

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

THURSDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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THURSDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2019

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

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present except the Honourable Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu; Honourable Adi L. Qionibaravi; Honourable A.M. Radrodro; Honourable M.R. Leawere; Honourable L.D. Tabuya and Honourable Lt. Col. P. Tikoduadua.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 20th November, 2019 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

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

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, Honourable Vijay Nath. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Economic Affairs – Fiji Development Bank 2018 Annual Report

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am pleased to report to Parliament the Committees' finding and recommendation on the Fiji Development Bank 2018 Annual Report.

The Year 2018 marked a milestone for the Bank as it celebrated 50 years of existence in Fiji, 50 years of continuous dedication and fruitful contribution towards increasing and improving the country's economic growth as well as uplifting the lives of countless Fijians. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2018 was also the year in which the Bank started the implementation of the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan. The launch of the Plan enabled the Bank to make a significant progress in areas such as Green Climate Fund activities, improved of management, diversifying established funding base and revenue streams. The Committee also acknowledges FDB's commitment towards achieving SDGs.

Despite the challenges faced, the Bank achieved a respectable net profit of \$7.411 million. The Committee commends the Bank's continuous effort towards the agricultural sector reflecting an increase of 11.5 percent in 2018 over 2017. Further to this, the Committee welcomes the new product and services designed by FDB such as the Yaubula Term Deposit and Agriculture Family Loan facility. The Bank continues to work towards Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy to enhance women and youth participation in Bank's portfolio which is commendable.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Members, Honourable Veena K. Bhatnagar (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable George Vegnathan, Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, Honourable Viliame Gavoka and Honourable Inosi Kuridrani.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Parliamentary staff who gave us invaluable support. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Fiji Development Bank 2018 Annual Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. 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. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

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

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

Standing Committee on Social Affairs –
Annual Review Report of the Consumer Council of Fiji 2016-2017

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Honourable Viam Pillay. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Annual Review Report of the Consumer Council of Fiji 2016-2017. In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies in order to investigate, inquire into and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109 (2) (b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social service, labour, culture and media. The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from 1st August, 2016 to 31st July, 2017, conducted into the Council's administration, structure, budgetary allocation, programmes offered, policies, challenges, highlights, priorities for the coming year and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At this juncture, I also wish to thank the Chief Executive Officer of Consumer Council of Fiji, Ms. Seema Shandil and her staff for their assistance in this inquiry.

I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodro, Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions as well as to Honourable Simione Rasova for availing himself as an alternate Member for those Members who were unable to attend the Committee meetings. Finally, I thank the Secretariat for the assistance provided during the Committee's deliberations.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs commend the Consumer Council of Fiji 2016-2017 Annual Report to Parliament. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. 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. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

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.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights –
Reviewing the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, Fiji's society today is plagued with problems of constant growth in crime and this issue is exacerbated by the decay in moral in society, which is evident in the increase of sexual offences commonly being committed to one of the most vulnerable groups of our society; our women and children.

Such offences are degrading and dignity-shattering and the more concerning aspect of it is that, most of the perpetrators are persons in positions of trust. Therefore, the Government of Fiji has introduced the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018 as a means of addressing this growing problem of sexual offences and to protect the public from sex predators.

The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018 in November 2018 to scrutinise and to return a report of its findings to Parliament. This report covers the Standing Committee's role in reviewing the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill to ensure that all due processes regarding the Bill has been followed and that the provisions contained in the Bill would contribute to the achievement of the Bill's objectives.

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

- The creation of a Sex Offender Register whereby sex offenders will be registered;
- Putting in place monitoring mechanisms for sex offenders including reporting obligation by sex offenders;
- That all sex offenders who commit a sexual offence under Part 12B of the Crimes Act 2009 except for an offence under Section 213 will be registered; and
- Minimising and limiting access of sex offenders to employment that deals with children and women.

The Committee commenced its work and read the Bill, called for public submissions, invited and consulted experts and valuable stakeholders. Issues were identified from the Bill which were used as basis of extensive discussion with stakeholders.

The Committee conducted public consultations within the Parliament and in key selected areas around Fiji. Public input identified concerns similar to that of the Committee and other pertinent issues which the Committee deliberated on extensively.

In the course of the Committee's deliberation, the Committee believed it was appropriate to also give consideration to the work done by the previous Committee of the last term of Parliament. The previous Committee was referred a similar piece of legislation which was introduced in 2016. Deliberations by the previous Committee utilised by the current Committee aided in setting the direction for the review of the Bill.

To do justice to the importance of the Bill, it was also prudent to note the amount of time and resources the Committee invested in reviewing the Bill. The Committee had to extend the period of its deliberation on the Bill in order to have a wider and extensive consultation. This then gave the opportunity to the Committee to also hold public consultations in various other venues in the four Divisions of Fiji to obtain the widest possible views on the Bill. It would also be amiss to turn a blind eye to the Committee's experience during public consultations. This was an eye opener for the Committee and was an experience of its own witnessing all the emotions felt and grievances raised by the submitters during the public consultations. Emotions ran high in the consultation venues with some submitters showing sympathy for the sex offenders and others condemning sex offenders, and requesting that there be more severe penalties and punishment in place for sex offenders.

There were also views that the Bill should not protect sex offenders by keeping their identities and other personal information confidential. Some of the main issues highlighted from the review are as follows:

- a) There were concerns that the Bill is indiscriminate to the types of offenders there are. This applies to all sex offenders including juvenile sex offenders, first time offenders and offenders who commit less severe sexual offences.

- b) There was concern that the Bill has a lot of leeway in allowing the sex offenders access to and to live in close proximity of the victim.
- c) It was noted that the information contained in the proposed register will be kept confidential, which promotes the protection of rights for all. However, there were also views that see this as a gap in law which allow sex offenders who are genuine predators to live amongst communities and families without being known.

Furthermore, the Committee compared pieces of legislation of other jurisdictions with the proposed law to see whether there were similar provisions of the laws pertaining to the issues identified in the review. The laws in the other jurisdictions looked at by the Committee had both similar provisions to the Bill and also provisions that had different approaches to that of the Bill. The Committee was appreciative of these varying provisions but also considered the diverse make-up of Fijian communities and how laws introduced into the country are localised for effective implementation.

Consideration was also given to the impact the Bill has on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Committee focussed its consideration on SDG 5 – Gender Equality and SDG 16 – creation of peaceful and safe societies. It was noted from the review that this proposed law has been worded and designed not to discriminate between genders and will apply to all sex offenders. The Bill could also be relied on to combat the problem of increasing in sex offences, thus making societies safer to live in.

The Committee consulted the initiating Ministry and agencies, and also sought legal clarifications pertaining to issues noted from the Bill. This ensured that the primary objectives of the Bill were preserved.

At the conclusion of the review, the Committee acknowledged that numerous issues had been noted and this was evidence of the sensitive nature of the matter that will be addressed by the Bill. However, the sensitivity aspect of the Bill, adds to the careful nature of consideration the Committee has chosen to follow, when considering making any drastic changes to the provisions of the Bill.

The Committee believes the objective of the Bill is preserved by acknowledging the sensitivity of the Bill and that any changes to it could, at this stage, dilute its intended impact.

The Committee also realises that the Bill will bring about a new law in Fiji, which, like any other law, will have implications on the lives of Fijians. However, at this stage, there is little to no data on these implications in Fiji's communities. Therefore, given this lack of relevant data on the implications of such a law in Fiji, the sensitive nature of the Bill and the need to preserve its objectives, the Committee believes that the Bill is sufficient as it is and that no amendments are needed.

Notwithstanding the Committee's position in terms of the status of the Bill, there are a few recommendations the Committee feels are vital for the successful implementation of the Bill. It is recommended that before commencement, awareness and advocacy programmes which educates Fijians on the impact of this law, is vital.

Educating all Fijians on the impact of this proposed law could hinder the commission of such offences, since it makes people aware of the consequences of being subjected to this law. The projected impact the Bill would have on people is too great and should be something that all Fijians are given appropriate awareness on.

Given the Bill's novelty in terms of its empirical evidence on the implications of such a law in Fiji, the Committee does recommend that after the proposed law comes into force, a proper review

of this law should be carried out. This review will have to be carried out after an adequate period has passed, which allows for proper data collection on its implications.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their deliberations and input and the vast experience they have brought from different sectors, the likes of the Honourable Deputy Chairperson, Honourable Rohit Sharma; with 15 years of experience in the teaching field; Honourable Dr. Salik Govind, with four decades of service in the public health sector within Fiji and internationally, namely the United Nations; the former State Minister of Fijian Affairs, Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua; the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu, with over a decade of legal services and management; and not forgetting the vast experience by our Alternate Member, the Honourable Niko Nawaikula, with over two decades of legal services.

I would also like to acknowledge the staff of the Research Unit and Secretariat, the entities who accepted the invitation of the Committee and made themselves available to make submissions and the members of the public for taking an interest in the proceedings of the Committee and Parliament.

I, on behalf of the Committee, commend the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018 to Parliament and seek the support of all the Honourable Members of this august House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, at this juncture, pursuant to Standing Order 86, I hereby move that the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018 (Bill No. 34 of 2018) be set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament at a future sitting date.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Standing Committee has now reported back and pursuant to Standing Orders 121(1) and 86, the Registration of Sex Offenders Bill 2018, (Bill No. 34/2018) is now set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament on a future sitting date.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Annual Reports 2014, 2015 and 2016-2017

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Consolidated Report on the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Annual Reports 2014, 2015 and 2016-2017. These are the first Reports by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be reviewed by the Standing Committee at this session of Parliament.

The Committee recognises the essential role of the Ministry in terms of Fiji's Foreign Policy, and the ratification and implementation of international treaties and conventions. Therefore, the Ministry should be seen to be the leading agency for Fiji's Foreign Policy in its diplomatic and sustainable development engagements in the region and international forums. The Ministry's name was Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in 2014 to reflect the Ministry's attempt to re-establish diplomatic relations with other countries after the events of 2006 to gain support towards the Election that

took place in 2014 under Fiji's new Constitution. From 2015, the name reverted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The objectives of the review was to analyse operations, functions and administration of the Ministry for the reporting periods 2014 to 2017 with the view to identifying strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvements. The Committee after reviewing the Reports identified pertinent issues confronting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs today. Some of the issues are identified:

1. The Reports used inconsistent formats and terms, and did not conform to the standard performance reporting and monitoring, which made it difficult to assess the Ministry based on normal indicators.
2. The Reports do not provide Annual Corporate Plans and their linkages to the Key Performance Indicators, Key Result Areas, MDGs/SDGs and budget provisions.
3. The Reports do not provide sufficient details of treaties and conventions that Fiji has ratified and deposited with the Ministry, nor the progress of its implementation. Since 2015, the responsibility for treaties and conventions shifted to the Office of the Attorney-General.
4. The Reports, while highlighting MOUs with other countries, do not provide the status of implementation, impacts and benefits to Fiji of those MOUs. The Committee noted that the responsibility to oversee the implementation of MOUs once it is signed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rests with the line ministries and agencies, resulting in the inability of the Ministry to update the Committee on progress.
5. Delayed Board of Survey had raised concerns about Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) issues in relation to office accommodation and residences which concerns the safety of diplomats, staff and families in the Mission locations.
6. Gender mainstreaming – while the Reports mentioned the number of female staff, they lacked in-depth analysis on gender mainstreaming within the Ministry's staffing structure and leadership roles in senior positions in the Ministry in-country and abroad.

It was pleasing to note that the Ministry's current senior staff were willing to accept change and implement strategies to improve the performance of the Ministry in the future. While applauding the achievements of the Ministry, the Committee had identified some opportunities for improvements. The reporting periods beginning 2014 were significant since after a lapse of eight years, Fiji's return to parliamentary democracy under the new Constitution enabled Fiji to sign and ratify several important treaties and conventions that were long overdue.

The Committee notes the extensive rehabilitation works after *TC Winston* in 2016 was enabled through several MOAs and MOUs with bilateral partners and international NGOs. The Committee commends the Ministry in ensuring that Fiji is aimed at maintaining a stable and sustainable system of international relations based on international law and the principles of equality amongst States, respect for national sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs of States and respect for international treaties which are captured in the UN Charter.

I take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister, Permanent Secretary including all staff and their families for a job well done and their dedication to affirming Fiji's foreign policy in the region and globally. Importantly for being good ambassadors of Fiji in making the best, first and last impression of Fiji in all their diplomatic interactions and engagements.

I also wish to thank Members of my Committee and the Secretariat for compiling this bipartisan report. On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this report to the Parliament. Thank you, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- 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 date.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is there a seconder?

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Honourable Speaker Sir, I beg to second the motion.

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

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 Members opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Honourable Viam Pillay. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs –
Annual Review of the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited for 2017

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Annual Review of the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited for 2017.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies in order to investigate, inquire into and make recommendations relating to agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social service, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January to December 2017, conducted into the FPCL's;

- administration;
- structure;
- budgetary allocation;
- programmes offered;

- policies;
- challenges;
- highlights;
- priorities for the coming years; and
- implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank the Chief Executive Officer of Fiji Ports Corporation Limited, Mr. Vajira Piyasena and his staff for their assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues: Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodoro and Honourable Dr Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions; as well as Honourable Simione Rasova for availing himself as an Alternate Member for those Members who were unable to attend the Committee meetings.

