other areas in Fiji as well, and we hope this will be successful given the partnership that is involved.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no other questions, I give the floor to the Leader of Opposition, the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa to ask her question.

Garbage situation countrywide
(Question No. 86/2018)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Before asking my question, Madam Speaker, may I offer a warm word of welcome to accompany yours, Madam Speaker, to the Honourable Niki Rattle, Speaker of the Cook Islands.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Acting Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport briefly explain what the Government is doing to address the worsening garbage situation countrywide, which is contributing to environmental and health issues?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Acting Prime Minister and Acting Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport to have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Acting Minister for Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Thank you Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Leader of Opposition for the question.

Madam Speaker, waste management is a major issue for all growing urban centres in particular, not just in Fiji, but throughout the world. Indeed there have been many initiatives done at the international level and also at domestic level.

Madam Speaker, in Fiji of course, as has been highlighted throughout the week and also last week, we may recall that the Honourable Minister for Health also talked about how she had been out to Nausori and where there were garbage issues.

The dumping of solid waste, Madam Speaker, has been carried out maybe gently by individuals, households and individual citizens or maybe a driver travelling in their cars or in the buses et cetera and just simply throw out rubbish, but there are also households that actually go out and dump rubbish in specific locations. We have also found, as has been highlighted last year, that we have companies that actually collect waste, that have gone around dumping rubbish in various parts of Fiji, in particular in the rural areas without necessarily going to the actual dump sites where they pay a fee to dump the solid waste.

So, Madam Speaker, the waste management is a major issue for everyone. It requires a change in attitude. Some people think that just by throwing a plastic bottle out on the road or somewhere, it will disappear. It is not actually, Madam Speaker, biodegradable. The reality of fossil fuel in the 21st century is that, many of the products that we do use, even include these things that we have, that people change in a yearly basis. The huge problem with disposing of this, Madam Speaker, so, there needs to be a change in attitude firstly, of how we treat solid waste.

Secondly, of course Madam Speaker, governments throughout the world have implemented various systems in place, so for example, in Fiji's case we have litter fines there that are being enforced by the respective enforcement agencies and enforcement officers. We also have as announced in the Budget try to change people's attitude, for example, by stopping the usage of plastic bags, we have got a small fee on that. In the groceries stores, of course, people still use plastic bags when they go to the market and there is no levy on that. We were encouraging also to the Ministry of Women to encourage people to keep on using reusable bags that are sewn together. So, it is a whole fleet of initiatives that we need to undertake, Madam Speaker.

It also includes as has been highlighted previously, a number of funding initiatives that has been given both to the municipal councils. We have just by way of what we have done, there has been a subsidy of \$1.2 million from June 2017. So, the disposal of solid waste collected from the Nausori – Suva corridor then to the Naboro landfill. A sum of \$350,000 this financial year is to assist the municipal councils in the Central Division for waste collection in the greater Suva area. We have helped the municipal councils purchase, for example, compactor trucks in Nasinu, Nausori, Lami, Ba and Nadi municipalities, a system in efficient waste collection.

Madam Speaker, a number of initiatives are also being undertaken. There is a lot of community projects in schools. The whole philosophy of what we call the three 'R' programme which is Reduce,

Reuse, Recycle in the township areas have been rolled out to the schools and also through the municipal councils.

So, Madam Speaker, it is a whole, like we set a smorgasbord of approach to ensure that we are able to reduce the garbage disposal in a negligent fashion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, indeed, it is something that is really very painful to see in our country. Can the Government consider setting up industrial waste bins, the big ones, in strategic locations like in settlements? I say this, Madam Speaker, because when I was in Germany, every settlement has this huge bin and you do not even keep your refuse for one day. At the end of the day, you take it and throw it in one of these bins. I remember near my village, they had one like this and they did very well until they could not afford to pay. So, maybe that is the answer to it because you hear the Honourable Prime Minister on the radio everyday extolling people not to litter but it is just a losing game, Madam Speaker. It is really difficult, perhaps this is a way out. I think one of my colleagues had recommended this. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Acting Prime Minister

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, as we said, it is an ongoing issue. We are looking at numerous strategies in respect of that, it has been discussed. I think the Honourable Minister Bala, who holds a substantive position had also mentioned perhaps not in Parliament but also outside Parliament that he, together with the Honourable Minister for Health have been looking at those options as suggested by the Honourable Member, by having these large bins.

Madam Speaker, we also have, through the municipal councils, being discounting the Compost Bills, so Discount Prices, Suva City Council have been given up sale compost fertilizers and the bins in Suva, Lautoka, Lami, Labasa, Nadi. In fact the Ministry is committed to distributing 1,300 more compost bins this year to rate payers.

I remember in 2014, Madam Speaker, I think it was prior to the Elections when we had gone out and distributed bins in Nasinu. I think the Members of the Opposition, at that time, were campaigning. They were trying to win votes by giving garbage bins. I remember that, Madam Speaker, the reality is, it was nothing to do with winning votes, people do not give me vote please give them a garbage bin, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

The idea of course was to inculcate and engender a sense of responsibility in terms of how we treat our garbage. It is a very fundamental issue, Madam Speaker, and the Honourable Member also highlighted the fact that of course garbage is not only thrown in the municipal areas. It is also thrown in the rural areas and when we drive along highways we see a lot of the villages also. We have some people of course, Madam Speaker, who willy-nilly just designate in one area, they distribute to the garbage dump and they all simply just throw their garbage there. Of course, there needs to be some sense of awareness and as the Honourable Minister for Health and the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment has been looking at how we can further enhance the deposits of these large bins.

It is very interesting, Madam Speaker, because you will also find that there are some people, their attitude is, if you look at the garbage bins along the foreshore area here when the Suva municipal

council put on those new garbage bins, even in My Suva Park, you literally find people who may be cooking crabs or fish at their home, when they clean the crabs and the fish, they gather all the rubbish then they put it in the car and they will take it and go and put it in this garbage bin at My Suva Park. There are people who are still doing that, they take their household garbage and put them there, even though they have the bin, they do not want the smell at home. It is a very fundamental issue because we think garbage is something that is not your responsibility.

So, all of these attitudes, Madam Speaker, does need to change and yes there are initiatives that are currently being looked at by the Minister for Health and Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment.

There is also another issue, Madam Speaker, which is perhaps a lacuna in the law, and that is part and parcel of the review process of modernising our laws. We have what we call the local governments, so we have the municipal boundaries and then, of course, you have what we call the “rural areas” that fall outside the municipal boundaries. And as we have seen, many of the towns and cities are actually falling outside municipal boundaries, what we call some of the “peri-urban” areas. So, garbage collection also becomes an issue there and we are currently, as being highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Health and Honourable Minister Bala, that we are looking at how we can perhaps collapse this demarcation and have one legal authority that looks after the entire garbage area. So, whether it falls also within the local government *per se* as opposed to falling out to rural local authority. Those are some of the work that we are currently looking at and how we can actually improve, not just attitude, but also in terms of legal framework regarding garbage collection. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- Supplementary question. Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. Now, I think Madam Speaker, that there is a very simple solution that we can start with.

We are just looking at Albert Park, Madam Speaker, which is a beautiful iconic park and I know that parliamentary staff also use it on a daily basis. Everyone who uses it, Madam Speaker, manage to not litter the park but there is no rubbish bin there. There is no rubbish bin at all. What I am asking the Honourable Minister to do, since he is the Acting Minister for the Environment, if he can supply enough rubbish bins of the durable variety. The ones in My Suva Park are very small. If he can supply rubbish bins, starting with the Suva area.

In that regard, we can start changing our attitude that there is a rubbish bin, put my rubbish in it. But right now, there is nothing like that, Madam Speaker, or very little.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I did not get any question in there, Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- I am asking the Honourable Minister since he is Acting Minister for the Environment, if he can start off with supplying rubbish bins. For example, Albert Park, there is not one rubbish bin there and all over the city where there are no rubbish bins. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I assume there is no rubbish bin in Albert Park itself but there may be rubbish bins around Albert Park.

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

(Laughter)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I know the Honourable Minister responsible is not here but I have highlighted before the dire need for the Nasinu area for those big portable rubbish bins. If the Honourable Minister can explain why the Government has failed to take heed of those requests and provide those big disposable rubbish bins along the Khalsa Road and particularly the informal communities because they are just bordering on the formal communities.

HON SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED. KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, you may recall that Government had allocated a transit point for garbage collection in Nasinu and Honourable Radrodro, I understand was opposed to that through the local community.

Honourable Minister Bala actually has already made a comment on that. In fact, we had allocated funding for that, Madam Speaker, to make it a lot more easier for people in the Nausori, Nasinu and Suva corridor, rather than taking it all the way to Naboro to actually have a transit garbage point where, Madam Speaker, ...

(Interjections by Honourable Member)

HON. A. SAYED. KHAIYUM.- You see she is ignoring what I am saying ...

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED. KHAIYUM.- ... because she knows what she did was wrong. Madam Speaker, but we have to obviously give an answer that is contextualised.

Madam Speaker, the point is that, we had allocated funding for that. Obviously some people have been whipped up into a frenzy by people like Honourable Radrodro, who has actually created a lot of disquiet in the community.

In fact, the transit point, Madam Speaker, would have been a good issue, a good way of resolving these huge garbage problems we have had and Honourable Minister Bala has already highlighted this. We had the transit point. Madam Speaker, you see

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Please do not interrupt the speaker, the Member that is speaking.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I think the answer lies in her rebuffing of what I am saying. Madam Speaker, there is a solution. Yes, of course, you can have it in certain strategic places near large garbage bins but again we still need to be able to understand garbage management. They do not

understand garbage management. In order to have a modern approach to garbage management, we need to be able to separate garbage.

There are certain types of garbage that actually can become biodegradable. You need to separate that from your paper, from your plastic, if you have PET bottles, et cetera. That is how it is done overseas and that is in fact what we are trying to do.

The compost bins, Madam Speaker. If you actually apply compost to it, you put certain garbage there, it actually becomes quite useful, and that can be used. You see for them, it is like everything is dumped into one place. It is a short-term solution. By having these huge bins, Madam Speaker, you are actually not achieving the actual proper way of managing garbage.

Madam Speaker, the point about the transit point of garbage, the whole point there, once to be able to segregate the different types of garbage and then just take it to wherever it is necessary and which Honourable Radrodro actually appeared to have a hand in to try and stop this transit point. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Dulakiverata?

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply. Madam Speaker, littering is a national issue at the moment. I understand that the Local Government Act have provisions to cater for this anti-littering. One of the issues that is making this thing become a big problem is the lack of awareness mainly in the urban and the rural areas, all over the country. So I ask the Honourable Minister, why wardens cannot be appointed to police the cities in the urban areas, to ensure that no one litters in the town? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Member may not have been recently watching television and perhaps listened to radio, but there has been increased effort in terms of creating awareness.

There are numerous advertisements regarding the penalties and also now, the Ministry of Environment has also rolled out or got various officers out into the field, to ensure that they will start policing and in fact managing these various offence provisions pertaining to the Littering Act of 2008. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, the problem that we have is that the person responsible for the environment, Honourable Eden, is sitting there and not answering questions. My question is, why do you not let her talk? You know, 90 percent of what is happening here is from the Honourable Minister, if you would let the Honourable Minister responsible answer the question. Why? Why are you not letting her answer the question on environment?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! We are asking a question to the Honourable Acting Prime Minister as the Acting Minister for Local Government.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Nawaikula may not be familiar with the way that Government functions.

(Laughter)

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, again you see they have a tendency of personalising matters. Everyone knows that when you have an Acting Minister, the Acting Minister does the response. I have been answering questions as Acting Minister for the past, almost eight days. He did not have an objection then, suddenly, he has an objection now. If you do not like my voice, there is the door.

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You have freedom of movement.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Honourable Members, you will note that I do accommodate interjections but as long as the interjections are not disrupting the Honourable Member that is speaking. So, please, just be more controlled in your interjections.

Madam Speaker, this is the level of contribution of the Opposition. Standing up, we have been here answering questions and various other Ministers have answered questions where they have been acting in various positions. The substantive position is held by Honourable Minister Bala, he is overseas. I am the Acting Minister, so I will answer the questions. Honourable Lorna Eden is the Assistant Minister. The way Government functions is that whoever is appointed the Acting Minister, will respond, very simple.

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

HON. P. SINGH.- We all agree that garbage and waste collection is a concern to all of us and it is our duty to see that littering is avoided at any cost. Madam Speaker, I refer the Honourable Minister to the Western Division, particularly in Lautoka, where we only have one dump for Nadi and Lautoka. Are there any plans in the Ministry to construct a landfill or a garbage dump to cater for Nadi waste and garbage?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the issue about Nadi of course is, we have the runaway. We have to ensure that the location of a landfill does not have to be in Nadi. We have the Naboro landfill which caters for all the way up to Nausori. So, there are of course various assessments being done as to where it should be located, but it will not be necessarily anywhere near the airport. We do not want birds flying over the landfill area as it is a huge hazard. One bird can make an aeroplane crash, we have to remember that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, just a question to the Honourable Minister in regards to the enforcement. How far has the Ministry gone into monitoring the enforcement done on the anti-littering provisions that are there, given that the public is of the view that there is lack of enforcement in that regards?.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, through administrating the Litter Act 2008, the Ministry controls littering by-offenders in public places. The Ministry has conducted refresher trainings for newly appointed Enforcement Officers in municipal councils and rural local authorities. In addition, the Ministry is also finalising training programmes for the Community Enforcement Officers from the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the Police and the LTA, in assisting in implementing comprehensive waste compliance multi strategy in Fiji.

The Ministry has signed an MOU with the 13 Municipal Councils, with the main purpose of strengthening networks and effective reporting system through the enforcement of the Litter Act. The reporting system allows the Ministry to assess the success of the Litter Act 2008 through reports received on the total number of successful court cases, because obviously except when challenge it on litter offenders and the total number of successful penalised litter offenders with the issuance of the \$40.00 fixed penalty notice that it be given to individuals. Of course, companies attract a higher penalty for littering illegally. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other questions, that is the end of oral question time and I call on the Honourable Ratu Kiniviliame Kiliraki to ask his written question.

Written Question

Rental arrears accumulated by iTLTB and recovery action
(Question No. 87/2018)

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Prime Minister inform this House by year, the amount of rent in arrears accumulated by iTLTB as at 31 December, 2017 for the last ten years and what action, if any, is taken by the iTLTB to recover these rent in arrears as trustees of the iTaukei Land?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Acting Prime Minister, Minister for i-Taukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs) .- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I will table the answer at a later sitting date as stipulated under the Standing Order 45(3). Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Anare Vadei to ask his written question.

Breakdown by division and district – Free Medical Scheme
(Question 88/2018)

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

Can the Honourable Minister inform the House how many people are benefitting from the free Medical Scheme and give a breakdown of the same by division and district?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now ask the Leader of the Government in Parliament to respond.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you Madam Speaker.

...Madam Speaker, as per Standing Order 45(3), the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services will table her report at a later date.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. This is the end of question time. We will move on to the next item on the Order Paper.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- i) Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Attorney General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service, Communications has three Ministerial Statements;
- ii) Minister for Defence and National Security; and
- iii) Minister for Forests

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 five minutes and likewise the Leader of NFP or his designate.

I now call on the Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Attorney General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to deliver his statement.

Nation-wide Implementation of Digital Television Broadcasting Migration

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I would like to give Parliament an update on the nationwide implementation of digital television broadcasting migration, Madam Speaker.

Last year we had informed Parliament on the implementation of a digital television broadcasting service. We had also informed Parliament on our plans to roll out a nationwide *Walesi* service by the end of December, 2017.

Madam Speaker, we are pleased to inform Parliament that we have achieved this; which is not necessarily been an easy feat.

Madam Speaker, for the benefit of the Honourable Members, this is merely a refresher, please allow me to provide some background.

On September, 2014, the Department of Communications, then called Department of Communications, began site preparations for the procurement of installation equipment in anticipation to roll out the National Digital Television platform, which we now refer to as *Walesi*

The first transmission commenced in Suva in 2015 and once a proof of concept was accepted, was performing to expectations, the implementation plans for a national-wide rollout was prepared. *Walesi* was then established as a 100-percent Government owned company in 2015, which is currently chaired by the Solicitor-General to implement this project and took over the administration of this project.

A last scale of public trial then commenced in August 2016 for the greater Suva area. This trial was extended to the Western Division in December, 2016. The 3rd December, 2017 was scheduled and as we alluded to earlier, the *Walesi* Digital Service was launched nationwide with much excitement and indeed celebration, Madam Speaker.

Communities around Fiji switched on for the first time were able to access crystal clear, free-to-air television broadcast. Areas that previously only had access to pay-tel services, the Sky Pacific could now access free-to-air television and more importantly local content including news.

The *Walesi* service went live with eight channels, Madam Speaker; two more than what was promised to Fijians for who had for a very long time demanded access to greater content choices. The channels included, Madam Speaker:

- FBC TV;
- Fiji One;
- Mai TV;
- FBC Plus;
- Channel 2;
- FBC 2;
- Parliament TV; and
- Hope TV.

Of course there are opportunities to add more channels, Madam Speaker; all free-to air.

Analogue services, Madam Speaker, cover approximately 80 percent to 85 percent of the population using eight terrestrial transmission sites. A good portion of those covered, however still had to put up with poor reception and quality, as the analogue service is susceptible to issues such as what we call “ghosting”, snowy picture quality and transmission drops caused by poor weather.

Even the very first day of the launch of *Walesi* Digital Television Service, it exceeded analogue coverage. *Walesi* covered 92 percent of the country by terrestrial means through using 17 transmission sites and 100 percent through the use of satellite transmission similar to how *Sky Pacific* actually works. but with a clear difference, means that there are no monthly costs.

The free-to-air channels on the *Walesi* platform will obviously always remain free, Madam Speaker.

Walesi is now become a vehicle through which we can disseminate knowledge and information and of course entertainment to ordinary Fijians. It has become a medium through which our people can be better informed about what is happening in Fiji and the world around us. Of course, they are watching us at the moment through the free-to-air Parliamentary channel.

It has become the connecting hub for communities as they converge on communal places such as community halls to watch our Seven heroes compete in the global scene, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this also allows us to communicate to people ahead of a significant weather event and inform them what to do. This is fantastic in supporting a disaster management response also.

Walesi is more than a service, Madam Speaker, that gives people access to entertainment. It has become unifying force, as we know that it is bridging the knowledge gap between Fijians from across the country.

The Fijian Government has a vision that in the future, all broadcasting services, Madam Speaker, are free-to-air or pay-television services could be accessed from the same infrastructure and Set Top Box. This means you may have multiple service providers, but essentially they will have to be available on the same *Walesi* platform with the same reach.

Consumers would not need to maintain and run different equipment for accessing pay television services and another set of equipment to access free-to-air services. That is what we are planning to do, Madam Speaker. Already, you have seen the benefit in the use of a common infrastructure.

Previously, for example, *Mai TV* was only available to viewers in the greater Suva area, Nadi, Lautoka and some part of Labasa. Being available on the *Walesi* platform, Madam Speaker, has meant that overnight, *Mai TV*, has the same footprint as other broadcasters, namely *FBC* and *Fiji TV*. Once the analogue switch is switched off, or signal, I should say switched off, *Sky Pacific* will also be shown the *Walesi* platform as a pay television service. And I understand discussions concerning this are currently going on with our technical people.

Madam Speaker, this brings me to the issue of why Pay TV operators are prohibited from airing local commercial advertisements.

As Honourable Members of Parliament are aware, Section 42(a)(1) of the Media Industry Development Act 2010 prohibits the airing of local content or any subscription based pay television services owned by a foreign person or media organisation.

Pay TV operators collect revenue from subscriptions for the provision of premium broadcasting service. They should not be allowed to exploit the situation and then earn additional revenue for selling of air time for commercials.

