

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 15TH MAY, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	1412
Communications from the Chair	1412-1413
Presentation of Papers and Certain Documents	1413-1414
Presentation of Reports of Committees	1414-1421
Ministerial Statements	1421-1441
COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund (Amendment) Bill 2019	1442-1456
Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (Amendment) Bill 2019 ...	1457-1468
Public Enterprises Bill 2019	1468-1476
Review Report – Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism 2014 Annual Report	1477-1483,1484-1491
Suspension of Standing Orders	1483-1484
Review Report – Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development Housing and Environment 2012-2014 Annual Reports	1492-1501
Public Accounts Committee Report – Audit of Government Ministries and Departments (Volume 1-Volume 4)	1501-1507
Review Report – Fiji National University 2016 Annual Report	1507-1514
Consolidated Report – Fiji Broadcasting Company Limited 2010-2015 Annual Report	1514-1530
Engagement of Landowners in Commercial Agricultural Ventures	1530-1548
Questions	1548-1560

WEDNESDAY, 15TH MAY, 2019

The Parliament met at 10.35 a.m., pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 14th May, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote on the motion.

The Question is:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 14th May, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's Sitting.

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.

Today, I welcome another group of students and teachers from Dudley High School. A most warm welcome to you all, welcome to Parliament and I hope that you will find the proceedings interesting and educational.

House Committee Meeting

For the information of Honourable Members, the House Committee will meet during the lunch break today.

Parliamentary Business

Honourable Members, as you are all aware, we have been sitting late into the night, and in order to finish all the business on the Order Paper for today, I seek leave of the House to shorten the lunch break to one hour instead of two. Does any Member oppose?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. On the same note, I wish to advise Honourable Members that we will only have four speakers, two from each side for each of the motions that will be discussed today. Furthermore, I will limit the supplementary questions to two from each side.

Honourable Whips, please, keep me informed of the list so that we can coordinate and move the proceedings of the House smoothly. Thank you.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, the Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: 3rd Semi-Annual Report. Thank you.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: 3rd Semi-Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

I now call upon the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development, the Honourable Premila Kumar, to table her Report. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism's Annual Report 2015 to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism's Annual Report 2015 to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services, the Honourable Jone Usamate, to table his Reports. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Honourable Speaker, Sir in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the following Reports to Parliament:

1. Fiji Roads Authority Annual Report 2015; and
2. Fiji Roads Authority Annual Report January to July 2016.

HON. SPEAKER.- Please, hand the Reports to the Secretary-General.

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs:

1. Fiji Roads Authority Annual Report 2015; and
2. Fiji Roads Authority Annual Report January to July 2016.

Thank you, Honourable Members, we will now proceed to the next Item on the Order Paper.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Follow-Up Audit on the Management of the Land Reform Programme - Standing Committee on Public Accounts

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to present the sixth Report of the Public Accounts Committee. This Report reviews the Follow-up Audit made on the Management of the Land Reform Programme. The Report summarizes the work of the Committee for this mentioned Report. The Committee scrutinizes the information provided in the Audit Report in relation to the audit context which is highlighted in the audit.

In accordance with Standing Order 110(1)(c) of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji and as directed by the Speaker of the House, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts had been mandated to examine and thereafter submit its findings and recommendations to Parliament on the Follow-up Audit made on the Management of the Land Reform Programme Report.

The main objective of the Committee review on this Follow-up Audit Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 134 of 2018*) was to ascertain how the Land Use Division of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources had effectively implemented and actioned the recommendations of the initial Audit Report of the Auditor-General's Office (*Parliamentary Paper No. 6 of 2015*).

The content of the Audit Report was thoroughly examined by the Committee prior to the consultation conducted with the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources.

The questions raised to the Ministry were focused on the three main audited areas which include:

1. Policies governing the administration of the Land Reform Programme;
2. Systems and processes for land designation and allocation; and
3. Recording and monitoring of land bank activities.

The questions that were raised to the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources during the deliberation of this Follow-up Audit Report were fully answered. The responses from the Ministry were exceptionally positive and the Committee had proposed a few recommendations for the Ministry's takeaway in moving forward with the administration of the Land Reform Programme and most importantly on its audit reporting aspect.

On Monday, 25th March, 2019, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, Mr. Malakai Finau and his Team, appeared before the Committee and clarified those Audit issues that were raised by Honourable Members, especially on the main areas of audit as stated earlier. In the compilation stage of this Report, supplementary questions were raised and additional information was provided by the Ministry of Lands. The Committee agreed to the review process adopted by the Members to scrutinise the audit report until the Report was finalised.

The Committee commends the work of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources in its effort to address the audit issues that were raised and recommends that the Ministry positively takes on board the Committee's recommendations in relation to the audit issues that were highlighted.

I wish to extend my appreciation to all the Honourable Members of the Committee who were part of the successful compilation of the bipartisan Report namely; the Honourable Joseph Nitya Nand, Honourable Vijendra Prakash, Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu. Further, pursuant to Standing Order 115(5), Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi stood in as an Alternate Member to Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat staff for their timely support on research, compilation and submission of this Report.

With those few words, I now commend this Report to Parliament.

Thank you.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Department of Legislature Annual Report 2014-2015 –
Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, the Department of Legislature is the administrative arm of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. It is responsible for providing administrative and support services, including administering funding entitlements for Parliamentary purposes.

The Department is headed by the Speaker of the Parliament, and the Secretary-General to Parliament is the Chief Executive of the Parliamentary Administration and the Principal Procedural Advisor to the Speaker, the Members of Parliament and the Committees of Parliament.

The Department of Legislature had a challenging task of reinstating Parliament, back in September of 2014. Despite this, the Department overcame numerous obstacles to provide the best, effective and efficient secretariat support to the newly-elected Members of Parliament.

This Report will briefly provide a summary of the Department's work, challenges and achievements for the Years 2014 and 2015, as provided in the Department of Legislature Annual Report 2014-2015.

The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights of the last term of Parliament was referred the Department of Legislature Annual Report 2014-2015, by this august House and was tasked to review the Annual Report. The same Report had been re-instated in the new Parliament and has been referred to the current Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Just as the previous Committee, the current Committee was mandated by Parliament to review the Annual Report and report back to Parliament on its findings.

The Committee deliberated on the Annual Report thoroughly and noted a few pertinent matters in its content, which were then discussed with the Department's representatives.

The Committee's Report will cover these mentioned pertinent matters which include:

- The capability of the human resource of the Department in handling the workload;
- Clarification on the roles of certain Units within the Department;
- Clarification on certain administrative roles vested with the Department; and
- Clarification on certain financial anomalies, such as the lack of specifics in the reporting of the operating expenses which were incurred.

Consideration was also given to the requirements of the Standing Orders of Parliament pertaining to the impact on gender when deliberating on the Annual Reports, and it was encouraging to note that gender implications have been considered in all aspects of the Department, beginning with the make-up of its senior management team.

The previous Committee had proposed a few recommendations, which my Committee reiterates in this Report.

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights in the last term of Parliament, for their efforts and input, which have greatly assisted our Committee in the compilation of this Report.

I would also like to thank the current Honourable Members of the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee: Honourable Rohit Sharma (Deputy Chairperson); Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua; Honourable Dr. Salik Govind; and Honourable Mosese Bulitavu, for their deliberations and input; as well as the Alternate Members who made themselves available when the substantive Members could not attend; the staff and the officers of the Secretariat and the representatives of the Department of Legislature, who accepted the invitation of the Committee and made themselves available to make submissions which assisted the Committee in its work.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend the Committee's Report on the Department of Legislature Annual Report 2014-2015, to the Parliament and seek support of all the Members of this august House to take note of its contents.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, 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. M.D. BULITAVU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report - Audit Report of Municipal Councils for 2013 Financial Year
Standing Committee on Public Accounts

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. From the outset, this Report follows the Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji, Audit Report for various Municipal Councils for 2013 financial year. This is my seventh Report as the Chairperson on the Standing Committee for Public Accounts. The Report identified audit issues within the four Municipal Councils within the Year 2013 financial year.

Due to the timeframe that has lapsed, some of the issues have been resolved or are in the process of being rectified. All responses received from the Council in relation to the four Town Councils had been attached with the Report, showing many of the issues raised during the audit process and the responses from the Council, as well as the responses from the Ministry of Local Government.

Both, the Office of the Auditor-General and the relevant Councils can reflect on this for the future. The Committee identified the general concern regarding the need to lift a public sector accounting and audit skills and encourage relevant Ministries and Councils to address these as a matter of priority. The Committee strongly believes that the Head of Municipal Councils, especially CEOs, should be appointed on merit, having a good background in financial management and governance.

Municipal Councils should be managed as a corporate organisation while maintaining its social obligation. It is important to note that the Office of the Auditor-General has issued modified audit opinion on four Municipal Councils with two Councils issued a disclaimer of opinion. This is due to a non-preparation of Financial Statement under the International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) for small and medium-sized entities as required by the Fiji Institute of Accountants. Also noted whether unreconciled variance between the Councils, General Ledger balances and subsidiary records for balance sheet item, specifically the rates receivable.

In addition, the Office of the Auditor-General has also highlighted other significant matters affecting the operation of these Municipal Councils. These include issues such as:

- absence of supporting documents for Journal entries passed;
- increasing trend in rate arrears;
- variance between General Ledger and subsidiary records for rates receivable;
- absence of separation of duties;
- variance in Value Added Tax (VAT) between General Ledger and subsidiary records;
- non-preparation of VAT reconciliation; and
- Board of Survey not carried out.

The Committee consulted the following Municipal Councils at the Council Office from the 26th to 27th March, 2019, namely;

- Nausori Town Council,
- Rakiraki Town Council,
- Lautoka City Council; and
- Nadi Town Council.

It is also important to note that during the consultation, Members had raised questions with authorities identified by Auditor-General for the Year 2013, which impacted the overall system of the control of these Municipal Councils.

Overall, I commend the performance of these Municipal Councils and the tireless effort in trying to improve its system and processes as highlighted in the Audit Report. Further on, an action plan is placed by the Ministry of Local Government to improve all Municipal Councils' systems and processes.

At this juncture, I wish to extend my appreciation to all Honourable Members of the Committee, who were part of the successful compilation of this bipartisan Report, namely; Honourable Joseph Nand, Honourable Vijendra Prakash, Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu. Further, pursuant to the Standing Order 115, Honourable Ratu Tevita Niumataiwalu and Honourable Adi Litia stood in as Alternate Members for Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Ministry of Local Government representative to the Heads of the four Municipal Councils and the Office of the Auditor-General staff for their facilitation and assistance during the consultation. Finally, I also commend the Secretariat for their timely support in the preparation and compilation of this Committee Report.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with those few words, 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. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report be initiated at a future Siting.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) Annual Reports 2014 and 2015 –
Standing Committee of Justice, Law and Human Rights

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights of the last term of Parliament was referred the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 2014 and the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Annual Report 2015, by this august House and was tasked to review these Annual Reports.

The same Reports have been re-instated to this Parliament and have been referred to the current Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Just as the previous Committee, the current Committee was mandated by the Parliament to review these Annual Reports and report back to the Parliament on its findings.

The Committee deliberated on the Reports concisely and noted a few pertinent matters in its contents including:

- aspects of the awareness programs of FICAC and its effectiveness;
- aspects of the process of investigations and the various forms of complaints that come under the ambit of FICAC;
- FICAC's policy and structure with respect to the protection of whistle-blowers;
- FICAC's human resource and its ability to provide the necessary services; and
- certain discrepancies in the Financial Statements of the Report.

These matters were discussed with representatives of the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption, and were appropriately clarified.

Consideration was also given to the requirements of the Standing Orders of Parliament pertaining to the impact on gender when deliberating on the Annual Reports, however, the Committee appreciated the apparent gap in placing emphasis on such requirements when the Reports were drafted and tabled in Parliament.

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights of the last term of Parliament for their effort and input, which our Committee also relied on during the review process and in formulating this Report. My Committee utilised the salient information noted from the previous Committee to assist in the direction for its review.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend the Committee's Report on the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption's Annual Report 2014; and the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption's Annual Report 2015, to the Parliament and request all Honourable Members of this august House to take into consideration its content. Thank you, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

A motion, without notice, that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

1. Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts;
2. Minister for Forestry; and
3. Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services.

Each Minister may speak for up to 20 minutes. After each Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the NFP or his designate to also speak for five minutes, there will be no other debate.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts to deliver her statement. You have the floor.

140th Anniversary of Girmitiyas in Fiji

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament, students in the gallery and all those watching from the comforts of their homes; *As-Salaam-Alaikum, ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a great pleasure for me to rise in this august House to give a Ministerial Statement commemorating the lives of our Indentured Labourers, *Girmitiyas* or *Jahajis*, as they were known. I must apologise, this Ministerial Statement was to come yesterday as we celebrated the 140th Anniversary of our *Girmitiyas* in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand in this august House as a proud descendant of the *Girmitiyas*. I trace my heritage back to 2nd June, 1906 when my forefathers arrived in Fiji on the ship *Arno*. I think there are many, many others in this country or even in this august House who can relate to being part

of the legacy that our descendants lived. And for the students here this morning, I think the onus is on you to ensure that we keep the flames of the legacy of our *Grimitiyas* alive in our hearts.

For me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, celebrating *Girmit* Day or 140th Anniversary on one day or a week is not enough. I believe our forefathers have done a lot more and their celebrations must continue in our daily lives. The horrific stories that we hear written in literature, captured in arts, captured in dances, captured in dramas, et cetera, is enough, I think, to bring tears to any human being. We all have read history books, our teachers have taken us through their journey, 140 years now. What happened on a daily basis, Honourable Speaker, is something that we must reflect on.

When we had the celebrations at the Suva Civic Centre in the evening, I think, it was entertainment for a lot of people and it should not be. I believe it should not be entertainment for us. It should be reflections for us. As I sat in the hall full of students and our invited guests, unfortunately we were not able to get the attendance of many Members of Parliament.

The whole intention was to bring you all together on a very beautiful evening where we could commemorate the lives of our forefathers. A few in attendance enjoyed, reflected and I saw tears in some people's eyes. However, I was disappointed with the laughter that came from the back of the auditorium, especially from our young people, its entertainment. What we want to do within our Ministry is to ensure that the lives of our forefathers are treasured. It is not merely entertainment, so I can assure the House that the celebrations and the reflections have not ended.

Within the Ministry of Education, we have a Department of Heritage and we are going to ensure that every child is equipped with the information; the right information, to take that information back to their families, so we as Fijian families can celebrate the lives of these very, very important people who had an important part to play in building Fiji as a nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heard about 14th May, 1879 when the first ship *MV Leonidas* brought in the first lot of indentured labourers. However, today I also would like to reflect my personal narration on another event that happened on 14th May, 1987.

HON. MEMBER.- Why?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Just to relate the horrific event, we cannot forget history. We cannot forget the 14th.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- She is a Minister, let her speak.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Let me speak. As I shared my proud legacy with the indentured labourers, I also would like to share my experiences as a school student in Form 5 on 14th May, 1987. There was so much panic and I had no idea what was happening. The only word I heard was, if I may pronounce it as a child, I did not know it was supposed to be a *coup*, I said "coop".

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- You can talk about that, let me say my piece. So, Mr. Speaker, what I am trying to say, history should not be repeated.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- And in this House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as elected Members of Parliament, as responsible citizens of the country, it is our duty to ensure ...

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Rise above it.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- ... that we learn from (yes, that is what I am saying) our history, we note our history and we move forward.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Why didn't we?

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- We note our history, and we move forward.

(Honourable N. Nawaikula interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Maybe you have not moved forward, we have.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- So, Mr. Speaker, Sir,

HON. SPEAKER.- Do not converse across the floor, address the Speaker. You have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must ensure that we protect equality, we protect human dignity and we must ensure that the future is a brighter one for all of us.

At this point in time, please, allow me to thank my Director, Heritage, Mr. Collin; the Assistant Minister; the performers; all the schools who came together to celebrate; those who watched the performances, some very spectacular performances with lifelong learnings and teachings from our students.

I also would like to thank Shobna Chanel and Igelese Ete from the Pasifika Voices, they put in a lot of effort. Like I said, the information that we have compiled, the documentary that we have made will be distributed to students across the schools so they can watch and see for themselves with the theme "We must treasure, share, and respect our heritage".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that the *Girmit* story is a story of great sufferings, combined with, of course, enormous hope. Again all those who came together in our celebrations across the nation, in Labasa, Nausori, Western Division who held school celebrations and national celebrations, we came together as members of our diverse Fijian family to commemorate an important era, as I said, in our nation's history – the arrival of our First Indentured Labourers some 140 years ago. I would like to thank all the Members of Parliament who made an effort to attend.

During our discussion at lunch time yesterday, I stand to be corrected whether it was lunch or recess, one Member commented, "Because you put traditional dress, we were confused with what 'traditional dress' means." In Fiji, I think traditional dress means our traditional dress so that was the reason you could not attend my celebration, I say, "Shame on you."

On 14th May, Mr. Speaker, Sir, *MV Leonidas* arrived in Levuka from British India. These journeys took months and months on dangerous seas, diseases and even death facing all on board. Sir, *MV Leonidas* carried 462 men and women from India and, of course, we all know how they arrived in Fiji with false promises and deception, false promises of a better life in Fiji from their homes, some were not even given a chance to bid farewell to their families and other loved ones. These Indentured Labourers came from all walks of life, different castes and religions and, of course, we all know the signing of an agreement which later became known as the *Girmit*.

Of course, after *MV Leonidas*, Mr. Speaker, Sir, other ships continued to arrive until 1916, and these indentured reshaped our nation's history. All in all, history records close to 61,000 Indentured Labourers were brought to our shores. Only one-third of these *Girmityas* were repatriated to India after Governor Rodwell, under pressure from anti-indenture activists abolished all indenture contracts on 1st January, 1920.

Of course, we all can imagine the long journeys across the seas which they called the "*kalapani*" the "black seas" not knowing where they were going, not knowing how long would they be travelling on these traumatic journeys. They arrived in Fiji, having survived the voyage on board the ships, the miseries of being taken away from their loved ones, our Indentured Labourers arrived in Fiji. Of course, with the abolition of slavery and the prohibition of commercial employment of the indigenous Fijians, the brain child of Sir Arthur Gordon of indentured labour began, and this was cheap labour.

The *Girmit*, in reality, was indelibly linked to inhumane conditions, ruthless abuse, whipping, sexual exploitation, poverty. Basically, slavery was abolished but *Girmit* was another name for "slavery" which was never abolished, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through our performance during the week, we saw how these *Girmityas* battled everyday: how they battled to conquer the hostile lands of Fiji and sugarcane plantations, building roads and working on farms.

Another thing that literature brought about, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the abuse that women were subjected to; molestation, harassment, rape, child birth, all were common. During the celebrations at Albert Park, there was live performance of how women went through childbearing experiences. It is enough to make you shudder at the thought on how they were whipped. We tried to portray the overseers moving around on their horsebacks whipping and kicking people and cheating on their very basic human dignity.

We all know how our *Girmityas* sacrificed in order to ensure that their children did not suffer as they had. So they built schools, temples, mosques, they kept their culture alive and the diversity that we see today should be attributed to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was not all gloom and doom for the *Girmityas* because they were supported by the villagers who opened their hearts and their homes to them. There are stories which speak to this openness, it was initially displayed by our indigenous villagers who saw the *Girmityas* hardship. They extended a hand of friendship offering support when they witnessed the ill-treatment meted out to the *Girmityas*.

In earlier years, some *Girmityas* who had escaped, found refuge in our villages, but this kindness and humanity was in passing and the Colonisers discovered this developing support system and acted quickly to make it illegal to harbour escapees. This created a similar fear of harsh punishment among the villagers and forced them to change their perspective, they were no longer offering their help.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we should not underestimate the role of the *Girmit* women, girl, child and children, in general, played as they bore the brunt of these hardships and brutalities. However, these women were also resilient and when the time came for them to push, they fought back. There are also stories of how the women and men fought the overseers and, of course, they were also instrumental in strikes for better pay and working conditions soon after Indenture ended in 1920 and 1921.

Let me share a story, Honourable Speaker, of Totaram Sanadiya who worked to abolish the Indenture System and to improve the lot of the freed *Girmitiyas* after Indenture. He rose from being a *Girmitiya* to become a self-taught Pundit and community-based leader in Wainibokasi in Rewa. He valued education and moral teachings. He was a man well ahead of in his time.

In writing to Gandhiji, he initiated the movement that led to the abolition of the Indenture, not just in Fiji but other Indian *Girmitiyas* diaspora across the world. He realised that the permanent settlers, *Girmitiyas* and their descendants, would have to live and form relationships with the iTaukei for nation-building. To set an example, he learnt and became fluent in the Rewan dialect interacting closely with the iTaukei community in his area, closely following required iTaukei protocols.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, understandably in the beginning, *Girmitiyas* and their descendants resisted the celebration of a date they saw that marked a dark day in their lives. The shame and indignities they suffered was a scar which they did not want to show the world.

In 1929, the Colonial Government's effort for a 50th anniversary celebration of *Girmit* was boycotted by a wider community of *Girmitiyas* and their descendants. It was only when many *Girmitiyas* passed away and that local community groups began to look at ways of recognising the legacy, this finally eventuated.

The original celebration, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 1979 was initiated by the work of various Academics, like Professor Subramani, Satendra Nandan, Vijay Naidu, Dr. Ahmed Ali and Dr. Brij Lal, among others. Their work from the 1970s marked the beginning of academic studies of the Indo-Fijian diaspora and evoked wider public and community interest in celebrating *Girmit* and *Girmitiyas*.

On 11th November, 2016, national celebrations under this Government marked the centennial of the arrival of the last shipload of Indentured Indians to Fiji on 11th November, 1916 on board the *MV SS Sutlej*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *Girmitiyas*, like this Government, understood the value of education in addressing poverty and building the economy. This is why this Government has worked so hard to invest in education. We have introduced free education, text books, transport assistance for those who qualify. This is to remove the barriers of our students from being educated.

This Government has gone a step further and we have provided an alternative for those who may otherwise drop out of schools, so there are courses offered by our Vocational Schools and Technical Colleges are to provide clear pathways into the technical and vocational colleges' stream. Of course, this Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, understands and knows the importance of education for all our children. We have invested heavily in our education and we will continue to do so.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is true that even today we are not free from the legacy of discrimination and sometimes irrational hatred, both here and overseas. I was greatly heartened on Saturday when we heard the voices of our next generation committing themselves to treasure, share and respecting the *Girmitiyas* and their descendants. Sefanaia, a Year 13 student of Marist Brothers High School, spoke on the important role by the Catholic Church in including *Girmitiya* children in

their schools and how against the dictates of the colonial authorities, the original Sacred Heart School was set up in Suva in 1897 for our *Girmitiya* children. It augured well for our beloved nation and to our education stakeholders as we learn so much from these students about our *Girmit* past.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I have profound sense of faith and optimism in the boundless potential of our unity built on the strength of our diversity. I am convinced of the potential for us to build a better Fiji everyday for every Fijian. It requires us all to work together to continue to build Fiji, to know and love based on mutual respect and non-discrimination. I pray that we will take this message to our hearts and that we will not let the legacy of the *Girmitiyas* be forgotten that it is a key cornerstone of Fiji and it will remain so; a triumph of human dignity in the face of unbelievable adversity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I conclude, I would like to go back to the words of our Attorney-General who rose up in this Parliament last year to give his Ministerial Statement, on the legacy left by *Girmitiyas*, and I quote:

“As we celebrate our progress and commemorate the proud legacy of the *Girmitiyas* in Fiji, let us also reaffirm our stand against bigotry, against discrimination and against divisiveness, let us reaffirm our stand against this old politics and reaffirm our own commitment to each other as Fijians. Our commitment to working side by side to build a new and better Fiji and that commitment, that brotherhood, that sisterhood and that unity in our society is the ultimate dream of the *Girmitiyas* who were brought to Fiji (if I can change) 140 years ago today, and all those who followed them.”

We are all living a dream today, irrespective of our backgrounds, and we will continue to honour their memories and their legacies in the years ahead, and I thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for her Statement, and I now give the floor to the Honourable Adi Teimumu Kepa. You have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, on the successful outcome of the 140th Girit Anniversary Celebrations and wish her the best of health. In fact, through your initiative, Honourable Speaker, in having the Women Members of Parliament (MPs) work together as a caucus, we were planning on visiting her if she was still sick today, but it is good to see that she is well and able to deliver her Ministerial Statement today, and I sent in my apologies, Honourable Minister, because we had our Provincial Company Annual General Meeting (AGM) and being a Board member, I could not miss it, so I congratulate you on the celebrations.

Just going back to my response, Honourable Speaker, a compact summary of the Fiji Girit would be the arrival of more than 60,500 Indian indentured labourers who came in a total of 42 ships that made 87 voyages from the Ports of Calcutta and Madras between the years 1879 and 1916.

The Opposition wishes to place on record (and I am not looking at any *coup* whether 1987 or 2006 which were not mentioned but since she brought up the *coup* I will just have to say something very briefly on that) that we wish to express our sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the *Girmitiyas* and their successive generations who have, through their sheer hardwork and sacrifice, partnership with indigenous people and other groups in Fiji, and excelling in their respective vocations playing a defining role in the development of this country.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the plan to stage the 140th Girit Anniversary Commemoration at the major centres further deprives the ordinary citizens or descendants from being able to

participate because the rural and remote areas from which these Girmitiyas live have not been part of the celebrations in this past week. So I hope that they will be part of the celebrations that are going to be conducted throughout the country.

But I think also, Honourable Speaker, that the Government would have done well if it had taken on board and studied how the Centennial Gimit commemorations was organised by the Alliance Government in 1979, and the 125th Fiji Gimit Anniversary Commemoration in 2004 by the SDL Government. The planning, organisation and the execution of the celebrations in 1979 and 2004 spoke much for the importance of the concept of inclusiveness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as has been customary to mark any event or occasion of this significance, the launch of postal stamps and minting of commemorative stamps, commemorative coins have gone missing.

What will the future generations remember about this year's Gimit Commemoration and how? There will be no historical instruments or symbols left to reminisce the milestone we are now passing through in our history.

In our view, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government can take a leaf out of what we have been doing in Rewa. Very briefly, Honourable Speaker, I will just debate from my prepared notes, in that in 2016, a lady came and asked me if we could work together, and that is what we have done from 2016, 2017 and 2018.

In 2017, there were celebrations in Rewa where the people of Noco, Rewa (who went out to rescue the passengers on the Boat Syria which had gone aground on the Reef at Naselai in 1884) are working together and have decided to embrace the Gimit descendants and they are now called, "*Luvedra na Ratu*", and that is part of what we are doing now. What the Honourable Minister for Education has said that (I hope) we will be able to work together, I think that is one thing that we are doing together from the grassroots.

Before concluding, she has mentioned Dr. Brij Lal and Padma Lal and I hope that that will be taken into consideration because we are marking the International Year of Indigenous Languages. We hope that we will be able to speak Fijian and Hindustani on the floor of this House, Honourable Speaker, and this will be a real achievement in the working together of the two groups if we are able to have this spoken in this House, indigenous Fijian language and Hindustani, besides English. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Leader of the National Federation Party (NFP), the Honourable Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for her Statement, and I must say that I am very pleased to be part of the programme at the Albert Park which I think was very well-organised, and I also thank the Honourable Minister for her Statement and brief history of the *Girmitiyas* in this country.

I also agree with her, Honourable Speaker, that we should not forget the unfortunate events of 1987, as well as we should not forget the unfortunate events of 2000, which led to the removal of the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister of this country, as well as we should not forget the 2006 *coup*, which removed the Multi-Party Government in which seven to eight Indo-Fijians were Cabinet Ministers.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Honourable Speaker, we should not stoke the past to continue to create division and disunity in our country and I believe we should all move on. Nevertheless, Honourable Speaker, we pay tribute to our forefathers whose blood, sweat, toil, tears, as well as cooperation and racial harmony with the indigenous Fijians and other minority races that have made Fiji the hub of the Pacific.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Their contribution to the social, economic and political advancement of Fiji, notably the development of the sugar industry into the economic backbone of the country for more than 100 years, and the transition of Fiji from 96 years of Colonial rule, to Independence in 1970, is historical and immeasurable.

Descendants of the *Girmitiya* have done their forefathers and the nation, immensely proud nationally and internationally in the fields of economy, education, politics and law. They have and are serving the land of their birth with distinction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to also use this opportunity again (and I have said this in Parliament), the pre-eminent historian of *Girmit* in every country, not just Fiji, about the indentured labourers, Professor Brij Lal, Honourable Speaker. If anyone is looking at the history of *Girmitiyas*, not only in Fiji but in other colonies, where descendants of indentured labourers went to, you cannot pass the work of Professor Brij Lal and his contribution to the history of the *Girmitiyas* in this country and others.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- At the last Sitting of Parliament, Honourable Speaker, we were told that the instruction to ban Professor Brij Lal and his wife Padma Lal was from the Prime Minister's Office.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Talk about the *Girmit*.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You listen to me! You listen to me! Mr. Speaker, Sir,

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Listen and learn something.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... when a Government develops that kind of venom and hate for an individual and his wife and bans them from this country, and have the audacity to talk about celebrating *Girmit* in this country, it is ridiculous only because this man was critical of the Military *coup* in Fiji.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Talk about the *Girmit*.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He is a descendant of the *Girmitiya*. You cannot talk about him! You only talk about you, I will talk about him! I will continue to talk about him!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Honourable Speaker, this is about *Girmit*. They talk about working together, they talk about unity, yet they have banned the son of *Girmitiya* whose contribution to the *Girmitiyas* in this country is immeasurable.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Talk about him.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We have talked about him, but he moved on, he gave the 1997 Constitution to the people of this country and you keep stoking the past to whip up racial disunity, you! You did that in the last Elections!

Yes, Honourable Speaker, we do not forget the past but we should not stoke up the past to whip up racial disunity in this country as you people have done.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order. I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution. Honourable Members, we will move on and I now call upon the Minister for Forestry to deliver his statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Research and Development – Sustainable Development of Forest Resources

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Honourable Speaker, Cabinet colleagues, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of the House, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: I rise to deliver my Statement informing this august House of the Government's continued commitment to "Research and Development for the Sustainable Management and Utilization of our Forest Resources" for optimum ecological, environmental and socio-economic benefits for all Fijians.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, Government, through the Ministry for Forestry is committed to managing Fiji's forest resources in a sustainable manner so that our resources could cater for our current and future needs. The Ministry's renewed focus on Research and Development is helping to inform and drive the Ministry's policies and both our strategic and operational plans.

It is important to note from the outset that the Ministry's research initiatives, and its policies and strategies are aligned to Fiji's National Development Plan (NDP) focusing on the sustainable management of our natural resources and on enhancing economic growth, climate change (UNFCCC), including Fiji's Green Growth Framework and Carbon Market and Emissions goals.

Research and Development, in particular, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is one of Government's key priority areas that will help transform Fiji into a modern, progressive and prosperous nation State.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, forestry scientific and technical research has continued to enhance the health and productivity of our forest resources that our people have depended on and will depend on for centuries to come.

The Ministry of Forestry currently has two Research Divisions: the Silviculture Research Division located in Colo-i-Suva; and the Timber Utilisation and Research Division based in Nasinu. These Research Divisions play a key role in informing the Ministry's strategic and operational plans towards the sustainable management of Fiji's forest resources.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Timber Utilisation and Research Division in Nasinu, focuses its research and studies on the properties and potential uses of wood and non-wood species, quality management systems, product research and development.

The Division is currently conducting research on lesser known timber species. These are species that are available in Fiji but there is little or no information available regarding their properties and potential uses. Improved knowledge of the lesser known species will support the expansion of our current list of commercial species which will, in turn, reduce the pressure on the commonly used timber species, and positively contribute to the sustainable management of our native forests.

The Timber Utilisation Division also undertakes practical wood processing and wood utilisation problem-solving studies to support the timber industry in using best practices that will ensure the safe, efficient and effective utilisation of our timber resources in line with the existing standards and legislations.

The Ministry is also upgrading the sawmill and saw-doctoring facilities in Nasinu to enhance the work of the Division. For non-wood species, the Ministry of Forestry is working with other partners on a project funded by the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR) to study the suitability of peeling senile coconut logs to produce high quality veneers using the spindle-less lathe technology. This project has developed new knowledge and processes critical to establishing the technology that underpins a sustainable coconut veneering industry, and by doing so, determines that high density senile coconut logs with suitable pre-conditioning, which can be reliably peeled on spindle-less rotary veneer lathes.

With further commercial development, high quality veneer could be reliably produced in Fiji, dried and handled using standard industry equipment. In addition, a semi-industrial scale rotary veneer processing equipment was established by the project in Nasinu with key staff trained in its operation. The issue of senile palms need to be effectively dealt with to support Government's efforts to revive the coconut industry. It is also a great opportunity for us to use a material that can help reduce the pressure on the use of native trees for veneer.

The Ministry aims to strengthen its partnership with research institutions like the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIR) to help introduce new technology for the benefit of Fiji's timber industry.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Silviculture Research Division in Colo-i-Suva focuses on forest health, biosecurity and biodiversity, tree species development, seed and nursery technology and natural forest management. Since the 1950s, the Silviculture Research Division has introduced a total of 161 fast-growing exotic species by trials to determine their suitability as economic plantation species.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- The result of the above trials saw the confirmation of the suitability of *Pinus Caribaea* known as Fiji Pine and *Swietenia Macrophylla* also known as Fiji Mahogany which have become the two main plantation species in our forest sector.

The development of these two species has seen major development in the forest sector, including its industries, like the establishment of major pine and mahogany plantations in the Central, Western, Northern Divisions, including the Maritime islands; the establishment of key players around the country like sawmillers like:

- Tropik Woods and Fiji Hardwood Corporation;
- haulage companies;
- contractors;
- retailers and;
- exporters.

Over the years, pine and mahogany have generated over hundreds of millions of dollars in investment and income and has contributed significantly to the development and growth of the Fijian economy. Moreover, it has provided the socio-economic security in terms of employment and income for many rural people, especially the resource owners.

Honourable Speaker, the current focus is towards the use of more of our native species to enhance the status of our biodiversity and to increase the resilience of our forests in the face of climate change.

Government has now contracted the review of the Silviculture Research Division to help redefine its direction in the context of climate change and the need to develop climate resilient communities, whilst increasing the forestry sector's contribution to Fiji's economic growth. This is a balancing act that the FijiFirst Government has proven capabilities given our recent and ongoing global leadership on climate change and our unprecedented economic growth spanning a decade. The consultancy for the Silviculture Research Division has been contracted to two scientists, one of whom is a Fijian, Dr. Lex Thompson, who has worked in Fiji for decades; and Dr. John Doran will help Fiji to re-position our research efforts on tree species.

The Ministry intends to conduct a similar review for the Timber Utilization Division. In the meantime, the Ministry is forging ahead with Fiji's tree-planting initiative to plant four million trees in four years. A major focus of this initiative is to plant not less than 500,000 mangroves and not less than 500,000 sandalwood or among other high-value trees.

Mangroves will help protect our coastal environment and ecosystems and will form part of Fiji's contribution towards climate change and the blue economy.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Sandalwood, on the other hand, like other high value trees is aimed at generating greater economic growth for the benefit of the communities and the nation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, history has informed us that much of the trade by the European settlers in the early 1700s was on beche-de-mer and sandalwood. Sandalwood, in those days, were found mainly in Ba districts and Lekutu coastal areas in Vanua Levu; Nausori Highlands in the Western Division of Viti Levu; Kadavu, Gau, and the Lau islands, including Lakeba, Ono-i-Lau and Oneata.

The high value of the product and its over-exploitation has greatly depleted the resources. The build-up of stock over the years was undermined by associated short-lived boom in trade which helped keep the resource in virtual decline. In addition, the changing policies of past Governments have shifted the focus to concentrate only on pine and mahogany and other lucrative crops like sugar.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the current Government, through the Ministry of Forestry envisaged that by reviving the sandalwood industry, this would bring optimum socio-economic benefits for more Fijians and the nation as a whole. Since 2011, this Government created and funded the Sandalwood Development Project which is currently under the Silviculture Research Division.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Four million trees.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Coming. Government had provided close to a million dollars to support the programme and to promote the planting of sandalwood in rural areas. The programme has also actively encouraged the development of Public Private Partnership (PPP) by ensuring that this commodity is widely spread out across the nation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Sandalwood Development Programme is not new to Fiji as it has been recognized and supported by the AusAID funded South Pacific Regional Initiative on Forest Genetic Resources since 1996.

On the same note, the ACIAR in 2015 rendered the same support on its domestication and breeding. Currently, production of sandalwood is based on the population that was deposited in Kadavu, the Lau Group, Bua, Macuata, the tip of Cakaudrove and Nausori Highlands in Viti Levu.

In 2011, only 3.80 hectares or 1,520 seedlings were planted. As of 2018, a total of 46,200 seedlings have been planted in Ba, Bua, Cakaudrove, Kadavu, Lau, Lomaiviti, Macuata, Nadroga/Navosa, Naitasiri, Namosi, Ra, Rotuma, Serua and Tailevu, covering an area of 116 hectares.

There is an increase in demand for *yasi* by the people of Fiji who consider planting sandalwood an investment, not only for them, but importantly for their children and future generations.

Honourable Speaker, many people have also established their private sandalwood plantations, either through their own efforts or through assistance from other agencies or Non-Governmental Organisations. The Ministry is also currently working on identifying and mapping all these sandalwood plantations.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, for the benefit of the Opposition in case they are wondering what this investment might bring for Fiji, it is envisaged that based on the current selling rate of \$100-\$150 a kilogramme at a rotation of 20 years, a single sandalwood tree could produce an average of 100 kilogrammes of heartwood at a price between \$10,000 and \$15,000. Recently in Lakeba, a single *yasi* tree was sold for \$12,000 with a heartwood weight of around 200 kilogrammes.

From the known 46,200 trees planted around the country, and based on the current market prices and trend, it is envisioned that these trees could fetch \$462 million to \$693 million when they mature in approximately 15 years.

Honourable Speaker, the FijiFirst Government believes that this is an investment in our young people. It is an investment that the FijiFirst Government intends to accelerate so that our young people can be assured of socio-economic prosperity.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with this significant contribution, this Government is making great strides in the development and implementation of policies and guidelines that will transform and enhance the sandalwood industry into a sustainable and inclusive one.

The Ministry of Forestry plans to raise not less than 125,000 sandalwood seedlings in the next financial year to cater for more than 500 new sandalwood farmers. This target is expected to increase over the years. The Ministry intends to plant over half a million seedlings by 2022.

The sandalwood seedlings will be nurtured in our 3 divisional nurseries; Central & Eastern, Northern & Western before supplied to the interested farmers and targeted communities for planting.

The Ministry will also be engaging with readily available sandalwood private nurseries around the country, and will continue to work very closely with other stakeholders to ensure the success of the programme.

Community Awareness is another major component to disseminate researched information on sandalwood technology to enhance existing knowledge at the community level.

