

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 9TH DECEMBER, 2020

[CORRECTED COPY]

CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Administration of Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance	121
Minutes	121
Communication from the Chair	121
Resumption of Debate on His Excellency the President's Address	122-166
(1) Hon. Prof. Biman C. Prasad	122-126
(2) Hon. Joseph N. Nand	126-128
(3) Hon. Lenora S. Qereqeretabua	129-133
(4) Hon. Vijay Nath	134-137
(5) Hon. Adi Litia Qionibaravi	137-141
(6) Hon. Alexander O'Connor	141-144
(7) Hon. Aseri M. Radrodro	144-148
(8) Hon. Viam Pillay	148-152
(9) Hon. Salote V. Radrodro	153-156
(10) Hon. Simione R. Rasova	157-161
(11) Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy	161-166
Consideration of Bills	166-184
(1) Income Tax (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 2020	166-169
(2) Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (Amendment) Bill 2020	169-173
(3) Ozone Depleting Substances (Amendment) Bill 2020	173-175
(4) Telecommunications (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2020	175-179
(5) Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2020	180-181
(6) COVID-19 Response (Home Loan Assistance) Bill 2020	181-183
(7) Customs Tariff (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 2020	183-184
Suspension of Standing Orders	179-180

WEDNESDAY, 9TH DECEMBER, 2020

The Parliament met at 9.40 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present except the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

The following Members subscribed to the Administration of Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance and took their seats in the Chamber:

- (1) Hon. Tanya Waqanika; and
- (2) Hon. Virendra Lal.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I congratulate and welcome the Honourable Members to Parliament. I wish you all the best for the remainder of this Parliamentary session. Honourable Members, also please take note that the Honourable Tanya Waqanika will deliver her Maiden Speech on Friday; and the Honourable Virendra Lal will also deliver his Maiden Speech on Friday.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 8th December, 2020 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

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

Honourable Members, there was a delay in the start of today's session because we had technical glitches. That has now been repaired and we will be able to carry on with our sitting for the day. Thank you.

Honourable Members, we will continue with the response to His Excellency's Address. I call upon the Honourable Minister for Fisheries. You have the floor, Sir.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now continue with the response to His Excellency's Address, and I call upon the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am going to begin today by quoting my response to His Excellency's Address from 12 months ago. This is what I said then, and I quote:

“It is the custom when we rise to debate His Excellency's speech to this House, to thank him for his gracious speech. I do not doubt the grace with which His Excellency delivered his speech, but I wonder about those who wrote that speech. I wonder about how much respect they have for His Excellency's office. I wonder about how much respect they have for the people of our country”.

This year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the position is exactly the same. Once again, I have looked very carefully at His Excellency's speech of last week. I have looked carefully for anything that could tell me that this FijiFirst Government has a vision or a plan, or any idea about where it is taking our country. And the answer, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is nothing - no vision, no plan, zero! His Excellency's speech praised the government for containing COVID-19.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have done well in this. The officials who have managed the border, our doctors and nurses who have treated the patients in Lautoka and Navua; they have indeed done well, and it is right to praise them for their efforts to keep our country safe from this devastating pandemic. They have done their jobs, now the Government must step up and do its job. It must honour the work they have done by building on that success. By re-building our economy and setting out a vision for the future, and it is these plans that we were waiting for in His Excellency's speech.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 was blamed for all of Fiji's economic problems. After all, it is the Government that writes the speech and we all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that whenever this government gives us bad news, it is always someone else's fault.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the speech mentioned the so-called COVID-Safe Economic Recovery Framework. I will come back to that. Of course, it had to talk about the so called blue-green economy; it had to talk about climate change; the net zero carbon emissions. In fact there was talk of digitisation - very good; lots of talk but where is the action? As usual, there was a call on civil servants to be more efficient, but how can they be efficient when the government makes such inefficient laws and inefficient policies?

Then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was one paragraph, and I repeat one paragraph, on the government's legislative agenda for the year - there will be an Anti-doping Bill, there will be a Refrigerants Management Bill, there will be a Hotel Data Collection Bill and so on.