So, Madam Speaker, when you pay, for example \$50 or \$60, you are paying to get entertainment, that is what this is specifically providing. There is a limited pool of advertising in Fiji, we are not even a million people which amongst others comprise of telecommunication companies, hardware companies, retailers and supermarkets.

Imagine a scenario where a pay TV operator backbites, dip pockets and resources, getting \$50 to \$60 a month, secured a good portion of the local advertising market through offering very cheap advertising rates. This will have an enormous negative impact on the income for the local free-to-air broadcasters, which are *Mai TV*, *FBC* and *Fiji TV*. Reduction in the revenue of free-to-air broadcaster will mean that for the local free-to-air broadcaster to survive, it must reduce cost and content. Local broadcasting will be forced to close operations. Consequently, with the collapse of the free-to-air market, pay TV providers would run a monopoly. They will be at liberty to increase rates for the subscribers as they choose being a monopoly.

Madam Speaker, the current legislative provision protect not only our local broadcasters but also the people who stand to be exploited should pay TV be the only choice they have. Fiji's case is unique in the sense that due to a small population base and the limited advertisers pool, there must be protection established to ensure that local free-to-air broadcasters can survive, thrive and indeed continue to provide services to the ordinary Fijian.

Madam Speaker, following the entire nationwide roll-out last December, communities in Fiji have welcomed *Walesi* with open arms. The following sites where *Walesi* was transmitting from are:

- i) Nakobalevu - covering the greater Suva area and areas from Tailevu to Pacific Harbour.
- ii) Dogowale – Pacific Harbour to Namosi;
- iii) Gusunitaga - Sigatoka;
- iv) Kavukavu – outer Sigatoka, parts of Nadi;
- v) Sabeto – greater Nadi to Lautoka area;
- vi) Lololo - greater Ba area;
- vii) Tuidreke, Tavua - parts of Ba.
- viii) Koro-o - Tavua, parts of Ra, Nadarivatu;
- ix) Monasavu – central Viti Levu;
- x) Rakiraki – greater Rakiraki area;
- xi) Matawailevu - between Rakiraki and Tailevu
- xii) Savusavu - Town area;
- xiii) Uluivuya – Nabouwalu and surrounding areas;
- xiv) Delaikoro – greater Labasa, Seaqaqa, Nadogo areas;
- xv) Desvouex Peak – island of Taveuni;
- xvi) Kadavu – Vunisea area;

- xvii) Levuka – Levuka town area;

Particular interest to us as these areas have little or no analogue coverage at all, but they can now receive transmission and that too for most parts by terrestrial antenna, some of course are coming through satellite disks.

- i) Kavukavu, parts of Sigatoka;
- ii) Interior of Namosi Highlands;
- iii) Ra - in fact since *TC Winston* there has been no TV coverage by any of the providers;
- iv) Tavua, Monasavu, Vatukoula;
- v) Large parts of Rakiraki, Mataiwailevu;
- vi) Large parts of Tailevu;
- vii) Inner parts of Naitasiri;
- viii) Bua;
- ix) Savusavu,,Nadogo;
- x) Taveuni,
- xi) Kadavu
- xii) Levuka.

Walesi has also been on a programme which is part of its corporate and social responsibility has been connecting communal places such as community halls to the *Walesi* services. This makes a lot of sense especially for rural and maritime communities where not every household could have access to a television set or utilities. Where need has been established following an application on behalf of the community in the survey, *Walesi* installs a receiver in a nominated communal location.

Ten rural communities, Madam Speaker, have been covered through this programme which include areas in the highlands of:

- a) Nadi - Korobebe Village and Nagado Village;
- b) Rural Ra - Rabulu Village and Drauniivi Village;
- c) Taveuni – Bouma Village, Naselesele Village and Somosomo Village;
- d) Savusavu – Tukavesi Village, Drekeniwai Village and Naweni Villages.

Walesi has also despatched satellite receiving kits to Cikobia, Madam Speaker, where Fijians for the first time are enjoying free-to-air television services with eight channels. Kits have also been despatched to the islands of Moala and Rotuma and will be commissioned in the coming days.

In fact over the next three months, it is *Walesi's* aim to ensure every maritime island has a communal location so that residents can access free-to-air broadcasting services. The number of prominent locations on the island will depend on the size of the communities.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I would like to share a heart-warming story with you on how *Walesi* is practically impacting ordinary Fijians, even in the most remote and rural areas of Fiji.

There is a story about Matawailevu Village in Nalawa, Ra. This village has not had television before and has very limited access to internet. We wish to thank a volunteer community health worker

by the name of Sereima Niudamu who has worked tirelessly to help people in the area access *Walesi*.

Over the past month, she has visited people in her village, namely the senior citizens and assisted them with their subsidy applications. Before *Walesi*, the community had no TV access except for pay television services through *Sky Pacific* which they had to pay on a monthly basis. They could not watch local news, sports or Parliament. Now, as Sereima says, *Walesi* and I quote:

“... is making a big difference. Now we will have a clear view for all eight channels and people are more informed.”

These villages now are more connected to the rest of the country in the world. Sereima has now helped 15 families get *Walesi*. She is an example of how many people like her that are helping the villagers and communities in getting access to *Walesi* service for the betterment of their communities, Madam Speaker.

We currently have over 11,000 households using the service throughout the country. The *Walesi* Set-Top Boxes (STB) are sold at a number of outlets which include Courts, TFL, Home and Living, Tappoos and Rups Big Bear.

The increase in the number of retailers has also led to a decline in the prices of the STBs, which during promotions are available for \$89 as compared to \$99.95, which is the regular price. Of course *Walesi* remains open to partnering with even more retailers to ensure that access to these STBs are as easy as possible for Fijians.

The satellite STB receivers are available for purchase directly from *Walesi* at a cost of \$250 and can be purchased on applications once *Walesi* determines the area for which it is being purchased there is no terrestrial coverage. So, once you get the dish and you get a Set-Top Box, Madam Speaker, that is it, you are connected to eight channels. There is no monthly fee, nothing whatsoever. It is a one-off cost.

A toll free centre, Madam Speaker, was established by *Walesi* to aid viewers experiencing technical issues. In addition to this, *Walesi* maintains a *Facebook* page with over 7,000 likes and followers, and the website between 25 to 29 page views, to disseminate information pertaining to the service.

Since the launch in December, *Walesi* has had 40,300 engagement with Fijians with *Facebook* and the *Walesi* customer service team respond to approximately 40 to 50 messages, comments, or chat per day from across Fiji. *Walesi* advertising has reached much of the country through newspaper, radio, *Facebook*, *Google* and *YouTube* advertising. *Walesi* is communicating with people in the various vernacular languages, both in advertising and the customer service Helpline.

Market research conducted by *Walesi* found that 1 out of 10 people knew of *Walesi* before the launch in December, now 6 out of 10 people know of *Walesi*.

Madam Speaker, the Government is ensuring that our most marginalised also benefit from this programme has put in place a subsidy programme that allows any household with an annual combined

income of under \$30,000 to receive a free Set-Top Box paid fully by Government as approved through the budgetary process.

Madam Speaker, 11,307 households presently qualify for this subsidy and approximately 1,300 households have already received this subsidy. Recent changes to the subsidy programme now see that recipients who have gone through the application process are now able to walk into retail outlets by providing a copy of the FEA bill and valid ID receive their STB then and there.

Previously the subsidy plan was being implemented through Roadshows and user-vouchers which has limited *Walesi's* ability to be at multiple places at the same time.

Through deploying an online Customer Subscriber Management System and linking with the retailers of the STB, *Walesi* has been able to make this process a lot quicker and streamlined for the benefit of these recipients.

The subsidiary programme now also covers households that use their own generators or renewable energy systems as well as households that will require satellite STB receiver as they may be out of the terrestrial reach.

Walesi has made a good choice, Madam Speaker, by investing the state of the art containerise transmission solution whereby the equipment including transmitters, generators, battery backups, solar panel, UPS systems will be housed in a purpose built containerised modular data centre capable of surviving harsh weather conditions to continue to receive receptions.

Through using renewable energy on site, *Walesi* is targeting the reduction of electricity usage at transmission sites by at least 40 percent. Recent tests following the full commissioning of the Nakobalevu site revealed that during the day, the entire site could be run just through the use of the solar panels and the site only resorted to using main power during the evening.

Madam Speaker, this approach personified *Walesi* and indeed our Government's commitment to investing in sustainable green energy solutions and it is line with our vision on environmental sustainability as per our COP23 Presidency.

In the future, Madam Speaker, *Walesi* in its future plan is looking at providing cellular backbone capacity to a telecommunication service providers to facilitate the expansion to rural and maritime areas. This will allow these areas with additional services, as is broadband and voice services and we are seriously looking at this as to how we can get more footprints as far as internet connection is concerned.

Madam Speaker, it is the plan of Government to achieve one of the quickest and most ambitious Analogue Switch-Off Schedules – LSC. Our roll-out has been hailed by industry experts as one of the quickest that has ever happened anywhere, where within a space of days an entire network throughout the country will simultaneously be switched on.

Currently, we are working or going through a period of simulcast, where the analogue and digital platforms would run together. Early analogue switch-off will ensure that ongoing variable high operating costs with the broadcasters will be replaced by a fixed monthly rental fee for the

broadcasters. This will give broadcasters a certain plan and invest in programming instead of infrastructure. So we look after the infrastructure, they need to be able to look after the programming and improve content.

The Government is however mindful of the need to work with the broadcast in establishing these timelines and we work with them in developing a switch-off schedule to respond positively to the requirements of the industry. It is in our view that we can achieve the switch-off by June 2019, which is about a year away. This will place Fiji as the first Pacific Island nation to complete its analogue switch-off. The spectrum will be freed up by the switch off, we will then be relocated for the use of broadband expansion and will give our telecommunication sector a further boost in improving rural connectivity.

Madam Speaker, the analogue to digital migration presents Fiji immense opportunities, one that not only ensures access to crystal clear television broadcast service but an avenue to disseminate information, knowledge and entertainment. It provides the sector an opportunity to provide modern cutting edge broadcasting services to the people whilst utilising the most efficient and environmentally sustainable technologies.

Walesi has made huge investments in creating its own support structure from linking through the provision of redundant power options to ensuring Fiji has an access to a higher availability, digital broadcasting service, Madam Speaker.

I would like to assure all Fijians that this is only the start. *Walesi* will continue to make these investments and improve its service delivery. In a short span of time, Madam Speaker, since the launch of the service in December last year, *Walesi* has become a household name. It is indeed heartening to hear how something as simple as a television broadcasting is putting smiles on the face of ordinary Fijians.

As *Walesi* further strengthens its infrastructure over the coming year, further improvements in coverage and content will be made. This momentum is one that will not stop the Fijians to continue to have high expectations for better service, better coverage and better value.

Madam Speaker, we would like to highlight that through the use of both satellite and terrestrial technologies, Fiji, right at this very moment can proudly claim to be one of the very few countries in the developing world and certainly the only island nation in the Pacific to have universal access to free television broadcasting services.

Madam Speaker, this of course one of the proudest achievements of the Government and will be one of the key legacies for generations to come.

As discussed, Madam Speaker, I had a morning meeting with the Australian High Commissioner as discussed with his Minister of Education and the CCN that we are also looking at using the digital television to roll-out various education programmes. So if, for example, you are rolling out providing lessons in English, you must have someone who is in Oneata, Lau, or someone in Kadavu, Rotuma, or somewhere in deep rural Viti Levu, deep rural Vanua Levu or even the urban centre have access to the same curriculum. So if we are having a lesson half an hour on English

Grammar, everyone in Fiji, every single child will have access to that, it will not be limited. So this provides us that opportunity to roll out the digital television to provide that accessibility.

The opportunity, Madam Speaker, also as far as internet connectivity is concerned, with the switch over from analogue to digital television, we will be freeing up the frequency. This gives us more ability to actually get into the broadband space and give us the level of connectivity.

As we have said previously, digital age, many people have said is the great equaliser and it could also be the greatest dis-equaliser if that technology is not spread amongst everyone.

Digital television in Fiji, Madam Speaker, has provided that opportunity for us to do so and *Walesi*, Madam Speaker, has achieved that objective for Government. Thank you very much, *vinaka*.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to reply to the statement made by the Honourable Minister. At the outset, let me say that we join Government in celebrating this *Walesi* facility. We congratulate Government for putting it together.

Of course, SODELPA would have done it and done it better. Madam Speaker, I cannot understand why it took so long in some parts of Fiji to have television introduced. Just an experience I had, I was in Labasa last year, and I could not see any Fiji programme. All I was watching was some parliamentary debate in Port Moresby, PNG, and I was told that it was because of some work-in-progress, that limited the reach of Fiji TV to those areas.

Last week, friends of ours from the extremities in the West said, “Oh, we’ve got our TV at last”, I could not relate to that because I come from a part of Fiji where TV was happening every day and I did not realise that a major part of Fiji did not have TV.

So, while we celebrate this, while we congratulate Government for bringing greater access to Fijians, we question the execution, Madam Speaker, “ why did they do it in such a way that so much of Fiji missed out on television for so long?” There must be equality in our country. I always believe that whatever a child in Suva sees on television must also be available to a child anywhere in the outer islands or wherever. And here, for quite some time, we denied those people the type of programming that they should have had because of poor execution.

Madam Speaker, as I speak today, this week, quite a number of *TV One* people cannot access *Walesi*, it collapsed, again, it is execution. Did we check the equipment that we bring in, is it suitable? It is such a huge task and it should have been done better.

Today, our people in Lau do not have any TV; Kadavu, outside of Vunisea, do not have TV; Rotuma; Koro which was hit the most by *TC Winston* do not have this, and if there is another cyclone, how do you warn them about any calamity that is coming their way? They have to rely on radio.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.-That is quite all right with FijiFirst that they can go to radio but if other parts of Fiji have TV and TV is dominant in the way we receive information, why do you short change people outside there who are vulnerable to the elements and who we know need this kind of service? How long will it take Government now to complete this? Where is the priority? People are asking, should you continue to deny others? Why do you not do it quickly, apply the price, stop paying \$9 million for wealthy people to come and play golf in Fiji, do it for your people.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- These are everyday issues from our people. Where is the priority? Why did it take so long and why is it poorly executed? Madam Speaker, have they tested the quality of the programme with our people?

Madam Speaker, what we fear the most is this *Walesi* to be controlled by pro-FijiFirst journalist, that is what we fear the most.

HON. MEMBER.- Just like *Fiji Sun*.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- As you know, Madam Speaker, the quality of discourse in this country has deteriorated under FijiFirst. We used to be an intelligent people, now through the FijiFirst, the quality of journalism, the quality of discourse has really dropped. We have become collectively (I want to use the word here), Madam Speaker.

While we congratulate the achievement, while we think it should be done, it could have been done better and FijiFirst should learn to execute things better. Everything you touch becomes a disaster and not getting through. Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- *Walesi* entertainment.

(Laughter)

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

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. At the outset, let me state that we do not oppose digital television, in fact digital television is the future. However, Madam Speaker, people of Fiji must have a choice either to watch digital, analogue, or the pay television, and I know the Attorney-General talked about the infrastructure that is going to be used and possibly people will have the choice.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, you would note that we also have a pending motion on the issue and I heard the Honourable Attorney-General pre-empting the discussion on the motion and I know he was responding to some of the issues that I might be raising in that motion anyway. Despite, Madam Speaker, what people might say, *Walesi TV* does not have 100 percent coverage and the *Walesi* map on the *Walesi* website may be misleading. Almost 50 percent of Fiji is shown to be covered

through satellite, for this, Madam Speaker, one needs a dish and not a VHF or UHF antenna. So, the Government might need to clarify whether the *Walesi* website is actually misleading.

Terrestrial coverage, Madam Speaker, is confined to areas of main islands of Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Taveuni and I know it is an investment that will cost a lot of money. We are told that the *Walesi* platform has eight channels, the Honourable Attorney-General pointed that out; three for *FBC*, two for *Fiji TV* and one for *Mai TV*, and one dedicated channel for each religious programme and Parliament. We know that seven channels are used actively or in use actively, but we are concerned Madam Speaker, about the third channel for *FBC*. What is it going to be used for?

We are also concerned, Madam Speaker, about some statements made by the Honourable Attorney-General when rolling out *Walesi* and distributing decoders to villagers and residents; those who fall within the income threshold and qualify for the free decoders. Let me say this, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General was reported saying that people now have a chance to watch and listen to the truth. So I was intrigued, what is the meaning of that statement? Is it about watching news which is heavily lopsided?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Is it about watching Parliament, when the Parliament does not run for the whole year?

In fact, Madam Speaker, we are meeting after six months, this session is almost after six months. Therefore, the question is, what will the third *FBC* channel on *Walesi* be used for? We know that the General Elections are around the corner and we hope that it does not become a political platform for the *FijiFirst* Party and it is very important for the people to understand that it is not going to be used for that particular purpose.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now call on the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security to deliver his statement.

Search and Rescue Efforts – Pacific Flying School Pilots

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Honourable Madam Speaker; the Honourable Acting Prime Minister; the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; Honourable Ministers; Honourable Members of Parliament: Ladies and gentlemen. I wish to make a statement this afternoon on the search and rescue efforts of the two Pacific Flying School pilots.

Firstly, I wish to express my deepest sympathies to the families and friends of the Pacific Flying School instructor, Iliesa Tawalo and trainee pilot, Merelesita Lutu. I also wish to commend the tireless efforts of the search and rescue parties comprised of the Fiji Police Force, the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces, National Fire Authority, Airports Fiji Limited, Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji, Volunteer First Responders and the Pacific Flying School, especially for the use of their air assets, Government agencies in the North and the villagers of Dogoru for their efforts in locating the wreckage and retrieving the remains of the victims.

Madam Speaker, this was no easy task and I once again acknowledge and thank these people for their perseverance despite the adverse weather conditions and the rugged terrain that they had to deal with.

Madam Speaker, in response to the Opposition Member of Parliament, Honourable Moses Bulitavu, his comment on the effort by my Ministry and all concerned stakeholders, I would like to strongly condemn the short sightedness and lack of substance in the claims that the Honourable Member put out in his media release of 28th February, 2018.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Let me first reiterate, the need for all of us as Members of this House to carefully consider what we put out for public consumption. There were reasons behind all the decisions made on this operation and I will elaborate more on this later. But this was an occasion that needed careful and deliberate planning, given the difficulties faced on the ground on the day. It should not be used as a platform to try and gain political mileage, particularly when families of the victims who were dealing with the uncertainties regarding the lives of their loved ones.

Madam Speaker, allow me to take us through the deliberate actions taken by our responders during this operation. The first Maritime Surveillance Rescue Coordination Centre was informed by the Aviation Rescue Coordination Centre, Nadi on 26th February that a Sunflower plane registered aircraft Cessna 172, Registration DQ FTR operated by Pacific Flying School lost communication with Air Traffic Control for more than one hour. The aircraft was conducting flight training departing Nadi at 0730 hours bound for Savusavu via Labasa.

Madam Speaker, the aircraft was fitted with what is called an “Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast” (ADSB), which is an air traffic surveillance technology that enables aircrafts to be accurately tracked by Air Traffic Controllers and other pilots without the need for a conventional radar. The last known position was provided by the ADSB and shared with the Search and Rescue Team within three hours of the aircraft going missing. The position was verified by Air Traffic Controllers in Labasa and Savusavu.

The wreckage was found close to 500 meters from the verified last known position in the vicinity of Delaikoro in the province of Macuata. At 1335 hours, the Fiji Rescue Coordination Centre had the information available to determine the initial search and rescue area. At 1340 hours, the Provincial Administrator, Macuata, Police Special Response Unit North and the RFMF - Military Operations North were informed of the situation. The Divisional Police Commander North was identified and assumed the role of On Scene Commander duties.