Given the relative ease of establishing nurseries, the Ministry aims to encourage and empower more women and youths to participate in the tree-planting initiative.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in terms of research on the sustainable management of our native forests, work is continuing on the Nakavu Sustainable Forest Management Project. The main focus is to determine the appropriate forest harvesting regime that will support the sustainable management of native forests in the long term.

A critical aspect of this research is the determination of a new diameter limit table to replace the current 'across the board' 35 centimetre cubed diameter, irrespective of the type of tree species. Recent work in Nakavu continues to be on the elaboration of technical planning parameters for the integration of sustainable forest management.

As envisaged in the National Development Plan, the FijiFirst Government will continue to set the direction for continuous improvement while driving the nation towards the Government's overall vision of a "Better Fiji for All".

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forestry aims to help take Fiji's forest sector to new heights. Essentially, this will include providing more focus and undivided attention towards building a much more robust and sustainable forest sector equipped to face the challenges of tomorrow.

In addition to reviewing its research divisions, the Ministry intends to strengthen partnerships with reputable research and academic institutions to help re-define the direction for Fiji's forestry sector.

With Government approval, the Ministry intends to expand its partnership with institutions and countries that have proven to manage their forestry resources in a sustainable manner, not only to address their socio-economic needs, but also to address climate change. Our Research Divisions will play a critical role in this process.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement, and I now give the floor to the designate of the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Peceli Vosanibola, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement made by the Minister of Forests.

First, I would like to thank him for his Ministerial Statement and also, I think, we do appreciate the initiative in trying to strengthen the research and development in the forest sector. Well, however, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a lot of programmes online like the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) initiative, planting of \$4 million trees.

There are a few questions to be raised: Is this simply being done to appease Fiji's funders and lenders abroad, including the international agencies and also the people in Fiji?

Sir, the Honourable Minister talks about sustainable development and management of our forests. I think no one has any problems about it but, yes, let us examine the ground reality. How many acres of forests are destroyed each year by the influx of the corporate interest in the name of development, and if I were to borrow another terminology from the *FijiFirst* Party then it is modernisation of Fiji. Let me ask them: what have you done to mitigate; what are you intending to do to mitigate the damages caused in Wailevu, Bua, and Savusavu Bay, on Malolo Island and several other places in regards to sustainable development?

Is your research going to be above mitigation in these areas? Mr. Speaker Sir, research development in the forestry sector are relevant and a welcoming thing but given their actions and records of this Government in the last one decade, it leaves much to be desired.

Turning to the question of forest utilisation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ideology of SODELPA, I quote from our 2018 Manifesto:

“Sustainable management and value-addition of forestry resources through the effective participation of resource owners - that is the key to the way forward in the forestry sector.”

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker Sir, the Minister must announce in this House the ongoing negotiation between the Fiji Sawmillers Association and the Forestry Department with regards to the diameter of trees that can or should be harvested in the process of logging or is the Research going to further delay a decision on that matter?

If that is not enough being in the forestry sector, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca and many others in this House and in the previous Parliaments, are on record for calling

on the Government to revert the ownership of forest while listening to landowners but the super Decrees that have been put in place clearly go against the spirit and the original undertaking. How are we planning to mitigate these users?

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Government can go further without research and development strategies as they wish but the truth about the conundrums in the forestry sector is brought home by two events recently;

1. Bonuses should have been paid to the workers of companies which have failed to earn profits; and
2. The imminent closure of the Fiji Forest Mill in Malau, Labasa.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, actions always speak louder than words and, finally, for the improvement of mahogany, what I can say is, all proceeds to the economy of the landowning units, consideration should be given to review the Mahogany Industry Development Act as in Section 16(1). Also as the provision of the Native Land Trust Act and any other law that are found inconsistent with the Mahogany Development Act which prevail and other draconian provisions must be removed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his Statement, and I now give the floor to the designate of the Leader of the National Federation Party, the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just rise to thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement and may I say at this juncture, Sir, that, we, his *Tauvu* from Dravuni in Ono, Kadavu are very much looking forward to getting a visit from the Honourable Minister and his team as we have lots of mahogany seedlings that we would like him to witness us planting in our hills in Kadavu.

Honourable Speaker, we note that in February of this year, the REDD+ independent expert review on the self-assessment process package presented six recommendations, two of which I will read as;

1. Strengthening institutional capacities and coordination mechanisms amongst relevant sectors, ministries, landowners, private sector and civil society groups.
2. Strengthening awareness activities to provide or to improve participation and engagement of REDD+ relevant stakeholders, including landowners and CSOs (Civil Society Organisations).

Mr. Speaker, I just reiterate the message that we have continued to urge upon the Minister on the issue of forests and REDD+. Given that carbon is the new currency that Government is exploiting and that current standing forest are mostly on native land, the public hard copy communication outputs still appear to be primarily relayed in the English language, even if private consultations are being done in the *iTaukei*. This continues to be a failure of the Ministry's efforts in our opinion.

We again strongly urge the Honourable Minister to take a cue from this fair share of Mineral Royalties Act passed last year and bring an amended and expanded Bill for native and freehold landowners to capture forest carbon rights and blue carbon encompassing landowner governed mangrove, salt marshes and seagrasses, as well as robust safeguards to alleviate unscrupulous trading practices and surely this is something that the Government of Germany, through GIZ, would aggressively support as it has done over the last few years.

Again as we continue to also urge that we remain very aware that the World Bank's grievance redress services are crystal clear. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her statement, and I now call upon the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services to deliver his Statement.

Measures Undertaken by FRA to Address Fiji's Road Problems

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Attorney-General, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and colleagues, Members of the House; I rise to highlight to this august House the road problems Fiji has been facing in these past few weeks and also the measures that Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) have undertaken to address these issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Roads Authority is responsible for most of the countries' surface transportation network which is an integral part of Government's vision, of social economic empowerment for the Fijian people.

Fiji's surface transportation assets are primarily roads, bridges and jetties. These assets provide access and grant mobility to the Fijian people and facilitate flows of goods and services by connecting towns, cities, domestic and international ports, and rural and maritime communities.

The FRA is also responsible for implementing the footpaths and street lighting programs which aim to improve safety and security for road side communities and pedestrians all across Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FRA's assets are all or most of, in terms of the Government roads, Fiji's roads, bridges and jetties. These include the land on which our assets are located, together with the entire associated infrastructure such as drainage, street lighting, traffic signals and other street furniture. The total kilometre of sealed and unsealed roads which FRA is currently managing is more than 7,500 kilometres.

FRA was established to effectively manage and develop Fiji's Road network using International Best Practice of Assets Management to undertake its function.

Asset Management involves using long term planning to provide the required service at the best value for money, with assets worth \$11 billion, life-cycle management of our assets is critical. All our assets have historic value, design life, use for life based on use and stress and we can determine the due date for replacement and/or renewal.

FRA had undertaken past studies to acquire the preliminary data required to develop and implement the robust asset management plan. One of the strongest capabilities that FRA process is the FRA GIS system which is well-developed, updated regularly and available to the public and other stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FRA has been allocated a total of \$563 million for the 2018/2019 financial year which was an increase of \$85.5 million for the last financial year. This Budget is delivery-due and upgraded roads, crossings and bridges and will help build towards a sustainable and reliable network providing access to schools, health centres, businesses and markets for all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the majority of the FRA 2018/2019 Budget is targeted towards the renewal and replacement of existing road assets across the country, with the total allocation of \$74 million. Under this allocation, \$26 billion has been allocated for all roads, rehabilitation and drainage works

for Suva; \$14 million for the Northern Division; \$20 million for the Western Division and \$14 million for ongoing projects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recent heavy downpours over a prolonged period have caused significant damage to the road network, but they are not entirely responsible for the deteriorated condition of the network structures such as bridges.

In 2001, a presentation was delivered by representatives of the then Department of National Roads (DNR) to Parliament that identified worsening road conditions and requesting additional funding to address the problem before it became unmanageable. In this presentation, the DNR assessed acceptability of the International Rough Index (IRI) at IRI Four, and to maintain this would require annual funding for maintenance of \$15 million.

Their report to Parliament also indicated that if this funding was not provided, then in only a few years, the IRI will exceed eight and even approach 12. Instead of heeding this warning by providing the requested funding, the decision was to adopt a do minimum approach, and for the following eight years, barely half of the requested funding was allocated. The road condition we see today are the direct result of these decisions to do minimum.

Deterioration in many areas following the recent prolonged period of heavy rainfall has resulted in inevitable severe road damage. In many locations, the deterioration is so progressed that serviceable roads can no longer maintain through pothole repairs, and these areas will now require sectional carriage weighting repairs.

In addition to this, the FRA took over the responsibilities of maintaining the road network infrastructure that was more than 50 years old, but we continued to improve and maintain accessibility to the travelling public, especially in areas that are most affected by natural disasters. In the urban corridor, FRA took over the responsibilities of maintaining the road network of 2,000 kilometres from the Local, Municipal and City Councils, whereas, the DNR maintained the national roads only.

Both of these roads carriage-weights ways are inbuilt with essential public infrastructure utilities such as water, telecommunication and electricity. Much of these utilities infrastructure have reached their useful life and are fragile and suffering from the same maintenance deficit as our road network.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to highlight in this august House the key areas that FRA is currently working on. Firstly, the material grading, source rock durability requirements and possibly permeability requirements to ensure that materials used will endure the country's climatic condition and traffic laws. So there are much stronger emphasis now on the kinds of materials that we are putting on the roads. Use of alternative natural gravel or ripped rock base materials should be subject to approval by the engineers and compliance with the requirements specified in the FRA's standard specifications.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the administration of standards requirements so that qualified and skilled personnel are employed with appropriate technology to ensure appropriate execution of planned projects. Mr. Speaker, Sir, to address these conditions, FRA is planning and implementing a number of remedial actions:

- Maintenance contractors will focus their efforts on carriage weight rehabilitation;
- In the immediate term, additional contractors are being deployed to carry out rehabilitation work in the worst affected areas;

- Finalising due diligence requirements on a project to completely reconstruct over 50 kilometres of King's Road between Ba and Korovou;
- We are now intending to deliver road resealed work, totalling 150 kilometres over the next 18 months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, quality construction is fundamental to meeting the mission of the FRA, and quality assurance is the primary means by which FRA ensures the quality is mandatory for all constructed physical works on the national road network. Quality assurance encompasses all materials and construction activities on all FRA projects and directly impacts the service life of our road infrastructure facilities.

The elements of an acceptable quality assurance programme include:

- quality control by the contractor, accepted sampling, testing and inspection by FRA,
- independent assurance,
- qualified personnel,
- accredited laboratories; and
- a dispute resolution process.

These elements work together to ensure an effective quality assurance programme. Any element missing from the programme increases the risk of a reduced service life of our transportation assets.

The establishment of the FRA Quality Assurance Management Department Goal is to ensure the safety and quality of construction projects and their conformance to regulations, specifications, plans and reference standards. This is accomplished by monitoring construction activities from material testing and fabrication reviews stage to project completion. Various schedule safety and quality inspections and audits are performed during construction activities to ensure that work complies with applicable regulations. The quality of materials is verified that performing inspection of fabrication plants during production and processing of materials by performing materials testing inspections in the field. List of qualified private laboratory technicians, construction inspectors and approved vendors are maintained.

The Quality Assurance Management Department plays an active role for all FRA constructed physical work projects under the National Road Network during pre-construction, construction and post-construction phases. The Quality Assurance Management ensures that the materials and workmanship incorporated into each road construction project under the Fiji National Road Network are in conformity with the requirements of the approved plans and specifications, including approved changes. The Quality Assurance Management is also applicable to projects on the local public and sub-division road network that has FRA involvement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a way forward, FRA aims to move away from being a road repair organisation to becoming stronger as a highway management renewal and expansion organisation. It is also critical for the Authority to move away from being reactive to becoming more proactive and the kind of steps that I am talking about, looking at the whole process that is involved in looking after roads that I have just been describing when I talk quality management approach is what is driving the FRA towards this more proactive approach. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. I now give the floor to the designate of the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Aseri Radrodro. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Let me just acknowledge the Ministerial Statement that has been given by the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure. At a moment there, I thought he was pre-empting my questions that are coming regarding the review of FRA.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just like to state that when I pointed out the mounds on our roads to the other side of the House, the Honourable Minister for Economy smirked and made a mockery of that statement. Let me just describe to you what mounds are: “Mounds” are made after FRA attempts to make the patch on the potholes and after that the road is more uneven than before.

We acknowledge the Ministerial Statement that has been made regarding the repairs on the roads and the potholes that are occurring on the roads, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which are more evident than ever before. They are still a nightmare in causing unbelievable traffic jams that will increase the time of travel from Nausori to Suva to a minimum of three hours during peak hours.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we on this side of the House cannot allow ourselves and we now urge the people of Fiji to not believe what the Government is trying to explain about our roads any more. We should not believe it, we should reject the lies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are of the firm view that they have lost the plot. The current outsourcing arrangement of FRA is ineffective and I heard the Honourable Minister say that FRA is now becoming a repair entity of some sort.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Listen to this: Some bus companies are refusing to run their routes because of bad road conditions in Taveuni. Attend to that, please. Also in Sigatoka, Nadroga and also in Naitasiri, roads going up to Monasavu, please, attend to that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- That was what I was looking forward to, for you to give an update on that.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what has happened today

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Ask your former Honourable Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have heard that FRA has now changed ...

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Listen and learn.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- ... from Fulton Hogan to China Railway 5.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Once I went to Fulton Hogan Highway Company, Mr. Speaker, and I found out that people who had never worked in the infrastructure industry were managing Fulton Hogan Highway Company here, then I knew that doom was coming for our roads.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Then, now it is happening.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Travel to the Central Division, we see potholes, even bigger potholes than that time; there are *lovo* pits now. With China Railway 5, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the same company that we have talked about regarding the special audit that was conducted at Water Authority of Fiji.

A lot of issues regarding their non-adherence to the policies at hand that were existing at Water Authority of Fiji and now they are being taken on by Fiji Roads Authority, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- What assurance do we have that they will be better?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Water Authority, Fiji Roads Authority.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- What has changed in the roads levy that we are

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- You have to give me time. Listen to these constructive analysis of the Statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, go back to the need for Government to swallow its pride and bring back the PWD operation, because that is what we will do.

Whoever, thought of reforming PWD is responsible for the madness we have today in our infrastructure and must be rebuked for the idiotic idea. There are no solutions involved in it at all. My question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what new creations, new forms of infrastructure has this Government brought up?

They are fond of blaming past Governments for the dismal state of our aging infrastructure. Well, now they have been running this country for 13 years, we expect them to be more innovative,

Mr. Speaker, Sir. We must relook at the current policies in the meantime, cut back on the importation of secondhand vehicles.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- *Wawa.*

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Earlier, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is becoming a dumping ground for secondhand hybrid vehicles. What is going on, Mr. Speaker? I know that FRA and LTA will now be part of their revised Public Enterprise Bill of 2019. There cannot be any more excuses, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

With the changing weather patterns as alluded to by the Honourable Minister, Fiji just needs to find alternative options rather than making lame excuses. Infrastructure like roads and bridges are essentials for Fiji's economy. They even interlink with all the SDGs.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have already heard the second bell. Honourable Member, can you wind down because you have

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her extended statement. I give the floor to the designate of the Leader of the National Federation Party, Honourable Pio Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Wait Bala, wait, till you hear this.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, I hope my time is going to be seven minutes or more. Honourable Speaker, contrary to my learned friend, the current Minister for Infrastructure, I am not going to shy away from the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) and its problems. I admit there is a lot of work that needs to be done on our roads and he has got a plateful.

HON. P.K. BALA.- What did you do?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Oh, do not go there, I am going to come there, do not go there.

Honourable Speaker, I rise here because the Statement was for FRA. I was very influential amongst others in the establishment of FRA, and it was established for very good reasons and much of those reasons had been related by the Honourable Minister but unfortunately, much has happened since my six months stint as the Minister for FRA; responsible for roads, and I hear the Honourable Minister for Economy laughing, he is going to come to you after that, Sir, do not worry.

(Laughter)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- No, no, it is all right. Nothing personal here, we all want better roads, better bridges ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- ... and better drains. I want to speak here, Honourable Speaker, particularly the asset management aspects of FRA, and that was a work that made the distinction between the Department of National Roads (DNR) and FRA when it was established; how to stick with asset management plan and remove all the other influences. One of them:

- i) Political;
- ii) Impede on this thing about asset management; (There is a lot of money involved, a lot of money has been pumped into it.)

Like Maikeli Radua, the presenter on Viti FM, when he talks about the weather, he says, “Just look outside.” So when we talk about the state of FRA, we just look at the roads. Now that tells me that Asset Management has not worked, why? Because in my view, upon the removal of MWH in the manner that it did, caused the discontinuation of Asset Management. They took away a lot of intellectual property. Now, why MWH?

The Honourable Minister for Economy will remember distinctly the name, Bruce Buxton. He was the guy that came to Fiji to establish it at the behest of Government and in his personal behest.

Now, it was a really good idea and I say, FRA now continue to say to this day (and I will stand for it, it is a good idea) and that because it needs to work but it needs the least political intervention, let the Engineers do their job, let FRA do its job, let the workers do their job, let the contractors do their job. You still hold the right thing, Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Certainly.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- You said, “All right”, no, you are not. I will tell you one good example, Honourable Speaker. I have met so many pothole crews; local company going back to DNR days’ practice, running their wheels over potholes after it is sealed. That is not FRA practice, that is not the Engineer’s practice.

Now, that was supposed to be one of the main things that should have been imparted from the maintenance contractors to our local guys, the simple thing is how to fill in the potholes. Now there are potholes everywhere, but I want to say one thing, Honourable Speaker. We have been seeing too many resealings; too many re-gravellings, no rehabilitation. Those are distinct issues, you rehabilitate a road, it lasts you ten years, you reseal a road, you come back the next day because you just need to do it.

Now, I am just saying that FRA today should really put their mind to Asset Management and at least be honest with it, then they will help the Minister do a good job because if other interventions continue to decide where our money should go for roads, he is never going to make it in his term, and I can assure you that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua for his statement. Honourable Members, we move on to the next Agenda Item.

CONSIDERATION OF BILLS

Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 13th May, 2019, the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Amendment Bill 2019, will be debated, voted upon and be passed today. Debate will be limited to one hour. I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

COP 23 PRESIDENCY TRUST FUND (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 13th May, 2019, I move that:

The COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Amendment Bill 2019, be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on this motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As highlighted in the introduction of this Bill when we presented it on Monday, the Bill essentially seeks to rename the existing COP 23 Trust Fund and, in fact, rename it to call it the “Climate Action Trust Fund” because obviously, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have gone past COP 23.

Again by way of background, this particular Trust Fund was set up following Fiji gaining the opportunity to host the COP 23. As we know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, COP 23 was under the auspicious of Fiji, it was physically held in Bonn in Germany. This is the first time in the COP Presidency history, since COP has been initiated, which is the Conference of Parties (that is what COP stands for), that a particular country was given the opportunity to host it but physically it was hosted by somebody else.

The German Government, I would like to put it on track record, was extremely generous in respect of hosting this. They saw this as a wonderful opportunity between creating the synergy between a developing island State and an industrialised country because there has been in the negotiations, as the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs highlighted the other day, a disconnectivity between what we call the “Metropolitan powers and the emissions by metropolitan powers”, and the least developed countries in particular, countries like Fiji including others in the Pacific and the Caribbean and other parts of the world, who are at the cold phase of Climate Change, yet they are extremely low emitters of carbon themselves.

So therefore this COP 23 Presidency was a unique opportunity and indeed it was highly successful. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we were given this Presidency, the Honourable Prime Minister had also given an undertaking that the cost of the Presidency would not be borne by the Fijian taxpayers and, accordingly, we set up a trust fund and into this trust fund, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had a number of development partners that actually contributed funding towards that. Earlier on this morning, I presented the accounts for the third Semi-Annual Report and these accounts have, of course, been vetted by the respective committees and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have the entire funding of the COP 23 which was done through this trust account as highlighted the other day.

We raised in excess of \$40 million and these funds were used to pay for the disbursement cost and other related-costs, including the public relations, the websites, the various other travel costs. As you know that our current Minister for Defence was also our climate champion and through this Presidency, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we now have a number of pathways and indeed a number of initiatives that were launched through COP 23, including the *Talanoa* dialogue.

Talanoa, in fact, is quite a phenomenal success that is now being taken up by countries throughout the world and now we have been told that they are not only using it for the climate discussion negotiations but even at the UN level, some of the countries are using it for other aspects where they have found that perhaps there have been some acrimony situations or whether there have been a number of protagonists, and to try and resolve the situation, they have used what we call the “*Talanoa Spirit*”.

There is, of course, a number of other initiatives like the Koronivia Initiative and various other aspects of Koronivia, of course, relates to agriculture. We are able to mainstream Koronivia and it is now being talked about in the corridors of many other countries in the world.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Trust Fund, as we speak, as I have highlighted, no longer, of course, is relevant to COP 23 but the development partners have been so impressed with the manner in which we have handled the Trust Funds and the accountability mechanisms that have been put in place and the fact that there is a specific law approved by Parliament in respect of this. They, in fact, have allowed us to keep the residual funds that currently exists within the Presidency of Trust Funds.

We have sought their approval and they have agreed that we can continue with these funds to actually sit there specifically for climate action. We have also highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Monday that some of the residual funds will actually be used and we will, of course, bring another specific provision pertaining to this, set up a separate Trust Fund and some of the funding from this Trust Fund will go towards that specifically and only for relocation purposes.

We have already launched a Fijian Relocation Guideline. So, when you move or relocate villages and settlements, et cetera, to higher grounds, there obviously needs to be some guidelines in respect of adhering to aspects pertaining to gender, aspects pertaining to various cultural issues but also more importantly for most people aspects pertaining to sustained livelihoods. So, we need to take a holistic approach to that and we would be bringing to Parliament before Budget, of course, that particular Trust Fund provisions.

So, Mr. Speaker Sir, as highlighted, the Amendment, as we can see, there are eight clauses. A couple of the clauses, of course, are what we call, the “functionary clauses”. Now, you will see in clause 2 - just the name changes and where it will be COP23 Presidency, will be replaced by the words “Climate Action” and, of course, the COP 23 Presidency Office, et cetera. So, these are the changes that have been brought about simply to get the name change to the Trust Fund so then we can continue with the Trust Fund and a number of development partners have also agreed to continue to fund into this Trust Fund.

Just by way of information, Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday at the CAPP event, where we had the Pacific Leaders (and this is three times in a row that Fiji has hosted the CAPP event), the CAPP event, of course, denotes that the Pacific leaders getting together and the next CAPP event, in fact, will be in the Cook Islands next year. The funding for the CAPP event for Cook Islands, which is about \$0.5 million, will in fact come from this Trust Fund, because the donors were actually given the money for the purposes of hosting CAPP. So, we will be funding the \$0.5 million from here.

At every stage of the way, some donors, of course, have given anonymously, some donors have given funding into this Trust Fund without any conditions and saying, “You use it as per the purpose of the Act itself” and others have said specifically, “We want the funds to be used for x,y,z purposes.” Some have said “Look, we will give you the money only for CAPP events”, someone said, “You use the money only, for example, works you do in the ocean space”, others have said “You only do it for work”, for example, in respect of, perhaps, in the future we are looking at mitigation purposes, fuel efficiency, whatever the case may be and indeed relocation for which we will have a separate trust fund.

So, it is a very straightforward Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I would urge Members of Parliament to view it that way. This will set again another avenue for us to be able to take action relating to climate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this item. The Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have a very close interest on the proceedings of COP. The Fiji Minister for Environment in 1992 to 1995, over that period, was the late Colonel Jonetani Kaukimoce, whom we had sent to Rio for the first ever Earth Conference. Since then, we have been part of this movement. It became known as the Conference of Parties over the years and Year 23 was when Fiji had the honour to be President of the Parties.

We are here this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to debate on the change of name (what is in a name) from 'COP' to 'Climate Action'. I think it was yesterday or the day before, the Honourable Attorney-General and all the other things that he is responsible for in his portfolio, advised me not to come 'shadow sparring' with him. That was the headline used by one of our dailies. So Honourable Attorney-General, I will stop shadow sparring.

We are all allowed to add or delete our name once, at the Registrar of Births by Deed Poll and the other is, you and I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before later reflected in our Standing Orders in the Military by a paragraph of change of names with proof that we have changed our names.

But for us here, this is not just a simple name change. This is to collect, raise or input taxpayers' dollars into the Climate Action Fund. Logically, our attention turned to the plastic levy of 20 cents per plastic bag, the Environment Climate Adaption Levy and donor funds.

And then our attention turns to the wanton destruction of our environment, despite the global campaign of the Honourable Prime Minister, who repeatedly called for Talanoa and a coalition of nations to fight climate change. And who can forget the picture of our erstwhile, the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs (Lt. Col. I.B. Seruiratu), riding a bicycle in Bonn in November 2017 to promote clean energy and reduce carbon emissions!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, where there is a will there is a way. You may be asking the Honourable Minister to ride a bicycle to his village. Where there is a will there is a way, and we are all familiar with that.

But what concerns us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the usage of the funds, both in the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund and this soon to be enacted Climate Action Fund. Will the funds in this case that we are debating, be truly used for climate action?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, evidence suggests pilferage of the funds. At least, for COP 23 Presidency, wastage and, may I add, totally bypassing procurement regulations. That is where the Honourable Minister brought up his shadow sparring issue. And that brings me to my initial statement in this House, what is in a name – COP or Climate Action?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there had been tabling of COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund's Reports in Parliament, but there have been no breakdowns as to the actual expenditure. There is a popular saying, "Do not judge a book by its cover", and I said this to the Honourable Whip of the Opposition when she virtually showed me the new Standing Orders to Parliament and said, "Look at the words inside." We debated against some of those. Climate change climate action was both covered.

We question the transparency and accountability of the funds in COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund after what we deem, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be a gross abuse of Procurement Regulations and Tender Process by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy in awarding Qorvis Communications a FJ\$4.6 million communications contract for Fiji's COP 23 Presidency.

A Minute to that effect also states, Qorvis MSLGROUP, and I quote: “A trusted advisor to the Fijian Government.” I quote: “Irrefutable evidence proved the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy waived Procurement Regulations 2010 and engaged the services of Qorvis MSLGROUP for public relations, communications service and the development of COP 23 Presidency website for US\$2.295 million, equating to FJ\$4,658,850.

The violation of procurement procedures, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is exacerbated by the fact that the scope of the work is minuscule for the amount of money awarded. This was done following a Minute to the Honourable Attorney-General under first sight (ufs) of the Permanent Secretary for Economy by the COP 23 Presidency Secretariat Executive Director, John Connor, on 29th August, 2017.

The Minute shows the Permanent Secretary referring the matter to the Honourable Attorney-General by initialling the document and writing, “Sir, for your approval”. The Honourable Attorney-General granted the waiver by initially, “Approved as requested”, and stated the date that is clearly visible as 6th September, 2017.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Minute, while seeking a waiver of the procurement regulations, highlights that Regulation 30(1) of the regulations prescribes that a tender must be called for the procurement of goods, services or works valued at \$50,001 or above.

In the Minute, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Mr. Connor further states that as COP 23 will be held between 6th November, 2017 and 17th November, 2017, there is limited time to procure public relations and communications services in the lead up to COP 23. But here it is worth noting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the payment for most services is backdated to March 2017.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Minute states, and I quote:

“As Qorvis is a trusted advisor of the Fijian Government, it is recommended that Qorvis is engaged to provide public relations and communication services for Fiji’s Presidency to COP 23. Accordingly, it is recommended that the standard tender processes under the Procurement Regulations 2010 are waived.”

Even if for argument’s sake, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the matter was so urgent (which it was not), why the payment of services totalling US\$10,000 per month were to be paid from 1st March, 2017 until the end of 2018? Mr. Connor’s Minutes is dated 29th August, 2017 - five months after the first payment of US\$10,000 were due for 1st March, 2017.

Mr. Connor wrote a Minute seeking a waiver that the Honourable Attorney-General finally approved. If the services were required from 1st March, 2017, why were tenders not called? Was this Minute creatively manipulated to be backdated in order to pay for services already rendered, also a breach of regular procurement processes?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one, including the Honourable Minister and the Honourable Ministers vulnerable, has powers to waive procurement regulations for tender process, unless there is an emergency, like natural disasters - cyclones, floods, earthquakes, tsunami, landslides, forest fire or drought, a life and death situation, outbreak of disease or any other emergency.

Even then submission for a waiver of procurement regulations must be first made to the Fiji Procurement Office before submission to the Minister. Nothing of the above happened, Mr. Speaker.

Furthermore, incompetence in efficient procurements, can in no way justify the need to retrospectively approve and officers responsible are liable for disciplinary action.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is clear that all procurement procedures were breached and the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy did not have any power whatsoever to authorise the waiver. This is an extremely serious case of abuse of power, and a blatant violation of due processes.

The involvement of Qorvis as public relations advisor for both, the Bainimarama-led Government from the Interim Regime to the Elected Government, and the Fiji Government of today, is most unusual and highly controversial.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, accountability and transparency had been thrown out of the window and everyone should be concerned at how a foreign and widely renowned propaganda mercenary has been encouraged to profiteer in gross violation of procurement regulations and prudent financial practices, while the people of this country are shackled by its surmountable problems right now.

On Monday, 13th May, 2019, the Honourable Minister told me as Honourable Leader of the Opposition, not to shadow-box with him in relation to a procurement and waiver issue that I had brought up. I am now coming out of the shadow, Honourable Minister.

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

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- On 1st April, 2019, in a one liner response to questions on this very same issue, the Honourable Attorney-General said, and I quote:

“I cannot waive procurement regulations. The regulations allow me to waive certain processes.”

If this was not misleading Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I would like to lay on the table the Minutes that I have been talking about this morning. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's for his statement.

I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy. You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to speak on this Bill and in support of the Bill as Minister responsible for environment.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this change on the name from COP 23 to Climate Action Trust Fund, sends a number of messages, a message about of our continued leadership, not only in Fiji but for the entire vulnerable nations in the world.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister has done an excellent job, a remarkable leadership of being a leader of a small country. Never before a leader as such, has achieved that particular level of delivery and chairing an international forum, particularly to provide leadership and guidance to those small States who would normally do not get the opportunity to voice their issues at that level.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have been to number of forums of small States not only while I was in Parliament but also before that when I was at the University and I note how the Caribbean Region always thought that they will be the leader of a voice for small States regions. But in this one,

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I tell you, the talk around the region there is, they are wondering how Fiji got the leadership. And then when they saw how our Honourable Prime Minister delivered, they are now talking about it, that they must accept themselves, so that they will get leadership in future forums.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this change is also about leveraging funds to undertake works and projects that need to be done to mitigate the effects of climate change in Fiji and the region.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we do not want to be seen that we took up the leadership as a task, that the leadership is done, the baton is passed over and then our jobs ends there. This change is to say, “Look, the work begins now to deal with the issues here back at home and in the region, and amongst the small States.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this change in name is about building on the stock of knowledge that we have gathered during the Presidency of COP 23. This change is about educating our new generation about the challenges that we are facing and the reality that we are facing.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, this change is about our willingness to accept the reality and change our behaviour and conduct to deal with the problems that we are facing.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this change is also about telling all the sectors of the economy - the household; the commercial and the industrial, “Look, this is the reality. We have to behave appropriately and should be willing to take responsibility of the consequences that will arise out of inappropriate behaviour when dealing with the economy.”

Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is also about telling the world that we will also take responsibility of our destiny.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with those words, I wish to support the Bill that has been tabled. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I rise to make a short contribution on the Bill before us. Normally, I have no objection to name change to a fund. I think keeping it as COP 23 Trust Fund may not have been a problem at all to do other activities because it could have identified it as Fiji’s legacy on COP 23 and actions emanating out of that.

However, Honourable Speaker, I want to use this opportunity to share a little bit more about what could have been part of this Bill or what we should have done before considering a name change as a priority.

What is missing really from the objective of the Bill, Honourable Speaker, is the very crux of climate action and transparency, and especially drawing it from the Paris Agreement. And to be

more realistic with our ambition for Fiji's Nationally Determined Contribution of what we call Fiji's NDC, to rapidly decarbonise our economy, which is in dire need of on the ground support and resource prioritisation, I think that those two issues are very, very important.

As an example, we can say that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulation and practice in some ways, are weak and perhaps, useless when you look at some of the experiences of how companies and those engaging in getting the EIAs done, continue to exploit and damage the environment.

So another fund like this would merely appear to be a short-circuiting proper Parliament oversight when auditing measures are not as stringent through the office of the Auditor-General and we know that our oversight mechanisms are getting weaker and weaker day by day, not forgetting that the Public Accounts Committee is now chaired by the Government side.

When this Trust Fund for climate action, Honourable Speaker, is whether it is a donor's fund or whether it is a taxpayer's fund, the accountability must come from the Government which manages the Trust Fund and I hope to hear from the Attorney-General on his response to the just revealed information by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition on the procurement of the services through the COP 23 funding.

On 4th April, 2019 in this House, the Honourable Prime Minister was talking about rogue police officers when journalists were detained by the police, who were covering the Freesoul and the Malolo saga, I was not in Parliament but I was watching the event, Honourable Speaker.

So, really, we need to be looking at how environmental protection laws matters, how we can invest in those processes and implementation of those laws, so that companies like Freesoul do not violate it and damage our environment. And hopefully, we will have a little bit more in terms of the investigation, in terms of not only the rogue police officers who detained the journalists, but also a much more detailed investigation as to how that company was able to continue over so many months and damage the environment, despite some of the decisions and information and the stop orders that were already issued. That shows that laws are not working, whether they are not implemented properly or those responsible for implementation of these laws have been ineffective.

The Honourable Prime Minister, I heard yesterday from the Climate Action Pacific Partnership (CAPP) Conference, announced a regional shipping Blue Fund. I think that is a good initiative, Honourable Speaker.

I personally was involved in doing some research on looking at shipping in the Pacific and the economics of decarbonising shipping services in the Pacific. And I note that some of the countries, like Marshall Islands and Samoa, are already engaging in retrofitting old vessels and making sure that they help in their own process of decarbonising their shipping services in our region.

Honourable Speaker, what I am saying is, it is fine, we can have a name change, we can have donors putting funds into this Trust Fund, but I think it is absolutely important for us, not only as Members of Parliament, but also for the Government to actually take a serious note of what happened with respect to Freesoul. How did those who were responsible, failed to actually check the extent to which this company was able to continue to damage the environment?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is a different matter. Not everything is before the court.

This Parliament has a responsibility and we will wait to hear the results of the inquiry as to what the Minister for Environment, where was he, even for the last three or four years? So it is related.

In economics, Honourable Speaker, we say everything is related to everything else. And when I talk about this Bill, I think it is important for me to relate this Bill because the objective of the Bill is an overall objective to address the issues of climate change, environmental damage, climate action and all of these things are related.

I mean, the Honourable Minister revealed the other day that there is going to be another trust fund which is going to be used to relocate people who are vulnerable to climate change or sea level rise. All these things are related, not only just to climate change, in fact, when you are relocating people from a particular area, there are not only just climate issues, there are social, economic, health, a lot of issues so everything is related to everything else when we talk about it.

So once again, Honourable Speaker, I think it is very important for us to, not only look at what is the objective of the Trust Fund, but we have to make sure that the Trust Fund is used properly, that there are proper accountability and transparency in the use of those funds, despite the fact that it might be donor funds. The responsibility will be on us to ensure that those funds are used effectively and efficiently. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I wish to contribute to the debate before the House on the Bill to change the name from COP 23 Trust Fund to Climate Action Trust Fund. To begin, Honourable Speaker, Sir, let me just highlight the processes involved once a country is selected to preside over the Conference of Parties meetings.

Fiji, Honourable Speaker, Sir, was nominated to Chair the 2017 COP 23 in Marrakech, Morocco, in 2016. After the nomination, there were a few requirements that were asked of Fiji if it can provide there and then in Marrakech before the whole Fijian delegation returned home. Of course, the Presidency, that is quite clear, rested with the Honourable Prime Minister. We have to appoint a chief negotiator and a climate champion as well.

Climate Champion, Honourable Speaker, Sir, was born out of, I think Decision 121 of COP 21 in Paris in 2015. It was on the insistence of Developed Countries and particularly, the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), for the very simple reason that the Paris Agreement which at that stage, there was a lot of doubt, whether even it will be ratified but that surprisingly came very early.

The expectation was, after the ratification process, the Paris Agreement would kick in or come into force in 2020. So there were a lot of concerns by LDCs and SIDS on what happens between COP 21 in Paris and the 2020 period before the Paris Agreement would enter into force.

We, the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) under the Suva Declaration, insisted on 1.5, but COP 21 in Paris came to an agreement for the period from 2015 to 2020, global warming to peak at 2 degrees and then work towards 1.5. This is where the Office of the Climate Champion was established under Decision 121, if I remember correctly and I need to be corrected on that as well. But to answer the question by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, what is in the name?

There is a huge difference between COP 23 Trust Fund and Climate Action Trust Fund. Because COP is Conference of the Parties and Parties are National Governments but National Governments alone will not implement the Paris Agreement. There is a huge difference between the two, and the thing that really frustrates is that, I have been involved in Climate Action, Honourable Speaker, Sir, in the last 24 months and Climate Action is solely responsible for what we call Non-Party stakeholders because the Governments, the Parties, they continue with political negotiations, but the whole world is concerned about the Climate Change. It is the role of the Champions to bring together all the Non-Party stakeholders at sub-national government level, financiers, NGOs and CSOs, indigenous people, towns and cities, the list goes on. That is the role of the Champion and it is very linked to the name that is here in this Bill today about Climate Action.

It is about the implementation of the Paris Agreement. It is one thing to have the Paris Agreement and to ratify the Paris Agreement, but we need to peak global warming and reduce global warming, and that is where Climate Action is so important, Honourable Speaker, Sir. This is not only the role of Parties, it is not only the role of Governments, Fiji in its NDC, the biggest component of our NDC is energy, but energy will not be implemented by the Government on its own, but it is the EFL but EFL is not represented in the Conference of the Parties, it is a non-party stakeholder. So it has a responsibility to the party for the implementation of the Paris Agreement so that we can peak and work towards the 1.5 degrees, so that we can have sustainable development.

Honourable Speaker Sir, I want to say again, as part of my contribution to the debate today, there is a huge difference in the name and that is why we need to change it to Climate Action because Climate Action Trust Fund will attract donors again. When it is COP 23 Presidency Trust, Honourable Speaker, Sir, as I have said that I have been involved in Climate Change in the last 24 months, the shift now that is expected of us is to shift from political negotiations to implementation.