And then suddenly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency's speech was over. That was it! Why, Mr. Speaker, Sir? Because His Excellency's government, the people on the other side of the House have nothing to say. They have nothing to offer to the people of Fiji. This has been the pattern that I have seen, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the last three years. For example, what did the speech say about agriculture? Zero - no plan. What did the speech say about sugar? Zero - no plan. What did the speech say about tourism, our largest industry? Incredibly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, zero - no plan! What did the speech say about manufacturing? Zero - no plan. What did the speech say about exports? Zero - no plan!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with all respect to His Excellency, his speech was zero content zone. That is the speech his Government wrote for him because we have a zero-ideas Government. Mr. Speaker, we are facing the worst economic crisis in Fiji's history and unfortunately we are led by the worst Government in the history of Fiji.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- They have spent all their money and all they can tell the people of Fiji now is - "take out more of your FNPF"; that is what they are telling the people. They tour the country in four-wheel drive motorcades giving speeches of all manner of unimportant things, as if nothing is wrong, everything is normal. They turn up at school prize giving functions, they will pop up at seminars and workshops, they even turn up to open shisha bars in Suva. They will go anywhere that makes them look busy and important and good, but they will not visit people who have lost jobs and small businesses.

They will not visit people whose incomes and lives have been wrecked by the coronavirus crisis. They will not stand-by the ATS workers who have all been made redundant; the same workers who found their same jobs being advertised in the *Fiji Sun* the following week. They will not visit the COVID-Relief Centre in Nadi, they will not talk to the hundreds of distressed families who do not know where their next meal is coming from. Instead they make new laws for the NGOs, Mr. Speaker, and charities - all the people who are doing work which the Government is supposed to be doing and what do they say them - "We have passed a new law, if you do not file your accounts, we will de-register you."

That, Mr. Speaker, is how this Government treats all those people who are trying to help others. Why is that, Mr. Speaker? Because this Government does nought - they worry about being shamed about its inaction. It does not want to see all the ordinary men and women of Fiji who are doing good, who are doing their best to help their fellow Fiji citizens because the Government itself, in my view, is doing nothing. What is the only thing they are doing? They are saying, "take out more of your FNPF."

This Government, Mr. Speaker, wants all the credit for all the good things that happens. If someone else is doing good things, they are a political threat. Mr. Speaker, this is the level of pettiness and small-mindedness to which our Government has descended. In fact, this is what preoccupies the Government. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this country is confronted with its biggest-ever economic crisis. A crisis is a time to bring everyone together. It is a time to ask people for the best ideas, it is a time to work together and decide on a unified course of action and then to carry it out. What does our Government do? Nothing.

Mr. Speaker, we are now looking at signs of recovery for global tourism. If our source markets can get quick access to a vaccine, which it appears to be already, and if Fiji plays its own card right, tourism may re-open fully in July or August 2021. But we all know, Mr. Speaker, that it is going to be a very different tourism industry next year. The industry must give our tourists the same experience or a better one, but the industry must also deal with the new world of health restrictions. It will also be a new world of cut-throat competition because every tourist destination will try and get tourists to their shores and recover the market that they have lost. So, Mr. Speaker, what is our Government doing? How is it working with our tourism industry? The answer again is zero. The tourism operators are in the dark, the hotel owners do not know what is happening. What has happened to the famous Tourism Response Team announced by the Government? Mr. Speaker,

I will tell you, I will tell you what has happened. It has not met since August. It has not met for about four months now.

In all of Fiji's tourism competitor countries, people are working together - the Governments, the hoteliers, the airlines, the tour operators – they are all working together. They are planning for the re-opening of global tourism, they are planning for the health issues, the marketing issues, the risk issues, the financial issues and in Fiji, zero. No plans, again.

Mr. Speaker, the Government talks grandly about its so-called COVID-Safe Economic Recovery Framework. They pretend that this is some grand strategy. They pretend that this is some grand strategy but, Mr. Speaker, I encourage every Fiji citizen to go onto the internet and read it. This is on Government website. What is the so-called Economic Recovery Framework? And to use the Honourable Attorney-General's favourite phrase – “What is the reality of the matter?” It is a simple chart. It talks about when schools can reopen, it talks about how many people can sit in cafes and restaurants, and it says markets must be well-ventilated.

This, Mr. Speaker, is the so-called Economic Recovery Framework. I am talking about the Economic Recovery Framework, you do not know what it is, you worry about the health facilities, that is another issue. This is the grand plan that the Government is following. This is the grand plan that the Government is following. New ideas – zero; Targets – zero and Timelines – zero.

Mr. Speaker, who remembers the so-called “Bula Bubble”. For a while, this is all the Government could talk about. All of a sudden, they have been hit by the reality of the matter. There will be no Bula Bubble for many months. They talk about the Bula Lane but allowing a few yachts to come to Fiji will not solve our economic problem.

Mr. Speaker, this is what you get with a Government that refuses to listen. This is what happens with a Government that pretends it has all the answers. What is the reality of the matter? The only ideas that this Government has ever had are about how to spend money and because this Government now has no money, Mr. Speaker, it has run out of ideas as well.

