

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 31ST AUGUST, 2020

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Minutes	1597
Communications from the Chair	1597-1598
Presentation of Papers and Certain Documents	1598
 Presentation of Reports of Committees	 1599-1605
(1) Review Report on the Madrid Agreement, Madrid Protocol and Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property - Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence	
(2) Review Report of the Office of the Auditor-General 2019 - Standing Committee on Public Accounts	
(3) Review Report on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict - Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence	
(4) Review Report on the Office of the Prime Minister 2016/2017 Annual Report - Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights	
 Ministerial Statements	 1605-1619
(1) COVID-19 Unemployment Assistance	
(2) Role and Functions of the Land Use Division	
 Public Health (Amendment)(No.2) Bill 2020	 1619-1620
Pharmacy Profession (Amendment) Bill 2020	1621-1622
Television (Amendment) Bill 2020	1622-1625
Companies (Amendment) Bill 2020	1625-1627
Immigration (Amendment) Bill 2020	1627-1630
Citizenship of Fiji (Amendment) Bill 2020	1631-1632
Passports (Amendment) Bill 2020	1633-1635
Housing Authority 2015 Annual Review Report	1636-1652
Ministry of Defence, National Security & Immigration 2016 Bi-Annual Review Report (January-July 2016)	1653-1662
Suspension of Standing Orders	1662-1663
Special Committee of Inquiry on the Impacts of Drug-Related Abuse	1664-1685
 Questions	 1685-1706
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) High Average TCTS Recorded by FSC (Q/No. 91/2020)	
(2) Shipping Accidents on Fiji Waters (Q/No. 92/2020)	
(3) Repayment of the Global Bond – US\$200 million (Q/No. 93/2020)	
(4) Drug Shortage for Chronic Diseases (Q/No. 94/2020)	
(5) Update on Health Facilities & Personnel – COVID-19 Cases (Q/No. 95/2020)	
(6) Toppers Scholarships Priority Areas & TELS Categories (Q/No. 96/2020)	
(7) Update on Government Shipping Franchise Scheme (Q/No. 97/2020)	
(8) Update – FNPF Unemployment Assistance (Q/No. 98/2020)	
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Medical Service Update (Q/No. 99/2020)	
(2) COVID-19 \$40 Million Allocation (Q/No. 100/2020)	
(3) First Homeowners - 2019-2020 Housing Grant Scheme (Q/No. 101/2020)	
(4) Land Lease Payments for Forest Reserves (Q/No. 102/2020)	
(5) National Toppers Scheme and \$35.5 Million Budgetary Allocation (Q/No. 103/2020)	

MONDAY, 31ST AUGUST, 2020

The Parliament met at 9.31 a.m., pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Josai Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications
Hon. Lt. Col. Inia Batikoto Seruiratu, Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing
Hon. Parveen Kumar Bala, Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports
Hon. Mereseini Rakuita Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment
Hon. Rosy Sofia Akbar, Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts
Hon. Cdr. Semi Tuleca Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries
Hon. Osea Naiqamu, Minister for Forestry
Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya, Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport
Hon. Jone Usamate, Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources
Hon. Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete, Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Premila Devi Kumar, Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development
Hon. Alexander David O'Connor, Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services
Hon. Veena Kumar Bhatnagar, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
Hon. Vijay Nath, Assistant Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services
Hon. Alvick Avhikrit Maharaj, Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports
Hon. Alipate Tuicolo Nagata, Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports
Hon. Jale Sigarara, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Development
Hon. Viam Pillay, Assistant Minister for Environment and Rural Development
Hon. Joseph Nitya Nand, Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts
Hon. George Vegnathan, Assistant Minister for Sugar Industry
Hon. Selai Adimaitoga, Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs
Hon. Mosese Drecala Bulitavu
Hon. Mitieli Bulanauca
Hon. Viliame Rogoibulu Gavoka
Hon. Dr. Salik Ram Govind
Hon. Ro Teimumu Vuikaba Kepa
Hon. Sanjay Salend Kirpal
Hon. Inosi Kuridrani
Hon. Dr. Ratu Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu
Hon. Ratu Naiqama Tawake Lalabalavu
Hon. Mikaele Rokosova Leawere
Hon. Ratu Suliano Matanitobua
Hon. Niko Nawaikula

Hon. Vijendra Prakash
Hon. Professor Biman Chand Prasad
Hon. Lenora Salusalu Qereqeretabua
Hon. Adi Litia Qionibaravi
Hon. Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka
Hon. Aseri Masivou Radrodro
Hon. Salote Vuibureta Radrodro
Hon. Simione Rokomalo Rasova
Hon. Jese Saukuru
Hon. Rohit Ritesh Sharma
Hon. Lynda Diseru Tabuya
Hon. Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua
Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau
Hon. Peceli Waqairatu Vosanibola

Absent

Hon. Ratu Tevita Navurelevu

MINUTES

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 31st July, 2020, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also welcome all those watching the live broadcast and the live streaming of today's proceedings from the comfort of their home, offices and mobile phones. Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament.

Handing-Over Ceremony - CWP Fiji Group

Honourable Members, later today during the morning refreshment's break, there will be a handover ceremony by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Fiji Group to the Fiji Red Cross Society. For the further information of all, the CWP Fiji Group comprises of all 10 women Honourable Members and is chaired by the Honourable Deputy Speaker. The handover ceremony will take place at the Big Committee Room and I invite all Honourable Members to attend.

Parliament Live Streaming – You Tube Channel

On a final note, Honourable Members, despite the indefinite deactivation of the Parliament's *Facebook* live streaming, I am pleased to inform Honourable Members that effective from today's Sitting, the Parliament's live streaming will also be available on *You Tube*. Members and viewers can access this channel by visiting the *You Tube* page and typing in 'Parliament of the Republic of Fiji'. Thank you, Honourable Members.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the Pacific Fishing Company Pte Limited 2018 Annual Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the Pacific Fishing Company Pte Limited 2018 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs.

I now call upon the Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources to table his Reports. You have the floor, Sir.

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

- (1) 2011-2013 Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources Annual Reports;
- (2) August 2016-July 2017 Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources Annual Report; and
- (3) August 2017-July 2018 Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources Annual Reports.

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

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

Under Standing Order 38(2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources:

- (1) 2011-2013 Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources Annual Reports;
- (2) August 2016-July 2017 Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources Annual Report; and
- (3) August 2017-July 2018 Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources Annual Reports.

Thank you, Honourable Members. We will now proceed to the next Item.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to table his Report. You have the floor Sir.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report on the Madrid Agreement, Madrid Protocol and Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property - Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report to the House.

On 28th May, 2020, the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji referred the following Treaties to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, the:

- (1) Madrid Agreement Concerning the International Registration of Marks 1981 (Madrid Agreement);
- (2) Protocol Relating to the Madrid Agreement (Madrid Protocol), (together known as the Madrid System); and
- (3) Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.

The Madrid Agreement was established in 1891 to provide a mechanism that would allow for a single and inexpensive international trademark registration and to eliminate the need for filing, prosecuting or maintaining separate registrations in multiple countries. It came into force in 1892.

The Madrid Protocol was established in 1989. It was created to address perceived defects in the Madrid Agreement, and to make the international system of registration of marks more flexible and compatible with the domestic legislation of individual States.

The Paris Convention was established in 1883. It was created to provide protection for industrial property, including patents, trademarks, industrial designs, utility models, service marks, trade names, geographical indications and to repress unfair competition.

The Committee heard submissions from stakeholders online using the *Microsoft Office 365 Teams Applications* for the duration 8th June, 2020 to 17th August, 2020, and also received oral and written submissions from Government, law firms, Fiji Performing Rights Association (FPRA) and Intellectual Property Office New Zealand (IPONZ). The Committee also visited Fiji Intellectual Property Office (FIPO) on Monday, 17th August, 2020, to ascertain the readiness of FIPO to meeting the requirements of the Madrid Systems.

Government and statutory authorities affirmed that Fiji is ready to accede to the above Protocols for its benefits as follows:

- (1) Acceding to the Conventions will demonstrate Fiji's commitment to the development of its legal framework with respect to intellectual property. In addition, acceding to the Conventions also reinforces Fiji's intent to uplift its business and investment climate by enhancing the ease of doing business and the digitalFIJI initiatives.
- (2) The intent of the Conventions are to provide a streamlined system of international registration of marks where applicants can protect their marks in several jurisdictions by filing one application, paying one set of fees and in one language.
- (3) Additionally, the Paris Convention intends to provide for the protection of industrial designs, trade names and indications of source, and to protect against unfair competition. Accession to the Conventions will ensure that Fiji is compliant with its international obligations for the protection of intellectual property.

There were disagreements from some Fiji law firms noting that the:

- (1) relevant laws are not in place to effect the rigours or the challenges of the Madrid Systems;
- (2) FIPO does not have the capacity to meet the requirements of the Madrid Systems that include a digital process and timely processing; and
- (3) win-win situation is to maintain the imperial system and raise fees whilst Fiji builds the capacity to accede to the Madrid Systems in time.

The Committee recommends that:

- (1) Fiji accedes to the Convention and adopts without reservation after passing the following Bills in Parliament:
 - (a) Trademarks Bill 2020;
 - (b) Patents Bill 2020;
 - (c) Designs Bill 2020; and
 - (d) WIPO certifies that FIPO is compliant to implement the requirements of the Madrid Systems.
- (2) Government directs and strengthens resources to the Fiji Performing Rights Association (FPRA) to protect Copyrights and pass the Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Culture laws.

The Committee acknowledges and commends the contributions by stakeholders in Fiji and in New Zealand that assisted in the preparation of this Report. I take this opportunity to thank the Members of my Committee, including the Secretariat for compiling this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament. Thank you, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4)(a), the Standing Committee has now reported back. We will move on.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report of the Office of the Auditor-General 2019 -
Standing Committee on Public Accounts

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the 2019 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG). This Report provides the detail of the review that was carried out by the Committee.

The OAG is established under Section 151 of the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, and the Audit Act 1969 further specifies the powers of the Auditor-General to audit the whole of Government's Financial Statements and the reports of all the entities of Government. It also empowers the Auditor-General to conduct performance audit of the Government entities, to assure

Parliament that the entities are achieving their objectives effectively and doing so economically and in compliance with all relevant legislations.

The Auditor-General is responsible, on behalf of Parliament, to audit the accounts of all the Government agencies, State Owned Entities (SOEs), Statutory Authorities (SAs), Municipal Councils and Provincial Councils, except for its own Office and those entities that may have been exempted by law.

The Auditor-General carried out the audit in accordance with the relevant provisions of the standards on auditing issued by the Fiji Institute of Accountants or other relevant standards considered appropriate. Moreover, Section 152(1) of the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, states and I quote:

“At least once in every year, the Auditor-General shall inspect, audit and report to Parliament on:

- (a) the public accounts of the State;
- (b) the control of public money and public property of the State ; and
- (c) all transactions with or concerning the public money or public property of the State.”

At the outset, I commend the OAG in clearing 80 percent of the backlog accounts which involved 264 accounts being submitted to OAG for audit as at 31st July, 2019, of which 151 accounts had been audited and out of 264 accounts audited, 186 accounts audited were in backlog. The Committee has taken note of the challenges in clearing the backlog that involved the:

- (1) significant time taken to sign the audited financials;
- (2) unavailability of key responsible client personnel;
- (3) ultimate provision of records for audit verification;
- (4) unresolved accounting issues;
- (5) late submission of draft financials for audit; and
- (6) resources being tied up to undertake backlogged audits.

It is important to note that the OAG is funded through an annual appropriation by Parliament. This enables OAG to fulfil its audit mandate of public sector entities and these include; financial audits, performance audits and special investigations.

In the 2018-2019 financial year, the OAG had received a one-line budget with an allocation of \$6.6 million, compared to \$4.6 million in the 2017-2018 financial year, which was an increase of 43.6 percent. The Committee commended the work of OAG and the support provided throughout the scrutiny of all audit reports that were referred to the Public Accounts Committee, and also the responses provided during the deliberation of this Report.

I sincerely thank all the Honourable Members of the Committee for their valuable contribution in the successful compilation of the bipartisan Report, namely; Honourable Joseph Nand - Deputy Chairperson; Honourable Vijendra Prakash; Honourable Aseri Radrodro; and Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa. I also wish to acknowledge the Secretariat for their support in the compilation and finalisation of this bipartisan Report.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I can hear you and I can see you as well.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on. I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, Honourable Alexander O'Connor, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict - Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

The Committee when reviewing the Treaty heard oral submissions, received written submissions, as well as holding virtual online public consultations in Suva and with Canberra, Australia, from relevant stakeholders and the general public. This is in line with Government and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services' restrictions on physical distancing on the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Fiji signed the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 2nd July, 1993, and ratified the CRC on 13th August, 1993. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (Optional Protocol) is an international instrument that State parties to the CRC may ratify.

The Optional Protocol aims to protect children from recruitment and use in hostilities. It was adopted by the General Assembly on 25th May, 2000, and entered into force on 12th February, 2002. The Optional Protocol is a commitment that:

- (1) States will not recruit children under the age of 18 years to send them to the battlefield.
- (2) States will not conscript soldiers under the age of 18 years.
- (3) States should take all possible measures to prevent such recruitment, including legislation to prohibit and criminalise the recruitment of children under the age of 18 and involve them in hostilities.

- (4) States will mobilise anyone under the age of 18 years conscripted or used in the hostilities and will provide physical, psychological recovery services and help their social reintegration.
- (5) Armed groups distinct from the armed forces of the country should not, under any circumstance, recruit or use in hostilities anyone under the age of 18 years.

As at 26th May, 2020, 170 countries have ratified the Optional Protocol. There are 17 countries that have neither signed nor ratified the Optional Protocol, and 10 countries that have signed but are yet to ratify. Fiji signed the Optional Protocol on 16th September, 2005 and has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol.

The Committee is of the opinion that Fiji adopts the straight 18 years rule when recruiting young people into the Disciplined Service, as well as removing the powers of Commander RFMF to recruit children between the ages of 16 to 18 under exceptional circumstances. Various stakeholders, in particular faith-based organisations, also raised concerns over the relevance of cadet training and the value of arms in drill in school.

The Committee recommends that:

- (1) Parliament reviews the relevance of cadet training in schools; and
- (2) Fiji ratifies without delay.

The Committee commends the contributions by stakeholders that assisted in the preparation of this Report.

I take this opportunity to thank Honourable Members of my Committee, including the Secretariat for compiling this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament. I thank you, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER..- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4)(a) the Standing Committee has now reported back.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to table his Committee Report.

Review Report on the Office of the Prime Minister 2016/2017 Annual Report –
Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Prime Minister is primarily responsible for providing sound policy advice and support to the Honourable Prime Minister and his Cabinet. It also engages with international and regional development partners, civil society organisations and the private sector.

In reviewing the Office of the Prime Minister 2016/2017 Annual Report, the Committee noted that one of the key achievement was on timely submission of the Ministry's Annual Reports

presented to Cabinet and the total number of complaints that were addressed by the Office in the reported year. This sees the coordination and facilitation which was sufficiently provided by the Office in ensuring that the prioritisation of ministerial Annual Reports are also presented in Parliament through Cabinet for review.

The review also highlighted a few pertinent issues which the Committee discussed extensively with the Office of the Prime Minister and is covered in this Committee Report. These pertinent issues include, the:

- timeline of Government Ministries Annual Report tabled in Cabinet;
- ability of the Office of the Prime Minister in addressing complaints that are being lodged by the public; and
- mechanism used to monitor and evaluate projects funded through the Small Grants Scheme.

The Committee was also mindful of the requirements of the Standing Orders of Parliament with respect to the principle of gender equality. Therefore, as part of the discussion with the Office of the Prime Minister, it was encouraging to note how the principle of gender equality was reflected in the Ministry, beginning with one of the vital parts of the institution, the human resources.

The Office of the Prime Minister plays a vital role in the oversight of Government's development plans which are aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

This Committee Report will also provide certain recommendations that the Committee has put forward for consideration by the Office of the Prime Minister. These recommendations, include the:

- dissemination of information on Small Grant Scheme to the public;
- creation of a user and public friendly tracking and monitoring system for small grants funded projects and related matters; and
- continued support to be provided to public engagement units within the Office of the Prime Minister, especially those that deal with complaints from the public.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights; the Honourable Rohit Sharma; Honourable Dr. Salik Govind; Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua; and Honourable Mosese Bilitavu for their deliberation and input, the Alternate Members who made themselves available when Substantive Members could not attend, and the representatives of the Office of the Prime Minister, whose cooperation assisted the Committee in its work.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend the Committee's Report on the Office of the Prime Minister 2016/2017 Annual Report to Parliament and seek support of all Honourable Members of this august Parliament to take note of the recommendations by the Committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

Question put

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications; and
- (2) Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources.

Honourable Members, the Ministers may speak for up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the Statement for no more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the National Federation Party (NFP) or his designate to also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Attorney-General and the Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, to deliver his Ministerial Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

COVID-19 Unemployment Assistance

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the latest ILO Monitor on COVID-19 and the World of Work Report released at the end of June this year, noted massive global labour market disruptions affecting all categories of workers where certain groups have been particularly affected a lot more than others. Around 93 percent of the world's employees or workers continue to reside in countries that have workplace closure measures still in force. Indeed, also within that context, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are certain economies that are suffering a lot more than some of the others, depending on the make-up of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this obviously is the case in Fiji too, given the closure of international borders from our major tourist source markets with the free flow of movement. Many of the employees, particularly those in the tourism and related sectors, including the airline industry, tour operators, restaurants, cafes and, indeed, the garment industry have been particularly affected. But there are others that have also been affected including those in the informal sector.

The Government, through the COVID-19 (Response) Budget and the 2020-2021 Budget have placed strong emphasis on supporting workers affected by the pandemic. In the COVID-19 (Response) Budget, the Government allocated close to \$30 million for various unemployment assistance programmes and in the 2020-2021 Budget, a total of \$100 million has been allocated for unemployment, of which \$5 million is for upskilling and retraining of affected workers, who want to find employment in new areas or become self-employed.

To complement this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also introduced the concessional funding support for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). A total of \$30 million was set aside

for this purpose in the last Budget and we have, again, provided \$30 million in the 2020-2021 Budget. We currently have about 8,000 to 9,000 applications that are being processed and we hope to have those applications, at least, 4,000, processed by the end of this week. We will see a total injection of approximately \$60 million over a period of time to these MSMEs.

Predominately, the applications are from the micro-enterprises sector, which means a lot of people who were self-employed will be able to reignite their businesses. There are people who have become unemployed and want to get into businesses and, of course, small and medium enterprises have asked for cashflow concessional funding, which means they will continue to run their business and be able to continue to employ people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since April this year, Government in partnership with FNPF, has been providing unemployment benefits to affected Fijians. Under this agreement, Government continues to provide top-ups to those eligible members who have expanded their eligibilities in their General Account. Close to 113,000 members have been assisted so far with a total withdrawal of \$93.9 million, and Government will continue to assess the needs of the affected workers and assist them so that they are able to put food on the table for their families and, indeed, meet their day to day expenses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I could explain the rationale behind our decision to assist those who are unemployed through the FNPF, in particular those who are in the formal sector, and only providing Government top-ups to those who do not have sufficient balance in their General Account. Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, Government revenues have been drastically affected due to COVID-19. It is also extremely uncertain how long this crisis will last and thus, unemployment support would have to be provided for a much longer period. If, for example, we continue in this manner for the next 18 months or one year, we will need to continue to provide unemployment benefits. We need a solution, therefore, that is sustainable and, indeed, for the long haul.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, such after weighing those considerations and ensuring that we do not drop off any of this assistance, we decided that those who are unemployed or on reduced hours should first access their General Account and Government top-ups will be provided once these members have exhausted their General Account.

If I could clarify, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the difference between FNPF member accounts; what are their differences? Following the FNPF Reforms in 2014, all members' accounts are split into two – Preserved Account and General Account. Any contribution received into a member's FNPF account, both for compulsory and voluntary members, is divided into 70 percent Preserved and 30 percent General.

The Preserved Account is reserved for retirement, where members' accumulated savings during their working life to reach meaningful balance in their retirement age. The only time in which a member can access funds from their Preserved Account is for withdrawal to purchase a land, an existing house or to build a house. Members under this condition can access up to 30 percent of their 70 percent Preserved Account of which is 21 percent, in addition to the 30 percent available from their General Account, a total of 51 percent they can withdraw. For example, a member whose total FNPF balance of \$50,000 will have \$35,000 in their Preserved Account which is 70 percent, and \$15,000 in their General Account which is 30 percent.

To purchase their first home, a member can access up to \$10,500; 30 percent of their Preserved Account, in addition to the \$15,000 in their General Account. This is a total of 51 percent of the member's FNPF balance. Of course now, Government provides an additional grant to the first

home construction scheme which is the \$30,000 grant or \$20,000, if you are buying your first home and you earn less than \$50,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the General Account is available for early access under limited approved withdrawal grounds, for example, we know that medical, education, funeral, housing and, of course, unemployment and in 2016, for immediate relief following *TC Winston*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, much has been said about COVID-19 unemployment withdrawals where Government has been chastised by certain commentators for allowing members to access their FNPF funds. In 2016, a \$1,000 withdrawal post-*TC Winston* assistance was introduced where the FNPF paid out \$276 million to 180,000 members. Tropical cyclones' depending intensity are assessed at once in a fifth-year event. Of course, we know that apart from those withdrawals, Government had the Help for Homes Programme where it disbursed over \$120 million in addition to the withdrawals made by the FNPF members.

The severity of COVID-19 has been compared to the 1919 flu pandemic a hundred years ago. *TC Winston*, devastating as it was, followed that particular path and lasted 48 hours. Afterwards, the Government and the nation set out to rebuild and restore all that was damaged. Air travel was not affected, the only certain thing about COVID-19, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you would probably know, is the uncertainty it brings because we do not know what will happen in the next few months. For example, unless and until a vaccine is developed, tested and becomes a global public good, accessible and indeed affordable, we will need to contend and come up with new solutions within the current framework that we do have and indeed an impact on the economy and the livelihood of all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, around \$93.9 million has been paid out to 113,000 Fijians. Of this two-thirds or up to \$68.1 million has been sourced from members' General Account balances and a third of \$25.8 million provided by the Government in the form of top-ups. But as this critical support continues and as more time goes by, more members will become dependent on the top-ups from Government and we will see a much larger share of the payments funded by Government.

We acknowledge that some FNPF members have lower balances even prior to COVID-19 and they have been provided with top-ups right from the beginning. Low member balances is due to several factors, including historically low income levels, earlier withdrawals whether it is housing, education, medical grounds, or joined the formal sector at a late age, or employers have not deducted FNPF for the employees. One of the positive things out of all of these has been that now, we have been able to track employers who have not been paying their employees' FNPF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is also important to note that prior to the FNPF reforms, there used to be over 20 grounds for withdrawal from FNPF. The reforms have ensured that the FNPF is in a solid financial position. It is now to support members in their retirement and also in their actual time of need.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to put this into context, Fiji is not the only country that has allowed earlier access to superannuation funds to help members cope with the impact of the pandemic. Australia is temporarily allowing its citizens, including New Zealand citizens living in Australia who are affected by the Coronavirus to access their superannuation up to the maximum of \$20,000 until 31st December, 2020. Within the Pacific, although there are no official COVID-19 cases reported, the Solomon Islands and Samoa have allowed laid off workers to dip into their superannuation funds to cover their living expenses.

In the Solomon Islands, for example, within a month, 12,869 members have received payouts amounting to SI\$63 million. At least, 600,000 Australians have accessed their superannuation

funds. The Australian Government has since introduced control measures to minimise the misuse of withdrawals and curtail those intending to exploit the system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I could now elaborate on the various phases of assistance provided through FNPF, the rationale for the phases and the number of members that have been assisted under each phase. Excessive consultations, of course, were held with the FNPF Board and Management prior to the implementation of each phase. The MOU signed between the Ministry of Economy and FNPF guides the implementation of the programme.

Under Phase 1, a lump sum of \$1,000 was paid to employees in the tourism sector who were affected through reduced working hours, leave without pay or permanently laid off. A lump sum of \$500 was also provided to workers affected by the lockdowns in Lautoka and Suva and other COVID-19 related restrictions imposed on nightclubs, gymnasiums and sporting venues. These affected employees were able to withdraw from their FNPF General Account. Those who had insufficient balance in their General Account below \$1,000 and \$500, their withdrawals were topped-up by Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sole proprietorships, such as taxi, minivan and hired drivers, small enterprise owners and those who lost their jobs within the past six months were also able to access up to \$1,000 from their General Account. Phase 1 ended on 31st May, 2020 and around \$54.2 million had been paid out to 85,959 members. Out of this, 20,253 members received top-ups worth \$70.4 million from the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Phase 2 targets workers or members who were still permanently laid off after the lockdown in Lautoka and Nadi was lifted. The Government recognises that as borders remained closed to mainly tourism-sourced markets, majority of workers in the tourism industry in the related sectors will continue to remain temporarily unemployed, unless they are able to find jobs in other sectors.

In Phase 2, the applicants can access up to \$1,100 paid out in instalments of \$220 over five fortnights. Members who continue to be affected up till the fifth payment of 18th August, 2020 will simply have to fill out the form and they will continue to get their fortnightly payments of \$220. In addition, members who did not apply for Phase 1 and apply for the first time in Phase 2 are able to access the lump sum of also \$1,100.

To date, a total of 33,768 Fijians have received payments at a total value of \$34 million in Phase 2. They will, of course, continue to get that if they had been unemployed. Around 18,220 members have been provided a total top-up of \$16 million by Government. This assistance will continue to support these affected Fijians and, of course, Phase 2 will continue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Phase 3 is about those Fijians whose working hours have been reduced and are being assisted also. The affected members are provided with \$44 per fortnight for everyday they are not working. To explain, a person who is now working only three days a week instead of five, he or she will receive \$88 per fortnight. Similarly, if a person is working two days a week, he or she will receive \$132 per fortnight. These rates are aligned to the full unemployment assistance of \$220 per fortnight in Phase 2.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fijians affected by reduced salaries, in particular some in management positions, for example, we know people who are earning \$20,000 a year, now their salaries have been cut down to \$15,000 a year, they can access a lump sum of \$550 from their General Account if their pay is reduced by less than 50 percent or lump sum of \$1,100 if their salaries have been cut by more than 50 percent. To date, a total of \$9.5 million has been provided for 17,602

Fijians in Phase 3. Out of these, 5,788 members were assisted by the Government top-up with the total value of \$2.5 million. Phase 3 commenced on 10th August, 2020 and will continue to support affected Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had also announced, after our discussion with FNPF, a Phase 4. This is not about people who are affected by COVID-19, but they have actually been unemployed for over two years prior to COVID-19 or six months prior to COVID-19. Sir, under Phase 4, Fijians who have been unemployed from 1st October, 2017 until 30th September, 2018, or within two years depending on their account balance, are eligible to withdraw a maximum of \$1,100 from their General Account. This category of members were previously not allowed to withdraw, but following representation to the FNPF Board, Phase 4 will commence from today, 31st August, 2020 and the payment will roll out from 1st September, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted, these people have been unemployed for the last six months prior to COVID-19 and while they genuinely will not be allowed, what we have discussed with the FNPF Board if they could be, because there could be people within their own families who probably are no longer employed. Therefore, unemployment assistance will, of course, benefit those families. Under Phase 4, around 32,000 are expected to be assisted with the total value of \$21 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Reserve Bank of Fiji had calculated that there were, at least, 130,000 Fijians who are gainfully employed in the informal sector. Some of them may work every week, some may work two weeks in a month or some may work for a couple of days in a week, but they need to be assisted. As an example, there may be someone who is selling boiled *ivi*, or someone is selling *mithai* outside the hotel area to the workers who work at the hotel when they come out from work. That person can no longer sell the boiled *ivi* or sell *mithai* because there is no one working in the hotel, so their income levels have been affected. We obviously want to assist them but the reality of the matter is, most of these people have absolutely no records. It is open to abuse as we have seen in the Help for Homes Initiatives that sometimes it can be abused. So we have come up with a system, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we are currently working this out.

As we have earlier said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the challenge, of course, is identifying the genuine individuals, for example, there are certain people who work as housegirls or housemaids. We can have people certifying that they used to work for them but I can easily go off to my uncle and ask him to write a note to say that I used to work for him, even though I did not work for him. So what we have done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as seen from the past track records, that despite our best effort, our experiences that casting the net too wide without proper checks and controls in place often leads to misuse.

A reliable way to provide earning opportunities in the informal sector after a crisis or disaster, and ring-fence the assistance to genuine recipients is by way of Cash for Work Programmes. The principle of Cash for Work Programme is simple; people work and receive pay for various projects. And to start this assistance with the informal sector, it will be limited to those who can provide proof that they do not have FNPF accounts and are not registered with FRCS for taxation purposes. Those individuals must also be able to provide proof of a reliable income source prior to COVID-19.

As with FNPF, Government will work in partnership with other organisations and government-related agencies, such as municipal councils, Ministries like Agriculture, Environment and Forestry, or credible NGOs that can develop temporary work programmes in return for pay. They could be in a form of clean up campaigns in municipalities or residential areas, planting trees and other agricultural produce.

This will ensure that only genuinely affected people are assisted. There is no abuse of funds and Government realises value for money on its spend. We are mindful that a large number of people may turn up seeking registration and as such, we may have to provide employment to people in groups, for example, one group can work the first week and another group can work in the second week, et cetera. In relation to payment, we will ensure that those temporary workers receive decent pay over a daily rate based on one lump sum payment, based on the \$220 a fortnight.

While the impact of the pandemic has been felt across the economy, the impact is not spread evenly, so we intend to roll out this Cash for Work Programme as a pilot, first, in the Western Division covering Sigatoka, Nadi and Lautoka, where the impact on informal sectors is more pronounced due to the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector and related ancillary services. The details of the informal sector assistance will be announced once consultations are completed and guidelines to the implementation are finalised.