We need to act and we need to act now. Enough of the negotiations because we can still be meeting here while sea rise continues, people need to be relocated, our food security is threatened, our health is threatened, et cetera. That is why we need climate action and that is why the Secretary-General who is here now in Fiji, is organising a special climate summit in September this year because he is trying to tell the leaders, "Enough of negotiations!" We need to act to save the world.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. COL. LT. I.B. SERUIRATU.- That is why there is a big difference in this name. So, that is what is in the name because the name is linked to the events, the activities for the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

We have our National Determined Contributions. We have our National Adaptation Plans and for Fiji it is not only about mitigation. More mitigation is good for everyone but at the same time for survival, and it is appearing in today's paper that for the Pacific, we need to survive. And for us to survive, we have to implement and that is why Climate action needs to be the priority.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is not only parties; let us take responsibility. All of us. Let us go back to our villages and plant mangroves. That is your responsibility. Instead of coming to work with your cars come by your bicycle or walk. That is your contribution to reduce global warming. That is climate action.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, about that bicycle, I wanted to bring that bicycle to Fiji to cycle to Kumi. But, Honourable Speaker, Sir, they are telling me and this is why the name; find an NGO for us and we will give you a bicycle because they know that I am a government minister. The Conference of Parties, COP 23 Trust Fund; as long as we have this name we will not have this bicycle

in Fiji because we need non-party stakeholders to come and contribute so that we can work towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Honourable Speaker, the mechanisms of climate change is sophisticated and complicated. It is not easy. The Honourable Attorney-General will talk about the waiver according to the powers that he has under the Finance Instructions but let me tell you, Honourable Speaker. After Paris and after Marrakech in December, 2016 by 8th January, 2017 I was already in Paris. We did not have any money then in the Trust. It did not come from private sector funds.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- How did you do that?

HON. COL. LT. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I went through GIZ, GIZ sponsored the Champion's work, not a single dollar from Fiji's taxpayers. All the travel for the Champion in the 24 months was funded by Germany under GIZ.

Honourable Speaker, in February of 2017 when we had no money in the Trust, Germany was here. We met at Suvavou House and they came to tell us we are giving you \$75 million Euro to host COP 23 in Bonn. We did not have money then. It is not easy. It is not that simple. I need to put this into context, Honourable Speaker, Sir. We are so transparent that is why we brought the Bill into this House, we can debate it and we will debate it. We have just tabled the report here. It is here. That is transparency.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Independently audited.

HON. COL. LT. I.B. SERUIRATU.- What is wrong with that, Honourable Speaker, Sir. That is the huge difference in the name, Honourable Speaker, Sir and I would urge all of us - Climate Action is the way to go if we are to save the world and leave a better planet for our children.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, the procedure for this motion is that it is debated only for an hour. I now give the floor to the Attorney-General for his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am glad that the Honourable Minister for Defence, our Climate Champion in the COP 23 process, has managed to highlight a number of the key issues which perhaps the Opposition were not aware of and should have been aware of in the past two years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the Trust Funds as he has highlighted, is that the Trust Fund monies are not taxpayers' money. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition, whom I have seen to be the most energetic since he has been in Parliament, became quite fervent. I kind of sense a bit of vindictiveness there; perhaps he did not like the fact that I said he was shadow-boxing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he of course quoted from a document that was leaked, therefore, I cannot comment on what he has read out because those documents are Government documents. As a former Prime Minister, he would know the rules and regulations surrounding leaked documents. But nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence, has quite aptly put it into perspective, and that is, when Fiji was given this Presidency, it was given to us at a very tumultuous time.

As you may also recall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was when Barack Obama who was a supporter of climate change, in fact lost office. And immediately after that there was a sense of what one may call 'retraction' by the US authorities. We had a number of matters that needed to be attended to. The global community itself was very concerned and to be frank with you, I think there is a complete lack of understanding and indeed appreciation of the work that Fiji carried out.

The climate champion did so much work to be able to get a certain level of respectability and indeed cohesion in the global community to be able to ensure that the momentum, notwithstanding the fact that changes took place in USA, was not lost. And Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that today the COP 23 Presidency website, which was actually started by the Qorvis Group, has been the most engaged COP Presidency website ever. The number of followers that we have got, the sort of publication that has been generated, and what we really need to look at is the type of awareness that has been created because of the COP 23 Presidency.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Leader of Opposition talked about retrospective approvals; he knows that, he is an ex-military person, ex-Prime Minister, and has worn various other hats. If tomorrow a naval ship gets a hole in it and they have to go out and repair it and they do repair it, and they come back and say, "Look we had to repair it." We have to get retrospective approval and these things do happen, so let us not put it out of context.

Again the Trust Fund has been audited independently. We have the actual report tabled and Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me also remind this Parliament that all the donors were cognisant of who was doing what; how the funds were being expended. When the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs talks about transparency, he not only talks about a report we have tabled, he also talks about transparency that we have with the donors namely GIZ, the British and various other groups that put funds into this Trust Fund. All were aware of where the funds were going to. Even the anonymous people knew where the funds were going to. Even they were kept abreast of where the funds were going to. No one todate has raised a single objection because they have a better understanding and appreciation unlike you people. That is the reality, that really is the reality. They have looked at the big picture.

I also want to highlight the issues about Freesoul that has been raised, of course. There is a distinction between what we call environmental standards and climate change matters. Environmental standards are imposed by domestic countries. They are for example, rules and regulations surrounding developments. And yes, the rules are there, but there are people who do break the rules. The test of the matter is, when the rules are broken, what steps have we taken to ensure those who had broken the rules actually get punished for that or there is a deterrence methodology put in place.

There is a matter in court which you should know about. They have been prosecuted by the DPPs Office and there has been a life of its own. There are other aspects, of course, that the Honourable Minister for Environment will address. I cannot understand how that is related to climate change when we are talking about global carbon emissions.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Very poor, very poor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Global carbon emissions has got nothing to do with that. Global carbon emissions Mr. Speaker, Sir, are actually generated predominantly by the metropolitan powers as we have said. It is leading to increase in temperature which is leading to, and we have said we need to restrain to 1.5 degrees as it is killing off ocean life.

The current rate of global warming will kill off 90 percent of all sea life, not Freesoul. Global warming will kill 90 per cent of all sea life, including our coral reefs, including the fish stocks - that is how catastrophic it is and this has no boundaries and it has no borders. This is why the Conference of Parties and the certain rules pertaining to it are critically important. Unfortunately, whenever we have talked about it they have used the methodology of reductionism and always reduced it to home. I remember Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua in the lead up to elections, talk about Ministers coming to work by bus. I have seen her car parked outside Parliament. I wonder how many times she has taken the bus? This is the kind of reductionism that is taking place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality is that....

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Honourable Speaker, I may just want to stand up on a Point of Order because that is not what I had said. I think the Honourable Minister has misrepresented what I said and I think that he should retract his statement. That is not what I said.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You did say that Ministers should catch the bus. Did you say that?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- I said if we were in power, those in power should.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! You have made your Point of Order, take your seat. There has been from one side, one riding a bicycle and now we have someone from this side on the other side riding a motorcar; I cannot see the difference. Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A.SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am looking at you for inspiration.

(Laughter)

HON. A.SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I am trying to draw is that issues pertaining to climate change at a global level and the issues pertaining to environment or environmental breaches of the law domestically are two separate things. In the same way we have pollution.

We have kilometres of plastic floating in the oceans from North America towards Asia; from North America towards the Pacific. Now that is a global issue and that is a problem. Now that plastic is not generated by us but we have domestic plastic that is generated by us. It is not floating across vast expanses of the Pacific Ocean in particular with the Northern Pacific currents. But what is actually happenings is that we are taking measures, for example the banning of single used plastic bags.

We announced this two years ago. We are taking our own measures but climate action involves a global movement. It involves a global commitment to ensuring that with the effects of climate change, ice will reduce predominantly in the health of our oceans and, of course, in the rise of global temperatures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly, I just want to highlight the point about relocation. This trust fund, Mr. Speaker, and just to be clear, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about ECAL. Please, let me categorically state what the differences are before I sit down.

This trust fund was set up for COP 23 purposes. Now what we are saying is that because COP 23 is no more there are some funds that may need to be paid off in relation to expenses incurred by COP 23 and you see this is why “paragraph b” is not being deleted so that is one aspect. What we are saying now is that COP23 is finished, it is over, and now for this trust fund because the donors have faith in us, we will use it for climate action and a lot more donors are willing to put in funds into a separate law that caters for specific purpose. Not money coming from the Consolidated Fund, that is one. We then are saying that we will propose a reallocation Trust Fund.

Again, the reason why we are doing this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is because there are certain bilateral partners or certain countries they are not interested in, for example, carbon reduction or what have you, but they are more interested in adaptation processes, and one of them is about relocation.

A lot of countries are actually very keen on relocation, they feel a sense of grievance about it, some may feel a sense of guilt and they want to help people relocate. So that Trust Fund is there. We have already spoken to the donors who put money in COP 23, that we will take some of the funds and put it in the Relocation Trust Fund as seed fund.

Then we have Environment Climate Adaption Levy (ECAL), that is levied on certain business operations. You stay at a hotel that makes more than \$1.5 million gross turnover, you drink at a pub that makes more than \$1.5 million gross turnover, if go and rent a car that makes more than \$1.5 million turnover, or go and watch a movie or charter a yacht, you pay a 10 percent ECAL. Mr. Speaker, Sir, every Fijian who earns more than \$270,000 in Fiji has to pay a 10 percent ECAL also.

All those funds, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is then used only for environment and climate adaption measures, that is how it is supposed to be. What we are saying now, from that we will take a small percentage and put it ourselves into the Relocation Trust Fund to show the other donors that Fiji has skin in the game too, we are also putting money in that respect.

In the last two financial years, we collected \$150 million from ECAL. And as stated when we introduced ECAL, that those funds cannot go into pool of Government Consolidated Fund, in the bigger pool. It needs to be ring-fenced, and only for environment and climate adaption measures. And you can see that we publish a report and have given it to this Parliament. They need to read that as to how those funds have been expended.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs has highlighted, the name is actually very important because now, we are saying that these funds will be used for action.

In the global summit that the Secretary-General is now going to host in September, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ball game is changing constantly. We are now also looking at what we call ‘nature-based solutions’, to many of the environmental issues and climate issues that we do have. So, for example, the sequestration rate of the oceanic life, the sequestration rate of mangroves or seagrasses, is a lot higher than terrestrial forestry. They have a much higher sequestration rate, in other words, they are able to suck in carbon more than say, a pine tree or a tree on land. So this is what we are also focusing on in respect of ensuring that we have nature-based solutions to many of these climatic phenomena that we are facing now.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge Honourable Members of Parliament to support this Bill because this Bill will give us another level of funding and focus in respect of ensuring that we engage in climate action. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.
Question put.

The Question is:

Pursuant to the Resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 13th May, 2019, that the COP23 Presidency Trust Fund (Amendment) Bill 2019, be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Noes')

There being opposition, we will now vote.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	29
Noes	-	21
Not Voted	-	1

HON. SPEAKER.- There being 29 Ayes, 21 Noes and 1 Not Voted, the motion is, therefore, agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Act 2017 (Bill No. 5 of 2019) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Act No. of 2019)]

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, at this point we will suspend proceedings for lunch and this is being provided in the Big Committee Room.

Now, Members of the House Committee are reminded that their meeting is in the Small Committee Room.

Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m. We have one hour for lunch, but before we do, I look forward to witnessing the Minister for Defence on his bicycle.

(Laughter)

We adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.31 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.34 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 13th May, 2019, the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (Amendment) Bill 2019 will be debated, voted upon and be passed today. Debate will be limited to one hour.

I now call upon the Attorney-General to move this motion. You have the floor, Sir.

**FIJI INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST
CORRUPTION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 13th May, 2019, I move:

That the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (Amendment) Bill 2019 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted in the introduction of those Bill on Monday, the provision seeks to amend the particular law to bring it in alignment with the appointment process of all the other independent bodies, in particular those that have prosecutorial or legislative or litigation powers, namely the Director of Public Prosecutions and also the Solicitor-General's Office.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will also see that under the Fijian Constitution that already the Judicial Services Commission under Section 115(2) is the authority that makes the decision regarding the remuneration of the Commissioner or the Deputy Commissioner.

So essentially, this is to bring it in alignment, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have elucidated all the other previous points. The actual appointment is done by His Excellency our President and in this particular instance, what will happen as we have with the Judiciary, that the Judicial Services Commission will make the decision. They do consult the Attorney-General and then the recommendation, of course, is sent across to His Excellency the President for the appointment.

One jurisdiction that is quite well known for the international reputation as a fairly non-corrupt society and, indeed, Government and that started its anti-corruption activities in the 1960s and I had been fortunate to actually visit that particular Commission when we started FICAC, is the Singaporean Commission.

The Singaporean Commission, Mr. Speaker, Sir, interestingly enough, because of the forward-thinking of the Government in those days of Lee Kuan Yew, and their ability to position their country. They started a corruption commission in the 1960s and in fact, it is very interesting just talking to them. They have been in the initial stages in Singapore that a number of prosecutions actually took place against Ministers but also more importantly, against their own staff, who at that point in time because of the powers that were given to the corruption commission became quite powerful and, indeed, some of the staff did abuse that. So they also went through what one may call a 'cleansing process'.

The point being, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that in the Singaporean instance also, whilst the President of Singapore is the appointing authority, the President does so, in their case, on the advice of the Minister directly, or on the advice of the Minister based on a cabinet decision.

In Fiji's case, of course, we made that separation between the Executive in terms of who can actually, for example, call for Expression of Interests (EOI) or advertise a position, which will be, in Fiji's case, the Judiciary Services Commission. They will actually carry out the interviews, they will do the shortlisting of the interviews and then they will make their recommendation.

As has been highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, previously, and I know a lot of song and dance have been made about the input of the Attorney-General, but the record would show that whenever the Judiciary Services Commission has nominated someone, there has never been a single process where the Attorney-General has gone against the decision of Judiciary Services Commission.

Most jurisdictions actually do have them. There are numerous other examples I can show, for example, in some of the corruption commissions in some of the States in Australia where they have a similar position, in fact, they directly do that.

In a similar position, in fact, far worse than ours and one could argue, in States in Australia too where even the appointment of the Judiciary, they do not have a Judicial Services Commission where the Attorney-General or the politicians actually make the appointments directly and which, of course, we do not have in this case.

So essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what this Act seeks to do, is to align it with the provisions of the Constitution, and that is the substance of the Act itself. I look forward to, of course, responding to any matters that may arise. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, we oppose this amendment as we had indicated on Monday, seriously on the basis that we feel that there should be a very, very clear separation of powers.

Independent commission should be independent for real. We should not have, as we are having in the case here, an amendment which is subject to the Judicial Services Commission or consultation with the Attorney-General. We know that there are other commissions after the 2013 Constitution that has been placed in that regard but we feel entirely that all those should change, and it is no excuse that we should make this one consistent with those. That is wrong, they should be independent.

So in the present amendment, the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner for FICAC are to be appointed by the President on the advice of the Judicial Services Commission with the consultation of the Attorney-General. And we feel yet again, that the FijiFirst Government is trying to make the Commissioner quasi-judicial officer when the independence of FICAC has always been questioned since the establishment of this institution by Decree in 2007.

We feel most sincerely that this institution, FICAC, has been used as a private gestapo by the regime over the last 13 years to prosecute political opponents and you should ask Dr. Mere Samisoni, Imrana Jalal, and even here, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Rabuka. It is totally sad that this institution which is supposedly independent, should be used, we feel, to hunt down political opponents.

There are, of course, other problematic provisions in the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption 2007 Decree which should also be repealed, including the provision of Section 55, that the Commissioner may consult with the Attorney-General.

We know that since that day, the Attorney-General appears to be calling the shots. Langman has been a regular visitor to the Attorney-General's Office since day one and given that he has no legal background, he is entirely dependent on the Attorney-General. As well, Honourable Speaker, the Sri Lankan Magistrate, who joined FICAC ended up resigning and fleeing when they disagree with the Attorney-General on prosecution.

Since then this Malaysian President of Law Asia, Mr. Mah Weng Kwai, resigned as FICAC Commissioner, the position has not been filled and Langman has headed FICAC for the last 13 years. The former President of the Fiji Court of Appeal, Gordon Ward, was criticised why by letter for accepting the position was declared a prohibited migrant by the regime and his home in Pacific Harbour burnt down in a mysterious fire.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What's that got to do with FICAC?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, you listen!

Even the current Commissioner Qiliho was seen at Pacific Harbour a few days prior to that with soldiers and a few days after the fire. Those are the things that can happen where you do not have a clear separation of powers and it is wrong for you even to cite Singapore or Australia, there is no comparison. Those are what we call mature democracies, for us, no. For us here, you take advantage of the position and you use these institutions to hunt down political cronies. That is the fear we have and that is the reason why we are not supporting the amendment.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. The Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. I want to just make a very brief contribution on this Bill. I do not see any problem in the recommendations in the Bill, that changes to the Bill but I think this has come 12 years late. I am saying this because FICAC was established in 2007 as a Decree and now obviously as an Act and we have had some amendments to that as well. But, obviously since 2007 we have not had a Commissioner of FICAC and the fact that this Bill seeks to amend the Principal Act and align the provisions with the appointment criteria of the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP), Solicitor-General, supposedly in line with the 2013 Constitution makes sense.

Obviously, one can interpret things differently and I know the Honourable Attorney-General always does that, but this Bill, Mr. Speaker is trying to (he puts his own interpretation) in trying to redress the issue that the Commissioner of FICAC ought to be qualified to hold Judicial Office either as a Magistrate or a Judge or a Chief Registrar. In other words, Mr. Speaker, a lawyer in practice for not less than 10 years to be able to qualify for an appointment as a Magistrate, or 15 years in legal practice in order to qualify for an appointment as a Judge.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, again we can have different interpretations but there was no Commissioner as I said before for FICAC in its entire existence since 2007. We have always heard of a Deputy Commission, and we have never heard of a Commissioner.

If you look at the 2013 Constitution, Section 107(1) and I quote;

“ The Judicial Services Commission has the authority to appoint Magistrates, Masters of the High Court, the Chief Registrar, and other judicial officers as may be prescribed by any written law. “

Further, Section 107(2) states and I quote;

“In making appointments under subsection (1), the Judicial Services Commission must consult with the Attorney-General.”

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, both the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner of FICAC, from what I understand with respect to the Amendment to the Bill, will need to be qualified for appointment as Judicial officers and because the Judicial Services Commission cannot recommend the appointment of anyone although in consultation with the Attorney-General who is not qualified to hold a position in the Magistracy or Judiciary, so I take it that both the Deputy Commissioner and the Commissioner will have to qualify probably as a Judge, if you are looking at the appointment of a Commissioner, to be appointment as Commissioner of FICAC.

So, the question that boggles my mind, did it take the Government so long to actually realise that they needed to bring this change and they needed to appoint a Commissioner. I do not want to get into the discussion of whether FICAC is independent or not but what I want to stress, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the success of an institution like FICAC is thoroughly dependent on the perception that it is an independent institution, that it has no basis whatsoever for any kind of political interference because if there is no interference but if there is a perception that there is some kind of interference and that FICAC looks at cases, not based on merit of the case then the success of the institution could be compromised.

That is why I think it is very important that we have a full complement. Urgently we must have a Commissioner appointed. We must have a Deputy Commissioner and we must ensure that there is no perceived perception from anywhere that this institution could be compromised. I agree with the Honourable Attorney-General, the example that he gave about Singapore that their own staff from the Independent Commission Against Corruption were prosecuted is a very important point. If the institution itself is perceived to be not independent then there is a possibility that people within that organisation will start behaving in their own ways and that is why we need a very thorough, a very effective, regular in monitoring of those kinds of perceptions. Just like Honourable Nawaikula, if I would mention some names, he forgot the case of Honourable Doctor Mahendra Reddy.

The success of FICAC prosecution it shows that we can have any kind of perception and it is very important for all of us as legislatures in this Parliament and those outside to feel very confident about this independent institution and I support the role of FICAC in our country. It is an important institution. It must get the appropriate resources. It must be empowered to act effectively, efficiently and independently. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I stand to support the amendments to the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Act. The Honourable Member who spoke before me mentioned, why did it take so long?

Well, FICAC was established in 2007 which was prior to the 2013 Constitution of Fiji. Hence the appointment provision for the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner was inconsistent with the Constitution. So, the current Act requires that the President of Fiji is responsible for the

advertising and recruitment process of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. I am questioning whether our President should be involved in this kind of work. However, the President's Office should not be undertaking all these tasks, instead our President should receive advice from the Judicial Services Commission for the appointment.

Therefore, the amendment is simply making the Act consistent with the Constitution and the manner in which Heads of other independent legal authorities are appointed. Hence, this is not a new practice, and it does not compromise the independence of the body. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the amendments to the FICAC Act. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. Let me also contribute to this debate on FICAC on this amendment. Let me just say, Honourable Speaker, from the outset, the people of Fiji were not comfortable with the setting up of FICAC. We already had the Police, the prosecution arm of the Police and this was seen to be in conflict with what the Police already had in place.

FICAC, Honourable Speaker, has grown to become an agency of Government that creates fear in the hearts of the people of this country. And not long ago in this very House, Members of the FijiFirst Government were celebrating this. They were saying that this was an indication of a success of FICAC. FICAC today in Fiji, when you say "FICAC" in any location and any situation would be similar to someone saying Gestapo during those days of the Nazis in Germany and in Europe. That is the degree of fear that is associated with FICAC.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, we can go back to *Hansard*, and it came from that side that the success of FICAC is that people are now fearful of that name. That is not the way to set up an agency of Government; to create fear in the heart of people. One of the challenges with FICAC, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is scope. I sit in the Economic Affairs Committee of Parliament and we scrutinise the book of the Fiji Intelligence Unit. In that Unit you have the FICAC, Police, FRCS and one or two other agencies. When we interviewed the Police and FICAC and asked them to try and define their roles or their limits, they were both very confused. In actual fact, they tried to evade the question. There is no clear demarcation on where the Police ends and where FICAC starts.

I do not think it is healthy for this country and that is even today, even years after FICAC has been set up. I know we have come this far, we cannot dismantle, I would like this body it to be dismantled, we are not Singapore, we are not Australia, where are still not big enough to have an agency like this duplicating and in the process creating fear amongst our people.

I would urge, Honourable Speaker, that we are very sparing in the use of FICAC. It appears to be in the frontline in the fight against anything that is wrong in this country. I believe it should be used very sparingly and I would ask that they report to a Commission who would then empower them to act on every situation. You cannot give them a free hand to determine what they want to do. That, Honourable Speaker, is my concern and I hope it would be reflected in the way we structure or relook at FICAC. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister Reddy, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, I rise in support of this Bill. Honourable Speaker, my name was mentioned and there were some questions raised about the independence of FICAC.

Honourable Speaker, I have been charged by FICAC, and I was produced in Court and there was a process that I had to go through to clear my name. Having been through the process, Honourable Speaker, I must say that FICAC was independent, FICAC is independent and I would want to believe that FICAC will be independent.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, I lended myself to scrutiny giving a signal that without the Minister or whoever I am, we must subject ourselves to scrutiny when we are dealing with any issues being raised with respect to our integrity, our honesty in the manner in which we discharge our duties. Honourable Speaker, there is a process. If the process is circumvented, if the process is not followed then that is something that we must question.

Honourable Speaker, I want to say that I have no doubt about the independent of FICAC. I support this Bill and I wish to say to the Honourable Members from the other side that they should not make comments on institutions which have been established to safeguard the integrity of this country and make the institution of Government stronger. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Mosese Bulitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. My short contribution this afternoon on the Bill that is before the House and also I am just been told by my learned friend who have spoken before me on this side of the House that we disagree with it in the manner in which the Amendments had been brought to the House. It is quite late, given that FICAC was established right back in 2007 and the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji came about in 2013, and not in 2007, Honourable Minister.

We had Elections in 2014, for the last four years, this particular Bill has not passaged into this august House and has taken the second term of Parliament for this particular Bill to come in. If this Bill should have come in the last term of Parliament and if there was really an inconsistency in the law to align it with the Constitution if the Act was inconsistent, but again the using of Standing Order 51 to bring about this Bill, I think it should be discouraged given that since 2007, FICAC had been established, it has got offices around the country and they have prosecuted many cases.

There are people who are out there who have witnessed FICAC's role probably as accused people and also some who had been prosecuted and some, luckily they were being acquitted. But again the important part of that is, this particular Bill should have been taken around the country, not only in terms of the appointment of FICAC, the appointment of the Commissioner or the Deputy Commissioner of FICAC but the overall function and review of the role that FICAC has played in the last ten years or so, given that the argument in our political divide on the usage of this particular institution as a political tool, which only the people have got answers to that.

The Committee would have been the best option to go around the country, to collect those views and clarify some of those opinions with the people if that particular exercise was undertaken. But unfortunately, that it got only one hour to debate over this. On Monday it was tabled and then we have to give our opinion on this particular Bill.

One of the things that I asked the Honourable Minister responsible for FICAC is the appointment of a Commissioner for FICAC. We have got a Deputy Commissioner for the last 13 years. If we could have a Commissioner appointed for FICAC, because the relevant provisions in the 2013 Constitution are there for that position, that has not been filled in the last 13 years or so. If that could be done and if the Honourable Minister can give us an assurance as to when a particular Commissioner could be brought to Head FICAC, who has got extensive legal background and also investigative background as to the core functions and roles of FICAC that need to hold that Office, that is one.

The second thing that I will take this House back to, Sir, back in 2015 in the month of July, in one of our sittings in Parliament where a question was posed from this side of the House to that side of the House by the Honourable Semesa Karavaki, in terms of who FICAC reports to. That particular question led us to another proceedings in Parliament, where a matter of privileges, fine against the Honourable Attorney-General of an allegation of misleading Parliament that the FICAC reports to His Excellency the President. Honourable Speaker, Sir, you were the President of Fiji then.

We did not have any time to ask you, but again given that you are the Speaker now, and given this particular institution again is now on the floor of discussion, the issue here, Sir, whether this particular institution reports exactly to who? The Constitutional provisions also say that they do periodic reports and that is the administration function of FICAC, they come under the line Minister, the Minister responsible for FICAC.

But, on cases where the test of independency really is aware of who do they really report to, and given that an answer was given in 2015 that it reports to the President, we still do not believe but, again, if the Honourable Minister can answer that this afternoon to this August House through this debate on where does this particular institution actually reports to in terms of cases, whether he likes to withdraw that answer in 2015, it is up to him.

But, that is my view and I call upon the Minister to withdraw the Bill and come in the right procedure and let the people decide, and let us take it around the country, inform the community where we to have the consultation and let the people give their opinion and views on this particular Bill. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member, for his contribution to the debate. The Honourable Minister, Honourable Inia Seruiratu.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief, do we need FICAC? Yes, we do. We already have the Police Force, but, we, as a responsible Government, we have to have institutions in place that ensure that all issues that do arise as we progress and develop are well-accounted for under the processes and the institutions that we have.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have been in the Defence Ministry now for the last 6 months and I have noted a lot, and this is the big picture that I wanted to start building now, and you would understand very well Honourable Speaker, and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition where I am coming from. The elements of national power, we need economic security for national security. At the same time we also need national security for economic security. We cannot go without the other, we cannot have one without the other. Fiji has progressed a lot in the last few years, from our early

stages of democracy to where we are today, of course, we maybe not like Singapore, but that does not mean that we do not have to have the processes in place.

In fact, I wanted to contribute yesterday when we were talking about Investment Fiji, the Report that was tabled because this is very, very important as we look at Fiji into the future. This is about strategic direction that we need to take. Let us not only look at the negative aspects of FICAC, where some people are concerned with, but there are positives to this as well, and this is where I have said, 'We are a developing country', now we are a middle-income country, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Our development, our economic progress, in my assessment as Minister for Defence and National Security in the last six months, has outpaced our security arrangements and that is why we need to invest in institutions, like FICAC; we have to invest in the Police Force; we need to invest in the Finance Intelligence Unit (FIU); in the Naval Division; in our border agencies, because institutions as such you want an investor-friendly Fiji. We want investors to come but we all know that development comes with the price and we have to be proactive, we have to prepare for that and each institution as such will give confidence, Honourable Speaker, to those that would want to come and invest in Fiji because we have mechanisms in place that will protect their interest, not only in the short term but in the long term.

Elements of National Power, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we need political directions and this is why we are here in this House. At the same time, we need that economic component and, of course, the national security and the military component; these are all very critical for Fiji to have prime in democracy and sustainable in the long term and, most importantly, investor-friendly so that we can attract our investors into the country. It is very important for our future directions. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution today. Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General for his right of reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will not talk much about the Bill, I think because a lot of it has been said, but I would like respond to some of the issues that were raised by, in particular, Members from the other side.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just reiterate again that a number of independent institutions or bodies or persons appointed to independent bodies does have people who are appointed through a particular process.

In Fiji's case, we have chosen the Judicial Services Commission and let me reiterate, for example, in New Zealand, the judicial appointments are actually made by again, the Governor-General, the equivalent of our President directly upon the recommendation of the Attorney-General. We do not have that system here in Fiji.

For the Supreme Court, the Fiji Court of Appeal, the High Court, the Governor-General's advice by the Attorney-General again, by convention, who receives advice from the Chief Justice and the Solicitor-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Australia, the Attorney-General is responsible for recommending judicial appointments directly to the Australian Government. This includes the Family Court of Australia, Federal Circuit Court of Australia, Federal Court of Australia and the High Court of Australia.

In Singapore, for example, the Chief Justice, Judges of Appeal, Judges and Judicial Commissioners are appointed by the President, on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is required to consult the Chief Justice before tendering his advice on the appointment of Judicial or Judicial Commissioner, and as highlighted again that the appointment of the Commissioner to the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption is done by the Minister responsible.

So this is nothing untoward about it as such, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think the test is whether subsequent to the appointment, the person appointed to that particular position is allowed or can carry out their work with their level of independence that is guaranteed by the law. To date, not a single shred of evidence has been provided by the other side nor anyone else that there has been any form of interference, both with the Judiciary or FICAC for that matter.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that, we have had this debate, I mean, whether Honourable Nawaikula does contribute, we always see the discussion heading generally southward and what has actually happened, he brought in former Court of Appeal Judge, Gordon Ward, he brought in the current Commissioner of Police, Sitiveni Qiliho to the whole fray of things. What has that got to do with FICAC? Somehow or the other, intimating that Commissioner Qiliho went and burned Gordon Ward's house because he was seen there few days before, and she is saying, "Yes". This is the level of competence and the contribution we get.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, tomorrow if someone is walking down from here, walking past FBC and at night there is some prostitution, then they say "Oh, we did it" or "We participated". What a whole lot of nonsense! That is the level of debate that we have and the contribution from the other side.

And, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we do point out to the other side on how other jurisdictions are dealing with it, then it shows they are mature democracies. Other times, they want to adopt their ways so they want to adopt it when it suits them, other times when it does not suit them, then they do not want to adopt it. You have to be principle in your position.

Honourable Professor Prasad, I do not know where you get your legal advice from, but there is absolutely no legal requirement in the Constitution, nor the Act for the Commissioner or the Deputy Commissioner to be a person who has got legal qualifications. I do not know where you got your advice from. He went on about that. But there is absolutely no requirement under the Constitution or the Act, please, read my lips, that says the Commissioner or the Deputy Commissioner has to be someone who has got 10 years or 15 years of qualification. They are trying to muddy the waters, and we need to get away from it.

(Hon. Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There is no assumption. There is assumption only in your mind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment's name was brought about, Honourable Leader of Opposition has also been prosecuted by FICAC, we have had two former Prime Ministers who have also been charged, one was not actually charged by FICAC, but actually by the DPP's Office.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact that the Honourable Leader of Opposition on appeal was acquitted, the Honourable Minister was actually charged being a member of Government, demonstrates that FICAC is independent and demonstrates that the Judiciary is independent. As we have highlighted previously, you do not suddenly say an institution is independent, not independent,

independent, depending on who has been charged, who has been prosecuted and whether the prosecution is successful or not. That is when you are politicising it.

At times, I also see the fact that there are people being charged. Why? I think from a legal perspective, maybe should not have been charged or people who should be charged, are not being charged, but that is my opinion. I do not go and tell FICAC what to do. I do not tell them who to prosecute, who not to prosecute, whether to do a *nolle* or not, that is their independence.

The point that they do miss which they have missed upon, and Honourable Nawaikula would be very interested in this because he always quotes from the Auditor-General's Report. I can tell you that in previous Parliaments and previous Auditor-General's Reports, including the Public Accounts Committee Reports where people have outright been blatantly stealing from the system, there has been absolutely no prosecution.

Today, we see that the level of prosecution and, indeed, successful prosecution of people who have been charged by FICAC and have been convicted, relates to civil servants and people from the private sector, who have been engaged in a systemic corrupt practice.

We have business people who were locked up because they have been bribing our officials. There has been blackmails going on from the other side. That indicates that FICAC is working. And, yes, we want people to be fearful of FICAC if they have done something wrong.

In the same way a person who had raped someone, a person who has robbed someone, a person who has assaulted someone, needs to be fearful of the law that the police will investigate and prosecute them. We need that deterrence effect.

It is absolutely essential, and it goes to the point of what the Minister for Foreign Affairs is saying. It gives confidence to law-abiding citizens and law-abiding business people who want to carry out businesses in a straight way. Previously, you had people bribing people and good business people did not want to participate. They said, "What is the point", because they will get paid off. There used to be certain fees that people used to get paid. We now have e-tender. All of these things are holistic approach to reducing systemic corruption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Minister for Industry and Trade also made a very salient point in respect of the Office of His Excellency the President. You do not expect His Excellency the President's Office to be putting out advertisements for jobs, nor, His Excellency the President, to sit there and vet interviews, shortlist interviews. That is taking away from the high office of His Excellency, the President. So obviously we need an agency that will actually do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to round off very soon. I remember when I was in the private sector and at that time, I used to work for Colonial and I was also a Board member of Transparency International, and I remember that as Board member of Transparency International, when we had the SDL Government in place, we actually took a petition for the SDL Government to ratify the United Nation Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). Under UNCAC, Mr. Speaker Sir, there is a requirement to have an independent corruption agency and that is what we wanted to the then SDL Government to do, they did not ratify UNCAC.

One of the first International Conventions that the Bainimarama-led Government ratified was UNCAC. We ratified UNCAC unreservedly, and we also put ourselves up for the Peer Review and the Peer Review is not something that is mandatory, it is voluntary. We had countries come in to review our adherence of UNCAC through our laws. Normally, they have a developing country and a developed or metropolitan country and I remember that the first two countries we had was USA

and Bangladesh. And we subsequently had other countries that came and reviewed our adherence to UNCAC via the FICAC Act.

They made recommendations, we made various amendments to the laws, various procedural changes and, Mr. Speaker Sir, today, Fiji is on the panel of countries that actually go and review other countries in respect to their adherence to UNCAC. That is the stage that we have reached, Mr. Speaker Sir.

The requirement, of course, now as the Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs said, we are living in a globalised world. It requires a particular level of sophistication, and you cannot say that the Police will go off and do all of these.

Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, all of these jurisdictions under UNCAC, you are required to have a separate agency. Why have they done this? To provide a particular focus on removing systemic corruption. Few years ago, there was a huge scandal in the New South Wales. Mr. Speaker, the reality is, we always have to be constantly vigilant. We have to constantly build the expertise and specialisation within our laws for this to take place.

Mr. Speaker Sir, again, the last point that I would like to make is that, this particular amendment simply clears up the administrative side of things. It does not, in any way, affect the independence, and I hope that Honourable Members from the other side when they talk about various office holders, it is not a personalised matter.

We are here today, we cannot be here tomorrow. That is a fact of life. I am standing here talking, I could be dead tomorrow, but the fact of the matter is, some of them may want me to die but that is beside the point.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- But as much as I disagree with all of you...

(Laughter)

...and I do not want you here, but I do not want you to die.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge Parliament to support this amendment which will bring this particular Act into alignment with the 2013 Constitution and various other provisions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General for his Right of Reply.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

Pursuant to resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 13th May, 2019 that the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (Amendment) Bill 2019 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote.

Vote cast:

Ayes	-	26
Noes	-	23
Not Voted	-	2

HON. SPEAKER.- There being 26 Ayes, 23 Noes and 2 Not Voted, the motion is, therefore, agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 2007 (Bill No. 6 of 2016) enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Act No. of 2019)]

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 1st April, 2019, the Public Enterprises Bill 2019 will now be debated, voted upon, and passed today. I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

PUBLIC ENTERPRISES BILL 2019

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed on 1st April, 2019, I move:

That the Public Enterprises Bill 2019 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed, may I remind Honourable Members that the debate must only be on whether the Bill should pass or not, on the content. I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on this motion.

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief. By way of introduction as highlighted earlier on, this Bill was tabled in Parliament on 1st April, 2019, and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. The Standing Committee has tabled its Report after having consultations and, of course, meeting with various representation that came before it.

As highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill seeks to repeal the existing the Public Enterprises Act of 1996 which was brought about during the SVT days when changes took place in public enterprise and those changes, of course, were essential to move State-Owned Enterprises or various Government Departments into the 21st century.

Whilst the laws at that time may have been pertinent, of course, things have moved along. It was from one perspective rather bureaucratic but nonetheless, these laws back then provided the impetus for the numerous changes that have taken place. For example, the corporatisation of Telecom which used to be called the Post and Telecommunications Limited. We saw the creation of ATH. We saw the diversion of the shares where FNPF became the majority shareholder in ATH.

Of course, then subsequently we had Vodafone that was created which is a subsidiary company now. I am glad to say that it is a 100 percent owned Fijian entity, although it carries the name of Vodafone. TFL is also a 100 percent owned Fijian company. ATH now has also ventured outside Fiji. They have gone into Samoa. They have recently bought BlueScope, and I understand they are looking at various investment opportunities in the other Pacific Island Countries.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen that public enterprises does provide a number of economic factors that can spur an economic growth. In our time also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have currently in the divestment of partial shares of EFL, we have also divested our shares in Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, the turnaround time of the Port has improved, now they are paying huge levels of dividends to the three shareholders which includes FNPF, the Fijian Government and Aitken and Spence.

In all of these, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to be able to ensure that we do invite a lot of private sector participation into this space which requires also better quality laws, better quality standards and better quality instruments of governance. And what this particular Bill seeks to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to actually provide improved opportunities in better corporate governance, ownership monitoring, reporting accountability and monitoring of what we call “non-commercial obligations”.

For long periods of time many of the State-Owned Enterprises had what we called “non-commercial obligations” or corporate social responsibility, whatever term you gave. The Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, suggest in terms of some salient features eliminates the distinction between Government Commercial Companies, Commercial Statutory Authorities and reorganisation enterprise and treats all public enterprises in the same manner, which is what it should as opposed to be having it fairly bureaucratic.

The Bill further mandates that all public enterprises should operate on a commercial basis that is efficient and profitable and to this end, the Bill also highlights the significance of the role of the Board of Directors in ensuring that the Public Enterprise adheres to this mandate. Concomitantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have the Companies Act which this Parliament also approved, which now places enormous responsibility on the Directors of these Boards to ensure that they act with proper conduct, but fulfil more importantly from a legal perspective, their fiduciary duty to that particular Board or organisation. Therefore, the rules of conflict of interest, the rules between, for example, related entities needs to be very clearly demarcated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in contrast to the existing Act, the Bill specifically provides for duties and responsibilities of the Director appointed to the Board and specifically states (we have never had this) requires Directors to act honestly and in a good faith with reasonable care and diligence and to comply with the Code of Conduct of the Public Enterprises.