Mr. Speaker, this Government cannot be honest with the people. It does not have the courage to tell them that things are going to get worse in the new year. It just continues to pretend that everything is normal. Mr. Speaker, it is now 14 years since the 2006 *coup* and look at our country. Fiji is more divided, more indebted, more dictated than it ever has been.

The Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General had promised us true democracy. What do we have; a Parliamentary dictatorship. Even the other Ministers, many of them do not know what is going on in the Government. They do not even know the laws that have been passed. I was told by somebody that one Minister was asked about the citizenship law, the passport law, the immigration law and the Minister said, “Oh, I do not think that came to Parliament”. They do not even know what is going on in the Government. They have banned town and city council elections because they know that the Opposition parties will win in that system.

The Honourable Prime Minister promised an end to corruption but corruption is worse than it ever has been in this country. How many of those Government-controlled councils are being investigated by FICAC right now? How hard is it to build a swimming pool in Lautoka, Mr. Speaker? What about the Bainimarama Boom? Now, when people talk about this Bainimarama Boom, they are actually laughing. The national debt is really as big as our economy. The sugar industry is on its knees, the rates of violence against women and children are some of the highest in the world, so are our rates from health, from hypertension, heart disease and diabetes. The health system is in tatters, Mr. Speaker. I visited the Western Division and the Honourable Minister for Health needs to

concentrate on that. I was in Vanua Levu, I looked at the Dreketi Health Centre, the Seaqaqa Health Centre, the Wainikoro Health Centre, these health centres are in a dilapidated condition. It does not require a lot of imagination and money to deal with them, Mr. Speaker. That is what the Honourable Minister for Health should concentrate on.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Attorney-General has reported, saying that Aspen Medical has been given more time to take over Ba and Lautoka hospitals. We should be more honest, Mr. Speaker. The reason for the delay is that the hospitals are not fit to be taken over. The Government cannot meet its promises to Aspen to give them working hospitals. I have warned in this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, when the Honourable Attorney-General brought that, you know this so-called public-private partnership and I gave examples around Australia, around other countries, how these models have not been successful and how they have failed.

We have an education system that is failing our young people. We have deepening poverty. Our cherished public institutions, the public service, the police, the constitutional offices, our Parliament are all politicised and are bent to the will of a few.

The Honourable Prime Minister, I remember very well, promised that no-one would sit on more than one Government Board. But look at the Government Boards today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have now packed with the same people. They have been rotated around, most of them are people who have contributed to the millions of dollars in the FijiFirst bank account I can see. And many of them would have benefited from it.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Are you jealous?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am not jealous, that is what you promised, Honourable Prime Minister. You promised that no one will sit in more than one Board. I am holding on to your promise. But, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no vision for the future. This is a government, in my view, that seems to have given up, that makes it up as it goes along. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are calling on the people of Fiji to change all of this. We want a government in which everyone has their say. We want to combine the best ideas and the best people to deal with our pressing national problems which is likely to get worse in the next few years, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The people of Fiji have no say in what happens except, once in four years, their vote. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are calling for new leaders to step forward now and help us prepare for the 2022 Elections. We need young people, those who have led in their communities in the fields of education, social work, business and professions. We need them to step forward. We want Fiji to prosper and our people to live in a fair and equal society where all are respected and taken care of and there must be change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National Federation Party has brought about momentous change in our beloved nation since its formation 57 years ago in 1963. We are seven years older than an Independent Fiji which itself was a crusade led by the Party's founder, the late A.D. Patel, his able lieutenant – S.M. Koya (who became the first Leader of the Opposition) and the pioneering members of the Legislative Council that resulted the end of 96 years of Colonial rule in 1970.

We have weathered many storms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but our principle fortress is impregnable because we believe national interest must always be paramount and not subservient to personal and political advancement. We may have paid a very heavy price for not practicing political expediency but we did not shirk our principles for short-term gain.

The country now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is at the critical juncture and we need practical solutions, not cosmetic ideas that cause long-term pain that we are now experiencing. The next General Elections, Mr. Speaker, Sir, some two years away, will be a defining moment in Fiji's history. Change is a fact of life. And genuine change will start with rejection of the bondage that people have with the so-called FijiFirst Government.

Let us all march forward in this direction, Mr. Speaker, Sir. And people may ask, what would we do differently? The answer is "everything". Good Government is not about making a law here or spending a bit of money there. Government is about honest, accountable leadership. It is about bringing the people of our country together. Good Government is about working to combine the people's talents to solve our national problems. It is about bringing together a Government and the Opposition to reach agreement on long-term policies for long-term issues. Issues like our future economic direction, our key industries and important social issues such as education, health, land tenure and climate change.