To reiterate Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue to provide unemployment benefits to the formal sector through the FNPF and as we see every week now, more and more people are requiring top-up to the \$220 and, of course, we will continue to provide that unemployment benefit for as long as necessary. Of course, we will then continue to roll out the MSME concessional funding loans and also now with the informal sector Cash for Work Programmes. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy for his ministerial statement. I now call on the Leader of the Opposition or his designate, to have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Minister for Economy. We are pleased to note that he has listened to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's suggestion on the Cash for Work Programme. That was the one of the fundamental suggestions from this side of the House and we are happy that it will go ahead in terms of employee assistance.

But most of what has been pronounced, apart from that, is just a repetition of what we have already been told. For example, the SME grant is an initiative that will assist members of the communities but then we note also the downturn in the economy and the ability of members of the public in terms of cash and their ability to purchase. It is critical when you are looking at SME grants to also look at what their products are and how marketable are those.

There is a lot of discussion by the Honourable Minister for Economy on the FNPF. I note the Budget Supplement and he mentioned the total paid out to individuals of \$54.2 million and had assisted 85,959. However, of that \$54.2 million, \$7.3 million is Government top-up and \$46.9 million is FNPF. So, most of that is really from the employees or the workers. Of the 85,959 who were assisted, only 2,157 received Government top-ups and this was out of the estimated 115,000 who are unemployed.

In Phase 2, I also note that 14,400 members out of 26,034 have been provided Government top-ups, so we can see that those who were assisted with Government top-ups are close to 50 percent in Phase 2, but the majority or a large percentage of those were assisted through their own funding.

We have also seen the decline in tourism and there have been discussions about the Bula Bubble vacation in paradise and we have seen the initiative to bring in more yachts to Fiji. This needs to be handled with care in terms of quarantine. We know that it will bring more economic activities to Port Denarau, et cetera, and the other outer islands.

Our other island communities have expressed concern regarding how this has been processed. There has been a concern about the consultations that should have been done where most of the decision-making seems to be coming from the headquarters of the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. Of course, the projects they had mentioned, for example, Office of the Prime Minister, police stations, et cetera, they need to explain on how these will convert to employment creation. It looks like maybe it will benefit specific contractors. So, Mr. Speaker, those are some of the concerns from our side of the House.

Of course, they mentioned there have been cuts in the Toppers and the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme (TELS). How does that convert to employment? It does not, it results in a lot of apprehension with our young graduates and people coming out of school. They are already facing difficulties and here, we have these reductions and also the focus on capital expenditure for unnecessary items such as the Office of the Prime Minister.

There are various issues on what they have mentioned which not only impediments to employment, but are also contributing to social problems. For example, the head of Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has expressed concern on the rise in abuse of alcohol because of the reduction in duty on alcohol. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we note the points raised by the Honourable Attorney-General in terms of employment but it needs to be looked at carefully, properly assessed in its real socio-economic value to the nation.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. The Leader of the National Federation Party (NFP) is not here because he is attending a funeral, so I now give the floor to the designated speaker, the Honourable Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know, unemployment has become the civil biggest cause of pain and suffering for our workers. It has been estimated that over 115,000 workers have lost their jobs, thousands more on reduced hours and reduced rates and in many cases, both, and the Honourable Attorney-General talked about Government help towards the unemployed. What we have seen so far is, this help pales into insignificance when compared to the workers helping themselves by withdrawing their hard-earned savings from the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF).

The FNPF's CEO recently stated that Phase 4 of withdrawals that is scheduled to begin today will not see any top-up from Government but why is that, Mr. Speaker, Sir? Reportedly, \$20 million has been given by Government to top up withdrawals of its members with insufficient balances.

Now, Head 50 of our latest Budget has an allocation of \$100 million listed as unemployment benefit. This was hailed as great news when the Budget was announced, but barely a month into the financial year, FNPF says there will not be any top-up from Government. But we ask, the remainder of \$80 million, is it for workers who are not FNPF members? Actually, it does not sound like it because the Honourable Minister for Economy said the preferred mode of distribution is going to be through FNPF.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in yet another example of how Government is treating our workers, are the cases of the hundreds of workers of Fiji Airways and Air Terminal Services (ATS), both majority owned by Government. Before last week, the Fiji Airways announced a \$1,000 bonus payment to all workers who were on the airline until the end of 2019 from its 2019 financial year profits, but no mention of paying out redundancy packages as per the collective agreement between the unions representing the workers and the airline.

No remorse from Government, Mr. Speaker, but yes, Government does have the money to give them excess of \$11 million to FBC as radio and television public service grant. The Government does have money to build 12 new police stations and, of course, the Government definitely has the money to build a \$7 million office complex for the Prime Minister. Government did have the money to allocate \$13.35 million for the Prime Minister's Office complex in the previous three Budgets, bringing a total allocation to \$20.35 million, but no money to help the unemployed without any preconditions.

No money to feed our hungry children in schools! No money to subsidise kidney dialysis to the tune of \$75 for a session for patients from families earning a combined annual income of less than \$30,000 per annum! No money to ensure supplies of all kinds of basic medication, medical equipment and blood testing reagents in our hospitals! No money to supply blankets and pillows to inpatients in hospitals, improving medical consumables like bandages! No money to properly fix the hospital washroom and bathroom door! No money to ensure the sugar mills can crush efficiently! And where is the money, or the aid money of \$9.9 million from Australia for poverty alleviation? The Government is unable to distribute it fairly to all recipients. The Cash for Work should have been in the Budget.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, we are aware that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) initiated a survey in a tripartite manner involving the Government, unions and employees. The Government was supposedly responsible for surveying the labour market in the non-unionised sector. We are told that while the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC) and the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation have completed their survey with relevant statistics, Government, through the Ministry of Employment, has fallen short on carrying out the survey accurately, so much so that its statistical data exercise is incomplete. The question that I ask is this, was Government given a grant of \$70,000 for the survey?

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- If it was given \$70,000 for the survey, then Government cannot even carry out a proper exercise with donated funds to correctly ascertain the plight of our working class. How can we trust it to look after our employed? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for refreshments and I invite all Honourable Members to join me at the Big Committee Room for the handover ceremony by the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Fiji Group. The Parliament will resume in half-an-hour.

Honourable Members, when it comes to Ministerial Statements, it is the Leader of the Opposition or the Leader of the NFP replies, or their designated speaker. I look at the Whips to see whether there is any indication, so cooperate with me. I want to know beforehand. Do not ignore me. When you were supposed to speak, I might ignore you, so let us cooperate on that.

We adjourn for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.50 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.55 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now continue with the Agenda Item and I now call upon the Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources to deliver his Statement.

Role and Functions of the Land Use Division

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji; I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to address this House in my capacity as the Minister for Lands and Mineral Resources to deliver my ministerial statement.

We are entering a new financial year and I think as we enter this financial year, we take the opportunity to look back at how well we have progressed. We are happy with what we have achieved and we know there is always a lot to be done, especially during the difficult times that the world faces today because of the advent of COVID-19 and the economic calamity that it has brought to the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my statement this morning is on the role and the functions of the Land Use Division responsible for the Land Bank which, over the past few years, has been the subject of a lot of misconceptions and fake news, if I may use that term. It seems there has been, at times, a deliberate ploy, a blatant attempt to mislead and create mistrust about the work of my Ministry's Land Use Division and the Land Bank. Such misconceptions are doing a disservice and misleading Fijians of the benefits accruing out of the work of the Land Use Division and in particular, the Land Bank for both, the landowners and for the country as a whole.

Many Fijians are not fully aware or have been misinformed of the Land Bank investment and what the Land Use Division stands for and as such, some of them have refrained from depositing their land into the Land Bank. The Land Bank was established under the Government's Land Reform initiative and enacted in 2010. This initiative was implemented in 2011 to make more land available for productive and socio-economic purposes.

With Government's concern also that a lot of *iTaukei* land lay idle and unproductive, the Land Bank programme provided an alternative to our *iTaukei* landowning units. It gave them an opportunity to get returns from their assets that they own, that they would otherwise have not had. The Land Bank under the Land Use Division provides landowners with another option and complements the work of the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board for leasing their land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of the Land Bank initiative, the development of *iTaukei* land is undertaken to help convert what we have always called asset-rich *iTaukei* landowners to become both, asset-rich and more cash-rich. At the same time, this development releases assets into the economy that can be used to generate growth, jobs and capital that benefit, the country as a whole.

Through the Land Reform initiative, idle *iTaukei* land have been utilised. Their lands are surveyed and developed, while they are assisted to become more financially literate so that they can use the money they earn from their investment into the Land Bank in a sustainable manner that benefits themselves and their families over the long term.

Additionally, there has also been a wide misconception over land grab through the Land Bank. There is no such thing happening in Fiji. There is no land grab that is taking place by Government. Such misinformation as I said, at times, may lead to insecurity of investors investing on these land due to false advice by other parties, political oppositions that land sought after through the Land Bank

is a result of a land grab. Let me say it again, that there is no such programme of land grab by Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the protection of ownership and interests to land are secured and enshrined in the 2013 Fijian Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land that governs every action of this Government. This Land Bank initiative is not something that this Government has plucked out of thin air, the establishment of the Land Bank was born out of Government's Land Reform initiative and is now a critical output of my Ministry.

It works to ensure a balance between land availability, security and land resources development for economic development. That is what it does. It grows our country, and provides benefits to landowners whilst protecting their rights. This was outlined in Pillar 6 of the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress 2008 and the Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development 2010-2014.

The Land Use Act 2010 established the Land Use Division and they, in turn, are required to act in the best interest of landowners. This Unit is also required to promote transparent dialogue between the landowners, the lessees and the State. Their primary role is the development of the Land Bank to facilitate the efficient leasing of land which are currently idle and unutilised under the terms and conditions which are attractive to both, the landowners and the tenants. That is the key - it must be attractive to both the landowners and the tenants.

With new developments and Government's plan to strategically craft our journey, reforms to improve access to land through the Land Bank is once again reflected in our Five Year and 20 Year National Development Plan. Over these past 10 years, this Government still sees the importance of enhancing Land Reform initiatives with the intention to protect land ownership and those who may have interest on each parcel of land.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the inception of the Land Use Division, there have been a number of developments and achievements. First is that, as a result of this, there has been a total of 119 land parcels with a total area of more than 10,500 hectares or 26,144 acres that have been put into the Land Bank. Of these 119 designated land parcels, 100 of them were *i Taukei* land and 13 were freehold buy-back land and six were State land.

Of the 100 that came from *i Taukei* land, 89 of these parcels of land have already been surveyed and 71 have been leased out. Out of that 100, two have been reverted back as per the request of the original *i Taukei* landowners. So, that is the summary of this Land Bank. A total of 119 parcels, 100 were *i Taukei*, 89 have been surveyed, two reverted back and 71 have been leased out. Out of the *i Taukei* land that have been surveyed, it comprised of almost 9,000 hectares of land that have already been surveyed. So, when the landowners put their land into the Land Bank, they get the surveying done for them, they do not have to pay for the surveying cost.

Out of the land that has been put into the Land Bank aligned to the objective, there is a total amount of lease proceeds amounting to more than \$11 million. This is money that would have not been circulating in the economy if we did not have the Land Bank. So, \$11.2 million is circulated and all of that money, there has not been any administrative cost that is cut by the Ministry of Lands. All the lease money goes back directly to the landowners, they get the total value of the land that they are giving to the Land Bank.

The fourth point to make, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that when the land comes into the Land Bank, it undertakes market valuation of our designated customary land with ongoing assessment at prevailing market rates. This is a proactive measure adopted to ensure pre-determined market trades

for designated properties are made available to both the landowners and also to the potential investors as and when it is required.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had mentioned and may I reiterate, there has always been controversy and misconceptions about the Land Bank since it was introduced. There has always been rumours that once land is deposited into the Land Bank, landowning units will lose out on their land, but it is not true. The control is always in the hands of the landowners. I have just mentioned that out of the 100 lots that *i Taukei* landowners put into the Land Bank, two of those land parcels have been reverted back to the landowners at their request after the period of five years when they were not leased out. That shows that they still have access to their land and they have control over it.

As I had mentioned, the two *i Taukei* land parcels reverted to the landowners due to their wish to cease designation is an option available to the landowners if they wish to withdraw their land from designation after five years if the land is not leased. This is covered under section 6(2) of the Land Use Regulation 2011, and it needs to be highlighted here in this Parliament to set the record straight over the numerous misconceptions often preached by Honourable Members on the other side, that Government will rob landownership rights once the land is deposited into the Land Bank.

Additionally, there have been claims that the Land Bank is a breach of indigenous rights and land grab with no proper consultation and consent. The designation of any *i Taukei* land into the Land Bank can only happen if 60 percent of the qualifying members of that relevant landowning unit agree. That can only happen if that happens. If the 60 percent threshold is not met, the process stops, so the control is with the landowners. The process stops if the consent is not given so, the control, therefore, is securely in the hands of the landowners.

In addition, once the consent is being given, the Honourable Prime Minister has the power to then designate the land. He has the opportunity to review the whole process to make sure that the rights of the landowners are maintained and kept safe. It goes to the Honourable Prime Minister, who makes the final ruling. The Honourable Prime Minister then designates the land before it finally goes into the Land Bank.

Additionally, section 10 of the Land Use Act states; “All leases issued under this Act shall be for a period of not more than 99 years.” Therefore, land can be leased for 50 years, 30 years or even five years. However, this does not undermine the fact that the 99-year lease will also attract investors because when they have long lease time, they know they can take a million dollars or \$2 million and put it into that piece of land, making it as productive as possible and they have the timespan in which to recover the investment that they have made into that land.

That is what we need; we need people to invest into those land. Landowners get their due returns, they get employment and the investor gets what he invested in the land initially. So when you have those long terms, the banks also use this as collateral so that they can raise capital to invest it into that piece of land. Landowners of Fiji need to know that the Government is not taking away or stealing anyone’s land. We will always respect their decisions and the decisions made by the landowning units.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Land Use Division also includes a Public Relations Team, whose primary role is to conduct landowners consultation and awareness throughout the duration of any financial year. Their main objective is to correct misconceptions that have spread throughout this country on the Land Bank.

In the last financial year, the Unit conducted 57 landowners’ awareness and consultations. They also conducted 30 landowners’ re-visitations where they went back to meet the landowners.

The landowners' consultation is an internal part of the work of the Land Use Division and the welfare of the resource owners is and will always be a priority.

Furthermore, there have been annual landowners consultation workshops, coupled with financial literacy training by financial institutions over the years. The success of these consultation workshops has helped bring forward proposals and views that reflect the wishes and aspirations of resource owners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has also been misleading information that once landowning units deposit land into the Land Bank, they will receive less benefits. I reiterate the fact that I said before, when you put your land into the Land Bank, you do not incur any administrative charges. There is no administrative fees. The money that is collected goes straight to the landowners. They enjoy the full benefit of receiving 100 percent of proceeds derived from the lease money received, which is paid back to them through their Trust bank accounts. Government's quest is to improve access to land through the Land Bank initiative and the fulfilment of deriving optimal and equitable return to be utilised by the landowners.

I went and have been around the country a few times looking at some of those plots of land. I visited the land of the *Tokatoka Vunamasei* of Saunaka Village in Nadi. The Government has developed and constructed a 17 acre *i Taukei* land for 77 residential/subsistence subdivision in Legalega, Nadi. This development is now nearing completion and ready for pre-sale. The Government has already spent around \$2.2 million for this construction development alone. Government has put that money into that particular land.

The landowners of *Tokatoka Vunamasei* will benefit through optimal return generated from the sale of those lots. When the lots are sold, they will get that money and over and above that, apart from the profits payable, the landowners will also be receiving annual projected ground rentals of approximating \$50,000 per annum, with five yearly rent reviews to last the full duration of the lease term of 99 years. That is one example of people that have put their land into the Land Bank.

I had the opportunity of visiting the land that has been prepared by the *Mataqali Raralevu* of Serua. They put around a 116 hectares of their land into the Land Bank. The Land Use surveyed that, then the *Mataqali* created their own commercial company for the *Mataqali* and then they leased it to the Land Bank. So they gave the Land Bank, they got the survey done by Government and paid by Land Use. Once that is in place, they set up their own company to manage that land again, so they got two bites of the cherry. That is what Government is doing to help those landowners.

They did other developments at Cuvu Top where there is a comprehensive development scheme to suit the needs of the landowners, whilst investors' interest and additional expressions of interest are also accommodated. This is around 71 hectares and the land has already been surveyed, the scheme plan has been done, not paid by the landowners but paid by the Land Use Division, so they get the full benefits of what they need.

There are some who put their land into the Land Bank and after five years, they want their land back because it was not been leased up. Even if it is reversed, when they get their land back, the land has already been surveyed. In some places, the scheme plan has already been done. In some cases, it may cost \$15,000 or \$20,000, some money that they did not have to spend to get the survey done. So there is a whole host of benefits that landowners get after putting their land into the Land Bank.

Government puts the best interests of its people above all else. Government also ensure that it protects the interests of *i Taukei* landowners and it will never, ever, ever compromise on this. It

will never do that. That is a constitutional provision that we will uphold in this Government. The *i Taukei* landowners have land that they are not using which can be put to productive use and at the same time, earn income on those. This system delivers on that.

To all *i Taukei* landowners, this is my message to you, rest assured that this Government puts people first and puts you first. My Ministry will always opt for the highest and best approach with maximum returns on *i Taukei* land or any other land. Most importantly, we want you to become both, asset rich and help you to become as cash rich as possible, and we will do our utmost to see that, that happens. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for the ministerial statement and for the Opposition, I now give the floor to the Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for updating us on the Land Bank under the Land Use Policy that they have been working on, but I wish to comment on the misconceptions that he has mentioned, particularly when he mentioned the words ‘misleading’, ‘misinformed’ and ‘misconception’ to the landowners.

I must let the Honourable House know there is no misconception and there is no differentiation in the interpretation of the Act itself. The fact is that there is a role already played by the *iTaukei* Land Trust Board (iTLTB) so why transfer that role to the Government? Because it is important that the iTLTB itself who is the owner of the land be in control, develop and manage the resources for landowners. The Government has to help in whatever way they can. So, it is important that the assets of the landowners are managed by the iTLTB itself rather than the Government. That is a very important issue about this area.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very important to recognise the ownership of the land here in Fiji. The chiefs and mataqali landowners themselves need to be consulted in the way the land is to be controlled, developed and managed. In this particular Land Use Policy, they were never consulted at all in the year 2000 when the former Prime Minister mentioned land use; they never consulted the Bose Levu Vakaturaga. Also the Honourable Prime Minister tried to bypass the consultation process with the Bose Levu Vakaturaga or the Great Council of Chiefs in relation to the control and development of the Native land here in Fiji.

No one is grumbling about the benefits that the landowners are going to get by developing their own land. The main principle here is that a mechanism is already there with the iTLTB to deal with the development of Native land here in Fiji. So, it is important that the right consultation process is made before an Act, particularly the Land Use Decree 2010, is completed.

Sir, the Honourable Minister also mentioned that the interests of landowners are well protected under the Land Use Act 2010. I must say here, and let me quote from Section 15(1):

“No court, tribunal, commission or any other adjudicating body shall have the jurisdiction to accept, hear, determine or in any other way entertain any proceeding, claim, challenge or dispute by any person or body which seeks or purports to challenge or question

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- (a) the validity, legality or propriety of this Decree;
- (b) any decision of any Minister or any State official or body, made under this Decree;
- (c) the terms and condition of lease issued by the Director of Land under this Decree;

- or
(d) the validity of the cancellation of any leases, licenses or other instruments.”

So, it is important that they have the rights to take anything up to any court or any tribunal for their interest, Sir. Their interests have been taken away. Their rights have been taken away under the Constitution. So, in other words, let me explain it further on Section 15(3) which says, and I quote:

“... the presiding judicial officer, without hearing or in any way determining the proceedings or the application, shall immediately transfer the proceeding or the application to the Chief Registrar, for termination of the proceeding ...”

So it is going to be thrown into the rubbish bin straightaway. There are no rights for the landowners to challenge in court or in a tribunal any legal issues that have been raised for the leases. We understand that if there is no development within five years, they can withdraw so we understand that but the legal issue here is that their rights have been taken away. Their rights in the Constitution have been taken away by this Land Use Decree 2010.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Bulanauca for his contribution. I now give the floor to the Honourable Tikoduadua. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. Although, I am not surprised that he is taking a major goosetep to talk about the Land Bank, when the nation most likely wants to hear from him in his capacity as Minister for Infrastructure about the appalling situation on water and empty taps from the past couple of days.

Mr. Speaker, may I add that access to clean drinking water is a constitutional right, like any other right. It makes a mockery of what the Constitution day that we are to celebrate on Monday next week, if the Minister, his Ministry and the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) cannot make accessible clean drinking water to parts of the Suva-Nausori corridor from last Thursday until today, Mr. Speaker. Since everyone is sweating about the Land Bank, let me talk about the Land Bank.

Mr. Speaker, the last time the Government side spoke on the Land Bank was when the former Honourable Sudhakar was the Minister for Lands. He took the opportunity to laud the Land Bank's successes just in March of this year.

(Honourable J. Usamate interjects)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Stop beeping, Honourable Minister. If you stop beeping, I will continue.

As reported in the *Daily Hansard*, Mr. Sudhakar could only speak of the successes in single digits, and that is only a handful of success stories. Since then, as we all know, Mr. Sudhakar has made many revealing updates outside of Parliament, including how the proxy Deputy Prime Minister directs how interjections from the Government should be made to the Opposition side.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, whatever he said now from the other side, the fact remains that the Land Bank (I know) was a kneejerk policy reaction to undercut the role of the iTLTB and open up access to Native land for development because the iTLTB had lost its way in terms of being an able, competent and just guardian of Native land administration, as Sir Ratu Lala Sukuna had intended. Now, what would Ratu Sukuna be thinking of these initiatives today, as Fiji approaches its 50th year of independence? Now, these, Mr. Speaker, are points to consider.

Mr. Speaker, many of us in this august Parliament possess Native landowning community rights. We know the problems with the iTLTB but setting up the Land Bank since 2011 has not diminished or improved the many problems within the iTLTB. I wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the Honourable Minister responsible for the iTLTB would be bold enough to hold a public inquiry on the workings of the iTLTB, in the same way as the Housing Authority inquiry is presently being done and overseen by the Honourable Minister responsible because Mr. Sudhakar took great pains to explain in March that *mataqali* consent by 60 percent of the landowning unit is integral before any land can be deposited into the Land Bank but for 99-year term of lease, most of them said 'no'.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is high time that the Honourable Minister responsible tables a motion to institute a public inquiry into the workings of the iTLTB so that we do not have duplication of efforts and resources between the body and the Land Use Unit. I believe many would support such a public inquiry so that the landowners and tenants have a chance to resolve many of the historical challenges and find a way forward. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua for his contribution to the debate. We will move on.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

PUBLIC HEALTH (AMENDMENT) (NO.2) BILL 2020

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

That the –

- a) Public Health (Amendment No. 2) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 31/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- e) One hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded, we would like to debate this Bill on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020. Honourable Members are now getting a copy of the Bill and you will see that it is a very simple amendment. Essentially, the gist of it is to allow the Honourable Minister for Health, through his Permanent Secretary, to allow for regulations to be able to charge

people who come in privately or foreigners who come to Fiji and live in Fiji, or holiday in Fiji, that they pay their quarantine fees.

At the moment under the law, for every single person who enters Fiji, we have to pay for their quarantine costs or expenses related to quarantine. So when you put them in a hotel, we pay for their hotel cost, their meals, et cetera, but what we are seeking is an amendment to the existing law so that the Honourable Minister for Health can actually charge them. For example, we have had some high net worth individuals who are coming to Fiji. They go through quarantine through their own choice. Of course, it is good for the economy, but they need to pay for their own quarantine costs.

Honourable Tuisawau talked about the Blue Lane initiative. We have over close or close to 70 yachts that have now come to Fiji, so when they are here, they are in quarantine. Our Navy, RFMF, et cetera, bears costs so we need those costs to be paid by them, not by the Fijian taxpayer because that is their own choice to come to Fiji. What this amendment does is allow the Honourable Minister through the Permanent Secretary, to be able to pass the regulations and be able to pass on those costs, including the cost of our Medical personnel and Disciplined Forces related costs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have a right of reply from the mover of the motion.

Since no Honourable Member wishes to take the floor, I will give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have nothing further to add.

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the –

- (a) Public Health (Amendment No. 2) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 31/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- (e) One hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

PHARMACY PROFESSION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That the –

- a) Pharmacy Profession (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 32/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- e) One hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, this Bill is a minor amendment essentially to bring about some re-alignment.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have encouraged the entry of private hospitals in Fiji and we, indeed, had some fairly large private interest, for example, with BSP at Suva Private Hospital, and we have got some other small ones that are popping up. Under the Amendment that had been passed at that point in time, we could allow hospitals to also provide for pharmaceutical services both, to inpatient and outpatient.

Generally, a lot of hospitals provide what we call Inpatient Pharmaceutical Services because you are in the hospital itself, they give you the drugs or medicine, but there are companies also and many private hospitals, of course, that want to have outpatient facilities for pharmacy and these hospitals are also given the outpatient facility.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to provide a uniformity. At the moment, any person, for example, who runs a pharmacy in Cumming Street or wherever in Fiji, there are two types of licences or certification that the person has. One is that the pharmacist must be certified on an annual basis and secondly, the pharmacy must be certified on an annual basis. The reason is, of course, because it gives out drugs so the pharmacist must have a current licence approved by the Pharmaceutical Board, and the pharmacy premises because it has to be kept under various sanitary hygiene conditions has to be certified on an annual basis.

The anomaly that exists at the moment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the private hospitals and there is one at the moment, that has been given an outpatient pharmacy licence, actually has been given for an indefinite time which obviously, is not correct and is unfair to the other existing pharmacies. So, like every other pharmacy outlet, this private hospital pharmacy should also be brought into the one-year regime. That is essentially what this Bill seeks to amend, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the mover.

As no one wishes to take the floor, I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have nothing further to add. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote. The question is pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- a) Pharmacy Profession (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 32/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single Sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to Standing Committee or any other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- e) One hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

TELEVISION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That the -

- a) Television (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 33/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single Sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to Standing Committee or any other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- e) One hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, essentially, the Television Act 1992 which is fairly an old Act, comparatively goes back to 1992 when I understand Fiji One was first then started. I think it was during the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's time, the Fiji One started in 1992 and the Television Act 1992 came into being.

Obviously, since then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, technology has changed significantly and this amendment seeks to bring it very much in line with the technology. We have a phenomena at the moment with what we call live-streaming. Live-streaming is fine; if I am sitting there and watching a rugby match and I have got my cousin in Sydney, I can take out my phone and actually live-stream it and he can watch it, that is fine. Fiji Rugby Union (FRU) does not lose any revenue, nor do I gain any financial gains. The moment I start live-streaming it and charging people money for it, there is a commercial gain. For example, FRU may have given the television rights to someone else for which people actually pay FRU money for that, or for that matter even Fiji Football Association or Netball Association or anyone.

In order to protect the rights both of the particular association and also to ensure that people who are making a commercial gain from this live-streaming, there needs to be, obviously, certain requirements. They have to comply with the law and the law currently does not envisage, nor did it at that point in time in 1992, envisage that there would be such a thing as live-streaming. Essentially, this is what the law does, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Those people who want to live-stream for commercial gain only and not for personal gain, they have to get a licence.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they do not need a spectrum licence. Even, indeed, if we were to issue a television licence tomorrow, it no longer requires spectrum licence because as we have elucidated in this Parliament, we are now moving to a digital age. Therefore, there is no need for the specific television company to get a spectrum licence.

So the amendment essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, seeks to provide for that and obviously, the same rules, for example, about the validity of the licence and the term of the licence is all in alignment with the television licence and the explanatory notes are quite clear on that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the Right of Reply from the mover. Honourable Member, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to object to the way this Bill has come through Standing Order 51, and the need for public consultation. We understand that this is a very old Act that we are concerned with but, again, given the recent evolvement in the communications sector, I see the need for the public to be consulted and their participation in terms of these licences and their conditions. Some are currently operators in this particular area, but probably would like to be consulted further. So it would be an opportunity for a Parliamentary Committee to hear from them and also compile a report in terms of how this would go out, and also protect the interests of those who would be affected. That is my view, Sir.

Similar to other Bills, it would be an opportunity to also object and to amend the Pharmacy Profession Act which I thought should have gone through the Committee to conceive the views of pharmaceuticals and the pharmacists, and also those who would be affected, given that we hear a view from what has been said by the mover of the motion, according to the background laid out in the Bill and also the clauses that will come with it.

Again, given the alternate views that would come from those who would not agree on a particular clause, it gives the Committee a chance to formulate a report and also sit down with the drafters at the Solicitor-General's Office and look at the interpretation that would take into account some teething problems that would consider the interests of other stakeholders who would be affected by the Bill. That is the opinion and views from this side of the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Bulitavu for his contribution to debate. Honourable Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, Standing Order 51 is now the synonym for abuse in this Parliament. It is sickening that we have these three Bills, all very important and they are using this pathway to have it passed.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister says that the Television Act is an old Act, more of the reason as to why we should have proper dialogue on this. Our people will need to know what the implications are, we need to hear the voice and the views of the people, Mr. Speaker. Even the Pharmacy Profession Act, Mr. Speaker, as mentioned by my colleague at the back, he understands what is happening but there are other issues that should be brought to a Committee to be discussed so that we fully understand the implications of these Bills.

We are getting very tired and it is sickening watching the way Standing Order 51 is being used, Mr. Speaker, and on Thursday, we are prepared to debate on some motions that had been passed by the Business Committee but the way it is happening now, they are counting us out from the agenda on Thursday. At a time like this when we need to be working closely together, they are using all this trickery to neutralise anything from this side of the House. We also care, we also love our country. The way we have been pushed aside by the abuse of the process, Mr. Speaker, is simply quite sickening.

Speaking on that, Mr. Speaker, we will meet this week, and when do we meet again, in December? When you have an emergency like Coronavirus, when the whole world is affected in a manner that we are being affected, do you not think that we should be meeting more often?