Finally, I thank the Secretariat for the assistance provided during the Committee's deliberations.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, commend the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited 2017 Annual Report to Parliament and request all Members of this august House to take note of the Committee's Report. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

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")

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

Standing Committee on Public Accounts – Review Report on the Follow-Up of
Selected 2016 Auditor-General's Reports for Various Sectors

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to present the Public Accounts Committee Review Report on the Follow-Up of Selected 2016 Auditor-General's Reports for various sectors. This Report covers the following audit Reports that were tabled in Parliament in 2017:

1. Audit Report on General Administration Sector 2016 (Parliamentary Paper No. 100 of 2017);
2. Audit Report on Social Services Sector 2016 (Parliamentary Paper No. 101 of 2017);
and

3. Audit Report on Economic and Infrastructure Sector 2016 (Parliamentary Paper No. 102 of 2017).

International Standard of Supreme Audit Institutions (ISSAI) 10 enforces the significance of follow-up mechanism for Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) which are required to have their own internal follow-up system to ensure that the audited entities properly address their observations and recommendations as well as those made by the Legislature, one of its commissions or the auditees governing board as appropriate. SAIs are also required to submit their follow-up reports to the Legislature.

The Office of the Auditor-General has carried out this follow-up audit to ascertain whether appropriate and timely corrective action has been taken to implement the management's action plans and to advise Parliament on the progress of these issues.

During the audit of the 2017 Agency Financial Statements, recommendations made in audit reports of selected Ministries and Departments in each budget sector were followed up. The findings of the audit indicate that one agency had fully implemented all the recommendations, three agencies were yet to implement any of the recommendations, 48 percent of the total recommendations were fully implemented, 28 percent of recommendations had been partially implemented and 24 percent of recommendations were not implemented at all.

Following Committee deliberations, the Committee resolved to hear submissions from the Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Forests and others. The findings of the submissions are detailed in this Report.

The Committee commends the work of the various Ministries and Departments in terms of implementing the various Auditor-General's recommendations highlighted in the audit reports however necessary actions should be taken to fully implement these recommendations. Strengthening public financial management in the Civil Service is important and this is consistent with the objectives of the Supreme Audit Institutions as well as creating an effective oversight function of the Public Accounts Committee.

I wish to extend my appreciation to all Honourable Members of the Committee, who were part of the successful compilation of the bipartisan Report namely: Honourable Joseph Nand; Honourable Vijendra Prakash; Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat for their timely technical assistance and compilation of this Report. I now 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, 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.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

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

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.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay. You have the floor, Sir.

Report on the Annual Review of the Fiji Roads Authority for the Period
January – December 2015 and January – July 2016 -
Standing Committee Social Affairs

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Annual Review of the Fiji Roads Authority for the period January – December 2015 and January – July 2016.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies, in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the agencies’ administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media. The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January 2015 to July 2016, conducted into the Authority’s:

- administration;
- structure;
- budgetary allocation;
- programmes offered;
- policies;
- challenges;
- highlights;
- priorities for the coming years; and
- its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank the Chief Executive Officer of the Fiji Roads Authority, Mr Jonathan Moore, and his staff for their assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues: Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodro, and Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions as well as to Honourable Simione Rasova for availing himself as an Alternate Member for those Members who were unable to attend the Committee meetings.

Finally, I thank the Secretariat for the assistance provided during the Committee’s deliberations. I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, commend the Fiji Roads Authority 2015 Annual Report and the Fiji Roads Authority, January – July 2016 Annual Report to Parliament, and request all Members of this august House to take note of the Committee Reports. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

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.

I call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Honourable Viam Pillay. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Social Affairs -
Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts’
January - July 2016 and 2016 - 2017 Annual Reports

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Consolidated Review Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts – January to July 2016 and 2016-2017 Annual Reports.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies, in order to investigate, inquire into and make recommendations relating to the agencies’ administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January 2016 to July 2017, conducted into the Ministry’s administration, structure, budgetary allocation, programmes offered, policies, challenges, highlights, priorities for the coming years and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts, Ms Alison Burchell, and her staff for their assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to my following Committee colleagues for their contribution: Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodoro and Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu.

I also thank the Honourable Simione Rasova for availing himself as an Alternate Member for those Members who were unable to attend the Committee meetings. Finally, I thank the Secretariat for the assistance provided during the Committee’s deliberations.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs commend the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts' January – July 2016 Annual Report and the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts' 2016 – 2017 Annual Reports to Parliament, and request all Members of this august House to take note of the Committee's Report. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. 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. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote. 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. I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Honourable Alvick Maharaj. You have the floor, Sir.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts -
Review Report on the COP23 Presidency Trust Fund
Third Semi Annual Report for the period
1st May, 2018 to 31st October, 2018

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Public Accounts Committee Review Report on the COP23 Presidency Trust Fund, Third Semi Annual Report for the period, 1st May 2018 to 31st October, 2018.

The COP23 Presidency Trust Fund was established to manage donor funds intended to support the successful execution of Fiji's COP23 Presidency. The Fund was guided by the COP23 Presidency Trust Fund Act 2017 for the period of the Semi Annual Report and the COP23 Presidency Secretariat was responsible for the administration of the Trust Fund.

In scrutinising the Third Semi Annual Report, PAC noted that a total of FJD\$847,996 was received as contribution to the Trust Fund during the audit period and the major contributors were the Children's Investment Fund Foundation UK (FJD\$409,089), France (FJD\$222,102) and Israel (FJD\$210,805). The Committee further noted the expenditure by the Trust Fund for the period amounted to approximately FJD\$6.5 million leaving a balance of just over FJD\$10.5 million, prior to payments for COP24, the Third Climate Action Pacific Partnership Conference, advisory services, legacy initiatives and residual costs.

PAC acknowledges the feedback given by the Ministry of Economy to its queries regarding the Third Semi Annual Report and provides six key recommendations for consideration by Parliament. In particular, it is suggested that only annual audited accounts of the COP23 Presidency Trust Fund are presented to the PAC while the Semi Annual Report be directly tabled in Parliament just for the Members' information. PAC also chooses to highly commend the work of the Fiji Rural Electrification Fund and suggests certain improvements to the service it provides to better leverage on its transformational potential.

PAC notes that on 16th May 2019, the Trust was renamed the “Climate Action Trust Fund” by COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund (Amendment) Act 2019, thereby, broadening the scope of utilisation of the Trust Fund. In this regard, PAC recommends that more innovative on the ground projects are financed through COP, particularly in the area of disaster risk insurance and broader disaster risk management.

I wish to extend my appreciation to all Honourable Members of the Committee who were part of the successful compilation of the bipartisan report namely the Honourable Joseph Nand, Honourable Vijendra Prakash, Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat for their timely support on research, compilation and submission of this Report. With those few words, I commend this Report to Parliament. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

(Report handed to Secretary-General).

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir. Pursuant to the 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. *Vinaka.*

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

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

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.

Honourable Members, at this juncture I take the opportunity to welcome the students and teachers from the Liwativale Primary School in Rakiraki.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I also take the opportunity to welcome those in the public gallery who have just arrived. Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament and I hope your visit today will be rewarding and fruitful.

Honourable Members, at this juncture we will suspend proceedings for morning tea in the Big Committee Room. We will resume in half an hour. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.24 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.00 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before we proceed with today's agenda items, I would just like to welcome the school that I had welcomed in the former session. It was a premature welcome, but I welcome most sincerely the Liwativale Primary School of Rakiraki.

(Acclamation)

I thought it was a bit funny at that time when I welcomed, because I looked around and there were only adults there, but it was only after I started reading then I realised that. But I welcome you all most sincerely to the proceedings of the House today. I hope that your visit today will be rewarding. You are most welcome.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now continue with responses to His Excellency's Address. I now call on the Minister for Health and Medical Services, Honourable Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- *Vinaka vakalevu.* Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament, our visitors in the gallery and also to the Liwativale Primary School from Ra, my *ma'aqali*, welcome again from Rakiraki. Welcome.

I am pleased to say before I start, that we have completed all the works that needs to be done post-*TC Winston* in all the health facilities in Ra. The last that has been done at the moment is Nasau Health Centre which will be completed early next year ...

(Acclamation)

... to the tune of \$850,000 and that is the level on which we, this Government support the people of Ra.

I am honoured to rise today to express my wholehearted support for the Address delivered by His Excellency the President. I would like to begin by responding to some comments raised by my colleague Honourable Dr. Lalabalavu.

The health budget is healthy. Most of you in this room had the measles injection. That cost money and the Government paid for it. The lights, that is electricity which is Government money. Your allowances, I hear some Honourable Members on the other side usually ask for their allowances in the middle of the week and that is paid by Government money. So money is not an issue and I want to say that also in terms of overseas medical evacuation, Honourable Salote Radrodoro will understand as a former civil servant and a Ministry of Health employee that there are policies and procedures in place. Not all those who want overseas treatment can be funded by the Government.

At this moment for this 2019/2020 Budget, Honourable Speaker, we have committed already \$1.5 million. Again, there is a budget appropriation that is available for overseas evacuation. The overseas referrals are for treatment only and not for diagnostic workup, second opinions or experimental treatment. The rules around which we run the Overseas Evacuation Treatment Scheme is based on best evidence, best practice, and also on discussions with what is happening within the region and on some advice that we receive from colleagues from New Zealand who come through under the New Zealand Medical Treatment Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, His Excellency rightly said as representatives of all Fijians we deliver solutions to our nation's greatest challenges. We are not here to guard our political fortunes and not to make a theatre of political discourse but to serve as guardians of every Fijian's wellbeing. I can assure you that over the last year, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services have been just that. He made mention of a boy from Moala. It is very interesting because I am from Moala and to hear that a boy from Moala was very happy with the visibility of our health staff on his island and understanding his constitutional right to health tells us there is a lot of confidence and trust in the health system and the Government overall.

I am pleased that very soon we will have three subdivisions in Lau. We will have Lakeba, Lomaloma and the *Yasayasa* Moala subdivision to serve the entire *Yasayasa* Moala group. The *MV Veivueti* which was purchased by the Government through the vision of the Honourable Prime Minister is a hospital-based platform has been to Lau two times in this last year alone. Recently, it was in Kadavu. I congratulate and thank His Excellency for demonstrating his unwavering faith in Fiji and we as a nation.

Honourable Speaker, we have a measles outbreak and the epidemic was in January to June of 1985. It was estimated that a little more than 40,000 or a quarter of the population perished in that. Honourable Speaker, I do not want to go into many details about it but suffice to say that after the Great Council of Chiefs' (GCC) meeting, the 69 esteemed chiefs of our nation, when they went back, at that time they did not realise that they were infected with measles and we had 40,000 of us that perished.

Honourable Speaker, we have a very robust and effective immunisation programme. The question is, why the re-emergence of measles in Fiji? I want to assure this noble House that we had no measles in Fiji. Measles came and from the investigations that we are having at the moment, it is beginning to show that it came from one of the countries that is infected in the region. There are countries in the region such as New Zealand, Tonga and Samoa and the Honourable Prime Minister and I reiterate the condolences that we have as a nation towards our brothers and sisters in Samoa and the challenges that they are going through at the moment. We are also grateful that Australia and New Zealand and also other development partners such as the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organisation (WHO) are working hand in hand with our brothers and sisters and colleagues in Samoa to be able to try and stop and eradicate measles that is running rampant in Samoa at the moment.

Honourable Speaker, the Serua/Namosi Subdivision declared an outbreak on 7th November, 2019 when a four-year child contracted measles. As I have said and I alluded to from what we believe came because of contact with a relative who came from a country in the region that has measles. So, far today as we speak, we now have nine cases of measles.

Recently, a child who visited family in Serua have measles and today in this august House, I want to make it very clear as the Minister for Health on behalf of the Ministry of Health, we strongly advise against mass gatherings in Serua/Namosi. We strongly advise against people from outside Serua/Namosi travelling in to Serua/Namosi. We strongly advise against mass gatherings in the Suva/Nausori corridor because we need collectively as a nation, to attack this rampant disease of measles, and we cannot on this watch, allow this nation to go through the problems that we went through in 1875. We will not allow anyone to die.

We must work together all of us in this noble House. We must advocate, we must talk and we must not allow anyone to die from measles. Then our forefathers who suffered in 1875, that 40,000. I hear in Moala, 279 died, 280 survived. I hear in Oneata, only 100 people in Oneata survived, 800 died. We will not let anyone die in this nation. We collectively must work together, and I thank the Honourable Members on the other side for agreeing to this.

Vaccination of contacts was expanded to include the type of vaccination. And in Wainadoi alone, we have covered more than 95 percent of that population. Last night, I was told that we were up in the highlands of Namosi and Serua, the Honourable Tui Namosi knows all about this. Our people were on the ground, walking and going through the villages to ensure that we re-vaccinate.

The Measles Taskforce has been working hand in hand with WHO, UNICEF, et cetera. Ever since April/May this year, we have been talking about measles. We have been talking about what we are going to do if it does come.

I am also pleased to say that so far, over the last two to three weeks we have vaccinated more than 90,000 Fijians. At the moment, we are curtailing our stocks to be able to vaccinate those who are at risk, but I also want to assure this noble House that the UNICEF has promised us 200,000 vaccinations that will arrive from Copenhagen, hopefully, this weekend or early next week. And Government is also in the process of making its own secondary procurement processes for measles vaccinations.

I also would like to, at this stage, to thank our Ministry of Health and Medical Services staff for working around the clock, headed by Health Protection Head, Dr. Aalisha Sahu Khan, and the Divisional Medical Officers, the Subdivisional Medical Officers, the teams on the ground and the hospitals in this regard in the case of measles.

Honourable Speaker, leptospirosis, typhoid and dengue have a special place in our public health watchlist, and we have talked about it and we want to eradicate this with tuberculosis (TB) in the next five years. It is a difficult ask, but our Health Inspectors are being mobilised, going out and advising communities and I have been part of some of these programmes. In the last quarter alone, they have conducted nearly 400 awareness sessions, 400 cleaning up campaigns, targeting mosquito breeding grounds.