The Bill also requires Directors to avoid insolvency, to not to use information obtained as a result of being a Director on the Board of a Public Enterprise for any improper purpose and to properly declare and register interest and to avoid conflicts of interest. Yesterday in the discussion of PAFCO, I think someone had mentioned that the Chair of PAFCO said he wanted to have more business people on his Board. We also have to ensure that we do appoint business people that conflicts of interest need to be managed. There will not be direct of conflicts of interest and that is critically important.

These principles and values are actually enshrined in that particular Bill, now hopefully it become an Act, you actually have the ability to then commence proceedings against Directors who do not adhere to the provisions of the Act; clearly enunciated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also the oversight of the regulatory functions of a public enterprise remains with the relevant line Ministry. The Bill also formulise the current process for Board appointments whereby Board appointments are made by the Minister responsible for the Public Enterprises with the approval of the Prime Minister. So again this is to ensure that we have clear separation between the regulatory arm of the Board in line with the Ministry and the actual enterprise part. So the enterprise part rests with the Minister responsible for Public Enterprises, the regulatory aspect is with the Minister, that is, the line Minister responsible for regulatory aspects.

It is very important to make these distinctions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because they require different views or different aspects and different proficiencies to be able to deal with those aspects. If, for example, a public enterprise has a regulatory aspect to it, the line Ministry should be working with that particular Ministry. A case in point, if, for example, MSAF is declared to be a public enterprise, I am not saying it has, we have to look at the Schedule, the line Ministry is of course, the Minister responsible for MSAF, and in this particular case it is the Minister for Transport.

They look after regulatory aspects. But the actual corporate governance, the commercial side of dealing with the organisation is done through the Ministry of Public Enterprises. So this is the approach and this is a very good approach because we need to keep that demarcation because if you merged the regulatory with the commercial aspects, we will have enormous levels of conflict, which we have of course seen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not want to perhaps going into the summary of the Bill which is clearly enunciated in the notes to the Bill, but essentially the Bill encapsulates what I have said. We have been working actually, Mr. Speaker, on this for about two years with the Asian Development Bank. This is part of the technical assistance that they have provided to us. Of course, it is part of the ongoing upgrade of all our laws and the business environment that we are trying to create, it fits in very well with the Ease of Doing Business, it makes the laws more transparent, for example, if a foreign company may want to participate in a State-Owned Enterprise, they know exactly what the rules are. So, with those introductory remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Bill to Parliament. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. One of the primary reasons why we oppose the amendments is because we feel that not enough work is done. Noting of course that during the last session the resolution was that this Bill is to be referred to the Standing Committee and for the Standing Committee to get all the public consultations that is needed within that period which is about one month. I commend the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for attempting to that timeline given his very busy schedule, he even has to be rushed from overseas to here and he is also the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee so that is just too much on his plate even to do this. To be able to do this, within that time ...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Superman.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... he managed to call in to account of the representative of the Public Enterprises. And speaking of Public Enterprises, there are 11 of them. These institutions come under the scrutiny of this legislation:

- Airports Fiji Limited;
- Energy Fiji Limited;
- Fiji Broadcasting Corporation;

- Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited;
- Fiji Meat Industry Board;
- Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited;
- Fiji Rice Limited;
- Fiji Food Processors Limited;
- Post Fiji Limited;
- Unit Trust of Fiji; and
- Yaqara Pastoral Company Limited.

So these are the enterprises that have been subjected to the scrutiny of this amendment.

And noting, of course, that the purpose of this Bill in a nutshell to reduce the emphasis on public enterprise establishment and introduce provisions that clarify Ministerial responsibilities and accountabilities, define and strengthen Directors' duties and responsibilities, improve transparency and accountability by strengthening public enterprises, forward planning requirements and their reporting against these planning documents, et cetera. This is where the limitation that I am trying to explain here, being that we need more time to look into that especially to be scrutinised by the public. I know that they spend two years, but that is two years only of their very narrow view.

The view that I am talking about is the public view and to note that, Honourable Speaker, we often feel that we are the experts, we are not the experts. Just invite other people to come and see other areas, other angles of the law that they will bring in that you have never think about. And that is the critical thing of any democracy, we should be inclusive and that is why we are saying, we should spend more time to look into it.

I feel somewhat, this could also be cynical. The question that comes to mind when these enterprises become privatised is the question of the Government's social obligation, the common good, the primary objective of this company going private is to make money. So we ask the question, what about public good, what about common good, what about social responsibility, what will happen to the water, what will happen to your entitlement or to human rights through the water when the Water Authority became privatised? Those are the questions that we ask and that we need the input of the public. This amendment in the shape that it is can also be abused, and that point was raised by those who came specifically the Fiji Law Society, for example, and here I want to publicly thank the Fiji Law Society because they have been consistent in all the Bills that have been put out to the public.

And it pointed out to Section 2 talking about the common good, talking about the public responsibility where it can be abused. There needs to be a definition there because how the Act is stated, it allows this company to have a Memorandum of Understanding or an agreement with Government and for Government to pay that money into it. I am saying that it can be abused, say for example FBC. FBC, in the last many years, had been consistently making losses in:

- 2010 - \$517,000;
- 2011 - \$1.1 million;
- 2012 - \$7.1 million;
- 2013 - \$5.6 million;
- 2014 - \$3.9 million; and
- 2015 - \$3.6 million.

Then suddenly in 2016, it made a profit. Why? Because Government made a decision that the money that it allocated to it to be converted to income. And if you read the Annual Report for 2016, that is the reason why the auditor gave a reservation, gave a qualified opinion.

Now with this law, all that will be legitimised because FBC can make an agreement with Government for public broadcasting and that money will go in as an income.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You do not know what you are talking about! You are not making any sense.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That will go as an income. So, it can be abused and so the point that was made by the Fiji Law Society was that you need to define. You will have a provision there to allow these private companies to address their social responsibilities or common goods, but, it can also be abused because public broadcasting, for example, it can be used solely as propaganda. It may slowly turn out to promote Government.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, it is doing it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So that is how this can be abused and that is why we need also to have a proper look into this. That amendment, that proposal has not been looked at, so it will be there and it is very likely that it will be abused.

The other one, of course, is the Fiji Sugar Corporation making losses after losses. What it could do after this is to make an agreement with Government, so that whatever Government pays into it will be converted as income and all those losses will be losses. But it is good in my view that public companies should indicate those losses, because those are our obligations.

The other thing that is wrong is that, some of this, for example FBC, despite those losses have their increments increased and even their Managers taking bonuses, but those are public money, they are not entitled to that, they did not even make the money, they were incurring losses, but this amendment will change that. Those are some of the reasons.

HON. MEMBER.- You have no idea!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We refer this to the drafters and they pushed it away and I think sincerely that they are wrong.

The other point was that, there are also provisions there where they can be indemnified for their negligence like that. The Honourable Minister has stated that now there are bigger obligations imposed by the Companies Act. But no, here the Government is allowed to indemnify the Directors and the Managers for doing something wrong, and that is totally wrong.

HON. MEMBER.- No! You do not know! Read the law. Did you read the law or not?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, it is there.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It goes to section 55. The public enterprise may indemnify liability of a director or executive officer subject to the approval of the Minister; the liability arose out of their capacity as CEO. What we had recommended was that, we should change that Directors and CEO are public officers ought to be subjected for the same standard and liability of Directors of

private companies under the Companies Act, so you read it. Those are the reasons why we are opposing this, we need more time. It is a good thing but we need more time to improve it and this is not enough.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate, having no one else wishing to contribute to the debate, Honourable Alvick Maharaj, you have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ:- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I, as the Chairperson of the Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, I believe I need to give in my contribution with regards to this Bill.

Sir, at the outset, I would actually say that one month was more than enough to go around the country and get the submissions. It was not just that we went to the Public Enterprise entities, but we went out to the general public covering the major districts, rural and peri-urban areas as well, collecting information.

With all those respect from Honourable Member, what he says about me, but the fact is wherever we went, Honourable Speaker, we did actually give a presentation with regards to the Public Enterprise Bill as well but what we have seen, while we were actually collecting public submissions, that majority of common or ordinary Fijians that do not actually understand about this particular Bill. We tried to understand but the entities that came before the Committee were very happy and my other two substantive Members of the Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights (Honourable Mosese Bulitavu and Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua) will agree with me that the work that is being done by the public enterprises is very much commendable, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, there was another point mentioned with regards to the submission by the Fiji Law Society. I believe this is also very surprising that the Fiji Law Society came out with eight or nine submissions before the Committee and they were seeking clarification and the interesting part is, Sir, I, as a Pharmacist deliberated on their submission and clarified and they as lawyers representing Fiji Law Society understood and they left satisfied after the submission, but it is interesting that a lawyer from the Opposition actually does not understand.

Sir, also drafters have nothing to do with it because none of the Fiji Law Society submissions were actually sent to the drafters so it was not actually pushed aside by the drafters.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with regards to the Bill itself, it is vital for our country to keep up with our regional and international counterparts. Fiji recognised the benefits and the needs for the Public Enterprise Reform Programmes in 1990s and introduced the Public Enterprise Reforms Framework through the introduction of Public Enterprise Act 1996.

However, since 1996, the dynamics of the public enterprise portfolios have changed and the understanding of the international best practices, Public Enterprise governors, monitoring, reporting and accountability has developed. Therefore, in order to keep our Public Enterprise relevant, it is imperative that the legislation which governs public enterprise is urgently updated and aligned to the international best practices.

The Fijian Government now intends to make this a reality and has introduced the Public Enterprise Bill 2019. The Bill, amongst other things, aims to mandate the public enterprise operate on a commercial basis that is efficient and profitable. It will align the regulations of public enterprise in respect of governance and operations with other legislation, such as the current Companies Act 2015 to ensure that there is nothing inconsistent. It is also to ensure that our legal framework is

consistent with international best practice and is fully implemented or result in improved public enterprise financial and operational performance.

Additionally, the Bill aims to formalise the current process of the Board appointments and requires Directors to act honestly and in good faith with reasonable care and due diligence and comply with the Code of Conduct of Public Enterprise. It introduces:

- provisions that clarify Ministerial responsibilities and accountabilities;
- defines the strengthened of Directors' duties and responsibilities;
- improves transparency and accountability by strengthening Public enterprise;
- forward-planning requirement and other reporting agencies planning documents and enhances public enterprise monitoring;

This Bill also requires public enterprises to adopt a code of conduct and standardise expectation dealing with conflict of interest. Despite the apparent urgency for the Bill to be made into law, the Government saw the need for the public input in law-making process, and this is one of the key aspects of democracy.

The Bill was then referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for review, and public consultation was conducted in key areas around Fiji. Evidence received from the submissions greatly assisted the Committee in its work. It was amazing and I believe all my Members of the Committee would agree to see how public enterprises have evolved in the past years after reforms took place. Also, to note the amount of social obligation carried out by these entities is commendable.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with those remarks, I once again commend the Public Enterprise Bill to Parliament and seek support of all the Members of this august House for the Bill. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor for your right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very quickly, I think the Chair has very aptly consolidated what needed to be said but I would also like to point out to just responding and to reiterate that Honourable Nawaikula read out Section 55 or Section 56 of the Act about indemnity or Section 55 about indemnity. Unfortunately, he did not read the whole thing. What it says is that, if it says that the Minister has given his or her prior approval, the liability arose out of an act or omission of the director or executive officer in the capacity “and”, not “or”, the act or omission was done in good faith and with due care. If you do not have that, you will not find anybody sitting on any of the boards.

What it says is that the directors did everything right, did everything in good faith and despite that, they still get sued. Then you have the indemnity that covers them so obviously the Government, the Ministry has to ensure they acted in good faith. Only then will they be covered for indemnity. Of course, if they have not acted in good faith, they are subject to being sued, otherwise nobody will actually sit from outside on any of the boards. That is the point, this is not something peculiar to Fiji. It is international best practice. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, obviously again, like I said, Honourable Nawaikula probably needs to understand the commercial side of things.

He also raised the issue about privatisation and he raised the issue about what he said about the social obligation which is actually defined under Section 2 as what we call “Non-Commercial Obligation” which means that the specified service or activity referred to in a non-commercial obligation agreement now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, please, he really needs to read up on these things.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, obviously, you need to be specific relating to the company or relating to the entity. So, for example, the social obligation or non-commercial obligation that would be, say, provided by AFL or EFL are completely two different things or Biosecurity Authority of Fiji or Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF) or whichever organisation. You cannot have a broad-ranging non-commercial obligation.

It also says non-commercial obligation agreement means an agreement referred to in Section 21 between the Government and public enterprise for the undertaking of a non-commercial obligation by the public enterprise. The reason why that is done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to be able to account for it because the balance sheets (and this is what goes to the core of this), of these State-owned enterprises need to be strong. We are trying to do that. As a result of the reorganisation and the corporatisation of EFL, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the balance sheet being strong, traditionally, Honourable Leader of the Opposition would testify to that.

A lot of this happened during his and other governments' time. We have also done it, that generally when State-owned enterprises when they go out and they want to, for example, improve the infrastructure but part of the cost of the infrastructure is actually increased because they provide non-commercial obligations, Government always guarantees these loans when they go out. So the banks, for example, will not lend to them unless there is a Government guarantee because the banks do not feel secure that they have got a very strong balance sheet. As a result of the balance sheet of EFL improving, we have got rid of the Government guarantee required by ANZ for EFL and we said it in this very Parliament, in excess of \$200 million have gone off our books as far as guarantees are concerned. So, the whole idea is to build strong balance sheets.

The other point about social obligations, he talked about water, electricity, et cetera, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the old way of thinking was that "All right, we need to provide affordable electricity to everyone." So, therefore the pricing of electricity, for example, used to be completely controlled. So, even though the cost of providing the electricity was much higher, even though there were people who had access to electricity, some people may have 10 air conditioners, three swimming pool pumps or whatever, they paid the same rate as the person who may be living up with just having 1 fridge, 1 television and lights.

So, there is no distinction made between the usage so at one point in time in Fiji, everyone paid flat rate of twenty-four cents. Today, we have a distinction made and, Mr. Speaker Sir, those people who need assistance, Government directly subsidises them.

So, in EFL's case the tariff rate is about thirty-four cents a unit, if you are for domestic usage but those people who earn less than \$30,000 a year, the Government pays 50 percent of their tariff for them directly to EFL.

So, EFL still charges the same rate, you have the low-income person not paying the full rate, so we are fulfilling our obligation, they are getting lower tariff rate as far as the electricity is concerned but EFL's balance sheet is not affected. The EFL can go out and invest more infrastructure, can go to the banks and borrow on their loan, that is the whole purpose behind it. So, just because the company may be partially privatised, et cetera, it does not in any way mean that those social obligations as required under the 2013 Constitution would not be fulfilled. It is completely misleading to say that.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again I do not want to go any further than this, I think a lot has been said. If you look at the listing of the companies that the Honourable Niko Nawaikula also referred to as Schedules 1 and 2. The Schedule 1, of course, are all the companies that are 100 percent-owned

by the Fijian Government but more importantly, there are certain entities that we do not place the same requirements of profit.

So, for example, we do not expect Biosecurity or MSAF to be running on a commercial basis because they provide more of a regulatory function but we expect AFL to make money. We make other entities like Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, all the others that are listed there to actually make profit whereas the others cannot be expected to make profit, that is why we have demarcated that but nonetheless, it does not mean that the rules of governance does not apply to them.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this Act or this Bill, which is not an Amendment to the Public Enterprise Bill, the former Bill is actually repealed and this is a new Act that we are proposing. This will put Fiji's Public Enterprise segment into the 21st century. It will increase investor-confidence, it will give confidence to people to actually sit on our boards and, of course, it will in fact, create more economic activity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

Pursuant to resolution of Parliament passed on Monday, 1st April, 2019 that the Public Enterprise Bill 2019, be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, the Parliament will now vote.

Votes Casts:

Ayes	-	26
Noes	-	23
Not voted	-	2

Honourable Members, the result of the vote are as follows: There being 26 Ayes, 23 Noes, 2 Not Voted. The motion is therefore agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

[Public Enterprises Act 2019, enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji (Act No.....of 2019)]

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I wish to clarify that with respect to the five Standing Committee Motions listed on today's Order Paper, at the end of each 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. You all know the procedure.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to move his motion.

**REVIEW REPORT - MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, TRADE
AND TOURISM 2014 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism 2014 Annual Report which was tabled on 15th May, 2018.

HON. V.R. BHATNAGAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Honourable Members on the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the findings and recommendations of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism 2014 Annual Report which was tabled on 14th May, 2018.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism (MITT) is responsible for preparation and implementation of policies and strategies which would improve Fiji's economic growth.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Year 2019 proved to be another successful year for MITT as they continue to implement the Government policies and initiatives by strengthening industrial development, trade and investments.

Speaking on achievement, Honourable Speaker, Sir, one of the highlights for the Ministry in 2014 was the continued growth of its 'Fijian Made Buy Fijian' Campaign, with a total of 53 new applications and 980 products granted approval to use campaign emblems.

Also of interest is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry and the National University in which the Ministry offers job training and engaging students in projects within the Ministry. In the long run, the MOU had to be extended to other tertiary institutions and provide valuable specialised experience to our future workforce of Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, film production in Fiji is increasing its potential through the implementation of the 47 percent tax concession that attracts the production companies. In the long run if the range of activities with local content are to be extended, the concession rightly injects more benefit to Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, for the past 20 years, Savusavu Industrial Zone had been identified to be the depressed area. Therefore, an extend explanatory reform and review to facilitate that had been undertaken to improve the update of its economic activity.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, trade barriers and high standard of international trade requirements are two factors that affect the performance of local exporters and the aggregate export for Fiji's economy. A suggested recommendation is for the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji and other relevant agencies needed to implement an effective coordinated approach to address packaging issues.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with those few comments to enlighten the House and as the Member moving the motion, I thank you for the opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER. – I thank the Honourable Chairperson. I give the floor to the Leader of the Opposition.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Sir. Honourable Speaker, I thank the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs and the Members of its Committee for reviewing the Report of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, in its Annual Report for 2014. I am interested in their original Report, the Report from the Ministry because it mentions some of the names that are close to my heart and one of them is the Savusavu Tax Free Zone, as mentioned by the Chairperson. Right now a group of local Heads of *Vanua* in Cakaudrove are working towards setting up something using the tax free zone facility identified for in Savusavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that the Ministry should be looking at its own core function, which is to facilitate trade both, internationally and regionally rather than just issuing items like, T-Shirts and local advertisements. Unfortunately, the 'Buy Fijian Made' has been interpreted by some as 'Buy FijiFirst'.

(Honourable Members interject)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, PACER Plus has been around for more than 10 years. More effort should be directed to find common solutions. We are economically small, therefore, we must continue to work with others and not be twirl-headed about some periodic starring role we get in the international arena.

We have mentioned that, boasting about our Presidency of COP 23 when we all know that chairmanship of those come around which is cyclic to our appointments.

The Ministry should focus more on facilitating investments. I know how difficult it is to set up investment in Fiji, working with joint venture partners from overseas, otherwise I would not have stood for Election. Better targeting hugely applied under the National Export Strategy to assist businesses in export market. I am hoping that what we are trying to do in Savusavu, the tax free zone and Savusavu being port of entry, et cetera, will help the economy, not only in Savusavu and Cakaudrove but the whole of Vanua Levu and Fiji in export.

Sir, the cost of doing business in the country is sliding to encourage investors to come in. Still there are some who were not very happy. I have an executive summary on Fiji and I would like to quote from it. It says, and I quote:

“Although the Government has made some progress to improve the investment climate, transparency remains a concern with foreign investors encountering land dealings and costly bureaucratic due to delays.”

We had just finished discussing a Bill which has now been passed into an Act and this is why we oppose it. These are not being properly resolved before the Bill was debated fully in this House.

Another one, on land ownership. The land ownership situation in Fiji is complex and the land sales law restricts ownership of freehold land inside the cities or towns to Fijian citizens. Tax clearances from Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS) may hinder the remittances of profits and dividends. In a way, we are trying to attract the foreign investors and some of our own legislations are restricting them on their full enjoyment of the facilities in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report with very clear in its statement. The introduction of the Report says that the Ministry is responsible monitoring seven Statutory Agencies, I will not name them, they are already there in the Report. They have highlighted the growth in Fijian Made Buy Fijian Campaign, extensive advertisements, as I had mentioned earlier could be mistaken 'Buy FijiFirst'.

Extensively used by the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General and the FijiFirst candidates in our last Election. Prior to that where we misfortunate or the accident that come in, in the very close resemblance of the colours used in the promotion by the Ministry and the promotion of it in political parties. An example of that walking into the hall this morning at the GPH, I saw the special *Bula* Shirt given to the guests who came in. I thought there were all SODELPA supporters with the colours.

Assistance to exporters through the National Exporters Strategy continued with 12 companies receiving a total funding of around \$1.75 million. The MOU between the Ministry and the FNU whereby students are now able to obtain valuable experiences through on-the-job training with the Ministry in various projects. So these are some elements of the Annual Report brought by our own Standing Committee.

My concern or my view is that, instead of just reporting or commenting on the Report, we as legislators, need to be proactive in trying to make our Ministries and Departments and agents of Government more productive by our suggestions and that is why we need more consultation.

We oppose the three Bills brought up into the House this afternoon, Sir, because of the lack of consultation. Some of these things that appear or come up in the Report could have been avoided if we have had a wider consultation.

I support the acceptance of the Report. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

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

Honourable Speaker, let me make some observations on the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism 2014 Annual Report. I was one of the Committee Members who was part of the scrutiny of this Report.

I would like to start, Honourable Speaker, on Recommendation No. 2 regarding the growth in film production in the country. It has certainly grown in leaps and bounds, Honourable Speaker, but one of my concern that I have articulated in this House is, how you secure the usage of the resources of the resource owners?

Fiji is a land of great natural beauty in the Yatu Malolo, in the Yasawas and other parts of Fiji. The scenery, the natural beauty of the land is a huge factor in all this. But there is always this sense of confusion in our people on how they are compensated for the use of their resources. I had asked on many occasions to set up some proper structure of fees so that production houses would know in advance and pay what we all deem to be fair.

A case in point, Honourable Speaker, was in the Yatu Malolo where they closed off a part of a foreshore for quite a number of months. I think it was for almost one year for the people of that area not to walk on the shorefront, neither to fish in their *qoliqoli*. I think it was for some F\$100,000

but when you look at the number of people affected and the period of time that *qoliqoli* was closed to them, it did not make economic sense.

I think my calculation at that time was that they would have ended up all making a F\$100 each for six or seven months of not accessing that beachfront or fishing in their fishing ground. When I asked that question on who consulted them to setup these rates, I was told that it was iTLTB and the provincial officers.

My suggestion was that, you put in a proper body of experts to talk to the landowners and offer them other options as opposed to dollars that when divided between hundreds of members comes down to an amount that is negligible for them denying themselves the use of that area. For instance, villagers are always raising money for projects, an example would be, if we close off one *qoliqoli* for a couple of months, if there is \$200,000, that would better used to buying a generator or to buying a desalination plant for those islands.

I speak, Honourable Speaker, because I manage an Island Resort in that part of world and I know how useful it is to have a generator or to have a desalination plant. It would be more worthwhile to approach it from that angle as opposed to paying them a sum of money that when divided into individuals becomes quite meaningless.

We appear to be not getting through to the powers that be on how to approach this and I think we should. I would prevail on my colleague the Minister today to try and set this up, because we can talk about hundreds of millions of dollars, but, at the end of the day, the resource owners do not get much in terms of return. Imagine, if you shoot three or four films in any particular location and you follow that formula, the number of projects a village can fund.

We all know, Honourable Speaker, that while I travel all over Fiji and I see a community hall or a church and they say, “we went to the west to cut cane to build this”, I mean that is a story of Fiji. So, here is a way you can really help our people by using proceeds from film production for use of purposes like that. I would hope that you could take this on and have proper dialogue and set some meaningful fees for our people.

Honourable Speaker, if I can also add to the concern about Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER Plus). Dialogue on PACER Plus started about 10 years ago and I have been asking the question in the last term on where we are on PACER Plus. I was shocked that two weeks ago, a full page advertisement in the *Fiji Sun* was asking for people to express their interest to carry out feasibility studies on PACER Plus. Other countries have signed this in 2017, Fiji is just starting on feasibility studies on PACER Plus. We spoke with visitors from the Australia Government and he spoke about PACER Plus and they said, “the key element for countries like Fiji is the way we help you access our markets, for you to export what you have into Australia and New Zealand.”

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. MEMBER.- Yes, and what will they do?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- This was said in a meeting and Honourable Speaker, I might just ask the people on the other side to explain why our mahogany can no longer be exported in New Zealand? It stopped about two weeks ago. There was an article in the paper about it. They can laugh, but, this is what I am coming from. Our exports to these markets are very critical, and everyone else has signed and Fiji which has been relying on public spending, needs to up its act in terms of exports.

We heard yesterday that fisheries is only 1.8 percent of the economy, forestry is only 2 percent, sugar is what now, under .2 percent, agriculture in total has come down to about 8 percent. The only two that are keeping Fiji alive is tourism and remittances and yet they are saying that we have had 8 or 9 years, how many years exactly of unprecedented growth? It is all very flimsy, Honourable Speaker. The foundation for this economy is very weak and here we are, not taking the PACER Plus with the seriousness it deserves.

Let me just talk about exports. In Navua, Honourable Speaker, is a gentleman called Ben Trading. He virtually is the biggest *dalo* exporter in the country and he has managed to gain accreditation for exporting to Australia (in all States in Australia). And that is through the work of Government and the Australian end to try and ensure that his products can be exported into Australia. Now imagine Honourable Speaker, if he can streamline that into the production of *dalo* all over Fiji, with the assistance from the Ministry of Agriculture that someone has five acres of land, a young man, all the assistance that he needs to grow the *dalo* knowing that it will be exported.

HON. MEMBER.- He has been assisted time and again.

Like sugar, Honourable Speaker, the secret to sugar is that when you grow sugar, you know that cane you are growing will be bought by FSC. The problem with our people in Fiji is that when they grow *dalo*, they are not assured of a market. If they have the market, and if they have the intervention and support that they need, *dalo* will be a huge export in Fiji.

I say this, Honourable Speaker because comparing it to sugar, the Chairman of FSC has indicated that over the last ten years, \$400 million has been used to help the sugar cane farmers and where is sugar today? Nowhere.

Honourable Members interject.

In 1997, there was a huge drought in this country, Honourable Speaker, the SVT Government pumped \$40 million into Sugar Cane Rehabilitation, and there was a bumper crop the next year.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Sir, \$40 million in 1997 and the drought, bumper crop the next year; \$400 million over ten years, where are we? Still nothing.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I was also a cane farmer, my contract number was 6298, (look into my record), I produced 670 tonnes in one year. Can we ask the Honourable lady how much production has she made?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- So I do have an idea about sugarcane farming, Honourable Speaker. *Vinaka*.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Tell you son!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- That was my production, I was a cane farmer, I am sure she produced more, but that is me, 670 tonnes.

Honourable Speaker, all these can be done, yesterday we spoke about models on how to grow more, the Tutu Model, I believe would be welcomed in Navosa (up in the highlands). Navosa, Honourable Speaker, has been identified by experts to be suitable for carrots and we import so much every year, we can also export. We can by setting up a Tutu kind of model and we can feed this country and also export.

I happen to be Chairman of Nadroga Corporation, we have a collection centre in there that we built. The problem is production, Honourable Speaker. I do not want to belabour the point but my good friend, the Minister of Agriculture, promised us an agricultural revolution. I really thought it was going to happen but it did not happen.

Honourable Speaker, we also talk about “Made in Fiji”. One young man here, Vijendra Singh of the Fijian Elections Office, he had an IT software that could have been used in Fiji but no, we brought in people like Yalamanchili and people from outside. We should walk the talk. We should believe in our own people. Grow local.

HON. MEMBER.- Fiji made.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes, we talk about “Fiji Made” and these are people, IT specialists, there are quite a number of them in Fiji that we tend to overlook to go outside and bring in expatriates. I am not anti-expatriates, Honourable Speaker, I work with them, but not at the expense of our own people.

Let me just end by also touch on tourism a bit. If I can ask my colleagues here to look into something that really shocked me. Two weeks running, Tourism Fiji is advertising the sale of a 50kVA generator which they bought in 2015 and it says, “Hardly used, well serviced, well maintained.” Honourable Speaker, 50 kVA generator - Tourism Fiji. As you know, I run an organisation, Honourable Speaker, and I was a hotelier.

I bought generators for my hotel. I could not understand why Tourism Fiji would buy a generator. They did not say how much. It was in 2015 and it is interesting to read, “Hardly used, well serviced, well maintained.” This is an example of low priority spending that is the hallmark of FijiFirst. They spend money in the wrong areas and I am talking about something small here because a 50kVA generator would be about \$110,000 or \$120,000. But when you look at it, on the scale that FijiFirst have spent money, it is indicative. I could highlight more low priority spending.

The Honourable Minister is shaking her head. I would fire that board and I would fire that executive for buying a 50kVA generator and they say later, “Hardly used, well serviced, and well maintained”.

(Honourable Member interjects)

There is more if you look into the way they spend money. Once we were told that in Bua, equipment purchased for WAF were sitting, exposed to the elements.

HONOURABLE MEMBER.- What are you talking about?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- That is the tragedy of FijiFirst. Low priority spending of lack of attention to what they buy.

Honourable Speaker, it is the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism (MITT) and it covers quite a number of departments. So, one would speak with some latitude in here and meandering ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ... I do not think we have the ownership on that, it comes from that side also. Honourable Speaker, today I just thought I would say this that we should have had more time for COP23. One of my biggest problem with COP23, what we discussed today, is that overseas consultants come here, expensive ones and take over the process. Our COP23 champion was dismissed in February 2018 when she was being asked to support the views ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Member is misleading Parliament because the champion was never dismissed. The champion is here and the champion was never dismissed.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- My apologies, Honourable Speaker. It is the chief negotiator. The chief negotiator, I do apologise to my colleague here. There are so many terms here but the chief negotiator was relieved of her position because she said that overseas consultants were taking a direction that she did not want to go to, and the unfortunate part is that, these overseas consultants cost a lot of money.

HON. MEMBER.- Who was she replaced by? By a local!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I would suggest, Honourable Speaker, that for consultancy with COP23, with the climate change, you use our academia. We have three universities in here, we can use them to be part of this, to be consultants and in the process, you inculcate a culture of awareness for COP 23, that will benefit the country.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, could you take your seat for a moment. Honourable Members, for the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times. I will allow a Suspension Motion to be moved, the time is now 1631 hours, and I call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move 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 the remaining items as listed on today's Order Paper.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.-Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have a few items to complete on Schedule 2 and, of course, we still have items as listed in today's Order Paper under Schedule 3 that need to be completed, thus the request for extension beyond 4.30 p.m. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as per the procedures in the Standing Orders, the floor is now open for debate on this motion. There being no debate on this motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- I have nothing further to add, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

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., to complete the remaining items as listed on today's Order Paper.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE REVIEW REPORT
- MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, TRADE AND TOURISM 2014 ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, I am just about to finish.

Also, Honourable Speaker, yesterday, I highlighted in the debate also yesterday Honourable Speaker, debating on the issues on Investment Fiji, I brought the point about this increase in population on a particular segment in this country which has impacted on those activities that used to be restricted for locals because the people who are complaining here are mostly *iTaukeis* and Indo-Fijians but then as an influx of a new segment that is coming to the country that has changed the landscape of businesses in this country, and my colleague from across the room said, "What has that got to do with what we are discussing?" It has everything to do with it.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Citizens.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Everything to do with it, Honourable Speaker, because the people who are complaining are our traditional segments. So, they should take that into consideration and I was surprised when she raised that because I thought she would see where I was coming from but I hope she does now. Those Honourable Speaker, are my observations and I thank the MITT for their

Annual Report and for the Committee and our Chairperson for making the recommendations that are before the House today. Thank you very much. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. I want to thank the Committee for their Report and in the Report, they have made five recommendations. I will start with the recommendation they made on Film Fiji and particularly the 47 percent tax concession.

The Fijian Audio Visual Industry was given a boost in 2012 by increasing the Film Tax Rebate to 47 percent. This is the best incentives provided and has attracted attention of production companies from USA, India, Australia and Europe.

Fiji can be proud to provide the setting for internationally prominent shows such as the Emmy Award Winning TV reality show ‘Survivor’ by attracting film and TV productions that highlighted some of the most eye-catching areas of our country.

Let me tell the Honourable Member that when it comes to Compensation rates, it is the iTLTB that decides the compensation rate on film production sites. So, this is an independent organisation, they decide and come up with the list.

In terms of numbers since 2014, the industry has grown exceptionally. In 2014 there were 52 productions. They generated economic activities valued at \$32.6 million. This grew by 104 percent in 2018 to 106 productions and the economic activities were valued \$336 million or an increase of 930 percent.

In 2014, 751 Fijians were employed by the production which was around 1,973 jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also worth noting that in 2014, the local spend by productions were valued at \$11.6 million which increased to \$402.2 million in 2018.

Further to the economic value, Fiji has developed new skills and talents in a number of areas required by the production companies. This include grip assistant, camera operators and assistant, light and sound technicians, special effects technician, costume assistant, to name a few.

In addition, local vendors have been engaged to supply production services such as accommodation, transportation, catering, equipment, et cetera.

The local communities have also benefitted from the Audio Visual Productions through employment opportunities, improvements of the local economies such as cleaning of villages, improvement to schools and improvement to public roads. So, there has been a substantial contribution through this particular initiative and we have seen how this incentive itself has attracted the various production companies to come to Fiji and contribute to our economic growth.

Now, let us move on to the second recommendation which was on the Savusavu Industrial Zone. Again, for Savusavu Industrial Zone, the report very clearly says that it started 20 years ago and for those long years nothing really much happened but this particular industrial zone was revived in 2009, under the “Look North Policy” where my Ministry worked to establish utilities and infrastructure to ensure that the zone could promote investment. There was no traction gained at the Savusavu Industrial Zone due to the lack of key infrastructure such as fibre optic, port facilities and support services, which the Ministry has worked to assist with.

Now, with the introduction of Tui Samoa Cable landing in Savusavu last year, a key barrier to ICT movement and innovation has been resolved giving the zone better access to ICT opportunities.

Regarding the barriers faced by a small nation like Fiji, Fiji just like any other developing country, faces barriers in the international market. This includes Pacific tariffs, anti-dumping measures, tariff quarters and other non-tariff barriers such as food safety standards, environmental certification and labelling requirements, to name a few.

The Ministry works with the support from technical experts towards mitigating this type of market access issues, through local arrangements and negotiations at the regional and international arena, and I would like to inform this House that in this area, the Ministry has been working with New Zealand and Australia, particularly with their Biosecurity agencies so that they understand our requirements and we can understand their requirements, and we can facilitate this trade between the two countries.

Fiji is party to modern trade agreements such as Melanesian Free Trade Agreement which is between Fiji, Solomon Islands, PNG and Vanuatu, that aims to ensure greater regionalism. In addition, agreements such as the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement is being reviewed to meet the changing dynamics of the market and provide improved rules of trade. This is where Honourable Gavoka was raising his concern that why did the Ministry advertise or put out an advertisement on PACER Plus.

We do not want to just blindly follow other countries. We have looked at the PACER Plus Agreement, there are various clauses in there that we are not comfortable with, because that will restrict our trade with other trading partners, and there is nothing wrong that we should take cautious approach and this is the precautionary approach that the Government is taking to ensure that such trade agreements do not restrict Fiji, that trading is not affected. The problem, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the Honourable Member is, he has been just talking around everything else except this Report, that is his problem.

Every session, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he deviates so I would suggest rather than wasting this House's time, it would be better for you to listen to what I am saying so that the Honourable Member does not waste time further in the next session.

(Honourable Members interject)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry, through its Trade Commission based in Australia, New Zealand, China, PNG and the North America, they also facilitate Fijian exporters to penetrate markets. The Trade Commissions also work with the trade agencies in their host countries to develop new market pathways.

Coming to the next point, which again was raised by Honourable Gavoka, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we should use universities. We are using universities for our research work, getting the students for attachments. We, in fact, signed a five-year MOU between MITT and FNU. This is to assist improved tourism international visitor surveys.

A similar MOU has been signed between the Ministry and the University of the South Pacific. Hence, students from both the universities are engaged for research and survey work. In addition, we continue to collaborate closely with our universities such as USP, on the flagship Young Entrepreneurships Scheme (YES). So there are so many different ways to which the Ministry engages with the various universities we have in Fiji.

Let us come to the last point raised by the Honourable Leader of Opposition and I think his Statement was very insulting to the number of people who are trying to create products so that they can earn money for their livelihoods. They are not there actually to be tainted the way the Honourable Member was trying to taint by saying that it is FijiFirst, it is nothing to do with FijiFiirst. It is a programme where we are trying to encourage our own people to grow products and make products in Fiji, and we are also encouraging the buyers, that is the population within this country to buy these products rather than buying foreign products. What is wrong with that?

It seems the Honourable Member is not in favour of this, that is why he is picking on the promotion. You need to promote any new programme that you start and we have been promoting this programme. Let me tell you, the achievements of this programme, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the “Fijian-Made-and-Buy Campaign” in 2014, 980 products were licensed and 149 companies were approved to use the emblem. The success of the Campaign has been exceptional with over 2,729 products and 610 companies already registered. The Fijian Made Brand has gained recognition domestically and in the regional markets. In 2018, the Fijian Organic Brand was included in the campaign and this brand is for the niche organic market that Fiji can supply to, for example, *Noni*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, looking at the various activities undertaken by my Ministry, the Report has also acknowledged the hard work the staff of this Ministry has done to promote our products and services abroad, and I do not think it is fair that they should receive such criticism for nothing.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I welcome the acknowledgement of MITT’s policies mentioned in the Report, and we will continue to improve our policies to support and assist all Fijians in Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief. In fact, the film rebate is paid through certification by the Fiji Revenue and Custom Services, which then goes to the Ministry of Economy. We need to certify. There needs to be audited accounts that need to be presented. The film crew who actually do come in, the Production Houses all have to go through what we call an Audio Visual Agent and they are the only people who can actually certify the particular process.

I just give an example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was a Survivor series in the Yasawa-i-Rara and this is just the amount of money that actually went into the community. I have just got the figures:

- Catering (from the village ladies) they paid \$345,230;
- Boat hire (this is to cater for the local crew and other people who worked) was \$42,100;
- Location fees charged by the village (the people who owned the land) was \$768,893;
- Location fee paid to iTLTB was \$148,101;
- The employment - the amount of wages and salaries that were paid to the local villagers and the period of that shoot was \$944,971;
- They built a road. I think going from North to South or East to West, one of those ones, across the island, the cost of the road making was \$552,540.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is why this film production is actually very good for us because traditionally what happens is, when you have this kind of productions, you normally have what you call the multiplier effect. The multiplier effects of film production is about \$2.1 million, it almost

invariably doubled. So from our financial economic perspective, when we pay out a 47 percent rebate, we actually have calculated it. Yes, it is very high, but it is also to attract and develop that appetite for Fiji as a location.