Mr Speaker, I am expressing my disgust at the way this is being done and I just hope that the FijiFirst Government should take full responsibility and not continue to go about things in the very ways that they have done in the past. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Gavoka for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor for the Right of Reply.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I see that the Honourable Members from the other side are commenting on Bills that we have already agreed to hear or debate on, on Thursday. But if they actually read the Bills, I have just said that the for the pharmaceutical companies, it will actually make it a lot more fairer.

No pharmaceutical company existing in Fiji at the moment, whether it is in Sigatoka, Nausori, Lautoka or Ba will have their rights affected. In fact, they will actually want this Bill in place because it makes sure that they do not get treated differently to a private hospital that has been given an outpatient pharmacy licence. It brings them all in alignment. It is a very basic issue. How is it that their rights are affected? The explanatory notes is written in very simple English.

The issue about the Television Act 1992, yes it is an old Act, in comparison to the technological changes and that was what I said. Live-streaming, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the only aspect of this particular amendment that will be incorporated into the substantive law which is, how do we address live-streaming? Now, we have in Fiji a lot of people who may not necessarily be going to the grounds, who may actually be watching live TV, watching a sport from the comfort of their homes, or they may be concerned that if they go they will have a lot of public exposure or

unwarranted exposure to COVID-19. The reality of the matter is, we are using more digital technology.

In this age, in this fervour of using digital technology, we want to ensure that the sporting organisations' capacity to earn revenue is actually protected. If Fiji TV, for example, or FBC or Mai TV buys the rights from Fiji Rugby Union (FRU) or Fiji Football Association (FFA) to televise a game live but at the same time, they know that there are other people using their phone, where people are doing it to live-stream the game and charge people money for it, what do you think will happen to the value of the rights that FRU or FFA is selling?

It will be significantly diminished. So it protects them, it protects our sporting organisations so that is all it simply does, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I cannot see all this kerfuffle about it. The reality of the matter is that, we understand that the Committees at the moment are also restricted in the manner in which they can interact with members of the public, and these Bills are fairly not substantive at all in that sense.

So, Mr, Speaker, Sir, they have three days to digest these very simple Bills and I hope they can come back with some good arguments, only to support it, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote. Pursuant to Standing Order 51:

That the -

- a) Television (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 33/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single Sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to Standing Committee or any other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- e) One hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to the Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

COMPANIES (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That the -

- a) Companies (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 34/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stages at a single Sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday 3rd September, 2020; and

- e) One hour will be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This Bill, again, has only three Clauses. We have gone to great lengths to make sure that the explanatory notes are very simplified so that Honourable Opposition Members can actually understand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all this Bill does is, it simply says that any company that is limited by a guarantee but is set for the purposes of charity, must disclose their annual accounts on an annual basis. That is all it simply does.

At the moment under the Charitable Trusts Act, when any organisation, for example, is set up for charitable purposes, we had an amendment to the law in 2013 because prior to 2013 charitable trusts were set up (organisations), people do not have to submit any annual accounts to any members of the public. They received money from people, people donated money to them in good faith, international organisations, et cetera, and there was no accountability.

In 2013, we amended the Charitable Trusts Act and we said that they have to, on an annual basis, publish their accounts and avail them to the public. People can go and get it from the Registrar of Titles. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Registrar of Titles has not necessarily been very vigilant in enforcing that particular aspect of the law.

There are two aspects to this amendment.

- (1) Under the Charitable Trusts Act, there is an obligation to disclose your accounts on an annual basis that will continue but if organisations do not do so, the Registrar of Titles has the ability to publish the names and other details of that organisation that has not submitted their annual accounts to the Registrar of Titles.
- (2) The reason why we had an amendment to the Companies Act because what some NGOs or charitable organisations did after we made the amendment, they went off and registered their charitable organisation as a company limited by guarantee and they are no longer providing an annual report.

So, what we want to do is similarly, only for companies that receive donations or public money sometimes or receive money from international organisations and aid organisations but they are not publishing their annual accounts so by law now, they will be required to do so because they come to you and ask for donations and you may give them money in good faith.

Secondly, if they do not do so, again, the similar provision of name and shame will apply. The Registrar of Companies can actually publish the list of companies that have not complied with it so you as a potential donor, would know that this organisation has not actually published their annual accounts. That is what the law simply seeks to do, and there are only three Clauses. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply by the mover.

Since no one wishes to take the floor, Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir. I have nothing further to add.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote. The Question is pursuant to Standing Order 51:

That the -

- (a) Companies (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 34/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday 3rd September, 2020; and
- (e) One hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

IMMIGRATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That the -

- (a) Immigration (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 35/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- (e) That one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to second the motion.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Again, if you look at the Bill itself, there are quite a few Clauses compared to the last one but only six more. It is nine but if you look at the amendments, a lot of it is to actually correct some of the anomalies that existed.

Some of the key ones, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I could highlight, it:

- clarifies the ambiguities and corrects the redundancies in the Act itself;
- aligns the age range of a child in the Act to under 18 years, in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and also in respect of the United Nations(UN) definition of a child, because you are a child until you reach the age of 18 years. Previously, the Act had 21 years and as we know that now, adults are at the age of 18 years;
- removes the requirement that permits must only be issued for three years at first instance, so as to allow for permits with longer terms which provide greater assurance to permit holders;
- assures persons who may be granted a permanent residence permit on the basis of investment in Fiji that their permits may only be revoked if there is a clear breach of the conditions of the permit applicable at the time the permit is granted; and
- increases the penalties for certain offences under the Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we can talk about this when the Bill is debated on Thursday. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate we will have the right of reply from the mover of the motion.

Honourable Bulitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This particular Bill is a bit different because this probably falls in line with Standing Order 51 which is made probably to expedite a particular Bill to address the error in the law that has already been implemented. That is why Standing Order 51 is in the Standing Orders.

It is the role of Parliament and Government to bring in this sort of amendment to correct the error in the law or if the current implementation of the law is very difficult, so this is to enhance it. It is quite different from using Standing Order 51 and that is why over the years, the Opposition has been seeking approval from Parliament to put a criteria for Standing Order 51 and what kind of circumstances where Standing Order 51 should be applicable.

I think there is a need, Sir, given now that we have seen the reason cited by the Honourable Attorney-General. He knows very well that the Standing Committee is not holding any public consultation due to the COVID-19 restrictions and policies adopted by Parliament in terms of physical meeting. We have virtual meetings now, and probably soon, we will be allowing public consultations or more physical or face to face meetings to hear oral submissions. But again, the need, Sir, to set a criteria for Standing Order 51 and to also look into the specific requirements to allow the mover of the motion to use this to see the passage of the Bills.

We had a few workshops with the UNDP Parliament Project when I was Deputy Whip back in 2016 and I had raised this particular issue a lot with our counterparts from the New Zealand Parliament, New South Wales Parliament and all other parliamentary groups that were helping us to develop our new democracy on how they use Standing Order 51 to expedite Bills. One of the things that we have learnt over the years is that, it is probably used to correct a particular error in an existing law.

Sir, again, without any reservation, I just want to point out the fact that Honourable Gavoka had raised this afternoon the need for the Committee to sit because it boils down to our duty as legislators and as lawmakers of this land. We are here because the people had voted us in and that

we have a duty to make laws for them and the people need to be heard and be part of the law that is made because it will govern them. That is my contribution to the motion, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Bulitavu for his contribution to the motion. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor for your right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. Honourable Bulitavu is perhaps, reading too much of Standing Order 51 because if you read that Standing Order, it simply says and I quote:

“A motion requesting that Parliament consider a Bill without delay -

- (a) may be moved without notice; and
- (b) shall be moved by the member moving the Bill.”

Then it sets out the procedure in which you will do so. It does not talk about whether it is correcting errors or not, Mr. Speaker, Sir, nor has there been any guideline with respect to that. So, please, let us not mislead Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the amendment itself...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I did not hear you, maybe you can share the joke.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member spoke about the duty to members of the public. Duty to members of the public is to apply your intellect to these Bills and see how best we can improve the quality of their lives and what is the mischief or what is the current status we are trying to change. If you were clever enough, you would actually look at the Bill and Honourable Tabuya would be able to tell you these things too, because if you look at this, it talks about giving certainty, as I highlighted, to permit holders.

It also means that if you are a Fijian citizen and you married someone who is a foreigner, you will be able to get them with certainties some level of permit. They are not going to be treated like aliens, even though they may have been married for the past five years. It is trying to address those kind of anomalies and predominantly, as we know, a lot of the times it is the women who get discriminated against.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, if you look at this, and you may not actually have the foresight to see that, but there are two more Bills that I will be presenting under Standing Order 51, and they are tied in with immigration which is citizenship and passports.

On citizenship in particular, we are making it a lot more difficult for people to become Fijian citizens. This is why if you read Clause 4 of this particular Bill currently before Parliament, it talks about, “permanent residency permit issued on the basis of investment in Fiji is required under the regulation must not be revoked unless there is a clear breach of condition of permit.”

Why? Currently, for anyone to become a Fijian citizen, you simply have to be in Fiji for five out of ten years, and you are entitled for citizenship. This has been going on for years. In fact, when the Honourable Leader of the Opposition was there in the Government helm, a Minister had that discretion to give someone citizenship. He knows some of the people who were here only for a short time and were given citizenship. There was a big controversy about that at that point in time.

We removed the discretionary powers of the Minister to give citizenship, to make it a lot more transparent. We are now going one more step ahead to say just because you have been, for example, brought here to do massaging and you have been here for five years on a work permit and suddenly you get a citizenship, that will no longer happen. That is what this Bill is about. It goes towards and works hand in hand with the Citizenship of Fiji (Amendment) Bill.

At the same time, there are people in Fiji who want to come and invest but only on permanent residency. So what we are saying is, if you have been granted a permanent residency, it cannot be revoked at anyone's whim. If, for example, the responsible Minister who is the Honourable Prime Minister, has the power as all Ministers have had previously, to make regulations in respect of permanent residency and if he decides and says, "You will get a 10 years of 15 years permanent residency, if you bring in \$5 million or \$10 million levels of investment", then that person bringing in that money needs to be assured that if he/she brings in that money, their permanent residency will not be changed tomorrow, unless, of course, they breach the conditions of the permanent residency that gives them that certainty.

I do not know how many of you have seen, Vanuatu is selling passports. They have just made \$86 million, basically giving people citizenships. We are going the other way. We are not selling our citizenships. We are making it more difficult, but what we are saying is that, "You can have a category of permanent residency."

The reality of the matter is, the global economy is changing. People are looking at other destinations, there are lot more people now looking at Fiji. Please, do your research. There are a lot of people in other parts of the world (you can go to the internet and find out which countries they are searching for) who are looking at Fiji because of our very good health status, so people will look at investments based on your health credibility. We want to take advantage of that, but we do not want to sell our citizenship. We want to modernise our laws and look at different categories of permanent residency, and this is what this particular Bill does. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney- General. Parliament will now vote. Pursuant to Standing Order 51, I move:

That the -

- (a) Immigration (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 35/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- (e) One hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members I call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

CITIZENSHIP OF FIJI (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That the -

- (a) Citizenship of Fiji (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 36/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee in Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- (e) One hour be given to debate the Bill with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In fact, I referred to this Bill when responding to the other Bill that was just presented, the Immigration (Amendment) Bill 2020.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, if you look at the Bill, it seeks to ensure that for one to become a citizen of Fiji, you have to be, at least, a permanent resident. You cannot be actually someone, for example, if I could, sort of, juxtaposed this, the law currently states if I come to Fiji as a foreigner and I get a work permit and I am here for an aggregate time of five years, I can actually qualify to apply for citizenship without doing my five out of the 10 years. In fact, a lot of people, as soon as they reach five years, they apply for citizenship.

What this Bill basically seeks to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it says, 'no'. Even though you may be here for a work permit for the next 15 years, you will not be entitled to Fijian citizenship. You must acquire Permanent Residency (PR) and if you have acquired PR, out of 15 years of PR, you must spend 10 years in Fiji as a permanent resident. Only then, will you be entitled to apply for citizenship. It does not mean you will get it, only then, you can actually apply for it, so it makes it a lot more difficult in that sense.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it also says that you cannot, for example, calculate the time of your citizenship if you are here on a work permit. We have an anomaly at the moment. If, for example, I am a university student and I come from one of the other Pacific Island countries or any other country in the world and assuming I am studying at FNU or USP, if I come here on a student visa, the calculation of my five years on student visa cannot be taken into account. But if my spouse comes with me, she is not here on a student visa but on a residence visa, her five years will be taken into account. So that is the anomaly we want to be able to remedy. We will create a lot more cleaner slate and more transparent slate in respect of dealing with citizenships.

They are the main provisions under this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which we can debate on it on Thursday. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the Right of Reply from the mover.

Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, you have the floor.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a short contribution, Sir, on this particular Bill and the amendment that is part of it.

The point that I would like to raise here, Sir, is, what happens to those who are serving in the British Army abroad, who had their children born where they are serving and yet, by virtue of them being registered in the Vola ni Kawa Bula (VKB), what happens to their children in this particular instance?

I cannot find anything to kind of safeguard their interest in Clause 5 here, Sir, in this particular Bill, so that is the point interest this side of the House has because they are registered in the VKB, yet they do not qualify in this particular instance. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. There being no Honourable Member wishing to take the floor, Honourable Attorney General, you have the floor.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in response to Honourable Lalabalavu, the existing provisions regarding children of Fijian citizens remain. This is just the amendments regarding the other categories of permanent residency. So, there will always be contentment for Fijian citizens, so that does not get affected at all.

I have no further comments, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now vote. The question is pursuant to Standing Orders 51, I move:

That the -

- a) Citizenship of Fiji (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 36/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single Sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to Standing Committee or any other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- e) One hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

PASSPORTS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That the -

- a) Passports (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 37/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single Sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to Standing Committee or any other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- e) One hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving that motion.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very briefly, again, this relates to the previous two Bills. There are some stylistic, sort of, issues you need to deal with or nomenclature of the Act itself, in other words, the title of the Act, we are changing it. It is not just simply passports because they do not only issue passports, they issue what we call travel documents also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so we want it to read as the Travel Documents Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other amendment has been sought to bring it into the 21st century, for example, it has things like unmarried minors which is now being amended to child and, again, the lower age criteria of child from 21 years to 18 years.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it seeks to amend the Act to increase the penalties for offences under the Act where a lot of people whom, for example, may try and make fake passports or they try and alter the actual passport itself. Those need to be brought into line with modern day penalties. It also shifts the responsibility to the Permanent Secretary responsible for Immigration. So, there are some key areas, Mr. Speaker Sir, that is being sought in respect of the Bill itself under the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course you will see in Clause 15, a number of consequential amendments. Essentially, wherever there is used to be Director of Immigration, you have Permanent Secretary for Immigration. For example, the Passports Act is now going to be amended to read the new title of the Passports Act. So, they are simply what you call the Consequential Amendments.

We are also changing the name as opposed to Department of Immigration to be called the Fijian Immigration Department to give you a bit of that branding too because we try, of course, to lure people and it fits in well with all the other branding that we have done with all the other organisations in Fiji - Tourism Fiji, Investment Fiji, Film Television, Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission, et cetera.

So, the Immigration Department plays a very pivotal role in that respect so we are getting the name change regarding that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. The floor is now open for debate on this motion.

Honourable Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion, particularly also expressing my concern on Clause 51 and the use of that. So, looking at the programme on Thursday, we have questions and motions that would basically cover the day. So the concern is, will this be crowded out?

The other issue is that some of those are substantial motions which are in the public interest and it is critical that we have those motions tabled and discussed.

The other question, why was this not brought to the Business Committee because of course, this would have been known beforehand and would have been discussed there rather than bringing it at this stage and then we are left in a state of uncertainty about the programmes for the rest of the week? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, echoing what my colleague has just said, we now have seven Bills and that is seven hours. How many hours do we have on Thursday, Mr. Speaker?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, do you want me to answer that question?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Yes. How many hours do we have on Thursday, Mr. Speaker? It is seven hours and the Business Committee had approved some motions from this side of the House, one being Fiji Airways which has the interest of the whole of this country. By doing this, the FijiFirst Government has crowded the programme and pushed the motion away.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just speak to what we are on. That is all.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, those are seven Bills and seven hours to push the other motions away. I must say, FijiFirst, brilliant, brilliant! The way you push things away that are important to the people of Fiji, brilliant!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, are you trying to do my job for me? I will administer the workings of this Parliament and if you have to work overtime, you work overtime. There are no two ways about it.

We will work and we will complete the work that we have to do. It might take a bit longer but just a little bit longer, but we will get through, no problem. Honourable Attorney-General, you have your right of reply.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we did inform the Business Committee that we will be bringing in Bills and we did say it will be under Standing Order 51. Honourable Tuisawau, you should have spoken to your Whip and she would have informed you about that. He is just sitting across the aisle from her.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will tell you, they think that we all sit around in some room and we are conspiring, “let us not get their motion ahead.” In fact, the only reason why we have deferred it to Thursday so you can get maximum time, for you to be able to digest those Bills. We are quite happy to debate this tomorrow. If we do it tomorrow, then you would complain and say, “Oh, it is 24 hours.” If we do it on Wednesday, you will say, “We have 48 hours.” Now you are complaining, “Why it is on Thursday?” We cannot do it on Friday because it is your day supposedly, so that is the issue.

We are giving them maximum time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but we are quite happy with that. If there was some concern about Thursday, if their concern is Thursday being their trump day supposedly, then they could have actually debated it tomorrow or on Wednesday. They can move a motion. Let us do that if you want to do it on Tuesday or Wednesday, no problem, but you are not coming up with a solution, all you are doing is you are whinging. That is what they are doing, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote. The Question is pursuant to Standing Order 51:

That the –

- a) Passports (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 37/2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single Sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to Standing Committee or any other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 3rd September, 2020; and
- e) That one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, on that note, we will adjourn proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume at 2.30 p.m. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.20 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.33 p.m.

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

HOUSING AUTHORITY 2015 ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report on the Annual Review of the Housing Authority 2015 which was tabled on 1st April, 2019.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Housing Authority is responsible for strategy, policy, funding assistance, monitoring and regulation of Fiji's housing system. The Authority is also responsible for promoting and facilitating the provision of accessible and adequate housing for low and middle-income households and people living in informal settlements in line with Government's National Housing Policy 2011.

The Committee, upon being referred the Housing Authority 2015 Annual Report, invited its senior officials on Tuesday, 29th January, 2019 for a public hearing. During this meeting, officials from the Housing Authority elaborated on its core role in helping Fijians own affordable homes, as reinforced by Government's vision along with the objective of the Authority.

In respect of the Housing Authority's financial performance, a profit of \$2.234 million was achieved. The Committee is of the view that Housing Authority is now in a sound and sustainable platform for the future.

Furthermore, the overall operations of the Housing Authority are aligned to SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). There are plans and discussions underway with the Fiji Development Bank and other Ministries to incorporate solar into housing residential lots. The Committee noted that the Authority is on track in providing safe and affordable housing and basic services and through its plan to upgrade informal settlements.

To continue promoting accessible and adequate housing for low income households, the Government continues to recognize and support the initiative and, therefore, has introduced the First Home Purchase Incentive, First Land Purchase Programme, Formalisation of Informal Settlement, to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee commends the team of committed and motivated individuals, who have worked together to bring Housing Authority to new heights. There is, no doubt, that great success will continue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Members the floor is now open for debate on this motion. Honourable Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Chairperson for presenting the 2015 Annual Review Report for Housing Authority, although it is now five years

later and really at this point in time the Report is almost irrelevant. Where are the other Reports - 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, where we could have a better indication of how Housing Authority is doing?

The Honourable Chairperson mentioned their finding in that Report where the Committee feels that Housing Authority is now in a sustainable position for the future and that was in 2015. We are now in 2020 so let us discuss what they meant in that statement. There have been changes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that have occurred within the Ministry that is now affecting the work of the Housing Authority in the last three years.

The Housing Authority's projections have been slashed due to a directive from the Honourable Minister for Public Enterprises, of course, it is the Honourable Attorney-General, that Housing Authority can no longer sell their lots in the new subdivision so the Subdivisions that are under them are Nepani, Tavakubu, Koronisalusalu in Tavua and Davuilevu which was being negotiated in 2015 which is part of this Report.

Then a further directive from the same Minister was to hand over the Subdivisions to the IFC to handle. What is the effect of this, Mr Speaker, Sir, is the question. The Housing Authority which is being mentioned by the Honourable Chairperson has been profitable for the 15 years prior to 2017 and have spent over a \$100 million in development costs to develop the Subdivisions, yet they have not been able to realise income in the last three years. The only sales they were doing is from the old stock in the older Subdivisions.

Now, we hear the announcement by the current Honourable Minister, of a public inquiry into the Housing Authority handling Khalsa Road, as well as Wainibuku. As they have stated in this inquiry, and I quote:

“The public is requested to provide full disclosures of any alleged irregularities or non-compliance regarding Housing Authority lot recipients, including any misconduct by Housing Authority staff in the execution of duties relating to lot allocation.”

The question is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why a public inquiry? Why not an internal inquiry first, when it is under this Government that the mandate of Housing Authority is to go from affordable housing under the Housing Act to making a profit under the Public Enterprises Act? So this is their directive. Is this an attempt to publicly vilify the Housing Authority to justify the directive of the Minister to handover those Subdivisions to IFC?

Just on that note, my understanding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, for example, the development in Khalsa Road are misused development Subdivisions, where around 20 percent of the lots which are located on the prime spots are regarded as prime real estate are for higher income earners that buy the land at or above market valuation, but then the profits from those sales are then used to subsidise the remaining 80 percent of the lots to make it affordable for low to middle income earners. Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the directive from the Honourable Minister has not been undertaken without proper consultation with stakeholders. Why has this change in policy not come before the proper Standing Committee in Parliament to whom the Housing Authority reports to?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the handling of Housing Authority and directives issued at the whim of Government, has only caused delay. Delay, delay, delay with close to 15,000 individuals waiting to be able to buy the lots in the Housing Authority Subdivisions that would average to about 60,000 citizens, counting the number of people in the families. This delay from 2017 to-date shows no regard for our low income earners who have been waiting, wondering why these lots are not available for sale when there is a huge demand for the lots.

This is a delay in the vision of the Housing Authority. Now that the Subdivisions have been handed over to IFC, then what is Housing Authority going to do? What is their mandate now? What is their business? It is all very well to talk about what happened five years ago, but we are now in that future and the fate of Housing Authority hangs in the balance. What is going to be their core work now?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also hear now a merger or now bringing Housing Authority and the Public Rental Board (PRB) under the Ministry of Housing. This was approved by Cabinet but that was way back in 2007 when there was no Parliament. Both Housing Authority and PRB report to Parliament, any change to their composition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, should be brought back to Parliament for debate and approval through change in legislation.

Again, a directive issued by the Honourable Minister has cut out our involvement, just like the decision to hand over the Subdivisions to IFC. We are here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to protect the use taxpayers' money and to protect the interests of our people. Unfortunately, this is causing delay for our people and they are not able to access those lots, for goodness knows how long.

So, in contributing to the motion before the House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the report is outdated, there needs to be a review of the Housing Authority's role and that needs to be brought before the right Standing Committee and Parliament, so that we can debate and make decisions on it. Therefore, even though their report is presented here to Parliament, we do need to be mindful of those things. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My contribution will be to note the Committee's Report, and I have seen the genesis of this Report. It is a 2015 Annual Report which was brought to Parliament in 2017 and on 20th January, 2019, probably the Honourable Minister is looking at the power-point presentation also, it was presented to Parliament and now in 2020, we are debating to note the recommendation.

It was unfortunate during that time that there was only one recommendation with regards to the gender equality in senior positions in the Housing Authority, but if you look at the 2019 power-point presentation, there were a few key challenges that have been highlighted by the team that came to present to the Committee. I will highlight a few, probably the Honourable Minister will look into others too.

One is the Weight Average Cost (WAC) of capital. That is something that will affect low income earners, given the reason for this Housing Authority is helping Fijians own affordable homes. One of the challenges the Housing Authority is facing is to lower that rate to a level of 3.5 percent which will help low income earners in their interest repayment for loans.

Also, we are in difficult times now, given the effects of COVID-19, some are employed but have reduced hours or are also part of the scheme, could also be given consideration, especially in terms of loan repayments either for their land or house mortgages that are there through their transaction with Housing Authority. That is one barrier, probably we would like to hear from the Honourable Minister on the progress with regards to that and what measures are in place to maintain WAC at 3.5 percent.

The other challenge that was highlighted by the Housing Authority in the 2019 presentation was the recruitment of technical teams such as engineers and surveyors. Given that those are

specialised areas and also the need to bring in Asian Development Bank (ADB) and also International Finance Corporation (IFC) in terms of getting experts to assist in housing development. I think this is an area where there is probably a shortage of top surveyors and engineers in Fiji, given some of these particular contracts are of higher standards and we do not want to do the work over again.

The other thing, Sir, that I note from this Report is the increasing infrastructure cost. This is one of the challenges, given the number of players in the market and looking into innovative housing solutions to assist with the bulk of the work internally. What is the progress of getting these experts within Housing Authority rather than them outsourcing most of the work that needs to be done, especially on preliminary projects or preliminary stages of the phase of work that will be done?

The other thing, Sir, will be on acquiring technologies for the land development team that is based at the Housing Authority. They will continue to look into areas especially drone technologies which is relevant now, when we move towards land development to a bigger scale, especially when we look at the timeframe of approving scheme plans and also engineering plans. A subdivision plan from Labasa given to Town & Country Planning here in Suva takes almost a year for surveyors to lodge and after that, there could be re-drawing if the scheme plan is not approved and then to development lease, to a final stage of proper lease which is very costly. So, the Housing Authority and its development team can be equipped with technologies which is relevant in this modern day and age to help expedite the processes.

The other challenge that was highlighted during that presentation was the lot production. When you do subdivision, the various stakeholders that also run in line in approvals if there could be a briefing too on efficiency and support with regards to EFL, WAF and FRA in providing earthworks, roads, electricity lines and water pipes like Electricity. These are works probably that they need to build more support inter-related to other institutions that help in the production so that things are done as soon as possible and customers do not have to wait for long for those approvals.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am now turning to the informal sector. I think there is a need for affordable housing. Sometimes the requirements are too high, given that they cannot be uniform, even some of the requirements need to be relaxed. I think in Bainisucu, Labasa, some of the development requirements such as tarseal roads, just to approve those titles with gravel roads so that people in those areas who need homes can have access to a title so that they can build and own a house. So, if you can look into the informal sector too and identify the programmes that are available now to help those who have been affected by COVID-19 and its effects.

Lastly, Sir, the other area is the lack of suitable land for development for affordable housing. This is an area that was raised by the Housing Authority in their presentation in terms of finding prime land. I will bring this up because there are only two types of land available for Housing Authority, the iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTTLTB) land and through the Lands Department, as well as the idea of the iTTLTB lease, given that most of these leases were up to 99 years for subdivision.

The idea of the iTTLTB lease, given most of these leases go up to 99 years for subdivision and those who might purchase a home want 99 years lease and also banks for mortgages. They do not go for 30 years or 35 years lease. There is discussion but, again, from a landowner's perspective, given that most of these land are developed, the rental reviews need to be done, taking into account the hardship clause of the landowning units, given they have already leased out those land for commercial development but, again, as they grow, iTTLTB also with Housing Authority, given that the value of the land will appreciate in terms of economic development in that area if also lease can be reviewed so that landowning units could benefit through a scheme from land rentals through Housing Authority Subdivisions will also have a fair return.

Also synchronising that with Government programmes such as the *itaukei* land development grant that also has the same role of trying to develop landowners, not only to be passive land providers but also to become entrepreneurs and developers. So a consistency of that, and these are all aimed at helping Fijians own affordable homes. Those are some of the issues. Probably, the Honourable Minister can enlighten the House on the progress that the Housing Authority has done on those issues.

That is my contribution this afternoon, Sir, to take note of the Committee's recommendation. As I have said, it is unfortunate that it has come this late but, again, it is never too late, given the issues that I have raised are quite relevant and recent, and the Honourable Minister will have to reply, as I have already alluded to. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to briefly contribute. This Report is bipartisan but let me say, excuse me and sorry to my Members because I will be speaking my mind here and criticising this.

The Report says that in their view, Housing Authority is in line with its vision. I totally disagree. You will agree with me, I think Housing Authority has lost its core function and its role since its inception in 1958. The Act is there and it needs to be amended. It is still restricted to Lautoka, et cetera, and the towns, and we have gone past that. It is good that the Honourable Minister will speak after me to say whether she agrees or not, and she will agree to that. They have been in Government for 14 years and I look around, what have you achieved? Nothing!

Alright, let us go through it slowly. Edenville Housing – that is not yours, that was not FijiFirst. Bagasau Housing – that is not FijiFirst. Raiwai Housing – that is not FijiFirst. Raiwaqa Housing – that is not FijiFirst. Then moving on, Nabua – that is not FijiFirst. Nabua at the top, those three barracks there, those are not yours. Topline – that is not yours. Naodamu Housing – not FijiFirst. Nabua Housing – it is not FijiFirst. Then we move on. Caubati Housing – not FijiFirst. Vesida ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But you have been there for 14 years. This is why I am recounting this. There is more!

Kinoya Housing – that is not yours. Kalabo Housing – that is not yours. Nadera Housing – that is not yours. Nadawa – that is not yours. So, it is a shame.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Makosoi, nothing, and I think the Honourable Minister would agree with me. In the last few months, she has been totally against and is very angry about Housing Authority of what it has achieved. Let me just quote some of the reports quoting the Honourable Minister.

On 4th August, *Legend FM* quoted her as saying, “Housing Authority are not doing their work.” She criticised 220 people there, who are supposed to be doing the subdivision, just sitting around.

Then, Fiji Broadcasting Commission (FBC) on 29th August, quoted her as saying that Housing Authority is currently not serving its purpose. As for years, it has only been providing subdivisional lots that are now demanding homes. They should be building homes. They should be doing all these, so it is good that the Honourable Minister will speak after me to say whether she agrees or not because I know she agrees with me.

She is correctly critical of the Public Rental Board. She is now proposing they should merge to cut cost and I agree with that because in all those years, they have lost their way. I saw nothing. In the 2015 Report, there was only Wainibuku and Khalsa Road but, Mr. Speaker, who can buy houses in Khalsa Road, for a minimum of \$70,000?