Madam Speaker, bad weather, heavy rain and low clouds on that afternoon and the next day hampered the search and rescue operations. On Wednesday, 28th February, the weather improved with search commencing at 0730 hours with the two helicopters searching the ridge line of Delaikoro. At 1031 hours sighting of the aircraft crashed onto the cliff was confirmed, approximately 2.5 kilometres Southeast of Dogoru Village. At 1100 hours, the search teams re-grouped at Dogoru Village for a co-ordinated effort to access the wreck site and confirming the two deceased bodies on site. The crash areas was declared a crime scene and an investigation team from the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF) and the Fiji Police Force Forensic team arrived on the scene at 1630 hours

to provide guideline on the retrieval of the bodies, collection of evidence and the continuation of the investigation.

Madam Speaker, both remains of the two pilots were brought down from the wreckage on Thursday, 1st March, to Dogoru Village by helicopter and then transported by road to Labasa Hospital. CAAF and an independent investigator have taken the lead for the investigation phase. The wreckages have now been recovered.

Madam Speaker, the delay in that decision to deploy our air search teams was not a result of delays in the processes which the Honourable Bulitavu referred to, but was the deliberate decision based on the unfavourable weather conditions that existed at the time. It would be unreasonable for us to put our aerial search teams out when visibility was almost none. In addition, we do not want to risk losing additional lives when common sense dictates that it would be untenable to deploy those assets and responders in unfavourable flying and search conditions. Pacific Flying Schools used their assets during the first and second day, but were unable to locate the site because of very poor weather conditions.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to comment on the suggestion made by the Honourable Bulitavu on his release, to give parachutes to air travellers. It baffles me to think that an Honourable Member of this House would make such a baseless and misleading statement in public. Parachutes are not considered a lifesaving equipment for all fixed wing aircrafts. The most basic training requires several hours of theory and several practical jumps with experienced jumpers before a layperson, such as a passenger on a commercial flight can even consider making that jump.

Madam Speaker, jumping out of a fixed wing aircraft with a parachute with or without training is more than likely to be met with a fatal outcome. I humbly urge Honourable Members of this House to take some time to think through issues before we put them put out for public consumption.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry has conducted a debriefing session last week on Friday, 9th March, 2018 on this incident and there were lessons learnt. As a result, my Ministry intends to incorporate the findings from this experience before we finalise the draft Search and Rescue Manual by June this year to enhance such operations in Fiji.

The proposed Search and Rescue Bill which we hope to present it in Parliament this year, empowers agencies, in particular the establishment of the Fiji Rescue Coordination Centre and the subsequent alignment of the three classes of Search and Rescue namely; land, maritime and aeronautical search and rescue to the Rescue Coordination Centre.

Madam Speaker, this establishment is envisaged to align and put in place the existing fragmented responses into a more coordinated approach in terms of resource deployment and command and control.

Madam Speaker, the Search and Rescue concepts, all Advisory Councils, *Turaga ni Koros*, villages and informal settlements will be empowered under the Search and Rescue Manual, to initiate initial response to any distress call or incidents, whether it will be land, maritime or aeronautical, and guided by the Rescue Coordination Centre. The Advisory Councillors and the *Turaga ni Koros* will

undergo the necessary training with basic Search and Rescue knowledge, and we have already completed the first training in the Western Division two months ago.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry, as part of the new establishment, will request through the normal budgetary process, to increase the Search and Rescue allocation in the next financial year to support the new machinery of Search and Rescue in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I again express my deepest sympathies to the families and friends of the deceased pilots. I would like to assure this august House of Government's commitment on enhancing Fiji's Search and Rescue response mechanism. My Ministry will continue to work together with all concerned stakeholders, to ensure that we continue to improve on our Search and Rescue capability. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to response to the Ministerial Statement given by the Honourable Minister of Defence and also my sympathy to the family of the two deceased - trainer pilot, Iliesa Tawalo and pilot trainee, Merelesita Lutu.

First of all, Madam Speaker, I thank the *Tikina* of Wailevu, in the *Vanua* of Macuata, in the village of Dogoru for their assistance and help in helping Government Officials in the North in the rescue and search operation.

Also, I also urge the Government, given that it had done the *sevusevu* late to the village, I think those are some of the things that probably Government can improve next time when they deal with the *Vanua*, especially they were going right into the search without *sevusevu* and after that, it came to the mind of the Divisional Police Commissioner Northern to do a *sevusevu* and a *mata ni gasau* on Tuesday after the crash on Monday, and that was accepted by the village, especially the *Mata ni Tikina* - Mr. Semi Radradra, who was very helpful with the youths in the area to at least guide the RFMF Officials, Police and also the Fire rescue team into the site, Madam Speaker.

Talking about search and rescue, it is common knowledge, Madam Speaker, that all Search and Rescue funds are managed by the Honourable Minister in regards to sea, aeronautical or land rescue, but again, that needs to be coordinated properly on how those funds are readily available to be released to various stakeholders in the quick response time that we have for the teams that are there to make up to the site that they are trying to reach, Madam Speaker.

On the other issue, Madam Speaker, given the difficulty in terrain and weather that they had faced, I thank the officers, mostly the National Fire Authority (NFA), the firefighters who played a lead role in the rescue operation, and given the difficulties and the equipment they had, the equipment had to be flown from Suva to Labasa on Wednesday, Madam Speaker, for them to be able to extract the bodies and also the wreckage on Friday. The time from Monday to Friday when the bodies were finally retrieved and taken to Labasa Hospital, it took a very long time, Madam Speaker, given the lack of technology and equipment that the Ministry has, that were made available to the officers in Labasa. Those skills used to be played by the RFMF before when they had those special units that were able to conduct those mid-air operations, but again, those were conducted by the firefighters of Labasa.

Most of them had gained some knowledge from Osaka in Japan, were able to use in this particular incident.

On the other, Madam Speaker, given that the Commissioner Northern too has gone up to Dogoru Village last Friday to present a *vakavinavinaka*, probably some tea and bread for the villagers there, for hosting, giving meals, food and even *yaqona* and shelter to the Government Officials who were there. He thanked the villagers for their generosity and for their assistance in those times. It came out that everyone worked together and it is a lesson for the Government to work with the *vanua* and things that can be done together, if we work hand in hand.

Again, Madam Speaker, I call on the Government too to recognise the rescue team in terms of awarding bravery medals. On this particular case, Madam Speaker, given that this is the first case that our SAR was really tested. I call upon the Government too, to recognise the team effort and also the ability to avail and offer themselves to bring back two fellow Fijians and give a relief to the families who were there.

Madam Speaker, just to response to the Honourable Minister, given the investigation is still ongoing in terms of the independent investigation, it was unfortunate that the Honourable Minister had an attack on me, given most of the facts and findings will come out of the independent investigation that is currently being conducted by the investigator who had come from New Zealand. We look forward for the report to come to the House on what was the cause of the incident and the various activities and the timelines he had mentioned. It will all come out clearly, once the investigation is finalised and the report is available. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement.

Madam Speaker, further to my brief tribute to the two young pilots that I made in this august House last week, I again wish to extend heartfelt sympathies and prayers to their families and friends, who I understand gathered last week to bid them farewell in their final journey and rites.

Madam Speaker, like the tragedy of PC121, the Air Fiji plight that occurred in 1999, these incidents gripped the nation. The Cessna 172 incident engulfed everyone who joined the families of our two young pilots in the highs and lows of the search and rescue efforts.

I note the Honourable Minister's update on the Search and Rescue efforts and most importantly, the key role of the *vanua* in extending their local knowledge of the terrain to the official Search and Rescue personnel.

Madam Speaker, however, if we draw on the PC 121 tragedy, I would like to think that the post Search and Rescue efforts also includes extensive counselling for those personnel involved, including the media, the families and the fellow students/colleagues of Pacific Flying School. Indeed, it was a traumatic time and there needs to be an outlet for those directly involved to be able to deal with how they cope emotionally because if we do not, these unresolved emotions manifest in many other ways.

Madam Speaker, furthermore, I note that the independent investigator has stated publicly in the media that he will submit his report to the State, as he is contracted to do. However, it entirely falls in the hands of the Honourable Minister to table that report to this House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, thank you very much for your input to this morning's debate. We will now adjourn Parliament to have lunch and Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.32 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.33 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have with us this afternoon the students of International School from Nadi.

(Applause)

They are here to observe today's proceedings. Welcome to Parliament! Hope you will enjoy the sitting and listening in this afternoon, and all the best to you.

International School in Nadi is always so keen to come to Parliament, it is almost every year, and we really welcome you again.

We will now resume from where we left off and I now call on the Honourable Minister for Forests to deliver his statement.

Partnering with Stakeholders Into the Future

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker; the Honourable Acting Prime Minister; Attorney-General, Minister of Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service, Communications and Education; the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of the House; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen: I rise to deliver my first Ministerial Statement for 2018.

Madam Speaker, we have had a productive start to the year and we, as a nation, are progressing towards a brighter future for all. With all the progress that we have been witnessing over the years, I am really impressed with the enhancement that the people in the Northern Division of Fiji have achieved, especially in the forest sector. This was evident during my visit in February when I visited stakeholders in the provinces of Macuata, Bua and Cakaudrove.

Madam Speaker, before I proceed with my Statement, I would like to respond to Honourable Niko Nawaikula's comment which was in the *Uncorrected Daily Hansard* of Monday, 5th March 2018, and I quote:

“The Honourable Minister referred to Government's commitment to reduce carbon, but we all know that one of the programmes, the reforestation was a total waste, and the Honourable Minister for Forests will explain to us why plants were wasted in Nabou.”

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- (inaudible interjection)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I might have to make some drastic decisions on how to address these interjections that are really very disruptive to the speaker. Allow the speaker time to make his speech and to be heard by everyone, including those watching on television, please.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, with reference to Honourable Nawaikula's comment, I urge him to get his facts right and educate himself on carbon reduction and the contribution of one year old pine seedlings to emission reduction, party holders and non-party stakeholders as well, as well as where emissions largely come from. There is absolutely no correlation, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member was referring to the pine seedlings which were given to Forests by the EU-SPC Reforestation Programme for rehabilitating the sugarcane belt areas which have been degraded through fire incidences and other environmental changes brought about by natural and man-made causes.

The Reforest Fiji Programmes gave my Ministry pine seedlings, as well as *vesi*, sandalwood, citrus and mahogany, to assist their project in planting the sugarcane belt areas, greening them and protecting soil and catchment, as well as the production and livelihood purposes.

Madam Speaker, mortality is expected in any nursery programme but the elements that cause these plants to perish are many, one of which is severe drought. The pine seedlings in Nabou were stressed due to the severe drought and unusual drought conditions in the West last year with zero rainfall recorded for some months, one of the worst faced by Fiji. My staff did their best by carting water but despite these attempts, some of the seedlings could not survive. However, due to their focussed efforts 14,000 did survive.

I wish to correct the Honourable Member that the plants were not wasted but unfortunately, some could not survive the dry spell in the West. It was not deliberate but a lesson to us all in this room that we need to put in place measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change and that the pine seedlings, Honourable Nawaikula referred to as wasted, were not a loss to carbon but a reminder that we need to collectively work to build resilient communities, resilient people and resilient pine seedlings.

Honourable Nawaikula should stop distorting the facts, Madam Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- I hope this clears any doubts that you may have had on our reforestation programme which is still running smoothly today, despite the many setbacks which are often faced by the effects of climate change.

Madam Speaker, I now wish to deliver my ministerial statement. Under the Ministry's long-term Strategic Development Plan priorities, one of the targeted outcomes is enhancing economic advancement through the sector by strengthening of national partnerships. This is a key-focussed area for my Ministry, to promote forest sector industries involvement and creating a sustainable trade environment that will encourage forest businesses to thrive.

Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of the House, let me introduce to you a few examples of progress and unity which has been made possible through the public private partnership which the FijiFirst Government continues to place emphasis on.

Pinto Industries Limited, situated in Namara, Labasa, has been praised for promoting Government's "Look North Policy" through its diverse investments. Madam Speaker, the company has grown from strength to strength and has clearly outlined areas which we hope to strategically develop over the years. Apart from other business ventures, their sawmill has been operating since 1982 when they first started producing wooden brushes for the locals. They also moved into the construction business to expand their business lines.

Madam Speaker, the company designed a small sawmill concept to cater for the company's sawn timber requirement as they did not want to depend on other sawmillers' for the processed timber specific to their product types, their needs and that of their customers.

The company has been purchasing indigenous species logs from landowning units in the provinces of Macuata and Bua, whereas their pine and mahogany is purchased from small woodlots. This, again, shows the effectiveness of Private Public Partnerships between industries and forest communities, and the significant improvements seen. This has improved the livelihoods of forest dependent communities and landowners, as well as created employment for those living in the nearby areas.

Madam Speaker, the second example, which I would like to highlight is the Vanua Levu Pallets and Sawmillers Limited which operates in Vuniika, Labasa and employs around 20 locals. The company started their business in 2000 and was producing pallets to supply in the Northern Division.

This particular company, Madam Speaker, was given technical assistance and advice from my Ministry and through this continued dialogue, they were able to secure funding from the Northern Development Programme (NDP). The assistance has enabled the company to expand their production through the purchase of an additional woodmizer portable sawmill and supplying pallets to companies here in Viti Levu.

Madam Speaker, whilst the Government of the day encourages and supports wood processing business ventures, at the same time, our commitment is evident in our reforestation programme, which focuses on the replanting of native species. This will contribute towards the enhancement of carbon stocks and the resilience of forests and rural communities in terms of climate change.

The challenge for my Ministry is to balance the two; forest harvesting and forest conservation. These are two contrasting undertakings which can lead to unsustainable resource management, if not properly implemented. However, Madam Speaker, the main aim of my Ministry is to promote conservation and good management practices. This should be environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, generating and maintaining benefits for both present and future generations.

One of the key-strategic objectives of the Ministry is strengthening forest resource management frameworks and implementation to support conservation of soil, land, watershed and coastal areas. Government has committed over \$1.5 million in the past three years under its Reforestation of Degraded Forests Project in such areas, and has empowered rural communities and individuals to actively participate in reforestation effort.

Madam Speaker, I reiterate my Ministry's commitment to the proactive implementation of our reforestation programmes in the Northern Division. For the first time, my Ministry is providing incentive payments to communities engaged in planting for this reforestation project. This has created a lot of interests and success among communities in the three provinces of Cakaudrove, Bua and Macuata.

Madam Speaker, I am also pleased to note the interest shown by private harvesting companies in initiating reforestation activities on their own. I had the greatest privilege of meeting a young man, Mr. Jay Kumar, who owns a logging company in Cubue, Bua. He had a vision to do something for the industry in order to conserve and sustain forest resources in the areas that he worked in. It was encouraging to witness the opening of his nursery at his sawmill and I wish to encourage more harvesting companies to come on board and assist Government's efforts in planting more trees for our future generation.

Madam Speaker, this is a huge commitment that he has shown in which he will be replanting trees with the support of my Ministry and landowning units in areas that he had removed trees from. From companies to communities, the ministry is strongly committed and vocal in advocating for reforestation, as well as leading by example.

Madam Speaker, let me inform this House of the enormous work my Ministry has accomplished, assisting village communities in replacing tree species in the three provinces of Vanua Levu on degraded land after the devastation caused by *TC Winston* in 2016. The village communities were assisted by the Ministry through provision of seedlings, technical advice on planting, maintenance and monitoring.

The province of Cakaudrove recorded the highest area planted with a total of more than 60 hectares within 20 villages around the areas of Vanuavou to Nasinu, from Buca to Naweni, right to Naidi Village near Savusavu. The surrounding islands of Kioa and Taveuni planted a total area of 11 hectares. These village communities participated in land preparation and planting of indigenous species, sandalwood, pine and mahogany seedlings.

Madam Speaker, the village communities from Bua Province also participated in the reforestation programme and planted an area of 44 hectares with a variety of fruit trees, indigenous tree species and mahogany. These included the villages of Bua Lomanikoro, Koroinasolo, Nabalabalawa and Nakavaki. There is still increasing interest and demand from other villages within the Bua Province for nursery establishments and seedlings, which my Ministry will assist with.

Madam Speaker, in the Macuata Province, village communities of Raviravi, Nabiti, Savusavuitaqa, Lovelove, Nacereyaga, Naduna and the two islands of Mali and Kia, have collectively planted over 40 hectares of *vesi*, *damanu*, teak, mahogany and pine species. There was also a demand for fruit trees like breadfruit, *ivi*, *dawa* and *kavika* for income generation.

Madam Speaker, last year, the Northern Division alone managed to plant a total area of 154 hectares of private woodlot plantations that would serve as conservation and for economic purposes for village communities. Annual replanting forecast by the Ministry for 2017-2018 periods for the Northern Division will exceed 200 hectares by December this year. This will make up half of the annual target of 500 hectares for both, natural and plantation forests.

Madam Speaker, while all efforts are focused on community reforestation programmes under the Reforestation of Degraded Land (RDF) Project, may I also highlight the achievements by our two

Forest-based Commercial Plantation enterprises replanting programme, that is, Fiji Pine Limited and Fiji Hardwood Corporation.

Fiji Pine Limited has replanted a total plantation area of 13,354 hectares since 2011. By December 2018, the company targets to replant a total area of 2,000 hectares of pine forests to feed its processing demand. The company has also invested a total sum of \$2.5 million this year to boost its plantation replanting programme.

Madam Speaker, I also like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Alivereti Nabulivou in organising and mobilising the villagers of Naitasiri to move to Bua Province to participate in the replanting programme offered by the company. The Fiji Hardwood Corporation has replanted over 1,100 hectares of mahogany in the 2016-2017 planting year, and will be planting 1,400 hectare in the 2017-2018 planting year.

Madam Speaker, the company has also raised a total of 500,000 potted mahogany seedlings, a first of its kind at Nukurua Nursery and currently raising an additional half million seedlings. I am also happy to say that my Ministry has been allocated \$200,000 in this fiscal year to propagate indigenous tree species, to ensure the availability and continuous supply to enhance indigenous species forests and plantation.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Forest is committed to setting high standards for conservation and development by working with the people of Fiji and providing opportunities for the sustainable development of our forest resources. The strong partnership between our stakeholders and Government give us a unique advantage and we must continue to make conscious efforts to cultivate and strengthen this partnership.

Madam Speaker, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of the day, staff of my Ministry, our stakeholders and the general public who had provided continued support in the development and prosperity of the forest sector. Thank you, *vinaka vakalevu and dhanyavaad*.

(Applause)

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

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Firstly, I would just like to respond to the accolade by the Honourable Minister in regards to the people from Naitasiri that went to plant pine and mahogany. For the information of this House, I received these issues that replanting mahogany in Nukurua was done by the people of Serea, Naitasiri, and they are still not paid. Two weeks and they are still waiting for their pay.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, the pine planters in Bua, one died while working under the planting contract. The issue is, what is the term of the contract in such circumstances? We take that into perspective when you are so concerned about the agreement of our fruit pickers to New Zealand and all those are in place, whereas in our backyard, these people who go and plant pine and mahogany are still not covered in the contact. In such instances, they had to fork out the money to take the body from

Bua to Serea, so, that is an unfortunate situation and probably such contracts should be looked after by the Government.

For the information also, Madam Speaker, in terms of public-private partnership, I take note that the landowning units are excluded and they should be partners in such projects. As we have heard this morning, the partnership of landowners in terms of agriculture in Nadarivatu, in this instance, the landowners are excluded.