Also, as the Honourable Minister highlighted, it is to build the local cadre of people who can actually now provide support. For example, some of the Production Houses that are now coming in, we have actually Fijians who specialise in, for example, being the light person, the sound person and they provide all these. So they do not have to bring people from overseas.

One of the key areas that we do want to build upon that we need to provide local facility, is in the areas of the actual film equipment which a lot of them cart from overseas. So we, in fact, a few budgets ago, Mr. Speaker, Sir, actually gave a zero-rated duty and gave various incentives if people actually invested in film production equipment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very quickly highlighting a couple of other issues that was raised, I really think that sometimes Honourable Gavoka is on retainer by the Aussies because he was always going about the Aussies coming to the Qantas Board, now he is flying the flag for PACER Plus, he flew the flag for the Europeans, including the Honourable Leader of the Opposition the other day.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that PACER Plus or the non-signing of Pacer Plus does not, in any way, stop Ben's Trading from trading. Ben's Trading is actually protected under the current SPARTECA Agreement and everyone knows the SPARTECA Agreement, it has been there in place for quite a number of years.

But, people need to understand what PACER Plus will do, it will essentially mean that 90 percent of our tariff will go. We cannot apply tariff anymore to these products coming into Fiji. Any Australian and New Zealand product when coming into Fiji, will be allowed duty free.

Now, we do export to Australia and New Zealand, but our balance of trade is not that high, not in our favour I should say, obviously our tariff revenue will completely go. So the revenue collection for Government will completely go. Whether for this Government, next Government or 20 years' time whichever Government is in place, revenue will go.

The other point that they also do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the agreement essentially is against South-South Co-operation because we have a number of agreements within the South-South Co-operation spectrum that will not happen.

It would also mean, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we will have to make special carve-out provisions for Australian and New Zealand investors. We have been talking a lot about environment, so they will be treated in a special group of people. So it could possibly be, even they may be able to overwrite some of our regulatory provisions, even relating to the environment. This is the implication of PACER Plus.

The other issue, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir,

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The other important issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that it does not allow for what we call very little infant industrial protection. For example, we have got a company in Vanua Levu, Pinto. Pinto makes boxes, plastic bags, buckets, and they also make, for example, plastic bottles for storing medicine and buckets. We have given protection to Pinto.

The Honourable Tabuya, I think in one of her posts recently said on plastics, “I will remove the 54 percent duty on it.” Mr. Speaker, Sir, she does not understand that we have Fijian companies that make those kind of plastic bags in Fiji. So we impose the duty on overseas companies so that our local companies keep on running which are actually resourced by Fijians who work in those factories, the same thing with Pinto.

If we sign PACER Plus, there is no way we can give protection to Pinto in Vanua Levu. We will have to zero rate it so we can kiss that factory goodbye, you will get cheaper products coming from Australia and New Zealand, they place a high volume of those things. We will not be able to build those kind of protections.

We similarly have various other tax breaks for people who set up business from Nausori all the way to Matuwalu Village, North West of Viti Levu, in Vanua Levu, Lau, Lomaiviti and Kadavu, and all those places. That will also be under threat under PACER Plus, because we will have to open it up. We cannot give those kind of favourable conditions.

It is good to say, “Let us do PACER Plus, new markets”, but what are the implication for Fijian products? What are the implications for our revenue collection? What are the implications for our infant industries? If you want to grow a particular industry, we need to nurture it, we need to give it protection and some form of assistance, but that will not be allowed under PACER Plus. And this is one of the issues that we have been negotiating with, we have been fighting hard for. Again, we have had issues relating to this, we have had industry submissions before and we are doing it again because the door has been opened.

Now, the the other point that I wanted to raise also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Honourable Leader of the Opposition said that MITT should be restricted to negotiating only trade agreements and facilitate investments. Then, of course, he is living in the past. The MITT’s job is not just that. Its job is also to facilitate domestic business, its job is also to go down to the grassroots level and that is why they administered the \$1,000 grant for those men and women who want to grow their small business. They are raising three pigs, we want them to grow five pigs, seven pigs, so we give them that assistance. If they have a goat farm, we give them the assistance to grow it. That is part and parcel of the MITT.

The MITT promote standards, we have to have standards. We talk about energy saving lights, we talk about standards in respect of electrical appliances. That is under the purview of MITT too. Otherwise, your appliances are catching fire, your house is burning down, so those standards need to be introduced, whether it is water quality too for our export market. So the whole gambit of MITT is not only restricted, as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition suggested. Perhaps, that was what used to happen in the SVT days, that they only negotiate trade agreements and facilitate investment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also the Minister touched on Savusavu Industrial Zone and I remember before 2014, we actually picked up the Savusavu Industrial Zone as neglected, and the Minister is absolutely right. There was no connectivity, no three-phase power, et cetera. To have an industrial zone, you need to have three-phase power, you need to have connectivity to water. We now have the telecommunication connectivity.

I would urge the investors there please, approach the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism and look for a plot of land over there, and I am sure that they will facilitate if it is a bonafide investor. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to just make one point and it is also very dear to us, in respect of Buy Fijian, it creates jobs, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It creates a sense of patriotism that you identify with Fijian products. If you go to the supermarket shelves, if maybe a difference of 5 cents, 10 cents or 15 cents, it inculcates a sense of patriotism that, “I will buy this tin of fish, I will buy this flip flop because it is

made in Fiji, and to draw that connectivity between, “If I buy this, I will be securing five or ten jobs.” But that is what it does, most countries do that. You go to Australia, you see ‘Buy Australia campaign’. We do that because we want to protect our industries.

So we should not, in any way, sort of smear that and give a political thin sweep. Please, I have said this for the past two or three days in this Parliament, “Let us not reduce everything to political point scoring or by the last Elections. Let us move forward. Elections was done. You are there and we are here. Let us focus on the economy.” These things mean a lot.

Talk to the young people, they have actually embraced Buy Fijian -Fijian grown, Fijian made, Fijian produce, Fijian soul, Fijian organic; all of these inculcate a sense of togetherness for the economy and creates jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last point before I forget, the issue about the “Champion” who was the “Chief Negotiator”, Nazhat Shameem, was replaced by Luke Daunivalu. What is wrong with that? Luke Daunivalu was the Chief Negotiator for the COP 23 negotiations. He is a Fijian also, I cannot understand that?

They talked about, “Oh, we can only wish we do not use overseas consultants, we should only use people from Fiji.” But the capacity sometimes does not exist in Fiji, to be able to

You cannot grow within six or eight months. To be able to get access to information regarding the increase in climatic changes

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... Yes, I think he really lives in La La Land, frankly! Seriously!

To be able to access that kind of data, to be able to get that kind of information, the repository of that knowledge is not just at USP in Fiji, it is also outside of Fiji. That is what the world is doing, the world is actually now putting knowledge and information together, and to be able to then use that information for specific purposes and for the overall good for our individual countries and also the environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to say that is, I think, completely misleading. I would like to thank the Committee for the Report, and we look forward to better things under this Ministry. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I call on the Chairperson of Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, to speak on your right of reply. You have the floor.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, just a few observations.

First of all, I would like to thank the Honourable Premila Kumar, for discussing item by item and promoting Buy Fijian Made by Fijians.

The other point I would like to raise is that, I would like to thank the former Minister, Mr. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya and his entire team, who worked tirelessly and their foresight and dedication towards making this ‘Fiji Made Buy Fijian’ Campaign a success.

The other point I would say, let us not undermine our people. Let us buy Fijian made, even I am Fijian made, so by buying Fijian made ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V. NATH.- ... Buying Fijian-made will bring smiles to many people's faces, Honourable Speaker, Sir. So I urge all Honourable Members in this House please, buy Fijian Made and support the campaign. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes the motion, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion is agreed.

Honourable Members, it is 5 o'clock, we will now adjourn for afternoon tea in the Big Committee Room for half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.00 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.35 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please be seated.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Honourable Viam Pillay to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

REVIEW REPORT - MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, URBAN DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT 2012-2014 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move that:

Parliament debates the Review Report on the Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment's 2012, 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports which was tabled on 16th May, 2018. Thank you.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Environment was responsible for the formulation and implementation of local government, urban planning, housing and environment's policies and programmes. The Ministry also was responsible for the National Fire Authority, Housing Authority and Public Rental Board.

On 5th April, 2018, the Committee was referred the 2012 to 2014 Annual Reports of the Ministry to scrutinise. On 8th May, 2018, the Committee convened a meeting with the officials from the Ministry to deliberate on its 2012 to 2014 Annual Reports.

The Committee noted that in 2014, the Ministry was recognised for its achievements at the Service Excellence Awards on the three major sectors which includes the good governance sector, economic development sector and social-cultural sector. The Committee noted some of the Ministry's achievements in 2014 which are as follows:

- The construction of accommodation units for rural women vendors at the Suva, Nadi and the Sigatoka markets;
- Reduction of the first home owners grant aimed at assisting Fijians with their first residential homes; and
- Squatter upgrading projects relocation and integrated income generation projects.

The Committee commends the achievements by the Ministry despite all the challenges. The overall performance of the Ministry was commendable. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. Honourable Members, the floor is open for anyone wishing to contribute. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the debate on the motion on the Report on the Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Environment from 2012 to 2014.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in 2014, a very popular Ba businessman made a bold promise. After many years without Local Government Elections that as a newly elected Minister for Local Government that upon his appointment, his Government would hold Local Government Elections and this was met with much fanfare, cheers, the same sort of fanfare that met this Government's bold infrastructure developments and million-dollar road construction plans. But the heavy rains of scrutiny have revealed that these promises were filled with gaping pot holes that the public has to endure day in and day out.

The Ministry was supposed to have adopted a terms of reference and appoint a committee for the review of the Local Government Act. Still there are no terms of reference, still no appointment of any committee and no review of the Local Government Act. We have had no local government elections.

Now, everyday the incompetence of his Government is leaving ratepayers with appalling living conditions such as poor waste disposal facilities, pathetic road conditions and the takeover of civic amenities by corporate interests. Under the SODELPA Manifesto, we clearly state that the party will work towards enabling every Fijian to have access to affordable housing and of course, the Honourable Attorney-General continues to try modelling on the Singapore Model and how much we admire the Singaporeans.

Well, yes, the success of Mr. Lee Kuan Yew in his interview to a media outlets stated when he was asked the question. What is your number one success in making Singapore what it is? He said that it was that he solved the issue of the housing and we still have that big problem in this country. So, if we are to look at affordable housing and access to affordable housing, SODELPA Manifesto also includes removing capital gains tax, provide targeted subsidy, carry on with the rent to own, Housing Authority, PRB policy and to develop necessary infrastructure such as roads, water and electric supply to existing and new community developments.

The notice of approval of lease issued by the Government still has not solved the housing issue. I know, in the settlement that I grew up in in Wakanisila they still have this notice of approval of a lease and they cannot gain a mortgage from that and they cannot obtain proper credit facilities to build a home and this is a big issue for our informal settlements.

The Government has not been able to continue and complete the land development for squatters around Fiji started by previous Governments. Once such informal settlement that faced some dark consequences in terms of development was the Namara Settlement on Khalsa Road where they were forced, 50 families with a church and families who were far back as in the early 1900, Honourable Speaker Sir who were actually descendants of Solomon Islanders and they were given the land because of their mother's heritage being a *iTaukei*.

And so they have had to leave the settlement and of course as we know in Khalsa Road, there is a big subdivision that is being built by the Chinese, but there was no relocation plan for the Namara settlers and they literally had somewhere to go. They were given an amount of money but nowhere to go and relocate as a result, Honourable Speaker.

So, the second recommendation in the Report deals with strengthening of human resources. It is an inter-related issue with the Civil Service Review. This continues to deter suitably qualified and competent people to stay away from the public sector.

The third recommendation is about the collection of rates, again a major issue faced by the Councils and this needs to be improved.

The last recommendation in the Report regards extensive red-tape involved in the processing of applications for licencing and permits in the urban areas which is slowing down the pace of development and discouraging investors. It needs to make the system more efficient and Honourable Speaker, Sir, that was 2014 and four years later, this is still the same observation. This recent Report is, it is the US State Department, Investment Climate Statement of 2018 and again the observation by the State Department in this Investment Climate Statement for Fiji, foreign investors continue to encounter lengthy and costly bureaucratic delays. So, this is tied in, Honourable Speaker, Sir, with the processing, the amount of time it takes to set up a business in Fiji. The ease of business index in Fiji, we are 101 out of 190; we are ranked a 101 out of 190 countries that were ranked. So this is very poor, Honourable Speaker, and this needs to be improved.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the answer to the woes of local government is in the word “local”. The centralisation and local elections are crucial in effectively managing our towns. Now, this Government does not want local elections which is what they have said, then it should name the city councils accurately. It will no longer be the Ba Town Council but the Ba FijiFirst Council or the Suva City Council as the Suva FijiFirst Council, let us just call it that, that is the truth. Honourable Minister for Local Government has stated that election equals corruption.

Now, the Honourable Attorney-General has left but he knows sitting on Transparency International as he has stated that really corruption is as a result of a lack of transparency and accountability and this, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is what is clear when you are replacing local elections with your own chosen council; that is not a democracy, Honourable Speaker, that is dictatorship. Now, just going back to some of the comments that were made by the Honourable Attorney-General about the duty biodegradable plastic. He mentioned that this would cause the Pinto Industries Limited the company in Vanua Levu to vastly get out of business.

Now, Honourable Speaker, Sir, what we are advocating is the removal of that duty but it is on bio-degradable packaging which is really everything from your cup, lid, straws all that to be a biodegradable, Honourable Speaker, Sir, might I add because Pinto Industries Limited is not producing that. It may be producing plastic bags but not these items and so removing that duty will encourage local companies and local businesses, your restaurants, coffee shop and the like to use bio-degradable packaging because the duty is just too high. So, that is what we are advocating for.

Honourable Seruiratu, I sat in awe as I listened to his presentation earlier before lunch, and I think if anyone walked in here, it sounded like a sermon because he really is blessed with that very loud bellowing voice. But I hope he was loud enough so that his drivers outside in the parking lot or the Ministers’ drivers would have heard it that they would switch their engines off which they run all day to keep the air cool so that the Ministers can enjoy air-condition.

One of the Standing Committees travelled

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- This is saving the environment. You are burning diesel all day.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, climate action.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, even Standing Committees who travelled to Vanua Levu by boat, the engines keep running on the boat as they travelled to Vanua Levu. Again, such killing the environment, keeping the engines running for our Ministers. Climate action, Honourable Speaker,

Sir, is louder than climate words. And climate words is what we have heard today, that touting climate action, they need to put climate action in many counterparts. Turn off those engines, Honourable Speaker, Sir, that is what action is and that speaks louder than climate words. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to make a very short contribution in relation to an aspect of the Report that touches on women market vendors. This is in relation to the building of accommodation in three markets around Fiji to enhance livelihoods of women market vendors that frequent our markets.

This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is under the Markets for Change Project, a partnership between the Ministry of Local Government and also UN Women, a funding from the Government of Australia and more recently the Government of Canada. What makes it so important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that market places are one of the main avenues in Fiji where women gain an income. Women dominate the informal sector (the markets) with about 70 percent of market vendors being women in Fiji. The statistics is similar around the Pacific.

With the women living in rural areas who frequent our markets sometimes travel over 24 hours to get to the market. We all know that in the recent past before the Markets for Change Project, these women would spend nights under market tables to take advantage of the weekend sales. With the Markets for Change Project that is ongoing, that has changed, the livelihoods of these women market vendors. I congratulate the Ministry in relation to this work in partnership with the donor countries and UN Women.

Apart from infrastructure itself, the Markets for Change Project has mainstreamed women's participation in infrastructure through three outcome areas.

1. Voice and participation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the empowerment and inclusion of Market Vendor Associations in decision making processes in market management and infrastructure.

2. Gender Mainstreaming with Market Management as duty bearers to ensure that management is able to engage with women market vendors and ensure inclusion of women's views.
3. Joint Actions, scoping studies, design meetings, infrastructure meetings, completed jointly, the women's voice being heard in all these matters.

The project started with about six Market Vendor Associations in Fiji, and now works with 12 and a total of 3,588 Market Vendors Association members. Nine out of 12 Market Vendor Associations are, at present, led by women and women occupy 50 percent of leadership roles in all.

At least in this particular area, gender is doing very well. The markets for change has successfully increased women vendors access to an enabling environment. Improvements have ensured that markets are now safe and accessible for women vendors, more economic opportunities for women, safe spaces and improved working conditions in both the physical infrastructure and the improved market management systems have now seen women increasing their opportunities to improving their businesses.

With the introduction of accommodation centres, women from rural areas now have a choice to frequent the market more often since they have a safe space to sleep overnight instead of under their tables where they sell produce from.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with that contribution, I again congratulate the Ministry for the great work that they are doing in relation to gender equality in market spaces. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for the Statement. Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank and acknowledge the Committee Chair and the Members of the Committee for that Report. First and foremost, I would like to remind us that the Report is from 2012 to 2014 and we are now in 2019, and that we are five years behind.

We often hear about transparency, accountability and good governance from the other side of the House but, Honourable Speaker. The very fact that they have not tabled the Reports from 2015 to 2018 is a clear reflection of poor governance of no transparency and no accountability. I say that based on the very fact that when it comes to Budget announcement, the people of Fiji look forward to that, it needs a big fan fair, but when it comes to be responsible enough to tell the people of Fiji on how that money has been used, as promised in the Budget Estimates and announcements, the Government has failed miserably in that aspect.

Honourable Speaker, if I may just add on to the previous speaker from our side on the Ministry of Local Government, in regards to, may be, the commitment, may be the promise as made by the previous Minister in 2014, let me just read the presentation from the Minister who did the presentation on that day and then we will understand why he made that commitment. It reads:

“There are three types of councils that could run as a council. One is certainly being elected council. The Local Government Act review exercise has come to a stage where the Local Government Act Review Committee will be appointed soon.

The Local Government Act Review will establish the mode of new election for Municipal Councils, including the town boundaries and structure and whether there should be a town ward, whether there should be one single constituency within the townships, electing council members and other areas, including whether the ratepayers will elect a mayor, or where the conventional structure under the British system, that is election of a mayor will continue. So we do agree that this is one area that will be addressed through this Local Government Act Review.”

That was the commitment or the presentation made by officials of the Ministry, and I suppose with that, that gave the Minister the audacity to say in this House that there will be a Municipal election. That was for the last term.

Now, when we come to this Government, we have changed tune. The new Honourable Minister or maybe that is why Honourable Minister have changed. The new Honourable Minister had said in this House (this is in just one of the recent Sittings) and had pointed out that we had an old flawed Election system and earlier, there was low voter-turnout amongst the reasons for the delay.

Honourable Speaker, we have had the General Election in 2014 and we still have not had the Municipal Council elections. Honourable Speaker, the new Minister had said a lot of things that needed to be done such as revising laws which were more than 40 years old and expanding town and

countries boundaries. Governance of Municipal Councils have been evolving and we need to look at different and effective governance structure that will give better returns to ratepayers, and further on added, in 2005 (that was the last Election) only 31 percent voted in the local elections.

Honourable Speaker, she went on to say that we cannot use the flawed election system that was introduced in 1972, and there was a need for a system based on global best practice but up until now there is very little words from the other side or has even said that we are not going to have an election, and that Honourable Speaker, from this side of the House, we are saying that we need to have elected Councils so ratepayers can have their democratic representation in the Council, just like they have in this House.

Honourable Speaker, it is very sad and disturbing that the Honourable Minister, Premila Kumar, will continue deny and delay the Municipal elections just like her predecessor. Honourable Speaker, so we ask the question, why is there no Municipal elections when we see the great need for it? Is it because the Government is unable to align the Electoral system to the Municipal Council Electoral system; or they know that the outcome will not be in their favour?

Honourable Speaker, we now move onto to another important area which is the rate-collection arrears. In 2012, the Report sighted \$34.9 million (that is for 2012), 2013 and 2014 (was silent), they did not reflect any arrears at all, and I hope when the Honourable Minister will make her contribution will be able to clarify as to what is the rate of uncollected revenue as arrears as of today? Because that is a big source of revenue and also it gives justification for the ratepayers to be serviced in the various Municipal service delivery.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I can but I do not have the time.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Or we can talk outside.

(Laughter)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Speaker, on garbage collection I highlighted this in my Maiden Speech in 2014, and still it is a big problem in the Nasinu, Nausori corridor. Some of the areas, for example, in Tacirua Heights, our problem rests on the review of the Local Government Act.

In some instances, they say the area belong to the Nasinu Town Council and then in some instances they say that they belong to the Suva Rural Local Authority. That is why, Honourable Speaker, that Act needs to be reviewed because it defines the boundary of municipalities, and until now, they are still sitting on that review and until and unless the review is done, there will be clear demarcation.

Honourable Speaker, moving on to the environment and we have just heard about the 4 million trees being planted, and even in the Report, the presentation by the Ministry officials, they highlighted the big problems that have been brought on by the removal of mangroves due to development projects. On one hand we are removing mangroves and on the other hand, the Minister for forest is forever telling us the planting of the 4 million trees.

The replacement is one to six, but even if you do that, Honourable Speaker, like they have done the damage in Malolo and in Nawi, when mangrove is being replanted, it does not include the other species that were originally there and other species of plants and the mangroves that grow there before the replanting because the removal of mangroves that is also equates to the destruction of the ecosystem. So the removal of mangroves for its destruction of the ecosystem, your replanting of the 4 million trees will not solve that problem, Honourable Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Also, Honourable Speaker, in regards to Housing, we all know housing is an urgent dire need in Fiji.

HON. P.K. BALA.- We are working on it.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- If indeed you are working on it, then the squatter settlements will stop mushrooming every time. Squatter settlements continue to grow.

(Honourable Government Member interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Yes, we hear that, but in reality it does not. Honourable Speaker, that is why we really need to look at the Housing Scheme in Lagilagi, the Housing Scheme in Raiwai, where those that were originally promised that they were entitled to housing have been missed out. These things need to be looked at and I am imploring upon the Honourable Minister, if this could be looked at and scrutinised so that those that are really entitled to those low-cost Housing indeed do benefit from them. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member, and I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister Premila Kumar, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Committee for the Report and acknowledge the various recommendations made in the Report. The Annual Report is for the Year 2012 to 2014 and we are in 2019, so definitely a lot of things have happened along the way.

For those years, if you look at the Report itself, some of the recommendations made actually relate to the civil servants. The quality of human capital we had within the Civil Service to deliver the targets that were set, and that has actually led to the Civil Service Reform. Even today and last month when I spoke about the Municipal Councils, I did say that a lot of reforms are required even till today. We still need to change the way things are happening, and I acknowledge that that there is a problem, I am not denying it, but we have made a lot of difference and we are trying to work towards improving the civil servants who are working in the Local Government Ministry, with the help of the Civil Service Reform Unit. We had already conducted the review of the Ministry and we found where the problems were and that those are being rectified.

The Report also suggested improvements to the systems and processes to reduce the processing time, and Honourable Lynda Tabuya also mentioned that the processes are very long and ease of doing business is an issue for the nation, yes, it is, we acknowledge that, and I have done a number of presentation on that in relation to the Singapore Team working with MITT to put these systems and processes on digital platform.

It is happening and as I have said, next month, we will be launching the BizFiji platform. What does that mean? It simply means that all the processes that are involved in granting licences are then simplified and placed on this platform with informatics. So here, it creates a system of transparency where the person who is applying for that permit and the one who is issuing the permit are all on the same page. They understand what the procedure is and there is no subjective decision-making but more objective decision-making.

In the area of rezoning, this is, of course, a major problem. Why? Because the town schemes I mentioned last month were done like 30 years ago and we need to redo our town schemes and the master plan. Again, master plan is being done by the Singapore Team which will take about 47 weeks. The work has started, there is a question which I will be answering tomorrow, and I will be able to give more details on this.

We believe that through this master plan, rezoning application should not take long. Why? Because the master plan will exactly show where the industries would be, where the residential houses would be, where the cities and towns would be for new areas.

That makes it much easier for the one who is processing the application to look at the master plan and make the decision, rather than going to that community and asking them whether they want this area to become commercial and, of course, that takes time because there will be a lot of objections.

The other aspect that I want to talk about was ease of doing business. For ease of doing business, there are two things happening simultaneously; one is the permit processes, if someone is putting an application for the construction permit; and the other one is the business licence.

Again, in both the activities, it will be placed on the digital platform. This is what we call 'One stop shop' where tracking can be done by the investor or a business person who is applying for a business licence. There are lot of improvements that will take place with this system going online.

Then there were other issues being raised in relation to the municipal council election. I think just three weeks ago, I made a Ministerial Statement, there was a motion that was debated and I do not think I want to add anything more on that subject. I mean, we can talk about it, talk about it, but we will not achieve anything.

If you want me to repeat that, I will, and my statement is this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the National Government that decides the Municipal Councils. So in this particular case, the decision will be made through consultative process. But what I want to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that was 1972. From 1972, the whole municipal council governance structure has evolved. It is no longer just election, there are three modalities I spoke about:

1. Elected;
2. Elected, plus appointed; and
3. Appointed.

So there are three modalities being used globally, so we need to look at which modality fits. I gave examples. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will not speak more on that particular subject.

Going back to the affordable housing, I was planning to do a ministerial statement which I will do later on, but I just want to say that for the affordable housing, the problems started with the expiry of cane leases.

In 2003, the squatter settlements increased by 73 percent. Today, we have more than 250 squatter settlements around the country. To resettle them, it will not take four years. If you are expecting the results, it will not take four years, it will not take ten years, it will take more than 10 years to find a solution to the housing problem. It is not a quick fix. Why it is not a quick fix? Because first, you have to identify the land and then acquire the leases.

Most of these squatters are sitting on Native land and Reserved land, so there is a process involved. So far, we have only acquired 43 leases, just 43 out of 250 squatters sitting in different, different areas. So obviously, it is going to take time and there is no way we can fix it overnight. And I just ask you to have that patience, and if you have any solution to that, please provide that solution. I will be happy to incorporate that rather than just saying that we need to have more houses. We know that there are a lot of squatters and we need to find solutions.

Just a couple of years back, a number of squatter upgrades were made. Leases were issued to them. At the end of this year, we will be able to issue leases to two settlements. Then for the next programme, we have identified only 13 settlements where we will be working, to ensure that they get their leases. It is not easy.

Why is it not easy? One problem that we normally see is when we go into these informal settlements, the people living there fight amongst themselves. They do not want the road to go this way, they do not want their house to be shifted and that delays the project.

There are some projects that have been delayed for the last three, four years now. The consultants are there but there is this internal fighting going on, and we have to deal with all these issues. It is not easy to uplift people. If we do that, then again the Opposition will come up and say that we did not follow the Human Rights obligation. So we have to take everything into consideration before we can venture out into the housing sector.

But I want to assure the Opposition that, yes, it is a difficult area but we have not given up. We are working towards that. Just in the month of March, the announcement was made regarding the strata title. A contract has been signed. Work is progressing with IFC, and you should be able to see some result.

Even when it comes to making our own homes, it does not happen overnight. It takes years, sometimes one year, sometimes two years. Why? Because we do not have the people in the market to really come on board and construct your houses. There is shortage of technical people, so these are some of the challenges that we have. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me the opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Chairman for the Standing Committee, you have the floor on your right of reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes the motion, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE REPORT – AUDIT OF GOVERNMENT
MINISTRIES AND DEPARTMENTS (VOLUME 1-VOLUME 4)**

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I move that:

Parliament debates the Review Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Audits of Government Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31st December, 2015 (Volume 1 to Volume 4) which was tabled on 17th May, 2018.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you. The Honourable Speaker; Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition; Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members: I, as the Chairperson of the current Standing Committee on Public Accounts who moved the motion, take this opportunity to speak on the motion on the review made the Public Accounts Committee on the Audit Report for Government Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31st December, 2015, which was tabled in Parliament on 17th May, 2018.

Given the content of the Report, it was noted that the Report was for the year ended 31st December, 2015 and the issues noted may not be current. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to showcase the progress that Ministries and Departments in Fiji continue to make and the issues identified in this Report had either been resolved or are in the process of being addressed.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, whilst in an instance whereby issues had been raised in previous Audit Reports, it is important to note that some of the audit issues had been resolved. However, these issues have been deliberated and the Committee has developed eight recommendations in good faith that would enhance the better transparency and accountability of the various Ministries and Departments, and we add relevant parties for which the recommendation has been made to consider and respond accordingly.

The Report identified audit within 37 Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31st December 2015 in accordance with the Financial Management Act 2014, the Audit of Whole of Government concludes with the Unqualified Audit Report under Section 152(2) of the Constitution, Section 6 of the Audit Act and Section 46 and Section 47 of the Financial Management Act. Of these, Unqualified Reports were issued to 20 Ministries and Departments, while 17 were issued Qualified Audit Opinion.

Variances were noted between reconciliation prepared by the Ministries and Departments at FMIS Ledger maintained by the Ministry of Economy, the Board of Survey was not carried out, financial transactions were not recorded in the FMIS Ledger, amounts reflected in the Trust and Trading Manufacturing Accounts (TMA) were not fully supported, funds and approved Budget estimates for 2015 were used for trust account expenditure and independent stock was not done, and Ministries and Departments concentrated spending on their budget towards end of 2015, hence indicating lack of proper financial planning during the year.

This contributed to the significant Unpresented Cheques at the end of the year placing an undue stress on the Government cash flow at the beginning of 2016.

The Committee notes that the root cause for these issues highlighted in Volume 1 to Volume 4 Audit Report is attributed to the quality of human resources employed in Ministries and Departments. That is why, Honourable Speaker, the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) is so vital, so that we can get suitable qualified personnel for a particular position.

It is imperative that the Heads of Ministries and Departments carry out a detailed analysis of the Audit Reports and take proactive action to address people's issues, either through capacity building or disciplinary process for non-performance and non-adherence to existing policies and procedures.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in respect to processes, more assertive effort needs to be taken to streamline processes, enabling quicker completion of capital projects so that intended benefits are realised as soon as possible. Greater use of information technology system will eliminate manual inventory control which are vulnerable to errors, omission and fraud.

In safeguarding the interest of Government, proper public financial management, accountability and ownership needs to be held accounted for by Ministries and Departments, particularly those that are charged for good governance and good leadership.

Finally, I commend the effort of the previous Public Accounts Committee Chairperson and the members in the compilation of this Report. We are looking forward to the Whole of Government Ministries and Departments to take heed of the Committee's recommendation positively, and addressing the issues that were raised by the auditor during the audit of each financial statement.

Honourable Speaker Sir, with those few words and comments, as the Member moving the motion on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts Committee Report, I thank you for this opportunity. Thank you Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. The floor is now open. Honourable Aseri Radrodro you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. Again, as a Member of the Public Accounts Committee, I would like to make a short contribution on the Report that is debated upon today in the audit of the Government Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31st December, 2015.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the findings done by the Committee shows the level of good governance that has been practiced by the Government. The question that needs to be asked, what is the cause of all these bad governance? There are lot of causes but I would like to speak on some causes that have been highlighted:

1. Lack of transparency especially in financial transactions as has been highlighted in the Report which I hope, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will allow me to wade into as we go into the details of the Report.
2. Investing too much power and trust in one individual. That is also the main cause of bad governance. As you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Parliament changed the Standing Orders in the past year and again amendments this year which limits the work of the Public Accounts Committee.

3. And by Convention the role of the chairmanship of the PAC should have been undertaken by the Opposition Members. They would be in the best position to give oversight, that is CAPAC standard. The Honourable Member should be aware of that as a former Chairman and a Member of PAC that attended the CAPAC Workshop in London. The benchmark is usually that PAC is to be chaired by the Opposition Member. He will provide the best of oversight in terms of how Government spends in a financial year.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You wanted it?

HON. A. M. RADRODRO.- We will come to your Ministry later.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what the whole report says is a result of the changes that have been happening and the reforms that have been undertaken. Now the Constitution has also changed to reflect that all employment in the Civil Service in their respective Ministries has to be on the approval of the line Minister. Now, what is that?

That is a cause of bad governance, investing too much power and trust in one individual. I know you always talk about two people but probably one will have to be sharing the other.

4. Lack of respect for others who hold different views. It sounds common.
5. There are not enough checks and balances in the system.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Good governance, bad governance right there, Honourable Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the recommendations of the Audit Committee are noted but as we go through the general observations of the Committee, it talks about unsubstantiated write-offs due to lack of supporting documentation and posting errors over a period of time. If we go into the details of the Report, I will take us to one example of the write-off that was made during this audit period.

In the Ministry of Finance at that time, audit noted that assets totalling \$12,461,333 were written off in 2015 by the Minister of Finance. These are all the details stated in the Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, the question that arises is, what authority does the Minister have to allow and approve the write-off of such a huge amount of \$12.461 million?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Check the law.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Who is in charge of the law? I am talking about finances here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another example of the write-off is the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development. The auditors have noted that the substantial amount of write-off by the Ministry of Economy; the Ministry of Economy alluded that the clearing of the outstanding reconciliation and in determining the accuracy of the reconciliation entered was an issue. These are the findings that have been repeated throughout this Audit Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I would like to also highlight another write-off, these are huge amounts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it would be remiss of me not to mention it so at least the Government side can improve on it and not repeat these write-offs in future financial periods, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The accounts receivable balance totalling \$14,673,909 was written off as approved by the Ministry of Finance. The write-off of accounts receivable is a loss of public funds. This what the Auditor-General said, not us.

The Ministry of Economy on 31st May, 2016 approved for the write-off a sum of \$1.8 million from various accounts in 2015. Two adjustment exercises had already been carried out in 2013 and 2014 amounting to \$96 million and \$20 million respectively, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The amount of write offs that has been processed and approved raises a lot of questions and the red flag in terms of the power of the person approving these write-offs, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In terms of the perspective Ministry, I would just like to highlight some of the major ones that probably the relevant Minister can also work on so that future reports can show an improvement in the audit issues that accounting issues that have been highlighted.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, unreconciled variances in overseas mission bank account. This has been a repeated issue and is probably still happening till today if we get the latest Auditor-General's accounts. As at 31st December, 2015, this is what the auditor highlighted, cash held in overseas mission's bank accounts totalled \$8, 215,131; an unreconciled variance of \$3.3 million was noted between the FMIS General Ledger of \$8.2 million and the bank reconciliation of variance missions totalling \$4.8 million.

In addition, it was noted that the Fiji High Commission had an overdraft balance in the General Ledger of \$38,936. The Committee was informed that the cause of these variances was due to mis-postings. These are big amounts but this is something that the relevant Ministry could look into and the relevant Minister of the changes that now they are responsible for their respective staff as compared to in the past, they can look into it to ensure that such audit issues are addressed and properly attended to by their staff.

For Judiciary, Mr. Speaker, Sir, note that we just passed a Bill regarding the number of High Court Judges, but this is another issue that has been ongoing. Audit issues, the review of trust fund accounts revealed the following anomalies: Unreconciled variance of \$726,000 was noted between the main trust fund, bank reconciliation and bank statement balance as at 31st December, 2015. The variance was due to the transfer of balances from old allocations to the newer allocation in 2009, where the actual cash was not transferred to the new bank account by the Ministry of Finance. Trust fund account reconciliation has only been updated up to 31st October, 1991 thus a balance owed by the Department and the detailed breakdown for these balances could not be substantiated.

These are very serious issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, especially the amount that is involved and again I repeat that this needs to be attended to by the relevant line Minister to ensure that their staff pay timely attention to these audit issues.

The other issue that has been highlighted is on the ITC, the Private Public Partnership with a software provider and I think this has been already alluded to by Honourable Minister for Economy regarding the software to be developed and the timeframe is silent on the Software Agreement. Audit highlighted this that Government entered into a Private Public Partnership with a software provider through a head agreement on 28th September, 2012 which was subsequently terminated on 24th April, 2014.

A new Software Agreement entered on 24th April, 2014; the number of software as to be developed by software provider, its commencement date and target dates of completion for each software, development project was not specified in the Software Agreement or agreed on an annual basis. So we have heard about getting the Government eBay services. The latest update we got is for every citizen to have individual ID cards.

But the question in this audit issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when will this end? When will this arrangement of having the Software Agreement finish? Is there any completion date on this particular agreement regarding the Software Agreement with the software supplier, ITC and the Government?

Lastly, Mr Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat on the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism. The Auditor-General highlighted the failure to submit accounts. This is something that probably the Honourable Minister and the rest of the Honourable Ministers that I have highlighted their ministries could provide an update. Audit noted that the National Centre for Small and Micro-Enterprise Development (NCSMED) and Real Estate Agents Licencing Board (REALB) had failed to submit accounts to the Ministry since 2013 and 2014 respectively as required under the Grant Agreement, Section 7.2(5) for both entities.

The Ministry continued to release yearly grants and the Ministry informed that in accordance with Section 5.4 of the Service Agreement, it only releases quarterly grant after proper analysis of financial acquittals such as statement of income and expenditure and bank reconciliation. The Ministry further noted the audit comments and emphasis has been made to the Statutory Authorities to provide audit reports. Sir, NCSMED audit for 2010 to 2015 is in progress by Aliz Pacific and REALB is completing 2014 and 2015 Financial Reports in accordance with IFRS and will submit to the Office of the Auditor-General for auditing. This was in the last interview that was done with the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Speaker. Sir, on the anomalies that has been identified on the current Naboro Landfill Stage 2. Regarding the findings, that there was a disagreement on the payment of withholding tax by the contractor and the Ministry agreeing to pay the 15 percent tax threshold on behalf of the contractor to FRCA totalling \$44,118, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Committee was informed that it would not have become an issue had the Fiji Procurement Office included the 15 percent withholding tax for non-residence in the bidder's checklist. The Ministry had raised its concern to the Fiji Procurement Office in 2015 and requested that such conditions be considered. The consultancy for the design of Naboro Landfill Stage 2 was then for five months beginning from 8th May, 2015 until 8th October, 2015.

There are other issues that are here regarding Naboro Landfill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I hope that the line Minister would come up with updates as to what has happened to the audit issues highlighted here in terms of the Naboro Landfill Stage 2, to ensure that we are up to-date and not that the respective officers come and tell us something else while the Ministerial Statements are saying something else, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a short contribution in regards to the Report that is before us today to debate on, the Auditor-General's Report and the Public Accounts Committee Report on the Audit of Government Ministries and Departments for the Year ended 2015, and I support the motion before the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Radrodro. There being no one else wishing to take the floor, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee to speak on his right of reply. You have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, after listening to my own Member from PAC, I am compelled to give in a short contribution.