Housing Authority was set up for the workers who can afford. People who are coming out as teachers or nurses who are getting about \$20,000 per year, they can only loan up to \$60,000, three times their salary.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- No, no!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So, how do you expect them to afford those lots that are being built by Housing Authority? That is why I am saying that they have totally lost their core role, it needs to be revived. They need to come back and tell them, "Look, you should be doing this." So, I was saying that I see nothing,

Well, I see Waila City. What happened to Waila City? There is about 5,000 lots that were supposed to be delivered, not given. I see EXIM Bank of China, a lot of waste. What have you done to that \$3 million? So it begs the question, what have you been doing in the last 14 years? And all those works are from the Ratu Mara years, there is nothing for you to look up on. Let me just go to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

This is the 2015 Report and the Committee feels that the Housing Authority is in line but I looked through it and within an hour, I can see some problems here. If you go to the Land & Housing Development, they were supposed to get as their target, 200 lots per year, that was never achieved. Further on if you look at the number of lots referred to as Total Mortgage Portfolio, at the end of the year 2015, it was \$81.78 million. That is for that year, so we might say 'good', but you compare that to the last 10 years and you will see the graph going down, and that is clear from here, if you look at this.

In 2010, let me just read it out, Mr. Speaker, because I said they are not doing their job and you see that the scale is going down and down. It says, and I quote from page 18 of the 25 Annual Report:

"The mortgage portfolio increased through sale of land stock and loans to purchase properties."

So when the number of lots goes up, the mortgage portfolio goes up and as you can see that the graph is going down. In 2010, it was \$136.73 million; 2011 - \$130.13 million, coming down; 2012 - \$110.16 million; 2013 - \$98.7 million; 2014 - \$80.95 million and 2015 - \$81.78 million. That means in terms of the lots that they are producing and giving out, it is going down and down. Hopefully, the Honourable Minister will put an answer to that.

Just very briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I googled to compare this to their recommendation, to what they are saying that Housing Authority is performing its task in relation to housing. But I see about 12 or 13 factors about housing in general in Fiji that needs to be addressed. Let me just read this:

- (1) Despite the high housing cost in Australia, the cost per dollar in salary for Fiji is higher. That means, it is far more difficult for people in this country to be hearing that.
- (2) Fijians have to pay 80 percent of their salary to rent a one bedroom apartment in the city centre. For families living outside of the city centre, the renting cost for a three-bedroom apartment is 145 percent. The high cost has placed a serious problem for the Fijian household.
- (3) There is a serious income disparity in the Suva area and that only a certain elite group has the access to the housing market.
- (4) From 2001 to 2005, the average price of residential property has increased to 102.63 percent, from \$50,000 to \$120,000. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that was 2001 to 2005. Imagine what is happening now, no wonder the cost of the houses in Khalsa Road is at \$70,000 minimum. Who can afford that? No one can afford that.
- (5) As a useful indicator as the supplier of housing, the completion certificate issued recently is 555, which is very little compared to 184,235 of the total households in 2014. So in 2014, there were 184,235 households of which, they only managed to give 555. That is less than 40 percent of the completion rate.
- (6) It is found that with 1,887 lots to be launched in Housing Authority, the pressure of housing shortage remains. There is a serious shortage of housing needs. There are only 35 residential listings in the Northern area, 134 residential listings in the Central area and 571 listings in the Western area. The supply in the housing market is less than adequate, comparing to the total number of households. So, whose fault? Housing Authority's. The Housing Authority was established to meet that demand and they are not doing their job.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- It's your fault.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, it is not my fault, it is your fault. If you are not doing your job, you should be out of here.

Next, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a result of the rising building prices, it is becoming impossible for public sector housing developers to serve our citizens with low income earners and the circumstances, the ability to set up a loan while maintaining high standards. At this point, I totally disagree with the handing out of the \$10,000 for the first home owners. In my view, that should be applied to the development cost, so that the benefit is spread out.

Next, Mr. Speaker, Sir, up to now, there are 9,000 people in the Housing Authority of Fiji's waiting list who are qualified for the lot allocation criteria. Honourable Minister, 9,000, well according to this. I might be wrong, but as you have said, over, so at least we agree on something, that there is a serious problem in relation to that.

Well, good, and I congratulate the Honourable Minister for trying to make the change there and I totally support her that change should be made to the Housing Authority. I agree that those 150

people are just sitting down there. If work is being sourced out, those people should be out, because their work has been done by other people.

Another finding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the high construction cost and lack of available development of land in Fiji makes 35 percent of Fijians living in informal settlements. The previous Social Housing Policy is not very successful that only 0.35 families nationwide were assisted. The fast rising housing prices make it even more difficult for low income earners to start owning a legal property.

Basically, I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I look to that side of the House, they have done nothing in the 14 years. They should have done something and the Honourable Minister will agree that she is now saying that they need a housing plan. That is good. We can have a Constitution that says, we have a right to housing. We can have a national housing policy that says, “We are entitled to affordable homes”, but what we want to see is that, its delivery. We want to see houses being given out, we want to see lots being delivered, and that is not being done. Well, I say ‘good luck’ to the Honourable Minister and I hope and pray that she will do something about it.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. What I heard was just contradictions between Honourable Members. One said, “Why did you give the land to IFC?” The other one said, “the legislation is very old, what are you doing about it?” So what I am trying to say here is, we have not given any land to anyone. Those land are being considered for strata apartments. While on one hand you are saying that we need to increase the number of houses in Fiji, that is precisely how we want to do it.

You have talked about infrastructure cost, well surely, if you are going to give a piece of land for anyone to build on, the cost will be higher. But if you do strata apartments, the cost can come down. So what are some of the technologies that we are going to use to bring the cost down? We have already identified two companies who can work with Housing Authority and that is why those lots that you talked about earlier on are not given out as yet, because we would like to get these strata apartments done on those lots.

To get fee for the first time, we will be doing strata apartments of that scale. We had done strata apartments within Housing Authority for certain flats, but that is on a small scale. To get this strata apartments done, there has to be a Cost Benefit Analysis, more understanding of how the law should be applied, what should be the strata management system in place, so all that need to be looked at.

Now, you spoke about two other issues, blaming this side of the House. Let me tell you, that under the Public Enterprise Act 1966, there were some changes being brought about and in that legislation, the reason why Housing Authority came under public enterprises was to become more efficient, productive, more accountable and better organised. That was the purpose, but still, they have to serve the social aspect of its function.

Regarding the issue raised by the Honourable Member, why \$50,000 and below or why 20 percent is for the high income earners and 80 percent is for the low income earners, when the land is developed. Again, that policy came about in 2003 and Housing Authority is implementing that policy. However, Housing Authority needs to change the way it functions, it is still functioning the way it was established in 1955 under that particular legislation. So lots of changes are required, so that it can serve its purpose.

Now, Honourable Nawaikula mentioned that we have done nothing. Well, we have done a lot. Housing Authority has done a lot in the last couple of years. There were land development in Tacirua, Wainibuku, Matavolivoli, as well as in Nepani, Davuilevu, Tavakubu and in Tavua. Those are all the land that have been developed but as I said, it is not put out in the market because we want to do strata apartments.

In terms of PRB, they have also developed rental apartments in Savusavu and in Simla, construction work is going on but there is a completion date of December this year. So, there will be a lot more rental apartments pushed out in the market, and Kalabu as well.

On land acquisition, it does not mean that if we are not building, the staff are lying low, but they have acquired a number of pieces of land around Suva, Veisari, Naqeledamu and Korovou. We already have other pieces of land.

What are the projects under construction? Just on 19th August, 2020, Housing Authority signed the contract for Covata Subdivision in Labasa, so I assumed that the Honourable Bilitavu is very happy. Some work is happening in Labasa for your political mileage, probably. So those are the pieces of work that are going on.

Housing Authority is under review at the moment. It has to be reviewed so that it fits the purpose. At the moment, the way the Housing Authority services are delivered, it does not fit the purpose. The demand is there but they are not able to supply. So, we need to change the whole structure of Housing Authority the way they deliver the lots.

I want to talk about the public inquiry, as mentioned by one of the Members. You are under the impression as if we just went out for a public inquiry and that is the only investigation that is taking place. Actually, no!

There are two types of investigation being done; one is by the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG), that is, to look at the systems and processes within Housing Authority, whether the Housing Authority staff followed the procedures and processes and how the lots were located. The other investigation is the public inquiry where people have a say - their experience, so they can talk about the customer service. They can also talk about their experience in terms of lodging an application for a lot, or their knowledge in regards to who else got the lot before they did, whereas they applied many years back.

So, all those information will help us to develop a better policy for Housing Authority but at the same time, prepare the National Housing Policy which is outdated now. It is 11 years old and the work is going on in terms of coming up with a better National Housing Policy.

After the development of this National Housing Policy, there is an acute need for us to come up with a law to guide housing in Fiji. We have the Housing Act but that is only to establish Housing Authority, but not other aspects of housing that needs to go into the Housing Act. So, the public consultation which will follow or will commence for the formulation of this National Housing Policy, that will also assist the Ministry to come up with a better legislation to guide the housing sector in Fiji.

I will be presenting my Ministerial Statement, a very detailed Ministerial Statement this week on housing, so you will be able to hear a lot more on the work of the Housing Authority, PRB as well as, particularly on informal settlement because what I can see from the other side of the House, is after sugar industry, housing support is more lucrative in becoming a political football and we have seen that time and again.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- This is what you have been raising because the knowledge is not there, the facts are not there and your understanding is not there. So, let me present that paper in a few days and you will hear the whole story of the work that is done by the various agencies, including the Ministry of Housing and Community Development.

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

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Pillay for his Report. However, there were very few recommendations there. One recommendation that I am looking at is on gender equality and he also had a bit on the SDGs.

Now on staff establishment breakdown in 2015, Mr. Speaker, of the five executives all of them were male. On the next level - management level, 90 percent were male and 10 female. Maybe, with a bit of better gender balance, there would be less problems in the Housing Authority.

The team leaders to go on to that, Mr. Speaker, male - 56 percent and female - 44 percent. There seems to be a confusion on the staff numbers because the Honourable Minister, in her Budget response last month, said that there were 220 staff but the union disagrees and says it is 150 staff. So, what is the right staff complement, Mr. Speaker?

It is very interesting in reading this Report, one is unaware that whilst the Housing Authority is a statutory organisation, the hard work, the implementation of the work that is done there by the Honourable Minister for Housing, while the money part and all other consideration and authorisation falls under the Ministry of Public Enterprises which comes under the Honourable Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Minister for Justice, minister of other ministries, so that is probably why there are so many issues and very little work is accomplished.

The 2015 Report was submitted to its Minister in August 2017, tabled in Parliament over a year later in November 2018, referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs after various processes and delays and finally, five years later, the public get to hear a little about Housing Authority's performance; so much time to sweep things under the carpet. This laxity shows either disrespect for parliamentary processes or trying to keep things out of sight from taxpayers and other stakeholders.

Even the Honourable Minister stated that for some time now, and this would go back to the time of the writing of this Report, that Housing Authority was not serving its purpose and we will hear it again today, and that it is up for review as it has only been providing subdivided lots whereas people are now demanding homes. With COVID-19 and the new normal, with its added demands like food security, issues where a bit of additional land is required for vegetables, et cetera, Housing Authority needs to factor this into their new policy.

Very strangely, Mr. Speaker, as I was reading through the Report, it states that there was a savings or surplus of \$2.234 million which was stated again by the Honourable Chairperson, when it is common knowledge that Housing Authority cannot keep up with the high demand for housing, so how come there is savings? Hopefully, as the Honourable Minister had announced with PRB and the Housing Authority amalgamating as was the original intention under one roof, things would be more speedily addressed.

With the new chairmanship of the Housing Authority Board, the Board hopefully will better serve its initial purpose which is to provide affordable housing to middle and low income earners in line with Government's National Housing Policy 2011. We have heard announced that the members of the public inquiry will be looking into the possible irregularities and fraudulent transactions in relation to allocation of lots by Housing Authority in the past 10 years.

The Committee Report will be presented to the Honourable Minister in two months' time, and hopefully the Report findings with its recommendations, because it involves the use of taxpayers' money, will find its way into Parliament for necessary action, appropriate funding and timely implementation.

We need to hear the concerns of people like the man from Lautoka, Mr. Speaker, whose application for a piece of land in the 1990s, was finally contacted in 2017, to be told that land allocated to him was in Tacirua, Suva. But he said he was from Lautoka, then he was offered land at Matavolivoli in Nadi to build a home.

After submitting the required documents and being given the run-around, he was told in the meantime that his documents had been misplaced. He submitted the documents again on four separate occasions, in Valelevu and Lautoka, shown the pegs and everything else, only to be told that he did not qualify for that land, that because of his age he does not qualify anymore, as he was now only three years away from retirement.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, heartbreaking stories like that which is coming before the public inquiry committee and that is in today's *Fiji Times*, is a concern for generations to come ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- The right paper, Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- ... which is in today's *Fiji Times*, the right paper, this is a concern for generations to come. For the Honourable Minister, this is a big challenge, so she has to get her act together, get the Housing Authority house in order, set the record straight for the Housing Authority and for the people they are mandated to serve.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, if the Committee which is a bipartisan one - so I am criticising us too - could write-up a bit more comprehensive report, as this one is very scanty with hardly any recommendation in it, apart from the one on gender parity and SDGs.

As stated in the Chair's Foreword, the Committee's job number was to examine Annual Reports of agencies in order to investigate, inquire into and make recommendations relating to the agencies administration, and make recommendations relating to the agencies administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, function, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee (as we read from the Report) conducted public hearings to gather additional information, but there is nothing in this Report addressing any of that. What did the public say? What were their concerns? What was the reality on the ground?

We are now hearing about the scams that went as far back as 2010 and FijiFirst was the Government then as they are now. So, please, *kerekere*, give us some more detailed truthful report, even if it does not make Government look good. Even if the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson

are both Government Members of Parliament, you owe it to the public to tell the truth. Why was there savings of \$2.234 million?

That, in itself, should have raised red flags to the Committee that with a statutory authority, such as Housing Authority, with the greatest demand for housing that far outweighs the supply, with so many accounts of people literally crying out for help from Housing Authority, who are mandated to provide affordable housing to middle and low income earners and to have that amount of savings, so many things do not add up. We are slowly finding out from the public inquiry committee, some of the things that have been happening and should be of great concern to us all. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Only one bite of the cherry, you cannot have two bites.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- You can only talk once.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- You cannot have two bites.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO F.TUISAWAU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the debate. The debate would not be complete without the mention of what is on page 46 of the Annual Report regarding the low cost housing project. On that page it states, and I quote:

“...The Government of Fiji entered into a financing agreement with the EXIM Bank of China for the Fiji Low Cost Housing project. The project was contracted to China Railway First Group (Fiji) Ltd for FJ\$49,959,679. The Authority, as the eventual owner of the project on behalf of Government entered into a non-lending agreement with the Government. As at 31st December 2014, the disbursement from the EXIM Bank included an advance of FJD 3,000,000 for Mobilization which was equal to 20% of the total part of the contract price. The advance payment of 20% was not utilized since that part of the project did not eventuate as a joint inspection between the Housing Authority, Ministry of Finance and the Contractor, revealed that the quantity of model houses built by the contractor was substandard.”

It has been in the media and a lot of members of the public are aware of this and we wonder where the Waila Project is, at the moment.

Some of the questions we could raise are: Has that \$3 million been paid off? By who? Was it the Housing Authority or the Government of Fiji? Has there been any recovery court actions against the contractor for the substandard housing? Was there no provision for the sub-contracting of this project? How was the \$3 million spent without the Housing Authority Board being aware of the substandard nature of the China Railway Group's work?

Page 13 of the Report also shows EXIM bank loan comprises 48 percent of the Housing Authority debt stock and the question which could be raised; was the whole \$49 million taken, and where was it spent?

Still on that housing project, we also note that there was a media report on 11th July, 2020, where the Honourable Minister for Economy stated that Waila City will be revived in two years' time. I suppose that is July next year, so we will be looking forward to that. This was confirmed by the Honourable Minister and as they have an allocation for Waila City in a motion for Government to guarantee the Housing Authority borrowing of \$150 million. The project was supposed to be done by Malaysia's top symphony company in partnership with Housing Authority. Thousands of applications were received for those houses. So that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is still a major concern not only for this House, but also for the public as taxpayers of the nation.

I also highlight in one of the audit reports one or two issues raised on Housing Authority, even though the report is 2015, this is 2016. It says:

“Concerns of significant matters were raised on the methodology of calculating retirement of loans and advances. While the method is in accordance with RBF guidelines, the method is inconsistent with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), the framework on which the financial statements are prepared. The Authority noted the finding and agreed to review its policy in accordance with the statutory requirements and compliance.

There was also concern about the review of risk grading and annual provisioning. The loan provisioning is based entirely on arrears days past due (DPD) of the loan account. Even though DPD calculations are correct, the Authority is in breach of Part 5 of its Credit Management Policy which states that at least 60 percent by value of all loans and advance will be assessed on an annual basis. All significant loan accounts should be assessed individually.”

So the Authority agreed to relook at those issues raised.

The other point that I would like to raise is on the National Development Plan (NDP), which clearly states the policies on goal – Accessible and Adequate Housing, Provide Affordable Housing and Safe Housing. So there are various strategies there. What was interesting was on page 30 of the annual targets. Out of all the lead agencies, Housing Authority is the major lead agency, so they have nine projects there with Department of Housing – three; Public Rental Board – one; HART – one; and Rural Housing Unit (RHU) - three. So Housing Authority is really the major agency, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for housing in our nation, which we need to support.

The last point I would like to state is that the NDP is a good document. It has clearly identified outcomes in quantifiable numbers and as mentioned by the Honourable Minister, there are various projects specifically mentioned there - Nasinu, Waqadra, Labasa, Nepani, Davuilevu and Tavua. There are specific numbers there to be developed – 300, 108, so the Annual Report would be good if it is formatted according to the NDP and that is clearly stated in the Annual Report as to how far they have gone in achieving those performance targets as identified in the NDP. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution. Honourable Qereqeretabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just very briefly I would like to welcome the Honourable Minister's Ministerial Statement on housing in Fiji in the next couple of days. I hope to hear about the problems that people have been facing in Kashmir Housing, as well as have something on Tomuka, one of the oldest squatter settlements in Fiji where there has been apparently no effort made to develop the land and this place has been surrounded by

land that has been converted from residential to industrial. I also hope to hear from the Honourable Minister during her ministerial statement, something about gentrification that is happening now on a big scale in Fiji. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a couple of issues that I would like to address from a finance perspective and I understand some questions have been raised about IFC. I also understand that Mick Beddoes was ringing up IFC to ask them whether IFC had bought land in Fiji. I just wanted to put that to rest.

Before that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think one of the issues pertaining to the discussions focused on two areas, but the ultimate goal is about giving people access to home ownership. That is our fundamental objective. You can have access to home ownership either through subdividing land and then giving people the ability to purchase the land and then build their homes, or you have what you call ready-made homes which they then simply can go and purchase.

One of the other issues in respect of housing, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the cost of the funds that you will actually utilise to then use to lend to other people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the issues that has been pertaining in the housing sector generally in Fiji has been the interest rates that have actually been very high for housing. Now, if you look at the interest rates that Housing Authority has been utilising, I will go back to as far as 10 years, so in 2010, the average lending rate was 8.4 percent. Then it went up to 8.5 percent in 2011, 8.47 percent in 2012; 7.55 percent in 2013, 7.13 percent in 2014, 6.6 percent in 2015, 6.26 percent in 2016, 5.9 percent in 2017, 5.89 percent in 2018 and 5.84 percent in 2019. So the cost of the interest is actually coming down which, therefore, makes it a lot more affordable.

Sometimes, I think the debate only centres around the subdivision or around the home, but you need to be able to borrow money which you can actually afford to borrow and be able to pay back. That is critically important. That is one of the positive things that has actually happened within the Housing Authority. That has been, overall, Government's objective.

As you know, we now have an arrangement with the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF). The RBF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, now lends money at about 1 percent to banks, including Housing Authority, where they can then add their cost to it and then lend to the borrower at no more than 5 percent. So we are seeing housing lending rates coming down to 4.2 percent or 4.3 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Minister for Housing may have touched on this, and this is about the loan write-off. The Social Housing Policy that Government has been funding for the past number of years, because we initiated this in 2011, it was brought to the Honourable Prime Minister's attention that there were a lot of people with loans going back to the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000, who actually had paid more than what they had borrowed. We understand that the Housing Authority, at that point in time, had some form of compound interest. They also had some issues with their IT.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the calculation of interest rate was highly significant. We had some people from low income families who were continuously and very regularly doing their loan repayments but they were actually paying about two or three times more than what they should have paid. We came in and so we initially looked at the criteria. Customers who have retired at the age of 55, medically proven to be unfit, physically and mentally disabled, customers who are unemployed and low income customers with single or combined housing annual income of \$10,000, the Government started

making budgetary allocations to help them pay off their loans and you can actually go and look at the Budget Estimates where we have made allocations.

So Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to date has provided to Housing Authority a total sum of \$3.2 million to assist 410 customers who actually were not able to pay off their loans. So their loans are now paid off, Mr. Speaker, Sir. And combined from 2011 to 2019, there are 410 customers, Government assistance - \$3.2 million, Housing Authority - \$3.7 million; a total of \$6.9 million was actually paid off.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, irrespective of what the price of the land is or the readymade houses, the customer has to pay for it. We are not going to give free homes. That is a fact because it has to be paid for. The reality of the matter is, we need to continuously provide more housing stock so it needs to be done on a sustainable basis. Therefore, any assistance that is given to the would-be purchaser of the land, or the lot, or the lot and home, obviously would be greatly appreciated.

This morning, we highlighted that FNPF now allows an FNPF member to withdraw 50 percent of their entire FNPF funds, dipping in also into their Preserved Account. That is number one. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we are going to look at housing as an overall issue, we need to be able to look at not just Housing Authority lots but private subdivisions, ability to build on communally-owned land. So, now, for example, if I am a member of the landowning unit, FNPF will allow me to take out my housing entitlement from my FNPF and build upon my land because I am a member of the *Vola ni Kawa Bula* (VKB). Therefore, I can borrow and take my money out because I have legal possessory rights over that land. No one can boot me out.

However, if I want to take out money from my FNPF account to build on a *vakavanua* arrangement or yearly lease, FNPF will not because they can boot me out and my FNPF money is gone and they take over the house. So, that is one option. You can build on the land in which you are a member of the landowning unit and the second option is, of course, you are able to lease land of which you have possessory rights or legal rights and obviously as the Honourable Minister has highlighted, buy strata title of which, again, you have those similar rights.

If, I, for example, am earning \$20,000 a year, the reality of the matter is, even if you had a strata title, assuming that the flat is worth \$75,000, the more upfront money I have towards my deposit, it means less repayment. It makes it easier for me to pay from my disposable income. Therefore, I do not know which Honourable Member from the other side said that the housing grant should be scrapped.

It is a lot of nonsense because now, if that person earning \$20,000 a year wants to buy a \$75,000, \$80,000 or \$100,000 flat, immediately they can be eligible for \$30,000 grant. That will go towards the payment of the deposit towards their house and then you can get some of your FNPF money and suddenly, your loan amount comes down to maybe \$50,000, \$65,000 or even \$60,000. Therefore, your loan repayment will be less, coupled with the fact that your interest rate is now lower, so it makes it a lot more affordable. That is the entirety within which you need to look at access to housing, affordability of housing and, indeed, ownership of housing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I would like to highlight also (the Honourable Minister has, of course, highlighted many of the developments and she will be making those comments in her Ministerial Statement), I want to very quickly talk about the issue of IFC and put that matter to rest because, again, I think there seems to be a lot of misinformation. There is a lot of information, Sir, I had talked about in the Budget also and I wish people had listened to the Budget Address.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have been doing is, we have been working together - the Housing Authority, Ministry of Housing and International Finance Corporation (IFC), to identify areas and there are about six areas that had been identified - lands that Housing Authority (HA) actually owns. We are looking at areas in Raiwaqa, Davuilevu, Nepani, Wainibuku, Tavakubu and Tavua. We are coming up with different models in respect of what we call a mix development because if we have, for example, 100 acres of land to develop into housing lots, on a sustainable basis we need to be able to fund it so generally, most countries have this model.

If we are going to give low-income people affordable lots or affordable strata title, the money has to come from somewhere. It cannot always come from direct budget support. So, if you had out of the 100 acres, a mixed development where you have high-end commercial, also some high-end residential, middle income residential lots or strata title but also affordable housing lots that will be able to cross-subsidise the development of those particular homes.

As the Honourable Minister also highlighted, the technology that is available in Fiji in respect of housing is comparatively fairly archaic whereby you put the steel, you put the bricks and it is very manually intensive, et cetera. There are many different ways of construction.

I met the minister responsible for housing in New Zealand a couple of years ago and they have a number of issues themselves. In fact, there is a shortage of homes in New Zealand, so they are looking at also developing various models and they themselves face these issues that I have just highlighted. There are companies in other countries, for example, in Malaysia, Singapore and even New Zealand for that matter, through IFC's international reach, we can get them to partner up with local construction companies. It is not just the quality but also the cost of it and, indeed, the speed at which they can build those homes on a sustainable basis. So that is the model with IFC that we are looking at.

The IFC is not going to own any land, the land will still be owned by Housing Authority. We will have this mix development and they have a lot of expertise in that area and that is precisely what we are doing. What we can do, for example, is the strata titles that have been built on those land, we can then deem those houses to have been built by low income families and they will get the \$30,000 grant towards that which will help defray the cost for them. That is the type of mechanism that we are looking at in respect of the IFC projects. I do not want to go too much into details, I am sure the Honourable Minister will talk about that later.

The other point that I wanted to make was on the issue that Honourable Kepa talked about on gender absence, et cetera, the equality of gender being absent and some of the issues highlighted by Honourable Nawaikula. I remember in 1999 when I first came to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, we were given huge files because of corruption matters then in Housing Authority. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition will remember this. This was when some contractors were actually benefitting, so the system has actually had the rot for a long period of time and frankly, there has not been any political nor administrative will to actually do an entire, sort of, overhaul of the organisation. We obviously need to do it but still be able to get that organisation to be able to deliver what it is supposed to deliver, so the issue is about the appointment of the right people on merit.

Honourable Bulitavu talked about outsourcing versus in-house. There is a lot of different models regarding that but efficiencies are actually gained when you are able to outsource and, in fact, outsourcing also creates jobs as we know because once you are employed, your ability to deliver projects is actually delayed, as opposed to reaching certain milestone which is contract-driven.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that kind of worries me was when someone said, "how come there is savings and there is still all the shortages". I mean, it just makes sense. I cannot even respond

to that because obviously, it is a profit and loss (P&L) issue. That is why I think you have cash reserves, et cetera, but I completely agree, of course, that in the past, there have been bureaucratic blunders but it is your ability to deal with it.

Of course, there will be people who could be corrupt in the Lautoka office, who could be taking a bribe, putting people's names up the ladder. Yes, there could be that, of course. The fact that you now have an open public transparent process to deal with it is actually something that they should gain comfort from because we want to tackle this issue to be able to get rid of this particular bureaucratic issue that has been existing in the organisation.

The last point that I would like to make also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, again, when you talk about housing, you cannot actually escape from the issue of what we call informal settlements. The reality is that in Fiji post-Independence, we saw an upsurge of informal settlements throughout Fiji because people wanted to move closer to towns and cities. They wanted to have their own homes, so there was movement from the agro-based economy to more urban areas.

A lot more people are living in informal settlements. Now, under the Bainimarama-led Government and under the FijiFirst Government, we have had enormous strides in respect of formalising informal settlements that no one spoke about. In many areas in Fiji now, where people have been living in squatters, they now have 99-year leases. That also needs to be taken into account in respect of the housing demand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the budgetary allocation that has been put in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we agree that there needs to be room for improvement and the reality is that, there are new models being looked at. We are constantly looking at the solutions we can provide, the improvement of Housing Authority and getting the housing grants in place.

In the Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also made an announcement that if the private sector also subdivides the land, they will be given various tax rebates and any profits they make from the sale of the subdivision lots is not taxable at all. Why are we doing that? Because it is going to be in all our effort, so it is not just the Housing Authority, the private sector or the IFC project, we have the Honourable Minister for Lands and the Honourable Minister for Housing formalising the informal settlements. So, it is a multipronged approach, to try and improve the rate of home ownership in Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his contribution to the debate. I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have any further comments. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. I remind Honourable Members that once the vote is taken on the motion, it ends there and the Report will not be debated again in Parliament. This will be the case for all the Standing Committee Reports that will be debated this week.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to move his motion. You have the floor.

**MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, NATIONAL SECURITY AND IMMIGRATION
2016 BI-ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT (JANUARY–JULY 2016)**

HON. A.D. O’CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir. I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration Bi-Annual Report (January-July 2016) which was tabled on 4th April, 2019.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.D. O’CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Honourable Members of the Committee, I take this opportunity to speak in support of the motion in regards to the debate on the Committee Report. This is the first report by the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Immigration to be reviewed by the Standing Committee at this session of Parliament.

The Committee recognises that the Report was put together in haste because of the change in the financial year of Government. The Report was quite basic and does not discuss the Ministry’s Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). This made it difficult for the Committee to thoroughly and accurately evaluate the performance of the Ministry over the reporting period.