Let me read to you, Madam Speaker, the volume of hectares of native forests is 899,229 hectares; 52,419 hectares of hardwood plantation; 50,000 hectares of softwood plantations, namely Caribbean pine, and 38,742 hectares of mangrove forests. So, these forests are mostly in landowning units' land and they provide the resources that these public-private partnership sustains their business whereas the resource owners are out of the partnership in terms of agreement, whether it is 70:30, 60:40, or whatever agreement because there is a partnership agreement that exists in the quarrying business in Colo-i-Suva landowners are given, even though it is only 10 percent but at the end of the chain in the value adding you had, 60mm rocks, 20mm, sub-base and all the chips.

So, the landowning unit is the partnership of the business, in this case, Flame Tree, they receive from the value-adding of the product, which in this case, they received about \$40,000 every month. That is not including the mandated requirements where you have to pay the lease and all those statutory requirements that is not counted in the programme.

Madam Speaker, in this respect, in terms of forest, it is big business when you take in for granted carbon trading and carbon is absorbed by the ocean and I have mentioned the volume of forests in Fiji, next to the ocean that absorbs carbon, and that is sold on the market as carbon credit, and may be the Government on that volume of forest is taking it as its asset to bargain for Green Growth Funding, excluding the landowners who should receive a fair share from the carbon credit that is available on the Climate COP23, of which Fiji holds presidency. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Leader of the NFP or his designate to respond.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement and I also acknowledge the presence of students from my home town of Nadi, Nadi International School. Thank you for being here.

(Laughter)

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Extra time will be given to Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Thank you. Madam Speaker, at the outset can I just say that the fervour with which the Government is chasing the public-private partnership is quite astounding. I am tempted to

think that we have a cash flow problem where the current Government is very aggressively abdicating key State functions to the private sector. In fact our party leader just this week highlighted in a new year debate on PPPs, that PPP projects do not always work out and we exercise this caution on that front.

But on this issue, Madam Speaker, I note that mid-2017 report to the World Bank on the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, I note that as of mid-2017, consultants were tasked to look into drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, the DD Project and the REDD+ Strategy Development, as well as the consultancy for the development of a Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanism, the FGRM. This consultancy was expected to conclude in January 2018. Perhaps this august House could be privy to those reports as well.

We are very well aware of the World Bank's Grievance Redress Service and hopefully our landowning units involved in forest carbon trading keep these options open, if they feel the projects are not in their interest, particularly in relation to consultation. I note that update report to the World Bank, one consultancy delayed a study on benefit fairing mechanism and carbon rights. We need more information on that front and please Honourable Minister, could you make that available to this Honourable House.

We note Fiji's emission reduction programme was going to be considered at the 13th meeting of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) Carbon Fund and the letter of the intents has been signed by the bank and approved by Cabinet and counter signed by the Ministry of Economy on behalf of the Government of Fiji (GOF).

Madam Speaker, on reforestation, the Honourable Minister has given us a breakdown of how many acres have been planted and how many acres are to be planted. We note that some 18,000 hectares would be planted by 2018.

Madam Speaker, it is all good on the one side but as alluded to by my colleague, the landowners are an integral part of this reforestation programme. Their consultation, their input into this scheme or initiative is something that we would like to see happening more on a regular basis. Their involvement in itself is an indication that the Government cares about the resource owners. Madam Speaker, with these words, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, in the absence of the Honourable Acting Prime Minister who is in hospital on a family visit, he will be back soon. We will move on with the Order Paper and will give him back time for his ministerial statement on his return. We will move on to the Motions.

MOTIONS FOR DEBATE

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Before I call on the Chairperson, I wish to clarify that the wording of the motion allows the Parliament to debate the content of the report. At the end of the debate, we will be voting merely to note the report and once the vote is taken, it ends there and the report will not be debated again in Parliament. I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on National Resources to move his motion.

HON. CDR. J.CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report on the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management Annual Report 2014, which was tabled on 22nd March, 2017.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on National Resources to speak on his motion.

HON. CDR. J.CAWAKI.- Madam Speaker; the Acting Honourable Prime Minister; the Honourable Leader of Opposition; the Honourable Members of Parliament: On behalf of the Honourable Members of the Natural Resources Standing Committee, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the review that was made to the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management for 2014 Annual Report.

It is a pleasure and a great honour for me to report on the overall performance of the Ministry's 2014 Annual Report. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources for executing a bi-partisan report, and also extend my appreciation to the Senior Officials of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management for their submissions.

Madam Speaker, at the outset, while deliberating on the 2014 annual performance of the Ministry, the Committee noted that the year 2014 achievements were aligned to the Ministry's mandate. To highlight the mandate of the Ministry, the Ministry is to coordinate the implementation and management of all Government Rural and Maritime Development programmes through the four Divisional Development Boards and the 15 Provincial Development Boards, which are consultative and the planning forums were development in the rural areas.

The Ministry also has the overall responsibility to effect National Disaster Management Strategy, as required by the National Disaster Management Act of 1998, encompassing prevention, mitigation, preparedness, emergency operations, relief and rehabilitations. Also, there are four Divisional Commissioners who manage and coordinated the implementation of Government Rural Development programmes in their respective divisions.

The Committee further noted that the four divisions also engaged themselves in other ancillary services on behalf of other Ministries not physically represented in the divisions and also in the districts. The Committee also noted that the Ministry's Development Services Division monitors and evaluate capital programmes, including planning, implementation and monitoring of rural housing projects, poverty alleviation projects and the housing rehabilitation programme.

The Ministry's Corporate Services Division provided support services to other divisions in the Ministry to ensure that the application of vast human resources management practices are in line with equal employment opportunities, the OHS and the Environmental initiatives.

The Committee also noted that the approved Ministry's staff establishment was 328, of which 226 were Established Officers and 102 Government Wage Earners in 2014. Furthermore, on the Ministry's Financial Statement for the year ending 31 December, 2014, Independent Audit Report of the Auditor-General was a qualified one. A variance of \$3.6 million exist between the Trust Fund Cash At Bank recorded in the General Ledger. The Trust Fund Liability account balance of \$4.1 million, contrary to Section 58 of the Finance Instruction 28.

It was also noted by the Committee that for the audit opinion, except for the matters referred as "Qualified", the Ministry's Financial Statements were presented fairly in accordance with the Accounting policies and financial statements gave the information required by the Financial Management Act of 2004.

The Committee anticipated that the issues raised and the challenges faced by the Ministry in 2014 would have been considered and addressed through appropriately. Madam Speaker, the Committee wishes to make a note that the Ministry has made their response and they have taken on board all issues raised in our report.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, the Committee is thankful to the Ministry for responding to the findings of the Committee on the Ministry's 2014 Annual Report, and hopes that the Ministry further implement strategies as way forward.

I am wholly confident that the ideas that will be discussed today in Parliament will be pursued and will be the foundation on which the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management will build a new direction on the overall performance of the Ministry in the future.

Madam Speaker, with those few comments, as the Member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion now is put for debate. I invite input, if any.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I hear from the Honourable Minister's comments that the Committee has scrutinised the 2014 Auditor's Report or recommendation in relation to this Ministry. The first point that they noted it was a qualified audit, meaning that they did not do their bookkeeping, and that is my first concern.

The second concern is that he hopes that all the issues that were raised for the period 2014 has been addressed. What I wish to say is that, I have also looked at the 2014 Auditor's Report, what I am concerned with is that the findings of the Audit Committee in relation to rural housing, the Government has not learnt from the *TC Winston* era.

The findings were a , the distribution of material is not a good way of dealing with things because there is no certainty for the Government to ensure that those materials will be used. There was an example where they said in relation to a house in Nagado, after giving them materials for *Cyclone Evans*, which happened in 2012–2013, audit revealed that it was leaking. As well as some of the materials that were distributed were not being utilised and they were stolen.

You look to *TC Winston*, exactly those things were happening. This Government did not learn from the experiences of the past, and a snapshot of 2014, and if I could refer to some of the issues that the Auditor-General noted. The first one concerned the anomalies noted in the Public Sector Investment Projects. What did they find? Madam Speaker, they found:

- “Incomplete project after the completion timeframe;
- Payments were continuously made despite projects were delayed by the various contractors;
- Monthly project status and monitoring report were not filed and produced to audit to determine the status of the project;
- There was no evidence of legal vetting of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the Solicitor General office.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) does not specify timeframe of work losses or in delay of work.”

He gave some examples, the construction of the Vunisei to Daku Road, the upgrading of Namara to Muanisolo Road and the Kadavu Feasibility Study, no monitoring report was submitted. No progress report submitted to audit to determine the state of this project. The agreement for the project was not vetted by the Solicitor-General’s Office. Our understanding of course, this is 2014, this is a snapshot of what happened to this Ministry in 2014, and we hope that we have learnt from it.

But let me carry on. In the Northern Division, Korosi/Balaga Bay Road, this was given to the engineers in the RFMF, only Stage 1 was completed and on inspection, 2 to 10 kilometres yet to commence. The Kilaka/Niudua Road, only 10 kilometres was completed and physical implementation is 66 percent, so a lot more were not done.

The grid from Nakasa to the newly constructed Ulivalili Secondary School site visit was made in 2015 reveals there is no power supply by the Government. There is no evidence of vetting of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by the Solicitor-General. The MOU does not specify the timeframe for the work and for the causes for the delay.

For the Vunilagi/Lea Road, audit site visit verification revealed that only one kilometre was done and the cost of this was \$693,719, so that is a waste of money. This Ministry is wasting money, Madam Speaker, this is from the Auditor-General. You are wasting money.

He notes the failure to properly certify and approve the payment of PSP project increases the risk of fraudulent payments and corrupt practices. You are breeding fraud which may not be detected in a timely manner thus increase the payment or the burden on taxpayers funds, very obvious. If you do not do the work properly, who will eventually carry the burden? We, the taxpayers.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, according to the Standing Order, each Committee had been nominated with a Chair, Deputy Chair and Members are from both sides of the parties and under Standing Order 112, Powers of Standing Committees is that the Committee can summon any person to appear, it is almost the same as the High Court. Madam Speaker, it is like what Honourable Nawaikula is doing today. There are six Standing Committees here which has been nominated under this Constitution and their powers are in Section 74:

- i) Parliament, and each of its committees, has the power to summon any person to appear before it for the purpose of giving evidence or providing information;
- ii) For the purpose of subsection (1), Parliament and each of its committees has the same powers as the High Court.

All committees have the powers to scrutinise, Honourable Nawaikula does not know what he is saying.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, point of order should really last just about 30 seconds.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- You should only bring up the rules or procedures of the House. Whatever you are saying is really not a point of order.

Secondly, the Honourable Nawaikula from what I have heard he never attended any Committee meetings, which means he was not a Committee Member, and right now he is taking his right of freedom of speech.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- What I was saying, let us listen to what the Ministry said in answer. In answer to the Niudamu Road, why did you not make any report? The answer was most of the reports was saved in the desktop without any file. What is the use of a report sitting in a desktop? Print it and take it up to the superiors for use.

Again, for Vunilagi/Lea Road, what did they say? Most of the reports were saved on desktops, for what?

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- For reference.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Future reference.

Let me now go to the self-help projects. Yako Koro Doko Water Project, no MOU, no acquittal report, no completion certificate; Namada Borehole Project, no MOU and no completion certificate; Vatamai Borehole No.1 Project Water Pump, no completion certificate, no acquittal; Mackay Fishing Project, no completion certificate, no MOU, Project File not endorsed by the Commissioner. The Commissioner did not approve this and you wonder, Madam Speaker.

Next is Vunuku Sea Transport, no monitoring report, no completion certificate and no MOU; Tokatoka Naivisovadravu Outboard Engine, no monitoring report; Napuka Village Fibre Boat and Engine, no project file; Vunivacea Rice Farming, no project file; Delaivuna Water Project, no project file. So you wonder how is this being implemented? How is the fund being sourced? Who is making the approval? The comment is that, failure to properly record and monitor the progress of projects, safeguard and endorse projects paper may result in the delay of implementation and the completion of the project in a timely manner. Also, the risk of fraud and manipulation is very, very high when this happens. In the absence of a Completion Certificate, there is a risk that the project may not be surveyed, evaluated and certified by the required technical engineer, as required according to the required standards.

Madam Speaker, let me now go onto the cyclone assistance. As I had noted earlier, the lessons that we should learn from according to the findings of the auditor was that, if you just supply material you risk a lot, there is uncertainty whether those materials will be used for the desired purpose. There are examples, Nagado Village in Nadi, houses completed and all materials have been received, yes, fair enough, however the roof is leaking as shown in the picture.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Point of order, Madam Speaker. Please, let us focus on the Annual Report. The Audit Report goes through a separate channel. Let us focus on the Annual Report, please.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, that comes under the rule of relevance and I totally agree with you. Please focus on the Annual Report. You have 20 minutes but focus on the Annual Report rather than

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... including the AG's Report and as quoted by the Honourable Minister. He said that the accounting was qualified and he hoped that what had been raised will be addressed, so I merely clarified what was raised, so are you ashamed? Can you handle the truth? This is the truth.

HON. MEMBER.- ... the truth?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, let me just clarify this: in 2.11 of this Audit Report, it only talks about

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is about the 2014 Annual Report.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- No, I am talking about the 2014 Annual Report that was tabled before Parliament, and the Audit Report is just restricted to 2.11. That is all that is in this Annual Report about the Audit Report, Madam Speaker, but he is referring to a different report altogether.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You are all over the place.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order. Honourable Member, you have raised a lot of point of orders from around the House, merely because you are really not focusing on the report. You are asking the questions that should have been asked at the Committee level. Hear me out, please, you are asking questions that should have been raised at the Committee stage. Right now, you need to be focussing on what lessons to be learnt from the Report, just that, lessons to be learnt but do not quote from the other reports that you have.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will not quote, but let me remind you on this, you go back and, please, do your work. That is all I am asking, please, take into account the recommendations of the audit.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, you do not speak to a Member directly, you speak to me.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Please, take into account.

HON. SPEAKER.- And me?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, Madam.

(Laughter)

The point I wish to emphasise is for us to learn from its findings, especially distributing materials and the Auditor will have a big task when it comes back to us in relation to the distribution of *TC Winston*, because you never learn.

HON. MEMBER.- Who?

HON. SPEAKER.- Who, me, never learn?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, the Government, I am sorry, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. MEMBER.- Apologise to the Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, please, learn a lesson from this presentation that we have just had. Focus on the report and what lessons to be learnt from the Report rather than quoting from the other reports.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I will speak on the Report of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management Annual Report of 2014 - Page 14, Item 3.1.13, Emergency Water. It says that due to the dryness, an emergency water operation was activated on 31st July, 2014 and this operation was manned at the Divisional Emergency Operation Centre by the Divisional Office Staff.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, you are still quoting from another report.

HON. P. CHAND.- No, this is the Report that we are discussing, as in the Order Paper of today, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- But you are quoting from another Report?

HON. P. CHAND.- No, I am quoting from that Report here.

HON. SPEAKER.- All right, carry on!

HON. P. CHAND.- My question to the Government is this, this water supply continues up till today, it is important to supply water to people who do not have water. Water is one of the basic commodities of life.

Madam Speaker, as I speak, we have so many trucks carting water today. There are two different size trucks, one charges \$100 an hour; the other charges \$80 an hour. If these trucks, for example, go to Lagalaga, which is about 50 to 55 kilometres

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So

HON. P. CHAND.- I come from Vanua Levu, I will talk about Vanua Levu because I am the only resident Member of Parliament from Vanua Levu. The rest of the 49 are representing Viti Levu, Vanua Levu is missed out. I am the only resident Member of Parliament from Vanua Levu, I am the only one.

(Laughter)

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P. CHAND.- None from that side, thank you, Madam Speaker. What I want to say is this, there are trucks that carry water, for example,

HON. J. USAMATE.- A point of order, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member is telling something to this Parliament that is not true. There are other Members in this House, sitting here, who reside in Vanua Levu, so he should take back that statement that he is the only person living in Vanua Levu, look around you!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have made a misleading statement, would you like to withdraw - that particular statement that you are the only Member representing Vanua Levu?

HON. P. CHAND.- I am talking about NFP, I am the resident Member, withdraw.

(Laughter)

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is not a withdrawal, this hand motion is showing that that is not a withdrawal, there has to be a genuine withdrawal.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, Honourable Member, I made a ruling and you deliberately

HON. P. CHAND.- Yes, I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- No, it is too late, so I am terminating your speech as from now.

I now move on to the next item on the agenda, Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I just wish to make some clarification. We have submitted our report on how we are responding to the 2014 Annual Report, not the Audit Report, Madam Speaker.

Again, let me remind the Honourable Members on the other side that the audit process has its own mechanics as well, Madam Speaker. Every civil servant on the other side knows that when audit reports are made, there are what we call “exit interviews”, that will be done with the Ministries because they make the reports whenever they do their normal audit inspections, whatever you call it, Madam Speaker. So, it is through these exit interviews and then the final report that is made on the ministry.

It is the efforts of the ministries to continually improve on the issues that are raised and definitely, Madam Speaker, no one has been arrested or whatever, based on these findings of the audit report that he was referring to because there are systems and processes in place that will address the issues raised. So let us separate the Audit Report from the Annual Report, Madam Speaker.

I just wish to highlight on what was raised in the qualifications of the Audit Report, Madam Speaker. I noted in the report proceedings that it was asked by the Honourable Dulakiverata and of course, we have responded to that, Madam Speaker. We have clarified that what was raised in 2.11 of this Annual Report has been accumulating over the years because first, the Ministry was part of iTaukei Affairs, and then it was part of Multi-Ethnic and Rural Development, so because of the financial systems changes within Government, the systems have amalgamated the trusts but the normal records which they keep physically have not been updated.

Madam Speaker, our team from the Ministry have highlighted that what was raised in 2.11 had been addressed in the 2015 Annual Report, so we are doing our best to improve the services to our rural people and we remain committed, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thankyou. Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, I just want to make a brief contribution on this Annual Committee Report. First, to start off, I think this Ministry has covered a wide range of activities in terms of the areas of responsibilities that they cover. Referring to the challenges that the Committee has highlighted, for the office space and accommodation in remote and isolated rural and maritime stations, I think these are very important aspects of operations of the Ministry that the Minister should look into to ensure that people are not left out there without proper accommodation and office space.

Also, Madam Speaker, on the staff recruitment process, obviously there is a need to have qualified staff, considering the various levels of activities that they are engaged in. They are engaged in the Self Help Scheme, the Non-Cane Access Road Scheme, Divisional Development Road Scheme and Rural Housing Scheme. These are basically technical aspects which the Ministry could take into in terms of staff recruitment and recruiting qualified staff. We have noted some of the concerns highlighted by the Auditor-General that the Ministry could also take into consideration.

The other one is the training and development. This is obviously an important aspect of the Ministry's operation, to ensure there is continuity, to ensure there is no repeat in terms of the operations and financial aspects of the Ministry. Madam Speaker, the transportation, I think this is not only for this particular Ministry, but it is for all other Ministries.

Transportation in the rural outer islands for provision of services to provide excellent services to the general public, they need transportation, without this there will always be difficulties and challenges faced by the staff of the Ministry to ensure that they carry out their work as highlighted in the other recommendations. The other recommendation is the Fiji Procurement Office requirements on the use of Government contractors.

Most of these contractors are not able to meet the demands of the Ministry and especially in not having the materials right up to the project sites. The Ministry have clients with one-third

contributions but the budgetary provision is not enough to cater for the two-third contributions from Government. The Government need to increase its budgetary provisions to meet the demand. These applies to the Ministry's Self Help and Rural Housing Programmes.

So those are the comments in terms of the Report, Madam Speaker, hopefully the Ministry will take heed of the recommended challenges that have been identified by the Committee to ensure that it improves its services, as it continues into the future. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bulitavu?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU .- Madam Speaker, a brief comment on the motion that is before the House and I will comment on the Report and the challenges that the Honourable Radrodro has already talked about, especially on the last recommendation on the one-third and two-third contribution. A very important note that has been noted by the Committee there, the increase in budgetary provision to meet the demand. This is has been an ongoing issue where the various *Turaga ni Koro* and *Mata ni Tikina* have been making their way to the Commissioner's office and also to the Provincial Administrator's office, to follow up applications by various villagers and again they are still pending.