Honourable Speaker, it is definitely a sad moment to see that a PAC Member speaks up again and shows that it makes no difference on how much freedom we give them at the Committee stage. Even after having a bipartisan approach at the Committee stage, yet they come here and they question

the Chairman's position. I believe from now onwards that a lot needs to change at the Committee stage.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I must put this on record that there has not been a single instance when we stop our Opposition Members to ask questions when a particular Ministry or Department is before the PAC Committee to present on the Audit Report. But, yet they come over here, I do not know what they are trying to push on, when they try to question ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- ... that the Chairperson should be from the Opposition. I do not know how it will change when we get a bipartisan Report to the Parliament. All these Reports are bipartisan Reports, so if the Chairperson from the Opposition, how will that Report change?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- At the Committee stage, they talk about bipartisan approach and here when they come, they just talk against their own Report, which is a bipartisan Report - what a shame!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Opposition Members and NFP need to realise ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Opposition Members and NFP need to realise that the Chairperson of PAC is from the Government side and is not going to change anytime soon.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- So the faster they come into terms with that, it is better for them.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Also, Sir, I must inform this House about the follow-up Audit Report. At least now under this Government, we are getting follow up reports, Sir, and that is after two years or three years, we get a follow-up Report, and because the time has actually lapsed to what was then audited, it is better to go and talk about the follow-up audit to see how Ministries and Departments are coping up and developing teams, with regards to the recommendation that was given by the Auditor-General in the Audit Report itself.

That is the short contribution from my side, Honourable Speaker. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

REVIEW REPORT - FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Fiji National University 2016 Annual Report which was tabled on 17th May, 2018.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, on Wednesday, 4th April, 2018, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs received a submission from the Fiji National University. The University highlighted that it is a young and dynamic University with colleges that have deep roots reaching back to the 19th century with a clear vision to provide education and training which is aimed at employability, either to ensure that new graduates are highly employable or to assist those already in the workforce to advance their careers.

The University is committed to the highest standards of ethics, integrity, transparency, corporate governance and professional standards. The University was established in 2009 under the Fiji National University Act and was fully registered with the Fiji Higher Education Commission which was effective for the five years from 29th November, 2006. It was noted that for the first time in 2016, female graduates of 1,629 exceeded the male graduates of 1,604 respectively.

Taking into consideration the gender composition in staff from different disciplines, the Committee noted the FNU's administration staff were pre-dominantly in favour of women whilst the Academic staff remained male-dominated. The University continued to enhance and strengthen its organisational and management structure through fostering, coherence and cooperation across the University in its teachings, research and services and promote the efficient and effective deployment of resources across its campuses and centres despite highlighting some of the challenges that hindered the University in fully implementing its vision.

In 2016, FNU experienced a number of innovation designed to strengthen equality of its learning and teaching and enhance the impact of its research. During the same year, FNU undertook

a major academic portfolio review designed to assess the academic quality of its programmes. Nevertheless, FNU continues to put the students at the heart of the University and 2016 has seen great strides in correcting the University to its key stakeholders.

The Committee was pleased to note that FNU had made great strides since 2016 to improve on their infrastructure, programmes, research and overall service delivery. The Committee acknowledges and commends the overall performance and achievements of the University. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. The floor is now open for debate. I give the floor to the Honourable Adi Teimumu Kepa, You have the floor, Madam.

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- I thank the Committee Chairperson for this Report and there are four recommendations made by the Committee, Honourable Speaker.

The first recommendation is the focus on the role of FNU as a tertiary institution and to relinquish the investment arm. FNU, Honourable Speaker, has acquired properties such as the Unifarm and the old Navua Hotel with its cost of operations. I believe since then, it has changed hands since this Report was written. It is believed, Mr. Speaker, Sir that these initiatives as planned initially to generate revenue for FNU has instead become a burden of the University.

There is a need either to reform the practices and regard to property management or to dispose them and buy or hire alternative facilities for teaching and learning as FNU's core function is not to be diverting or divesting into investments but to be training people for the job market. FNU should be concentrating on quality education and training that is relevant to the changing needs of the labour market.

The second recommendation, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is about facilities for new student accommodation to meet the demand.

The third recommendation is related to the second one which deals with fast-tracking, renovation works for existing student accommodation, and these really need to be speeded up.

Student Accommodation and facilities for teaching and learning at FNU has been an ongoing issue. With the pressing need for more accommodation space, and this is keeping students away from FNU and affecting the teaching and learning programme. The explanation given in the Annual Report of the FNU confirms a long procurement process for buildings works and lack of strategic planning on the part of the University, in respect to student accommodation. This is worrying and gives rise to the question, where are the student fees and levies going to; which bank account is it going into; and who is auditing it?

In conclusion, Honourable Speaker, we support the recommendation given that local academic staff be given scholarship to pursue further studies to upgrade their qualifications. That is my contribution and I support the Report. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister for Education, you have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise in support of the motion before the House. The Fiji National University is our national university. It is an institution which we have supported with significant financial inputs via grant in 2016 of \$42.6 million as well as approximately \$23.8 million for students via the Tertiary Scholarships and Loans Board. This commitment is further

reinforced by a grant to FNU for this current financial year of \$65 million for Operating and \$19 million for Capital Expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is on the basis of this investment in our Fiji National University that we now have a high-powered Council to support the management to align FNU to meet our country's skills shortages and our research requirements. FNU now has to demonstrate that it is ready to lead after nine years of consolidating its five colleges, 10 campuses and several smaller technical centres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2016, Mr. Iqbal Jannif undertook a dual role in FNU by being both Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor. It was no doubt a challenging year for him and the University and I would like to express my sincere thanks to him for this and for his service to FNU as Chancellor over many, many years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note in 2016, FNU became fully registered with the Fiji Higher Education Commission for five years. It has achieved ISO accreditation, signed 15 MOUs with institutions, including Skills International, Engineering New Zealand, the Waikato Institute of Technology, Pacific Disability and what is now, Australia Pacific Training Coalition, all aimed at improving quality. FNU worked to ensure that all teaching staff are qualified to deliver adult education. FNU reviewed its academic programme to ensure it is fit for Fiji's purpose. It also started more systematically to consult employers to develop qualifications which meets the needs and thus the needs of our students and our economy. These are all welcomed developments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Social Affairs recommended that local academic staff be given support to pursue further studies and upgrade their qualification. Of course, this is critical to ensure empowerment, personal growth and improving quality; 30 FNU staff enrolled for further studies in 2016. There have been complaints from students about the quality of lecturers and this process, we believe, will not only empower our local faculties but establish local role models but also address the students' criticisms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on another note, the Committee also recommended that the University should address the shortage of student accommodation. I am pleased to inform the House and, of course, the Honourable Member before me that FNU has renovated its current hostels and accommodations and has set up a portal to advertise available private accommodations available to students.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, accommodation in our urban areas is the premium and as a result there is provision under TELS to contribute to accommodation and transport costs for our students on TELS. However, I believe it would be prudent for both FNU and the TELS Board to assess whether students can study closer to home. This is a concept that we are trying to promote, studying closer to home which may help reduce the pressure on accommodation in some of our towns and cities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this also points to the need for a long term infrastructure plan for our University and this is demonstrated by FNU wanting to relocate some academic and research activities to Navua. But unfortunately, students not wanting to commute, leaving the University to abandon that plan. However, this opened up a commercial opportunity for FNU in leasing the land for a commercial farming operation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a key role that the new University Council will be playing is ensuring the development of such an infrastructure plan. This will, of course, include an assessment of the impact of online learning on the need for additional lecture theatre space, balanced with the number of students enrolled.

There is also recognition that some parcels of land allocated to FNU may not be ideal for its purpose, and this will be reviewed in terms of cost benefit analysis.

Mr. Speaker, as a dual sector university, the Fiji National University traverses the Academic and TVET Sections. This is important as we are determined to promote TVET as a key contributor to our economy. Indeed, with many of our TVET technicians taking up employment opportunities overseas and contributing to remittances, it is important for Fiji to meet our own needs, as well as those of some of our neighbouring countries.

Mr. Speaker, my own Ministry indicated to the five teacher training institutions last year that we have a shortage of teachers in certain very critical areas - Maths, Science, among others. It is critically important that we address this collectively as it has an impact our economy, as well as the education sector.

If we do not have inspirational Maths teachers in primary and secondary schools, we will not have enough data analysts, statisticians, engineers, machine designers, IT specialists and other skills, to ensure that our economy grows.

Of course, this extends to other critical subjects in science, technology, engineering and maths. The Government is assisting by providing support to teachers to upgrade their qualification, but this needs to be addressed by teacher training institutions to promoting the same subjects for undergraduates and our teachers ensuring they attract the best, and that TSLB also provides the requisite support.

It is pleasing to note, Mr. Speaker Sir, that in 2019, the number of fulltime students in engineering, science and technology increased over the previous years, and we must ensure that this continues.

Mr. Speaker, in the interest of democracy, I was delighted to read that the FNU Students Association was established, and that students at each of its 10 Campuses are now represented. In addition, representation of students in the Senate and Council is a welcomed development.

In summary, Mr. Speaker Sir, FNU has, as mentioned by the Chairperson, an increasing number of women enrolling as students and being appointed as academic and administrative staff. It has focussed on consolidating its campuses and ensuring leases have been transferred. It has reviewed its academic offering and works to ensure improvement with more international accreditation has been achieved.

With the FNU considering the recommendations of the Standing Committee, its student representatives and the industry, supported by well balanced and involved Council, the future of our national university looks very bright, and I thank you Mr. Speaker for giving me this opportunity. Thank you.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. I rise to contribute on a motion before the House and allow me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, and also the Fiji National University and staff and the students.

Before I get into the proper debate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I join this House to commend and congratulate the Fiji National University on its achievement to the year under review and also put on

record how proud we are that Fiji has now three fully-fledged universities providing choices to our tertiary students.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Review Report under consideration on the FNU deals with four specific recommendations and allow me to respond to each of them so as to facilitate every dialogue and discussion on them.

The first recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, deals with focusing on the role of FNU as a tertiary institution and to relinquish its investment arm.

The Opposition, Mr. Speaker Sir, fully agrees and wholeheartedly endorses this recommendation based on a number of good and valid reasons. Firstly, it needs to be determined, why the FNU ventured into these investments and whether a feasibility study was conducted to ascertain the financial viability of these assets. If it was, how come they have become a burden or a liability to FNU in less than a decade?

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Navua Farm was acquired in 2014, and shortly after in 2015 the students found this as a problem, especially in travelling and relocating the College of Agriculture to Navua. The FNU decided to sub-lease the land so as to obtain a return on the farm. Grace Road Farm and South Pacific Aquaculture run their fish farms at Uni-farm, and all these could have been avoided and taxpayers' monies saved had FNU conducted a feasibility study on this subject. The move was doomed to fail right from the start, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Secondly, how were the investments perceived to be contributing to achieving the intent of the Charter of the Fiji National University.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, were they, in anyway, related to the core ideals and principles of teaching and learning. In addition, are there any of the management staff who also had an interest in this deal whether on table or under the table?

The sponsors and funders of FNU, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and those who support these investments and who were part of it in the first place must come out clean and clear. I want to ask whether the FNU, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was set up to provide tertiary education or to be managed like a business firm.

It is totally repugnant to every universal ideal and principle of tertiary education, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where the funds intended for student welfare and education are used for commercial purposes of the education teaching institution in which they are learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the second recommendation by the Committee is about facilities for new students' accommodation to meet the demand.

The third recommendation is related to a second one in which deals with fast-tracking renovation works for existing students' accommodation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, student accommodation and facilities for teaching and learning at FNU has been an ongoing issue with the pressing need for more accommodation space, and I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for highlighting that this has been done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is keeping students away from FNU and affect the teaching and learning programme because of the lack of space. It explains why student numbers are in decline at FNU?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Professor Healey was quoted as saying:

“The students do not apply because they knew they have no prospects in getting accommodation in the Halls of Residence.”

The Professor mentioned that FNU was in the process of renovating all its hostels and how true is this statement, needs to be ascertained. The competency rate of three to a room is not conducive to healthy living and learning. It goes on to say. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Government needs to assist in ensuring that no students are left behind in order to induce prospective students.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the explanation given in the Annual Report of FNU and the responses provided to the Committee, depicts that there is a long list of procurement process for building works and lack of strategic planning on the part of FNU in respect to student accommodation. This is worrying and gives rise to the question, where are the student fees and where is going to? This is where the FNU should be investing in as far as its capital investments are concerned.

The fourth recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, deals with the need for local academic staff to be given scholarships to pursue further studies to upgrade their qualifications. That is also supported by Opposition with some reservations.

In the last budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Economy announced a grant of 50 Doctor Philosophy scholarships for local citizens. We would like to know whether this grant had been utilised, order to address this issue at FNU.

The other important point I would like to raise, Mr Speaker, Sir, if the staff are not competent enough to teach at FNU, how were they employed by FNU in the first place? Is it because some of them refused to follow the line that they are now going to be checked out of the system, but there is a reason.

This is an emerging problem, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for all universities around the world now because of the State funding or funding corporate interests. A freedom of expression of academic teaching at these institutions are being curtail and once that happens, the very concept of universal education takes a nosedive way back into time of ignorance and compromise.

We have seen how it happens in Fiji and around the world. There must be necessary safeguards to avert disports upon the academics.

There are few other issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which I might highlight very briefly, and these are:

- Poor property deals such as the lease being issued to Grace Farm Road which is totally unfair.
- Unhealthy and poor student facilities.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the manner in which FNU has been managed gives us a lot to be decided. There are miles to go in this journey and our prime concern is that there should be no compromise on the teaching and learning processes and student welfare issues.

That being so, while under his watch this is what happened. I call upon the FNU to implement the recommendations made in this Report and I urge Government to allow FNU the necessary resources and ensure that the intents of this Report is achieved to pave the way forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I will be very brief. The reason why we say that someone wrote the Honourable Member's speech is because he said that universities nowadays are funded by corporates and no longer as Government funding, therefore, as a result of corporates funding universities, there is a loss of academic freedom or academic ability to critique things because of corporate funding.

That is precisely the reversed position in Fiji. Over here, the entire funding for FNU comes from Government - \$32 million, \$34 million to 36 million dollars was funded to USP and University of Fiji also gets a grant from Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality is this, that FNU is the youngest University in Fiji. USP was the first University, then University of Fiji started when the Honourable Kepa was the Minister for Education. I understand there were some struggling about the name, et cetera, but that was when it started.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji National University is, in fact, a conglomeration of different institutes that existed within the setup. So the Derrick Technical Institute with Agricultural College, the Fiji School of Medicine and various others, they are all essentially put together, we have the Nasinu Teachers College. And when you bring different educational institutions together under one umbrella, there is a transition point, there is a transitional phase.

I know Honourable Nawaikula returned the note, he knew what I said was correct, but the point of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a transition point. Yes, there have been gaps in terms of the infrastructure. Yes, there have been gaps in terms of the student accommodation. The reality now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that FNU is a viable University option for students not just in Fiji, but also from within the region.

The last count, we have already about a thousand students from outside Fiji, who are attending FNU. As the Honourable Minister for Education has highlighted and I would like to thank her for appointing

Well, that is very topical, is it not?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Education for appointing a very good Council. We have the benefit of having the former Vice-Chancellor of USP, who is now the Chairman, we have got people from the private sector, we have people from overseas with engineering background, ITC backgrounds and also as has been highlighted from the tourism sector, because we want to build the management capacity of Fijians.

We also Mr. Speaker, Sir, as announced by the Honourable Minister for Education, we will be transferring the budget, it goes without saying that the funding that is currently in the Ministry of Education, to the FNU in respect of running the 15 Technical Colleges. And in respect to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will now find a seamless mode for the students where they can do one and two modules, then three and four into the FNU.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in respect of the FNU Library, it is now available online. People now do not go physically into the Library, it is available online, and to help them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we funded AANet, we also then provided all the FNU Campuses throughout Fiji a Wi-Fi Hotspot, and with

geofencing by having much faster speed and much bigger broadbands. So that, of course, helps the students too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last but not least, Government has also provided funding through the TELS and the Toppers Scheme for PhD qualifications, some for outside the Government and those from within.

I would also like to highlight that FNU, through the budgetary allocation that we provided, before if staff went studying offshore, the FNU only provided \$500 per month. But now, the allowance has been increased to \$1,500, which has tripled now to incentivise the teachers and lectures to actually go overseas to study.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we believe that FNU, notwithstanding the issues it had and no one doubts that there have, of course, been some purchases that were made, that probably should not have been made, I completely agree with that, we are not here disputing that, we are not here to defend anything that is not defensible. But the reality of the matter is, where there is an acknowledgement to try and clean it, to fix up the issue and we would be doing that and you can see the fact that we have got a very good council in place. We believe we will solve those issues and also model FNU into a National University that we need to be proud of and that we should be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just by way of comparison the National University of Singapore, when they started off in the late 60s and early 70s, there were not a force to reckon with. Today, they are one of the highest and well rated universities in the Asia Pacific Region and indeed in the world. And we believe that FNU can become a similar high class university with international accreditation in a very short time which we all will be proud of. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Chairperson you have the floor, on your Right of Reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs,

Honourable Vijay Nath to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

CONSOLIDATED REPORT - FIJI BROADCASTING CORPORATION LIMITED 2010–2015 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move that:

The Parliament debates the Consolidated Report on Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited 2010–2015 Annual Report which was tabled on 12th July, 2018.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing on Economic Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Consolidated Report on the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited 2010–2015 Annual Report which was tabled on 12th July, 2018.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, by way of introduction Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited (FBC) began operations as a Public Service Broadcaster Radio Station in 1954 as the Fiji Broadcasting Commission. It was then corporatized in 1998 under the Government Private Sector Reform and renamed as Island Network Corporation Limited.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, FBC aims to be the premier broadcaster of Fiji and in the region and has a mission to inform, educate and entertain through the highest standard of radio and television. FBC continues to operate six radio stations in three major languages and three TV stations. Two of the radio stations and the TV stations receive funding by the Public Service Broadcasting fees from the Government.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, after deliberating on the Report, the Committee noted that despite the challenges FBC has faced during these years, the Corporation has evolved into a visible Government Commercial Company today. At year ending 31st December, 2015, FBC's total asset valued at \$21.137 million and the total liability was at \$18.76 million.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Committee also noted that FBC has continued the costly operation of the AM Radio Station as part of its social obligation to reach citizens of more remote areas. For their consideration of gender equality, by the end of 2015, FBC had 169 employees of which 40 percent were females. FBC has also indicated that they will be transitioning from analogue to digitalization by 2020.

The Committee would like to commend the FBC team for their dedication, persistence and hard work in a very competitive environment. Honourable Speaker, Sir, with those comments to enlighten the House, as a Member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Chairperson. The floor is now open for debate on this motion. Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Speaker, thank you. I rise to contribute to the motion at hand on the FBC, but before that I would like to respond to the Honourable Attorney-General where he told us yesterday to read and in the *Hansard* he had mentioned that: "... debt to GDP our ratio is currently 45.9 percent."

But, according to RBF 2017 and 2018, the total Government debt stood at 47.5 percent, higher than the 47.2 percent recorded the same period last year. So, yes, that is the official

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. MEMBER.- Current, now.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- I know it is current, but where do we get it? It is not available to us.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Ministry of Economy, Permanent Secretary.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Yes, it is from you, and it should be from here.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just stick to what is on the agenda.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Yes, thank you, Sir.

Sir, I would like to contribute on the FBC motion, we spoke this morning on FICAC. It is very important for us when we talk about the FBC to look at the history too, which is critical when we are looking at an institution. FBC has an interesting relationship with FICAC and it is important to note the history of that, especially with the current executives of the FBC; the appointment of the current CEO.

There was a bit of complication at that time where FICAC alleged that Chairman of FBC, Mr. David Whippy and Mr. Kapadia procured an offer of an advance of \$1.03 million from Westpac Bank Corporation on the basis of a fictitious Board resolution. There was other evidence to suggest that some FICAC officers were against those charges and of course this was proven later to be true because that charge was withdrawn. The Suva Magistrates withdrew that on 2nd October, 2012. So what I am saying here, we spoke about FICAC and some Opposition Members had indicated the independence of FICAC as an issue.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- FICAC?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Yes, FICAC and FBC regarding that issue and it resulted in suffering for the Chairman at that time, Mr. David Whippy and Mr. Kapadia. I am not sure, was it because of the statement which Mr. Whippy issued on the appointment of the CEO at that time, which were not in line with the Government Press Release?

It is something which we need to keep in mind which we as Parliamentarians need to understand that whatever actions we take, as persons in power, can result in a lot of suffering. And not only these two gentlemen, but, there are numerous examples. I am just giving an example here because it is related to FBC. The other part relating to FBC is the loan from FDB which was taken out around that time, which started off as a \$17.8 million loan, particularly taken out to start FBC television and that increased to a staggering \$22.6 million loan.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What is it now?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Let me finish. Not only that, but, also looking at the issue of FBC which the Honourable Attorney-General knows, there were other incidences which we need to be reminded off which as a leader, you need to be responsible for and which you need to lead our nation in fairness.

There was the incidence regarding the Television (Amendment) Decree 52 of 2012 which was designed to suppress Fiji TV and then there was the Television (Cost-Carriage of Designated Events) Decree. That was another huge incident or series of incidents which resulted in again suffering for some staff of Fiji TV. That relates to the Wellington Sevens and also resulted in another gazette to remove the Sevens event from the Cost-Carriage list of events.

What I am saying is that Government failed to provide proof to World Rugby and the people of Fiji at that time, the soccer's governing body had given approval for the Cost-Carriage of the World Cup played in Brazil June and July last year.

The illogical Cost-Carriage Decree provisions was clearly manufactured to prop-up FBC TV with no proof of FIFA approval of World Rugby approval for the Cost-Carriage under World Rugby, they removed World Cup events from the Cost-Carriage as required.

All these activities eventually resulted in the illegal and forced removal of innocent iTaukei professionals such as Tanya Waqaniika and Tevita Gonelevu from Fiji TV.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. MEMBER.- We are talking about FBC, not Fiji TV.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- It is related because Fiji TV is at a disadvantaged because of the Decrees you created which is why it is inter-related.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you got the floor, but stick to the agenda.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- So going back to that issue, what I am asking with those series of incidents, the Opposition had asked Parliament for an inquiry into that because it resulted in an unfair dismissal and there were are a whole lot of issues regarding that.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- No, that was after that last year in 2014 when there was an election, so we had a Parliament. The Opposition was asking for an inquiry but Government did not react neither did the Honourable Prime Minister nor did the Honourable Attorney-General for justice at that time.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! No cross-talk!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- It is important to go into history and just look at the series of events because all these are inter-related; FBC, Fiji TV. Sorry, excuse me Sir.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, but do not forget the Speaker.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- My apologies, Sir.

So you cannot say it is not inter-related because the actions of the Government at that time interfered with Fiji TV on behalf of FBC with those Decrees and resulted in the termination of two innocent staff and they are still out there, it is not only them, but there are numerous others with similar types of experiences; not only at Fiji TV but other Government departments. And at one stage, we will need to hold Government to account for that and take action; probably compensate them or see whether those actions were unjustified or whether it was illegal or criminal.

Let me touch on the financials regarding those particular years. We look at the report, there have been consecutive losses:

2010 - \$517,000
2011 - \$1.1 million
2012 - \$7.1 million
2013 - \$5.6 million

And 2014 and 2015 also. So cumulative adds up to \$21.5 million. But the interesting thing is that Government grants kept on (fees later), but at that time “grants”.

2010 - \$2.6 million
2011 - \$2.5 million
2012 - \$2.6 million
2013 - \$2.9 million
2014 - \$2.9 million
2015 - \$2.9 million

So that amounted to approximately \$16.4 million.

On top of that, they had that loan with FDB in the six years but there was a loss of \$21.5 million. So it was continually receiving cash grant up to \$16.4 million and basically Government was underwriting FBC. The interesting thing is that, these grants have been increased: 2016 - \$9.2 million; and 2017 and the profits started from 2016 and 2017, thank God.

So the question here is: did the profits result from the commercial operations or from the Public Service fee, and I am asking that because I am also querying the basis of the performance bonuses for the staff, in particular the CEO, November 18, there was an e-mail (8th November, 2018 or a letter to Mr. Sashi Singh, Chairperson, FBC), granting a bonus of \$21,259 to the CEO for the 2017 financial year, signed for the Attorney-General.

So what I am asking here is the commercial basis for granting that; what were the grounds for that and No. 2, the clear conflict of interest as to the approval letter from the Attorney-General to the Chairperson of FBC where the brother of the Attorney-General is the beneficiary. It is clear conflict of interest and it is something which the Government should steer clear of, at least give it to another person to approve.

HON. MEMBER.- Read the letter. What does it say?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Sir, part of the letter reads:

“Following consultations with the Prime Minister, approval is granted for the bonus payment of \$21,259 to the CEO for the 2017 financial year.

Yours sincerely

Unaisi (for the Attorney-General)

So that is what the letter says. The final responsibility is with the Attorney-General, so that was the bonus.

The other one referring to the Verbatim Report, if you look at Page 5 (right at the bottom), the CEO says:

“I am glad you have asked us the question on the acquittals as it stands at the moment, the value of what we provide Government this year, inclusive of the two new channels that we have launched with FBC 2 which is non-commercial. We are now sitting at a value of around (on the next page) \$30 million for which we receive a fee of \$11.4 million so basically we receive a third of what we provide.”

So basically what they were saying here is that, it is a shortfall in terms of the cost of the public service they provide and what Government is giving them. That is a concern because they have established Fiji TV and the question is: what does public service constitute? There is a long list of programmes they have developed, which include:

- Aaina;
- Speak Your Mind;
- Navakekeli;
- Juke World;
- Sports Lounge;
- Bati Ni Tanoa;
- Movie Tok;
- For The Record ...
- Jejemon.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- So there are about 32 programmes, so what I am talking about here, they are complaining about the shortfall in public service broadcasting fee, but they have developed a whole list of programmes and the question is: which ones of these constitute public service?

Of course, we know that Radio AM is one of them which goes out to the islands and areas which cannot be reached by Radio FM. The question is: is that kind of statement justified that there is a shortfall. My view is that, it is not because they need to work out what exactly is public service and that really is an issue which needs to be decided.

We make recommendations from the Committees but I do not know how effective are those, so probably the Minister will need to look at that and that, Honourable Members (ladies and gentlemen) is my contribution and some of the recommendations I was thinking of, I thank the Committee for those recommendations that we need to conduct an independent review of the public service broadcasting contract between the Government and FBC and determine which or how the broadcasting fee is apportioned to the services it provides so that we really determine what are the costings in accordance with those apportioning rather than just a generalised statement that there is a shortfall in what the Government is giving them.

The other issue is that, there are other service providers who probably can provide a more cost-effective service rather than asking or saying that there is a shortfall of about \$11 million, and these services, when we determine what constitutes public service, need to be tendered out so that we get a more cost-effective use of public funds.

The last one, of course, is cost control measures which need to be put in place. We see the major developments taking place, et cetera which is positive but how cost-effective are these?

With those, Sir, I conclude my contributions to the debate today on FBC. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, we will now adjourn for dinner which is served in the Big Committee Room, and will resume in an hour's time to continue with the agenda items. We adjourn or dinner.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.26 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 8.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off before dinner. Anyone wishing to take the floor? The Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. We are debating here the Consolidated Report on the Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited 2010–2015 Annual Report. There is only one conclusion and it is laughable. It says, “To conclude the Committee believes that FBC is well-poised to grow its operation profitably whilst ensuring delivery of quality, responsible and needful public services”. Laughable because we all know that FBC is a bad institution. It has diverted from its role. It should be a media and it does not follow media ethics. It does not do balanced reporting, it does not do all that. It is only a propaganda tool for Government.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can I repeat that? It has only been a propaganda tool for Government. No, you admit that. It is not a broken record and here, all these.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, this is the fact because you cannot handle the truth, that is your problem. All these come under it: *Radio Fiji One* (AM/FM), *Bula FM* (iTaukei), *Radio Fiji Two* (AM/FM), *MIRCHI* (FM), Hindustani, *Gold FM*, *Today FM* and the FBC also provides free-to-air television services which not only has commercial TV programmes but also local programmes.

All that to propagate the Government, very political as a propaganda tool for the Government, so we are wasting our money. I pay tax and it is being used for this and you look at all their news, you look at all their programmes, you look at the *Vakekeli*, the Road Show, *Cucurui*, all promoting Government, all promoting the political side and it is not making any money. How can you thank them, thank them for what? Thank them for failing the Government, all these years, the figures are here.

This is the loss in 2010 (\$516,000) and no nepotism and what is the cost and what is wages or the salary of the two executive management (\$205,000), overpaid, no work, just sitting down.

In 2011, the loss increased (\$1.1 million), the salary also increased. In your business will you do that? When you are making a loss, will you increase the salaries? With \$1.1 million and their salaries increased from \$205,000 to \$240,000.

In 2012, a loss of \$7 million and then you asked, what happened to their salary? Increased again, here, I will not read that at all but coming down to 2015, it incurred a loss of \$3.3 million and their base salaries has now reached \$302,000. So, you ask yourselves and you look back at the conclusion. This is the conclusion from your Government Committee.

It should be a shame doing that. Committee with all these loses over and over again and at the same time trying to increase, trying to copy the TV stations to become a better one, trying to make this and make that, it should concentrate on its social obligation, its common good to broadcasting. That is what it should be doing - non-commercial, and that is common sense.

So, my point, Honourable Speaker, this is an organisation that has diverted from its social role or duty and our common good which is to make fair and balance reporting at our expense, that is the bottom line. If you look at the Verbatim Report, there was only one topic. The CEO trying to

convince the Committee that this Government Grant should be taken as income, all of the Verbatim, and let me just read you some:

Public broadcasting that needs to be fair and balance reporting not propaganda. So, this is the outcome. If you look at the 2016 from January to 7th March in compliance with the Cabinet decision that was the time an FBC finally convinced Cabinet to turn this into income so that when you asked them here and here, they will say Cabinet. So, they can point to someone to turn that loss into an income.

I can tell this House here I am not an accountant, Honourable Speaker, but when the 2016 FBC Report came, I was on my way to Savusavu. From Suva to Savusavu, I am trying to work out, how come after five years loses, they finally made up the profit. How come? So, close to Savusavu Harbour I found out, how? It is in the notes by the Auditor. There is a small piece that said “Qualified”, the Auditor disagreed with the Government that this should be “Income” but they put it in. In that year, it turn out after five years, loss, loss, suddenly profit, not only that, and they gave the CEO a bonus. Totally wrong, is that morally right or morally wrong?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Forget about income, forget about accounting. Is it right if you are doing a loss and you should be given a bonus?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, you can read it but they argue and argue, and the CEO and the Chairman were trying to convince the Committee that this amount incurred for broadcasting should be turned as income, and they have not succeeded, and I caution the House today, in the Public Enterprises Act, it will appear as an agreement between FBC and the Government to do public broadcasting so that they can divert it to “Income”. But public broadcasting for who?

It is not public broadcasting, it is propaganda. What they are doing is propaganda, it is not for everyone’s good, it is not the common good. They are political tool for your side. So that is a serious concern that we want to raise in relation to this.

It is totally unfair for the public to be funding an organisation that has gone away from the ethics of journalism and which is trying to turn all their losses into income, by convincing the Cabinet and sure enough, we will also pass the legislation to regularise that.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Deputy Speaker, you have the floor.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

I rise to contribute towards the debate on the floor on the Consolidated Report on Fiji Broadcasting Corporation 2010-2015.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had been a staff of FBC during the period actually until mid-2014. I will always value and treasure my tenure with FBC. My deepest gratitude to the CEO of FBC, Mr. Riyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, for his great leadership. I applaud his commitment towards FBC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I joined FBC in 1999. I have seen the deteriorating conditions of the infrastructure, the falling ceilings, the frequent transmission problems, the failing equipment and the list is endless.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, things changed after Mr. Riyaz Sayed-Khaiyum joined FBC as the CEO. Without any reservations, I must say that with much determination and diligence, Mr. Riyaz Sayed-Khaiyum steered FBC out of the doldrums.

With the help of the Bainimarama-led Government, FBC embarked on a journey of complete transformation.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- I am waiting for them to stop. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we saw the upgrade of infrastructure. The establishment of a brand new state-of-the-art TV and Radio broadcast facility, the best in the South Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is only obvious that the cost incurred during that time would have been huge. They had to secure loss for the upgrade and the works they had undertaken. Why is there so much of cue and cry over the losses, especially when it is known fact the FBC has never defaulted any payment until todate? I reiterate, that FBC has never defaulted any payment until todate and financially they are doing well.

But what amazes me most, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the constant bickering about the losses, and it looks like Honourable Nawaikula has some animosity with FBC or the staff there because sometimes you feel the arguments are so baseless. The constant finger pointing on the fee provided by the Government to FBC for their public services.

Actually I feel that even Honourable Tuisawau is confused, or was it deliberate? But throughout his delivery, he was calling it a Government grant, Government grant, and at the end he said fee paid for the Public Service Broadcast (PSB) . Well, at least, he agreed that it is not a grant but the fee paid for the service provided by FBC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, recently, we had the CEO FBC for a submission to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs and I would like to quote him. He says, and I quote:

“In the past, there was a fundamental mistake where the fee was referred to as grant. It was never a grant. The wrong word for transaction was used and language is so important that we have seen in the last week, certain words used and caused a lot of damage. And in our case the word grant caused the FBC a lot of damage, because the general perception in the country within some members of the Government as well, some Ministries, was that we were getting free money, because grant refers to, and indicates and alludes to free money. It was never free money, it was for a service that we have provided and that fee was never to the value of the service that we provided.”

So this is what actually comes from the CEO himself.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we take a look at the history of FBC, it was initially established as a Government owned entity 100 percent, so obviously there was a 100 percent grant to the entity. But in the year 1998, it was corporatised under the Government reform programme and after

corporatisation FBC was paid a fee for the airtime they utilise to provide programmes under PSB but, unfortunately, the fee was always called a grant, Mr. Speaker.

But having said that, it was noted with interest that a positive move in favour of FBC was a Cabinet decision effective on 8th March, 2016 which we classified the term 'grant' to 'fee' for services rendered and as such, has enabled FBC to categorise this fee as revenue in their Profit and Loss Statement because airtime is something which normally people do not understand. FBC sells airtime and the airtime used to provide Public Service Broadcast was paid for ...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is propaganda!

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- If we bought logs from Fiji Pine or someone for \$14 million worth and then you are paying them \$11 million, obviously there is a shortfall. So, basically the fee has always been confused with the grant, so hopefully this statement sets it right. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for the time and I wish FBC well. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think Honourable Nawaikula just gave away why he has got such a gripe with FBC. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I mean, in all seriousness, I stand up as the Minister for Public Enterprises to talk about a State-Owned Enterprise (SOE).

I think a lot of these issues have arisen or they are targeting FBC is because and I have to declare this and you all know this, let us talk about the elephant in the room, the CEO is my brother, and I think this is where a lot of this gripe is coming from.

As alluded to by Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, he mentioned the former Chairman of FBC, Mr. Daniel Whippy. It was during Mr. Daniel Whippy's time and when I was not the Minister for Public Enterprises when the current CEO was actually appointed, for the record, and you can go and check the records.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to, of course, highlight a couple of the issues that Honourable Tuisawau highlighted. He brought in Tanya Waqanika and Fiji TV, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji TV is not owned by FBC nor is it owned by the Fijian Government. The Fijian Government used to have a small share in Fiji TV sometime back, but the Fijian Government actually sold its shares. The majority shareholder of Fiji TV is actually Fijian Holdings, and they are the ones that actually manage Fiji TV.

In respect of the TV Cross Carriage laws that have been put in place, the whole purpose, Mr. Speaker, was this, and I will put it very simply. Maybe, the person who put together notes for Honourable Tuisawau did not explain this to him, is that when you have two or three TV stations and there are important national events, important sporting events, that are of significance to the whole country, then it should not be the domain of only one particular TV station.

Many countries in the world do this. Significant national events or significant sporting events should be televised in all the free-to-air television. For example, if there is Sevens being played and everyone in Fiji watches the Sevens, whether it is the Hong Kong Sevens or one of the Sevens leg, there are certain areas in Fiji where Fiji TV does not have the network but FBC may have the network, Mai TV may have the network. So what it means is that if, for example, the TV station goes and

buys the rights for the Seven Series, what the law stated was that, if they paid \$240,000 for it, the law then says that, that \$240,000 the cost of it must be shared by all the three TV stations, based on the percentage of viewership. For example, if the cost of a particular right is \$300,000 and if Fiji TV has a 50 percent viewership, then instead of paying \$300,000, they will pay \$150,000. If FBC has the balance of 25 and *Mai TV* has 25, they pay the respective balance amounts, according to the percentage of viewership.

In that way, then the entire Series gets shown on all the three TV stations, which means everyone in Fiji gets to watch it. That is the whole purpose of it, it is not something peculiar to Fiji. Many countries do, do that and that was the whole purpose of it, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

As a result of that, of course, we saw that the game was shown everywhere. What he talked about the Sevens was that the World Rugby said that, “We do not want to do that, we are not going to allow you to do that, you make your own internal arrangements.” On that basis, we struck a deal with Fiji TV, and they allowed that to happen. And now going forward, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all the major events are now shown on the TV stations.

If, however, a TV station does not want to show it and does not want to give the money, they do not get to do it. So *Mai TV*, for example, in many of the instances have said, “No, we do not want to participate in it.” *Mai TV* footprint is quite small, et cetera, they said, “We do not want to fork out the money.” So they do get to share it, only on the listed sporting events, only on the listed national events. So that is how the system works. Unfortunately, Honourable Tuisawau, you have got it all wrong. Whoever wrote it for you had misled you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I think the other point that I would like to make that Honourable Nawaikula should listen to this too, is that if you go to many countries in the world and the classic one is, of course, ABC Australia. ABC Australia is a public service broadcaster that is 100 percent-funded by the Australian Government. And the funding for ABC runs into billions of dollars on an annual basis, because they provide those kinds of services to everyone in Australia and is funded by the Australian Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not saying we will give FBC billions of dollars, and many people have claimed, for example, politicians like you, Honourable Nawaikula, “Ah, ABC Australia is biased or whatever.”

But, again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the standards of journalism is guided by the Media Industry Development Act (MIDA). You have the right to lodge a complaint about any media organisation that you believe has not adhered to the standards set out with MIDA. You have a right to complain and people actually have done so about various media organisations.

I think the Honourable Nawaikula is very aggrieved over a recent story that was done by, I think, one of the journalists called Alik. And he went ahead and that is what he said in the end, and that is where the problem is. He is aggrieved by the story that was done by Alik. He said that after the story was done, he again went on his usual diatribe on *Facebook*.

He went on a diatribe against *Fiji Sun*. If he does not like the story, he goes and attacks that particular media organisation. You do not judge, Mr. Speaker, Sir, an Annual Report on the basis of your emotions based on what the story is done for you. It is quite silly!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that the Honourable Tuisawau forgot to mention, he went on about the loan. I mean, this is so clearly put out in Recommendation No. 3 and he refused to read it out. It says, and I quote:

“The Committee notes that the Government Guarantee to the children of \$21 million is held at the FDB as part of security for FBC loans.

The Committee further notes that the loan exposure to FDB has now decreased to \$12 million.”

It has almost halved.

The other point that the Honourable Nawaikula also forgot to miss out was that under the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), the PSB fee has to be shown as a revenue, that was the issue. And if you look at the Report, the whole Report was about that predominantly because in particular Members of the Committee from the other side failed to understand that.

They also failed to understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that airtime actually costs money. You have these programmes that you have here: *Cucurui*, *Noda i Lavo*, *all of these things*, *Bati ni Tanoa*, whatever it is. When you produce the programme, you have to get sponsors who will actually buy the air space and the air breaks, and that is how you pay for it.