We have also increased our legal enforcement and at the moment we have 200 matters before the court. Fortunately, new innovation and technologies also enhance existing control programmes, and I am pleased to say that Fiji is the first country in the Pacific to implement the World Mosquito Programme of introducing *Wolbachia*, which is a bacteria in a mosquito that nullifies the effect of *dengue*, *zika* and *chikungunya* virus. So, far we have finished phase one which is the Lami-Nausori corridor, and phase two which is Nausori-Lautoka and Ba.

It is hoped within the next three years to five years, we will see what is happening in Queensland which now has very reduced numbers of dengue because of the roll out of the *Wolbachia* Programme. This is being supported from the New Zealand Government and also USAid.

Honourable Speaker, we have also been doing some work in the communities and I have been pleased to be part of this. We were up in Tailevu, mainly the Wainibuka area, Bua, Naitasiri, Ra, Tailevu and we have just recently commissioned some sanitary facility projects in Nasebitu Village in Wainibuka and Nalidi Village in Ra. Sokoveti from Nasebitu said she was pleased being a single mother that we came and we worked together with Flour Mills of Fiji to be able to give a proper sanitation facility.

Also Ilimaleki from Nalidi Village in Ra, who has a very young family and he said that he was very happy that Government, through the Ministry of Health, Rural Water and the District Officer and they will be able to work hand in hand to be able to improve his sanitation. I was also very pleased when I learned later from my wife that her great grandmother was from Nalidi Village of Nakorotubu in Ra.

In the beginning of the year, the Ministry, together with the Office of the Commissioner Central spearheaded a Water Supplying Upgrading Project in Nabaitavo Village, which usually happens to be a place where typhoid has an outbreak. We worked together with them and Elenoa said that she was thankful to the Government and the Ministry of Health working together with its partners, to uplift the

hygiene and sanitation. Water shortage was one of their main problems but the installation of free water tanks has helped solved the problem for them. All these measures are designed to keep our communities free from disease.

Honourable Speaker, Fiji as a member of 22 Pacific Island Countries under the Pacific Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis Umbrella, continues its journey to combat filariasis and head towards meeting the elimination goal by 2025.

In order for Fiji to eliminate filariasis the Government, through the Ministry of Health, has adopted the new World Health Organisation (WHO) guideline for Mass Drug Administration of Ivermectin, Diethylcarbamazine and Albendazoles (IDA) also known as Triple Drug Therapy.

I have heard yesterday that in the North where we piloted this, 95 percent of the targeted population in the first doze were given the doze and 81 percent so far in its second phase. And this is in the hope of eliminating lymphatic filariasis in the North and we now roll it to the rest of Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, we are interested in leaving no one behind. Our surgical outreach programmes and specialist doctors and nurses and allied health workers, take the services out to the major hospitals. As I have alluded to in the previous sittings that we had this year, our people now have far greater access to specialist health services.

As you may be aware Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) was accredited by WHO as an international Type 1 Fixed Emergency Medical Team (EMT), and Fiji has become the 50th country in the world.

We have been able to use FEMAT and run field hospitals in our outreach and I am pleased to say that we have now done it in Korovou, Sigatoka, recently in Kadavu, where the boat was actually in Kavala Bay and another team was in Vunisea, and next week they will be up in Vunidawa. And that is how we are going to be rolling in, as we continue to bring the services closer to the people. And the people have been very, very happy with having operations, eye checks and dental very close to where they are.

Honourable Speaker, all these outreach innovations are helping to reduce the cost the burden on our people of accessing health facilities and the impact of travelling away from family support to access surgical services. In total, 234 surgical operations were done in Korovou, Lau, Sigatoka and Kadavu, not including next week's in Vunidawa.

And so when we think about it, having to travel across to Suva or if they run into problems and we having to evacuate them, the cost to it apart from the cost of life itself, we can see that there is significant savings of both, life and also the cost to the people and also to Government.

Honourable Speaker, Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) is a problem but it is a problem all over the world. We conduct an NCD Risk Factor Steps Survey in 2002, which shows that our diabetes prevalence then was 16 percent. In 2011, it was 18 percent. The factors are smoking, being overweight, and having raised blood pressure.

Honourable Speaker, I hear talks of 30 percent of our population having diabetes which is about 283,000 people. We have yet to do a Step Survey which is going to be done in 2020 to 2021. That will tell us the real picture, given that it rose by about 2 percent within 2002 to 2011, I actually think it is going to rise by about 2 percent to 5 percent, so I am thinking the figure will be around 22 percent rather than 30 percent as being said at the moment. But we collectively have to work together in curbing this.

We have increased taxes on alcohol and tobacco and palm oil. We have reduced taxes on fruits and vegetables. NCD drugs are now available, including under the Free Medicine Scheme. We have also

increased development in the area of Speciality Care, Cardiology, Nephrology and Surgery to name a few.

We have improved health literacy to address issues and when we go out into the peripheral areas, including the outreach teams that have been up in Kadavu, we asked the specialist to actually go out into the communities and help the Public Health Zone Nurses in making awareness and advocacy around NCDs.

Honourable Speaker, there is a recognition, there is always room to improve how our healthcare workers and improve our systems, processes, our assets and our people. And the Ministry has initiated an independent aim and to review the entire pharmaceutical service, pharmaceutical consumable and biomedical equipment supply chain. This review is currently underway and will be implemented by the end of the calendar year. The review scope is to be comprehensive and will allow us to make timely, efficient and effective supply by early 2021, including relevant policy systems, infrastructure and capacity building.

Honourable Speaker, we continue to grow in the area of nurse specialisation. We are now beginning to look at maybe taking nurse practitioners into areas where there is a zone nurse, so that we have a mid-level practitioner in those areas, but we are also looking at areas, such as oncology which now has its own nurse, hospital in the home which now has a nurse practitioner, and these are areas in which we want to bring our nursing fraternity.

Honourable Speaker, we agree that as one of the frontline ministries, sometimes there are challenges in the way that we present ourselves and in the way we present our care. Having said that, we are very critical of ourselves. We have a very robust auditing system, we take complaints very seriously, but having said that, I have witnessed the enthusiasm, passion and commitment to our people by our health staff. And I have been also humbled by the collective effort of the NGOs, Civil Society Organisations, Faith-Based Groups and individuals, who deliver services and manage programmes to provide healthcare services to our people.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to those who played a part by our bilateral development partners, including the Governments of:

- Australia;
- New Zealand;
- China;
- India;
- Japan; and
- Korea.

We also benefit greatly from the support of UN agencies and WHO. We work hand in hand with the Provincial Councils, the District Councils and also, we try and make sure that we go to the remotest villages in Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, this week has been a wonderful week in Parliament. There has been a lot of banter and a lot of talk. In anything from that side, I hear “resignation” – resignation, resignation, resignation. I can assure them that I have been working hard. I can also assure them that all the Ministers over here and all the Members of Parliament on this side have been working harder than I am and I cannot see why we should resign.

Honourable Speaker, I believe what the Honourable Inia Seruiratu said that should happen, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition should resign. And Honourable Adi Litia and Honourable *tovata* Bulitavu should resign because they are the mastermind behind it.

(Laughter)

Honourable Ro Teimumu should resign because she was taken out from her post by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, *Turaga Tui Cakau* should not resign because he is my chief from *tovata*. Honourable Ratu Antonio should not resign because the chief is also staying, Honourable Rasova should resign because Honourable Rasova is neither there nor here. If he had his way, he will be on this side. Honourable *tovata* Nawaikula he should resign, but, do not resign. Honourable Gavoka should resign because he said something different from what we gave - the figures, the GDP was different. Honourable Tuisawau you should resign. Why? Because you became President and the Honourable Ro Teimumu is still not President yet. His chiefly show of respect.

(Laughter)

Honourable Tui Namosi, you should resign because we in Nakorowaiwai, our role in Namosi is to protect you, Sir. And I want to protect your chiefly status so you should resign.

Honourable Lenora, you should resign because you cursed my children, but I forgive you. I bless you and I bless your children and I bless your descendants. Honourable Radrodro because she is my *tauvu* from Vanuabalavu, do not resign, please do not. Honourable Biman, you will have to resign because Honourable Lenora will resign.

(Laughter)

And Honourable Vijendra do not resign because he is on this side. And Honourable Ratu Tevita, he is my *tovata*, he will not resign.

(Laughter)

Honourable Jese, do not resign, but when you see the others walkout, you will also walkout. I thank you, Honourable Speaker. God bless you, have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services for his contribution to the debate.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services, the Honourable Jone Usamate. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament: It gives me great pleasure and honour to stand before you here today to thank His Excellency the President, for his inspiring and thought-provoking words, which remind us as Member of Parliament of our duty to the people of this country.

As the Ministry responsible for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services, my Ministry plays a critical role in all of this and we hope to be able to deliver our service to the best of our ability.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, electricity can transform people's lives, not just economically but also socially and it is one of our roles to be able to do that. According to the 2017 Census reports in that year, 96 percent of our people had access to electricity, and this has increased by 7 percent from the Census that took place 10 years earlier and the percentage of our people in Fiji that are now connected to the Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) Grid has increased to almost 80 percent in 2017, compared to 63 percent in 2007 - that has been a

significant increase of around 16 percent. The increase in access to electricity contributes to Government's plans and commitments.

Over the past five years, Government has committed a total of \$159.8 million, almost a \$160 million for its Rural Electrification Programme that has benefited more than 25,000 households and approximately 100,000 individuals all across the country.

One of the commitments of Government at present, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to transform the energy sector by increasing a renewable energy mix to 100 percent by 2036. Why do we need to do that? Because we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our Honourable Prime Minister has got a strong target in terms of promoting the things that we need to do to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions. The realisation of that target will allow Government to achieve its carbon emission reduction commitment.

Apart from energy renewable resources, we need to make use of things that we do have such as hydropower and biomass and Government through EFL is investing into new and emerging technologies such as solar grid connection with battery storage. Also, as I speak EFL is also working in partnership with the European Investment Bank towards the development of additional Hydro-Electric Schemes in Western Viti Levu and we continue to encourage private sector investment in the power-generation sector. We hope to see more independent power producers signing up long-term Power Purchase Agreements (PPA) so that we can have the private sector becoming involved in the production of electricity in this country.

Through our Rural Electrification Programmes, Government is ear-marked to complete a total of 80 projects by the end of this year. Through EFL, we are looking to have another 94 grid extension projects, where the EFL grid can be spread out so it can have an impact on more people in this country. Out of these 94 grid extension projects, there are about 65 projects that have been completed, six are under construction and the remaining 23 to be undertaken. We know that there are people from across Viti Levu, Vanua Levu who tell us that electricity poles are there. I would like to assure them that the grid for the places that are targeted to have grid extension - that will take place. We will leave no one behind.

Just this past fortnight, the Honourable Prime Minister was up at the Village of Waibalavu to extend the grid in the upper ridges of Naitasiri. Last week, we had a group from the Ministry that went by path for two hours, went by boat for another one hour and trekked over the jungle, through and across the rivers for another 3.5 hours to get to the Village of Nakida, isolated villages. Even though the numbers are small, we make sure that no one is left behind, and that they have access to transport, water and electricity.

Furthermore, Government is using smart metres and energy measurement systems to monitor and control-remote systems which allow us to view real-time data. We have such a project on the island of Namara in Kadavu, and we are thankful to the Koreans who have helped us to put in that hybrid system between solar and diesel providing them electricity, and at the same time, allowing our officials and the experts back in Korea to monitor how well the system is working.

As a small island economy, Fiji faces two major challenges that have an impact on our ability to provide power for our people:

1. Severe weather events: When we have cyclones and floods, these things are going to have an impact on our ability to be able to provide power;
2. Global fuel prices: Prices go up, demand goes up in Europe, it is going to have an impact on the cost of fuel, therefore, the cost of power here in Fiji.

These two things are both outside of our control. But what we do as a Government, we try to make sure that we try to put in place measures to minimise the impact of these things on the provision of energy in our country. To ensure reliability and security of power supply, works have also commenced with the development of 132 kilovolt transmission network from Virara to Koronubu in Ba, to meet the growing demand of electricity in the North-Western region of Viti Levu.

We currently have infrastructure available in the Western Division that has already reached its full capacity and we know that that part of Viti Levu is becoming a tax-free zone, so we need to be able to provide the power to that particular area, so this huge investment from EFL will allow us to be able to provide the power to the Western and the North-Western part of Viti Levu. It is going to cost us around \$70 million. When completed, this project will enable power to come from Wailoa and Nadarivatu and connect direct to Ba and all the regions across the Western part of Viti Levu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to prepare and implement robust transport and mobility plans for Fiji, we need to take simple steps and we will continue to do this. One of the things that we are doing now is looking to develop a more comprehensive transport model with set guidelines for the appraisal of plans and projects on a consistent basis. We are using a number of tools. We have started to use or we have been using the Sustainable Urban Transport Index (SUTI) and also the Household Travel Surveys (HTS). These tools allow us to get a better grip on how people are using the existing transportation systems that we have to help us to summarise, compare and track the performance of urban transport in cities.

With the assessment that we have been undertaking together with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), we have found that in Fiji, this course that we have amongst the four pilot companies that are using this project, we rank the highest. So that is the good indication of how the transportation system is being developed to be able to provide assistance to the people in Fiji.

We are now into the Phase 2 of our Household Travel Survey where we look at how the different forms of transportation that people are using in this country, and we find from the base of these surveys, we are able to get the information to be able to better understand people's travel patterns and behaviours that will allow us to fine-tune the transportation systems that we have in this country.