Good Government does not dictate to people, good Government supports people, Mr. Speaker, Sir, good Government enables them to work together to find solutions at local level, then to come together and work on national problems and good Government uses the power of laws and public money to deliver the solutions our people have discussed and agreed.

Our current Government unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has forgotten these simple, basic things. It only wants to dictate to people even Honourable Ministers when they go and talk to the people they actually dictate to them. You must do this, you must do that, this is how they talk, and they look for opportunities to punish their perceived enemies and, Mr. Speaker, they reward friends. That is their *modus operandi* – punish the enemies, reward their friends. Without good governance, Mr. Speaker, Fiji cannot progress. This is what must change and, Mr. Speaker, we are the Party to change it, the people on this side of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I wish you a very happy and merry Christmas.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad for his contribution to the debate. I now call on the Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, Honourable Members of Parliament and thousands of fellow Fijians who are watching this via online platform; I stand in this august House to provide my response to the Opening Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote.

Please, allow me to begin by respectfully thanking His Excellency for a very powerful, inspiring and momentous Address on Monday, 30th November, 2020. It has really set the pace and the direction for Parliament deliberation for 2021 and, therefore cannot be a better start.

While the rest of the world is still finding ways to combat COVID-19, we have done quite well and we are still going strong, despite slight ups and downs.

As alluded to by His Excellency, we, Fijians, must be proud because what we achieve in terms of containing COVID-19 is still unbelievable by many nations. I think the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General needs to be commended for their versatile leadership which enabled Fiji to contain COVID-19 and manoeuvre its way ahead in terms of the daily lives of many Fijians. Although we had and in fact the timely assistance, support and intervention programmes by the Government ensured that we, Fijians, kept going.

Actually, resilience level has been getting stronger and stronger after *TC Winston* and COVID-19 further united Fiji ever than before. It has made every Fijians much stronger to deal with issues and rise above the occasion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also agree with His Excellency that the pace of our recovery is looking very promising and the timely revised Budget by the Honourable Minister for Economy made a difference and salvaged many Fijians and businesses from being impacted much more negatively than what they had gone through.

I will not let this opportunity go past me by not mentioning and acknowledging the sacrifice and hard work of the frontline workers, such as Health and security personnel. They have been our pillar of strength in these trying times. Thanks to their families, who have also silently sacrificed for the safety of all Fijians.

On the other hand, I fully agree with His Excellency in terms of challenges related to climate change, which has no relations to COVID-19 but still requires the same level of attention and commitment as before. COVID-19 cannot be used to relinquish our efforts towards the climate change battle.

Our Honourable Prime Minister has made things very clear in his address to the United Nations high-level Roundtable on Climate Change in September and I quote:

“If we don't win the race to net-zero emissions, we are headed for three or four degrees of global warming -- an earth we will not recognize and a climate we cannot survive. Speeches won't save us; neither will nice tweets or photo-ops. From here on out, our only expectation is action. We need solidarity we can feel; reductions in emissions we can measure; and resources vulnerable nations can afford to access now”.

I am sure this message of our Honourable Prime Minister is very clear and shows the level of commitment he has towards the climate change battle.

As for the Ministry of Education, I am proud to work with the Honourable Minister, as she stood tall and turned out to be very innovative and a reflective leader by implementing appropriate and timely actions towards the education system in times of this pandemic. As we are approaching the end of the 2020 academic year, students have been provided with necessary education in a very strategic way under the “new normal”.

The Honourable Minister has talked at length on this with specific details and this speaks volume of her leadership vibrancy. Her response in respect to the Ministry of Education has been very explicit whereby she presented and deliberated with specific figures and data. Under her able leadership, the Ministry acted pro-actively to ensure that the delivery and quality of education provided in Fijian schools remain a high priority.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support her deliberation done earlier because the Ministry of Education has done all its best to ensure that COVID-19 shall never become an excuse when it comes to quality education.

However, I wish to reiterate the sentiments shared by the Honourable Akbar in terms of the commitment by teachers and students which have been tremendous during lockdown and even post COVID. The rolling out of online learning, reaching out to all communities with learning materials and teaching of best health practices to students have been few of many success stories under this “new normal” which were carried out in schools and communities by our teachers.

The core function of the Ministry, which is providing quality education to Fijian children, has not been deterred by any factor because all initiatives in place such as transport assistance, textbook assistance, free education grant, student mentoring and counselling services continued as it would have been under normal circumstances. Under “new normal” it just demanded all the stakeholders to become more strategic and responsible in these trying times so that students are least or not affected at all.

The Ministry has been working very tirelessly with its relevant partners to ensure that no stones are unturned in terms of providing equitable learning platform to all our students.