Most of the time, they are not given truthful answers by officials in regards to the various promises that were made during the *Bose ni Tikina* and the *Bose na Yasana* on the availability of provisions and budgetary allocation. But on practice, it is really difficult when they brought back what is required, the photos of all those stages of the one-third that villagers have contributed and the assistance on the two -third scheme. Probably the Honourable Minister will be able to look into those issues and try to resolve them, so most applications will be dealt with much fairly.

On the other note, Madam Speaker, I was very concerned with the finding on Page 17; 3.2.3.4, that is in regards to a village hall in Viseisei Village in Ba, which is very good. It was approved by the Commissioner Western, then and again, generally we know that the Honourable Prime Minister has already announced that this Government will not build village halls and churches. If this is a precedent, if this was allowed in the Western Division, then probably the Honourable Minister should

clarify whether the other Divisions too can bring up their applications in regards to village halls or was there a special window that was open for this particular case.

If you turn to Page 17, Madam Speaker, there is a table there where the name of the project is Viseisei Community Hall in Ba. If there are other provisions that are there, that the *Turaga ni Koro* and villagers can use to exhaust to be able to qualify for those funding through a one-third and two-third scheme to come through that too to build village community halls and the various Divisional Commissioners must enlighten the *Bose na Tikina* and *Bose na Yasana* on various other things that they can use.

Madam Speaker, the other options that are currently ongoing projects like Evacuation Centres in some areas. I think one particular case is in Vunivutu village in Macuata, I think they brought up this case many times with the Prime Minister's Office and we came to see to his PSO once with the village headman from Vunivutu in regards to a village hall which was then converted to be an Evacuation Centre, which the engineers from the Sukanaivalu Barracks were to complete, I think they are still awaiting approval.

These projects are under the Prime Minister's Office and those are to be transferred to the Commissioner Northern because they come under the Ministry of Rural Development. I think those line of approval and the other bureaucracy that accompanies it really needs to be cleared off because we are normally asked by the villagers about those pending projects, when we come to visit them. Those are the few things Madam Speaker.

In regards to cane access roads and all the other water carting, those are certain services which Commissioners are responsible for but I think more effort to be given on the changing weather patterns and climate change that we currently face.

The other issue that has been brought up, Madam Speaker, is in regards to contractors as shown in in 5.0.1.0. Most of these contractors are not able to meet the demand of the Ministry especially in not having the materials right up to the project sites. I think this is one of the problems that we have at divisional levels that most of the contractors probably do not have the full machines and capabilities which the Government would demand for tender. But again the projects need to start and most of those contractors that are there normally do not meet the standards of the work they do in a completion of a particular project and sometimes it results in the delay of the project.

Madam Speaker, the other issue is, if you turn to the verbatim at the back on the Appendix, there was a discussion during the Committee then. If you have time to peruse and that is in regards to the *TC Winston* rehabilitation, on how the rehabilitation has been administered. This is probably what the Opposition has been calling Government from this side of the House, if the whole rehabilitation programme could have been centralised under the arrangement of the Ministry of Rural Development to be administered by the Commissioner Northern. Not only doing the assessment, but also in times of emergency, and all the risks assessments they are doing but also in the implementation, especially for the "Help for Homes" initiative.

The distribution of cards and materials and at that point they could have been the best agency of the Government to follow-up the implementation on rebuilding of homes, schools and also other programmes that were running from the budget allocation in regards to *TC Winston* rehabilitation.

I think the current line Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation finds it very difficult, last week when she was answering questions in regards to the cards because the cards are delivered by the Honourable Minister for Women and Social Welfare and the materials will be delivered by the Ministry of Economy. If that could be centralised in a line Ministry to carry that out, it will prevent the delays and all the timelines that need to be met. Those are a few things Madam Speaker, probably that could improve...

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, the report is for 2014, he is aware of that but Honourable Bulitavu is talking about the *TC Winston* which was just last year.

HON. SPEAKER.- Your point of order is really addressing the rules of procedure of the House and not the content of what the Honourable Member is talking about. Therefore, the point of order does not qualify. Honourable Bulitavu, you may continue.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, I was just giving a suggestion there Honourable Vunivalu on something that the Government can improve next time if you come to face another cyclone in the magnitude of *TC Winston* on how the rehabilitation can be made speedy, Madam Speaker.

On the other issue, Madam Speaker, there had been many significant achievements done by the Ministry in that particular year, and we note that. Also, the things that they have achieved and a few things that needs to be improved as noted by the Committee's recommendation as challenges.

Madam Speaker, the other point that is one of the four issues that is listed there probably the Honourable Minister had already spoken about, but just to clarify on the CBUL allocation that was there. It is coordinated probably by the Ministry in regards to the renewal of leases in coordination with iTLTB.

Those are some of the issues, Madam Speaker, that are coming from grass-roots level on the review of cane leases specifically that there is a monetary value that is given in about 4 percent to the 6 percent unimproved capital value on the lease, which is given under the CBUL arrangement, and how that is working and how the landowners have benefitted from that arrangement.

And plus the Rural Housing Scheme, coming from the villagers' perspective, Madam Speaker, some difficulties they face in getting applications with approval from FNPF. The requirement of FNPF with the Fund's policies have really changed and it is sometimes very difficult for ordinary villagers to attain, Madam Speaker. If the Government, too can consider actually extending the requirement, not only to be specified in a particular village, but also for certain people who are VKB members but

reside elsewhere, because they are married to another province so they will be residing there, they should have the freedom to be able apply for FNPF as long as they stay in those boundary.

Madam Speaker, those are a few things that I would like to contribute on and hope that Government takes on board. Madam Speaker, again I thank the Committee for the work that they have done in bringing up this Report, it is a bipartisan report, and I thank them for identifying the challenges that will help again the Executive Government to function properly.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I just make a brief contribution in regards to Item 5.0.11 in relation to the Self-Help Projects and the recommendation to increase the budgetary provisions for the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, I visited Vanua Balavu towards the end of last year and I brought back with me requests for Self-Help Projects, as we know they are trying to recover from *TC Winston* in regards to their livelihoods. Madam Speaker, I brought back applications for self-help projects, and when I approached the Ministry, I was told by the PA Lau that...

HON. SPEAKER.- Is that reflected in the Report? What you have said now is reflected in the Report?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Please just focus on the report.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Yes, Madam Speaker, I understand...

HON. SPEAKER.- That can brought up as a substantive motion related to that but please speak on the Report.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I was told you cannot lodge any other new applications because they are still dealing with the previous applications. So that substantiates the recommendation that there is a great need to increase the budgetary allocation for self-help Projects, Madam Speaker. And this morning we will recall, as the request went to the Honourable Minister for Fisheries, he highlighted that he does not have the budgetary provision that it goes to this Ministry. And this Ministry, Madam Speaker, as the recommendation there, even though, it is 2014, as of now, they are still trying to deal with maybe three years' applications.

So which means this year's application will never enter their radar this year or even last year. So that, Madam Speaker, goes to show the need that there must be a review done to the allocation for self-help projects in the rural and maritime areas.

Also that goes for the same in regards to help for housing. Even though it is stated here, it is looking good on the budget, and on the Report, but in reality, the allocation is so small. I mean, they will only cater for the Eastern Division, lucky if they can cater for six. So, Madam Speaker, my point is, the Honourable Minister and the Honourable Minister for Economy to seriously consider the

increase of budgetary allocation for this particular projects; the self-help and Housing assistance for the rural and maritime areas. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Vadei?

HON. A.T. VADEI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. With my short contribution to this Report, I would like to highlight to this House that in rural and maritime areas, there used to be a depot in various islands like Gau, Kadavu, which maintains roads in those areas.

In 2014, there was very poor maintenance of roads in our rural and maritime areas, up-till to-date, we have not found any improvement on the budgetary allocation for those areas to be visited, especially those vehicles that have been running in those areas, where they pay the same taxes (road levy) as the ones that are running in urban centres. But they are being disadvantaged in terms of road maintenance in the rural and maritime areas. So these are the concerns raised from the maritime islands in terms of the maintenance of roads in the islands of Koro, Gau, Kadavu, Lakeba, Vanua Balavu and all those areas where they used to have PWD depots. That is my short contribution to this Report. Thank you.

HON.SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to speak in reply.

HON. CDR. J.R. CAWAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. As in the Report, we have raised challenges that have been faced by the Ministry. The Ministry has responded to these challenges and they have taken on board all that have been said in the Report.

So on that note, Madam Speaker, the Ministry is working in rectifying some of the challenges that have been highlighted in this 2014 Report. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to move his motion.

REVIEW REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE POLICE FORCE 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Committee on the Fiji Police Force 2014 Annual Report, which was tabled on 8th February, 2017.

HON. H.R.T. POLITINI.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak on the motion.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister; the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; and the Honourable Members of Parliament. Madam Speaker, I also acknowledge the presence of the Honourable Speaker of the Cook Island Parliament and I thank the Honourable Speaker for gracing the Parliament sitting today.

Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure to brief this august House the review that was undertaken on the Fiji Police Force 2014 Annual Report . First of all, Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Commissioner of Police, senior officers and all the police officers for the much improved performance of the Fiji Police Force in 2014. This is in regards to the Fiji Police Force internal obligation to ensure the safety and security of people of Fiji and its visitors.

Madam Speaker, initially the Committee had reviewed the Fiji Police Force 2014 Annual Report and then invited the Police Force to provide a power-point presentation. In addition to that, the Committee had also undertake a study to visit to all major Police centres in the Suva and Nasinu areas, physically observe and verify what was presented by the Police Force on what is available on the ground.

Madam Speaker, to be very particular, one of the challenges identified by the Committee during the deliberation, consultation and the site visit was the issue about the allocation to cater for their infrastructure, capacity and capability development, leadership development and the review of the Fiji Police Act. Further, Madam Speaker, a budget was also identified as a need in 2014 for the improvement of training, forensic unit, communication, safety and security and most importantly the staff welfare of the police family.

Madam Speaker, whilst we commend the performance of the Fiji Police Force in 2014, however, the Committee found that there are still gaps for improvement. Madam Speaker, given the three years that have lapsed, the Committee anticipated that corrective measures have been in place to address the issues and challengers highlighted in the Committee findings of this Report. Again, I thank the Fiji Police Force for its performance so far and with these few words, Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- The motion is now open for debate and I invite input if any. Honourable Prem Singh.

HON. P. SINGH.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Chairperson of the Committee for their conduct in carrying out the report. I also wish to extend the Fiji Police Force my deepest gratitude for their hard work of keeping Fiji safe.

Madam Speaker, the 2014 Fiji Police Force Annual Report revealed a few issues that may be relevant today and the key recommendations were:

An increase of budgetary allocations in these four areas and these are;

- 1) infrastructure;
- 2) capacity and capability development;
- 3) leadership and development; and
- 4) review of the Fiji Police Force Act of 1965.

Madam Speaker, on the first point, infrastructure will allow the police to improve their services, decrease response time and better serve the Fijian people. It is absolutely vital that this is looked into in a systematic and organised manner, in order to make the best use of taxpayers fund. I commend the Government's effort in trying to bring about change in police infrastructure.

However, Madam Speaker, I believe and I am sure all the Honourable Members in this House will agree that there is still a lot more that needs to be done. For example, the number of police officers available per thousand people was 4.97 in 2007 and actually decreased to 4.46 in 2014. In other words there were only four police officers available for 1,000 people in 2014 compared to 5 in 2007.

Madam Speaker, I refer to the findings in the report. There is an issue - retention of staff. These could be due to retirement of police officers, migration, disciplinary processes, et cetera. That is one area that we had to build capacity and empower the Police Force. Madam Speaker, I also believe in the appropriation of technology to ensure that police officers receive the best assistance as possible during the conduct of their duties.

The police should never be put in a position where they are underequipped to deal with the ever increasing complexity towards a crime that they come across. The training of experts here at home is also very important and in that respect, I encourage the Government to consider offering more scholarships in the areas of forensic, tact forensic and so on.

On leadership and development, Madam Speaker, it needs to be enhanced so that the police service has a co-ordinated approach in the conduct of their duties. When police officers who have spent their lives in the service of the force are overlooked, then there is discouragement, Madam Speaker.

On the review of the Police Force Act of 1965, I hope it will not be fast-tracked in this House like many other important pieces of legislation that have gone through. There has to be input from the public and those who are directly involved in the Force so that there is indeed a Police Act fit for the 21st Century. I hope that the Government will ensure that this happens and not an under cooked piece of legislation that Parliaments of the future will curse us for.

Madam Speaker, I once again thank the Committee for their report and I hope that the few suggestions that I have made are taken into consideration. Thank you.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I just want touch on the recommendations here regarding capacity and capability development.

Madam Speaker, I am in the Committee that scrutinises the FIU Annual Report and in there a lot of the officers are highly trained. They develop skills that are very marketable and most of them are poached by other countries or other jurisdictions. So it behoves us, Madam Speaker, to ensure that they are well paid and we look after them and we do not lose these people. It takes a long many years to train them to reach that level of competency, which as I said becomes very marketable.

Others within the ranks, Madam Speaker, to be encouraged to take up additional studies, we have our scholarships in here that should be made available to them. I know we speak about TELS, we speak about other scholarships, it could be made easier for them to take on extra studies and become proficient in the way you want them to be. Just based on the TELS situation, Madam Speaker, I just want to clarify something here. We spoke yesterday about this, that we are talking about the burden to our students on TELS and I made a comparison with America and I was told that in America it is funded by financial institutions.

Madam Speaker, whether it is funded by financial institutions or by government, the point is, the burden on our youth and that is one thing that I hope the Government would always remember.

Madam Speaker, also on this is the staff welfare, and again we need to look after them, not only the specialists but the general workforce in the police. You hear stories of the work they did with the recent tragedy of the pilots; the hours they had in there, the difficult terrain - they need to be properly rewarded, Madam Speaker.

Yesterday, Madam Speaker, we spoke about starting another pension scheme and we were told of the audacity to come up with something to rival FNPF. Madam Speaker, the pension scheme has been in the works for many years, I have never had a say in it, RBF has been working on it. There is a Bill that is now with the Solicitor-General that should come to this Parliament. We are now told that FijiFirst Government does not want a scheme. What I am saying here, Madam Speaker, is this, FNPF has failed a lot of us; 3,000 people signed a petition protesting about the scheme at FNPF.

What we want to do is to make sure those young constables who are starting out today are not like us. We started out with a promise from FNPF, come our time to retire FNPF says, "I am sorry, I am not going to keep my contract with you, I am going to reduce your pension." So what it is, is the choice for people to make to choose the pension scheme that will best reward them, that is basically what it is.

You cannot hold people hostage to a scheme that has reneged on its duty of care to people. That is why, Madam Speaker, our party will push for it. It has been there for quite some time, the people of Fiji should have a choice on where they want to put their money, who is going to guarantee them a better retirement.

Madam Speaker, on that note I support the report, I support the Police Force and I believe they should be well looked after and the recommendations here should be implemented. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I wish to make brief comments in relation to this and of course I limit my comments to the audit findings for this Ministry in 2014 that was tabled under Parliamentary Paper No. 64 of 2014.

The Police Department of course had a budget in that year (2014) of \$102 million and most of this, of course, were used for salaries and wages.

In terms of the accounting process, the only comment that the Auditor-General found was in relation to the FNPF issues, otherwise it was very good; no comments. So, here we have clerks and accountants in the Ministry who are doing their work properly in terms of accounting procedures and accounting things.

On capital works, projects and assets, the Auditor General found nothing.

HON. SPEAKER.- You are still quoting from the Auditor General's Report?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes. Nothing at all. Unlike, if I may say, the other Ministers have commented on. So, thank you very much to the Honourable Minister, especially and please thank your staff from me especially and this House for doing a very good work; very good accountants, very good asset managers there, unlike others.

(Laughter)

If I may say so in disciplined forces, this is one which gets very little benefit, they are overworked, they are less paid, and I hope that in time their pay will be increased.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, please.

On the Annual Report for 2014, the only comment that I wish to say, looking at the crimes statistics that they had for that year, the highest was damaging property and then you have house break-in, fraud and false pretence and assault, but there is a tendency looking back at their six-year record of increase in sex related offences. I am not sure how we will tackle that, I leave it to the Government. There are many things and these statistics speak for itself that this is an area for concern and I hope you will look into it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- Support it?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, I support it, of course.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to make a very brief contribution on this motion and I make reference to the usefulness of Beat Patrol. Madam Speaker, when I came to the university when we were students in the 1980s, we used to walk from the USP to

the city, we used to walk to Raiwaqa, we used to have two theatres in Raiwaqa (Raiwaqa A and Raiwaqa B).

One of the most important features of policing in the 1970s and 1980s, Madam Speaker, was police beat, police were actually moving around the communities, streets, there were three shifts and a lot of the crime prevention strategy and the reassurance and the confidence in the public was through the police beat patrol and over the last 20 years, Madam Speaker, what I have seen is that very

important aspect of policing has been completely eroded. You do not see police officers in the community, around the city. Usually, you see them in Police Posts and it is not their fault.

I think two things have happened. Firstly, the manpower itself, there has been a lot of emphasis on military budget over the last 30 years in this country, but we have not actually put in a lot of emphasis on building a police force and building a police force in a way that we can improve the crime prevention strategy and actually have a very clear understanding of how police beat, police patrol can be a deterrent to all sorts of crime.

So, I really think and I thank the Committee for actually bringing this up because it is a very important aspect of policing and it is a very good strategy for crime prevention. I do hope that when the Committee actually looks at other annual reports for 2015, 2016 and 2017, they would actually spend a bit of time looking at the strategies for crime prevention. Of course, Madam Speaker, we need to increase the strength of the police force, their numbers as well as improve their condition. I know Government has addressed some of the issues in terms of pay but when you compare the police pay structure, Madam Speaker, it is not commensurate with the objective that we want to set up for the police force in terms of our overall strategy to reduce crimes.

So, I really would urge the Committee when they look at the 2015 report, they need to look at, at least two aspects of policing; one is patrol and the other one of course is the numbers and improving the terms and conditions and their salaries. That would be a very strategic way to prevent crime in this country. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Madam Speaker, very briefly, I would just like to thank the Police for the work that they are carrying out. In 2014, Madam Speaker, many of us have forgotten that they were there for the first time carrying out work that was very new in a new system of Elections which is the *D'Hondt* method Madam Speaker, and we expect them to be just as good or even better this year.

Just looking at the Annual Report 2014 on page 28, where they have the Criminal Records Office, where in preparation for the 2014 General Elections they had to vet 268 political party candidates (all of us here and those that stood in the Elections) and 22,771 polling day workers. This year they will be even more, Madam Speaker. So, I would like to thank them for the work that they carried out in 2014 and the high expectations that we all have for the General Elections this year.

In terms of the *Duavata* Community Policing, Madam Speaker, which is an initiative that goes right down to the village level, I would like to commend the police who come from the Nausori area and also Suva South because they do great work in terms of crime prevention and also following up on any cases that are reported to them. And also I commend the police on the Crime Stoppers Programme that they go into the schools and working with the school communities.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, in terms of assets, we know that they have been given many more vehicles this year but in terms of boats, I am looking at their report, in which it says that they have one fibre glass boat in the Central Division, two fibre glass boats for the Eastern Division, and the Western and Northern Divisions which has much more coast line area that they need to police, I do not see anything in terms of boats.