The Committee recognises the essential oversight role of the Ministry of Defence in the security, defence and well-being of the nation and our people. Therefore, the Ministry should be seen to be the leading agency for the issuance of policy guidance to shape the functions of all Government Departments under its umbrella.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight the gist of few of the Committee recommendations:

- (1) The Committee recommends that relevant policies be put in place to safeguard and protect critical national assets, such as water catchments, petroleum storage facilities, power stations, sewerage treatment plants, telecommunication sites and seaports and airports. Vibrant and efficient monitoring and evaluation together with legislative framework for those critical national assets is the way forward for the Ministry.
- (2) The Committee strongly recommends that the laws and regulations governing the security and safe movement of explosives and dangerous goods ordinance be reviewed to strengthen compliance to safety standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is anticipated that the recommendations by the Committee is given due consideration by Government and addressed through appropriately.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few comments as a Member, I support the recommendations of the Report before the House. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. Honourable Prime Minister, you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to speak on the motion by Honourable O'Connor. As immigration sits amongst my portfolio, I will speak as to how our immigration systems have strengthened with the view towards a more secure Fiji.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, national security starts at the border. As we have seen through the duration of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Fiji's strong border controls have kept new cases of coronavirus from entering the country, preventing new outbreaks of the virus, while also safely allowing some flows of tourism, such as yacht tourism to resume.

Our vigilance has now placed us more than 130 days from a new case of the virus in our communities. We are one of, if not, the only country in the world with such a record, which is testament to the strength of our immigration infrastructure.

We are also strengthening our immigration systems in ways that make travel more convenient for our people. We recently, as you have heard, rolled out our e-passports, leading a new layer of security to our immigration system. These new e-passports contain new range of security features that make it much more difficult for people to enter the country illegally, establishing a more secure Fijian passport and bringing greater integrity to our immigration system. Thanks to industry leading technology incorporated by Germany's Mobile ID services, who's very same security features are found in passports in countries like Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

Fijian passport holders are also protected against forgery, identity theft and passport tampering and re-production. The Government will continue to provide appropriate technology, professional training and continue to upgrade relevant legislations to strengthen the institutions charged with border security.

With that commitment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I give my support to the Report. *Vinaka.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to talk about the contents of the Report that are coming to the House. I wish to say that it is very, very difficult for the Committees to properly assess the performance of a Department or a Ministry because of the contents. It is highlighted here, it says, "The Report is quite basic and does not discuss the Ministry's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)."

This made it difficult for the Committee to thoroughly and accurately evaluate the performance of the Ministry over the reporting period. It is the same issue that I always say every time when I sit in one of the Committees. The Government has been in performance management culture for nearly 10 years now, so can we, please, include in the Report their targets, their Key Performance Indicators and more importantly, whether those targets are achieved or not and the reason. Without that, it is very, very hard for the Committee, so this is one example.

I wish to say that of all the Reports that I have seen, the Police Report is the best because it clearly sets out what their corporate targets are, what their Key Performance Indicators are, whether those are achieved or not and the reasons. I make the comment similarly for the other reports that are coming before the Committees for review.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to place my support on this Report that was tabled in Parliament by the Honourable O'Connor as a Member of the Committee that he chairs, and I recognise what he noted that the Report concentrated around the six months in which the Ministry had to report because of the change in the financial year. I would just like to make some general observations on the findings of the Committee and also some of the submissions that were made to the Committee with regards to this Report.

Mr. Speaker, you will understand that this is a report for the year 2016 and since then, it has been 20 years. The same Report was reviewed in 2019, three years after the Report was tabled to Parliament. Initially, I would like to say that unfortunately, from the Report, we were not able to visit the Fiji Police Force. On this particular occasion, we were going to visit the Office of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Toorak. Unfortunately, for some unknown reason, the Committee was unable to go there on the case of differences between the Committee and the Police Headquarters. I hope that in the future that this is not going to happen because it does create a bad precedence where the Members of Parliamentary Committee are unable to go and visit the different Offices of Government and independent institutions in Fiji.

I would also like to note some very interesting observations. I must note and I would like to thank the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) on a very interactive session that we had at Blackrock during our visit there, talking about projects at Blackrock. It also gave a good understanding of what he is thinking, particularly on some of the concerns that the Committee have raised.

One of the issues and that is noted in the Report itself is that, the Committee had raised with the Commander at Blackrock the concern that the RFMF had not submitted an annual report to the House for a very long time. He did make a commitment that he would do that, and I hope that that, that occasion is going to come because it could only be good for the RFMF and also for those in Parliament to have a level of transparency an institution that has such a level of responsibility under the Constitution for the security, defence and well-being of our people. So I hope then, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Defence would also note that, that Parliament would like to see the tabling of the reports from the RFMF from the past years up until last year.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to note on this occasion a very important observation that was made by the Commander during his presentation and that was on the level of maturity that he had discussed with the Committee with regards to the recruitment of soldiers into the Force at the age of 18. He made a comparison on the maturity of the individuals back then, he noted 1987 in particular, and then he noted the challenges at the moment where the youths that are joining the RFMF today who do not seem to possess that similar level of maturity that he, as a Commander, would like to see. It has, in a way, created an added burden perhaps, to him and the Force, to try and bring up the level of maturity obviously, of young individuals, particularly young men and women who see a career in the RFMF into the future.

We saw this as being significant, Mr. Speaker, because such is the extent of responsibility entrusted upon the RFMF as an institution, the Commander as being the Head of the Force, and also the officers and men, in maintaining and upholding the constitutional role in a professional and mature manner. He also recognised that he had noted in our deliberations with him that he has an

issue, because majority in the Force have been from 1987 soldiers around that time who are now at the top end of the command and leadership in the RFMF, and will be exiting very soon. I am talking about the Officer Corps here and also the Warrant Officers and senior NCOs.

The point here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the concern by the Committee, given that this high level of attrition going into the future, it is important that the RFMF for that matter, and I would like to say here that because it has such a bearing on Force which in turn has a direct bearing on the National Security Strategy which, I believe, has been through Cabinet and has yet to see the floor of the House.

A lot of work has been done. I understand that Captain Natuva was looking after this work after Commodore Teleni, and I understand that Brigadier Kalouniwai is doing that work. But it is such an important thing because I think at the national level, Mr. Speaker, given the great sense of responsibility to which the Force is entrusted, the level of expectation in terms of professionalism that it needs to have to be able to carry out its functions, that the people of Fiji will have confidence in, in the future.

This is something that the Commander, according to this Report, is facing at present and he deserves every support in that regard because I can only say here that in the future, I hope that Government is going to bring the National Security Strategy into the House sooner rather than later, and also in that respect the Defence White Paper and the Police White Paper which are related to that. . The nation needs to see how the Force deploys itself, how it weans itself with regards to the role it is supposed to be playing for the security of the nation.

I bring this issue here as being one of the critical issues that we had discussed with the Commander, so let me repeat that again. He needs help to try and make sure that the recruitment into the Force has mature people and they need help with the majority of the applicants so that upon the enforcement of the role that they are given, that the people of Fiji can have confidence in the Force into the future and, of course, the issue of the Annual Report that I had noted earlier.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to just share again my concerns, particularly with regards to the National Security Strategy. We have had discussions about this in previous committees and I think in one of our future reports, it is going to note this but I see this post that was put out in the Fijian Government website and may I be permitted to read it, "Yet, Government will ensure a safe, secure and stable Fiji guided by the National Security Strategy. The rule of law will be upheld and the Constitution will be protected."

We all support this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but the important thing is that, we need to know what is entailed in the National Security Strategy. It is an issue that needs to be brought to the floor of Parliament so that when we are talking about the RFMF or the Police in this case, we need to understand their role in the whole scope of what our national security landscape will be into the future.

Mr. Speaker, just to conclude, I would like to make some comments with regards to the Department of Immigration which I believe is now called the Fijian Immigration Department. I had noted the concern that one of the challenges that is faced by people who live in Fiji, particularly for those who are non-citizens, is about their rights. When they come to Fiji to work under work permits and the laws that guide it, the concern here is that, we often hear stories and issues about how they have been mistreated or have been taken advantage of by Officials of the Department of Immigration as it was called then.

I understand that we have a new Director of Immigration, Ms. Amelia Komaisavai, and I would like to wish her well in her new job. But I think this is probably one area that she would also have to look at in the Department, in looking after the rights of non-Fijians who are here. Most of them, because of the fear of their own work, are unable to raise their rights and concerns with the Government and other offices of authority for that matter, in particular Immigration and this is a major cause of concern, Mr. Speaker.

Earlier on this year, Mr. Speaker, we, as a Parliament, had acceded to the Convention on the right of migrant workers and I would like to raise that again in the House that the migrant workers here in Fiji play a very critical role in the development of our nation. Therefore, they need to be accorded the rights that is deserved of them and in particular, we would like to ask them to make sure that when it comes to matters of immigration, that those foreign workers are treated well and fairly by the Fijian Immigration Department.

Also, as a concluding remark, I would like to note that there have been issues faced by employers in Fiji with regards to migrant workers, who they had contracted to work for their companies. Some of these workers faced difficulties, particularly where some companies faced difficulties in being able to retain those workers when their terms came to an end.

We all understand that when you build a team, you would like to reap the benefits of investment in people whom we have trained so when they work with those migrants, the different companies that bring them, they would like to keep them and be given the opportunity to be able to use their services for as long as it is possible. So we would like to ask that the Fijian Immigration Department and the relevant authority look at helping our employers in Fiji to be able to use the services of foreign workers when they need them, particularly when immigration issues do come to the fore with regards to those workers.

With those few comments, I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly, I am concerned about an observation by the Committee on the pertinent issues they have raised. Number three says, and I quote:

“The Committee noted that little was done to ensure that the incident at Wailotua in Tailevu did not reoccur. The incident referred to here is about a container full of cyanide was placed at risk when the truck carrying this dangerous cargo was involved in an accident. The accident posed grave and immediate threats to personal lives and environment.

It worries me, Mr. Speaker, that we do not seem to be taking precautions when transporting harmful chemicals and it is very concerning that the Committee is saying, “little has been done to rectify that.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago, there was this explosion in Beirut, Lebanon, due to harmful chemicals that were not properly stored. I had raised this question to be asked in Parliament this week but it did not make it passed the Tables Unit and I suspect someone is going to make a Ministerial Statement on that because it is quite concerning. But if you see in this Report, we appear to be lax in safeguarding our community from harmful chemicals.

In this particular case, if it was a truck, was there a convoy of protective trucks – the lead vehicle and those at the back, to ensure that the convoy travelled at the right speed and that people were aware that something harmful and dangerous was being transported on the road? We would like to know more about this.

I wonder if the Committee, in its closing statement, the Chairperson could give us a bit more details about this. I would hope that we could hear from the honourable Minister on whether the harmful chemicals in this country are properly stored. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my short contribution this afternoon is just to note the Committee's recommendation. Probably after this, the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Immigration will speak. In the recent Budget Debate when it came to Head 6 – Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing, he talked about the Defence White Paper, the Police White Paper and also the RFMF, and had assured that it will come into Parliament soon, it is going through probably the drafting stages. Also, that will determine the restructure of the Force and also the National Security Strategy.

My concern is also on Recommendation 1 of the Report, if the Honourable Minister is on the same page, whether work has been done on the progress of reverting immigration functions at the border because there is talk on that, from FRCS to the Fijian Immigration Department. If there could be an update on that.

Also, the issue of e-passports that we have now and the cost of the new passport, the affordability given the requirements that come with it in terms of the birth certificate, et cetera, that our ordinary Fijians find it difficult or too high to pay, but we also consider the security measures that come with it. However, those are things to consider, on how people benefit from the various policies that fall under this Report.

The other thing which has been a re-occurring issue, again, is the Annual Report for the RFMF since 2014 which are still pending and I hope the Honourable Minister has something to say about the availability of these Reports to be scrutinised by the Parliamentary Committee.

We are also thankful for the technological development happening at the Republic of Fiji Navy and their Data Collection Centre and Crisis Management, especially SAR (Search and Rescue Operations). Also, the SAR covering Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu waters bordering Fiji. I think the technology could be given to our Navy to carry out that particular task in looking after Fiji's EEZ and the security of our waters, even on dangers that can come into our EEZ.

One of the other two challenges that was noted in the Annual Report on page 14 where the Committee recommends for the latest satellite and geospatial technology, appropriate training for our Military, Navy and Police, Military and Defence personnel to assist in law enforcement, security, defence operations and crisis management, whether this will also be part of the White Paper that will be coming and taking into consideration those challenges that are listed there. The other challenge would be the degree of autonomy between the Ministry, the RFMF and the Police, because we know that policing now has come under the Ministry of Defence.

Those are some of the observations. Probably, some clarifications can be provided by the Honourable Minister and some assurance on when the documents that I have stated will be making their way to Parliament and also the progress of the White Paper. Thank you very much, Sir.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to make a short contribution on the findings of the Committee. First, is the variance of \$94,000 that has been identified in the Auditor-General's Report. I note that the Committee was very satisfied with the clarity in terms of the occurrence of this variance of \$94,000 but this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, indicates the operational challenges within the Department of Immigration. I see that there is a lot of issues that have been highlighted by the Committee, addressing the operational capability of the Department of Immigration, especially looking after those who have overstayed in Fiji.

We note that the details of the overstayers and the reasons for their overstaying has been highlighted in the Committee Report, but this questions the terms of the work of the Department of Immigration. How effective are they monitoring the people who have come to Fiji through work permits or through other visitor arrangements that had allowed people to overstay or work without advising the Department of Immigration that they have now changed employers? So these are some of the issues that I have noted from the contents of the Report. We would be grateful if the Honourable Minister could advise that they have now addressed this issue to ensure that there is no repetition of what has been highlighted.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is regarding those who have been arrested. I note in one of the question sessions that surveillance was conducted and they were given a deadline for July 2016, even though the Report also highlighted that there was one Solomon Islander who was a student who breached his student permit. So this raises a question in terms of the operational capability of the Department of Immigration.

I note that a new Acting Director of Immigration has been appointed and hopefully, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this will address the issues that have been highlighted by the Committee. I also thank the Committee for preparing this Report and giving us a detailed information in terms of the operations of the Department of Immigration.

The other issue that I would like to speak on, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Security Division of the Ministry of Defence that noted in 2016 that the traffic situation on our roads would worsen if nothing was done to address it. This traffic congestion still continues today and I hope that the Honourable Minister, in his reply, will also inform the House on how they are going to address this traffic situation which also affects productivity and workers' lives, as I had already mentioned, leaving homes at ungodly hours in the morning and also reaching home late at night. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I take this opportunity to clarify some of the issues raised and, of course, make some comments on the 2016 Bi-Annual Report for the Ministry of Defence, National Security and back then, we also had the Department of Immigration but the Honourable Minister for the Department of Immigration has already highlighted some of the improvements that they are currently undertaking in the Department.

Let me thank the Chairperson of the Committee and his Members who have presided over the Report before us today. As Minister responsible for Defence now, I do convey the sincere apology of the Ministry for the quality of the Report but be assured, Honourable Members and Mr. Speaker,

Sir, that those ongoing challenges is something that we will continue to work on as we have a relentless effort on pursuing excellence in the work that we do.

I will not use the change of the financial year and, of course, the switching of processes and the key documents of Government from Annual Corporate Plan (ACP) to Costed Operations Plan (COP) as an excuse, but I just wish to assure the House that we are doing our very best to improve on these areas.

Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on some of the questions raised by the Honourable Members who have spoken before me, let me just clarify this issue about the variance of \$94,000 in the Immigration Department. I have been informed that the Committee's findings on the variance of \$94,197 by the Immigration Department was due to the two systems used – the Financial Management Information Systems (FMIS) and the Integrated Border Management System (IBMS) that were not compatible and that resulted in the variance. But let me assure the august House that the two systems, though not compatible because of the IBMS which is not linked up to the Consul Service by the Fijian Missions abroad, the variance of \$94,000 derived from the manual receipts issued were not being recorded in the IBMS system, therefore, there was no loss of revenue to Government.

On the issue of traffic on the roads, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is benefitting from the development programmes of Government and this is perhaps, a positive side of how it trickles down to ordinary citizens, as the Honourable Minister for Economy has always highlighted. People have freedom of choice to purchase vehicles and, of course, its usage as well but in terms of the safety and security, the Traffic Department of the Police is working very closely with the Land Transport Authority (LTA) and other key stakeholders, although traffic issues is probably with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport.

But the role that we play is particularly on the monitoring of the traffic and, of course, road safety measures when it comes to the work undertaken the Ministry with the work of the Police, particularly the Traffic Unit. This is work in progress and this also requires the participation and support of every Fijian, particularly all road users. We need to be vigilant of the road conditions and, of course, the restrictions in terms of speed so that we can all ensure that safety is always observed when we are using our roads.

On the issue of chemicals, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted by the Honourable Gavoka, there is a clear distinction between explosives and chemicals. Of course, I admit the fact, Honourable Chairperson and Honourable Members of the Committee, that perhaps not highlighted in the Report but the Ministry is looking at, particularly the issue of the Chemical Weapons Act because chemicals and other combustible materials are mainly covered under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations and the Act itself. Anything combustible, whether it is chemicals, whether it is just rubbish or whatever, the OHS Committees in all the organisations are responsible for that.

As I have stated, there is a clear distinction between chemicals and, of course explosives. Explosives is quite easy to deal with and there are already regulations in place about the storage and movement but perhaps, the challenge, Honourable Members and Mr. Speaker, Sir, is on chemicals, particularly those that are also in this category - cyanide and other hazardous chemicals which can be incorporated into our Chemical Weapons Act. That is something that we will look at, particularly given this. But, of course, all that I can say at this stage, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Ministry, through the RFMF and the Police, will always be available to provide escorts if need be, but for those that are in possession of those chemicals or explosives, as long as we are contacted we can provide the escorts so that it is safe.

Definitely the long term solution to this is the review of the Chemicals Weapons Act which we are currently in the initial stages of discussing with all the relevant stakeholders so that such issues can be addressed for the future. As I have stated, we are always happy to assist if need be. The EOD Team in the RFMF and, of course, the Police can provide escorts if need be, otherwise let us liaise very closely with the Ministry for Labour which is the Ministry responsible, on the storage of other chemicals and its transportation as well. I hope that probably would assist for now.

Issues about National Security Strategy and the relevant documents, I did state that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we had the Budget Debate that we are in the final stages. It has come to Cabinet but Cabinet has directed that we conduct further consultations. There are still some areas that we need to sit and discuss with the Solicitor-General's Office and that is work in progress and, of course, that will lead to the other documents as well.

I did admit during the Budget Debate that I would want to speed up this outstanding work and, of course, the documents related to it. I did state and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition can recall that one of the key issues that I face in the Ministry is the capacity because it is now called the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing but the structure and most of what I have in the Ministry when I took over the Ministry, is still Home Affairs from the old Home Affairs days, Mr. Speaker, Sir, so this is something that we are seriously working on. Of course, I am thankful that Brigadier Kalouniwai is with me now in the Ministry Headquarters so that we can work into this.

I have talked about capacity and I am thankful to the Australian Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir. After my meeting with the Honourable Minister last year, I did raise about capacity issues in the Ministry and she wrote a letter to my Office earlier this year if I can formalise some of the requests that I had made and I am pleased to mention here in this august House, Mr Speaker. Sir, that last Friday, we received a letter from the Minister for Defence, Senator Linda Reynolds, that Australia is willing to provide an extra placing for Fiji at the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies (CDSS) in Australia for next year.

The RFMF will maintain their candidate. We have the Navy, Captain Humphrey Tawake, currently at CDSS but the good thing is, there will be a civilian equivalent senior attending CDSS as well next year and I am looking at Officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or from the Ministry of Defence, so that they can be exposed to strategic level training environment and, of course, the related work which will help us in the long term in terms of the development of our policies, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Annual Reports, again, I have stated before this august House that the Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) has appeared before the Committees of Parliament and he has given his assurance and, of course, I know that there is a team currently being tasked to look at the Annual Reports that are due from the RFMF.

On the issue, again, at the border, I apologise that I missed this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the work between the Fiji Revenue & Customs Service, the Fijian Immigration Department and, of course, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji and there are clear demarcation in their responsibilities. Although the person who sits on the desk is not entirely immigration or biosecurity in terms of the manning but the work programme and the allocation of responsibilities is clearly outlined and it is not only in terms of the processing but in the baggage checking system as well, where you will see either biosecurity manning it or customs manning it or even immigration officers manning it too. Of course, they have their own systems and processes in place but let me assure this august House that we treat security issues as a key priority in terms of border processing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is perhaps, some clarifications to some of the issues highlighted in the Report but let me just assure in this august House that we have already started working on the areas highlighted, including gender and our alignment to the SDGs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we hope that we will produce better quality reports in the future as well because the safety and security of all Fijians cannot be compromised and we have a responsibility to deliver to that higher level of expectation as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak in reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have any further comments. Thank you.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I will allow a suspension motion to be moved. I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As agreed to by the Business Committee during its meeting on 27th August, last Thursday, we have before us an outstanding item in Schedule 2 and, of course, the remaining items in Schedule 3 on Oral and Written Questions, thus the initial request for the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today, to complete the business as listed in the Order Paper. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. The floor is open for debate.

There being no one wishing to take the floor, Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have nothing further to add to the motion. *Vinaka!*

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, we will now suspend proceedings for refreshments in the Big Committee Room. Parliament will resume in half-an-hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.41 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.11 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi to move the motion. You have the floor, Madam.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY ON THE IMPACTS OF DRUG-RELATED ABUSE

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to move:

That Parliament resolves to establish a special committee under Standing Order 129 to inquire into the impacts of drug-related abuse and make recommendations on how the use of drugs can be reduced.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi to speak on her motion. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Assistant Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; I rise to present my motion before this august House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is an urgent need to reflect on the current efforts to address the abuse of drugs in this country, that is the rationale for this motion before the House. I acknowledge the work that is ongoing by the Police Force, the Military and Fiji Navy in combating the cultivation and trafficking of drugs in Fiji. However, despite these work, drug offences continue to increase, according to Police crime statistics. This alarming trend is evidenced by the fact that Fiji had a 560 percent increase in drug-related offences between 2013 and 2018, from 200 drug-related cases in 2013 to 1,400 by 2018. This source was reported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the statistics were presented by the Fiji Police Force at the 43rd Meeting of the Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies Asia and the Pacific in Thailand in 2009. According to the Report, seizures of parcels containing illicit drugs skyrocketed between 2013 and 2018. The Report said that this included intercepts of methamphetamine (Meth) which had originated from China, USA and South America.

The UNODC Report notes that the huge lead from 200 cases in 2013 to 1,400 in 2018 showed the level of infiltration by criminal elites in the Pacific. The Report states that for years, organised crime groups have exploited Pacific Island Countries and Territories as a transshipment point for methamphetamine traffic from East and South East Asia and North America to Australia and New Zealand.

The US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) Fiji Crime and Safety Report for 2020, that was published on 4th June, 2020, states that there are elements of Asian organised crime involved in illegal gambling, prostitution, cybercrime and narcotics distribution in Fiji.

In recent years, Australia outlaw motorcycle gangs have attempted to establish their presence in Fiji, but they do not appear to have caused any significant crime-related issues. The Report further states that drug addiction does contribute to some of the petty crimes that occur in Fiji. Penalties for possession, use or trafficking in illegal drugs, including marijuana are severe. Offenders can expect

long jail sentences and heavy fines. There has been a recent uplift in the local sale and use of methamphetamine which previously, only transited through Fiji on the way to Australia or New Zealand.

These past years, Sir, there has been spike in methamphetamine-related arrests. This was, again, confirmed by the Fiji Police Force, when it appeared before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence in 2019. The Police confirmed that in 2018, while aggravated robbery reduced by six percent, burglary by 13 percent, sexual offences by 10 percent, domestic violence by 35 percent, drug offences recorded an increase of 55 percent with 685 cases in 2017 to 1,223 in 2018 and 1,058 in 2019. The statistics show a sustained increase in drug offences and theft cases.

From the statistics collected, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji is not only the hub of the Pacific, it is clearly becoming a centre stage for drug peddlers and users in the Pacific. Fiji, by virtue of its geographical position is faced with twin problems of illicit drug trafficking and increasing use. These are further aggravated by the rapid transitional and social changes arising from urbanisation. These developments create an atmosphere which exposes entire communities to greater risk associated with drug abuse.

Save the Children Fiji reports that the continuing political and economic instability in the country, has also led to a lot more children working as drug traffickers or prostitutes. There is a range of evidence and data suggesting the potential for the increase risk of HIV infection associated with substance use in Fiji. But there is a need to explore this issue further with social behavioural and qualitative research.

While harmful substance use, patterns and sexual health risk factors are increasingly reported, there is little risk analysis regarding the interaction of the two. Our particular concern is the current environment of rapidly changing substance use and patterns with little in the way of structural responses to protect the people of Fiji from the range of social and health-related harms.

According to the National Substance Abuse Advisory Council (NSAAC), 1,634 cases of drugs and substance abuse in schools was recorded in 2019. This was an increase of 16 percent, compared to 1,058 cases in 2018. From this statistics, 75 percent of the cases were recorded in secondary schools which involved cases of smoking cigarettes, sniffing glue and even cases of smoking marijuana. All the other 25 percent was in primary schools.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2013 national methamphetamine cases totalled two, then in 2018 there were 113 recorded cases. That is only recorded cases. We note from the recent SPS documentary that the majority of drug use or hard drugs in particular, are happening below the radar, and away from the attention of authorities.

There is no data with regards to the rates of addiction. The St. Giles Psychiatric Hospital in Suva has reported that nearly 20 percent of its patients in the year from May 2017 to April 2018 were admitted for substance abuse, mostly for methamphetamine.

Mr. Speaker, our national drug problem requires a coordinated nationwide response. It is submitted that Parliament act today to establish a special committee to explore the issues and make recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not merely a law enforcement problem. It is a society-wide threat that requires us all to work together, including within Government, the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. The extent of the threat posed by green drugs -

marijuana and hard drugs - methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin, cannot be just a case for drones and special equipment for the Police.

The Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Youth and Ministry of Health also require budgetary allocations to undertake, not only preventative programmes but also for drug treatment or rehabilitation centres. This requires coordination at the national level to start with, and cannot be left to only law enforcement, but a holistic approach is required.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has no rehabilitation centre, no methadone clinic, no additional health specialist or even a narcotics anonymous meeting. With the lack of resources and professional specialists to tackle this drug problem, it is no wonder that there is a continual increase of drug-related issues and crimes in Fiji. It is critical to formulate a response coordinated at national level that addresses the law enforcement response, but also the psychological and destructive effects of drug abuse on individuals, families, communities, villages, provinces and the nation as a whole. Budgetary provisions need to be considered for construction of clinics to treat addicts.

Our schools require more counsellors. Consideration must be given to funding, to ensure that one counsellor is readily available to serve three schools, instead of the one counsellor per Division that is currently in place. Hotspot schools where drug use has become prevalent must be identified and we must ensure counsellors are available, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The figures from the NSAAC for 2018 records that the incidents of drugs and abuse in schools are alarming indeed. There were 118 cases of marijuana possession, 11 cases of drug dealing, 95 cases of homebrew and 301 cases of glue sniffing or inhalants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the numbers are telling us that it is not the time to treat drugs as just another crime, it is time to act with urgency. A bipartisan special committee is required to inquire holistically into this matter.

Mind education lectures are another concept that I am hopeful the special committee will consider. The Fiji Government with the Ministry of Youth has signed an MOU with the International Youth Fellowship (IYF) and so has the Methodist Church of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the development of material civilisation which pursues convenience and comfort and encourages absence of communication between people through the development of information technologies have affected minds, in fact, the straight minds. And there is a huge impact that comes to this including, suicide, game and drug addiction, among others.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am gravely concerned that if we do not act now to address the drug problem in Fiji in a holistic manner, then the problem will be insurmountable in the next few years. A generation of people on drugs will be the cause of disarray in our family units, our homes, our villages, our communities.

As I had said from the outset Mr. Speaker, Sir, we acknowledge the work that has been carried out by the Police and the Military. We all have to work together - Government, lawmakers, policymakers, the Police, the religious bodies, the *vanua*, the community leaders, NGOs, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), to fight this destructive epidemic that will destroy our people and our nation.

We need to co-operate across the aisle on this grave matter. That is why Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am proposing that the Government lead the special committee which I propose to be chaired by the Assistant Minister for Health, Honourable Alexander O'Connor; and his Deputy Chairperson to be

Honourable Dr. Salik Govind; the Assistant Minister for Social Welfare, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar is proposed as the third Member; and the other two Members from this side of the House are the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu, our shadow Minister for the Ministry of Defence; and myself.

The bipartisan committee will review all these issues and challenges, together in a holistic manner, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I urge colleagues on the other side of the House to agree to the terms of the motion.

In considering the terms of reference for the special committee, may I offer the following, Mr. Speaker, Sir:

- (1) The Committee is to examine the green and synthetic drugs issue in Fiji from three perspectives - those who are unfortunate to be addicted, the drug pushers and the community.
- (2) The Committee will consider recommendations that include, legislative policy and budgetary requirements and recommendations for consideration by Government.
- (3) The Committee will submit its report Parliament within six months, that is, by the first sitting in 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion.

Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to highlight, again, to the House that just last year in the same month - August 2019, the Honourable Tikoduadua moved a similar motion in essence and yet, it was defeated by the Government side. He also had alluded to the same sentiments that has been mentioned by Honourable Qionibaravi.

In his reply, the Honourable Minister for Defence said that legislations, a national framework and policies and programmes are in place to combat our drug problem in Fiji, that all these drug problems that are infiltrating our primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary schools and even in the community will be addressed by the legislation, by the national framework and policies and programmes that the Government have in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to highlight big performance indicators of those legislations, the national framework, and policies and programmes which are just not working. For example, the former Police Commissioner, Mr. Qiliho said in July, just last month, that in 2019, 1,223 cases were reported to the Police and that is a 16 percent increase from 2018, and that was also alluded to by Honourable Qionibaravi. Also, Commissioner Qiliho said that there is grave concern in the increase in possession of green drugs which is marijuana and hard drugs, like ice.

After having said that, the media highlighted (and I believe it was *Fiji Sun*) that in 2016 in their issue, they said that \$40 million worth of marijuana was seized by the Police. On 3rd July, another \$6.95 million was seized, and on 20th July, another news article ran \$86 million. So, just for those three seizures of marijuana plants, there was a total of \$132.95 million, approximately \$133 million. Yet, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the same Minister for Defence had the audacity to say in the last

motion that the legislations, the national framework, policies and programmes will resolve our drug problems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also know the media run stories of almost 100 bars of cocaine that were harvested or were found floating in our maritime islands. Also, there is a group of mothers who are concerned about their children having being used as peddlers in primary schools and in secondary schools. And they have formed an association and their president is one Ms. Ilana Kalounisiga, and these are concerned mothers who have taken things into their hands and have tried to assist the Government in having to combat this problem, Mr. Speaker.