We know for instance, that 35 percent of all car trips have only one driver or have only one person in the vehicle. There are a lot more cars and most of the cars on our roads only have two people. So when you have a lot of cars with very little people in the vehicle itself, it contributes to congestion. So these sorts of findings allow us to have a better understanding of our transportation system to allow us to put in place measures that we can try to reduce congestion. We know that most of the trips within Fiji that are one kilometre or less are done by people walking. That is why Government has invested in streetlights and footpaths, to encourage people to walk more and at the same time, make sure that as they are walking, they are kept as safe as possible.

The Ministry's role towards the reduction of Green House gas emissions. In the land transport sector, we are working in collaboration with the Global Green Growth Institute and UNESCAP on a study of electrical vehicles because in the long term, we need to bring electricity and transportation. We need to bring electricity into maritime transportation, we need to bring electricity into transportation, and we need to make sure that the electricity that is used for this transportation is renewable energy, and that is going to be the focus of Government in order to make sure that we can reduce Green House gas emissions in our country.

The provision of these mobility and accessibility options enables our citizens to live, work and play in ways that are unimaginable a century ago, but have been made possible by the vision of the FijiFirst Government. We are committed to modernising Fiji's land transport sector as an enabler for

economic growth with the capacity to improve the quality of life for all Fijians now and for our future generations.

We are also greatly encouraged to see the work that is being done by the statutory authorities under the Ministry. The LTA continues to explore different types of technologies, some tested technologies, proven technologies to improve enforcement and compliance within the prevailing regulations that we have. Some of these technologies include the weigh-in-motion. "Weigh in motion" basically means as a vehicle is running along the road, we can get some sort of measurements or the weight of that vehicle because one of the biggest problems that we have in the country is that, we have overladen vehicles. Overladen vehicles means they begin to destroy the roads, so while we have a number of permanent weighbridges, LTA is now looking into having these systems of weigh in motion. As the vehicle is moving on the road, we are able to get a measure of how heavy that particular vehicle is.

Our roads are like arteries that connect Fiji's heart triggering our socio-economic pulses by linking producers to markets, workers to jobs, students to school and the sick to hospital, to name a few. So our roads are vital for our development. In support of this, the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) is continuing to increase the number of new rural roads annually and planning an "upgrade to seal" programme, so they look at the roads that we have, they find the ones that transport most people and look to see the ones that we need to start sealing, so we still have a lot of gravel roads, but the ones that are required to be sealed, those are things that will be identified by FRA.

FRA has resealed in excess of 100 kilometres of major highways (Queen's Road, King's Road and Nabouwalu Road) and is now planning to reseal a further 200 kilometres of major highways over the next two years.

In transforming Fiji, a modern, safe and well-connected road infrastructure is necessary and in support of this, FRA has installed over 2,000 streetlights over the past two years. Streetlights in Natovi and Nabouwalu jetties, new footpaths in 30 locations and 40 new bus shelters and these investments will continue to take place.

Under the Bridge Replacement Programme, there are currently 20 bridges on major highways undergoing complete replacement of major structural rehabilitation. In support of inter-island accessibility, FRA has undertaken extensive programme of jetty rehabilitation and replacement. Some of the rehabilitation has been completed in Lakeba and Savusavu and work is about to commence on the rehabilitation of the Vanuabalavu Jetty. In a major plan to bring major jetty facilities up to an international standard, FRA is about to award a feasibility, investigation and detailed, design contract for new jetties at Natovi, Nabouwalu and Savusavu with construction expected to commence in the Year 2021.

Over the next two years, FRA will be moving away from temporary repair work to more sustainable and durable long-term solutions. This will see the reconstruction of over 100 kilometres of highways and arterial roads as well as the upgrade of pedestrian facilities and the utility upgrades along these roads.

FRA will be looking to utilise more technological advancement, I have already talked about the use of the weigh in motion, the:

1. Implementation of Intelligent Transportation Systems and the development of infrastructure that will allow us to have that Intelligent Transportation System.
2. Installing the SCATS Traffic Signals Management system
3. Installing speed cameras in all our new roads and road upgrade projects

4. Installing yellow box, red light cameras at all new signalised junctions and junctions signal upgrades.

Apart from this, FRA will also adopt new technologies, methodologies and materials in this construction programme, provide greater longevity, serviceability and reduce the cost of maintenance. FRA is also looking to reduce the impact of the work that it undertakes on the environment itself, in particular, our rivers and streams.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the effects of climate change are already upon us and we are seeing more frequent flooding and overtopping of roads and bridges where the water goes above the bridge itself because of sea level rise, because of intense flooding and all of these other reasons. In response to this, FRA is increasing the level of all assets as they are replaced or upgraded. If you go past the Bridge at Tamavua-i-wai, you will see that it is far higher than the existing bridge and that is what we will continue to have to do into the future.

In terms of NDMO, on disasters, we know that the countries in the Pacific, we are amongst the most disaster-prone countries in the world, and it has a huge impact on us - the cyclones, the heavy rains and the flooding are yearly occurrences and the costs are quite excessive.

Over the past five years, we have had a total of nine tropical cyclones ranging from Category 1 to Category 5 within 400 kilometres from radius, but we do not only get disasters from cyclones. I think most of the disaster comes from the intense floods that either accompanies cyclones or come on their own. Because of this, Government through the Fiji Meteorological and Hydrological Services is embarking on a programme so that no one is surprised by the floods programme. In order to do this, we are trying to address the flooding problems, taking proactive steps to prevent damaging effects.

Currently already in Fiji we have 41 stations where we try to measure the level of rivers and the amount of rainfall that is taking place so we can try to have better forecasting of floods. In the new financial year, there will be an additional seven such stations put in place so that we can strengthen our ability to be able to forecast floods and also to allow us to have better advisories and advance warning to people that might be affected by floods. Currently, this particular week in Nadi, we are having the closing session of our coastal inundation forecasting demonstration project that is basically designed to address three main components: to address coastal inundation wave forecasting; storm surge forecasting; river flood forecasting because these are very important for all the people in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are just a number of things that I would like to talk about in addition to the highlight that I have had on the work that is being done by my Ministry and basically refer to some of the statements that had been made in this particular House.

Earlier on this week, there was a statement that was made by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition who said that there was a promise to continue the reform and that he was waiting for the reforms. What I would like to tell the august House that the reforms have been underway ever since this Government took place. The reforms have been seen in this Government include the reform in improving governance because under this Government, we will never ever lose a national bank. We will not lose the assets that are important to this country.

Under the reforms that are taking place, we are seeing that public utilities like Fiji Pine Group and Airports Fiji Limited are making the kind of profits that they have never ever had before. That is the kind of reform that we have. Reforming governance to deliver better services. We have had reform in increasing civil servants' salaries. The kinds of increases most doctors and teachers would want. That is the evidence of reform that we have.

We have had 10 years of consecutive growth. That is a result of reform. We have now the reform of open merit appointments. We appoint people that are best for the job because when we appoint the right people, when you have fitness for purpose, people will deliver the kinds of things that you want.

We have the protection of *iTaukei* land in our Constitution. We have, for the first time ever, share of royalties to *iTaukei* landowners. That is part of the reform. This is the Government that delivers for the people in this country. The kind of reform that we have, the people that were in Monasavu, they used to watch these electric poles going across, they said, "how come that electricity is not coming to us?" It is through this Government that electricity is being provided to all of the people.

The Honourable Gavoka has been saying that this Government has done nothing for the *iTaukei*. I think all of these things that I have been talking about are proof of that. The royalty for the minerals, \$10 million for land development - landowners that want to develop their own land, the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board (iTLTB) grants for small business, et cetera. I think at the end of all of this, I concur with the statement made by the Leader of the Government in Parliament and the statement made by Dr. Waqainabete. If there is one group that needs to resign, it is that group. Not just your group but I think the Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka needs to do the right thing and resign. He needs to resign.

HON. MEMBERS.- Why?

HON. J. USAMATE.- I have already outlined for you the great benefits that our leader has brought to this country but for the Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, if I remember correctly, some of the rules that they have in the SODELPA Party that if you lead your party into an election and you lose the election, what should happen to the leader? The leader should resign. It is a hallmark of lack of integrity when you are not able to follow the dictates of your own constitution, your own rules.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- If you have the rule, follow your rule. If you cannot follow the rule, resign and move out. We need to have stronger leadership in this country. During his time, it has been the worst cases of poor governance in this country - loss of our National Bank of Fiji, failed public enterprises and all of those things. Do I still have time?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- There are a number of things that I also wanted to highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There have been some statements made in this House about things that are factually wrong. The Honourable Salote Radrodro said that Government gave away the land at Navua to Grace Road Food Company Limited.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is a lie, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That land was leased by the Fiji National University.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- A Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would like to correct that misleading statement that has been brought into the House by the Honourable Usamate. If he disputes

that information than we have the *Hansard Report* of the Committee that can verify what I said in this House.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the statement from the Honourable Radrodro is that the land where the Navua Rice Farm is or the land earmarked for the new Koronivia Agricultural College but instead this Government gave that land to Grace Road; completely inaccurate. I have worked in FNU during the time when that land was acquired. It was leased by the Fiji National University and on their own volition....

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Again I will say to the Honourable Minister, if he dispute that information then there is the *Hansard* record that will prove what I said. It was not my information. That came from FNU and he can verify that information with the line Minister responsible for FNU if that information is being disputed by the Honourable Usamate. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I think, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you come into this House as His Excellency the President said, this is a honourable House. You come with integrity, you say the truth, you make sure that everything you say is the truth. What the Honourable Salote Radrodro has said is factually incorrect and is a lie. That land was not given by Government, it was a lease that was owned by the Fiji National University and on their own volition they have decided to give a portion up.

The Government has absolutely nothing to do with that. You come into this House, you tell the truth, you-fact check, fact-check and fact check. Check your facts before you say anything in this House. That is something that all of us must do and not just read something from somewhere in the social media et cetera and you take it to be right. You come here, you have the responsibility to tell the truth, tell the truth, tell the truth. Fact-check everything that you say.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. Honourable Usamate can verify that information with the former Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Education. That was what was brought into the Committee and we, as Members of the Committee will take into account the information that is given to us by the organisations. For your information, if that information is coming from FNU, we are given to believe it because that is what they presented to us in the Committee and the Honourable Minister cannot come in here and accuse me of not telling the truth. He as the Minister responsible for Infrastructure, if he disputes that then he has to go and get the verbatim report and cross-check with the Minister responsible and that is the former Minister for Agriculture and the former Minister for Education. There is no need for him to come here and accuse me for that information which I am sharing in the House in my capacity as the member of the Committee.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Your Point of Order is being taken. The explanation has been given by the Honourable Minister. I cannot see what the problem is now and the thing is you have had your say and the Honourable Minister has had his say. We now have a better idea of what has happened to the land and we will move on.

I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution to the House.

Honourable Members, before I give the floor and I hope but I have got it right this time. I want to welcome the students and teachers of Dakuivuna District School from Naitasiri.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- You are most welcome to Parliament and I hope that your visit today will be fruitful and rewarding. A most warm welcome to you all.

Honourable Members, we will now continue and I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I start speaking on the motion before us I just want to give two friendly reminders to two Honourable Members in this House.

Firstly to the Honourable Minister for Lands, please do not mislead Parliament in the manner that you did yesterday by saying that the rot in the sugar industry started after the 1987 *coup* when growers were chased and leases were taken over in Wainikoro, Labasa in obvious reference to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in the first *coup* of 1987. If you are indeed right, please explain how did the number of growers who have maintained at over 23,000 seven years after the 1987 *coup* and how did we produce 517,000 tonnes of sugar in 1994, a record that will never be broken. Please, Honourable Members do not come to Parliament and say that this happened throughout the country ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... and that only under your leader the Honourable Prime Minister land is truly available but statistics clearly show that under his 13 years of leadership, sugarcane and sugar production has massively dropped by almost 50 percent compared to 2006. It happened after 2000 not after 1987.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Secondly, the Honourable Bulanauca on Tuesday, 19th November, 2019 blamed secular state as being the reason for the current state of leadership. I want to say that nothing can be further from the truth. We have always been a secular state not just because it suddenly appeared in the 2013 Constitution. The strong cultural, traditional and religious identity and customs of all ethnic groups for more than a century is testimony to this fact. Secularism has a truly nothing to do with leadership.

Mr. Speaker, it is customary, when we rise to debate His Excellency's Address to this House, to thank him for his gracious Address, but I wonder, Mr. Speaker, about those who wrote that speech. I wonder about how much respect they have for His Excellency's Office. I wonder how much respect they have for the people of this country.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- When His Excellency opens Parliament, Mr. Speaker, he of course must set out the legislative agenda of the Government of the day. And for that reason it is the Government of the day that will prepare parts of His Excellency's Address.

Mr. Speaker, I can say that the writing is all over the place. It has no substance, it is like a last-minute rushed assignment of some of the students that I marked in my 28 years of academic career. The Address talked about the Constitution, it talked about the so-called democracy, it talked about Parliamentary Committees. Mr. Speaker, the Address also congratulated the Government on past economic growth and its so-called achievements. It talked about not playing fast and loose economic football, it talked about next year's Independence celebrations.

And right at the end, there were two paragraphs which talked about the future. They talked about the Climate Change Bill. They talked about the Disaster Management Act, cybercrimes and some tax reforms, that was it. The speech written by the FijiFirst Government shows this Government's disrespect for His Excellency the President and for Fiji's people.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They do not know how to solve the problems our people are facing today. And it sometimes appears from the Address I heard that they actually do not care. Why? Because they have lost the sense of direction and purpose. I would say that this is a Zombie Government; half dead, half alive, wondering aimlessly around the political landscape.