Other Members have already brought in the House the need to increase their budget, Madam Speaker. This is in particular yachts that are arriving on different shorelines, the drugs that may be brought into the country that we may not be able to manage. That is just one concern that I am bringing up here which others have brought up also, Madam Speaker, in terms of the budgetary allocation for the police and here it is to do with boats. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I call on Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I would like to thank all the police officers for the wonderful job they are carrying out in looking after our safety and keeping law and order. Also I want to thank the Committee for their report, however, Madam Speaker, I would like to make a general statement. This is an Annual Report for 2014, we are in 2018, so I hope that in the future, reports will be due in time so that when they are scrutinised, the work of the Committee is not wasted. The recommendation they make will be implemented and not left unattended.

Madam Speaker, on the point raised by my colleague, Honourable Nawaikula on the welfare of police officers in respect to the FNPF.

On a personal note, Madam Speaker, when my FNPF was due, I paid for a financial advisor to advise me on options as to how much I should put aside for my retirement. He came up with three options. When I considered them, he advised me, “you put aside whatever you think that will never change your lifestyle.” So I considered that advice and I put aside what I got and that would give me a very good pension when I retire. But unfortunately, Madam Speaker, when the reform came, the pension was reduced by almost 50 percent.

I would like to highlight what the Honourable Minister of Economy had been boasting about that some of the pensioners, some on \$7 pension and they increased their pension to \$100. I mean, Madam Speaker, that is like robbing Tom to pay Peter because they have reduced our pension and they increased the pension of the people on the lower end.

On that note, I thank the Committee for their report.

HON.SPEAKER.- Honourable Acting Prime Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for accommodating my request and I would like to thank the Honourable Members for that too. There was a bit of an emergency.

Madam Speaker, I probably would like to just make a few comments in respect of the budgetary aspects. There was a recommendation about the budget being increased and indeed, it has increased. In this year’s financial year, the Fiji Police Force is getting \$148.8 million compared to the \$111.8 million it received in 2014. I would also urge the Honourable Members to read the Budget Supplement

because it does set out in detail the expenditures. For example, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition is talking about the marine capacity of the Police Force and that indeed is being addressed.

Madam Speaker, the career paths for police officers, this is something that Government has been talking about for quite some time and indeed has implemented it and it was of course reflected in the 2017-2018 budget with the Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) being completed and fully implemented, and there was an allocation of \$15.7 million to ensure that the police officers get their salary increments that they were actually entitled to, in fact that had been languishing for quite some time.

The current Commissioner of Police in fact is doing a fantastic job, not just in respect of getting the police out of the beat which I will come back to later, but also in respect of looking at restructuring the Police Force. The Minister of Defence will tell you that they are working with his Ministry to get a modern police force structure in place, to be able to ensure that we are responsive to the changing needs of our society and changing demographics. For example, as we would have seen, because of population movements there is perhaps no need to have police community posts in certain areas, there is a need to have it in other areas. All those sorts of changes are taking place. As also being highlighted, for example, there is now more need for CCTVs to be able to help them with the modern day monitoring of law and order situations, including curbing crime as opposed to turning up after the crime has actually occurred.

What the Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad talked about, Raiwaqa A and Raiwaqa B was before the 1987 *coup*. That was a long time ago, and as you know the structure of the Police Force is different and as I mentioned yesterday, in the 1987 *coup*, the Commissioner of Police was put in his underpants in the Central Police Station. That obviously had a huge demoralising impact on the Fiji Police Force then in fact, it continued like that for a number of decades.

Today we are rebuilding that, we are rebuilding the structures, we are rebuilding the morale that was actually decimated, we are rebuilding the career paths that were actually decimated because of a person's ethnicity or who they knew, which group they belonged to, which church they went to, which province they came from, all those things.

This is why the Open Merit Recruitment Selection (OMRS) is very critical to be implemented even in the Fiji Police Force. Of course, for the Elections, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you would see also in the budget that there is an allocation made for the police to prepare for the Elections. There is also a certain amount of money that has been reserved in Head 50 depending on when the Elections would be held and then the monies would be released in that respect.

Madam Speaker, it is very interesting to see how the, sorry before I get on to that. The police are also being given 262 new vehicles this year. There is about 69 ongoing vehicles that they have got, which will be replenished, we are changing the cycle. They have also received a 130 new motor cycles. This is the largest stock pile of vehicles that has ever been given to the Fiji Police Force. We have recently of course, received another 50 vehicles from the courtesy of the Chinese Government. All of that, Madam Speaker, builds an enormous level of capacity of the Fiji Police Force to be able to be responsive and to respond to various emergencies or indeed to have that presence in the streets, on our roads, and to be seen so that obviously can act as a deterrence.

Madam Speaker, the other issue of course is that the laws need to be revamped. Yes, the Police Act is old. We need to look at that and of course the law should not be changed prior to the restructure because once the restructure is completed, then we get the level of concentration that is necessary, it gets approved by Cabinet and then of course, we can amend the law according to the structure that is required.

As you know that the Fiji Police Force also has engaged in various other stakeholders including our development partners. Scotland Yard actually has been working through the British High Commission with the Fiji Police Force in respect to the First Hour Procedure, which will of course minimise any statements that are received from people who are arrested for it to be thrown out of courts, to be able to ensure that we are complying with the United Nations Convention Against Torture, all of those changes are being done. The Chief Justice is also carrying out some trials with the Fiji Police Force in respect of video recording of interviews. All of that is on a pilot project.

We, of course has introduced in Parliament yesterday, which we will be debated tomorrow too, we are carrying out amendments to ensure that the Police Force is actually protected from criminal elements in respect of respecting the institution and respecting police officers and assaults on them will now carry heavy penalties and we hope we actually get a unanimous support of Parliament in respect to these amendments to the law.

It is very interesting with the Honourable Members from the other side who seem to grind away the FNPF issue. I think probably many of the things that were said there yesterday were factually correct, probably it did not rest well with them. But the one point I would like to make, and I would like to contextualise it within the Fiji Police Force. The reason why the reforms were carried out was precisely to protect the young police officers because if those young police officers, hey talk about the young police officers. The young police officers, Madam Speaker, those who are in their 20s, by the time they would have retired in 2050, there would have been no pension fund left. That is why the reforms are necessary.

Yes, they may have said something to the Solicitor-General's Office. Of course, it is a fact. There are independent reports, Madam Speaker. No point shaking your head, Honourable Biman Prasad. Independent reports have been telling the various boards of FNPF since the 1990s; change the structure, reform it, otherwise your funds will finish.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- None of the boards, neither the governments had the administrative nor the political will to amend the structure.

That is precisely what it required; administrative and the political will because many of the people who were receiving 19 percent or 25 percent were people who were very well connected too. I do not want to get into that space. That is the space, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter, and this again shows a lack of understanding of administrative systems in Government, if the RBF has sent a Bill to the

Solicitor-General's Office, it does not mean that automatically it will land on the desk of the Attorney-General.

The Solicitor-General is an independent office appointed by the Judicial Services Commission. He gives independent legal advice. He or she, or whoever is occupying the office. It is the Government of the day that brings laws or Bills to Parliament. It is not the Solicitor-General who decides that, it is not the Attorney-General that decides that and in fact Cabinet decides that. Cabinet firstly approves it, then the Attorney-General brings it here. So they need to understand that there is a demarcation. It is the administrative will of the Government of the day to look at various laws and the Solicitor-General is drafting it, it does not necessarily mean that it will get presented to Cabinet.

So again, Madam Speaker, the reality is that, the Fijian Police Force at the moment is on a cast of being modernised. It has now been given enough resources, enough infrastructure, yes, we need to do more and we will do more and we need to be able to attract a lot more competent people also to the Police Force. We need it to be an employer of choice.

We had at one stage in the Police Force, Madam Speaker, a few years ago, where only people from a particular province were hired because the Commissioner of Police came from that particular province.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM .- Those were the shenanigans that took place. Everyone knows that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There were very few people from Nadroga being hired. The Commissioner of Police is from Nadroga. Please tell me one instance where a police officer has been hired just because that particular officer has been from Nadroga.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM Madam Speaker, that is the fact. We currently have an OMRS system with specific career path, we carry out a restructure of the Police Force, to make it a modern Police Force, Madam Speaker, and with awe. It is in the interest of every single Member of Parliament
....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, a point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, a point of order. Standing Order 62 (4)(d), that kind of statement is inflammatory, Madam Speaker, it should be withdrawn.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- That only certain people from certain province who joined the Police Force.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- You cannot make that statement, Madam Speaker, you cannot. You should withdraw it. It is inflammatory and it should not be used.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- I will look at this Standing Order further and then make my ruling later.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I did not say anything inflammatory. I said that in the past....

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- She has made a decision.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sorry, I did not hear that.

HON. SPEAKER.- I will make my ruling tomorrow.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, can I finish my....

HON. SPEAKER.- On that Standing Order, but carry on with what you are saying.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the fact is that I asked Honourable Professor Prasad, he said it happens now and I said, no. Please give me one incident where because the Commissioner of Police is from Nadroga, that only police officers from Nadroga are being hired or there is a particular proclivity. It does not happen because of the OMRS in place. I did say in context prior to that, that it had happened in the past. It is a fact!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, moving right along...

HON. SPEAKER.- Can you move on from there on that particular issue, I will be making my ruling later.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sure, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is that the Fijian Police Force is now on a cast of being modernised. It is now being given enough resources, being given enough infrastructure, getting the right technologies in place, for example, forensic equipment, the right lab equipment and also being able to access technology that is used for modern day policing.

Madam Speaker, from that perspective, the report is welcomed, of course, and the report relates to 2014, but since then, obviously, a number of changes have taken place. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bulitavu?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, just a brief contribution to the motion that is before the House.

Madam Speaker, I will just talk on one of the findings; to restore public confidence. Probably, this is an area that the Executive Government can work upon, especially the Honourable Minister for Defence and also the Police Force on how the Police Force can restore public confidence in their dealings with the public, the increase of brutality cases and other cases where excessive force was being used.

Madam Speaker, I think there is a need to restore public confidence because policing and community policing is how the public works with the Police Force to combat crime. You have got a model in place, the Duavata Police Model which the Honourable Minister had given a Ministerial Statement on last week, and that Model talks about a few *iTaukei* values – the duavata policy, *yalo vata*, *cakacaka vata*, all comes in the Model. I think there are key performance indicators of the Model, probably that needs to be reviewed on how we are engaging with the community and how that is standing out well.

The other problem is on how that Model has actually reduced the crime rate, given the fluctuating percentages that are coming out from the Assistant Police Commissioner in the month of January. There was a 30 percent increase in crimes, but increase of rural crimes, Madam Speaker, leads to illegal activities and other cases of assault and other issues we now hear about that comes out from the community due to the decay of our moral fabric.

Those are few issues that probably the Honourable Minister can take on board, on how we can restore confidence in our community.

The other issue, Madam Speaker, which the Honourable Gavoka had talked about, is the welfare of police officers. The Honourable Minister for Economy has talked about the salary increase announced in the various Budgets, even in the 2017-2018 Budget. But when you talk to police officers, they do not feel the increase because the increase is not factored with the cost of living adjustments, the cost of living through the years and that has to be considered.

The other thing, Madam Speaker, is the internal policy with the Fiji Police Force. When the budget increase of the Police pay was announced, there are other internal policy requirements under the current Police Commissioner.

One is the Required Fitness Level (RFL) requirement within the Force, where a particular officer needs to meet certain other criteria, then he will be eligible for the pay increase. That is quiet discriminatory, Madam Speaker, because they have worked for hours, they have done the job, they are performing under those ranks, so they should be given fair treatment.

The other left out group, Madam Speaker, are the Special Constables. These are constables who are doing police work, they are manning police posts and they also do basic police activities, such as free flowing of traffic, et cetera, but so far, the Government has not announced any pay increase in the last three years for Special Police Constables. I think that needs to be taken on board by the Honourable Minister for Defence, to make budget submissions this year for the next budget on how Police Constables can be considered in their pay increment.

On the Extra Duty Allowance and other allowances which used to be enjoyed by the Police, Madam Speaker, I think there are plenty pending issues with the Force Accountant and the Fiji Police Force, that many still say that they have claimed but they have not been paid, Madam Speaker.

The job as a police officer, once you are without the uniform, you are no longer recognised. That is the culture. When you are still wearing the uniform, you are a recognised officer, Madam Speaker. Once you are out there, you are no longer recognised or the Force does not recognise you any longer. We face this, probably in one of the issues which is still pending within the Committee, that was the police back pay and most of the retired officers had voiced their concern with the Committee in regards to this issue where things were not paid duly to them.

The last thing, Madam Speaker, I would like to raise before I take my seat is probably how can we restore the leadership of this institution, a very important institution, so that the leadership development and the succession remains with career police officers. For the last few years, the change of leadership as the Commissioner of Police, the sudden change of Police Commissioners coming from overseas and another one we have now, we had a few military officers, it is how we can give the position of Commissioner of Police to remain with a career police officer.

The military element, Madam Speaker should be removed from there, to remove the fear that could be there. The way too they operate is totally different from Military style leadership and also community policing because we deal with policing. That transition has to be made, that the police is restored to its original core functions and roles and the values and ethics of the Fiji Police is restored under a leadership which is focussed on policing and not the Military or any other training, Madam Speaker.

That is a very important element that needs to restore the confidence from the top and that confidence will trickle down to the various officers who come under that leadership. That culture is urgent to be reinstated in the Force so that we do not have cases where people do things, they get involved in road accidents using a police vehicle and at the same time, they are sent home without any disciplinary measure or any other avenues for redress. That is happening at the moment. Those are the types and culture of leadership that needs to be changed and it will only change if we have a career police officer at the helm of this institution. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson on Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak in reply.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, in reply, first of all, I would like to make myself clear that this Report is a bipartisan Report, so we all work together as a team to put this Report together.

Madam Speaker, most issues that were raised this afternoon are irrelevant issues to-date which is 2018. The easiest thing in the world to do is to point out what the policing is doing wrong or what the Government is doing wrong. For example, we cannot simultaneously put more time and effort and resources in every emerging priority. There will have to be some give and take. If we want more of something, there will have to be less of something else, and we need to understand that when it comes to making those decisions, there will be inevitable differences of opinion about what those something should be.

Madam Speaker, yesterday, the Honourable Acting Prime Minister and Attorney-General moved the motion on the Crime (Amendment) Bill 2018. The Bill seeks to amend the Crime Act in respect of offences against police officers and I thank this august House for agreeing to the motion. Madam Speaker, this is a positive move in order to protect our police officers in conducting their duties effectively.

Madam Speaker, let me also echo what the Honourable Acting Prime Minister and Attorney-General said, and I quote:“ The police force is an institution that must be safeguarded.”.

Madam Speaker, we are all citizens of this beloved nation and we must provide appropriate support and be ears and eyes of illegal activities happening around us.

Madam Speaker, it is a whole lot easier to talk policing than is to be a police officer, so those are some of the issues we need to be reminded of and I thank you for all the positive comments that have already been given.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defence, I commend the Honourable Minister of Defence, Commissioner of Police, senior officers, men and women of the Police Force for their commitment in carrying out their duties accordingly.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

Question put.

Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes”)

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

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members I now call upon the Leader of Government in Parliament to move his motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m., today to complete all items as listed in today's Order Paper.

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- No, Madam Speaker, I have already stated the intention behind the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is out for debate and I invite comments, if any?

There being no comments, Parliament will vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

That under Standing Order 6, that so much for Standing Order 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m., today to complete all items as listed in today's Order Paper.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of "Noes")

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

Motion agreed to.

In that respect, Honourable Members we will adjourn Parliament. We will break to have refreshments and we will resume at 5 o'clock.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.35 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.03 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we move on to the Ministerial Statements to be delivered by the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, I call on the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Lands and Mineral Resources to table his written responses.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 45(5), I now table my answer to Written Questions Nos. 09/2018, 42/2018, and 45/2018, which was directed to me by the Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Please, hand your report to the Secretary-General)

(Replies to Written Questions handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- I will now call on the Honourable Acting Prime Minister to table his second Ministerial Statement.

28th Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) Meeting

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, once again, thank you for accommodating this and thank you to the Honourable Members.

Madam Speaker, I rise to inform Parliament of the 28th Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) Meeting that was hosted in Nadi from 19th February to 23rd February, 2018.

Madam Speaker, Fiji and the Fijian people have already showcased our ability to organise world class events, not only in sports, of course, but in bringing regional and international meetings to our country as well, and we are proud to have hosted the successful 28th CCEM last month.

Madam Speaker, this is the first time it has come to our Pacific Island nation and, indeed, the first time since it was last held in this part of the world in Australia in the early 1970s.

Madam Speaker, we, of course, are also very keen in looking forward to the hosting of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Annual Meeting next year which will, again, be for the first time in the Pacific.

CCEM, Madam Speaker, address the theme; “Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?”, and we were honoured to have been appointed as Chair of the meeting.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the great work being done by the Commonwealth Secretariat, ably led by the Right Honourable Patricia Scotland QC as Secretary General, particularly in the area of education.

Madam Speaker, the Commonwealth brings together 53 countries with a combined population of 2.4 billion people, of which over 60 percent is under the age of 29. It is of particular importance,

Madam Speaker, to us that 24 of the members or 45 percent of membership are Small Island Development States.

Commonwealth nations, Madam Speaker, faced with many of the same challenges, the great benefit of the Commonwealth is that the member countries are national partners in development due to our shared histories, traditions and common language.

Madam Speaker, the Commonwealth member nations share a strong commitment to addressing the issues in the areas of education and climate adaptation. Both of these are critical to securing a sustainable future.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, as our Honourable Prime Minister had said many times, all nations they are in the same canoe together. As such, it was fitting that the logo of Fiji CCEM which was designed by a Fijian student featured a *drua* being guided by a four pointed star representing Sustainable Development Goal 4, which, of course, is Quality Education - Ensure Inclusive and Quality Education for all and Promote Lifelong Learning.

Madam Speaker, the time frame set at the very beginning by the Climate Focus Opening Ceremony, where two of our young Fijian Climate Change Warriors; 12 year old Timoci Naulusala of Tailevu and 11 year old Shalvi Sakshi from Nasarawaqa in Vanua Levu, impressed the audience with their speeches and performances in the same way that they had amazed the audience in Bonn at the COP23 negotiations in November last year. There is no doubt that this made for a wonderful opening to our conference and a treasured memories for our fellow Commonwealth members. In fact, many commented on how well these two young people spoke.

Madam Speaker, this is the first conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers to convene since the adoption in United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Fiji CCA reflected a new direction of the Commonwealth Secretariat to involve civil society in its broadest form with the organisation of Integrated Partners Forum (IPF), producing vibrant and diverse debates on important issues, as well as an inclusive approach to development policy.

The IPF, Madam Speaker, brought together presenters from student organisations, higher education, civil society organisations, teacher union groups, teacher groups and ran parallel with sessions for members of the Commonwealth of Learning, which is called the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) .

Overall, there are four lady delegates attending the IPF before and in parallel to the ministers meeting. There was a multiple set of ideas revolving on commonwealth values, including democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance.

The key themes addressed by the IPF were Education for Sustainable Development, Building Resilience through Education, Education Governance and Management and all of these, Madam Speaker, addressing the issues of inclusive and equitable quality education skills development, lifelong learning, accountability in education, sustainability and resilience, quality and equity.

Of course, Madam Speaker, it included financing of education, societal barriers, including drug abuse and internet social media, and the advocacy for education, strategies across the SDGs, including many of the challenges that are faced today by teachers who have to deal with access to technology which, of course, has its own downside.

All these issues are relevant for us here in Fiji, Madam Speaker, particularly as we pursue an integrated approach in education to address the skills gap, which will ultimately help us to continue growing our economy, and make our growth sustainable for future generations.