Yet with that kind of performance indicators, the Government now is still having our sea borders open, using the excuse of the Blue Lane Initiative. This Blue Lane Initiative still allows yachts, apart from the Superyacht Charter Act 2010 that is still in place, to come into our country. If the hundred bars of cocaine had been found on the beaches of our maritime islands, then what kind of responsible government would have such initiative like that? When our air border is closed, why is our sea border still open? Honourable Attorney-General, it is not a laughing matter.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- It is not a laughing matter.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Using COVID-19 as an excuse to still allow the Blue Lane Initiative and having yachts come into our country, Mr. Speaker. If they are responsible enough, they will close the sea border, Mr. Speaker. If the Blue Lane Initiative will allow yachts and will still bring in those kind of possibilities of having hard drugs, landing or ending up on our beaches, why is the Government allowing that Blue Lane Initiative, Mr. Speaker?

Also, I remember in the last term of Parliament, we had a debate when they moved the legislation to extend the opening hours of nightclubs. At least now, it is COVID-19 and there is a stop, but it may be temporary, Mr. Speaker. The law is in place, which they changed to allow extended opening hours of nightclubs. If the Government is really concerned about our drug problems in Fiji, then they will not bring in these kind of legislations so that it will encourage, it will provide some kind of enabling environment for peddlers to operate in, Mr. Speaker.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Government must stop playing lip service to the problems that we are faced with right now, on drug problems. I would plead to the other side of the House, to the honourable Minister responsible for our borders, the Minister for Defence, to support this motion. This motion is about the welfare of our people, it is about the welfare of our children and our youths. So I would earnestly plead to the other side of the House to support this motion to have a special committee established to inquire into the drug problems in Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on the motion by the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. Substance abuse, whether excessive alcohol consumption or the rising use of hard drugs, like methamphetamine and cocaine, these are matters of concern for all Fijians. But it is a particularly cruel problem for our young people, whose entire futures can be snuffed out by developing an addiction to one of these deadly substances.

Mr. Speaker, the drug problem is a crime problem. It is a health problem, a social problem, an educational problem, as well as productivity problem and that is why my Government has adopted a strategic all-encompassing approach to address the many layers of this issue. We have taken big steps to root out this problem wherever it exists. We are investing in helping victims recover.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, I was proud to open the Alcohol and Drug Unit at St. Giles Hospital, a first of its kind centre which helps rehabilitate victims of substance abuse. Patient-by-patient and staff are helping rehabilitate the victims of drug abuse and addiction, renewing their lease on life and introducing them to society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that being said, we are not only responding on the health side, while investing in recovery is immensely important, prevention is the key. The truth is, we would much prefer to invest our dollars in ensuring no child ever has exposure to hard drugs in the first place. We see the need to go after the root cause of this issue, the criminal networks profiting off the hard drugs trade in Fiji.

These criminals Mr. Speaker, who are within our borders and beyond our shores, put illegal profit beyond our people's well-being and they must be dealt with. Our Fiji Police has been properly resourced to pinpoint these offenders and even put them behind bars.

This financial year, my Government has dedicated \$40 million towards the construction of four new police stations in Nakasi, Nadi, Lautoka and Nalawa. The Fiji Police Force will be promoting 257 officers to senior posts to boost leadership and management. A total of 137 new recruits will be added to the ranks of the Police and we will be regularising Special Constables.

The allocation dedicated for Special Drug Operations increased from \$800,000 to \$1 million in the 2020-2021 National Budget and this funding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will help the Fiji Police Force better prepare and execute Special Response Teams to undertake special drug operations and we expect them to add on to the over \$200 million worth of various illicit narcotics discovered over the last three years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are some ill-informed people out there, claiming crime is on the rise in Fiji. That is not true. At the moment, with our nationwide curfew, in fact, violent crime is way down but even prior to the pandemic, crime was on the decline. According to the recent 2019 key statistics by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics, total crime cases recorded in 2012 was 22,000. Last year, we recorded under 17,000. That was not some lucky one-off year, Mr. Speaker, the trend is clear, last year was the second lowest year on record and 2018 was the third lowest year for crime on record.

There is no coincidence that in 2018, the total number of police officers per 1,000 population was 4.74, the highest since 2009. Over the last few years, drug crimes have indeed gone up but that is owed in part to the heightened focus we have put on clamping down on such offences. The Police are becoming more efficient and effective in their investigations and arrests. There are now more police officers on the ground with the mandate to investigate hard drug crimes. Naturally, due to the spotlight we are shining on this issue, we expect these crimes to increase before they begin to go down.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can reassure Honourable Members of this Parliament and Fijians who are watching today that my Government will not waiver. I have complete trust in the hard work of the Ministry of Defence, the Fiji Police Force and all other authorities who are actively on the ground fighting for the safety and wellbeing of every Fijian.

I actually believe this recommendation to form a special committee to look into the drug situation in Fiji is well intended. We all care about the safety and wellbeing of our people. We all want to see a drug-free Fiji. This proposal is simply a few years too late. Once again, Government is proving it already knows how to get the job done and adding another layer of bureaucratic, politically-driven decision-making is not the way forward.

That being said Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not need a whole of society approach behind this campaign. We need parents to speak with their children about the dangers posed by hard drugs. We need concerned Fijians to point those who are affected by the drug use in the direction of the health and support resources they need to be rehabilitated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is all I have to say and I do not support this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. Honourable Simione Rasova you have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Bula vinaka*, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I stand up to support the motion before the House and I thank the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi for the motion.

I would just like to support that Fiji has an ongoing drug problem. According to the National Substance Abuse and Advisory Council, 1,334 cases of drugs and substance abuse in schools was recorded in 2019. There was an increase of 16 percent, compared to the 1,058 cases in 2018. From these statistics, 75 percent of the cases were recorded in secondary schools, which involved cases of smoking cigarettes, sniffing glue and even cases of smoking marijuana, while the other 25 percent was from primary schools.

In 2013, the methamphetamine cases totalled two. Then in 2018, there was a total of recorded 113 cases. The arrest for drug-related crimes in Fiji has also increased from 685 in 2017 to 1,061 in 2018. There is no data with regards to rates of addiction, but St. Giles Psychiatric Hospital in Suva reported that nearly 20 percent of its patients in the year from May 2017 to April 2018 were admitted for substance abuse issues mostly for addiction to methamphetamine.

Currently, Fiji has no rehabilitation centre, no methadone clinic, no additional health specialist or even a narcotics anonymous meeting. With the lack of resources and professional specialists to tackle this drug problem, it is no wonder that there is no continual increase of drug-related issues and crimes in Fiji. The response to drugs and drug-related cases are reactive response whereby according to the Commissioner of Police, Brigadier General Sitiveni Qiliho, families and communities are suffering.

The ways and the work of the Police and the Military on the fight against drugs have been vigilant, however, on the other side of the spectrum, there is no response with regards to drug use, issues and the impacts, the psychological and physical effects of drug abuse on individuals, families, communities, villages, provinces such as mine in Kadavu, and eventually our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is about six of us from Kadavu. The issue is always coming up that Kadavu is a destiny for marijuana cases, and I think it is very unfair for the media and everyone to be making Kadavu a drug destination or where we grow marijuana. But then Government, at least, should do some kind of value adding on that marijuana if they are so proud of themselves in making or eliminating the death toll that we have in our country, Sir.

I would like to read a report on drug and alcohol use in Fiji. This was done, and I will just read a few lines from it, I quote:

“The use of a range of drugs types, including alcohol, are part of the traditions of many, if not all, communities in Fiji. The Fijian and Indo-Fijian communities have long traditions of psycho-active drug use in the context of ritual and ceremony. It has been noted that seafarers, together with indentured labourers, brought cannabis or Indian hemp traditions to Fiji, with the sugarcane plantations providing fertile ground for cultivation. Meanwhile, kava was widely cultivated and consumed by ethnic Fijians. The Indo-Fijian community slowly adopted kava drinking rituals and gradually others began to increase their consumption. In addition, marijuana use emerged and spread with increasing popularity amongst youth, especially males.

This literature review explores the current licit and illicit drug situation in Fiji. It considers peer-reviewed articles identified using Pub Med, Health Internet Work Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) searches and ‘grey’ literature, including published and unpublished reports, and web based resources. The review found that there is limited data available to assist in understanding the current situation and associate harms in Fiji, but notes more studies and reports have examined alcohol consumption patterns and associated social problems when compared to studies on illicit drug use.”

The WHO Global Status Report on Alcohol, data from the 1993 National Nutrition Survey indicated that consumption of alcoholic homebrew use is widespread in Fiji, as in other Pacific nations. These beverages usually contain up to three times the alcohol content of commercially produced beer and are mostly drunk by young men.

After 1995, unrecorded alcohol consumption in Fiji was estimated to be 1.0 litre of pure alcohol per capita for the population older than 15 years (estimated by a group of alcohol experts). Although there are no recently published statistics on the number of drinkers and abstainers, the same survey found daily drinkers to be 1.4 percent among males and 8 percent among females aged 12 years and over. Estimates from alcohol experts show that the proportion of adult males and females who had been abstaining.

Research shows that high rate of alcohol intake can cause abrupt mood swings, resulting in violence, accidents and fights, exaggerated emotions, uncharacteristic behaviour, memory loss, impaired judgement, communication problems, sleepiness, coma, stupor and death at a very high intake, and suicide attempts. Binge drinking has also been implicated.

While there is limited current information on the rate and consumption of alcohol, cannabis and kava among young people, were conducted to analyse the extent of tobacco and alcohol use among young people in Fiji in the 1990s and early 2000. One of the studies found that alcohol was widely consumed in one form or another among young men, with about two in five young people surveyed having tasted it.

The percentage of young people classified as current drinkers ranged from a high of 26 percent among males to 9 percent among females. Of concern was the high proportion of binge drinkers, about three in five young people reported having had five or more alcoholic drinks in one session.

The study indicated that the high prevalence of 13 to 15 year olds poses a serious concern, and highlights the need for law enforcement and intervention programmes to create an environment that promotes responsible drinking. Interestingly, the study found that when compared to smoking, alcohol and kava use, the proportion of young people using cannabis was relatively low. A follow-up survey of 2,147 students in 2004 by the National Substance Abuse and Advisory Council found a general increase in substance abuse amongst secondary school students.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you very much, that is my contribution.

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

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the motion before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to start by saying that drugs destroy families careers, and it has the power to destroy individuals. Like I said, it destroys, and we must, as responsible members of the community, wage a war on drug abuse, especially given the fact that it is a very serious matter that is affecting our young, our children and our adults. Again, if I can go back and say, let us instil the message in our communities that drugs destroys.

I stand before this House to inform the House on what the Ministry of Education's responsibility is towards protecting our students from drug abuse. We have a Substance Abuse Advisory Council, a statutory body under the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts which was established in 1998 to conduct research on the use and effects of alcohol and other drugs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Council conducts awareness and trainings on the harm caused by alcohol and other drugs, and offers counselling to those affected by alcohol and other drugs. The Ministry has a Substance Abuse Policy for schools that guides our teachers and heads of schools on how to address problems of substance abuse in schools.

The Volatile Substance Abuse Drug Review 2016 is currently on the public consultations stage where views from the public are collected. We use our schools' behaviour management policy to deal with students who are involved with drug-related issues. Drug-related offences are registered as grade 1 offences within the school.

We train our teachers on how to address students with drug problems and the proper ways to make referrals to our stakeholders, like the Department of Social Welfare and the Juvenile Bureau within the Fiji Police Force.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, counselling of students also include parents who are found to be using abusive drugs. We are providing mentoring support services to students who are involved in drug-related offences and todate, we have engaged 21 retired school teachers to help the National Substance Abuse Committee to deal with responsibilities.

We are also creating awareness programmes to parents and committees in how to improve their parenting task at home. We commemorate International Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking Programmes in schools on 26th June every year. We produce and distribute materials related to drugs and, of course, booklets and posters are provided to schools and the communities.

We engage with our stakeholders, especially the Police Drug Unit, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Defence, Child Welfare Services, organisations such as Drug Free Fiji and other counselling organisations. We also use mass media, television, radio and social media platforms to spread the information on drugs and its related impacts.

Of course, we are still strengthening our policies on drugs. We are going to strengthen our policies in engaging with parents, guardians and communities, more on drug harm reduction programmes.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to enforce the role that parents play in ensuring their children stay out of this. Parental engagement, parental supervision, parental monitoring of the whereabouts of their children and the company that they are in is equally vital.

We need to ensure that our children make the right choices. How do we do that? And we have always said that this behaviour and these things must start from home, so we are urging our parents to understand their children. Where their children are, whose company their children are in and, of course, identify signs of behaviour which is not normal to their children.

We will maximise the use of our mass media and social media platforms by sending messages to our students and we will continue to produce brochures and posters on drug. And like I said, we will continue to work with our stakeholders on drug rehabilitation programmes, especially with the Ministry of Defence and the Police Drug Unit.

The progresses that we have made, the Volatile Substance Abuse Drugs Review, like I said, is currently on public consultation. We have endorsed the School Drug Policy and this has already been implemented in all our schools. We are continuing to train our teachers on how to handle students with drug-related issues. Of course, we have a zero tolerance for drug use and possession in our schools, and all such cases are reported to the Police within 24 hours of being found by teachers and the Heads of Schools.

The TV advertisements featuring our Rugby Sevens players is already airing with messages of staying away from drugs. Of course, we have seen a notable increase in the number of drug-reported cases in schools, and like I said, we will continue to ask for reporting of such cases and we have advised our Heads of Schools that no such case should be swept under the carpet and we will continue to work with the Police in terms of reporting such cases. Of course, we have noted an increase in the number of students who go through drug-related counselling and we have seen that the students who go through counselling have shown improvement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with this, I can assure the House that as part of the Ministry of Education, we will continue our efforts but we need to work with all our stakeholders, especially our community leaders and our parents, in ensuring that we make our children aware of the dangers of drug abuse.

Again, let me conclude by saying it could be any of us. It could be our loved ones, it could be our children, it could be our neighbour, it could be our spouse who gets involved on this and it destroys. I am so glad we are talking about this but because we are doing so much, the enforcement agencies are doing so much and we have legislations in place, the Ministry of Health is doing their share, the Department of Social Welfare is doing their bit, as well as the Ministry of Education, so it is a stakeholder partnership. For that reason, because there is so much been done, I do not support this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Education. Honourable Minister for Defence, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, again, good evening and thank you for this opportunity to speak on the motion before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Minister responsible for Defence, National Security and Policing, please allow me to make some comments or short interventions on the motion that has been moved by the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as correctly stated by the Honourable Salote Radrodro, this is similar to the motion by the Honourable Tikoduadua in August 2019, whereby the Honourable Member moved that this Parliament urgently appoints a special parliamentary committee under Standing Orders 129 to holistically look into the multi-faceted risks of the hard drugs situation in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, we are not going to deny or question the facts that has been presented before the House but we are not opposing simply for the sake of opposing the motion by the Honourable Tikoduadua and, of course, by Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, we, on this side of the House, are well-versed with the developments related to drug issues in the country.

Let me say as the Minister responsible, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I have a lot of confidence and faith in what we already have in place and the work that are being undertaken by all stakeholders and, of course, the policy documents that are related to this that are finding its way into Parliament, thus there is no need for us to have this special committee again to look into the issue. I will try and touch on this during my contribution this evening.

Mr. Speaker, again, I acknowledge the Honourable Member's concern and let me say that Government equally shares this concern with great priority. Whilst acknowledging Honourable Qionibaravi's motion and the issue raised by the Honourable Member, I must reflect and reiterate the mechanisms that the Ministry has in place to combat this drug issue. It is only vital that I respond so that we are all aware of the measures in place and logically evaluate whether or not there is a need to establish a special parliamentary committee.

Let me start by linking what we are doing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the United Nations, particularly the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). This is not only a domestic problem for Fiji but this is a global issue and within the region, even if we look at our neighbour Tonga, their situation is worse than Fiji. I say that again, it is not only a local or domestic issue, it is a global issue and even in the region, we have our neighbouring Pacific Island Countries that are in far worse conditions than ours and, of course, we do not want to go down that lane, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There was a special session by the United Nations General Assembly on the world drug problem that was convened in 2016. Out of that Special Assembly Session, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was an outcome document that we are aligning all our efforts towards this drug issue and the three major outcomes. Honourable Qionibaravi talked about the terms of reference and when the National Narcotics Strategy will be presented to this august House and to all stakeholders, it basically covers all the areas that she has been referring to in the terms of reference.

But the three major outcomes when it comes to drug-related issues are demand reduction, supply reduction and harm reduction. Any drug activity will fall under those three pillars. I say it again, demand reduction, supply reduction and harm reduction, because we have to look after the victims and, of course, their reintegration back into society which I will touch on very briefly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have mentioned about the process of domesticating this and right now, if it was not for COVID-19, it would have been passed already by Cabinet because this National Narcotics Strategy aligned to the outcomes that I have stated earlier, has been developed and it is with the Permanent Secretaries now for their comments as part of the consultation before it gets to Cabinet.

Let me talk more about this National Narcotics Strategy. Of course, the outcomes to be achieved is through a holistic approach and this Strategy aims to ensure health, safety and security, promote development and reduce social and economic impacts of drug-related harm in Fiji. It literally

underpins the ongoing activities through collaborative, co-ordination and response undertaken by key agencies in terms of law enforcement, licensing and permits, awareness and prosecution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the demand reduction pillar, this is evidence-based driven with the goal to prevent, delay the use or totally avert the problem of drug effects to the individual and community. The demand reduction pillar entails the following:

- develop and implement;
- comprehensive multifaceted prevention initiatives, such as capacity building; and
- involving all relevant stakeholders - Government and Non-Government, civil societies, faith-based organisations that encouraged collaboration, coordination, cooperation and partnerships in addressing drug reduction which include sharing of information.

On education, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do agree with the Honourable Prime Minister that education starts at home and we need to take this responsibility seriously if we are to address the drug issues in Fiji. Enhance the awareness raising and information provisions at all levels, including an education seconds to educate about the harms of drug use, particularly targeting risk groups, faith-based organisations, parents, youth, vulnerable members of the society at community level and corporate organisations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the supply reduction pillar focuses on a stringent and effective approach to prevent and counter the illicit cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking of these drugs. The coordinated approach under this pillar would encompass the following:

- (1) Strengthen coordinated national border management strategies with various authorities;
- (2) Provide adequate equipment, technology and people with the right skills and knowledge in border control and law enforcement to detect illicit consignments;
- (3) To effectively prevent, monitor and counter trafficking in drugs, trafficking in precursors and other drug related crimes; and of course;
- (4) Enhance national efforts to dismantle clandestine laboratories with methamphetamine as the dominant illegally manufactured drug, including reviewing the effectiveness of the framework for the control of precursors and it does not mean that the seizure of 100 kilogramme of cocaine dictates that we close our borders totally. Of course, there are risks but we are managing the risks very well, Mr. Speaker Sir.

I invite the Honourable Member to go to Denarau and see the operations that we are doing when we are under this Blue Lane initiative, the control measures that we have in place. As I have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have every faith and confidence in this and the Australians even, are quite surprised that some of the seizures in Australia, the information comes from Fiji and of course, there are some seizures in Fiji as well, so these are well-coordinated, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have every faith and confidence in the work that they are doing.

Most importantly in this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to review the existing laws, including the Illicit Drug Control Act to be relevant in addressing the current issues of illicit drug supply and with the appropriate punitive approaches.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad to say also in this august House that this Illicit Drug Control Act review has been completed by the technical officials and all the consultations that need to be done are now pending the final approval of the Solicitor-General's Office and will probably find its way

into Parliament as well within the six months period that this special committee is also targeting to complete some of the work they are doing. So we are in the final stages of the consultation for the National Support Narcotic Strategy and, of course, targeting the demand, supply and the harm reduction and looking at our National Illicit Drugs Act which also is in the process of being completed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is also working very closely with the other agencies, particularly on harm reduction aspect which will focus on correcting human and social behaviours, post-drug use. This will be achieved through the following:

- (1) Enhancing our rehabilitation capacity to treat, assist in recovery and re-introduce these individuals back into the society;
- (2) Enhance support provided or to counselling services or programmes with an appropriate counselling framework to aid rehabilitation processes;
- (3) Ensure adequate access to treatment, rehabilitation and re-integration services, including prison settings, use of culture and tradition as a platform for strengthening rehabilitation and re-integration; and
- (4) To establish dedicated drug use disorder treatment and rehabilitation units in the Central, Eastern, Western and Northern Divisions which includes inpatient and outpatient and community-based, as well as ensure capacity building for service providers in delivering treatment and rehabilitation services.

The Honourable Prime Minister has stated about the opening of the Alcohol and Drug Unit at the St. Giles Hospital on 6th November, 2019, and this, of course, is a remarkable achievement which attests to Government's efforts in addressing drug issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also working closely with Government agencies and civil society groups and international partners in developing a robust strategy and action plan to combat illicit drugs. The strategy and its action plans are in its final stages of completion and once endorsed by Cabinet, it will be an operational document that will provide guidelines to agencies in their fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

A few weeks back, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before the launching of the National World Drugs Day in Lautoka, we tested this out where all the Government agencies and civil societies, particularly the youth groups, were in Lautoka visiting all the communities and we learnt a lot of new lessons from that experience, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is something that I had discussed with the senior management of the Police during my meeting with them last Wednesday that this probably is the way forward in terms of us working together with civil societies where they take the lead and we stand back and just provide all the necessary assistance, because the communities see ownership in these programmes when it is led by civil societies, NGOs and community leaders rather than being led by the Government agencies, particularly the Police in uniform.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do acknowledge the assistance and support rendered by our international partners, namely; Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand and the United States of America, because when we were trying to establish this National Narcotics Strategy to be consistent with the United Nations requirements, we had to consult widely and we had to go to these partners of ours to see what they already had in place and how they can help us in developing our own.

Moreover, Fiji has standing relations with the Indonesian National Narcotics Bureau through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Honourable Member moving the motion stated about the suppliers into Fiji, particularly from the Asian market, the US and from Latin America as well,

and this is why for us in terms of the Asian market, we have this MOU with the Indonesian National Narcotics Bureau.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, further to this, the Fiji Police Force has restructured its drug unit, transitioning to the development of the Police Narcotics Bureau. This is the first step before we establish the National Narcotics Bureau. But what we have decided, Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the consultations that we have had with our partners, is for us to establish a Police Narcotics Bureau.

On that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Civil Service and I have been looking at office space for them so that they can be totally isolated from the Police Force. This special unit Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I will not go into the so many compatible potential information that they have, they only provide briefings to the Commissioner of Police, to me as Minister and, of course, to the Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, for obvious reasons, they need to be supported. The Honourable Prime Minister has talked about the improvements in the Fiji Police Force, but again, in the 2020-2021 National Budget under Programme 1-1(7), there is an allocation of \$1 million for special drug operations for the year and \$200,000, out of that \$1 million allocation is for this Police Drug Narcotics Bureau.

Once we have the office, the intention is for them to have their fusion centre and I am sure the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence have been to the fusion centre that we have at the Naval Base where you saw the Immigration Office and, of course, the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service located in that. So the fusion centre will bring together into the Police Narcotics Bureau all the key stakeholders to help us in terms of overseeing the supply reduction regime, focusing on enforcement, border security, licensing and permits, analysis of drugs and prosecution as well.

Having a dedicated Bureau means a more coordinated effort by agencies under this regime to respond effectively and efficiently in our fight against illicit drug trafficking. The integrated approach will ensure the development of necessary capacities and capabilities required by these agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in modernising our approach, the Fiji Police Force has also acquired drones with cameras to assist in its drug operations, targeting inaccessible areas. The drones, as we speak, are still in Kadavu and last week, I was back at the PSRU to look at options where we can have drone controls from vehicles because of the limitations in terms of the screen that is available to the drone operator. We need bigger screens and we are looking now at having a control unit where we have a drone commander in vehicles with bigger screens, so that they can effectively touch on these areas. So, this again, is exciting development and, of course, if you have been following the news lately, the installation of CCTV cameras in Nausori is again another positive direction towards this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, green drugs and white drugs; methamphetamine particularly, some people prefer to call it meth, white, speed and ice with the lucrative market and local manufacture, the Ministry in collaboration with the Fiji Police and Go Advertising are in the process of setting up billboards to help us in campaign.

Let me conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that in June this year, when it comes to harm reduction, my Ministry in collaboration with key stakeholders - Drug Free World, Fiji Water and the Western Youth Empire conducted an outreach programme throughout the greater Lautoka area which I have referred to, from Lomolomo to Matawalu, this auspicious event culminated with the commemoration

of the International Drugs Day and, of course, the declaration by the *vanua*, chiefs of Vuda, Vitogo and Taukei Vidilo on their affirmation of a drug free society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are consulting with the iTaukei Affairs in the absence of by-laws. We are working on how the *vanua* can take ownership and provide some decisions on peddling, cultivation and drug abuse while supporting our law enforcement agencies.

I have talked about the Illicit Drugs Control Act, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the other key document that is also in the process now, the draft Volatile Substance Abuse Bill of 2016. This is the one that is taking a lot of time because of the involvement of the prosecution, particularly when it involves children and juveniles.

So, it is quite evident from the work that I have highlighted that this Government's priority is in this fight against drugs because the current drugs situation in Fiji seems to be increasing both, streams of trafficking and users. Government still recognises that it has a responsibility to curb this problem before it gets out of hand and let me reassure this august House that we are doing our very best to tackle this issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me re-emphasise that the National Narcotics Drugs Strategy is the Government's commitment to action and I would like to assure this august House of our obligation to fight against drug abuse and trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of the above I, therefore, do not support the motion raised by Honourable Qionibaravi to establish special parliamentary committee because most of the work that will be undertaken by this committee just in the process of been completed and find its way into this august House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- Just a short contribution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in support of the motion. I think we can all agree that drug abuse is becoming a really big problem in Fiji and will only worsen if no proper and effective interventions are put in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, beginning with students in schools, sniffing glue and anything else that can give them a high which parents and stakeholders should be aware of and what their children are up to, and do something about it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Substance Abuse and Advisory Council (NSAAC) of the Ministry of Education states that in 2018, 25 percent of drug cases in schools were in primary schools and 75 percent in secondary schools. It has been quoted outside of this House, Police did say that 1,223 drug cases recorded last year was an increase from 16 percent in 2018.

In schools where incidents recorded were of drug-related cases, proper and professionally skilled proactive interventions are not available as funding for school counsellors have ceased with no budgetary allocation. There is no more funding, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for people with proper skills to help students and even help the staff. School chaplains are also removed from Government schools perhaps if school counsellors and chaplains were present in Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS), their indiscipline over the past week and highlighted in the media might have been a non-issue.

Teachers are already overburdened with discipline issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where students aware of their rights, do not take kindly to correction. So, with two structures removed from the school system, that is, student counsellors and school chaplains in Government schools, another

structure is provided by boarding school allowance for teachers to monitor and supervise students during after school hours. Who can forget the video of that young boy in school uniform getting wacked with a wooden table leg by his cohorts also in uniform? Head teachers on duty providing supervision they would have been there bringing the situation under control.

Many teachers, Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Prime Minister right now concentrate on teaching but whether these students are learning or not is another story. So, to expect unsecured teachers to deal with students with drug issues would be very interesting, so the question is, how can students be assisted proactively on drugs and other discipline issues?

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because this motion has asked for us to put in recommendations, the recommendations that I have here is that proper budgetary allocation be provided for:

- a) School counsellors in secondary schools;
- b) Chaplains in Government boarding schools;
- c) Boarding school allowance for teachers supervising students during after school hours to ensure students are provided adequate structures for skill-assistance to minimise drug abuse.

I support this motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. We have had sufficient debate on this, I will give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General and the last speaker on the other side, Honourable Bultavu. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I will be very brief, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and thank you for this opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to very quickly highlight the point, if we read the motion, it says that the committee is going to inquire into the impacts of drug-related abuse. I think nearly every speaker who stood up and have spoken, they have all highlighted what is actually the impact of drug-related abuse. We all know that, so you do not need a committee to tell us that.

The next one, “and make recommendations on how the use of drugs can be reduced”, again, all the different agencies know what needs to be done. Again, we do not need a committee to tell us that. So if you look at the wording of the motion, the issue is that the intended motion through the committee seeks to do is already out there in the public space.

The Honourable Minister for Defence very lucidly and in detail, highlighted what is actually happening. The Honourable Prime Minister highlighted the issues in respect of that. We can also see that everyone talks about the social responsibility of parents. If you look at the drug abuse, some of the well-known cases we know of and would have been highlighted in the media, are people from high net worth, local individuals you can see.

Many would argue that some of their children have turned to that because perhaps, the lack of spirituality in their lives and material wellbeing is not enough, so they seek satisfaction outside material wellbeing. In other instances, there are a lot of children or young adults or teenagers, who are turning to drugs because the parents are actually absent from their lives. So, these are very socially-driven issues and we need to be able to look at, not a special parliamentary committee to tell us that, we already know that.

The level of expertise that rests outside this Chamber were accumulative knowledge that we all have. We have experts, we have counsellors, the Ministry of Health through the Unit that has been set up as the Honourable Prime Minister has highlighted through the St. Giles, the National Drug Advisory Council, they have experts there and we have allocated over \$600,000 to them, so that level of expertise already exists. I wanted to pick up on the point that the Honourable Prime Minister said, that we do not need another layer of bureaucracy that is highly politicised.

Honourable Kepa, unfortunately, has left, but even from her statement we can see the kind of digression that she went away from the actual motion itself. Therefore, what this committee actually would be vulnerable to are those kind of political digressions from the main subject topic. That is important to understand.

Honourable Radrodro has given a very rudimentary analysis of yachts coming into Fiji. If you look at countries like Maldives that actually lie in the crossroad of the drug route, because you have the vast Indian Ocean, the Middle East and you have India, Iran and going down to Africa, it is used as a transit point.