The Honourable Prime Minister's productivity or lack of it can be measured by a single yardstick, gallivanting around the globe from visiting climate change projects in Australia, attending Independence celebrations and dinner, hyping up Vuvale Scheme, still trying to get leaders to *talanoa* over climate change, visiting a cigar factory in Cuba and I would have thought the Honourable Prime Minister would go and look at the sugar industry and how it thrives in Cuba.

And back home while the Honourable Prime Minister was on Cloud 9, the Reserve Bank of Fiji was packaging the worst, but as we have always said, very predictable news. But the current economic growth forecast had further dwindled from 2.7 percent in May to 1 percent due to many factors associated which stagnating local conditions, stifling business conditions, including lowest level of investor confidence in a decade. And also my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, have highlighted a number of problems and I just want to add some of it as well. First, the cost of living is rising to the point of unaffordability. You just have to talk to the people. Patients in Serua and Namosi Provinces could not have a basic ultrasound scan at Navua Hospital and were being referred to Suva, Honourable Waqainabete.

Nadi Hospital had run out of diabetic medication last week. The Land Transport Authority decided to add further misery on motor vehicle owners and driving licence holders requiring them to be personally and physically present in LTA for any service, including payment of fees or any services for 500,000 CO, Honourable Usamate.

Fiji passport holders seeking renewal of their passports were told to spend thousands of dollars to fly down to the Immigration Department in Suva for biometrics and renewal of a \$200 passport. The 16-year-old boy allegedly subjected to Military brutality and the security forces ignoring calls by the Acting Prime Minister, the Honourable Koroilavesau, for a full investigation by justifying the action under Section 131(2) of the Constitution. That means the peace and security of Fiji was threatened by this boy, allegedly posting something against the Honourable Prime Minister.

A school destroyed by severe *TC Winston* on Kocoma in Qamea Island in February 2016, Mr. Speaker, resembling a derelict structure because the contractors responsible for building the abandoned works due to non-payment of funds, forcing students to study in the village church for more than three years.

A day ago, a group of Suva residents went to Samabula Health Centre (they came to us see us), Honourable Speaker, to get measles injection, only to be told that the Centre was only catering for those between one year and five years. A lady came to the Ministry of Health Headquarters at Dinem House on Wednesday to discover there was no team giving injections, despite widespread publicity led by none other than the Honourable Prime Minister himself about the need for everyone to be vaccinated. If there is not enough vaccination, that information needs to come out very clearly, Honourable Speaker, because the Prime Minister said very clearly that everyone should be vaccinated and when the Honourable Prime Minister speaks, gives a message, people listen. That everyone should be vaccinated.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- A Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- There is a Point of Order.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, Dinem House is the Ministry of Health Headquarters, we do not do injections there. You are misleading Parliament. It is Namosi House downstairs.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.-That is what I am saying, people are going there, you need to get your facts rights.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, he misled Parliament. He said, "Dinem House", it is Namosi House downstairs, misleading Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is not misleading, Mr. Speaker, what I was saying that people are actually going to the Headquarters, the information, the message is not very clear from the Ministry of Health.

The Local Government Minister threatening ratepayers owing rates.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Is that a Point of Order?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Point of Order! Again, misleading Parliament.

Honourable Speaker, the advisories are sent out everyday. Nearly everyday there is media out there, asking me about what is happening with measles. We are very clear on what is happening with measles. Up in the media, on our Government social media, Ministry of Health social media, all the advisories are there. Even in the Health Centres, there are posters indicating at the moment who is getting injections and I have just recently explained it to Parliament, very clear.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister is wasting his time.

The Local Government Minister threatening ratepayers owing rates to seize up their property and garnishee orders. The Local Government Minister also revealing rates could be increased as it was long overdue where the CEO of Consumer Council of Fiji actually quite vociferously criticised Municipal

Councils for unfairly increasing rates in 2011 and rightfully so, due to the rise in the rate of UCV and a year later.

In fact, several hundred teachers are still awaiting their performance-based payment for the last two years, despite the Permanent Secretary for Education sealing her lips as to when this will if ever be paid. And the many, many thousands of potholes on our roads, kept on growing bigger and bigger, may be in readiness for Christmas *lovo*, I think.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- And while all these is happening, where has the Honourable Prime Minister's loyal right-hand man, the Honourable Attorney-General, been for the last week? In France, in Dubai, travelling around for a new lease for Fiji Airways Aircraft. We know he is not here but he likes to control things. I hope he was not telling the pilots how to fly the planes.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- One could say, Mr. Speaker, that the Fiji Government is an intellectually barren space, not only have they run out of ideas, they have actually run out of money.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They are not admitting, they are not admitting it. Despite strategizing in December at Level 9 for the low hanging fruits, they have actually become a cash-strapped stature of Government. This is what they have become - a cash-strapped stature of Government.

Mr. Speaker, let me now come to the money part, this is more important. Mr. Speaker, for the last 10 years, the whole Fiji economy has been treated by this Government as a political event, nothing about the economic management has been real. What was the distraction? What was the illusion?

Mr. Speaker, for the last 10 years, the Fiji economy has been run like a real bad magic show. It has not been entertaining, but we can all see how the magic tricks are done - borrow money, spend money, give out freebies under any name, it does not matter. It does not matter, as long as you spend. It does not matter if your spending is good or bad, as long as you spend. It does not matter if roads are fixed once, have to be fixed again in three years, as long as you spend, it does not matter if the money is wasted, just continue to spend.

Mr. Speaker, that is what FijiFirst economics is all about, that is the Bainimarama Boom. In fact, the Bainimarama Boom has now become a national joke, and all of these economics of illusion has worked to fool the people for 10 years, but now it is the end of the party. Suddenly, the Fiji Government is \$1 billion short of budgeted income and yet, still it believes that it will raise the projected income of \$3.4 billion in this financial year. It failed miserably by almost a billion dollar last year, cut expenditure by a billion dollar and expect to collect more than what they have collected last year.

The FRCS revealed this and all collection two months ago, it was \$2.813 billion in tax collections. We were told that it fell well short of the initially revised target of \$3.04 billion in June this year. It was further revised, Mr. Speaker, downwards to \$3.02 billion and, again, to \$2.8 billion. But as of 31st July, 2019, it fell acutely short in fulfilling its projections. In fact, we strongly believe that none of the projected revenue targets were achieved by FRCS in the last three years.

Mr. Speaker, this Government pride itself an increase in our nominal GDP since taking the Government by force in December 2006. But at what cost to the current and future generations of Fiji? Was the GDP grow on real sector growth or inflated through massive borrowing? The figures tell us why the vast majority of the people are in excruciating pain.

In 2007, Fiji's GDP stood at \$5.447 billion. For the 2019 financial year, the value of GDP is \$11.282 billion, 108 percent increase over the period. In 2007, on the other hand, Fiji's total debt level was \$2.73 billion. If Government fulfils its borrowing obligations of \$1.019 billion under the 2019-2020 Budget, as well as mix the projected loan repayment of more than \$670 million, the total debt as of July 2020 is projected to be around \$6.1 million. This means that debt level is increasing by 120 percent over the same corresponding period. This means that borrowing, Mr. Speaker, of \$3.446 billion in 13 years to increase GDP by \$5.83 billion. This would mean that the current Government borrowed \$3.446 billion to increase GDP, only to see the economy starting to decline. Mr. Speaker, 120 percent increase in borrowing to increase GDP by 108 percent, which is what you call the "Bainimarama Boom".

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- We can safely say, that the GDP, in my view, was always inflated. In fact, they were driving an economy on a faulty speedometer, I think, and hoping that this goal is going to be sustainable. It was not going to be sustainable. This is what things have come to now, Mr. Speaker, the Government is just fooling its fellow citizens. It is so scared of bad news, it prefers now to fool itself.

Mr. Speaker, managing the economy is about creating economic confidence, supporting private investment, creating jobs, creating new industries, and this is the tragedy of the Fiji economy today. In 10 years, we have not created one new major export sector, not even a minor one. The so called sugar industry reforms, are a joke. Our agricultural manufacturing sectors are struggling. Mr. Speaker, it is the worst kept secret in Fiji, that the Government has actually run out of money. Now we have the Ministry of Economy running around just managing one money crisis after another. Finally, the reality has its own. Mr. Speaker, if there is a major crisis, if there is a flooding or cyclone, I am wondering what the Government will do and where will they get the help.

Mr. Speaker, we do not want to be lectured. A lot of them lecture about a patriotic sense of responsibility. Who are the patriots? The people who demand the truth from this side or people who try to cover it up? That is the question I want to ask. How will we solve our economic problems, in fact, if you do not admit we are creating more instability and we are creating less confidence?

Mr. Speaker, this Government, and they must admit that they have got us into this mess. They have three years left before they are voted out. They know they will have to raise taxes, they know it and we know it too. However, they can deny that they are not going to raise taxes, they have to raise taxes.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear as daylight in the last 13 years of the Bainimarama regime and FijiFirst Government, the independence of our institutions supposed to be the bastions against the use of transparency, good governance, rule of law and upholding at all times our fundamental rights, and freedoms have been seriously eroded.

I concur with our colleagues from the Opposition when they talked about the way in which the Acting Chief Justice, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and the Police Commissioner were asked to go to Geneva to defend the Government at the Universal Periodic Review at UN Human Rights Council. There are many other issues with respect to independent institutions, for example, there is a Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, whose Director is also the Chairperson, he still has not produced reports for the Media Industry Development Authority over the last eight years.

In those violation of Section 14(g) of the Electoral Act 2014, the Joint Report of the Supervisor of Elections and the Electoral Commission was tabled in Parliament almost 10 months, Mr. Speaker, after the 2018 Election, not within three months as stipulated in the Act. So the sad and unmistakable reality is that, there is nothing being done to twirl the perceptions of double standards and the independence of these institutions.

Mr. Speaker, I am genuinely worried for Fiji's short-term economic future. The FijiFirst Party has no plan to resolve it. For years, the economic policy had been about politics, not economics. They are talking about the NBF scandal but, Mr. Speaker, I can say that the biggest scandal in this country, if one looks at carefully, will be the millions of dollars that this Government spent in 2014 and 2018 to buy votes, and that is why they are sitting on the other side. That is the biggest scandal.

This is what we want to say from this side of the House, Honourable Speaker, to the Honourable Prime Minister and to the Honourable Minister for Economy, because we believe that this is only a two-men Government. That is a fact. There are many hardworking people on the other side, but the fact is, that is a two-men Government, and that is why I am appealing to both the Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister for Economy - face the facts, admit the problem and ask for help. I think that would be leadership.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Face the facts that are staring at your face. Mr. Speaker, I talked about the disease - cognitive dissonance. When governments get into that disease, they do not want to believe, they think that what they are doing is right even though the facts are staring at their face. The facts are staring but you still ignore, that is a disease and I want this Government to get out of that disease - face the facts, admit that there are problems, there are issues of governance, managing the economy, there are issues of independent institutions, of Ministers and civil servants being able to do their jobs independently - these are all symptoms of a government which has become a zombie which is half-dead, half-alive. It is not going to be in the interest of this country if the Government takes the view that they can continue like this. I like the humour that the Honourable Waqainabete said, I can tell him now that I am not resigning, but I am sure someday, he will be on this side of the House.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has done its part. We have been talking about the failures of economic management and economic policies since 2015, and if they go and read what some of us said about how government was managing the economy in 2015, 2016, they will understand, and now know the mistakes they made. People are waking up to the magic show that you had for a long time.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- What we are saying from the Opposition side - face the facts, do not bury the facts, do not disregard what is staring in your face. If you allow the people of Fiji to work together which includes us working together here ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... we can solve the problem, but if you continue to pretend that the problems will go away then, Mr. Speaker, God help Fiji!. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Sugar Industry, the Honourable George Vegnathan. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition (who is not here), Honourable Members of Parliament: Good afternoon and *bula vinaka* to you all.

At the start of my deliberation, I just like to correct something here that it is not good to point finger at the Honourable Prime Minister who goes on trips, so that we benefit as a whole, but look at the other side of the House, currently when we are now have a Parliament sitting and we have so many Members missing, and yet we are asking for more sittings, this reflects very poorly and, yes, this warrants resignation definitely.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to contribute towards His Excellency's most gracious speech for the opening of 2019-2020 Parliament Session. In supporting His Excellency's speech, FijiFirst Government, under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister has achieved an unprecedented 10 years of consecutive economic growth which no other Government before this Government could achieve, if I can repeat that, which no other Government before this Government could achieve.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister has demonstrated, through his perseverance, dedication and diligence that small nations have capabilities to lead at international and world stages. It was a very proud moment, not only for Fiji but also for the whole of the South Pacific region, when our Prime Minister, the President of COP23 successfully delivered at the Climate Change Conference in Bonn, Germany.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, it has been a year since my appointment as Assistant Minister for the Sugar Industry. I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for having faith in me and giving me this opportunity to render my services to the people of our beloved country. During this period, I have learnt a lot under the leadership of our Prime Minister. I would also be failing in my duties if I do not acknowledge the contribution of all the Ministers and Members of the FijiFirst Caucus here for their guidance and assistance. I have also learnt something from the Opposition, I should not forget them, that is to never believe in the colourful stories they come up with to discredit the hard work of this Government.

I also thank the staff of the Ministry of Sugar Industry, the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), the Sugarcane Growers Council, the Sugarcane Growers Fund, the Sugar Industry Tribunal, the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji and the South Pacific Fertilizers Limited, who rendered their full support to make sure that the industry runs effectively and progresses.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this Government does not believe in band-aid solutions, rather it believes in providing constructive and solid solutions to address economic challenges.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, unlike the other side of the House, this Government does thorough research before implementing policies which are conducive to long-term economic growth, policies that provide suitable, practical and sustainable solutions to all Fijians. This Government believes in developing policies that are not biased to benefit a particular group of people. Instead, we focus on developing policies that have positive spill-over effects on each and every Fijian's life.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the impact of this Government's sound policies are showing positive results through increased investment which increases employment opportunities for all Fijians. There are so much employment opportunities in Fiji today that we have started to experience shortage of labour in sugar, agriculture, transportation and construction sectors.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, one should not forget the efforts of this Government to address the shortage of cane cutter problem through farm mechanisation.