Now, if you are going to produce a programme called, ‘*Noda i Lavo*’ which is about educating people in the vernacular about managing finances, et cetera, and if you do not get anyone to sponsor it, so does that mean you cancel the programme?

Of course not, if he it is going to produce social good, knowledge, increase people’s awareness, you will still go ahead and produce it. That is the definition of Public Service Broadcast. PSB, Mr. Speaker, Sir, means that they actually produce a programme for the good of the public irrespective of your cost, irrespective of your revenue. Now if he were able to look at the accounts, Mr Speaker, Sir, which the Committee obviously did do, if you look at the financials, revenue for FBC has not decreased. In fact revenue, has increased, year in, year out, the revenue for FBC has increased.

As highlighted by Honourable Minister Reddy that when you actually set up a business, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar has also spoken about this, Hari Punja when he set up his biscuit factory, he did not make profit from day one. He factors in his cost, he factors in his amortisation, he factors in his depreciation, so if you look at the balance sheet, you will actually see a loss. It does not mean that revenue is not coming in, the balance sheet is completely different to your revenue and expenses. Your Profit and Loss, very different. They do not understand that he has admitted that he is not an accountant, he needs to get an opinion from an accountant. They come here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again with not clean hands. It is a very basic accounting issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just highlight the other point. They raised the issue about bonuses. Mr. Speaker, Sir, again when bonuses, not just for FBC or any other entity that needs the approval of, firstly the public enterprises, the Permanent Secretary for Public Enterprises and his or her team assess the Board’s recommendation. The Board themselves make a recommendation based on the contract of that particular individual. They assess that, Public Enterprises assesses that, then it comes to the Minister for Public Enterprises and also to the Prime Minister. He also has a view on that, we also have to have his approval, so this is why we have that letter.

I have absolutely no interest on what is done. The Board has done it, as well as the Public Enterprises, the Prime Minister has looked at it and based on that, the letter has been issued. It is based on the contractual obligation, it is based on the Board’s recommendation. You see, the whole thing has been personalised. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would venture to say, you see they are clasping at

straws, if tomorrow the current CEO of FBC drops dead or resigns or retires or whatever it is, their interest in FBC will wane, they do not care about it because I can go into historical information.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You see, he rubs you up the wrong way.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, you would not know conflict of interest if it hit you in the face.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you can go into the financials of FBC prior to 2007 and you look at how they used to struggle to pay for even salaries. Honourable Bhatnagar will tell you; week in, week out. They did not have money even to pay salaries and our Government sometimes used to step in to help them just with the cash flow. We do not do that.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again we need to be able to look at what is actually happening within their books, with the report itself. If FBC was run in such a shambolic manner as they seem to suggest, the Japanese Government would not have invested in excess of \$12 million in FBC to get their AM Frequency up. The AM Frequency, as we all know and you should know, some of you are always talking about maritime areas, is the only frequency that travels best over water.

The Naulu Station where the AM station was put in place many years ago, in fact had all the cables stolen around it. When you put AM cables, you do not put it on top, you put it under the ground because it conducts well with dampness and then you transmit the signal. Today the furthest reaches of Lau; Northern Lau, Southern Lau, all other parts of Fiji where they can get AM station. The Japanese Government saw the fact that FBC was doing a good work and then they participated and donated, and I urge the Members and I hope the Committee actually did do that and took the time to go to Naulu.

If you go to Naulu, if you look at the property worth of Naulu today, it is over \$1 million in itself, just the property itself. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if things were not right, obviously the Japanese who ticked every single box, very, very particular, very detailed would not have invested in FBC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to again and I thought that the Committee understood this. Honourable Nawaikula, the Member next to you and others were in the Committee and are deafeningly silent. The point of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to understand that the product of any radio station or television station is your airtime. That is your asset. That is your revenue-generating apparatus. That is where you make money from. It may be something in thin air but you need to grasp your head around it that, that is what you are selling and if you are then going to do things over and above the amount of return that you get from it, that becomes Public Service Broadcast and the costing of that is in excess of \$20 million. We negotiate and run them down for it because the Government can only afford that much. If we were to pay the full service broadcast fees, we would be paying in excess of \$20 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I just wish that when we come to these sessions and debates, that at least we need to look at the facts. We need to look at what are the ground realities that is taking place in these organisations. I have a number of other things to say, but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think I

have said what needs to be said and the reality of the matter is that the representations made by the other side are furthest from the truth and the fact of the matter is that this is a national institution.

FBC is a media organisation that is 100 percent owned by the Fijian Government which means the Fijian people own it. It is a company also that provides a vast number of services. Recently, an Australian-based company called Pulse Insights carried out a survey nation-wide and said that 72 percent of Fijians said that the daily 7.00 p.m. *FBC News* is their preferred news source on television over all others which includes free-to-air and paid television and over 70 percent of Fijians regard FBC as their favourite commercial channel. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is an independent survey that was done by Pulse Insights. So the reality is, it is providing service. The reality of the matter is that we should be proud of a national institution that actually runs and provides these types of services all across Fiji.

Tied in with this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we have got *Walesi*. *Walesi* provides you opportunity now not just for FBC but other television stations. We have increased, what we call, reconfigured the real estate as far as frequency is concerned so everyone is watching us on a dedicated Parliamentary Channel. We never had this before. This is only being provided through the *Walesi* platform. We are currently talking to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, talking to the Minister for Education on how we can use another channel to put out educational programmes and agricultural programmes to reach out to people in the deep parts of Viti Levu or Vanua Levu and the islands and the *Walesi* platform will be used for that.

The *Walesi* platform, also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is now using satellite which we are already paying for, we will be able to have data coming back to us which means, for example, God forbid that there is some cyclone down in the Southern Part of Lau, people actually can send data back to us through the *Walesi* platform. That is what we are currently working on, Mr. Speaker, Sir and by next year, we will be switching over from analogue to digital.

It will be phased over a one-year period where the entire country will become digital. We will be the first country in the Pacific to go digital with television. It is a huge achievement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and as a result of the re-arrangement of the frequency, we now have 3G and 4G. They do not understand that all of these things are actually linked to each other because we use the frequency for radio, frequency for television, frequency for mobile broadband as highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Industry and Trade in response to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

We now have the cable landing in Vanua Levu. As a result of that, the speeds will be increased by a 100 percent. As a result of that, we have already seen people asking us whether there is an opportunity for the ITC sector in Vanua Levu. So, Mr. Speaker, it is a holistic approach to what we are doing and I commend the Committee for their work and I hope that we are all able to look beyond the personal considerations or personalisations or who is related to who and the fact of the matter is to look at whether the organisation is run properly, to understand the financial system, the accounting system and to be able to input into an organisation that again is going to launch another feature of expanding their operations and I thank the Committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee for his Right of Reply.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. Just a few comments after listening to the Honourable Members of this august House. What Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau has just questioned in Parliament, the same question probably he had asked the CEO of FBC and he got all his answers. The CEO replied very well during the submission hearing. During the submission, the

CEO and CFO explained thoroughly on how they got their revenue, what radio stations they are working on and the profit they are making.

In this regard, I just want to read two of our recommendations, that is, Recommendations No. 4 and Recommendation No. 5. The Committee noted that FBC is the only radio station in the country operating an AM frequency which is very capital intensive. FBC has invested very heavily in upgrading and maintaining the frequency to reach people in remote areas of Fiji.

I was sitting one day in Labasa and I was listening to a radio station, that is the only station that is available there, honestly speaking. I was very happy to say that you will find the crew members in the interior islands, especially the staff from FBC, so the Committee recommends that support be provided to FBC to continue providing this service. We have recommended that.

Recommendation No. 5: The Committee noted that the fees paid by Government to FBC is approximately \$11 million each year contracted over a three-year period whereas FBC claims that the value of services provided for Government is much higher which is true. Honourable Viliame Gavoka was present during the submission and he agreed. This is a bipartisan Report, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and he is one of the signatories. He should have whispered to Honourable Nawaikula. This is amazing, Mr. Speaker Sir. The Committee recommends that the basis of determining the fees be reviewed because they often give acquittals to the Government and because of the contract in place, they cannot ask for more money.

If anyone passed in the family, this is what we do. We go to the radio station just to announce it over the air for the families to know. Three calls are free and thereafter....

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- (Inaudible interjection)

HON. V. NATH.- Listen.

This is facts. Three calls are free and then thereafter you have to pay because the airtime as the Honourable Attorney-General has just mentioned, airtime is their revenue. I request the Honourable Members to please read this report. It is a bipartisan Report rather than coming here wasting the time of this august House time or precious time, Honourable Speaker. We should not.

Time is very important. Honourable Speaker, with the same gesture, I would like to thank the CEO, CFO and the entire crew of FBC. When you next go to a maritime island, just look around which station people are using. If you go to Kadavu, you will find FBC there.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the entire team of FBC for the excellent work and I request that you continue with this excellent work in the future, thank you.

(Applause)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

I now call on the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca to move his motion.

ENGAGEMENT OF LANDOWNERS IN COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURAL VENTURES

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament considers how best Government can encourage landowners to engage in commercial agricultural ventures rather than just being a subsistence farmers or passive landlords or providers of land.

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU.- Honourable Speaker, I second the motion, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca to speak on his motion.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to introduce a motion to ask the Parliament to consider how best Government can encourage landowners to engage in commercial agricultural ventures rather than just being subsistence farmers or passive landlords or providers of land.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I submitted this as a question so that I could ask in this House so that the Honourable Minister can do the work and answer to this House, but it has turned out that as a motion, I am now doing the work to assist him in the future. I thank the opportunity to speak on my motion this afternoon.

I brought this motion to this House for a number of reasons which are as follows:

- i) To remind this House of the relevant covenants of the Deed of Cession and successive legislations pertaining to the interest and aspirations of the landowners to gradually become key stakeholders in the national economy, not only as landlords but also as cultivators of our land;
- ii) To examine how the policies and programs, legislations and funding by the current Government is aimed at empowering the landowners to transit from being mere subsistence farmers to commercial farmers. For too long our landlords have stayed on the margins as observers and the time has come to encourage them to take up the challenge of commercial agricultural adventures.
- iii) To facilitate discussion on the much-promised gradual transfer of ownership of resource-based industries such as mahogany and pine to the landowners as one of the ways to enable and empower landowners to enter the sphere of competitive and commercial agriculture;
- iv) To explore means and ways as to how our agricultural policies and programs, legislations and funding should be planned, implemented and monitored to encourage landowners to become commercial farmers putting their resources in the form of land, labour and skills to effective use to realize the objective of green economy.

- v) To emphasize on the importance of the development of basic infrastructure to eradicate poverty and access to open up more arable lands for agricultural activities in Fiji's rural and remote area.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the agricultural sector contributes 13 percent of the GDP with five percent contribution from the sugar industry and the other eight percent from the non-sugar agro-based industries. It cannot be denied or undermined that agriculture continues to provide employment, sustainable livelihood, food-security, put land to productive use and lead the fight against the rising cases of NCDs via the provision of fresh fish, fruits and vegetables and minimise urban drift.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the balance of payments in trade depends on how much we export and import. The macro statistics provided by the Government publication clearly illustrates that our imports overrides our exports. For example, in 2017, the RBF Quarterly Report stated \$4,294 million worth of imports against \$2,32 million worth of exports. The divide has been widening over the years and one of the intents of this motion is to empower our landowners to bridge that divide through agricultural exports and be competitive.

The declining trend over the years is or should be a matter of concern for the Government and all of us here in this House. Efforts, financials and other kinds of assistance will help and we pray that this endeavour to promote some ways of improving our agriculture sector.

In terms of National Budgeting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the agriculture sector received a total of \$196 million in the 2018/2019 Budget, with \$96.8 million for the Ministry of Agriculture, \$62.3 million for the Ministry of Sugar Industry.

The Ministry of Fisheries received \$20.5 million, and the Ministry of Forestry was allocated \$17.1 million.

Sir, the percentage of the total budget would be 4.5 percent for the agro-based industries altogether with Agriculture constituting only 2.2 percent; Sugar, 1.4 percent; Fisheries, 0.47 percent; Forestry, 0.39 percent of the 2018/2019 Budget.

The above shows how lowly the Agricultural sector is being rated for budgeting and development by the FijiFirst Government.

About 45 percent of population of Fiji is supported by the Rural Agricultural areas of the country as a whole, and their contributions to feed the urban population in order to live or improve their livelihood. By this measure, a mere 4.5 percent allocated for Agro-based commodities (except sugar), is a joke to say the least, taking into account the impact of industrialised way of living and its commercial developments, higher urban population of 55 percent, I would propose that you really put your money where your mouth is, at least 7 percent or 10 percent of the total budget should be for Agro-based industries to kick start the reform.

This percentage should be increased as activities become successful. Such emphasis will require increased-business activities are established, developed, controlled and managed profitably, aimed not only at food security but revenue-generations for the people, including export commodities. This we need to open doors for landowners to go into business which may help in minimising urban drift where the youth will drift aimlessly.

In 2008, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture published a report highlighting the state of Fiji's economy and Agro-based industries and the target to achieve what has come to be known as the "Green Economy". Part of that report includes the objective to induce more landowners as commercial farmers.

Government may have improved infrastructure development and have put in policies, programmes in place to achieve the intents of this motion. With the continued imports and exports figures and deficits continue, people are asking the following questions:

- Why have those actions failed to generate agricultural activities and encourage more landowners to become commercial agricultural farmers?
- Why has it pushed more people out of their lands to our towns and cities as the national Census Report states?
- Why the agricultural production not enough to reduce deficit considerably?
- Why the GDP component of agriculture and other agro-based industries are not increasing high enough?

These are questions that we in this House need to answer properly and thus, this motion.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Economy said during the Budget Address last year on Page No. 1889 of the *Hansard*, 2018, I quote:

"Madam Speaker, we will continue the Government's Grant assistance for iTaukei Land Development, giving Fiji's landowning communities the opportunity to better tap into the nation's prosperity by developing their land, reaping the financial benefits that come as a result. Specifically, these grants are designed to meet the cost of connecting and constructing utilities, such as electricity, water, roads and other critical infrastructure on iTaukei land that will otherwise be inaccessible to the public.

Todate, Madam Speaker, 11 development plans in Fiji have received the greenlight from Government to embark on their transformative journey - two in Tailevu, one is already completed in Tailevu out of the two; two in Nardoga, one in Tavua and six more in the province of Ba; with one development having been completed and another three nearing completion. We hope the success of these first 11 developments will inspire many more landowning units to follow in their footsteps, empowering many more iTaukei along that way to become both asset-rich and cash-rich. Of course, as introduced this year, Madam Speaker, 80 percent of any of the royalties for any mineral resources, mined on any land or seabed in Fiji go straight back to the resource owners."

I think no one in this House or in this country has any qualms with that profound announcement which we welcome then as we do now. However, on the ground of reality, it suggests otherwise. We would be interested in how this development plans have fared and if it is successful then fine, if not, what we can do to improve to make it a success?

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we need to assist the local landowners to develop and do business from their own land they are living in. In empowering the landowners, it means identifying where to empower or assist and quantifying resources, including finance expertise to be allocated to the assistants and legislating it to them by policies, regulations and rules to ensure profitability or success for such programmes of assistance or empowerment, so to speak. I hope in the green economy reform to probably empower landowner commercially.

Land development, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is a challenging area when it comes to encourage the landowners to venture into commercial agriculture. This is because freehold land is the best land and easy to develop, and there is State land which is good land but at the disposal of State. The Native lands are mostly lands with difficult terrain and difficult accessibility. They need to be developed in conformity with the kind of crops the landowners may intend to produce as they venture into commercial agriculture. Native lands need to be developed, leased by landowners and others and be productive.

Infrastructure development, Honourable Speaker, Sir, holds the key in empowering farmers, enabling landlords to avail and open up more lands for agricultural activities. These farms will need to be prepared, planted, maintained, harvested, processed and transported for the local markets or exported for international markets. These would require proper legal establishments of legal commercial entities, finance, expertise, farm implements, transportation, processing plants, power, water, to name the fundamentals. In that respect, the motion seeks to ask the Parliament to consider the following infrastructure developments to encourage landowners to become active participants in commercial agriculture:

- Road development and maintenance as mentioned, particularly for example in Wainimala, Korovou, Udu, in the Island of Kadavu and so many other places around Fiji.
- Drainage development and maintenance, particularly for flat areas throughout Fiji to make it more productive.
- Development and maintenance of bridges.
- Taking good care and upgrading of farm access roads in various areas around Fiji and there are so many there.
- Development of rural water and electricity schemes, solar and hydro sources. I think it is important to emphasise here, particularly, the hydro sources, for example, in Navakasali where I come from. There has been a study by the Ministry of Rural Energy and they found it feasible. This is way back in 2002, 2003, and they said that they were going to look for funds, until now nothing has happened. Feasible and the capacity is more than Bagata who can produce, which can supply power through Wainunu, Kubulau, Lekutu, Dreketi, Nadi, et cetera, as well as hydro scheme that is feasible by the rural electricity in Nasawaga, also in Driti.
- Communication systems: when you do business, you need to communicate properly. In our village (myself and the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture), there is no communication there yet, we cannot receive any calls through mobile telephones there yet, till todate.

These allowances, development initiatives, Honourable Speaker, Sir, will enable Fiji and the landowners to achieve the following:

1. To increase productivity for exports and reduce imports bridging the balance of trade deficit and increase contribution to GDP and more contribution to Fiji's economy;
2. Enable Fiji to achieve its target of Green Economy;
3. Empower and enable more landowners to enter the sphere of commercial agriculture;
4. Create meaningful jobs to the local people improving the quality of life and standard of living in the rural areas;

5. Arrest the rising cases of NCDs by availing more fresh meat, fruits and vegetables in the local market ;
6. Contain the rural population rather than encourage urban drift;
7. Maintain land and land structure in good condition and available for productive usage; and
8. Attract more investors into the agro-based industries in rural, remote areas.

Before concluding and commending the motion before the House, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to suggest that the following steps be taken within the exiting Government policies and programmes, legislative mechanism and funding programme to achieve the intents of this motion:

- Subsidy for transportation and acquisition of vehicles for commercial agriculture.
- Establishment of Farmers Co-operative Schemes working with the village farmers (yaqona, cassava, dalo, ginger and vegetables), cane farmers. There are some successful co-operative entities in the sugar industry, they need to be replicated. Also, in pine and mahogany areas.
- Training, Technical Support and Financial Assistance to farmers.
- Regular and planned monitoring and evaluation of commercial farming and progress for those landowners.
- Availing seedlings, farm inputs and machinery to prepare for farming.
- Availability of credit facilities to enable landowners turning to commercial agriculture to purchase farm implements.
- Establishment of Agro-Market Farm Gates at central points and securing markets for frozen farm produces, therefore, requiring power and water at identified processing locations or stations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to emphasise that in order to allow the landowners to turn to commercial activities in other research-based commodities, Fiji needs to place importance on the following, supplemented by the suggestions already made:

- Sustainable use of marine and fisheries resources – assistance to fishermen and sell from or by individuals to co-operatives or companies.
- Sustainable management and value addition of forestry resources through the effective participation of resource owners - growing, harvesting, milling, processing, value adding, selling, marketing and export. For example, in mahogany industries throughout Fiji and *mataqali* companies and they need to be assisted. That is empowerment, Mr. Speaker, Sir.
- Encouraging and empowering more landowners to acquire or set up sugarcane farmers, for example, partnership of landowners with FSC at Nasarawaqa, Lekutu, Bua

That is the kind of model that we need to look into to increase our productivity, whether in its sugar or any form of agriculture or Pine or mahogany.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, there are few local models on led, training of how landowners have been performing in commercial agriculture, such as Tutu, Wairiki in Taveuni, student farm in Navuso, have proven records in village or settlements. The Tutu Student Farm principle needs to be replicated throughout Fiji and other Provinces.

Then we also have Nakawago in Wailevu West, that has been in existence for 17 years, employing people and youth and have paid welfare to their elderlies, at least for the last two years.

They have contributed to their church fund, education fund for their children and also invest in the shares, et cetera.

Another case is the Nayarabale Church Youth Group where they employ people everyday at \$30 per day, that is \$150 a week there in the village, with the money from their *yaqona*, church *yaqona*, their vehicles and so on.

Another example is in Seavaci as well, individuals and also in groups. They have their own vehicles and they are selling in Labasa, and they are also creating employment then and there. They are doing that in their own volition, but they need assistance, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

I would suggest for research on these and other models that may be around Fiji as well for replication to other areas.

The sequence of approach, Honourable Speaker, Sir, land development and induction of landowners into commercial agriculture cannot be done anyhow. It has to be strategised, implemented orderly and monitored regularly. The suggestion by way of this motion is as follows:

- Empowerment Policy by the Ministry or the Government;
- Identification of commodities or areas to apply;
- Marketing availability and requirements;
- Establishment of Legal Commercial Vehicle;
- Proper farm management and project proposals;
- Identification of personnel;
- Education and training on those personal;
- Financial and Expertise Assurances to revolving funds to some that is already existing and struggling;
- Operation and proper application of labour and resources; and
- Proper Monitoring and evaluation process that we will need to do to improve and ensure their success in the business.

Going commercial, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we now briefly seek to say on how best we can go commercial in the agricultural sector. A few suggestions here would be as follows:

- We need to identify what type of business that we need to to into.
- Make sure that the markets are available and lower the requirements of the market, and we need to have agreements or memorandum of understanding.
- Need to go with technology rather than on traditional way of farming.

Two simple technology that we need to encourage to the farmers at the moment, one is a portable sawmill for farmers to saw their own timber, build their own House and also a need for a digger or a tractor to plough their land so that they can cultivate. An attitude that we need positive and profit driven, need to be motivated highly and commitment and allow time and energy therefore to be hard working.

And also relationship, keep good relations in business, be honest, truthful, and considerate and must have no business enemies. Also lifestyle to be ordinary, simple and be helpful or giving. Do not be worried, you will become millionaires, because you can give.

Another example is the Lovia Cooperative Limited is a village cooperative, supermarket in the village, bowser or fuelling station for vehicle of various types, bakery, et cetera. The Lovia

Cooperative buys farming products of various commodities and sells them for benefit of members who have shares in it.

The village cooperatives in Tailevu South in conjunction with R B Patel is a success. The Cooperative Departments need to be fully and properly resourced to empower their resources in here.

Lastly, Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is important that whatever we need to encourage the landowners to go commercial, we must involve the *vanua* and faith-based leadership. Honourable Speaker, Sir, there is a need for the *vanua* and faith-based leadership, together with the *Turaga ni Koro* and Government representative to work together at that level and encourage, educate and train them on how and why to go commercial.

We must have patience and a lot of it to be successful and we do pray for that. It is difficult how difficult and hard work, but nothing is impossible with the Lord.

It is my hope that this motion will form the basis of a fruitful discussion as to how we can empower and encourage landowners to venture into commercial agriculture, and I seek the support of all the Honourable Members in this House.

With those few words, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I commend the motion to the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on this motion. Honourable Tikoduadua, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, just a short contribution from me.

I thank the Honourable Member for the motion because it touches on a very true essence on what is happening our society, particularly within the state of subsistence farmers who live in villages and in our rural communities.

I say this because I can see that I am one myself, not really venturing into that level of commercial farming but doing enough to be able to actually live this actively in a village community or in the rural and live a respectable life and be able to enjoy the good things in life out of farming, for that matter.

The Honourable Member has said many things, things that are needed to be done, but I would like to perhaps suggest a few things to enable that. And this is really born out of my experience about people that I know, who have been very successful subsistence farmers, meaning that they bought properties, vehicles, big farms. I know this gentleman is a good friend of mine and many from Vanua Levu know him, Tim, but he has really gone commercial for that matter in *yaqona*.

But the other three people that I know are related to me but they are in Tailevu and the former Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence knows them very well:

1. Volotui Navakacoko
2. Alevina Basaga
3. Elia Tinariti

I think their combined income individually every year takes them up to \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year. Subsistence farmers, I mean. So they are absolutely in for it and in Tailevu they say, if you want to be successful, "*biuta na koro, lako i veikau.*" So I am going to add some value into this

because I think that maybe I suggest these things and Government is able to throw more light into it and maybe assisted even further with Minister for Agriculture in particular.

One critical component to make this work is the strengthening of traditional leadership in our society, and that is very critical because the chiefs and whoever that is subordinate to them have to be mindful of the requirements of this type of farming to be able to give their people a good standard of living.

So to erode it would kill it, and I have said this on many occasions, Honourable Speaker, that if there is no other reason to strengthen the chiefly institution that lead our traditional Fijian communities, it is because we have no substitute for it at all. The *turaga-ni-koro* is not a substitute because the *vanua* is tied to the land resource and the fisheries resource, so there is an integral relationship between these two.

So to be able to, at least, give some direction, mentoring guidance to villagers and community members that own land, I think it is very important to really get our traditional leaders to be able to involve themselves and to guide the activities of their people so that they can become competitive and become good subsistence farmers. That is the first one.

Secondly, is the issue of discipline. I think this is, sort of, a two-way process and I say this because substance abuse is a big impediment to this and we need as a House to be responsible enough to recognise this. This is something that is a big barrier. I hear what my learned *Tau* is saying, but this is one major obstacle and something needs to be done about it. It takes me back to strong institutional leadership within our community. They are going to help our people, let us not erode them, let us help them, let us give them capability, capacity so that they can help their people to improve their resource and then Government, maybe can then come in later and then try and help them out.

Honourable Bulanauca talked about incentive by Government and that is very important. He talked about farm gate, I know those of us who plant *dalo*, are very interested in this because it is a perishable crop that when it is matured, you need to get rid of it. I mean, to tell someone to plant 2,000 to 3,000 *dalo* in the village is a very good thing, but if he cannot get a good price and a market for it, then it would perish. I give you an example, Honourable Speaker.

When there is not enough market, people who will buy it at farm gate, the women of the villages bring it down to the market in Suva or Nausori, if you are from Rewa, Tailevu or Naitasiri, there is absolutely no guarantee that your *dalo* is ever going to get sold. You are almost guaranteed that 50 percent is going to perish before you go back. So this is a reality in terms of how we empower our people.

Now, I strongly agree with my *Tau* here that we must always try and get farm gate to the farmers. I know there is a strong argument to leave it to the market. But, Honourable Speaker, that cannot work. It is not going to work. It is never going to work. If you want to raise a good standard of living for people who are subsistence farmers, for the 1,000 to 2,000 *dalo* or *yaqona* that they plant, something needs to be done to make that work. And that requires both, the community and the Government to work together. Otherwise, the women will come, sleep in the market and go back with less money than they came with.

As for assistance, Ministry of Agriculture Extension Programme, I would urge the Honourable Minister, my good friend, to make that work. I mean, I have not had an Extension Officer come to my cane farm, yes. They are always there but in terms of *dalo*, et cetera, they do not. For

some reason, I am not sure why they do not and I am not sure whether that is experienced everywhere else, perhaps it is different. But maybe they could work out that a little bit more.

The last thing I would like to share though, Honourable Speaker, is this whole thing about free assistance. Giving, just giving to our rural community because they have nothing, is not going to help. It is definitely not going to help. I have seen it, it has made them poorer, those that have at least planted that 1,000 *dalo*, I am talking about Tailevu here not about anywhere else.

This African Tulip is the tree of poverty, and I was up in Nawaqabena in Naitasiri last week; it is everywhere. You go up Naitasiri, it is everywhere, Tailevu, it is everywhere, Serua, it is everywhere. Arable land, people only need help. So if you give them too much, who wants to go to the farm. There is television at home, just like my uncle who said, "I have enough, I am going to watch television whole day." So, there must be some rationale about what we give, but we should help them more for them to produce more, then only then we will be able to bridge the gap but the critical element if we keep eroding and weakening the traditional system that they know, that they have, the only thing that they have, we are going to see more poor performance. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker Sir. I really wanted to contribute now after the Honourable Tikoduadua's contribution, Sir. Thank you for this opportunity and I would like to acknowledge the mover of the motion, but I wish to begin by again saying that development is always a partnership between the applicant whether it be an individual or a couple, co-operative or community, it is a partnership between the applicant and, of course, the Government or whoever, the financiers or donors or whatever we may call it. So, the partnership is very important. I like the motion but I wish to also say, Honourable Speaker Sir, that we have everything in front of us to be successful commercial agricultural entrepreneurs. It is all there but we have to address a few things.

Firstly, the attitude must change, and that requires a lot of leadership, I do agree. We have leaders of the *vanua* here and we are leaders in our own communities. I speak as someone raised from a rural village, I have served as Commissioner Northern, I have served as Permanent Secretary for Rural Development and of course as Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. I have learnt a lot, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

I would say that we, *iTaukei*, are such a privileged community/race and this had started from the early days. If we go to our villages, our community halls, our roads, our seawalls, everything is done by Government and now this is one of the observations and then experiences when I observed as I came as Commissioner Northern. It is time that we have to shift from social projects into economically empowering projects. That is a shift that we want to make because I noted when I was Commissioner Northern and Permanent Secretary for Rural Development and of course as Minister for Agriculture, once we have finished the community hall, once we have finished the church, once we have finished the seawall and we have water and toilets, that is it.

We need to push ourselves to the next level and we do not have any reason whatsoever not to succeed because we still have the land, we still have the *i qoliqoli*, we still have our forest. We can do it but one of the key challenges and I would say is, we need to change our attitude. I always say in Vanua Levu when I was Commissioner Northern, progress is impossible without change. People who cannot change their minds, cannot change anything.

There must be willingness, you cannot develop someone who is not willing to be developed. You cannot develop someone who is not willing to be developed. Our attitude, Honourable Speaker Sir, must change and for that we need to work together; Government officials, the leadership, the church and all the key stakeholders. We need to work together.

At one stage I shared this with the *Marama Roko Tui Dreketi*, this was in the last Parliament. I shared with the *Marama Roko Tui Dreketi*, Government can come with the funds, Government can come with the technical expertise, Government can come with the technology but we only come as far as the village boundary, within the village setting we have the *vanua* and it is the leadership that must drive our people. We need to see things big. Our paradigm must shift and we already have the resources. I am for the motion but when we look at the environment that we already have, Government has provided more than enough for us to go into commercial agriculture, commercial fisheries, commercial forestry and, of course, with some of these issues to be addressed.

Honourable Tikoduadua has talked about leadership discipline. Can I be bold enough to say this, let us also cut down on *yaqona* consumption. Let us be honest. The former *Turaga na Tui Vuda*, Ratu Iloilo, he gave a directive to the *vanua* to stop consumption, production increased when that happened. It is happening in Gau now.

Honourable Bulanauca, do not only talk about the successes in Vanua Levu, Gau is picking up very fast now on commercial agriculture. They have grasped what we initiated in the Ministry of Rural Development back then; the rural millionaire concept because we argued we can be in the villages, but we become millionaires. Naiyarabale, they are into that. Mika Ting, an individual, he has already done that. One of the biggest obstacles to development in *iTaukei* villages today, let us be honest with ourselves, I say this as a proud *iTaukei*, let us cut down on *yaqona* for a lot of reasons, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- That is another thing that we need to do. We need to lease our own land and be involved in developing our own land. This is consistent with what Ratu Sukuna said way back in 1936. For those of us that have enough land, let us use it ourselves and of course, let us give it out to those who can use it for us. To *iTaukei* themselves and of course and they do this very well in Vanua Levu. People of Namuka do not have a lot of land and they are there in Cakaudrove. People from Tawake, they are there in Balawaviriki. People from Cikobia, they are

But we need to lease. Why lease, Honourable Speaker, Sir? Because one of the key characteristics of small holder farming is, they do not have capital. When we lease our own land, a lot of our people unfortunately cannot be assisted by FDB, cannot be assisted by the Ministry of Agriculture particularly when they want to go to the next level, it is simply because they do not have assets. So, we have to lease our own land so that it can be a collateral when we want to go big scale because once we have capital then we can access technology and then we can re-invest into the business.

That brings me to my fourth point, Honourable Speaker, Sir. The culture of saving an investment is something that we

When I was Commissioner, Northern, at one stage I asked the Manager (iTLTB), Northern, "Just show me how much each landowning unit is getting every six months?" This is after CBUL, Honourable Speaker, Sir, a lot of money. But the question is, where is this money going?

The culture of saving and the culture of investment. There is a difference between the two. You will save for today, you invest for tomorrow and we need to invest. This is why when we lease our own land, the money goes back to our own *tokatoka*, our own *mataqali*, our own *yavusa* and that can be recycled within.

Next, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is the need for us to organise production. Farming is just economy of scale and good husbandry practices. The Honourable Tikoduadua talked about Basaga. Basaga, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is a simple man from Navunisole Village. He sets his own quota every week, what to plant every week. On *yaqona* alone, Honourable Speaker, Sir, he plants 50 every week, regardless of what happens in Navunisole. He will sneak out of the village to go to his farm and do what we call “organised production” based on quotas so that you have consistency. Because for farming to be attractive, income has to be consistent.

A lot of our people have left the land, come back and do odd jobs in the towns because of the inconsistency in income. For us to entice them to stay, we must teach them to be consistent in their production. Basaga, Honourable Speaker, Sir, plants 50 every week. He plants 200 every month and he plants 2,400 in a year. And I asked Basaga, “How much is your selling price?” And he told me, “I only expect at least, if I make \$40 out of this 2,400.” You multiply 2,400 by 40, I think it comes to \$96,000. That is from *yaqona* alone.

The FDB Nausori respects Basaga. If Basaga walks into FDB and wants to cash a five-tonne truck today, he cashes the truck. He has got the number of *dalo* that he needs to plant in a week, he has got the number of cassava to plant in a week, it is just about organising ourselves and realising the potentials in the market. The market in Fiji is not a problem, but it goes back to organised production. We have done the surveys in agriculture, Honourable Speaker, Sir. In Fiji alone you go to the markets, the market is like this (indicates high level), but the production level is like this (indicates low level).

There is a mismatch between demand and supply. So for us, we can remain small but we need to organise us into groups, into farmers and that will bring one thing to the *iTaukei* that we have lost; *na solesolevaki*. Unfortunately, Honourable Speaker, Sir, in most villages today now, I did ginger in my village, but I cannot continue because of labour. Because now the expectation in the village is pay, *solesolevaki* is a challenge, it is a challenge. So it is that organised systems of production that we need to do. Agriculture has done the market survey and I have shared this, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we went to Australia. One of the buyers in Australia, as soon as he saw our people coming into his shop, he asked, “From Fiji?” We said, “Yes”. He said, “I do not want to see your face, I want to see your product here.” So what he wants to tell us is, huge demand. The three biggest challenges in agriculture are these - reliability and consistency in supply, volume and quality.

How do we address reliability and consistency in supply? It is just by having consistent quotas every week, every month. So if we plant everyday like Mika Ting, you harvest every day. Mika Ting harvests *yaqona* every day. If there is no sunshine, he has got dryers, because he is harvesting every day, he is drying every day, his income is coming every day. That is the concept that is missing in our people and I hope, thank you for the motion, this is what we need to take back to our people, organised systems of production.

I have been in the agro marketing, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Sad to say this, I will share this in this House, there is a big difference between the farmers from the Tailevu villages and the farmers in Muaniweni and the farmers in Lakena, because when we are short of *dalo*, we will always rely on Muaniweni. When we are short of cassava, we will always rely on these farmers because of consistency in supply.

We would take the truck all the way to Ra but only to bring five bags of cassava, wear and tear alone plus the cost of fuel, it must run like a business. For us to attract the buyers at farm gate, this is why we need to organise ourselves in groups so that we can meet the volumes as well because farmers have no problem in coming to a place as long as you have the volume, and we have to address the quality issue.

Lastly, Honourable Speaker, Sir, let me just also agree with the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, it is just about entrepreneurial skills and, of course, let us learn from those around us.

In Taveuni, they are successful farmers because it is mixed farming, the communities learn from the practices of those farmers around them, and I see that the Honourable Tui Cakau (Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu) is smiling but I know his project as well.

Honourable Speaker, let me conclude by saying that nothing stops us from going into big scale commercial agriculture. We just need to change our attitude, we just need to organise ourselves better and for that to happen, we need good strong leadership, and I urge each and every one of us here, it does not mean that we fail once then we will continue to fail.

I will never give up, I have tried in my village, we did ginger (no more), we did seaweed farming, thank you, Honourable Minister for Fisheries, I heard from the *Turaga Ni Koro* last week that has is being revisited. We tried to go into *dairo* but it needs leadership. We need to hold them by the hands but at the same time when the money is coming, we must force our people to save and, of course, to invest as well, and we will be successful entrepreneurial farmers. The environment is already here, we just need to change our attitude and get into it. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Tui Cakau (Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu).

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I rise to make my contribution as well on the motion that is before us and that is, I am in full support of the motion, Sir, given that there is something worthwhile to discuss in this august House, especially in taking up the challenges, just recently meted out by the Honourable Minister for Defence, and that is all this needs, good leadership.

I think I want to take it further, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by saying that the Honourable Minister for Defence once a Commissioner Northern, he initiated several schemes in the island of Taveuni where they are not only provided the seed funding for the projects, but they ensured that there is support from the Ministry of Agricultural officials.

Sir, why I am saying this is exactly what has been raised by Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, it has been a while since he has not met his Extension Officer, but for us in Taveuni, this particular year, one section of Taveuni, the landowners down in Vuna they were able to plant a million *dalo*. That planting of a million *dalo*, Sir, was headed by one of our locals (Rohit) there who happened to be the Head of the Agriculture Office in Taveuni, but again it is sad that when the Honourable Minister for Defence left the Northern Division after serving his wife's Province to take up this job in Cabinet, Rohit was also sent to study. That left a vacuum, Sir, this is something that I need to add so as to throw out this.

We have got the leadership, we have got the land and as highlighted by Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, we just do not want to be seen as land providers. We want to be catalyst for development as well, Sir, in our own individual lands and in our own *Mataqali* lands, but to do that, there is a lot of lessons to be learnt.

We learn from the Indian farmers in Qila. They taught us methods of farming, not what was being advised by the Ministry of Agriculture, this is something funny. They said to plant tomatoes, you need to put stakes so they are like creepers, it creeps up from the stakes before it bears fruits and the fruit does not touch the ground.

But, when we learnt from our fellow farmers in Qila, Honourable Member is back there, he knows better, he left it creeping on the ground, and we were taken there by the Ministry of Agriculture officials to be taught to give some insight as to how vegetables are planted.

Thirteen of us in our project that was helped by the Minister for Defence when he was the Commissioner, Northern. We supplied vegetables to Laucala and we are still doing that, Sir, every week. They bring in consistency and then there you bring in quality. So this is something that we can learn hands-on if the climate condition is good, Sir, if we have the support, we can achieve a lot.

As mentioned by the Minister, he is a *yaqona* farmer, he does it very well, but the discipline of farming is something that we have learnt again.

Our cane farmers that are reserved in Taveuni they come in with this very high discipline way of farming. There is time for everything, to plough, to take the leaves out from the cane plant, that is done according to time and according to that planting season right up till harvesting, everything is on time and that is discipline.