Similarly, as the Honourable Minister for Defence highlighted, that is what Fiji and the area around us is being used as a transit point for drugs coming from South America or Central America to the lucrative markets of Auckland, Melbourne, Sydney and perhaps, onwards. Normally what happens in the transit points, there is what we call some spill-over effect. So, the point is that, as the Honourable Minister highlighted, there needs to be coordination amongst all the different countries in the region and that is precisely what they are doing through the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Defence with our Australia and New Zealand counterparts.

The cocaine that Honourable Salote Radrodro keeps on talking about are dropped off in the high seas or near coastal areas for other yachts to come and pick it up. The reason why we have allowed the yachts that are coming in through the Blue Lane, is an economic issue. We want tourists to come into Fiji. These people go under quarantine, all of them and they are guarded by the naval boats, the RFMF.

On one hand, earlier on this morning, they talked about creation of jobs, looking after employees and here we are creating opportunities within the Fijian Economic Recovery Framework that not only looks at the economic wellbeing of the country but within the medical framework, within the framework that the Ministry of Health, the staff, the personnel actually have to certify these initiatives, so it is a balancing act, we cannot, it does not happen just because we say it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is that just because we found some cocaine out there, it does not mean that every single yacht that comes into Fiji is drug-infested, of course, it is not. It is what you call balancing and managing your risks. That is what running a country is all about Honourable Radrodro, which you do not know about. It is about managing those risks, it is about balancing those risks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was very interesting that Honourable Rasova talked, no one is singling out Kadavu but the fact of the matter is very interesting on how you gave the history of marijuana being brought into Fiji by the *Girmitiyas*, et cetera. I wish he did an analysis about who brought alcohol into Fiji. We can go back as to who brought what drugs into the country, but what we need to do is to deal with the issue now. How are we going to deal with it? What is our attitude towards it? How we, as individual members of society, as parents, as brothers, mothers, fathers, sisters, uncles, *Talatalas*, spiritual leaders, et cetera, deal with it?

The fact of the matter is, again, as the Honourable Minister for Defence highlighted, they are doing those levels of public consultations regarding that. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to again highlight, given the wording of the motion itself and the fact that, that knowledge is already out there, we do not need such a committee to be able to tell us the impact of drug-related abuse and how the use of drugs can be reduced. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. The last speaker on this side of the House. Honourable Mosese Bulitavu, you have the floor.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to support the motion which is before the House moved by the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. I thank her also for bringing up this motion, given the Honourable Attorney-General has gone into great length with the wordings of the motion and also what it appraise to achieve, and why the committee needs to be set up.

The reason why I like the motion is because this particular motion is a wakeup call. It has awoken an issue and also shaken up the Government to come up with a solution. We have also heard today from the Honourable Minister for Defence and responsible for Police talking about the various papers that he had committed himself in the past to bring within six months. Firstly, he was very defensive in blaming COVID-19 for the delay of those frameworks and papers but again he has committed that those papers will come into the House to address the issue and that is another promise.

However, what this motion has brought about is we have heard the solutions, strategies and measures that Government has. They have talked about the priority of funding that they have put in areas where the Honourable Minister for Defence had referred to as the demand driven factors, the harm and also the supply.

His speech today was only on trafficking and users and today we have moved into how we are going to control our borders. I will go back to a prophecy that I read few years ago, by an Australian Evangelist, Mr. Steve Penny who was brought to Fiji by the SDL Government during the aftermath of the 2000 *coup* when they had set up the assembly of Christian churches in Fiji to unite the nation.

In 2001, they brought this evangelist into one of the prayer breakfast and he prophesied a prophetic timing of the events we are talking about today, we are now in 2020, 19 years later. He prophesied and I can recall that line where he said and I quote,

“In years to come we need to pray that God should close up your borders because it will be entry point for drugs coming to your towns and eventually reaching your villages, so Fiji you need to pray”.

Those were the words by a prophet of God back in 2001 and again this prophetic time when God gives us those kind of messages to look into the future, now we are into the manifestation stage. The Honourable Minister for Defence is also a *talatala* at the All Nations Christian Fellowship (ANCF) and he knows about spiritual timings and also the spiritual realm that would manifest in the physical realm.

Now we are into the manifestation part of it and what we need to do while we need to keep watch, both on the spiritual side of it, where it talks about the measures that they are going to engage with *talatala*, NGOs and also other religious groups, such as Honourable Adimaitoga. These are some of the areas that they need to engage with, because the closing of the borders is one issue, but I am going to talk about how this is a spiritual problem, given those who are affected with drugs, do suffer relapses or withdrawal symptoms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are some of the things that they face and to remove these kind of lust of using drugs, I think there needs to be a spiritual solution to it through the renewal of the spirit. So the solution is there, because the physical body can only move but it is moved by the spirit within. That is some of the things that we should look into when they talk about various measures that Government is putting in place and various things it's doing. It might be boasting that we might have the technologies and also the rehabilitation, but it goes hand in hand with other spiritual measures too that we need to take, to fast and pray for our nation, because this is a drug war and we are fighting a drug industry, which is making money knowing that there is demand in the country.

Having said that, I think the Honourable Prime Minister said amen. The issue again Honourable Prime Minister, is not only about trafficking, but it is more into reviewing our laws in terms of pharmaceutical supplies and the medical drugs that we bring into Fiji. Few months ago I had a chat with some senior officers from the Fiji Police Force who are in the Drug Unit and they have also confirmed that most of the drugs that are available in our pharmacies, contain the bits of chemical that could be mixed together to cook drugs in Fiji. So this is not something that is only trafficked from outside through yachts. The problem we face now is the containment measures that we need to put in place when Fiji starts producing this, given there is a demand market, as alluded to by the Honourable Minister.

What measures do we have to bring down all those places they will be cooking up all these drugs? These are some of the things that they probably need to review like the pharmaceutical laws concerning medical drugs that would endanger our citizens. That is why I really support what the Honourable Qionibaravi has done. It is another awakening for us. We may boast about the things that we are currently doing, but again when this kind of motion comes into the House, it is an indication that nothing has been done or the public view on the daily reporting of the cases in the mainstream media. It shows the concern that is there and that is why it has come up to this level.

The Government Members on the other side always talk about bipartisan approach, and this is why the Opposition always do not agree to bipartisan approaches in trying to solve the national interest and national issue. This is an example why the Opposition has offered to work with the Government. We acknowledge the amount of work Government has done in the area and also the research that has done and also the information and the consultations that they have conducted so far, but they do not have the solution for all the problems. They will need the views of this bipartisan Committee, to move around, they could only be taking views from the stakeholders and from the enforcement agencies.

The benefits of setting out a Committee; to move around the country to the various villagers, to the various settlements and also the rural areas, because this is a big concern in the rural areas. If these hard drugs, white drugs and green drugs is already a big problem in the rural areas and if this white drugs end up in the rural areas, where we do not have equipped police stations, we have lazy police officers, we have what we call some corrupt police officers who are also part of this and have connections to these criminal syndicates and also the network even, there are allegations or even before a raid takes place in a particular area, even some police officers that they ring are part of those drug lords

These are some of the things that we are fighting against and having to instil that discipline. Within even in the force, an enforcement agencies and also to play their role in protecting Fiji and making Fiji a better place, so no one is left behind. These are some of the things, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I would like to remind this august House, that is why we really need to support this motion, given this particular motion, not only will give a holistic view.

I have touched about the production of rights in Fiji which the Honourable Minister did not talk about. He just talked about trafficking and uses. This is the bigger threat that is there and I think the various facets and level of combating this needs to be taken to another level. Again, given that the Government has indicated that it will not support the motion, but which gives an opportunity for us, Honourable Minister, to even tell you people, tell the other side of the House what you people need to be doing and engaging the right people who might have the right solution to the problems that we have.

We have a big problem, it is not a small problem. It will be a generational problem and it will affect our society. It will be affecting our very children who will be exposed to these kind of things. But again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said this in my address during my COVID-Response Budget, I think we need a spiritual solution too, a supernatural solution to this kind of natural problem.

It talks about prayers and also the Ministry of Defence and Police to engage with the *Talatalas* in the rehabilitation and also converting these drug lords. I have seen this in prison, some came in because of drug cases, they have actually repented and changed through spiritual renewing. This has been a tool used by the Fiji Corrections Service, to change hard core criminals, those who came in as pushers and drug lords have become powerless through the effects of this.

Not only have I seen this on the streets in villages, the effects of it even in prison, Honourable Koroilavesau. You know when a particular prisoner faces relapses when he is not consuming his drugs, he goes to the length of even cutting up his body with razor blade, to release that withdrawal symptoms that comes in. This is a very big issue that we are talking about. And it is good that a Committee as such, as proposed by the motion to set up and holistically look into the issues that is at hand, in view that will benefit our nation. Again, Sir, I support the motion which is before the House. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi to speak in reply. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this opportunity to respond to the comments that have been made in this House this afternoon.

First, I would like to say that I am disappointed that Government sees fit to reject the motion. However, it seems to be at par with the course that FijiFirst considers that it alone can solve our nation's ill, despite bringing our nation to the brink of collapse in its 14 years rule.

I am really sad. I thought that we could begin a new journey this afternoon. Be that as it may, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is to be hoped that Government policies whether by action or omission or failure to act, are not designed to ruin our people and the nation.

Mr. Speaker, may I say it is the ability to see the issue as a problem rather than the messenger as a problem is critical to anyone holding the position of leadership. The FijiFirst brand of imposing rather than consulting is exactly why the nation is in dire straits today. The statistics published by Police shows very clearly that Government's inaction or stubbornness to act on the methamphetamine trafficking, resulting in the over-supply of methamphetamine such traffickers then began to sell it very cheaply on our streets.

While the Honourable Prime Minister mentioned that increased cases show Police effectiveness, this special Parliamentary Committee would have enlisted the truth of the matter. I

reiterate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this is not merely a police problem. We noted there is almost weekly announcement from Police of drugs raids netting millions of dollars or the marijuana plants.

With respect, Sir, I believe the harvest in synthetic drugs are more of a threat to our nation and our way of life. The motion is proposed for a holistic inquiry, precisely because it is the hard drugs that pose a great effect. That is why, Sir, it is mysterious as to why we do not get regular reports raised on yachts or vessels that are trafficking drugs into Fiji, neither do we hear on the OSAC Report of Asian organised crime members which are pushing the hard drugs like ice on our streets.

We cannot be forked off with just news of marijuana raids. So, I urge the Honourable Minister for Defence that we await with abated breath for a crackdown on Asian organised crime gangs on yachts or vessels trafficking drugs into Fiji and through Fiji.

I also wish to reiterate Honourable Salote Radrodro's question with a seizure being used as a drug superhighway that runs from the US, South America and Asia to and through Fiji. Why is our nation welcoming yachts through blue lane? We are hearing anecdotal evidence that yachts are stopping by at maritime islands and inviting children on board. It appears that neither the residents of the maritime islands nor the yacht operators are all aware of the rule that they are not supposed to stop by the islands, especially in the time of this devastating COVID-19 pandemic.

What measures are in place to ensure yachts respect the conditions? Why are our communities not aware that they should not welcome these visitors, who may bring COVID-19 or drugs or other contraband into the country? Does tourism override the interest of our people, their health and their future, given the real and present threats of COVID-19 pandemic and the synthetic drugs to our people and our nation?

I acknowledge the Honourable Minister for Defence's comments that drugs are a global issue. He also said that some of our neighbours have it worse than us.

I recently noted that Tonga was previously the drug transit point until our borders were basically opened up and the drug traffickers happily came to ply their trade. The fact if there may be more ice uses in Tonga is not an excuse for our Government to sit on its laurels. Yes, they may have had it around for longer, but we need not wait until it gets worse to ensure nationwide and holistic approach.

I call on the Honourable Minister to convene a national forum with all stakeholders, including chiefs, the *vanua*, as well as religious bodies and civil society because you must have coordinated approach and a national plan of action. The time to act is now. It is unfortunate that Government continues to think that it alone has all the answers and refuses to acknowledge its own responsibility for the current problem.

I thank the Honourable Minister for his invitation to go and see how the Blue Lane is being implemented in Denarau. The question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is what is happening to the yachts before they reach Denarau? I am aware that finally, with increased aid from Australia and New Zealand, there seems to be finally, enthusiasm from the Government to counter the hard drugs issue.

It does not take away its responsibility to ensure a national plan of action, in particular to involve the Ministry of Health, Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Education, as well as religious bodies, the *vanua*, civil society organisations and everyone in Fiji in the war against drugs. It has to be a war against drugs. I am glad to hear from the Honourable Minister that a national plan of action is being devised and that is near completion. May I request him to involve the chiefs and the *vanua* and other bodies, in the drafting of this plan.

I thank you, Honourable Minister, for the opportunity to respond to the comments that have been raised this afternoon. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

Motion lost.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

High Average TCTS Recorded by FSC (Question No. 91/2020)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs explain to Parliament the high average of Total Cane to Total Sugar (TCTS) of 11.8 recorded by the Fiji Sugar Corporation until 10th August, 2020, in respect of cane crushing and sugar production?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs).- Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the question being raised by Honourable Tikoduadua.

I must admit, Mr. Speaker, it is unusual to be discussing the TCTS this early in the crushing season, given we have barely completed crushing 30 percent of this season's total cane. The industry experts will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it is premature to put too much talk in the ratio at this stage, so we know this question is not being asked for the sake of practicality, it is clearly for some political purpose and if this panic-driven analysis is any indication of how the National Federation Party (NFP) would contribute to the bureaucratic cane committee they proposed last year, all the better we saved our time and money by nipping that in the bud.

For those watching, Mr. Speaker, who may not know what the TCTS is, it is a measure of efficiency and quality. The ratio of total tonnes of cane required to produce a tonne of sugar. It is an important metric, one that is influenced by a range of factors, including the purity of Fijian cane which are determined by data drawn from cane growers, harvesters, lorry drivers, mill engineers, lab technicians and, of course, the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at countries similar to Fiji, the normal TCTS ratio sits between 9 and 11. Countries like Mauritius, Tanzania and India that have achieved an average TCTS of 10.25, 10.5 and 9.10 respectively but the important bit, Mr. Speaker, as I have said before that this average represents the final TCTS for the entire season. That is the only accurate way to determine the ratio and Fiji is nowhere, as I have said again, near the end of the season.

Fiji's crushing season varies per mill and ranging from 24 weeks to 26 weeks. The Labasa Mill is in its ninth week of operations, Rarawai Mill is in its seventh week and Lautoka has only been crushing for five weeks. Majority of cane in Fiji is still in the fields, yet to be harvested and much less crushed.

Generally, TCTS begins high, improves mid-season and rises again in the later part of crushing. The industry TCTS for the 2020 season began at 13, it declined to 12.4 as at the end of July, measured at 11.8 as of the week ending 10th August, 2020 and improved further to 11.45 as of last week. The cane maturity, the ripeness of the cane, is the dominant factor in cane purity. So, far, the Labasa Mill has outperformed the other two Mills.

As our growers know, we have been harvesting mainly early maturing varieties. In fact, over 50 percent of the total cane planted in Labasa have been early maturing varieties. On the other hand, over 95 percent of the cane in Viti Levu is mid late maturing variety dominated by the Mana variety, which has the highest sugar content between August and October. Therefore, we expect this will lower the overall TCTS as the season continues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can clearly see that this is not the right time for this question. It is simply too early, but the Honourable Tikoduadua is not only being short-sighted, he is also being small minded because he has failed to consider both, the strategic investments we have made to position this industry for long-term viability and the current global landscape.

We have been making the move towards mechanical harvesting for some time, removing the burden of manual labour off the shoulders of our growers and lending great efficiency to this industry. We are steadily equipping our people with the knowledge and skills to operate those mechanical harvesters effectively. But they are highly technical machines that in the new term, still require outside expertise to operate efficiently.

With the border closures due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Speaker, technicians from India have not been able to travel to Fiji to assist with this harvesting season but luckily one of those technicians is already in Fiji and the FSC is working with him to train and educate our people so that we can rely on this expertise locally moving forward. But in the interim, we have marked a drop in the efficiency of those harvesters this season with extraneous matters such as soil, leaves and weeds delivered with billet cane affecting the TCTS by an average of 13 percent. I would say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were it not for Coronavirus, I think the current TCTS would sit at an average of around 10.3 percent.

Over the long term, the move to mechanisation is critical for this industry's competitiveness. So rather than playing pandemic politics with our sugar industry, I urge Honourable Tikoduadua to show some patience, unless he would rather hit the panic button and explain to our growers why we should scrap the mechanisation process entirely because he is worried TCTS is too high, a mere third of the way into the crushing season.

Global pandemic aside, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this crushing season is off to an excellent start. The weekly reports suggest that the mills crushing for this season are much better than in 2019, 16 percent ahead as of 24th August, 2020. This is due to the strategic investment FSC made in the three sugar factories over the last two years to upgrade all sugar processing plant and equipment, including pans, filters and centrifugals. We were fortunate to escape serious destruction from *TC Sarai and Harold*. However, we did record some negative impacts to cane growth and sucrose accumulation due to heavy rainfall and high wind during the vital window of the growing season.

According to the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji, analysis conducted on the relative humidity values from November 2019 to May 2020, the growth of cane was not favourable and this has contributed to the lowering of the sugar content and, of course, TCTS. The report also concluded that if relative humidity remains high in June and July, the sugar content at this time of the season is also expected to be low and will continue in the following months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all stakeholders are diligently working together to improve cane quality, addressing soil health, promoting planting of mixed cane varieties and adoption of best farm management practices. With better factory throughout which reduces crush delays, the cane quality is beginning to improve to above 80, compared to 75 at the beginning of the crushing season.

For all these reasons, we fully expect the TCTS to improve as the season progresses. I wish the very best to our growers, mill operators, lorry drivers, research teams and all others who contribute to the crushing season. Together, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am confident we will make this season a success. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. You have the floor Honourable Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for the answers that he has given. Unfortunately, I am not quite sure if the Honourable Prime Minister understands himself the extent of what he is telling the people in Parliament today because this is supposed to be the season where the ratio should be at its lowest. I would just like to ask the Honourable Prime Minister, is the state of the mill efficiency, combined with frequent breakdown, particularly in Lautoka and Rarawai responsible for the high TCTS and losses to the growers?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I want to respond very quickly to that question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, even though the mill breakdown has nothing to do with TCTS. Some of the issues that were raised are exaggerations and false. Rarawai Mill is down due to cracks in one of the shafts; the new one is being fabricated while the existing one is repaired. It is expected that Mill should restart and farmers are assured that no cane farm will be left out of harvesting and the crush rate is far better than last year. We just need people to understand, like we know that there is a pandemic going around and you need to download the App, that this is a 140 year old machinery to run and we are working very hard to make things happen.

Might I also mention, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the assistance provided to farmers, a lot of assistance which came to a total of around \$299 million between the years 2016 to 2020. That, Mr. Speaker, just to let Honourable Tikoduadua know that, that is a Bainimarama Boom that he has been trying to evade. He has been going around telling people that there is nothing to show for the so-called 15 years of Bainimarama Boom. Let me tell him, to get his head out of the sand, so that he can see what is happening around him.

The Bainimarama Boom, let me very quickly tell him, Mr Speaker, is the free school fees and I am sure you all benefit from the free school fees, from the free bus fare, the pension, the subsidised bus fare for all the elderlies. I am sure you are all benefit from these. That is the Boom that you have been harping about. Remember the free milk. Oh, I am sorry, I forgot. In Kadavu, they do not like free milk because the six-year olds and seven-year olds are still breastfeeding.

(Laughter)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- The subsidised electricity and water, grants available through banks at low interest, and do not forget Honourable Tikoduadua

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ...that twice, I sacked you from my office and I got you back. I got you back, that is the Bainimarama Boom.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Remember, when everyone was trying to get road into their farm, you got yours free, so that is the Bainimarama Boom. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the second Oral Question for today. I call on the Honourable Pillay to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Shipping Accidents on Fiji Waters
(Question No. 92/2020)

HON. V. PILLAY asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament as to what is Government doing to address shipping accidents happening in our waters, especially in Nabouwalu?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Pillay for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Government is doing more than any other Government has ever done, I like telling them, Sir, because we actually do not need any bait on our fishing line, they will just catch it all the time, Sir. If you bait them, they will catch it.

This Government Mr. Speaker, Sir, has done more than any other Government has ever done with respect to the shipping industry. Let me tell you something that some of you may not know. At Government Shipping Services, at one time, the Honourable Prime Minister will confirm this, we had about 40 odd ships, Sir, but when we came around, we were only left with, I think, single digit numbers, probably two, I think. That is how bad it got, Sir, but nevertheless, we are here to ensure the protection of our shipping industry and the safety of our maritime travellers.

Shipping accidents or marine accidents, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are something which is prevalent, not just in Fiji, but across the world. International data shows that marine accidents killed about 1,163 people and caused about \$197 million in insured losses in 2017.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Kiribati in 2018, it actually experienced one of the worst maritime accidents that has happened. The *MV Butiraoi* broke apart and sank. Unfortunately, Sir, 95 people remained unaccounted for in this particular accident.

The Commission of Inquiry into this incident laid out about 15 recommendations, most of which, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were on safety. These included the prohibition of drinking alcohol during working hours and regular inspection of lifesaving appliances and stricter laws on ship inspection, Sir.

In December 1987, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Philippine ferry, the *Dona Paz* collided with a vector, a small coastal oil tanker, and according to the National Maritime Museum in the UK, only 24 of the 4,317 passengers actually survived. This is serious business, Sir, which this Government takes very, very seriously.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to address maritime matters in accidents, international conventions are actually introduced by the International Maritime Organization to which Fiji is a party. The ratification of these IMO Conventions is then nationalised into our domestic legislation. The Fijian Government, Sir, has introduced the Maritime Transport Act 2012 and its 34 corresponding regulations, with all the focus being on safety of our seafarers and our maritime dwellers, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since 2018, the total number of marine accidents recorded was 53, of which three was within the Nabouwalu waters. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the inspection and safety checks begin at each port before departure. These include checks on all lifesaving appliances in accordance with the law and the number of passengers and cargo on board a vessel. They must be maintained at a statutory required number and also in terms of tonnage, Sir.

The Marine Safety Authority of Fiji also known as MSAF operates 24 hour marine clearances services at Natovi, Nabouwalu and at Suva, Sir. All registered ships, Mr Speaker, Sir, in Fiji are required to undergo different types of surveys, such as a six monthly survey, normal survey, periodic survey and special surveys which include underwater surveys and also dry docking.

Fiji, like 174 other nations which are under IMO, is actually obliged by Conventions such as the Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea commonly known as SOLAS and the United Nations Convention on the Law Of the Sea commonly known as UNCLOS and its applied domestic legislations to conduct investigations for the purposes of determining the cause of accidents, incidents or mishaps at sea.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the objective of such investigations is to report on the cause of accidents, incidents and mishaps to enable changes in the international and national regulations that will assist in prevention in the future. The /Maritime Transport Act and its corresponding maritime regulations 2014 is an investigation and inquiry procedures that requires all accidents, incidents or mishaps at sea must be reported to MSAF, which then conducts investigations and the recommendations of these investigations then prompts the actions taken by the Ministry responsible for Transport and the CEO of MSAF.

Mr. Speaker, some actions that have been taken actually include the revocation or suspension of maritime documents or ships masters in this is, of course, dependent on the outcome of the investigations. I am being very thorough in answering this so that everyone knows in Fiji what is actually happening.

As earlier stated, Sir, the purpose of this investigation is to report on the causes and also, it helps us identify the way forward in terms of improvement. We are improving voice communications from ship to ship, ship to shore and port to port and this has been identified by us as something which requires immediate action, Sir.

To address this also, MSAF is implementing a second phase installation of Very High Frequency commonly known as VHF, for seven stations which includes Rakiraki, Levuka, Nabouwalu, Labasa, Savusavu, Taveuni and Navua, Sir. Four stations have already been installed with VHF and these actually include Suva, Natovi, Denarau and Lautoka.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to enhance the search and rescue capabilities also, MSAF has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces Navy Division and this is to provide efficient assistance to those in distress at sea. Furthermore, MSAF has been conducting relevant training of officers of the Fiji Navy who will be appointed as authorised enforcement officers under the Maritime Transport Act 2013.

In May, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2019 MSAF actually enforced the audit for Safe Ships Management Systems (SSMS) for ships with gross tonnage of 500 or more and by the end of 2020, we will have a full implementation and enforcement of the SSMS. The SSMS is actually a structured and

documented system which enable ships and shore-based personnel to implement the owners' safety and pollution prevention policies in accordance with the international safety management code under SOLAS.

I would like to reiterate that the work in the maritime shipping industry is a coordinated effort, Mr. Speaker, Sir, between the private sector and Government, to ensure that safety is prioritised at all times and this is incumbent on everyone, whether you are a passenger, a regulator or vessel owner, to support the Ministry and MSAF in its efforts to promote maritime safety. I thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Supplementary question, you have the floor, Honourable Sigarara.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- What are the results of the investigation in the incidences that happened at Nabouwalu?

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, unfortunately, with respect to the investigations, they are still currently ongoing and it is about to be completed. We cannot divulge the detailed information for this investigations, however, appropriate actions have been taken to address the causes of the accident and those who were responsible.

For the collision of the two vessels in May this year, both captains were suspended pending investigations and MSAF has improved its investigation procedures, so within 12 hours of an incident being reported, Sir, the captains are actually suspended and an investigation team is appointed within the 24 hours to 48 hours and the investigation takes about two weeks to complete.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Qereqeretabua, your supplementary question.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My supplementary question to the Honourable Minister is about the MSAF Enforcement Officers. Can he tell the House whether or not they are in ports, like Rotuma, Kadavu and in Lau?

HON.SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I knew there was going to be Kadavu in there somewhere. Sir, MSAF Enforcement Officers are available wherever we have facilities. When they are not available in their actual port, all the necessary safety procedures that are required to be undertaken are undertaken prior to the departure of the actual vessels.

I must remind everyone that it is not about how many ships you have, or whether you are a small operator or a big operator but when it comes to MSAF and I must commend the Chairman and the CEO, they have done a wonderful job. If their survey is not certified, if there is one thing missing, they produce another vessel, it does not leave. It is simple as that, because the safety of the people of Fiji is paramount to all of us. So, in terms of enforcement officers, yes, if they are there and whenever we have a facility they are there.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on to the next question.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the repayment of the Global Bond of US\$200 million which is due in October 2020?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for the question.

I would like to draw his attention to way back last year in the 2019-2020 Supplement to the Budget Address which was, of course, given to all Honourable Members of Parliament and is also available on our website. I would like to refer him to paragraphs 5.7 to 5.9 on page 45 where we talked about the global bond. It says, and I quote:

“5.7 ...Discussions are in advanced stages with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank for the refinancing of the US\$200 million global bond due in October 2020 through a policy-based operation.

5.8 The funding from ADB and World Bank is based on a package of policy reform triggers in the areas of fiscal management, institutional and legal framework for state owned enterprises and improving the private sector business environment. Other bilateral partners have expressed interest to participate in this operation. Refinancing of the global bonds through a policy-based operation will assist in the implementation of various reforms, and help reduce the cost of borrowing and minimise refinancing risks.

5.9 Apart from this, the World Bank Board of Governors on 26 March, 2019 approved Fiji's inclusion as an IDA- eligible Small Island Economy. Effectively, this means that Fiji has become a “blend” country, which allows it to access funding through the IDA and IBRD financing facility windows. As such, the Fijian Government will be able to access around SDR 21.0 million (approx. FJ\$55 million) at zero interest on an annual basis with an extended repayment term of 40 years, including a 10-year grace period. This funding is vital to support the financing of our development and disaster resilience needs.”

Again, in the same year, in the Budget Estimates, I refer the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to page 325 at the top and the footnote where you will see, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, it says, “Note on policy-based loans”. I quote:

“The Fijian Government has negotiated with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for loan funding up to US\$200 million in order to redeem the global bond which is due in October 2020 and there is a programme-based policy loan. The funds will be accessed in two tranches, in financial year 2019-2020 and financial year 2020-2021 of US\$100 million respectively, subject to parliamentary approvals.”

Then the last document that I would like to also refer the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to is this year's Budget Supplement on page 26, paragraph 4.8. It talks about the higher principal repayment of \$749.5 million for this year is due to the US\$200 million Global Bond maturing in October 2020 which would be refinanced through funding already secured under policy-based budget support operation with our multilateral partners. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- A supplementary question; what is the effect of that on our national debt burden, is it better or is it still the same, particularly now that we are in this difficult economic situation on how we are going to be servicing that debt? Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for this question. It, of course, will be lot better because as I had highlighted, the redeeming of the bond takes place in October this year so it is being refinanced. Now, the coupon rate at which it was issued, in excess of 6 percent. Now, the repayment of these bonds will be done at an interest rate, because we have secured this from offshore, it is done at 1.75 percent with the spread of 0.5 percent LIBOR rates.

It essentially means that you are looking at about a maximum of 1.5 percent or 1.2 percent with that and, of course, as you know, as part of that we are getting some IDA funds too. Although we have got a higher injection of funds this year and that is why we have got a higher rate as I mentioned and read out in the Supplement, the cost of that is much lower because it is like paying in excess of 6 percent for the \$200 million, now it is less than 2 percent. That is the difference, so obviously, we are saving quite a lot of money because we have managed through the past couple of years and we have managed to, in fact, put up all these policy-based measures in which we have been able to secure this funding.

The other interesting point, as I also highlighted in the Budget Address is that, last year we had already parked a US\$100 million offshore. Now, the additional funding that we are getting now has not actually been brought into the country for the \$200 million, which means we are not subject to foreign currency fluctuations. If, assuming we had brought into Fiji the US\$100 million last year, and then we had to take it out again, obviously we would have been subject to the foreign currency fluctuations. Thank God we actually did not do that because we have been prudent about it. As we have been saying, we are prudent managers of finance because the US dollar has actually dropped, so the cost of actually taking the funds out if we had brought it in would have been a lot more. As a result of that, we have actually done quite well from that perspective, firstly, not bringing it onshore, keeping it offshore and, secondly, that we had already had that in the sinking fund offshore.