One such platform or initiative is the “Read to Lead” Programme with the kind compliments of Fiji Water Foundation in collaboration with Vision Fiji, where books worth of thousands of dollars have been pumped into primary schools. The most recent one was when a few weeks ago the “Read to Lead” patron, Mrs. Mary Bainimarama, handed over the reading books to the Ministry which was at the tune of \$100,000.

The other platform which I wish to bring everyone’s attention is the Pacific Regional Channel in partnership with Commonwealth Learning. The learning materials available herein is downloadable, thus, making it very accessible and user friendly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other aspect which I wish to elaborate is our support programme towards our students who are very vulnerable and need timely care, counselling and guidance due to external pressures. The Substance Abuse Advisory Council (SAAC) is the entity attached with the Ministry to ensure that students are provided with mentoring and counselling services as and when needed. Post COVID, these services were well-utilized by many schools.

The Council Report for August to October show that a total of 1665 students have been mentored and out of this, 73 percent (which means 1229 students) showed improvement, 73 percent reflects the success rate of this mentoring programme offered in schools.

In the same reporting period between August to October, 187 students were counselled which resulted in 72 percent success where 136 students showed improvement. The mentoring and counselling services will continue in schools to make sure that we stand for our children when they need us the most.

Apart from the school, the Substance Abuse and Advisory Council has ensured to reach to community which plays a vital role in moulding our young minds and therefore 92 faith-based and community leaders in the Central, Western, Northern and Eastern were also trained by the Council so that the community can also actively engage in guiding and assisting our children at community level.

Last but not least, I wish to offer my heartfelt thanks to all Honourable Members of this Parliament from both sides and every Fijian for staying united and overpowering COVID-19. Though some thought to take advantage of the situation and gain some political mileage but then this was to no avail as many Fijians shrugged their differences aside and showed the true spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood companionship in these challenging times.

Before I take my seat, I wish to extend my best wishes to all students who are currently sitting for their external exams and pray to the Almighty to bless these children with great success.

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. May God bless Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts for his contribution to the debate. I now call upon the Honourable Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would like to congratulate the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu on his election to the position of Honourable Leader of the Opposition and pay tribute to the former Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Rabuka, for his leadership over the last two years.

I also wish to welcome to the House the Honourable Virendra Lal a former workmate - Welcome Viren and also to Honourable Tanya Waqanika, the 11th Female Member of Parliament of Fiji, and a daughter of Kadavu. Welcome!

(Acclamation)

I now wish to turn my attention to His Excellency the President's Address. His Excellency alluded to the direction Government will be taking during this new Session of Parliament saying that as we press ahead in our work to drive bluer, greener, more inclusive and more sustainable development, the Government's focus in this Parliamentary Session will be centred on three key priorities:

- (1) Our containment of COVID-19;
- (2) Our economy's recovery; and
- (3) Our response to the climate, oceans and biodiversity crisis.

His Excellency lauded the efforts of our Health workers, our Disciplined Forces and all those on the front line in keeping us COVID-19-contained and enabling the nation to mark the Golden Jubilee of our Independence.

His Excellency is right that we bit the bullet early to keep our people safe - admirable and indeed worthy of praise.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the true test of our mettle will come when the borders re-open and efforts are ramped up to kick-start the economy through tourism. Whether or not we are prepared for what lies ahead largely depends on the people of Fiji, the populations of our most lucrative markets and whether we and they have had access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

But more locally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, achieving all these depends on the unequivocal success of the contact tracing features of the highly recommended government careFIJI App that we have all been asked to download and activate on our mobile phones. A few days ago, we had the first taste of what could happen when the borders re-open, when the Health Ministry scrambled to isolate health personnel and others who had come into contact with COVID-19 positive crew members of a cargo ship which had berthed both at Lautoka and Suva ports.

The point that stood out like a sore thumb was that in briefings by the Health Ministry, there was no mention of contact tracing efforts through the careFIJI App to track down and isolate those who had come into contact with these Health personnel, but why, Mr. Speaker?

This App was designed for this purpose, that is precisely what we were told by the Honourable Attorney-General, the *Fiji Sun* and the *FBC* who, I must add, without checking, admonished Members of the Parliamentary Opposition as being unpatriotic for failing to download and install the App. On the topic of patriotism, whatever has happened to the promised \$10,000 prize money for

the best decorated home for Fiji Day. According to the Fiji Government advert, the winner would be announced on Fiji Day, 10th October, 2020, which has come and gone, November 10th has come and gone, tomorrow is December 10th. What are we waiting for? Christmas? For a photo opportunity with the family who could have done with their prize money much earlier.