Madam Speaker, prior to the Ministers' Meeting, we also organised a Small States Meeting which was attended by 18 delegations representing countries that share similar geographic based challenges.

This high level meeting, Madam Speaker, also served as an opportunity to prepare for the CCEM itself, allowing participants to develop a united voice that ensured the unique perspective for Small States and, indeed, how their voices should be heard.

Madam Speaker, the main issues addressed by the Small States included:

1. the impact of climate change, particularly as we, in the Pacific, and others in the Caribbean have experienced through cyclones which have severe impacts on schools, I should say;
2. financing education with the focus on infrastructure, accountability, procurement challenges, their lack of trained early childhood education teachers;
3. preparing for teaching and learning, including training and re-training our teachers to support them to provide quality education.

Madam Speaker, the fact that the Small States are doing better than before is attributed to the commitment from the Commonwealth as a whole to share policy solutions to the Commonwealth Secretariat and ensure education sector plans are aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, we must not rest on our laurels, Madam Speaker, efforts still need to be made to close the gaps between the large and small nations in the Commonwealth. We will continue to keep the interests of the Small States high on the agenda.

Madam Speaker, the last meeting of the CCEM in Nassau in the Bahamas, they established the Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG), as an Executive to ensure that the policy direction contained in the Communiqué is actually implemented through a Peer Mentoring system.

We are happy to declare that Fiji has been asked to Chair the EMAG through the next three years. Madam Speaker, EMAG met in Nadi and provided a report on its progress over the past three years and Fiji, of course, now being the Chair, look forward to leading the Commonwealth in the area of education, just as we are leading the world in confronting climate change.

Madam Speaker, we are also able to meet colleagues from Australia, New Zealand and India to discuss areas of co-operation and we will announce more details in due course, some of which we have alluded to already.

Madam Speaker, we were also able to extend invitations to the Honourable Secretary-General to open the Telecentres that we have been doing in Korovuto College in this particular instance; the Honourable Minister from New Zealand to open the Telecentre in Lautoka Andra College; the Honourable Minister from Australia to commission the rehabilitation work done after *TC Winston* in Vunisamaloa Sanatan Primary School; and the Honourable Minister from India to commission the Rabulu Primary School Staff Quarters damaged by *TC Winston*. They indeed were very complimentary of the Government's efforts in respect of the rebuilding of schools, in particular after *TC Winston*.

I would also like to take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to thank the schools for graciously opening their doors to our distinguished guests, in helping deepen our "people-to-people" ties with our partners in the development around the world. And as I mentioned also, Madam Speaker, I spoke to the Australian High Commissioner earlier this morning, where we hope to get a letter in respect of probably in education, the Minister is very keen to help us on a bilateral basis with respect of the review of the technical colleges to do a Gap Analysis, and also in respect of upgrading our curriculum, in particular in the area of the English language.

Madam Speaker, we are delighted to announce during the CCEM, Cabinet's decision to join the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), and we look forward to working with COL to support the further development of the Technical College of Fiji and meet our technical and vocational education and training of TVET requirements.

COL, Madam Speaker, works with governments to capitalise on new and existing technologies to improve and expand access to education and training while embedding gender equality into the process. This is what we need in Fiji, leveraging technology in an exclusive way that allows our knowledge-based society to continue its development and allows Fiji to implement cutting-edge approaches to address cyclonic needs.

Our membership in the COL will give us new opportunities to put bright tools and new technology into the hands of Fijian students and create classroom environment that every level of the Fijian education system that best prepare students for the demands of the modern place. Of course, Madam Speaker, COL also works with what you call, "life-long training", for those students who are also adults who may need re-training should they want to change their career paths.

Madam Speaker, we are also privileged to listen to presentations on the three former Heads of State or Government at the CCEM: the Right Honourable Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand; the former Minister of the United Nations Development Programme, His Excellency the President Jake Kikwete; the former President of Tanzania and Member of the International Commission for Financing Global Education Opportunity and also His Excellency Anote Tong, the Former President of Kiribati and the Chair of the high level group established to review the Commonwealth Secretariat's Governments' Arrangements.

Madam Speaker, all of these distinguished guests provided valuable insights into the areas of work. That was a clear example of how influential and impactful the COL can be in furthering access to education.

Madam Speaker, at the end of the CCEM three-day Meeting, the Commonwealth Ministers acknowledged that we share similar needs among our countries, that the opportunities to work together are many, that we need to spend intelligently, and that we need to make use of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Innovation and Education Hubs, as well as their health and other implementation tool kits.

There are also some key issues identified for us to consider implementing within our national jurisdiction:

1. Performance: We need to set achievable targets, ensure standards are met and ensure that the teachers are at work teaching. (Here, I refer to comments from other countries, not necessarily made by Fiji).
2. Innovation and how we harness technology.
3. Workforce: Planning for our needs now and in the future, not just in the education sector but in the economy generally.
4. Inclusion, so that children-at-risk and particularly, young girls and students with disabilities can be catered for.

These big-picture issues are of relevance to every nation in the Commonwealth and we are taking steps in Fiji to build upon our own success in addressing these issues. We look forward to the Workforce Initiative that the Commonwealth Secretariat will be launching later this month which will assist us in our planning approach, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, our track record and continued commitment to the education of the Fijian people make us very proud of the Nadi Declaration that emerged from the 28th CCEM. The Declaration affirmed that education can deliver in terms of sustainability and resilience, and had identified four key areas highlighted in moving education forward throughout the Commonwealth:

1. Education governance and management;
2. Building resilience through education;
3. Education for sustainable development; and
4. Strengthening educational partnerships.

Madam Speaker, we are already making tremendous progress in addressing these issues in Fiji, and we would like to speak on some of them on what is already happening in Fiji and that we are able to share with the Commonwealth partners.

Government's commitment to education is seen most clearly through our record allocation of \$964.5 million in the last financial year towards education. That is approximately 21 percent to 22

percent of our total National Budget and, of course, it includes the rebuild. These specifics on allocation have been detailed before Parliament and show clearly that yet again, we are putting our priority in the next generation, we are putting our resources towards building a better and brighter future for young Fijians.

In the 28th CCEM, we shared our experience in making education free for the first time in history, along with our introducing free-text books, subsidised transportation, our development of early childhood education and our work to massively expand access to merit-based scholarships and affordable tertiary loans, along with access to technical colleges.

Madam Speaker, we also shared our game plan for hiring and training quality teachers to rebuild the profession in Fiji and recognition of the critical role teachers play in developing our young people and ultimately developing our country.

We have continued our support to teachers in their professional development, for example, in instituting student-free days to provide a space for them to exchange best practice and participate in training opportunities.

Last year, our teachers received pay-rises through our job evaluation exercise and we established a merit-based system of recruitment and advancement, and reforming the Ministry's human resources to better support our teachers so that they can remain solely focussed when educating the teachers.

The Ministry is preparing to develop a strategic plan for the education sector which sets our vision at every level of the education system. Our school system needs a stronger linkage to technical and vocational education, and to our higher education system so that more of our students can go to university and take advantage of the record funding towards scholarships and affordable tertiary loans, and of course, get a tie-in in respect of what other job requirements are in the employment market.

We are rightly proud of Fiji's eight straight years of economic growth and by increasing cooperation within our education system from early childhood through to the higher education sector and our addressing the need for relevant and high value skills identified by both, public and private sector, we will keep our economy prosperous.

Madam Speaker, we are also putting in the time and resources today to build a sustainable resilient future for education in Fiji. The 2007, 2017 Census give us valuable information that we are using to identify trends and target resources, particularly towards delivering adequate infrastructure in our schools that accounts to current needs and future growth as well.

We are also rebuilding and constructing schools to new standard of resilience in preparation for the stronger and more frequent cyclones predicted to impact our region as we have discussed before.

There is an urgent need, Madam Speaker, to reassess our school curriculum to more effectively embed material and lesson plans that relate to the SDGs, human rights and anti-corruption. We also should consider seamless curriculum framework from Year 1 to Year 13, the Fiji Tertiary Education and TVET Systems, Madam Speaker, including things like civic education.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, we are proud to partner with the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) to embed anti-corruption. There are a number of subject areas within the Fijian Education System.

Fiji is now only one of four countries in the world undertaking this approach in education. So again we are taking the lead and the eyes of the world is upon us as we pursue this innovative new partnership.

Madam Speaker, it is critical that we focus our efforts on supporting more of our young people to finish secondary school and develop skills that lead them to high paid jobs in our growing economy in both the formal and an informal sectors. We also need to foster mentality shift so that more young people go on to become job creators rather than simply seeing themselves as job takers. That is why we are doing so much to instil a culture of entrepreneurship among Fijians at every age. All of that can only be built upon a strong foundation of literacy and numeracy for every Fijian everywhere in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the bottom line is that our education system is on the right track. The world is taking notice and we have many partners around the world willing to work with us in educating our citizens. Over the next few months we are going to see real impacts from a reformed programme in education, along with our developing partnerships in the form of most support to our teachers, resources for our students and an overall improvement in the quality of all levels of our education system.

Madam Speaker, we are already making significant progress towards realising aspirations set out in the *Nadi Declaration*. We look forward to working with all of our member countries to help address these key issues. We are glad to say that our hosting of the conference was heralded as a big success by representatives. The Secretary-General herself during the final media conference. Every Fijian can be proud that in this event we again showcased that Fiji is more than capable of hosting major international gatherings.

Madam Speaker, during CCM, the Right Honourable Secretary-General hosted the Commonwealth's first ever "Big Lunch" a series of community focussed events that are being held throughout the Commonwealth in the lead-up to the Heads of Government meeting in London this April. During the lunch, Madam Speaker, interestingly, the Secretary-General asked our two youngest participants a candid question, "What do you want our leaders to do?" These Fijian students with wisdom beyond their years responded that we need to 'walk the talk and to act'. Madam Speaker, this Government is 'walking the talk', we are acting and we are doing so for the sake of our children and by direct extension Fiji's future. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. RO T.V. KEPA .- Thank you Madam Speaker. I rise to give our response to the Honourable Minister of Education and Acting Prime Minister on his Ministerial Statement on the *Nadi Declaration*. At that meeting, Madam Speaker, Ministers' emphasised the need to make high quality teaching a priority and tackle the challenges faced in education. This means a conducive teaching and learning environment is crucial to a good education.

In this regard Madam Speaker, for teachers who are on the front line, they must be in a positive frame of mind to deal with the school environment. This means that teachers must be fairly treated. If given a contract, the contract must be honoured. If the contract is up for renewal and they fulfil the requirements, renew the contract, but please do not leave them hanging around weeks on end waiting and waiting, with no pay and no word for the powers that be to make their decision. So what we are asking the Ministry to do is to be proactive, get their act in order and when the teachers are given a contract please give them a fair wage.

Madam Speaker, we understand that the Ministry has a new Minister and a new Permanent Secretary. Both of them are new so they must learn to listen, have a good listening ear to the stakeholders, the officials, those who have been there, those who have the qualification, the experience and expertise, they must learn to *talanoa* with these people. They must listen to them and may be they might learn something.

Madam Speaker, the 20th Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers meeting in Nadi recognised a need to invest in Early Childhood Learning, Technical Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education. This means when the students graduate there must be a good fit between the institution that they are coming from and the industry they are going into so that there is no skills gap.

Madam Speaker, we welcome what the Honourable Minister has just told us here that he has had a meeting with the Australian High Commissioner in which they are looking at the gaps analysis study and we welcome that and we hope that he will bring that information to this House when that is done, we will also know what is needed in our country.

Whilst we are looking at higher education this does not mean burdening our young Fijians with student debt by forcing them into TELS. There must be a better way of providing tertiary education for them and this is one area that we will definitely address in our Manifesto.

Madam Speaker, at that meeting, the Ministers and the Commonwealth Secretariat were also urged to continue its work on the curriculum framework on sustainable development. All Sustainable Development Goals must be supported, implemented and strengthened including STG 4, which aims to ensure universal education for all. This does not mean exposing our young people to the most outdated and outrageous education system in Fiji. The curriculum in Fiji needs to be reformed, hence we still await the Education Commission to be set up as promised by the FijiFirst Government to review the educational system in Fiji.

(Honourable Member interjects)

By yourself, Honourable Member. This Education Commission, Madam Speaker, can address the issues highlighted in the *Nadi Declaration* that need to be addressed urgently and whether 2017 Census can be an important reference in this regard.

Madam Speaker, that meeting stressed the need to promote climate change awareness through mass education beyond the classroom. This does not mean leaving students in tents and debilitating classrooms two years after Cyclone Winston where students are still exposed to some of the worst educational environment in the Pacific. This does not mean denying young people a say on important

environmental issues like mining, unsustainable logging, dumping of wastes into our streams and rivers and on issues like coral bleaching.

Madam Speaker, young people use groups or networks like the Bua Urban Youth Network to speak up, yet the State refuses to engage them. Now the Honourable Minister is trumpeting the *Nadi Declaration* which we agree to some of the issues that have been highlighted in his statement. We understand that there is going to be a national

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD .- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. Madam Speaker, as always it is appreciative when we host important meetings like this, it is important for the country and important for all of us. Invariably, these meetings bring out recommendations like the *Nadi Declaration* and it is of course incumbent upon us to look at those outcomes and declarations and measure that against what we do in our country.

Madam Speaker, I just want to pick a few outcomes which I believe is worth highlighting. Outcome 16, the Honourable Minister pointed out that our budget allocation is probably around the globally agreed levels already so that is an achievement, but Madam Speaker, budget allocation according to global benchmarks is one very important indicator of how we are doing, but there are other areas which will determine whether we are actually achieving the outcomes that we intend to.

Outcome 22 recognises the importance of multi sectoral coordination and support to promote Early Learning, and Outcome 23, recognises the need to invest in Early Learning with the goals of providing universal primary education. I want to acknowledge the former Honourable Minister who actually started addressing the issues for pre-school early childhood education and bringing the teachers into the mainstream. I think that has been recognised as an important contribution and development with the education system.

On Declaration 31, Madam Speaker, which talks about the roles of the youth, Commonwealth countries actually talks about how we can inculcate universal and humanistic values through peace, education, creating better understanding of social rights and responsibilities and respecting cultural and religious diversity through formal and informal education and training. Here, Madam Speaker, I want to say that in the last 10 or 12 years we have actually developed that culture of control, fear and intimidation, and I am worried about our youth in universities and other technical colleges. I would suggest Madam Speaker, and I have read in the Newspapers about the participation of youths in the Commonwealth Minister's Meeting in Fiji. In fact, Madam Speaker, I believe that many of our young people in the universities and other tertiary institutions have not had the ability or have not had the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to organise themselves independently and contribute to the debate, the discourse. This is very, very important, Madam Speaker, and I can say this very clearly, Madam Speaker, when we come into Government we are going to allocate special funding to universities and colleges so that students in the country organise nationally and be able to present themselves into important forums and internationally represent their views. I think it is very important, Madam

Speaker, for our young people to actually engage themselves independently and discuss issues of concern to them.

Finally, Outcome 38, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Ministers were requested to work with different regional organisations, I hope we will see some plans and endeavours to do that.

The final one, Madam Speaker, in closing and perhaps most pertinent one I believe is for the Government to consider Outcome 41, where Commonwealth Ministers are encouraged to develop stakeholder engagement policies and mechanism that ensure teachers, civil society such as those in the trade union movement, private sector, young people as active participants.

Madam Speaker, this Government has been one of the most damaging Government in terms of breaking this partnership between teachers, unions, management. I would urge the Government and the Honourable Minister to build that support instead of breaking communities. Madam Speaker, in many countries Government actually put in money to get the community, the school committees to be engaged in the system. Here we have done the opposite, and I once again implore the Government to make sure that we engage the unions, the management, the teachers in taking the education reforms forward. Thank you.

(Honourable Members interject).

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Public Enterprise, Civil Service and Communication to deliver his third statement.

National Minimum Wage

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to provide a statement and clarification on the issue of National Minimum Wage, which of course many political parties and aspiring candidates are talking about without explaining the consequences and the real truth behind it and of it, but more importantly the impact on the economy, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let me first contextualise and put this issue into perspective and give a few straight facts. It is the Bainimarama-led Government, Madam Speaker, that introduced the first ever National Minimum Wage in 2014.

HON. GOVT. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Since then, Madam Speaker, it has been reviewed and increased twice and currently stands at \$2.68 per hour, we have another review planned this year.

Madam Speaker, it is important to note that this rate is only for unskilled workers and those who are not part of the 10 Sectorial Wage Categories. Madam Speaker, those workers that fall under the 10 Sectorial based categories of course have their own minimum rate or wages which is higher than \$2.68, which of course many people when they discuss this topic do not tell others or fail to understand it themselves. So for example, Madam Speaker, a Foreman in a building sector has a minimum rate of \$5.22 an hour; a Tradesman has a minimum rate of \$4.30 an hour; an Underground

miner in the mining industry has a minimum rate of \$4.69 an hour; a Log truck driver in sawmilling and logging industry has a minimum rate of \$4.25 an hour. There are many other categories under the Employment Relations Minimum Wage Regulations 2015 which was amended in 2017 by the Employment Relations (Amendments) (NMW) Regulations, 2017.

Let me reiterate, Madam Speaker, those under the 10 wage sectors, which include the printing trade, wholesale and retail, hotel and catering trade, garment industry, sawmilling, logging industry, road transfer, building and civil electrical engineering trade, manufacturing industry, mining and quarrying industry and security services at a minimum rate of more than \$2.68 an hour. Any employer that does not comply with this Regulation should be reported and action will be taken against them. There seems to be a lot of misinformation about the minimum wage and its related regulation, Madam Speaker.

It is also the area that the Opposition have used to try and gain political mileage, Madam Speaker, but the truth of the matter is this, many employers are in effect at the moment paying far more than the National Minimum Wage and the wage rates under the 10 Sectorial Wage Categories as has been highlighted in number of occasions. The buoyant economy and the high labour demand in many sectors by construction, electrical and engineering services, manufacturing, hotels and retail trade naturally pushing up the wages to the market. For example, Madam Speaker, workers minimum wage is set at \$3.50 an hour is actually being paid about \$7 an hour and other professions in high demand like qualified Electricians are getting as high as \$12 an hour.

As I mentioned in Parliament before, Welders are getting paid \$15 to \$16 an hour, construction workers, Madam Speaker, also getting far more because of the construction boom we are currently experiencing. We have heard the stories so many times, Madam Speaker, that construction workers move to the next contractor because he or she is willing to pay \$1 more or \$0.50 more or \$2 more than the current employer. These increase in wages, Madam Speaker, is based on productivity equivalents and it is market driven which means it is affordable for the employers and also adequate to attract and retain these workers. It is more sustainable, economically and financially sound, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, there are many on the opposite side of the Parliament, the many aspiring political candidates are advocating an Arbitrary National Minimum Wage increase to \$4 and \$5 an hour. I understand SODELPA is \$4 an hour and NFP is \$5 an hour. These numbers, Madam Speaker, appear to be plucked out of thin air to gain political mileage and lure ordinary Fijians. Such promises will actually harm ordinary Fijians and disrupt businesses and the economy and put people out of jobs and diminish job creation, Madam Speaker. It is not only about those who are already in employment we have to talk about those who need to be coming into employment. We want, Madam Speaker, to receive of course high rates. The Government of course wants that and we constantly carryout review, Madam Speaker. However, Madam Speaker, we cannot fix these rates recklessly as being proposed by the other side. Reality, we need wages to remain affordable for the employees and employers to be able to pay a rate that is sustainable. We also need to ensure it does not have inflationary impact on our economy.