As I speak, now we have 17 harvesters to harvest around 40 percent of our cane on our flat land areas. This has resolved the problem of shortage of cane cutters on flat land areas. Had this Government not taken this initiative to address labour shortage by introducing modern ways of doing farming through mechanisation, today our industry would be having difficulty in getting labourers.

The shortage of labour has driven demands by the cane cutters to a much higher level than what our working farmers are paying today. Sugar stakeholders have also explored the international market such as Brazil, Australia, Thailand, India and China to bring harvesting machines that are suitable for our cane farmers. It is a sad reality that there is no harvesting machine that is suitable to harvest cane on farms in hilly terrains.

The Ministry of Sugar Industry will not give up and will continue to explore other markets until we are able to get one because we know farm mechanisation is the way forward for this industry.

Here, I would like to address one of the issues raised by the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, my lecturer. She corrected me while I was a student, today I have a turn to correct her in her speech with limited facts and knowledge which raise two questions:

1. Why are we bringing the Vanuatu nationals to harvest cane; and
2. Why are we paying higher rate to Vanuatu nationals when we have so much unemployment in Fiji?

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- That is a true thing.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the reality is that, it is very difficult to get local cane cutters now. It is that the demand of the farmers are high because even if we give these local cutters the goodwill, food, kava, to name a few, demanded by a local cane cutter, that will leave our farmers with little or no profit at the end of the year. Even if the farmers meet world demands including goodwill before locals agree to harvest cane, many would leave in the middle of harvesting or some even do not harvest a single stalk of cane.

This real struggle our cane farmers are facing each and every day and this is why we have brought Vanuatu nationals. I wish to inform this august House that an expression of interest for locals to register as cane cutters was published in the *Dailies* which closed on 15th May, 2019. For the information of the Opposition, only 13 people registered as cane cutters. This was really shocking and also our field officers and farmers also went around looking for cane cutters, even after this advertisement was put on the paper, but very difficult to get our people to come and harvest cane. Probably, they have more other lucrative business or they may be involved in other farming.

In addition, our local cane cutters are demanding up to \$25 per tonne of cane excluding the goodwill, food and kava demands. By bringing labourers from Vanuatu, we paid them \$20 per tonne of cane and this has provided great relief to our cane farmers. Now, our farmers would not have to worry that the cutters would depart before or in the middle of harvesting. It provides relief from unrealistic demands from our local labourers which places greater pressures on the finance of farmers. This will ensure that growers have more money in their pockets.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, now and again the other side has demonstrated lack of depth of knowledge and facts on the reality. Again and again, instead of providing better alternative solutions, they have only criticised all good things, this side of the House is doing to resolve problems faced by our farmers. They had nothing to offer them and they have nothing to offer now and they will have nothing to offer in the future.

They are claiming that the government has run out of ideas but the truth is that the Opposition has nothing to run out of as there is nothing in their coffers apart from the half-baked solutions to any given economic challenges which is faced by our fellow Fijians. This government always believes in reducing the cost of production for our dear farmers. Reduction in production costs will increase profit to our farmers. This always has been the vision of the government to make the sugarcane farming a lucrative industry.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this government has been continuously working towards this vision where the government has been providing grants and subsidies to our growers. Never ever before, has any government apart from this, government provided grants to our cane farmers for planting cane, grants for repair access roads, grants for mechanising farms and subsidy on fertilizers and weedicides. Never before.

(Acclamation)

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- He is not misleading, it is the truth.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- He is misleading the House, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- In the drought in 1997 and 1998, the SVT Government gave a \$14 million grant to revive the sugar industry. That is a misleading statement, Honourable Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker Sir, just last week on Friday, the Ministry of Sugar Industry signed an agreement with 101 new cane farmers who will be assisted through new Farmers Assistance Grant.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Mr. Speaker, 101 new cane farmers. Under this grant the Ministry will meet lease acquisition cost to entice young and new farmers to venture into sugarcane farming. Since the inception of the new Farmers Assistance Grant in 2017, just in two years, the Ministry assisted a total of 209 farmers of which 58 are *iTaukei* farmers. This is a positive vibe for the industry.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, Ministry of Sugar Industry was provided with the total budget of \$70.4 million by the Government and this has enabled the industry to bring in positive changes and increase production in this country.

In addition, never ever in the history of Fiji, Sugar Cane Growers knew the price of sugarcane. It was unpredictable. Only this Government has assured and guaranteed to our sugar cane farmers that, that they will receive a guaranteed \$85 per tonne of cane by allocating \$30 million as Sugar Stabilisation Fund in the 2019/2020 Budget.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Such Government capital injections are showing results. Despite the catastrophic effect of *TC Winston* followed by *TC Josie* and *TC Keni*, our industry has fought back. Our production has increased from 1.3 million tonnes in 2016 to 1.69 million tonnes in 2018.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- As of 19th November, 2019, FSC crushed 1.62 million tonnes of cane producing 153,000 metric tonnes of sugar. It is anticipated that FSC will crush 1.8 million tonnes of sugarcane to produce around 170,000 metric tonnes of sugar by the end of 2019 crushing season.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister for Sugar Industry, this is the first time that the sugar industry will have a National Sugar Policy.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- This Sugar Policy will provide guidelines in seven thematic areas including climate change to progress towards three million tonnes of cane in the next five-year period.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, our Prime Minister's effort on his own on climate is unmatched even with the combined effort of the Honourable Members on the other side of the House.

On the international stage, Fiji is on the frontline of the global campaign to address the root cause of our changing climate by demanding decisive actions on an international scale to reduce harmful carbon emissions. This Government will keep fighting for global climate actions to protect our farmers from its devastating impacts while ensuring that we are more resilient.

At this juncture it would be appropriate to respond to the Honourable Kuridrani's question in which in summary he seeks to ascertain what Sugar Research Institute of Fiji is doing to improve quality and yield, develop new varieties and soil composition and structure of that land under cane cultivation.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, new varieties of cane seeds are not just developed over a day, a month or a year. It takes a minimum of 12 years to 15 years to develop one variety of cane. I am happy that the Honourable Member knows that it takes 12 years -15 years; that is good. Allow me to explain Honourable Kuridrani the process of developing an approved variety of sugarcane. This process is called the "breeding programme".

The plant breeding programme has four different stages. The first and early stage is called "single stool". At this stage, around 20,000 varieties of seedlings are planted at a location. Stage 2 is called "single line". At this stage, between 1,000 to 1,500 varieties of clone are selected and planted in single lines or rows. At Stage 3, further selections are made and around 120 varieties are selected and planted as observation plot. And Stage 4, further observation are made and approximately 10 to 15 varieties are selected and planted at multi-locations or on different soil types.

Stage 4 testing is conducted over a three-year duration which indicates how the variety will perform in the ratoon crops. At the end of Stage 4, SRIF is able to identify one or two promising variety of cane. The promising variety is then planted at large scale for mill testing. At the large mill trial, if the large mill trial is successful then the seed multiplication takes place before it is disseminated to farmers to plant.

To date SRIF has developed 19 approved varieties of cane which comprises of early, mid and late season maturing varieties that are suitable for Fiji conditions. There is good mixture of early, mid and late seasons available for our growers. SRIF continuously strives to educate farmers through the establishment of growers' demonstration trials and field days to increase yield. They also assist farmers to improve the quality of cane so that the Tonne of Cane (TC) Tonnes of Sugar (TS) improves.

Further on average, in a year SRIF conducts a minimum of 2,500 soil test to determine the nutrient status of soil composition and structure. Recommendations are also made to each farmer to achieve optimum yield.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, all members sitting on this side of the House have a vision that is united Fiji - one Fiji for all. But when you at the other side of the House, I can only see derogatory vision to divide Fiji. This side of the House believes in united we stand whilst on the other side of the House believes in divide and rule. This side of Government believes in equality and progressive Fiji while the Opposition believes in biasness and regressive Fiji; very poor.

Honourable Speaker, it has always been and still the other side of the House without doing any research, without finding the facts, without knowing the reality on the ground claims things and spread lies to demean the hard work of the FijiFirst Government. I therefore request Honourable Opposition Members to please do their research, speak with facts before they criticise the hard work of this Government.

With these words, I support His Excellency the President's keynote Address in the opening of 2019-2020 Parliament Session. Once again I thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir, and I wish each and every Honourable Member and all Fijians a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Assistant Minister for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members we will now suspend proceedings for lunch. Lunch is provided in the usual place and we resume at 2.30 p.m. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.35 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.31 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on His Excellency the President's Address. I now call on the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Sir. Honourable Speaker, Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Address on the 12th November, 2019 in formally opening the 2019-2020 Session of Parliament. It was a speech that exudes pride, hope, opportunity and patriotism. It was also a speech that acknowledged the challenges that we face as a nation and calling on a united Fiji. It was a speech that promised that we will continue with the reform agenda that he had set out in his speech last year and identified the new legislative agenda to add on to the current one. It was a speech that stressed on the importance of the Constitution in nation building. It was also a speech that drove home a few truths to us as Members of this august House, reminding us about the sanctity of the position that we hold and the responsibility that comes with that position.

Honourable Speaker, His Excellency also spoke about elements in society who seek to sow politics of fear rather than preach the proven power of unity. Honourable Speaker, this politics of fear, it is real. I have a real life experience that I would like to share with this august House. I am talking about the politics of fear that was sowed against some of us who were named in a curse. Not fear for ourselves but for our children who were also included in the curse.

I know that Honourable Qereqeretabua has apologised yesterday, albeit a conditional apology. But I would like to share this personal experience with you so that maybe in one small way we can, as Members of this august House, think seriously about statements that we so carelessly post on social media for the sake of political expediency or to borrow her own words "out of anger and disgust".

I speak not only as a Member of Parliament or as the Minister for Children, I speak as a mother whose children have been cursed by a leader of this nation by virtue of her membership of this august House. As a mother, I have tried as much as I could to shield my children from the trappings of politics, to give them an upbringing that any parent would want for their children.

The curse made my husband and I sit down with our 18-year-old and 13-year old, telling them to be cautious always about their safety when in school or when outside the house, telling our 18-year old child at University to be home before dark and to always make sure that she was with a friend no matter where she was. It made me paranoid as a parent, turning up to a birthday party our daughter was attending, to take her home when the party had barely started, out of fear for her safety.

That is fear, Honourable Speaker that is what fear does. What made us fearful as parents was first and foremost the fact that the curse was made by a Honourable Member of this House, a national leader against our children - children who did not sign up to be used as political football.

As a Member of this House, whether we like it or not, we attract a following of minds and we influence behaviours. That curse came from a place of deep irresponsibility and to quote the Honourable Member, "out of anger and disgust."

When we sow fear as Members of this House, when we speak out of anger and disgust targeting specific people we may not agree with, people react. People believe in what we say and as followers or non-followers, they can act to bolster or suppress what we say in this House. Such is the power we wield with the words that we speak. If anger and disgust become the cornerstone of what we say as national leaders, then what hope can the people we serve have in us.

Listening to the speeches made in this House over the past few days from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition down, we are all the same, speeches of “gloom and doom”, sowing politics of fear rather than preach the proven power of unity, elements we choose to undermine our prosperity rather than support Fiji's long-term economic growth and sustainability, to borrow His Excellency's words, speeches that obviously seek to score some political points by trashing His Excellency's speech and calling for the resignation of the Honourable Prime Minister and all of us on this side of the House - in their dreams.

Do they ever consider the impact of their speeches on the citizens of this nation? Is it the intention to cultivate and keep alive a spirit of ill-will, distrust and fear upon the people that we serve? What does that make them as national leaders? Is that the kind of leadership that they think the Fijian people want? I doubt it.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- No wonder His Excellency saw it fit to speak on this matter, and despite His Excellency's plea on this point, we still heard such speeches from the Opposition Members all week, and that is the reason why the word, ‘politics,’ will continue to attract a negative connotation. It is because of such irresponsible utterances that pay no regard to the greater good, statements that are made for political expediency, words that sow politics of fear and actions that mirror the nature of such statements.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Honourable Speaker, His Excellency spoke extensively about the Constitution and its cornerstone of equality, non-discrimination and the Bill of Rights, things that we would think that no one in their right mind could possibly oppose, especially the 51 Members of this Parliament.

Honourable Speaker, our assembly in this august House is the direct result of our Constitution and the critics of the supreme law of the land who happen to be sitting on the other side of the House, make us on this side of the House question again the integrity of those Members.

I have said this before and I say it again, because the same Members like us on this side of the House are here on the strength, validity and the legality of that Constitution. I take this time, Honourable Speaker, to remind all of us, that we are bound by a common oath to obey, uphold and maintain the same Constitution.

Honourable Speaker, I am humbled to be part of a Government that has the people of this country at heart, especially the vulnerable and marginalized members of our society. The core mandate of the Fijian Government remains service to all Fijians irrespective of gender, faith, ethnicity socio-economic status or geography. The net result is that while reaching the furthest is that we do not leave any Fijian behind. As a testament to this, an elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Naisogo of Nukulau Village on the border of Naitasiri and Ra, got married on Monday this week when Government's Rights, Empowerment and Cohesion (REACH) Team visited their village. The couple's eldest child is 42 years old and they have been living together all these years without getting married, because of inaccessibility to services, so Government takes those services to them where they live.