I want to take us back to COVID-19, why are the people of Fiji not being told to breathe easy because all our health professionals and citizens who have been in contact with the affected crew and with each other have been identified and isolated for safety reasons because the careFIJI App has worked?

One would have thought that the careFIJI App would have made contact tracing a swift and decisively effective tool to prevent fear, panic and a rise in rumours. There has been no demonstration of the effectiveness of the App for the purpose it was specifically designed for, which is swift and decisive contact tracing. Putting the blame on COVID-19 for Fiji's current state will not fix our health woes. It will not alleviate concerns surrounding Fiji's ability to handle a health crisis arising out of borders re-opening and, worst of all, the long standing problems within our public health and medical system and infrastructure cannot be blamed on COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the Opposition Leader's Listening Tour in late September early October, I found out that many village nurses all over Fiji were still owed their pay, some for months. I am happy to note today that two of the nurses I contacted yesterday told me that they have since been fully paid. But why did it have to take me to intervene for this to happen? One of them had not been paid since November, 2019, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let that sink in. Is it because the office responsible is under-resourced? If this is so, I urge the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to, please, look into this immediately to ensure it is not repeated. It should not take Opposition Members to raise these issues publicly before it is addressed. The Government needs to do right by its employees and honour its commitments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency touched on kidney dialysis, which I will speak about shortly. Like kidney dialysis, Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) is a lifesaving treatment for people living with HIV. This is a daily dose of anti-retroviral drugs. The HIV AIDS Act 2011, as I am sure you are aware of, being the Ambassador for HIV, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ensures access to HIV tests, accessibility to treatment and protection from clinicians. One of the instructions from HIV clinicians is to adhere to ART by taking HIV medicine daily. The goal of ART is to boost the immune system and reduce the quantity of the virus.

To determine this, two tests are needed. The CD4 count, which checks the strength of a patient's immune system and the viral load test to determine the quantity of the virus. These drugs are provided at no cost. Unfortunately, many people living with HIV have been having annual drug holidays, not by choice, but because stocks in medication are intermittently available. And this is the case for a person living with HIV whom I know personally. This person's most recent drug holiday lasted a little over seven weeks long. After five weeks, he was told to pick up his drugs, they were missing one of the combinations. Almost three weeks later, the third of his drug combination arrived after being out of stock.

When this happens, one needs a blood test to determine the best combination to continue treatment, but both the CD4 count test and the viral load test, were out of stock. I have been reliably told that it only arrived into Fiji in late October. However, upon last visitation to his Suva-based doctor, on 23rd and 30th of last month, these two tests were still not available to be used on the patients despite the kits being in stock in the country. Why is this happening so often? Putting the lives of people living with HIV at stake. I plead with the Ministry to, please, close the loopholes that

are allowing these forced medication holidays. People living with HIV must be able to access the correct, consistent and monitored medical treatment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to speak about broken promises relating to subsidising kidney dialysis treatment, a matter that our NFP Party has continued to bring before this House. On 29th July, 2020, when I moved a motion during the Budget Debate to have the dialysis subsidy increased from \$100,000 to \$3.5 million to ensure that low income families pay only \$75 per session for dialysis instead of \$100, \$200 or even \$250, the Honourable Minister for Health assured Parliament that the National Dialysis and Kidney Research Centre would be fully operational last month.

Once again, it looks like 'fully operational' is still in the pipeline and may finally exit this pipeline as we approach the next Elections. On that night in July, the Honourable Minister for Health in his response, blamed the supply of equipment as the reason for the delay in making the Centre fully operational. He said that machines had been ordered and nephrologists had already identified 40 patients who were to undergo treatment. I ask, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why is the Centre still closed? Why is there still no subsidised dialysis for patients in the Western, Central and Eastern Divisions? Why is Government treating with contempt the lives of our dialysis patients by continually breaking their promises year in and year out?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, tomorrow, 10th December, marks the end of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. Everywhere around the world the numbers of domestic violence cases have risen as COVID-19 lockdowns have meant that many victims are forced to live in closed quarters with their abusers. Gender-based violence and violence against women and girls is a global pandemic and this will be exacerbated further by COVID-19. It affects one in three women in their lifetime. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people in Fiji also face challenges that are not experienced by non-LGBT people. What is Government doing to address these issues?