The other aspect, of course, is that, the ADB gave us an additional \$100 million as announced in the Budget, which is going to be put into the economy now, which gives out the foreign reserves and pumps liquidity into the market also. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- I thank the Honourable Minister for that response and congratulate him on the luck of the draw so to speak, but with the current capability of the nation to generate revenue, although we will be paying a little less, plus the interest rate is comfortable, what about our ability to service it?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted in the Budget, we obviously are still generating revenue but our ability to generate revenue is quite significantly diminished because of the lack of economic activity, in particular from the tourism sector. But as highlighted in the Budget, our Estimates have been extremely conservative, in terms of our revenue generation. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, if you look at the Budget, you will see that we have the capacity to be able to repay our loans because obviously, we have never defaulted on our loans nor do we intend to default on our loans.

Honourable Radrodro opposes the Blue Lanes, we actually want the Blue Lanes because we are generating economic activity, so these yachts that are coming in are providing jobs. They are going out and they are buying things, so it creates VAT and there is revenue for us. They are paying ECAL. I just got a phone call from one of the resorts in the Mamanucas that because those yachts are here, they are going to organise a regatta in between the islands in the Mamanucas and that obviously generates economic activity. They go out and buy goods and services, then people will be hired for that. That is the type of financing that will obviously generate Government revenue for us and we will be able to then fund these loans that we have. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on the fourth Oral Question for today and I give the floor to Honourable Dr. Govind to ask his question.

Drug Shortage for Chronic Diseases
(Question No. 94/2020)

HON. DR S.R. GOVIND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the drug shortage for some chronic diseases that was highlighted in the media recently?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABELE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank Honourable Dr. Govind for that question.

Mr. Speaker, as we speak, majority of the medicine that were in short supply due to the chronic shortages worldwide are now all in stock. We have been blessed as I have said before, that we are coordinating with our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and also with the freight through Fiji Airways Freight and also through the ships that we are able to connect. Recently, for example, last week, eight containers arrived into the country bringing much needed stock, so they are in stock, majority of them as we speak.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other thing is that, as a rule of thumb, if you look at the healthcare reports from the previous years, about up to 20 percent of the population mostly would utilise private health service. During this COVID-19 phenomenal that has hit the economy and we are talking about numbers, such as 115,000 people to 200,000 people being affected, almost all of those who have been using private healthcare, are now all coming into the public health service, and we accept that that is our role to be able to provide a free health service and we continue to do so.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said it in my Budget response and I know the Honourable Dr. Lalabalavu was not here on that night, he specifically said that we must give and we must take. So he was not here, he did not listen and hear what I was saying, specifically around the chronic shortages that happened worldwide and a doctor friend sent me a *Facebook* posting that he put, again talking about the same things that I was sharing in my Budget response. So I would suggest that he look at the *Hansard* and, again, listen to what I am saying today to be able to enlighten him.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we know that we are struggling with COVID-19, but the struggle with COVID-19 is hitting everything in the healthcare systems. Global supply chains have been disrupted due to the issues around the loss of labour and the raw material, so raw material is as important and the biggest areas and countries in which this is done is in China and India.

The DARU Journal of Pharmaceuticals Sciences on 3rd July this year, outlined the short and long term effects of COVID-19 and also the supply shortages that are being faced in first-world

countries and also in second and third-world countries - high income, middle income and low income countries. We all are facing it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the global shortages also had resulted in the increase of essential prescription medicine, including antibiotics and so we have had in place a tender process where we tendered and had our drugs, for example, supplied to us on a five-year basis. Most of these pharmaceutical companies have reneged on that and they wanted us to break it because they obviously want to increase their prices.

We have also highlighted that the shortages as we have alluded to earlier, is not only the drugs but beginning with the raw materials and the labour costs. The border closes, lockdowns and movement restrictions all participated in giving us the challenges that we face.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the USA alone from 13th to 21st March, 2020, the demand for asthma medication during this week alone spiked by 65 percent, while medications for type 2 diabetes increased by 25 percent. Similarly, medicine for cholesterol, migraine hyperthyroidisms saw a noteworthy increase in claims.

What countries are beginning to do, is these big countries in which they have drug companies within them, they are beginning to tell them and issue instructions that they keep and stockpile supplies for their own first, and that is some of the challenges that we have at the moment, because we cannot manufacture drugs locally. So, they are stockpiling their own. Even including one of the recommended COVID-19 testing platforms that we use also, the WHO guided one, the country in which this is made from or has the patent for this has actually said, “ Let us stock up for our own purposes first.” So you can see that all over the world they are beginning to stockpile. We also do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am highlighting this global shortages because I want us to realise that this is a reality that is not peculiar to Fiji, that countries in the Pacific are struggling and in dire straits with drugs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government, through the Ministry of Health and Medical Services will continue to push our processes to build a health-resilient system and also health-resilient procurement system to be able to meet the needs of our nation. As I speak and as I have said earlier, we see improvements on our stock availability in comparison to the challenges we faced in the last four months and these challenges are not unique to us, but also around the world, even in countries that make these drugs.

I have indicated in the Budget response that COVID-19 has had a negative effect on our supply-chain management for medicine and in mitigation, we have remodelled and are remodelling our supply chain through the development and implementation of a supply chain management reform which plans to address the service needs and meeting the demands of all Fijians.

As you are also unaware, Mr. Speaker, we have the Free Medicine Programme to further improve the availability of medicine and there are 142 items in the Free Medicine Scheme. Just last week, our Team was in Nabouva, Nasautoka and also in Nakorosule, Naitasiri, continuing with their registration.

Mr. Speaker, to conclude, COVID-19 pandemic has had major effects on the health sector, the pharmaceutical sector and also the effect on procurement and supply chain. It is prudent that policymakers, especially those on both sides of the House that they realise that we have to broaden our sights and not look at issues from a tunnel perspective, but we have to understand the challenges that are there and this Government as a responsible Government, will continue to strive to deliver the health services that our people need during this difficult time.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Just a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you very much Honourable Minister for the answer. Can you elaborate more on the remodelling of the supply chain management system and how will that address the current shortfall that we are currently facing pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. That process of remodelling, we are going through the stages and in another sitting of Parliament, I will be happy to talk about what has happened. Suffice to say that Australia was involved in supporting us to look at best practice and how we can best do it, the Honourable Member will also understand that it is a digitalised system, so we are also looking at changing the current digital setup that we have and have access all the way down to the nursing station.

The Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy said that with the digitalisation programme that is in place with Government, we intend to ensure that even health facilities have the capability to be digitalised. One of the reasons that we are hooking on to that bandwagon is the opportunity with the remodelling of a supply chain to be able to have the supply system digitalised all the way to the nursing station. That is our hope and also the patient information system that we want to keep on improving, so that we have continued access for both, drugs and also to the particulars of our patients. *Vinaka.*

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on to the next Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodro to ask her question.

Update on Health Facilities & Personnel – COVID-19 Cases
(Question No. 95/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the preparedness of health facilities and the hardworking health personnel outside Viti Levu and Vanua Levu for any COVID-19 cases from pleasure crafts, including yachts and super yachts that stopped over in Lau and other maritime islands?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- *Vinaka vakalevu*, Mr. Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for that question.

Mr. Speaker, as I speak, there is now nearly 25 million cases of COVID-19 around the world. With the fatality reaching nearly a million, I would like to brief this august House on our statistics. We have had 28 cases. At the moment, there is only four active cases, 22 have recovered and we had two border quarantine cases that passed on. Both of them, as you know, are over 60 years old and we all know the susceptibility and vulnerability that people in that age group and also comorbidities have to COVID-19.

Total tests done now is 7, 986 nearly 8,000. Test per thousand people is nine, seven days rolling average is 50 and our test positivity is 0.4 percent. We actually, with New Zealand, have one of the highest test positivity in the world than Australia. Total test for confirmed cases is 282. In the meantime, we continue to remain vigilant and alert and this is because in our region, Australia and New Zealand are both contending with community transmission, as well as Papua New Guinea and French Polynesia.

In responding to the potential threats brought about by the current pandemic, we established our National Health Taskforce and also, we have been working hand in hand with WHO and the South Pacific Community (SPC) and meeting also with Fiji National University (FNU) Professors on areas in which they can make technical contributions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have talked about how we have the COVID-19 Incident Management Team (IMT) and the former General Manager is now the Acting Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Health and Dr. Ana Tabua from Serua/Namosi, a Sub-Division Medical Officer is now the new General Manager of the IMT and Dr. Aalisha Sahu Khan continues in her role as Head of Health Protection.

The health workforce and health facilities continues to be in a state of readiness for any escalation of COVID-19 cases and the IMT is tasked to ensure that there is adequate capacity and resources to respond to this in the four Divisions. We are continuing to remodel our services in the new normal, as with everyone else in Fiji, in learning on how to be able to function in this new normal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you are also aware, we have been sharing the knowledge and practical experiences of COVID-19 from both, the community and also the safety of our staff who are looking after patients and the clinical management is being shared regularly. The Government in its wisdom feels it necessary to embrace the initiative, to ensure our people on the ground and also in remote areas are equipped and protected.

Mr. Speaker, the Fijian COVID Safe Economic Recovery Framework was rolled out as a three-phased approach to the COVID-Safe Economic Recovery. This Framework is based on the four principles of preventing the importation of the virus, ensuring health system readiness and COVID proofing Fijian businesses and society at large. This has been discussed with the Honourable Minister for Economy in his Budget Address and also in other opportunities that have been available in this august House.

The goals of the Framework is to break potential change of viral transmission before they take hold, creating a new normal that allows economic activity to safely resume in a manner that protects against the large scale COVID-19 outbreak.

The measures within the Framework call for basic hygiene, infection control, physical distancing and adherence to COVID-safe operations in businesses, schools, houses of worship and other areas.

We also note that impacts of COVID-19 go beyond the health sector and this Taskforce consists of the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Commerce and Trade and other agencies. There are also other co-opted members.

One of the innovative ideas and probably the first in the world is the establishment of our Blue Lanes initiative with which we have continued to operate safely and successfully by partnering with key stakeholders in the private sector.

In order to manage COVID-19 effectively, there has to be a layer in between the seaside and landside, just like at the airport where, if an emergency occurs after boarding, or a landside transportation problem, there is a dedicated space where we can isolate screen swap or provide acute response without exposing health staff to the risk.

Future travel bubbles and increased sea movement will become a necessity, compared to the current deployment from the hospitals. People from other countries cannot enter Fiji at this time unless they have specific grounds that warrant consideration.

Mr. Speaker, under the Blue Lane initiative, visitors aboard yachts coming to Fiji are required to apply with the Department of Immigration and the COVID Risk Mitigation Taskforce and, again, I continue to say this, that this is a multi-agency Taskforce. These applications are received and assessed by both, the Department of Immigration and this multiagency Taskforce on a case by case basis. These assessments for permission to enter Fiji are undertaken on a wish-based approach, whether the individual travels from a country that has ongoing local transmission or not.

Mr. Speaker, all persons entering Fiji are required to meet a set of very strict conditions that have been formulated based on the current scientific principles and evidence of COVID-19. As of 29th August, 2020, 66 yachts have been approved under this Initiative, with more yachts and superyachts showing interest to join the Blue Lane Initiative.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure that superyachts can function properly, we are allowing for crew changes. That means crew are being flown in into Fiji to join superyachts, allowing those vessels to be properly run and maintained for months at sea whilst in Fiji. During this exercise, Mr. Speaker, no one is exempt to the quarantine process that we have. Again, the requirements for entry into Fiji are strict, all crew must have a clear pre-departure test, spend 14 days in Fiji, in quarantine they clear border quarantine exit test.

Mr. Speaker, currently all yachts are required to be cleared at Port Denarau and if the vessel has not met the mandatory 14 days quarantine, it will be required to be anchored in a designated mooring ground and its crew will be monitored daily by Health Officials. After completing the 14 days the COVID-19 test is conducted and with the negative results, then only will the Health Quarantine Officials issue a certificate of pratique. This certificate signifies that the yacht and its crew are healthy, and will result in the lowering of the yellow flag. Once the flag is lowered, other border agencies will then board and carry out the final clearance paperwork before they will be allowed to cruise within Fiji waters, as per cruising permit provided by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, this system allows a multi-agency support and at the forefront, are our Navy and Military Teams assisting our Health Quarantine Officers and the Medical Team, and we also have the border agencies in Denarau to facilitate the necessary clearances. I would like to applaud the vigilance of our *turaga ni koros* in the maritime areas, who have been calling to find out about yachts that are cruising close to their islands.

We need our society to be vigilant, we need a whole of society approach to protect our borders and send the alarm in times of uncertainty. And I must reassure this esteemed House that vessels visiting the islands are, indeed, cleared by all the relevant authorities and are regularly monitored by the multi-agency team.

In conclusion, I wish to draw everyone's attention to COVID-19 and I must stress that COVID-19 is by no means over and we must all do our part so that we can keep COVID-19 at bay, and also continue with our economic reform and economic recovery. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor for your supplementary question.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Minister for Health for that explanation. But out in the maritime islands and I am sure he will agree, running water, telephone communication and transportation are very problematic. For example, in Vanuabalavu, you cannot even make a phone call because the tower is still down, and these are also vital for the preparedness of the health facilities and staff.

The people of Vanuabalavu are putting out a petition, calling for the suspension of this Blue Lane Initiative in the Vanuabalavu waters until COVID-19 is given the all clear by the Government. So, will the Honourable Minister for Health support this call by the people of Vanuabalavu in their petition? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, I have just talked about the mechanisms that are in place for allowing yachts into Fiji at this moment and the COVID-19 measures that are also in place. I have just said also, Mr. Speaker, that discussions are done with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs regarding those yachts and where they want to go and where they want to land. For example, if there is a yacht that comes to Moala and we do not want them to land, we can tell them not to land, they cannot come to the land. That discussion is done with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, she is raising a petition and that could be done through the normal process and also the Business Committee of this House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on. The sixth Oral Question for today, I will give the floor to the Honourable Sigarara to ask his question.

Toppers Scholarships Priority Areas & TELS Categories
(Question No. 96/2020)

HON. J. SIGARARA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts explain the priority areas for Toppers scholarships and the categories of Tertiary Education Loans available for the academic calendar 2021?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for asking that question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I proceed with my response, I will just take a couple of minutes, maybe a couple of seconds, to answer two issues raised by the Honourable Kepa regarding the Government removing Chaplains from the school, as well as the removal of the boarding allowances.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Kepa the boarding allowances are still there in this financial year. As for the Chaplains they are still there, the Government did not remove them. We only removed them from our payroll and we negotiated with the Churches and they agreed to pay the Chaplains for their presence in schools, so the Chaplains are still there. I sometimes do not know where you get your information from, but let me clarify that for you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 has had a major impact on the Government revenue. Yes, we are still continuing the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme, known as TELS, and the National Toppers Scheme in a strategic manner to ensure long-term sustainability. The total budget for TELS and Toppers is \$161,105,000 and the breakdown is as follows:

- \$46.4 million is for the National Toppers Scheme Scholarships;
- \$66.8 million is for tuition fees for TELS;
- \$46.7 million is for allowances, such as food and accommodation for TELS;
- \$478,800 is for scholarships for students with special needs;
- \$544,800 for donor funding in the form of scholarships; and of course
- \$26,600 for Civil Service Scholarships.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently we have 16,611 students who are getting their education through TELS at a total cost of \$93 million, while we have 2,525 students currently enrolled through Toppers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the priority areas, if I can take you to the category of awards and programmes and the number of awards, we have:

- (1) 90 Toppers awards for Engineering Programme which includes; Bachelor of Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Energy Engineering and Mechanical Engineering.
- (2) 90 Toppers scholarships for Medicine and Health. These include; Bachelor's Degree in Dietetics, Nursing, Public Health, Medical Lab Sciences, Physiotherapy, Pharmacy and Medical Imaging Science.
- (3) 50 Toppers scholarships for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests which includes; Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture, Agricultural Engineering, Agribusiness, Veterinary Sciences, Forestry, Fisheries, Aquaculture, Fish Technology and Food Technology.
- (4) 35 awards under Toppers for Technology which includes; Bachelor's Degree in Networking, Software Development, Programming, Library Services, Media and Journalism, Information System, Computing Science, Information Technology and Applied Computing.
- (5) Five awards under Toppers for Social Sciences which includes; Bachelor's Degree in Social Science, Social Policy and Policy Administration.
- (6) 30 Toppers scholarships for Environmental and Marine Sciences which includes; Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Science, Environmental Management, Climate Change and Marine Management.
- (7) 20 Toppers scholarships for Land and Town Planning and this includes; Bachelor's Degree in Land Surveying, Urban and Regional Planning, Real Estate and Property Management, Geo-Spatial Engineering, Real Estate and Property Evaluation.
- (8) 120 Toppers awards are for Commerce which includes; Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting, Economics, Finance, Official Statistics, Project Planning and Management, Property Management and Valuation, Occupation Health and Safety, Information Systems, Professional Accounting, Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations, Public Administration and Management.
- (9) 150 Toppers awards for Education. This is for:
 - (a) Bachelor of Education in Primary Education, we have 80 awards;
 - (b) Counselling and Psychology, we have 20 awards;
 - (c) Special and Inclusive Education, we have 10 awards;

- (d) Secondary Education which includes; Mathematics, Physics, Food & Textiles, Home Economics, Computer Sciences, Early Childhood Education and Industrial Arts with 40 awards; and finally,
- (e) we have 10 awards for Special Areas - Diploma and Certificates which include; Marine Studies, Mining, Land Surveying, Early Childhood Education, Forensic Science and Fashion, Counselling, Special and Inclusive Education, Society and Community Work, Project Management, Geospatial Sciences, Organic Farming, Aquaculture, Horticulture, Animal Health and Husbandry.

So, a total of 600 Toppers awards for the next financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Higher Education Institutions eligible for the National Toppers local scholarships are: Fiji National University (FNU), the University of the South Pacific (USP), University of Fiji, Corpus Christi Teachers College, Fulton Adventist University, Sangam College of Nursing and Health Care Education.

For Tertiary Education and Loans Schemes (TELS), 4,000 students will be funded under the various TELS schemes and the courses are as follows: 3,000 for TELS categories and 1,000 students will benefit from TELS for Technical Colleges of Fiji, now under FNU.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of Toppers Award, the student qualifies for full tuition, meal allowances and accommodation at a rate of \$2,400 per semester or \$2,000 per trimester. The student also gets \$1,000 per annum for stationery and, of course, an incidental allowance of \$1,000 per annum.

Under TELS, it is a loan scheme so a student can apply for tuition, hostel and rent at \$250 per week, \$50 food per week, bus fare assistance of \$30 per week and stationery and incidentals are \$1,000 per annum. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for the reply. We move on to the seventh Oral Question for today. I call on the Honourable Aseri Radrodro to ask his question.

Update on Government Shipping Franchise Scheme
(Question No. 97/2020)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO asked the Government upon notice:

Since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport provide an update to Parliament on the status of the Government Shipping Franchise Scheme, in particular the seven non-economical routes namely; Northern Vanua Levu, Upper Southern Lau, Lower Southern Yasawa, Northern Lau, Lomaiviti, Rotuma and Yasayasa Moala?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Radrodro for a very incisive question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government Shipping Franchise Scheme which he is referring to is now known as the Shipping Services Subsidy (SSS). It is a Government-funded initiative and this initiative ensures the movement of cargo and passengers between our maritime islands. Through the SSS, accessibility is enhanced to markets with respect to increase in economic activities and generally improve livelihood which are essential for communities located along the shipping routes that he has actually identified as uneconomical.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the information of this House, in fact, there are more than seven routes but he specifically asked for this. They are operated under the SSS, so you are looking at Rotuma, North East Vanua Levu, Yasawa and Lower Southern Lau which operate on a monthly basis. The Kadavu and Lomaiviti, Upper Southern Lau, Northern Lau and Yasayasa Moala operate on a bi-monthly basis currently, and there will be other routes. We are including a new route of Beqa, Yanuca and Vatulele which will begin its maiden voyage, Sir, in September this year and this route will operate every two months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government is committed to providing affordable and efficient shipping services to all Fijians, so the SSS covers a total of 70 approved franchise ports of call to nine franchise routes. To answer the question by the Honourable Radrodro, Sir, all seven uneconomical routes continue to be serviced, despite the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the continuity of service pretty much shows the resilience of the shipping sector, and services have continued. It was literally reduced to the carriage of goods only during the lockdown period and during the pandemic, passage of travel was restricted, unless it was deemed absolutely necessary and, of course, approved by the Ministry of Health.

I must highlight here, Sir, that during the lockdown, the Government had actually arranged urgent shipping, supplying essential items to the Yasawas and also deployed several vessels during *TC Harold* for assessments and assistance to Kadavu and to Lau and the Lomaiviti Group.

Sir, I reiterate that the services to these uneconomical routes continued and in September, we will expand the coverage of shipping services to other routes that are also uneconomical.

Also, Sir, additionally, what we are trying to do eventually, we will get there but we are just in the process of doing all the necessary things that we are required to do, we will try and bundle the uneconomical routes with the economical routes and expect that the licences will be extended by a number of years so what will happen eventually is that, you do not have operators just using uneconomical routes. It would be incumbent upon operators when they come on board, that they take up a few uneconomical routes also whilst they take the economical routes, so better service for the general public.

We were just working through that at the moment, Sir, and once they get a bundle of licences, if at the end of the day they have three - two maybe economical and one uneconomical, that they must provide the services. If they do not, they are liable to lose the entire bundle. It also makes it better for the operators, Sir, if they have a bundle of licences. They can go to the bank, they can say, "We have a licence for 20 years", so that they can get a couple of million dollars to get better ships available for those. So all of that is under process, Sir. We will get that done to make sure that our maritime community is well taken care of.

Sir, the total number of trips that are undertaken annually is about 168 and the total number of franchise trips undertaken for the past five years is about 792. But we are always looking to better the services, serve the country and that is the status that we have, with respect to those circumstances.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We will move on to the eighth Oral Question for today and I now call on the Honourable Bhatnagar to ask her question.

Update – FNPF Unemployment Assistance
(Question No. 98/2020)

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications provide an update on the total payments made so far for unemployment assistance, together with their FNPF?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As the Honourable Member has highlighted that I have already addressed this matter quite significantly, but I would just like to take this opportunity to respond to the misinformation that Honourable Qereqeretabua made in a very erstwhile response and just very quickly to set the record straight.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, she said that we have allocated \$20 million when, in fact, we have allocated \$100 million of which \$5 million is used for re-training and re-skilling.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I would like to reiterate and I think there is an absence of sophistication in the economic thinking by Honourable Qereqeretabua, and perhaps the others around her, that they cannot look at things in isolation, like what Honourable Salote Radrodro said, not to allow the yachts, so drugs will not come. But we need to manage the economic impact of tourism or actions of tourism.

In the same way, Honourable Qereqeretabua said, “Do not build the hospital, do not build the police station and do not build the Prime Minister’s office because we need all that money for unemployment benefits.”

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- That’s not what I said.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the *Hansard* will prove you wrong and so will the video.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is that, we are going ahead with ready to shovel projects which actually creates employment. I think Honourable Tabuya was at some FTUC function where one of the unionists said, “We need employment.” This is precisely what we are doing.

All of a sudden they have woken up to this fact that we do not just need the unemployment benefit, we actually need work. And by having those projects as highlighted in the Budget, they are full throttle and employ about 1,600 people and those 1,600 jobs currently do not exist. But we will not only be providing them with employment, at the end of the day, we will also be having this infrastructure. This is precisely the approach that Governments have taken since the great depression in the 1930s. Please, if you can understand that it is basic economic theory as to how it works.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to also highlight is that, it is not a dichotomous approach. It is not like saying, “Oh, if you are going to build those buildings, therefore, we will not have unemployment benefits.” No! Actually, you can do both. Economic application is a lot more sophisticated than that.

And lastly, as we have highlighted, Phase II, Phase III will continue for as long as it is required. I think the Opposition, Honourable Qereqeretabua, in particular in this instance, does not seem to understand that as we have highlighted, more and more people will need Government top-ups and we are here for the long haul. She is simply mouthing what her leader, who is unfortunately not here today, said in the newspaper about the fact, “Oh, Phase 4. Why did Phase 4 not get Government top-up? Because Honourable Member, Phase 4 has got nothing to do with people who have become unemployed because of COVID-19. They were already unemployed two years ago. That is the difference.

You see, it will not fit in with their political agenda. Unemployment benefit for COVID-19 is for those people who have become unemployed because of COVID-19. These people have been unemployed for up to two years prior to COVID-19 and the FNPF policy does not give them the money or allow to withdraw some funds but we have spoken with FNPF and they have agreed that these people could actually withdraw up to \$1,100, if that is in their account. So, they may, for example, be affected because all this time they have been unemployed, they obviously are depending on family members.

Perhaps, some of those family members no longer have any jobs, who will be assisted by Government but used to be given initial additional funds. That is the reason, please, try and digest that. It is very simple. So, Phase 2, Phase 3 will continue for as long as we need to continue with that and the funding will be provided for that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- A supplementary question; I thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a quick question to the Honourable Attorney-General, how do those who do not have FNPF benefit from your unemployment assistance?

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- As we have highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, earlier this morning in the Ministerial Statement, there are some people who are in the informal sector. There are two types of people in the informal sector. There are some people who are now in the informal sector but they actually have an FNPF account, or they used to have one. Many people, for example, will say, "I used to work in hotel industry or I used to be a waiter or bus driver, or whatever it was, and I have FNPF contribution." But for the past three, four or five years, for whatever reason, they have left those jobs and they are doing their own business. Some may be selling coconuts or some maybe selling whatever they are selling, and they run their own business or providing a particular service.

For those people, what we have said is that, they can access those FNPF funds. But if they are also in the informal sector, we have already said they can apply for concessional loan that we have said, up to \$7,000 in the microenterprise - small business - \$14,000, medium business - up to \$21,000 and they can get a concession loan. But as also announced today, those people who do not have FNPF accounts, we have the Cash for Work Programme that will be rolling out soon. So, that is how they are able to also access funds or employment that will bring in cash.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bultavu, supplementary question.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary question is, could the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy assure members of the public that for those who are unemployed and when they are assisted through this scheme, that funds for other benefits, such as funeral benefit and educational assistance in their General Account will not be depleted, that their drawings will not affect their other benefits after receiving \$220 every month?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you take someone who may be receiving \$220 a fortnight. If they are going to use \$220 per fortnight from their General Account, it may come to a stage if they do not have that much, where it will finish and Government then tops it up. There are some people in their General Account who, for example, may only have \$300. So, if we are going to pay them \$220 a fortnight for the next five fortnights, they use the first lot, then everything else Government pays. We are already starting to do more and more, that is what I am trying to highlight.

Every week, Government is topping up more. In probably about two months' time, bulk of it will be Government-funded.

As we have highlighted, and the Honourable Minister for Health and the Honourable Prime Minister have both said this, that no one in this world at the moment knows for how long this COVID-19 pandemic will have such a deleterious effect on global economic activity. So, this may go on for six months. We need to have those funds to continue to provide unemployment benefits throughout, it could be nine months. But the comments coming from the NFP and some other Honourable Members from your Party seems like you want everything now. We are here for the long haul.

In respect of someone, in the meantime, for example, if they have enough funds in their General Account and they are withdrawing the \$220, if they want to go and withdraw some additional funds, should they have the funds, for a funeral or education purpose or whatever the other reasons are, they can do that if they have the funds. The choice is theirs.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on. The first Written Question, I now call on the Honourable Qereqeretabua to ask her question.

Written Questions

Medical Service Update (Question No. 99/2020)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services provide the following to Parliament, the:

- (a) total number of doctors in Fiji's public health and medical services as at 31st August 2020;
- (b) total number of doctors in each public health and medical facility respectively as at 31st August 2020;
- (c) ratio to population per doctor in each public health and medical facility as at 31st August 2020;
- (d) ratio to population per doctor in each respective public health and medical facility for the designated area/district/division that the facility serves as at 31st August 2020; and
- (e) number of specialists in each divisional public health or medical service hospital as at 31st August 2020?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). *Vinaka vakalevu.*

COVID-19 \$40 Million Allocation (Question No. 100/2020)

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services provide details as to how the \$40 million allocated under Head 50 in the COVID-19 (Response) Budget was spent, in particular:

- (a) list of all the goods procured from this allocation, the vendor and cost of each item; and
- (b) list of all the services procured from this allocation, the vendor and cost of each item?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date, as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- The third Written Question for today, I call on the Honourable Tabuya to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

First Homeowners - 2019-2020 Housing Grant Scheme
(Question No. 101/2020)

HON. L.D. TABUYA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on the following:

- (a) criteria for selection of grantees for the Housing Grant Scheme for first time homeowners in the 2019-2020 financial year; and
- (b) the breakdown of the 543 applicants who benefitted in terms of amounts given and location of their homes?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as permitted under Standing Order 45(3), I will table my response at a later sitting date.

HON. SPEAKER.- For the fourth Written Question for today, I call on the Honourable Leawere to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Land Lease Payments for Forest Reserves
(Question No. 102/2020)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Forestry inform Parliament on the following regarding land lease payments for forest reserves, the:

- (a) the total number of Forest Reserves;
- (b) list of Reserves by total land area and the Provinces where these Reserves are located;
- (c) formula for calculation of lease payment derived; and
- (d) whether the allocated amount of \$64,000 in the 2019-2020 Budget was fully utilised?

HON. O. NAIQAMU (Minister for Forestry).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- The fifth Written Question for today, I now call upon the Honourable Ro Kepa to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

National Toppers Scheme and \$35.5 Million Budgetary Allocation
(Question No. 103/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts provide the following to Parliament:

- (a) an updated record of the 2,525 active students on the National Toppers Scheme as stated in her response to the 2020-2021 Budget Address; and
- (b) itemise in detail how the \$35.5 million budgetary allocation for 2019-2020 was spent?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my written response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, Question time is now over.

Honourable Members, it has been a long day and I thank you for your contributions. Parliament is now adjourned to tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 8.14 p.m.