Madam Speaker, that is why determination with minimum wage needs to be done in a responsible manner based on affordability and productivity improvements. We need to be able to help as many Fijians as possible without disrupting the economy. Raising the minimum wage rate to the

level suggested by the Opposition will actually cause job losses. For example, Madam Speaker, many of us employ a domestic help unfortunately in Fiji we still call people house girls or housemaid. I can guarantee, Madam Speaker, there are many people maybe within this complex and outside this complex actually do not pay their house girls \$2.68 an hour which they should be. With the national minimum rate, Madam Speaker, increased arbitrary to \$5 an hour I can guarantee you, Madam Speaker, that many of these employees will no longer be employed. The service simply becomes unaffordable I will tell you why, Madam Speaker, we then create a situation, Madam Speaker, where most of these domestic workers who are previously employed and receiving \$2.68 before are suddenly out of a job. Let me give you an example, Madam Speaker, a stall in Dolphin's Food Court employs three staff paying them about \$3.50 an hour above the minimum wage rates. The rate is increased to \$5 an hour this small restaurant owner or the food outlet probably will have to lay off people and this is not helpful to those workers or the business owner neither the economy as a whole.

Madam Speaker, what would happen to a person who currently earns working outside at \$6 an hour and employs a housemaid at home to look after the children but now they have to pay the housemaid \$5 an hour so the Net that they will get is \$1, will they maintain or find it more economically viable for them to actually stay at home and not pay the \$5 an hour whilst getting \$6 an hour, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, with unreasonable minimum wage you can back the skill workers, those who are already above the minimum wage if he had jumped from \$2.68 to \$5 which is almost double then they will also turn up to their employees and say "look these unskilled people are getting \$2.68, we are getting \$2.68 now they be given \$5 an hour, I want my salary to be doubled also". Madam Speaker, what this does we will actually help people who paid \$6 an hour and suddenly get \$10 an hour. This will happen across the board and push up wages and prices which will lead to literally enormous inflationary impact. The cost of living will rise along with the price of everything else, Madam Speaker, including butter and lamp chops Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, inflation will accelerate including instability in the economy. No amount of including more items already called basic food items and VAT exemption will salvage the situation.

Madam Speaker, the other sad part people do not talk about, there is approximately 130,000 Fijians who are self-employed, who do not receive wages like market vendors, the taxi driver who drives by profit sharing, the handicraft seller, the farmer, the fish seller, the hawkers selling *purini* or hot roti and other owners of micro-enterprises will get affected diversely without a single cent increased to their income. They will just end up paying more. This is the reality of what the Opposition is proposing, Madam Speaker.

In fact Madam Speaker, it is not just these 130,000 self-employed that will be at a higher price without any increase to their income. We will all pay this high cost, Madam Speaker, but the burden will be heavy on those in the village, in the farm and the ordinary families. We have seen what the inflation impact has had on the job market in countries like Australia. Jobs have left and gone across borders to other countries into Asia.

Madam, Speaker, first hand they would have to pay \$5 an hour to their farm hands, the babysitters and housemaids. Then they also pay higher price to the bread shop, to the supermarket and the barber shop and even for their groceries. They get hit twice, these are the people who are informally

employed. Madam Speaker, Honourable Mere Samisoni is a business owner, of course, she suddenly has to pay double than what she is paying now or a bit more and she will obviously pass on the cost, which is just the way the businesses are run. So that price of bread will be borne by those people who are customers. Madam Speaker, this will have a price spiral effect and continue to make things even worse off.

Madam Speaker, the reality is we need to understand that at this point in time who will really benefit from the minimum wage of \$5 an hour. No one at all, Madam Speaker, except giving political expediencies to political parties going out and making these types of promises seems like a great idea, the reality is that everyone suffers at the end. People understand these rates spiralling effect, Madam Speaker. Many businesses, many small types of business and people run their own business are concerned about this new discourse that is taking place and they are already talking about foreclosure, Madam Speaker. They also understand the real implication of a promise to pay \$100 per tonne of sugar and at the same time raising the minimum wage rate to \$5 an hour for the labourers. There is no real gain. We can give a \$100 an hour and keep on increasing wages on the other hand what will happen, Madam Speaker, that is the reality if you add up all the cost. Madam Speaker, of course as we know it has been countered by political parties to manipulate ordinary Fijians and jeopardise the economy or for political gain.

Recently, Madam Speaker, one of the provisional candidates we understand of SODELPA gave a public lecture at USP, she as I understand is a recent acquisition from another political party. At the lecture, Madam Speaker, this candidate said or provisional candidate said, I have a recording of this actually in my phone. She agreed that even with the \$4 minimum wage increase that small and medium businesses will get affected by this proposal. She actually agreed to that but then she said, that Government will then step in and subsidise this small to medium size businesses that is going to be affected by the wage rise. What a preposterous, absurd and impractical idea. How is this even administratively possible? Of course, every business would line up to get the subsidy, a costly exercise that will inflate the nation's operating budget. There will be no control over it. Business would naturally be paying higher wages would also come to Government for the subsidy. It is totally irresponsible, Madam Speaker, for the candidate to even suggest such a scheme. If she is saying the small to medium enterprise will get affected \$4 an hour, can you imagine what is going to happen at \$5 an hour.

Madam Speaker, the candidate like the other people also made a claim that there has never been a study by any other bank or financial institution that correlates the hiking of minimum rates with unemployment. Again, Madam Speaker, this is straight false. May be the candidate has not even researched Google, but if you can go on Google on the internet these studies are readily available. Let me quote, Madam Speaker, from a paper done in April last year by the World Bank, and I quote "Most of the evidence suggest that sizable increases in minimum wage are likely to exacerbate unemployment, and the prevalence of informal employment, which could have a negative consequences for labour productivity and businesses as a result of reduced investment in employee training and loss of productive workers". There are many other studies, Madam Speaker, that clearly shows that an unreasonable hike in minimum wage leads to unemployment. There is statistical evidence of this, Madam Speaker, but it also makes common sense you do not have to be a rocket scientist or economist to be able to figure this one out.

Madam Speaker, the Government has taken a reasonable approach which is more sustainable, smarter and effective. The current rate of \$2.68 was determined through a robust comprehensive process that included a nationwide survey on wages and terms and conditions of employment in both the formal and the informal sectors and careful consultations, deliberations with various stakeholders, we also involved an expert in this exercise. Everyone is free to come and give their presentation, trade unions, and also in the same way with the CCN, everyone is allowed to come and speak, the trade unions and everyone else. Stop creating this nonsense there is a fear of culture and nobody comes out and talks. The review took into consideration this is probably trying to justify the lone member turn out to your meeting. The review took into consideration the various income and expenditure support programs provided by the FijiFirst Government to help low paid workers to what we call a sizeable social wage.

There is what we have a sizeable social wage. What is this, Madam Speaker? We will reduce people's pocket expenses so that they are left with money for other things including for rainy days. There is free education provided so that parents do not have to pay \$100 in school fees for children, we also provide free medicine, free water, subsidised electricity, subsidised bus fare, legal aid, price control of certain basic items, low income tax rate and a higher tax threshold of \$30,000 and of course a lower VAT rate. All these are what you call social wages, their target is specifically to those people with low end socio-economic scale, therefore they have more money left in their pocket and they do not actually have to pay for all of that directly.

Madam Speaker, what we are doing we are increasing the spending power of people through these measures and many more, we have lowered the cost of living and significantly improved the quality of life for ordinary Fijian workers. This is what we call target assistance as mentioned. We are also looking at the various inconsistencies within our economy as we have highlighted quite openly that there are many systematic issues within our economy where about five or six companies, Madam Speaker, have a stranglehold on all the products that are sold in the supermarkets. Nearly 60 to 70 percent, we have empowered through the last budget, we have setup an Economic Intelligent Unit within the Ministry of Economy, we have empowered the Competition Commission to actually go behind the scenes and get rid of these monopolistic position, which will actually have a real impact on the price of the many products that are actually being sold in supermarkets. None of the superficial stuff about extending the list of VAT exempted items et cetera. We want to look at the real causes not the superficial causes, Madam Speaker.

Our approach is reasonable, responsible and a smart one. The combination of adequate minimum wage and social wages does help achieve favourable outcomes with working Fijians without compromising the sustainability of the economy. We arrive at a current minimum wage through widespread public consultations, use of the experts and the process which will allow us, Madam Speaker, to increase minimum wage further. But it will be done responsibly, we have already made a commitment to review again this year, Madam Speaker, and that will be done again without anyone getting figures out we will be able to consult, talk, make the discussion inclusive so everyone comes along with it, as to some group of politicians.

We are looking at the future, Madam Speaker, and what is very critical for all of us in this Parliament to understand that we must make sound economic decisions not just for the elections but for the future. It would be very easy for us to say, 'Don't worry we will increase it to \$7 an hour just to compete with them', we could have said that, Madam Speaker, but we did not because we are being

responsible. We are not going to hoodwink the Fijian people. We are going to put in place, Madam Speaker, policies that has sustainability, policies that are not only for elections but policies that are built for the future and the good governance of our country. Thank you very much, *Vinaka*.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Leader of Opposition or her designate to reply.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the Honourable Minister regarding his statement on recent minimum wage and allow me to thank him for enlightening the House for his elaboration on the matter.

Madam Speaker, Labour Rights or Rights of Workers are Human Rights and it means;

1. Meaningful employment;
2. Conducive working conditions;
3. Fair terms and conditions of employment;
4. Just rates for the work performed;
5. Right to collective bargaining;
6. Freedom to excel further as a worker by further training and new development;
7. Other values enshrined in the ILO Convention, including the Rights of the Indigenous People;

We have seen these rights exist on paper but in fact they are not there for the ordinary workers of Fiji. This was made apparently clear in the ATS impasse until the matter was resolved by the decision of the Employment Tribunal.

Madam Speaker, returning to the core issue of Minimum Wage, which is a fundamental right of any worker. Let me begin by asking the Government of the day, what was the national minimum wage rate recommended by Father Kevin Barr Committee as opposed to the initial \$2.32 an hour? We are told that the Barr Committee had recommended \$2.70 an hour, and if that is true then what was the rationale and wisdom for reducing it by \$0.38?

The second statement, Madam Speaker, I wish to make is the formula that is used to devise the National Minimum Wage? Fiji has had the Industrial Wages Council whose recommendations were used to fix hourly rates for workers in respect of various industries. In addition to that, we used to have the National and Economic Summit which expounded upon the ideals and principles of the tripartite approach to labour relation issues in Fiji.

The Opposition submits that this approach was not followed either to fix the initial \$2.32 an hour or the now \$2.60 an hour rate, being the National Minimum Wage Rate.

Madam Speaker, there are number of factors that are taken into account to determine the National Minimum Wage Rate, such as the nature of work, hours of work, effects of work on the mental and physical health of the worker, importance of the industry to the national economy, state of the national economy and most importantly, the cost of living. We are still perplexed whether these considerations were made and if it was, then to what extent, to determine the current \$2.68 national minimum wage rate? We have serious reservations about this rate, Madam Speaker, and let me demonstrate by saying that we are opposed to the current rate and advocate \$4 an hour national

minimum rate. Let me just quote an example, for a \$2.68 an hour rate for a worker for a daily pay he gets \$19.70 to round it off it is about \$20 and for a \$4 an hour the rate of pay for the day will be \$29.44.

A worker currently based on a 40 hour per week net pay earns about \$90 to round off which is \$20 this is to pay for three meals, transport, rent, light, water and other family commitments. The proposed increase to \$4, Madam Speaker, will increase his net pay to \$29 or \$30 a day, which at least helps with the standard daily costs.

Madam Speaker, it is simply disconcerting that we have workers earning the minimum of \$20.00 a day and about a third of it goes in meals, transportation, wear and tear costs. Before I sum it up let me just state for the record Madam Speaker, that the week take home pay of a worker determines their purchasing power as opposed to the rest, in cost of living. While the current rate will worsen the plight we strongly believe that the \$4 hour rate, will uplift the quality of life and standard of living of our people in Fiji.

After all, that is what we are here for, that is to advance the interest and welfare of the people of Fiji. It is about basics: clothes, water, shelter, access to basic services and above all food. It is the table that matters the most not the lullaby GDP sung by this Government. On another note, Madam Speaker, some Government drivers have yet to receive their pay increase as reflected in the 2017-2018 Budget. Some drivers are earning as much as \$6 an hour, while others are receiving \$4 an hour. Can Government address this please?

Finally, Madam Speaker, there is a lot of discussion about aligning our National Policies with Sustainable Development Goals. Unfortunately, the current National Minimum Wage Rate in breach of SDG 1, SDG 2 and SDG 3. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Now I invite the Honourable Leader of NFP or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you Madam Speaker. If I had more than 5 minutes and probably 20 minutes, I would have demolished every argument that the Honourable Minister raised. However, Madam Speaker, for the benefit of those on the Government side, they can go and read my article of 28th October, 2017 where I have actually talked about the need for a Minimum Living Wage. This is a Government, Madam Speaker, which is thriving on fear mongering, they keep saying that \$5 per hour living wage cannot be done and will cause massive unemployment. They said that many employers and small businesses cannot afford to pay \$5 an hour. This is Madam Speaker, actually ironic, you know coming from a controlled freak government which is hell-bent on squeezing every single cent out of businesses in taxes, stamp duties and fines and talks about not having a living wage.

Madam Speaker, living wage is the amount a worker needs to make ends meet if he or she works full time based on the cost of living. Give you, an example, Madam Speaker, even with the \$5 an hour, someone working for 40 hours a week will get a gross of \$200. Takeaway \$16 for FNPF and you are left with \$184. If the person lives in Nausori and works in Suva, probably ends up paying about \$20 wage. You can imagine Madam Speaker, what that person would be left with?

So, Madam Speaker, the evidence that the Honourable Minister talked about from the World Bank, he talked about unreasonable increase in minimum wages. This is what we are proposing Madam Speaker, it is not an unreasonable increase in minimum wages. In fact, there is a lot of international evidence, Madam Speaker, which shows that there is hardly any link between the rise in minimum wages or the growth or loss of employment. In fact, the idea of a living wage is social. It is about reducing inequality, it is about looking after those who are at the mercy of the employers.

Madam Speaker, the NFP's proposal for a \$5 an hour living wage, it is recent, well thought out proposal based on the cost of living now prevailing in Fiji. When we actually put out the details,

Madam Speaker, we know that both the employers and the employees would be happy. In fact, businesses benefit from paying employees a living wage, better paid employees will have better health, better morale, better productivity and greater loyalty to the employers. They have more money to spend on goods and services and that is also good for businesses, Madam Speaker.

So, the idea of a living wage, Madam Speaker, is a very important one and what we are saying, is the Government is talking about a national minimum wage of \$2.68. They are scare mongering about inflation. What we are saying, Madam Speaker, is the cost of living has continued to rise, if you look at the cost of food over the last 10 years, it has actually gone up by about 65 percent. Now, most of the wages of the workers in this country have remained the same, so if you increase the wages, you are actually catching up with the inflation, Madam Speaker. It is not necessary all the time that you increase a living wage, you determine a minimum living wage you are going to create havoc in the economy.

Madam Speaker, there are many employers around the country and I will tell you that the Honourable Minister talked about wages council. I mean the garment industry, I pointed this out last year, Madam Speaker. A garment worker, who had worked for 18 years in a garment factory was receiving \$2.35. This idea of a minimum wage and the fact that there are wages council which have already got higher wages of more than \$4 or close to \$5, that is alright, Madam Speaker. But a large majority of the people in this country today, cannot make their ends meet and that is why it is very important to talk about a living wage. A living wage is a social contract, Madam Speaker, it is not just about ensuring that businesses survive.

In fact Madam Speaker, when we roll out the whole policy, the employers will be happy, the employees will be happy and we are going to create an environment, Madam Speaker, where we will raise productivity. Where we will raise people's income and we are going to create an economic model which will be useful for this country, which will be useful for the workers of this country. The low wage earners of this country, Madam Speaker, and that is the point that this Government is missing. I think what they are doing Madam Speaker, is they are actually scared of our policy because the people understand that, people who earn \$5 a week also understands that, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order to make personal clarification - explanation, Standing Order 80.

HON. SPEAKER.- That is not a personal clarification. You can bring it up as a substantive motion or apply for a personal explanation. You will have to put it in writing to the Secretary-General and when we approve, you can table it tomorrow or Friday. We will move on to the next item on the agenda. Secretary General.

CONSIDERATION OF BILLS

Succession, Probate and Administration (Amendment) Bill 2018

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

- a) That the Succession Probate and Administration (Amendment) Bill 2018 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) That the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) That the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) That the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 15th March, 2018 and that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right to reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again the amendments that are being sought are minor amendments and also brings the Succession Probate and Administration Act in alignment with the existing laws, such as the Family Law Act and indeed, in alignment with our Standing Orders which also recognises de facto relationships. The new reformed FNPF Act also recognises de facto relationships.

Madam Speaker, de facto relationships have been put into all these laws, however, the Succession Probate and Administration Act 1970, which consolidates the law relating to Succession Probate and Administration of Estates of Deceased Persons does not recognise persons in de facto relationship in relation to the granting of letters of administration or the distribution of property upon intestacy. In other words, basically, what it means is that those people who die without making a will and the Succession Probate Administration Act which actually governs as to how the property will be distributed has not been reformed .

The Succession Probate and Administration (Amendment) Bill seeks to amend the law to allow persons in de facto relationships to apply for grants of letters and to set out the entitlement in the scheme of property distribution upon intestacy. The Bill, thus, ensures that progress made over the years for de facto recognition is not curtailed. That the laws of Fiji are consistent in the protection accorded to such persons.

I do not want to go into the details of all the clauses, however, simply to highlight the fact that we all talk about Women's Rights, we talked about Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). We need to also ensure that our laws are actually in alignment, because as we all know, that majority of the people in Fiji who are in de facto relationships, are women. Majority of the people who have actually been marginalised because of them being in de facto relationships, are women. The majority of them are also the victims of the lack of recognition of their de facto relationship as far as property settlement is concerned. In fact, we get this on a daily basis where people who have, for example, generally men who have left their wives, they have entered into relationship with other women or one other woman and have been with that other woman or de facto for 20-30 years. Once the person dies, you see the spouse who was legally married jumps and grabs all the property.

In particular, when there is no will and the law does not actually protect the persons in a de facto relationship nor does it, Madam Speaker, in some instances also give the kind of protection to the children from that relationship. So, now of course, the Family Law Act recognises de facto relationships so therefore maintenance et cetera is catered for, now FNPF actually recognises that.

Now what we need to do is to ensure the recognition of de facto relationship as far as the Succession Probate and Administration (Amendment) Bill is concerned as it will help us cater for that

recognition to these women. Many of whom, unfortunately, we will not be able to provide that level of comfort to them, who have languished but at least we can now do so in the future.

HON. SPEAKER.- The motion is now open for debate and I invite input if any. Thank you. I take it that there is no one. Parliament will now vote.

The Question is:

Pursuant to Standing Order 51,

- a) That the Succession, Probate and Administration (Amendment) Bill 2018 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) That the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) That the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament.

Sorry, I am disturbed here. Can I continue? No I was being disturbed with the noise that is coming from ...

Thank you.

d) That the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 15th March, 2018.

But that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to the Acting Prime Minister, The Honourable Attorney General as the Member moving the motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of “Noes” and “Ayes”)

HON. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote on the Motion. Open the vote. Close the vote.

HON. P. SINGH.- A clarification. I understand that the Attorney-General moved that the Bill would be debated tomorrow.

HON. SPEAKER.- Tomorrow, yes.

HON. P. SINGH.- Yes, tomorrow is fine.

HON. SPEAKER.- Sorry, was this the cause of the disruption? This will be debated and voted upon tomorrow. Thank you, the result of the votes being

Votes cast:

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Ayes - | 28 |
| Noes - | 10 |
| Not voted - | 12 |

There being 28 Ayes, 10 Noes and 12 Not Voted, the Motion is agreed to.

Thank you very much, Honourable Members. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.07 p.m.