I am so glad for organisations like the Rainbow Pride Foundation of Fiji and the Haus of Khameleon, to name just two, that are doing so much work with these communities. Addressing the issues of another group of our citizens must also be prioritised - those living with disabilities. To quote Mr. Setareki Macanawai, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Pacific Disability Forum, "persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable during the pandemic due to a combination of higher health related risks, loss of income and disruption to their support systems".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully believe that our economy's recovery depends greatly on how we treat each other now. It depends on full and fair consultation, on empathy and on compassion. There is no doubt that leadership will be one of the most heavily tested skills throughout the Coronavirus pandemic here and abroad. In Fiji, we see a wide range of leaders facing a range of challenges. There are those running businesses and organisations who are trying to save jobs - stop the bleeding out of cash and savings, and innovate. There are school heads working out new processes to ensure student progress and holding graduations, public health workers making recommendations for people in poverty-stricken areas where social distancing or washing your hands with clean, safe water and soap are a luxury and are struggling to share honest information while keeping fear at bay. And there are the leaders of families trying to put food on the table when jobs have been lost and tummies are empty and there are extra mouths to feed.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I drove past a huge group of taxi drivers having a meeting in a Suva car park and about an hour later, I was able to ask a driver what the gathering was about. He told me that the drivers were being encouraged to accept e-ticketing in their taxis, something none of them are in favour of. I asked him why, and he told me that from a day's cash takings, a driver can top up his or her fuel tank whenever needed, get something for the family for lunch and dinner, pay base fees and do any number of things with ease because of the availability of cash. E-ticketing in

taxis would end this freedom. If this taxi driver does not properly understand how e-ticketing would work if implemented in taxis, then a huge exercise in communications is needed from government. This would be leadership.

As leaders, emotional intelligence is at the core of being able to make these behavioural shift in the people you lead or purport to lead. Empathy, communication, what you say and how you say it and the physical aspect, observation of your tone and gestures are just key.

Now, on our response to the climate, oceans and biodiversity crisis, I say Fiji needs to see commitment to protecting our environment translated now into more action. I quote the Honourable Prime Minister in early April last year, after the arrest and release of three Kiwi journalists who were carrying out investigations on Malolo Island in the Mamanucas. The Honourable Prime Minister said, "We will continue to lead from the front on this issue, at home and abroad. We will continue to walk the talk for the sake of our environment, for the sake of our way of life and for the sake of all those who come after us".

And then in this respect Mr. Speaker, Sir, I turn my attention to the Department of Environment, in particular, its Waste Management and Pollution Control Unit, which is responsible for waste and pollution control in Fiji - in solid waste, liquid waste, air pollution, hazardous and chemical wastes. The basic functions of this unit, Mr. Speaker, Sir, presently are to look after all wastes and pollution control matters including complaints and enforcement of waste laws and regulations. I have spoken about the department's website on several occasions in this august House, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

On Monday, when I went on the website it highlighted, as it has done for years, challenges faced by the Waste Management and Pollution Control Unit and again, I quote; "One of the major challenges is the lack of financial and technical resources. Currently, there are five or six staff who handle waste and pollution related matters Fiji wide"

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last Sunday morning, northerly winds pushed diesel and debris onto the Nasese shoreline. The usual East-South-Easterly winds would take these fuel and debris into Draunibota Bay, the village of Muaiyuso and further afield, impacting coral reefs, coastal fisheries, mangroves and the livelihood and health of seaside communities. What is concerning is there is no information on the website on who we should contact at the department in the event of an environmental emergency.

May I suggest proper patrols in our harbours to monitor the oil spills because this is how you can see which vessel they are coming from, often under the cover of darkness. Stricter enforcement and harsher fines are a must. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if Fiji is to earn its title as a global environmental champion, I think we must, at the very least, give more financial and technical resources to the Waste Management and Pollution Control Unit of the Department responsible for safe-guarding Fiji's environment.

Mr. Speaker, most of us in Fiji absolutely love our fresh fish from the ocean; whether it is simply boiled, curried for *surwar*; fried for chaser; steamed Chinese style; *vakalolo*; *sashimi*; *poke* or just good old *kokoda* and we especially love *parrot fish* also known as *ulavi*, *kakarawa* or *kamotu* in some places. Herbivorous fish including *ulavi*, *balagi*, *nuqa* and *ta* feed on the algae that grow on corals. By eating the algae, these fish play a big role in the conservation of coral reefs and the survival of the entire ecosystem. But they are being overfished, causing a dangerous imbalance to occur on our reefs; algae thriving on reefs, blocking out life-giving sunlight from reaching the coral, ultimately resulting in their deaths.

Last Friday, in order to build my own capacity around conservation efforts, I attended a one-day Coral Restoration Programme, funded by the US Embassy and run by Dr. Victor Bonito, head-scientist of the Reef Explorer Fiji in Votua, in the *Tikina* of Korolevu i Wai. I learned so much and I am so enthused that I now want to implement what I have learned.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Victor, a coral reef scientist, who has been working in Fiji for more than 15 years has been working closely with the community to restore coral reefs.