So today, I would like to acknowledge Government's REACH Team headed by Mr. Filipe Nayacalevu from the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and the partner agencies; Ministry of Justice Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM), Ministry of iTaukei Affairs (VKB), Legal Aid and the Fiji Police Force. For this week, this team has been combing the remote communities of the Tikina of *Nalawa*, Ra providing services to geographically marginalised Fijians.

Since its inception in 2015 to December 2018, REACH has provided essential government and non-government services to over 66,000 Fijians in 956 communities. Such services include births, deaths and marriages registration, actual weddings, Legal Aid services, VKB registrations, TIN registrations, social protection programme application, health checks, banking services, and the list goes on. It is also important to note that most of the communities visited are geographically-marginalised, making it a huge challenge for residents to access these services, which is why Government takes the services to them where they live.

Honourable Speaker, His Excellency also made mention of Fiji being signatory to all nine human rights treaties. The Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation is directly guided by three of them, namely the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The reality is that, as a nation, we need to consistently focus on the most vulnerable and marginalised in society if we are to realise our full potential. It is so easy to leave the furthest behind unreached and to widen inequality in an economy that is rapidly changing into a contemporary society like ours is, but my faith in Government and the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister gets renewed on a daily basis when I see first-hand the continued implementation of Government's social protection programmes for the vulnerable and marginalised in Fijian society. Laws and programmes that make them visible; programmes that tell them that Government cares and that they have not been forgotten:

- Poverty Benefit Allowance targeted at families that do not have a sustainable source of income;
- Social Pension for those over 65 years who are not earning an income and who do not have any other form of superannuation;
- Care and Protection Allowance for those single-parented children of school-going age without a sustainable source of income;
- Disability Allowance for people living with disabilities;
- Insurance Cover for all the primary beneficiaries of the 4 programs covering them for injuries, their homes in cases of fire and for their next of kin to help with funeral expenses for the primary beneficiary; also a \$3,000 cover to be given to their next of kin for those aged 60 years old and less and a reduced cover for those between 61 and 69 years old;
- Rural Pregnant Mother's Food Voucher Programme;
- Bus Fare Subsidies for the Elderly and Disabled.

That is only for the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Honourable Speaker.

In his Address, His Excellency also spoke about the dismantling of a culture of violence against women and girls. To this end, Honourable Speaker, the Government through the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation will before the end of this year, begin the process towards the consolidation of our first national action plan for the prevention of violence against women and girls. The Fijian Government recognises its obligation to prevent violence against women and girls and working closely with all relevant stakeholders and partners and in alignment with our national and international guiding commitments, including the National Development Plan, the National Gender Policy, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action amongst others.

The Fiji National Gender Policy was adopted in 2014 and the Ministry is drafting at present its forthcoming five-year Strategic Action Plan 2020 to 2025 of which elimination of violence against women and girls is a key component. The Government also recognises that we must now embark on a rigorous approach to prevent violence against women and girls while the concerted investment in violence

against women and girls response services continues and on this note, the Government acknowledges the sterling services provided by non-government organisations in response services over the years.

The National Plan of Action to prevent violence against women and girls aims to lead a whole of Government evidence-based, measurable and inclusive five-year National Prevention Plan of Action 2020 to 2025 with an emphasis on stopping violence before it starts. This includes scaling-up evidence-based policies, programmes and initiatives that promote transformative change and shifting the harmful social norms that drive violence against women and girls.

Honourable Speaker, still on the topic of gender equality in the areas of economic participation and opportunity, education, health and political empowerment, Fiji's ranking on the world economic forum's global gender gap has improved significantly in those areas since 2015 moving 15 places up in 2018. In fact, Fiji is the only Pacific Island country to be ranked in the World Economic Forum's Report.

Honourable Speaker, Government, through the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation also looks after the policy agenda and programmes relating to the elderly. Apart from the Social Pension Scheme for those aged 65 years and over, who no longer earn an income and have no other form of superannuation and the monthly bus fare subsidy for those aged 60 years and over, Government also administers three State homes for the elderly. Last week, I had the humble privilege of officiating at the ground-breaking event for the upgrade and extension of the Golden Age Home in Labasa. It is envisaged that the project will finish in July, 2021 and will showcase a fully elderly-friendly environment for residents. Similar upgrades will follow for the other two State homes for Lautoka and Suva.

Honourable Speaker, the Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises that the best interest of children should be respected at all times, and their special needs should be accommodated. A Child Sensitive Social Protection Programme is one which ensures the rights of the child and takes into account all the factors that might place children in a vulnerable position. The Care and Protection Allowance under the Government's Social Protection Programme today caters for all parents and guardians of children below the age of 18 years, who do not have a source of income, to cater for the immediate welfare and educational needs of their children. This assistance is not limited to children outside of State care but is also for children who are under the care of the Director, Social Welfare in residential homes across the country. It is this Government that has enabled all Fijian children to attain primary to secondary education for free and with free bus fare which undoubtedly has eased the financial burden off the shoulders of many poor families across the nation.

Honourable Speaker, persons with disabilities face various impediments to the enjoyment of their Human Rights and thus social protection programmes are required to employ the utmost sensitivity in regards to their needs. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires the Social Protection Programmes incorporate the key principles of, amongst other things, respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society and equality of opportunity and accessibility - key principles that are reflected in our 2013 Constitution.

The initiatives of the Fijian Government were well articulated by the Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar, when she delivered her address earlier this week.

To that end I would also like to pay tribute to the late Dr. Sitiveni Yanuyanutawa who passed away earlier this month. Dr. Yanuyanutawa was a man who committed the latter part of his life to addressing issues which impacted on the lives of persons with disabilities through his position as the Executive Director of the Fiji National Council for Persons living with disabilities. In that position he also worked closely with government in looking at needed policy reforms to plug the gaps that we had in

this area in anticipation of our signing up to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2017 and our national law that followed a few months after.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, His Excellency had also very powerfully reminded this august House about what needs to be done and what we must strive for. Members of this august House have been rightfully reminded that we must not lose sight of our pledge to our people - the very people who have put all of us here. His Excellency spoke about doing what is best for our country and that we think beyond gender, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status. The destiny of our country is in our hands, not only through the development commitments of government, but also through the words that we speak in this House and outside this House on issues that matter to the people that we serve, and I say this at an opportune time as we embark on the 16 days of activism on Gender-Based Violence beginning next Monday until 10th December, 2019. For those 16 days, let us try and put politics aside and all use our voices to denounce violence against women in all its forms.

As Members of this House, we are privileged in so many ways. With that privilege, Honourable Speaker, comes a huge responsibility - a responsibility to ensure that our words do not instil feelings of ill-will and distrust between ethnicities or communities or even gender, a responsibility to do away with racist divisiveness that led us to some of the darkest days in the life of our nation and our responsibility to advocate for unity in the face of our diverse ethnicities, cultures and tradition, to find strength in those diversities and to build bridges where these diversities seem insurmountable.

In doing that, we must always keep in mind that no difference will ever be worth driving the people that we serve against each other because it is ultimately to those people that we owe a duty and it is because of them that we serve. I thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for her contribution to the debate on His Excellency's Address. I now give the floor to the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, Honourable Aiyaz-Sayed Khaiyum. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank His Excellency and stand in support of the Honourable Prime's motion to thank His Excellency for his most gracious Address on the official Opening of the 2019-2020 Session of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the tradition is that when His Excellency the President gives his opening statement in Parliament, the Members of Parliament who speak after him, talk on His Excellency's Address as the speech lays out the government's plan for the year and indeed the government's philosophical outlook, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President talked not only about our Constitution but about the focus areas of Government and indeed he talked about nation-building. Nothing in His Excellency's Address or statement was untrue word nor is a departure from the Conventions that have been set out and carried out since Independence where sitting governments, through the Head of State, gives a statement laying out government's plans for the year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, but what we have seen that the Opposition Members have not only chosen, beginning from the Leader of the Opposition, which is completely unbecoming of him, however, we have become accustomed to him making unbecoming statements, and indeed engaging in many unbecoming actions right from 1987 when he became Prime Minister under the racist 1990 Constitution.

His term in office saw the escalation of enormous levels of corruption, collapse of the National Bank of Fiji, the unbecoming behaviour of him when he was Prime Minister and more ways than one and, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, his subsequent actions post-1999.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he implicitly and explicitly berated and so did his Members of Opposition berated His Excellency the President. At no stage, Mr. Speaker, Sir, did they have any objection, if they had any reason to disagree with His Excellency the President, they had, at no stage, since Monday, given a viable alternative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have not given an iota of alternative philosophical outlook for this country, they have not given an iota of sound economic policies, they have not given an iota of sound policies that would deliver better and improve services for all Fijians, they have not given an iota of inclusiveness (If you see, most of the statements have been completely exclusive - not inclusive at all); they have not given an iota of implementation - how do you implement civil, political and socio-economic rights, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There is not only a bankruptcy in the ideas or the lack of ideas by the Opposition, there appears to be a moral and ethical bankruptcy too in aptitude. There has been a failure as demonstrated throughout the week of the Opposition to grasp from very basic fundamental ideas and philosophies, where Honourable Nawaikula (unfortunately he is not here), who says on social media that the reason why Government will stop students from getting subsidised cards during the school holidays is because we do not have any money. When the purpose of the blue card is for students who go to school, if there is no school, obviously there is no card.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Be logical, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is what you call "prudent management", this is the kind of obtuse and nonsensical statements that we are getting, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also heard from someone else from the other side (I think it was Honourable Qereqeretabua), who talked about Government borrowing money from the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), and I will try and focus on the economic and financial parts of these statements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FNPF has been lending money to the Ratu Mara Government; the Rabuka Government; the Chaudhry Government; the Qarase Government; the Bainimarama Government and the FijiFirst Government. There is absolutely nothing untoward about that. What she does not understand, Mr. Speaker, and fail to grasp in a very pedestrian approach to economic fundamentals is that superannuation funds need to lend and invest money. So, you will find FNPF is building buildings, they lend money, buy bonds not only in Fiji but offshore, why? Because they get a return, when they get a return on those funds, then the value of your funds goes up. That is why till today, that is why till today, we have one of the highest rates of return in FNPF, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that again the pedestrian sort of knowledge of economics was applied, they said was that, apart from the fact the FNPF has now won international awards, they are saying that FNPF is not doing the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would accept the proposition if FNPF was lending towards at non-market rate, if you are getting discounted rates, they are most certainly lending towards at market rates.

The other thing they said was that we are borrowing onshore only because we can borrow from FNPF. Anyone who has a sound basis or knowledge of economics would know that it is always better to have debt onshore than to have debt offshore. You can have some offshore debts, the reason why you have onshore debts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is because you are not then vulnerable to foreign currency fluctuations. If you borrow offshore in US dollars, if tomorrow the value of US dollar goes up, your debt may jump from \$50 million to \$70 million, you get certainty in borrowing onshore - from banks, financial institutions, FNPF being one of them.

So, again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the level of contribution that we have had from the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make is that, there are other superannuation funds throughout the world. You go to Australia, the return rate is about 3 percent or 2 ½ percent, they also invest offshore, they also invest in banks, they also lend money, so there is nothing untoward about what they are doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I want to make was, we have our A350 - the first one is going to land at about 12.30 p.m. this Saturday. It is a very proud moment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because we are the first country in the South Pacific to get a A350.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Tell them.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Now apart from the fact that it is the largest aircraft, apart from the fact that it has got lower carbon footprint, it burns less fuel to get longer distances, it has far more business for our seats, it is a much broader product for us to be able to market and be able to fly to longer destinations like maybe to Chicago, to India, Thailand and various other places non-stop which means we will get more tourists coming in, getting to main catchment areas, flying to Dallas where the American Airline is based - all of these positive things are done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I like to also publically acknowledge the Fijian rugby players who are in France. Many of them who were able to get away from the training turned up. We had the session in the night before, they turned up for the traditional ceremony we had when the handing over of the plane took place. They turned up with their friends, families, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I want to acknowledge them, because they were also very proud. We are also very proud that they participated.

We had social media posts, everyone is commenting saying, "What a wonderful thing, proud to be a Fijian" - Fijians from all over the world, and amidst all of these, the Honourable Rasova puts up a post amidst all of this. (This is a man who I understand has worked in the travel industry), he says, 'Isa, Fiji Airways, some of your laws on tickets are non-refundable and non-transferable - \$100,000 ripped off by your company over the years, making you filthy cash rich, and poor poorer', and it does an emoticon like this (indicating). It is the most vulgar emoticon you can do - it is here.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Shame, shame!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Rasova, please, do not laugh, it is a serious matter. This is the level of contribution we now see from the Opposition. When the entire country, our young people, everyone in the travelling industry is proud, we get this kind of comments, why? Because the Opposition is not used to the idea of being in the Opposition. They do not know how to remodel themselves to be an effective Opposition. That is the problem, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I wanted to say

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will come to that very soon. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Gavoka's entire statement almost was replete with ethnic analysis. Mr. Speaker, Sir, you cannot run a modern nation's State on the basis of ethnic division. You cannot get good economic status through economic division.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition, after 1987, tried his EIMCOL (I think it was called), through the FDB. The Qarase Government tried the Blueprint, we know what the realities were after that, they were monumental failures. Who bought the Class A shares? They were the elites. Can the ordinary Pauliasi in the village get to buy Class A shares? No, it was the elites predominantly sitting in Suva who got to buy the Class A shares. Why did the people who started the EIMCOL supermarkets go, disappeared, debts not paid off?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the fundamental issue and that is, you help poor people based on their needs, of who they are, not about their ethnicity because invariably, you cannot homogenise people on that basis. He talked about the *iTaukei* people being poor, of course, some of them are poor but, of course, at the same time there are Indo-Fijians, there are other groups in Fiji who are also poor. We do not go around saying, "These group of people should only be given assistance", no, we did it on a needs basis, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is the hard call.