For us, Sir, this motion is trying to challenge us. Whilst saying this, we have a great farmer here as well, Sir, the Honourable Prakash who sits out there. He is a politician now, but he is great farmer. When you sit with him (because he can speak the Fijian *iTaukei* language), we learn a lot from him as he shares his experiences on dalo farming. He is a milk supplier as well, apart from other things like *tavioka* farming. He is from Serea in Naitasiri, that is another big lesson, Sir. The Honourable Minister for Agriculture was saying, 'Education', and then you need to have leases.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these projects that were undertaken during the Minister for Defence's time in Taveuni, we cultivated our own *Mataqali* land, and that worked very well, Sir, and it still works today. Again, it challenges the very thing that we are trying to mete out and inform our people. We hold leases, we managed to participate quite effectively in Agriculture. Did we get the support, yes, we got the support. What is coming out from Honourable Tikoduadua, support is very, very much needed.

So all in all, Sir, we hope that this motion would shed some light and help the government of the day, see better in how it can better help farmers. We, in this august House, the challenge given by the Honourable Minister of Defence, is a challenge. If we as leaders are able to farm and produce everywhere, we could be seen as good role models in this particular aspect of the way we sustain ourselves through farming, and that is a challenge.

I fully support the motion that is before the House and hope that it shed some light to the Government of the day to see as to how best they can try and mix whatever they have in their plan to better help our farmers in the rural areas as well, Sir. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member, Honourable Minister, we only have two from this side and two from this side. You are the second speaker.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was reading the motion; it states: The Parliament considers how best Government can encourage landowners to engage in commercial agricultural ventures rather than just being subsistence farmers or passive landowners or providers of land.

Any motion should have a specific outcome to vote for. I do not see where the motion part is, what are we going to vote for? I see it as a statement for 'Talanoa'. Where is the motion? Where is the specific outcome that we are supposed to vote for?

The basic definition of a motion is that you vote for a specific outcome. What is the outcome that we are going to vote for? Having said that, I do not think we can vote for that but let me give my contribution. I am happy to give my contribution on this statement. I believe they wanted to have a "talanoa", let us have a talanoa, my contribution to the *Talanoa*, but I do not think there is any basis or case to vote for because this is really not a motion.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I think that is misstated and should not be here as a motion. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I really envy you sitting there, trying to make out what the Members from the other side are saying; long unwinding statement; I just could not figure out 95 percent of what he was talking about. I could figure out some words like NCDs, landowner, cooperative, GDP, economy, et cetera, so on and so forth, but at the end I could hear him saying we should give subsidies, we should get landowners to plant, landowners should become rich, they should not only give out the land, et cetera, right at the end.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the statement is about increasing commercial farmers amongst the landowning community. There are three components, the three key components of being a commercial farmer or an entrepreneur in the non-agriculture sense. The first component of being a commercial farmer, in the farming sense or an entrepreneur in the non-agriculture sense or non-farming sense:

1. You should grow that for the market, then you are called a commercial farmer, that whatever you produce or whatever you grow, that is for the market, 99 percent of it, 1 or 2 percent, et cetera, but your overall objective is that you are growing that or raising that particular livestock for the market.
2. That venture is to create or generate profit.
3. A very important component - When you generate that surplus or profit, part of it you will save it or use it for yourself and part of it, you re-invest in the business or in the venture and continuously on an annual basis, you will expand that particular entrepreneurship, that venture, that business, that activity.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, you will find that over the last three decades, Government through the Ministry of Agriculture has supported a number of farmers, number of landowners to enter into commercial farming but, Honourable Speaker, they have missed these three aspects that it should be for the market, that it must generate profit and that profit or that surplus that they have created, part of it should be reinvested, then only you categorise yourself as a commercial farmer, as a business person.

Honourable Speaker, we can pour in money, but if that particular person, if that particular farmer does not see himself or herself as a businessman, does not want to reinvest the surplus that person or the farmer has created, we will never be able to make that person a commercial farmer.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have, for so long, rode on the back of subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers. For so long, we have poured in money day in, day out to expand agriculture, but we have supported subsistence or semi-subsistence farmers.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I was talking to the exporters in the Western Division recently and I said to them, “Look, we cannot and no country will ever be able to sustain agricultural expansion by continuously pouring in Government grants and subsidies to promote production and supply. That is unsustainable.”

Look at any country’s agriculture model, who have succeeded in expanding agriculture, expanding commercial agriculture. What they have done is, they have given leverage to the farmers to grow, to assist, provided by these services but hook them up to the market. Let the market signals drive production and supply, not the other way around where you want the production and supply to generate demand. It will never happen! Production and supply will not generate demand. Demand must generate production and supply. That will be sustainable.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, one of the exporters stood up and said, “Dr. Reddy, very nice, very good, excellent. But you know, Dr. Reddy, I have been going around collecting produce from the farmers at the farm gate and I have been telling them whatever you want to produce, we are here, we are a market, we are giving you signal, produce, we will collect it. But, Dr. Reddy, next month when we go, there is nothing to collect. Then later on we go, there is something to collect. Dr. Reddy, what are you saying that market signals will generate production and supply? It does not work here.” I said, “Yes, it does not work. Who are you going to? Who are these farmers that you are going to and asking them to respond to market signal?”

You know who they are, Honourable Speaker, Sir? These are part-time farmers, leisure farmers, retired farmers, whose sons and daughters and daughter-in-law and son-in-law are working in the towns and cities and they are providing, that is the main source of income for them. So farm is no longer the main source of income for them.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, you want us to pour in money and turn these leisure farmers, the part-time farmers, the aging farmers, the retired people to turn them into commercial farmers. It will not happen.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have said in this House sometime back that Cabinet has approved the proposal to inject in young, able-bodied, commercially thinking farmers into the agriculture sector. We will have to do that every year so that in about five to 10 years’ time, we will have a young, able-bodied commercially-thinking farmers, a cadre of them, who we will push the commercial agriculture agenda of this country.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in this year’s Budget we have got \$500,000 for expansion of *yaqona* programmes; \$1 million for the expansion of rice project farming; \$800,000 to expand dalo production; \$750,000 to expand coconut production; \$100,000 to support farmers in Rotuma; \$387,000 for the Sigavou Project; \$350,000 to promote agriculture extension in Nadarivatu; a separate \$1 million for export promotion; \$1 million for dairy industry support; \$600,000 for apiculture; \$200,000 for goat and a separate \$300,000 for Sigatoka Valley.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, you tell us, what is this money for? Is it for the subsistence farmers? Absolutely not! Not those who are planting a few cabbage in the garden, or a few goats and chicken and ducks running around. This is to promote commercial agriculture.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I was in Wainikoro about a month ago. After the *talanoa* session, a young farmer came to me and said, “Minister, we want to move away from sugarcane farming but you need to get a package for us. I said, “Bro, what does the package include?” He said, “You need to prepare the land for us, I said, “All right”. You need to provide the seeds, you need to do the planting, you need to provide us the fertilizer, you need to provide us the weedicide to get the weeds

off, you need to harvest it because we do not have labour to harvest, and you need to buy it from us at the farm gate.” I said, “Then, where do you come into this picture of farming? We do the land preparation, we provide the seed, we plant it for you, we clean up the weeds, we harvest it, we buy it and then I have to give the money to you. We do the entire farming and then you want us to give the money to you. Where do you come into this?”

Honourable Speaker Sir, it is a challenging task but we will do it, we will expand the commercial agricultural production but we have to change the mindset. Honourable Speaker, Sir, we will not want the new commercial agriculture that we want to expand in this country to be based on Government grants and subsidies. We will give them the leverage but we want them to graduate and become a true real commercial farmer in the sense that I outlined, the three components; they grow for the market, they generate profit then the part of that surplus, they must re-invest every year.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, on the third component, I give you an example. I went to one of the last villages, the Honourable Jone Usamate went there, beside Noikoro where there was a landslide in Sigatoka, just bordering Namosi Village, going up the Valley Road right to the last village. We had a *talanoa* session and the farmers said, “Thank you very much, Ministry of Agriculture, you gave us the ginger planting material, we have got 5 tonnes of ginger. Next week it will be harvested, the exporter is coming to pick it up from here, thank you, excellent.” So, we had a few bowls of *kava* and then he said, “Minister, Sir, one *kerekere*. We want to plant ginger again, can you provide us farming materials?” I looked at all my staff here, they were sitting beside me and I told them, “Did you not tell them: ‘Do not sell all the five tonnes of ginger that you are going to harvest, keep half a tonne for your planting material.’”

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is the dependent syndrome that we have to get out from. We give you leverage once, you grow on your own and I am going to go to another set of farmers, another set of farmers, another set of farmers. Honourable Speaker Sir, this is why agriculture is not expanding because continuously we are providing them with grants and subsidies year in and year out to the same farmers, we are not able to spread wide.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we will provide support for growth in the commercial agriculture in Fiji because no country can expand and grow and develop the agriculture sector or non-agriculture sector, without expanding the commercial agriculture, without making the agriculture sector as a commercial sector. Honourable Speaker, Sir, we will do it but we will need to change the mindset.

Honourable Speaker Sir, our five year strategic plan, we will probably go to Cabinet next week or week after the next Cabinet sitting. I has five components:

1. Food security;
2. Household income sustainable and livelihood;
3. sustainable resource management and smart agriculture;
4. climate smart agriculture;
5. quality public sector performance and delivery; and the key one there is commercial agriculture development.

Honourable Speaker Sir, a number of initiatives were announced recently passed by Cabinet, looking at fruit tree orchards, establishment of orchards, this is commercial agriculture. All along for the last so many years, we have been getting fruits during the seasons, grown widely, picked up and sold whenever it is available. We now want to go big time into commercially-established fruit tree orchards.

We have started with 10 orchards now, five guava and five dragonfruit, and we are looking at in the new Budget should there be funding available, we will expand this fruit tree orchard further.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we are looking at upscaling pulse production. We are importing massive amount of pulse into the country. We are supporting the livestock sector through pasture improvement. We are expanding the planting of juncao grass which is very high yield food protein so that we support the livestock farmers with respect to pasture. We are now looking at ways of supporting farmers in providing the fencing material.

There are a large number of smallholder cattle farmers and livestock farmers, who want to expand but they do not have money to have paddocks. They want to establish that, we are going to support them to move into livestock farming: 99 percent of sheep meat is imported, we are only producing one from here; 85 percent of daily production is imported; 15 percent is generated here. We are looking into big time beef production, dairy production and also sheep production. Of course, we cannot do that overnight, it will take us time, but we are getting the structure, we are getting the framework and the fundamentals right.

The thing is that, Honourable Speaker, Sir, Germany one of the master class infrastructure, I had asked them how did they do that? They said, “When the World War happened everything went down. So, it was easy to build the new structure, then to renovate. Secondly, it was all done by women because all the men got affected in the war.” So, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we have to restructure and remodel the fundamentals and get the right framework.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we are focussed in about a month, two months’ time, we will announce in every Province the new area under cultivation and the crops that will bring those areas under cultivation and the livestock. This, at the moment, we are doing the number crunching on each province, each area, the agriculture arable land that is vacant, we are looking at how and we will go and do, the assistance component will be done freely, construction of farm roads and provision of seedlings. These are the three components that we will provide and the rest the farmer will then take over from there.

We will be developing cluster groups. We will be announcing the new land that will come under production. We are looking at a major boost in the production of rootcrops, fresh produce and livestock by the end of next year.

Honourable Speaker, that is how we want to move to commercial agriculture and I think there has to be a major mindset change throughout. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Bulanauca, for your right of reply..

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable speakers for contributing to the motion that is in front of us, particularly when Honourable Pio Tikoduadua said that we need *vanua* leadership and tradition, strong institutional discipline, particularly the farmers for themselves and we need commitment by Government that would create the environment and support and advise accordingly. The crux of the motion is to request the Government to create environment and advice the farmers in order to be motivated and move to commercial activities rather than be in the subsistence level of farming all the time.

Also I thank Honourable Minister for Defence in highlighting the leadership discipline that is required and also the attitude as we already highlighted. Also, the requirement to be mindful of the *yaqona* drinking. It is very important that our body in good health and be good in farming.

Also you need to organise farming and organise production and the consistency with which we produce our quality, volume and quantity all the time.

Also there was emphasis on mixed farming. Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu emphasised on the need for timing. We need to be watchful of our time in order to be a good commercial farmer and also in our leadership.

The Honourable Minister for Agriculture seems to question the motion that has gone through the parliamentary process through the Business Committee and has been accepted as a motion. The motion is that, to request the Government to assist, to give environment and support and to increase the participation of landowners rather than being subsistence farmers, into commercial farmers.

In that instance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to move an amendment to the motion under Standing Order 105 to allow for the motion to vote for a resolution pursuant to Standing Order 129.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- The game is over. After the game, he wants to change the rules.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat what you said?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Honourable Speaker, I propose to move an amendment to the motion under Standing Order 105 to allow for the motion to vote for a resolution pursuant to Standing Order 129.

HON. SPEAKER.- It is very odd that you should move an amendment to your own motion. You are already on your Right of Reply. That is the thing, you are already on your Right of Reply, so that is what you should be addressing, not trying to amend this again.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- My apology, Honourable Speaker, Sir. What I am trying to say is that the motion has gone through the Tables Unit and also the Business Committee and the motion states, "How best can Government encourage landowners to engage in commercial and agricultural ventures?" That is the notion that we need to vote on. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Yes, Honourable Attorney- General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt when the motion is put to the floor, you can have amendments to the motion. However, you need to read Standing Order 106. Standing Order 105 says that you need to put it in writing.

Standing Order 106 states and I quote: "An amendment to an amendment that any member wishes to move (it should read amendment to a motion), may be moved at any time after the question on the original amendment has been proposed and before the question has been put on that original amendment." You need to have it done beforehand, before the actual debate took place. We cannot do that at the end of it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have already said that. The thing is, your motion was a good one but you have not thought through the whole process. When you come to this stage, and you got your Right of Reply, you cannot go and change or amend the motion.

Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The Question is:

That Parliament considers how best Government can encourage landowners to engage in commercial agricultural ventures rather than just being subsistence farmers or passive landlords or providers of land?

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes' and 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being opposition, Parliament will now vote. Open the vote.

Votes cast:

Ayes	:	19
Noes	:	26
Not Voted	:	6

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the result of the vote, there being 19 Ayes, 26 Noes and 6 Note Voted, the motion is therefore defeated.

Motion lost.

HON. SPEAKER.- I wish to remind Honourable Members that last night I ruled that Oral Question No. 102/2019 will be asked today because the Honourable Minister was unable to be here.

So, I now call on the Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua to ask Question No. 102/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

140th *Girmit* Commemoration
(Question No. 102/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts update Parliament regarding Government's plan for the 140th *Girmit* Commemoration and the status on the implementation of the *Girmit* Museum which were both budgeted for in the 2018/2019 Budget?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and thank you Honourable Member for the question.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I think most of the answers has been covered in the morning but I will just keep it very brief. Government's plan for the 140th *Girmit* Commemoration, of course, as I spoke in the morning, the celebrations will continue throughout the year. We started our celebrations

on the 10th of May in Suva and well before that, the Divisions across the country had organised school-based and divisional-based activities.

If I can go back, Honourable Speaker, to what I had said in the morning, these *Girmit* celebrations for me are not just entertainment. We are currently in the process of compiling documentaries, brochures and other information that is to be disseminated to all our school children.

But if I may add, Honourable Speaker, in order to do that, in order to ignite the passion for the rich legacy and history associated with our *Girmitiyas*, I think what we have already started within our school curriculum is ensuring that we break down language barriers. It is very important for us to understand each other's cultures and heritage and if we want the legacy to continue in the near future, what we are trying to do is to ensure that we strengthen the teaching of our *Vosa Vaka Viti*, conversational Hindi.

What we are trying to do is to ensure that we strengthen the teaching of our *vosa vaka Viti* conversational Hindi, Fijian, Urdu or Rotuman within our school curriculum. And that, I believe, is laying the foundation of better understanding, not only about *Girmitiyas*. Like I said, in the morning, we have a Department of Heritage that really needs to pull up its socks, if I can say that. And we have had a word with the Director as to how we can build on whatever is around us in terms of our legacy and heritage, not only for the *Girmitiyas*, but every other person, every other individual who has made a contribution to our nation's history must be acknowledged and we are just going to do that.

So celebrations will continue throughout the year, if I can assure you. The curriculum that we currently have when I say celebrations, again, I mean ensuring that the information flows on to every individual. When I talk about the curriculum, we have a very shallow curriculum when it comes to the indentured system within our Social Science curriculum and this is mostly within the lower forms of our Secondary Schools and Primary Schools. We will be embarking on a major curriculum review and an integral part of that would be to ensure that we inculcate this into our curriculum especially for our History and Social Science lessons.

So I can assure the House that we will continue with the dissemination of information because it is important that we pass this rich heritage, rich legacy left behind by our *Girmitiyas* as we have spoken in the morning, their contribution should never be forgotten. It must be embedded in our lives, in our daily living, and it must be embedded in our curriculum because there is so much to learn from them; their struggles, their hardships, whatever they went through, I am sure, you and I if we are whipped today in this age and era, we will not tolerate that. But, we had these people who went through abuses, who went through intimidation, who went through slavery as we called it in the morning and we need to record that.

The second part of the question, Honourable Speaker, is talking about the *Girmit* Museum which was budgeted for in the 2018-2019 Budget. The expressions of interest for the availability of land has already been advertised and as we secure the land, of course, it has to be a land that is of value to us and we will be embarking on a contemporary monumental structure, something that cannot be just an overnight, a lot of thought and planning will go into this and we will make sure that we live on our promise. At the moment, \$200,000 has been allocated in the Budget for preparatory works. Work is in progress, but that is how far we are; seeking land to ensure that we build that museum. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on to the first question for today, and I give the floor, he seems to have disappeared.

We will move on to the second question for today, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor to ask Question 108/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Air Pollution
(Question No. 108/2019)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment explain in Parliament as to what the Ministry is doing with regards to air pollution?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for asking the question. I will be short and unless they provoke me, then I will give a longer one.

(Laughter)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, our Ministry recognises that the air pollution is a major concern. We regard public health under Part 5 of the Environmental Management Act 2005 and I quote: "all commercial facilities are required to hold a valid waste disposal permit from the Department of Environment." So all commercial facilities must have a waste disposal permit. Of course, under certain limit and beyond that, they must hold disposal permit?

Now, to determine that limit, they must come to the Ministry of Environment and say, "We should be exempted because this is just a minor amount that we are disposing", so it is the Ministry of Environment that determines. Eventually, all of them must have a waste disposal permit and the various types of waste disposal permit that are issued by the Department ranges from solid waste permit to air pollution permit.

The air pollution permit are also required for businesses that build new structure that are potential sources of making significant contribution to pollution. These permit documents for air pollution sources would need to demonstrate compliance within the existing emission limits and with other applicable requirement, including work practices, for example, the dust coming measures, or watering a deck road. A number of times, we get complaints from residents that logging company trucks are driving so fast and dust is emitted and it comes to our house, we cannot dry clothes, et cetera.

There are conditions that we give in the permit for them to do that which, for example, they must water the roads in that particular interval during those times, et cetera. These permits and the legislation also allow how air pollution sources will be monitored periodically by the Department for the compliance and all applicable requirements on an ongoing basis, thus monitoring requirements and are very important aspects of the Department's operations.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, as briefly mentioned, every commercial investor's facility that emits exhaust gases, smokes, steams or dust from any of these premises must hold a valid waste disposal permit from the Department of Environment.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is a condition of every air pollution permit issued by the Department that the facility must comply with the air quality standards under the Environmental Management Regulation 2007. If there is an issue in any particular neighbourhood that complain, then we get an independent body to go and do the measurement of that particular discharge. For example, cement factories, we often get complaints from neighbours so we have got methodology and at times, we hire experts from USP to go and measure the volume of emission, the dust levels, whether it complies with international standards that are set. For example, there was an issue from the cement factory and it is not that the factory needs to be closed, there are certain gadgets that they need to fit in that will ensure that that particular emission is minimised or dealt with and it does not become hazardous for the community or the households that are around.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, under Part 5 of the Environmental Management Regulations 2007, it is an offence to burn tyres, household garbage within municipal boundaries, burning of wire coated with any material, open burning of oil and burning of bitumen or tarmac used for servicing roads.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, again I wish to state categorically here that it is an offence under the Environment Regulations 2007 for burning of wastes, burning of tyres within the municipal boundaries or any wire coated materials. If a person is found to have committed that particular offence, the penalty is \$10,000.00. That is why, Honourable Speaker, we have stopped providing incinerators like it used to happen those days. You are not allowed to burn rubbish, you are not allowed to burn tyres, et cetera. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister, we will move on to the next question. Now that he has appeared, it seems like one of these characters in Shakespeare whether they have gone into the air and what is in copper melt of thy breathe into the wind. Now he has come back, I give the floor to the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua to ask Question No. 107/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Fisheries Cooperation - Memorandum of Understanding
(Question No. 107/2019)

HON. LT. COL. PIO TIKODUADUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Could the Honourable Minister for Fisheries advice Parliament on the full and substantive aspects of the Fisheries Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding that he signed on 12th November, 2018?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to advise the House that there was nothing signed on the 12th of November, 2018.

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat your answer?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Very well, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to advise the House that there was nothing signed on the 12th November, 2018.

HON. LT. COL. PIO TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, I hear what the Honourable Minister is saying and I am going to recheck this and then I will probably come back and see if the Minister is right or wrong. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Scarcity of Teachers – Retirement Age
(Question No. 109/2019)

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

Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, in light of the scarcity of teachers for core subjects such as Mathematics and Science, is the Government considering increasing the retirement age?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will try and be very brief.

Honourable Jale, the short answer is, no, but there is a provision under the regulations where the Minister for Education or any other Minister for that matter can re-engage people over the age of 55. Indeed the Minister has already done that. They have already advertised for teachers in those particular disciplines and they can re-engage them.

And you also would know that teachers, for example, who retire in the middle of the year, middle of the term, are now allowed to serve to the end of the year. But they would put out an advertisement and similarly, for example, in the Health Ministry, we have doctors who are re-engaged for specific scarce skillsets, people get re-engaged on a yearly basis, if there is a need for it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The scarcity of teachers in Mathematics and Science is not only here in Fiji. I believe it is also in Australia and New Zealand.

Honourable Speaker, the Standing Order says that I have got one minute to ask the question which gives me time for some background. Can some of my colleagues on the other side be educated?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you have got the right to ask the question but it is a supplementary question. It is to do with the answer that has already been given. Not an entirely new question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- But I am allowed one minute to ask the question, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have got a supplementary question to ask.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, with the shortage in Australia and New Zealand, they will be poaching ours from Fiji, what are we doing about growing or incentivising and motivating our people to take up Mathematics and Science? Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the poaching has already begun. I have mentioned this in Parliament previously that the Kiwis have already stolen a number of our teachers in the areas of Science and Maths. The Honourable Member would also note that in the last Budget when we announced we are actually now offering scholarships for teachers who are already within the system to actually upgrade themselves in these specific areas and the scholarships, in fact, are given, in TELS, opportunities are given to these teachers to upgrade their qualification in the areas of Maths, Science and Physics. It is all provided for in the Budget.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- In light of the response that the Honourable Attorney-General has given about teachers retiring this year, they will be employed until the end of the year; when is that effective?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had a policy where when the teachers retire in the middle of the term, they could serve till the end of the term but now because of the number of vacancies that have been created, a policy shift has been made where under the regulations also we now allow these teachers to serve till the end of the year, and that has only been agreed to in the past couple of weeks.

HON. RO T.V.KEPA.- Does that mean for those who retire in February would be retained until the end of the year?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker Sir, as I said earlier on that we cannot apply these things retrospectively because you open a Pandora's Box, it is going to be applied prospectively.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the next question. The fourth oral question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Viam Pillay to ask Question No. 110/2019.

Solid Waste Management Collection
(Question No. 110/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament on the Solid Waste Management collection activities in place at the Municipal Council level?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Mr. Speaker Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for his question, and I would like to inform the House that real efforts are being made to manage solid waste in the rural areas and the Honourable Members know that previously rural areas came under Rural Local Authority which reported to the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Health, because their focus was health, and not really garbage collection, so rural areas were not well looked after, and Municipal Councils would not collect the rubbish from the rural areas.

So, again a policy decision was made to shift just a solid waste collection component from the Rural Local Authority to all the municipal councils and that led to the extension of the municipal council boundaries. Again, why would the municipal councils then collect the rubbish from the rural areas when they are not paying rates? In that situation, the Government stepped in and in 2018-2019 Budget, they had in fact transferred the rural areas solid waste management services to the municipal councils on the basis that they will provide the funds.

So, far the Government is assisting municipal councils all over Fiji by providing compacted trucks by subsidizing. They have given a grant of \$1.5 million and we all know Nasinu is one area which is densely populated (which is not very nice to say) but it is termed as a 'squatter town', so that is where the Government has come out in full force to assist the residents in Nasinu area.

Previously, the garbage collection was just once a week now that has been extended to five days. So, that is all I have to say for now. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I just like to ask the Honourable Minister to clarify exactly which areas that are servicing the five days a week in the greater Nasinu area because there are still informal settlements that has still under rural, that have come under Housing Authority and they have not been getting garbage collection at all?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I really do not have the list with me. If you want, I can provide you with the list but what has really happened, I can give you the total number of peri urban settlements where the solid waste has been collected, and that is about 54 peri urban settlements, 28 urban *i Taukei* villages and 78 informal settlements.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Tikoduadua.

HON. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, I just wanted to follow on from Honourable Tabuya question because only today, I learnt that even missing the Nasinu area, we are in Davuilevu Housing and my wife's family lives in Kinoya, they are five days in Kinoya and we are two days a week. Can we get some uniformity and equality around our garbage collection?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- In order to be more practical, the Nasinu Town Council is actually looking at the most dense areas where there a lot of informal settlements where the waste is being generated. They have provided Skip Bins. This is where the waste can be kept and then it is collected.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next question. I will give the floor to the Honourable Tuisawau to ask his question.

Status of the Bus Fare Review
(Question No. 111/2019)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development provide an update to Parliament on the status of the bus fare review?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I also thank the Member for his question.

My response is very short. The Review Committee has successfully completed the review exercise and they have submitted the report, with recommendation, to the Ministry of Economy.

HON. SPEAKER. –Thank you, Honourable Tuisawau.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. What measures are you thinking of to alleviate probably the high operational cost which the bus owners are complaining about?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Again, the decision is yet to be made. As I said the recommendations are made in the Report and obviously the Ministry of Economy has to look at the recommendation. But what I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are 500,000 people travelling every day in a bus and it is an essential service, and we want to be fair to both the consumers and the bus operators. It

is not one way. The only thing that the bus operators need to do or where they are supposed to do was to provide the audited financial accounts. So, that is where we are.

HON. SPEAKER. –Thank you, we will move on. I now give the floor to the Honourable Jale Sigarara to ask his question.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I withdraw my question.

HON. SPEAKER.- That must be a very fishy story.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- We move onto the seventh Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa to ask Question her question. You have the floor, Madam.

Mobile Connectivity Improvement - Maritime and Remote Areas
(Question No. 113/2019)

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

Would the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament on plans to improve mobile connectivity and services in the country, particularly in the rural maritime zone and remote areas?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There are a number of plans and in fact, a lot of the implementations have taken place. There is obviously vast areas in Fiji, in particular in the maritime areas. As the Honourable Member may know, that we now have 4G in many of the areas and we have, of course, what we call “Universal Service Access”, which is USA or USO, some people call it.

There have already been 21 areas that have been identified and these areas that used to be what we call either brown spots or black spots, they already now have connectivity, which includes the Navai, Bukuya, Nanoko, Draiba, Navala, Nadrau, Davota, Wainunu, Kubulau, Udu Point, Natewa, Dogotuki, Vatubalavu, Keiyasi, Nabalebale, Nadevu, Nawairabe, Naivucini, Matanisau, Barotu and Nalawa.

Again on top of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, accessibility is also not just about connectivity itself, but it is also about the cost and as you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the calls used to be about 40 cents a unit, they have come down quite substantially.

When we now talk about connectivity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not only about voice, it is also about data. Mobile Broadband, which is what we are delivering through the mobile phones and, of course, the speeds of 10 Mega Bytes (MB) per second, they have now been introduced. You get broadband packages for up to about \$25. As highlighted earlier on today, we now got the cable connectivity to Vanua Levu, which will provide enormous catalyst in terms of improving the broadband and the speeds in Vanua Levu.

Vodafone, apart from the resource, is investing about \$207 million. We have got about 85 towers coming up that will see an upgrade and this will, of course, include, Vanua Levu, Taveuni, and we expect the Taveuni rollout to be completed in the first week of June, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There are other areas, Legalega, Nadawa Residential, Valelevu, Delainavesi, Nawanawa, Reba Circle, Farm Road, this is around here. I know the Honourable Member always has a question about Rewa. We put four towers. Also, for your interest, we are putting up two new towers in the Rewa Delta area, the ones going up in Nabitu, because we need to increase connectivity in particular going towards the River mouth. I was there in your village or close to your village last year and a number of the schools had also requested connectivity in particular, they want to get their *Walesi* connectivity.

Again, in Vanua Levu - Batiri, Nasarawaqa, Lekutu, Dama, Nukubalavu, Naqere and Taveuni, of course, as I mentioned. In Viti Levu - Nabulini, Wailotua, Nalawa, Natawa, Yaqara, Malaqereqere. Those of you who do know Sila Village, you would know the connectivity is not that good, so Malaqereqere and around Cuvu, they will get upgraded too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again in respect of any of the USO areas, we are also looking at the Lauan Group of Islands which include: Nayau, Matuku, Totoya, Namuka; Namuamua in Namosi, of course, where you are getting connectivity too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in respect of getting ICT Services, we are currently working on the *Walesi* platform and with the Ministry of Communications under the USA Service, there is Cikobia Island, Tawake, Saqani, Ono, Tuvuca, Kabara, Namuka and Kia Island. These are the areas that we are currently going to cover, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, it is a whole range of programme that has been done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of funds through Vodafone, also through the USO Services.

There is a requirement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Telecommunications Authority of Fiji Act the mobile phone companies have to pay a certain percentage of their profits into the Universal Services Access Fund. Then those funds are then used to connect areas where they do not see as being commercially viable, and that is how we get the connectivity levels up. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- I thank Vodafone for upgrading the facilities around the Rewa area so I do not have to ask you that question. My question is, I know that you have upgraded Malaqereqere (that is where your heart is), now my question is, what about rural islands, Honourable Speaker, like Beqa, Yanuca and Vatulele where people go out fishing and they want to be in touch with their families? What about those islands - Beqa, Yanuca and Vatulele, for example?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot do everything all at once but I have highlighted and given a list of many of the islands and obviously we will be working as we come along. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have to say that 95 percent of Fiji's population actually has network coverage, 95 percent of the people are actually covered.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality is that, some of the areas the connectivity is intermittent and that is what we call the "brown spots" and we need to actually fix it up with the brownouts. And we will be working on that as you can see we have a very large programme in respect of the connectivity which, of course, includes the Lau Group too. But I take the point about what the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa is saying but I could come back to her specifically on Vatulele and areas such as that. I do not know about Kadavu.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Anare Jale, you have the floor.

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The transmitter tower for Vodafone in Vanua Balavu was blown down by *TC Winston* in February 2016. The Honourable Prime Minister visited Vanua Balavu soon after and promised the people of Vanua Balavu that it was going to be rebuilt soon, but until now it has not been done. Can the Honourable Minister confirm the time that this tower will be built?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This is part of the \$207 million upgrade that Vodafone is doing. This will also include the rebuild of many of the towers that they did have.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that for the information of the Honourable Members is that traditionally in Fiji, what we see if you look out up on the hill (and I forget the name of the hill), you will see about four, five towers all perched on one hill. And what we are trying to do is now get all the mobile phone companies to speak and we are looking at amending some of the laws where we only have one tower and all the antennas of all the different providers are only in one tower, because what used to happen is, everyone pays their own cost and building different towers.

Aesthetically, it is not very pleasing, commercially it is not a very sound thing to do, you actually a lot of costs upfront. You have to build individual towers. So what we are trying to do is get people to share. For example, if you have to put one tower in one of those islands, we would like Vodafone, Digicel to get competition on one particular tower, you can put there Walesi, et cetera, so the upfront cost is not that much.

Now, in order to do that one of the aspects that we have to deal with is that the strength of the tower needs to be fairly firm because if you have one tower with only one mobile phone provider, you have only one antenna on it. But if you are going to have four, five antennas around it, obviously the loading needs to be fairly much reinforced. And one of the things that we are also very keen on is for them to now rebuild, they are looking at the engineering standards about these towers - to be able to withstand Grades 4 and 5 cyclones, obviously Grade 5 is more than an aberration but to be able to withstand those strengths of winds. But it is getting done and is part of the \$207 million rebuild too. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We had agreed this morning that we will have to take two supplementary questions and we have covered two supplementary questions. I trust your memory is as good as mine. We will take the eighth oral question for today, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to ask Question No. 114/2019.

Capacity and Capability Development – Fiji Police Force
(Question No. 114/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs update Parliament on capacity and capability development recently carried out in the Fiji Police Force in order to assist the institution in fulfilling its core function and responsibilities?

HON. LT. COL. I.B SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. We expect a lot from our Fiji Police Force and, of course, for that reason we need to support them as well so that they can be able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I did mention today that development in Fiji has continued to progress and, of course, for that reason, we need to catch up as well in terms of our security arrangements. The Fiji Police Force is currently undergoing a five-year reform and restructure plan and the vision behind this reform and restructure is aligning strategy capabilities and resources.

I will go straight into some of the key components of this restructure, first on the manning level, Honourable Speaker, Sir. The plan in the next five years is to almost double the number of policemen and policewomen in the country. Currently, we have about 3,241 and the intention is to increase it to about 7,582 so an additional of 4,341. Based on the studies that have already been undertaken, we need to increase the number of the Police Force significantly. This year, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we are targeting 601 and with the recruitment, we have already trained about 400 and the last intake will be in July this year for about 201 for the last recruit.

I wish to refer to the question raised yesterday by the Honourable Gavoka about Special Constables. Special Constables are included in this reform, the priority, apart from new intakes is the serving Special Constables to be regularised for obvious reasons. They are already experienced, they are already trained, they have already been equipped and most of them are rugby players and that is why Nadroga beat Northland last week.

Not only rugby players, Honourable Speaker, Sir, but, I am sure our Committee from this Honourable House has also visited the Fiji Police Force particularly in Nasese and you will see, particularly the Forensic Unit. They even have the Pathology Unit, a lot has been improved in the Fiji Police Force. So these are the specialists, I will not go into the details Honourable Speaker, Sir.

With that training is very important, training aboard and of course locally it continues, and particularly that is for the Senior Management as well and in one of my previous answers to a Parliamentary question as well, I did discuss that UN is also involved in training. Equipment, mobility is very critical.

This year, Honourable Speaker Sir, we have included an additional 139 vehicles and, of course, about 130 motor cycles as well and these are distributed all over Fiji. I was in Sigatoka a few weeks back and I was really touched by the statement made by the Station Officer that before they usually have about 2 vehicles but now they have about 11 or so in Sigatoka alone which is very encouraging and of course raises the morale in the Fiji Police Force.

The equipment is very critical as well, Honourable Speaker Sir, for the Mobile Unit in Nasinu and likewise the Diving Unit, so once they have the personnel, they have to be properly equipped and given the necessary gears as well and, of course, part of this is technology as well. I have also briefed the House about cameras being installed and, of course, the video recording interview equipment. These are all part of this reform and restructure. So, a lot has been done and we will continue to do so and I hope if the allocation that is requested in the next Budget, again we will continue with this. I think for next year, it is one of the highest numbers of recruitment that we want to take as well. So, it will be continuing, Honourable Speaker Sir.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Honourable Speaker, thank you for the opportunity and I thank my colleague the Honourable Minister. Honourable Speaker, I think lately there has been a lot of capability development for the ability of the Police to respond quickly and I think we all like that because we want the Police when we actually need them.

However, Honourable Speaker, lately there has been some major concerns, perhaps the ability of the Police Officers to be professional about the way they conduct their work and in this very House, the Honourable Prime Minister called some “rogue” in the way that they treated some reporters from overseas. In the dailies talks about the lack of vehicles in Nakasi responding to a very specific case last week where someone died. Only recently we are hearing where the Police to the decree of intimidating LGBT people planning a march.

Now, my question, Honourable Speaker, what is the Police Commissioner doing or the Force with regards to the professional development of the officers themselves in the way that they follow the law to execute their duties? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I think the Honourable Minister has answered that but you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, again let me assure this honourable House that the Commissioner has zero tolerance on Police Officers who perform outside the ambits of the law, but again let me assure the Honourable Member and, of course, this honourable House as well that we are at a time where our relationship with our partners has never been that strong, not only in terms of Interpol but, of course, with Australia and New Zealand, with the Pacific reset and the *Vuvale* partnership and, of course, given the trans-border issues.

So, we have teams from Australia and New Zealand almost coming every week and as we speak, the Deputy Commissioner of Police is again in Brisbane. We are looking at all avenues in which we can utilise the experiences and the knowledge and technology in the other Polices Forces as well and with this, the training for our people is very critical, particularly in specialised areas; not only on crime scenes but in the other aspects of it. So, this is one of the key priorities now for the Commissioner. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Mosese Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for the answers given tonight ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for the answers that were given tonight. My question is in regards to the management and maintaining of Key Performance Indicators especially in the criminal KPIs and complaints against police services and personnel and also if an indication by the Minister could be given to the House as to when the Police White Paper could be available as to how it links up with the capability and development of the Fiji Police Force at the moment.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, as we speak, the Fiji Police Force is with the Office of the Solicitor-General for three days and they are reviewing the Acts and all the other policy documents and of course, we at the Ministry of Defence, I did state, I am new in the Ministry now and I am doing my best now to have policy documents as priority and then we will look at the rest of the work that has been done. But, Police, let me assure the Honourable Member, is ahead of the RFMF in terms of updating their policies and legal arrangements as well.

Written QuestionsPlans to Improve Non-Sugar Agriculture
(Question No. 115/2019)

HON. I. KURIDRANI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment advise Parliament on actions taken or plans to further improve the performance of non-sugar agriculture?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will answer now.

(Written response handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Closure of Fiji Forest Industries Mill in Malau
(Question No. 116/2019)

HON. RATU T.N. NAVURELEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Forests inform Parliament on the reasons for the closure of Fiji Forest Industries Mill in Malau, Labasa, number of workers affected and plans (if any) to revitalise the economy in the North?

HON. O. NAIQAMU (Minister for Forests).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

Underwriting Requirements – Insurance Companies
(Question No. 117/2019)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications explain the underwriting requirements that compel insurance companies to place policies offshore?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will provide the answers to that as allowed under 45(3) of the Standing Orders. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- The question time is now over. Honourable Members, I thank all Honourable Members for your contributions to today's sitting and your co-operation. It has been a long day, but that is what we are here for.

We will adjourn and will see you tomorrow at 9.30 a.m. Thank you.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.26 p.m.