There was a study, Mr. Speaker, Sir, done in the 1980s, 1990s by the United Nations that said at that point in time that the Indo-Fijians were very poor because they are landless. Now, you can go on harping all about ethnic groups but what we are doing, what this Prime Minister has done under his leadership, he said, "We help people where there is a need."

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You may be helping a group of people at that point in time, there may be all 100 percent one ethnic group, another point in time 50 percent. It is done on a needs basis that is the only way you can progress, you create transparency, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

If we are going to do an ethnic analysis, the Honourable Minister for Women has just spoken. She did not say a break-down of gender violence on the basis of ethnicity, she did it on the basis of gender. You do not actually help people, Mr. Speaker, should your level of sympathy, should your level of sensitivity be based on who the victim is, based on their ethnic group? No, it should be based on the basis of you and them needing that particular assistance and you are helping them. That is the reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make was that, there was a number of comments and again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Qereqeretabua said, 'Oh, you know, the Prime Minister and AG always talk about us being like Singapore and Singapore does ethnic analysis and therefore that is why we should do that.'

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is such generalisation.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Singapore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, also buys water from Malaysia. Does that mean we buy water from Tonga now? Singapore uses the jungle in Indonesia and Malaysia, do we do that now? Singapore has national service, do we do that now? The point being, you do not

generalise like that, the point being, you need nuance approach to understanding economics, understanding philosophy, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I wanted to also say is that, the Opposition, I was trying to think about how do I categorise them. I think they are the greatest obscurantist and obfuscators. Obscurantist, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will tell you afterwards, obscurantist, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are people who deliberately hide facts. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they deliberately hide facts and obfuscators ...

(Acclamation)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... are people who try and cloud over facts. The greatest obscurantist and obfuscators, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me point out the philosophical hypocrisy by the other side.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- All of the members of SODELPA when they joined this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, stood right over here, held up the *Bibles* and swore to uphold the Fijian Constitution. They swore to uphold the Fijian Constitution.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. After saying "*Ameni Jisu*" so loudly they are the first ones who now berate the Constitution. That is the level of hypocrisy that we see, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- How can you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, trust a bunch of politicians, on one hand hold the *Bible* and swear to uphold the Constitution but the next minute berate the Constitution. If they are so critical of it, they should not be here, they should not be participating in here, they should not have participated in the Elections, they should not have sworn a false oath; that is your problem.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was not going to comment on Honourable Qereqeretabua's curse as a lot of people have said.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what has actually prompted me to get into this debate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that she defended herself when Honourable O'Connor yesterday spoke about it and she said, "I did not mean all children".

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In other words, she meant our children and then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, she went on to justify about the fact that children will pay for the sins of their fathers by third and fourth generations by quoting Numbers; that is the Old Testament, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, anyone that has a basic understanding of Christian theology and eschatology, Mr. Speaker, Sir, would know that through the New Testament, I know more about religious studies than you my friend, the New Testament through the theological belief of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his love for everyone, everyone knows that the belief in one and one person be held accountable for their own sins is what matters. To quote parts of the Old Testament selectively is actually, Mr. Speaker, Sir, quite hypocritical because if she is going to quote from the Old Testament, then "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth matters, eating flesh of swine matters", that is from the Old Testament, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Remember Jesus Christ when the woman was being stoned and Christ said, "If you have not sinned then you cast a stone"; remember that, remember that? That is what she should understand.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have been selective, there has been a barrage of attacks on the Honourable Prime Minister, and I think the Honourable Members are riding high in what I call the "SLR glamour train" and that glamour train I am telling you and the shine is wearing off really quickly. And I remember some of our supporters after the results of the last elections were somewhat despondent about the result saying that it was such a narrow margin. I said to them, "God works in mysterious ways" and I tell you why because today, in the past one week has been a perfect example of how you have demonstrated to all the Fijian citizens and in particular who voted for you, your ineptitude, inability to run an effective Government and I tell you, Honourable Gavoka said will be toast in the next election. We will be the toast, God willing will be toast of the town, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will also talk extremely quickly because the other side have continuously cited all the numbers, because you have got this many hundred votes,

therefore you are not legitimate. Let me give you some example, I said this, I pulled this out from the *Hansard*. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2006 elections, SDL got only 44.6 percent of the votes and got 36 seats majority.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER. - There you go!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2001, the SDL received only 26 percent of the votes but got a majority seats of 32. That is how the electoral system works; Single Member Constituency. Donald Trump did not get majority of the votes from the Americans but through the Electoral College votes, he has won the presidency. That is how the system works. No point harping on about it. You are there, we are here, as I said. We beat them 33 to 31, it was a win! That is the reality of it, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The NFP, this is “johnny come lately party” to Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In the 2006 elections, they won 11.7 percent of the votes, but they did not win a single seat, they just scrapped over 5 percent, they won 3 seats in this elections under this system.

(Inaudible interjection)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I want to also highlight, they go on about the 1997 Constitution, and very quickly I want to highlight this point from a legal perspective. In the 1997 Constitution, we were divided along *iTaukei*, Indo-Fijians et cetera, in those days they were “called Fijian- Indian seats. The *iTaukei* people had 23 seats of which 6 seats were reserved for, what we call, “Urban *iTaukei*” voters. Urban *iTaukei* voters, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in those days were about 42 percent to 45 percent of the entire *iTaukei* population, but they got only 6 seats out of 23. That is the system they want to go to. I want all the Urban *iTaukei* people to understand what they are saying.

What they are also saying, if they want to go back, in those days you voted along the provincial lines, for each province they have one seat except Ba, Cakaudrove and Tailevu. I want the people of Nardoga to know that Honourable Gavoka is saying, “it is alright for Namosi with 3,000 voters to elect one person and Nadroga with 19,000 people to get only one voter”. That is what I want them all to know. I want the people of Fiji to know that Honourable Nawaikula says that my opinion does not matter because I am young, even though I am 54 years old. But as the Honourable Prime Minister highlighted, “70 percent of our population is below the age of 40 and 50 percent is below the age of 27.” I want our young people to know that Honourable Nawaikula and his party and his leadership do not value the ideas of young people.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Shame!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is what he is saying. If I am too young at 54, then what are they?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, a Point of Order regarding the Honourable Minister of Economy misleading the House. Misleading the House because no one said what he is saying. We are just explaining the Electoral Systems of 1997 and 2013, where the popularity of one person has taken all of them inside. Some of them got less than 1,000 votes. So he is misleading the House there.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Resign, resign.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! Your point is taken. You have the floor, Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just before I get on to the economy also in detail, I think the greatest threat to the *iTaukei* people are the likes of Members like the Honourable Bulitavu and the Honourable Nawaikula who spread DVDs and falsehood.

Do I have time? I am told to stop.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very quickly on the economy. I just want to highlight as we have been told continuously, there is no confidence in the economy et cetera, but these are the very people who are trying to undermine the confidence.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they do not understand when they talk about economic analysis as Honourable Bulitavu talked about the economy, at no stage did anyone of them talk about the effect of *Tropical Cyclone Winston*. Why talk one-third of the value of our GDP within 36 hours? We had a \$500 million rebuild. They are shaking their heads as if they understand economics. Completely no understanding!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They are shaking their heads as if they understand economics.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Completely no understanding!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- A \$500 million rebuild Mr. Speaker, Sir. Notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our debt to GDP ratio is far lower than what it is supposed to be.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prasad, unfortunately he is not here, tried to say the level of debt has increased greater to the level of our increment in GDP per capita. Completely false, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Honourable Nawaikula talked about FMIS. FMIS is up and running Mr. Speaker. Yes, it was down, it did not stop any payments, the payments were being made. We have in our banks sitting a \$150 million as I speak, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is no cash flow issue. They are the ones trying to cause disquiet in the economy, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make was one of the other key measures of measuring how well the economy is doing is to look at your inequality provisions, what you call the "gini co-efficient".

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the World Bank pointed out that Fiji is one of the five countries in the Asia-Pacific region where inequality has actually dropped.

HON. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- There are many countries, whilst the GDP per capita has gone up or the overall growth in GDP, but the inequality actually increase. Fiji is one of the very few countries where inequality has actually decreased, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the service delivery, of course Honourable Salote Radrodro knows a lot about service. I wanted to very quickly also, a very fundamental issue, it was very interesting, I find them that they are so selective. When there is good news, the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) gives good news, they say RBF is compromised. When the RBF has given a revised GDP growth, they say RBF has said 1 percent.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- This is the kind of hypocrisy that we see.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly, our inflation sits at, as we speak, -0.9 percent compared to October last year, the price of goods have all come down. The other point that I would also like to make, when the economy slows down, a slow growth rate does not mean contraction. Please try and understand that basic idea. The economy is still growing, I have reached out to the members of the other side.

I have a full list of the growth rates of the Fijian economy since Independence and you will see a track record. The point that we are trying to make about the ten-year growth is that it is a consecutive growth. If you see in the previous governments, yes, in some of the terms, Honourable Rabuka was there and Honourable Ratu Mara was there. There were growth rates for five to six years. That was the maximum it went to and then it would go into negative growth, then positive growth, negative, negative, positive. What we are saying, when you have consistency in growth, it gives confidence to businesses. I just got off the phone this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with a business and as we announced in the Budget, we are building warehouses. There are about five or six companies that are building warehouses. It keeps the economy robust, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

These are made available Mr. Speaker, and I also wanted to say

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Sit down!

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Speaker, he is saying that there was negative growth. I have the figures here, there is no negative growth during the Alliance and SVT days. There is no negative growth.

It is here, this is from the Bureau of Statistics, so where are you getting your figures from?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- What I am saying, there needs to be an independent assessment of your figure and our figures because that is biased.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Honourable Attorney-General said there was negative growth, there was positive, there was negative. Obviously, you two have a different list.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I urge the Honourable Member to get these figures from us. These are official statistics. We cannot rely on statistics you produced, Honourable Gavoka produced some debt to GDP ratio was completely incorrect.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last point I would like to make, as far as the economy is concerned, with your indulgence is that they talk about we have a consumption led economy. They need to understand that we are not the economy of the 1970s and 1980s where we, what we call, basically primary based economy, where you had sugar, pine, fish. We now have other factors in the economy. We have tourism that contributes over close to 36 percent of our economy. Obviously, it is a service-driven sector. We have, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our financial services sector, we have communications, food and beverage, accommodation, we have call centres now. All of these things are what you call services-driven sector that contributes to the overall GDP growth in the country. So they need to understand that we are not caught in the 1970s and the 1980s, they need to get on with the programme.

We are currently talking to Silicon Valley. As announced, we are moving our Trade Commission Office from Los Angeles to San Francisco to tap into the Silicon Valley. I met with two people who are helping us do coding courses here, so our young people can get into coding and into the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) space. That is the new way of looking at things, not you being caught up in how many people in that sector, in sugarcane, this that. Of course, that is important, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the last point that I want to make, last point. Honourable Qereqeretabua, talked a lot about that young 16-year-old who was allegedly harassed, and I want to get into the police.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was a case in 2000 and it is called Epeli Seniloli versus the Attorney-General and Semi Voleti. Semi Voleti was a 14-year-old boy, who was detained by police for four hours in an allegation of stealing tinned tuna. He was handcuffed to the post outside the police post in Nadera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my point being that, what you are citing is not necessarily unique. The issue is, has it been dealt with or not? Are we dealing with it? There are police officers, as we speak, who had breached the law and they are being prosecuted. That is what we need to do. In countries, like Australia and New Zealand, they do that. I can talk about a prisoner's death in custody. The point that we should be working towards in human rights cases, we need to collaborate, work together whether there is actually material recourse available to the people who are the victims of crime.

Last point about the police, they talked about the morale of the police.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is related to the police.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Qereqeretabua talked about the morale of the police being so low. I will tell you when the decay was set, Mr. Speaker, Sir. When Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka carried out the *coup* in 1987, they locked up the then Commissioner of Police, P.U. Raman, in his underpants in the cell of Suva Police Station. That is what they did.

And, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the salaries of police constables in 2006 was \$9,000 per year. Today, the salaries of police constables in 2019/2020 range from \$16,000 to \$18,000. We have a \$125 million restructure that is taking place to help our Police Force modernise. No amount of head-shaking, no amount of denying the facts, we have said continuously that we recognise what previous governments have done, you also have to recognise that under this Prime Minister, we have the greatest level of development that has ever taken place, unprecedented. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Attorney-General for his contribution to the debate. That ends the list of speakers for today. We have one more speaker on His Excellency's Address and that is the right of reply by the Prime Minister which will be tomorrow. Now, I am letting you in on some information which I always keep to myself because some of you are starting to think that I am giving too much overtime to the Attorney-General. I know you think that.

When I am here, I take your time of speaking, all of you. And I accumulate the minutes that are not used by others.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I have done that when I was the Speaker before. The two opening speakers here, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, they kept to their time beautifully. All the others, either went over, some went under, and when you go under I will keep a tab of that and if there is time left, and that is why some people on this side went over, I let them because they still have minutes, that is how you work this thing. I am not favouring this side or this side, and particularly when someone on this side in particular is speaking and I give them time, people are saying, "Oh...oh...this is a Bau, Rewa thing", not like that.

(Laughter)

I am giving time because you have got time to spare. In fact, you have another 5 minutes to spend but you will not get it.

(Laughter)

Honourable Members, we will move on to the next Agenda Item and I have been informed that there are no Bills for consideration today.

Honourable Members, the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad is not here today and most probably tomorrow because he is attending a funeral gathering and then the funeral tomorrow, as he has notified me on that.

We will now adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.30 when we will take the Right of Reply. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 3.27 p.m.