The development of small-scale coral cultivation and restoration efforts is one of the activities that Reef Explorer has been assisting district villages with since 2006. This initiative began with village Marine Protected Areas or MPAs largely as an educational and economic tool, but has now evolved to become an integral and growing part of management activities, particularly as a climate change measure and to engage village youth in marine eco-tourism and conservation. The four villages of the *Tikina* Korolevu i Wai each now have a permanent *tabu* MPA, vital for communities exposed to the ravages of human activity including tourism, growing village populations and farming.

Mr. Speaker, I just have to say, “Wow”. The beauty and the health of the coral, and the variety and number of fish in the coral restoration area where we snorkelled, is a sight I wish everyone here could take some time out to go and witness.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Yes, thank you. I will be happy to see you there.

To appreciate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the importance of our coral reefs to our biodiversity, our fish stocks and our fight against climate change - some six to ten years after their establishment, the Marine Protected Areas or *tabu* have 500 percent more live coral cover and 50 percent greater species richness of coral than the adjacent fished or *tara* area, little to no seaweed, 30 percent more food fish, 50 percent more species of food fish and 500 percent more biomass of food fish than the adjacent *tara* areas.

Similar coral restoration work is taking place in a few other locations in Fiji led or mentored both by Dr. Victor and by Dr. Austin Bowden-Kerby, a renowned coral reef restoration expert also known as the “Coral Gardener” promoting a high level of community participation in the management of natural resources.

Mr. Speaker, I thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious speech and I just wish to underscore the points I have highlighted in my reply with a well-known quote; “Those who refuse to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

May this Christmas renew in us a love for our fellow Fijians especially for those who are struggling and downtrodden, and remember that Jesus is the reason for the season. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Qereqeretabua for her contribution to the debate. Now that you have completed your musical chairs, we will adjourn for refreshments. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.39 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.10 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate and I call on the Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; I am honoured to address this august Parliament in support of the statement made by His Excellency the President during his Opening Address for the 2020-2021 parliamentary session.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as His Excellency the President in his wisdom has highlighted and reminded us of pertinent issues that global leaders are also grappling with in their respective nations. Our containment of COVID-19, our economic recovery and our response to the climate, ocean and biodiversity crises.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I share the sentiments expressed by His Excellency the President in his Opening Address in commending the work of our health service providers and workers at the borders, our frontline responders in dealing with containing COVID-19. They have taken great risk and patience in looking after our people in isolation facilities to ensure that COVID-19 is contained, and the rest of our population is protected from this contagious life-threatening disease.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also acknowledge the Ministry of Health and Medical Services for ensuring that the necessary framework and protocols were developed and the timely implementation of campaigns to fight against this disease. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to acknowledge the support of non-government organisations and civil society groups in this battle against COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year has progressed real quick with various challenges placed upon us by COVID-19 and climate change, more importantly, it brought us together to overcome these challenges as a nation amidst the celebration of our 50th anniversary of independence. Indeed, looking back, we have become more patriotic and stronger as a nation, as we journey together in the new norm.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am humbled to be part of a ministry that facilitates and implements development programmes in our rural Fiji. Although approximately 44 percent of our people live in the rural and maritime communities, the land area of which this population lives is approximately 94 percent of the country's total land mass.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, taking into consideration the potential for development in rural and maritime areas, the Ministry in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme is currently reviewing its five to 10-year programmes. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development will focus on three strategic priority areas that link directly to our quest for economic recovery post-COVID-19, climate change and disaster preparedness:

- (1) Growing the rural and maritime economy, sustainable living standards and resilient communities;
- (2) Coordination and Facilitation of National Disaster Operations and Disaster Risk Reduction;
- (3) Organisation Effectiveness, Workforce Development and Good Governance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry continues to support economic growth in the remote areas through rural infrastructure, empowering local communities and expanding the reach of Government services to rural and maritime areas.

The Ministry endeavours to improve livelihood through the investment of Self-Help Projects and the construction of community access roads, footpaths and footbridges improving accessibility to the communities. These include the construction of government stations and district offices under the Public Sector Investment Programmes and the facilitation of development forums and improving connectivity and empowering and building sustainable and resilient communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through coordination and partnership, the Ministry works with line agencies, stakeholders and development partners in coordinating and facilitating disaster risk management that includes preparedness, response and mitigation. The on-going review of legislation, policies and standard operating procedures will incorporate the new development in disaster risk management in line with the regional and global initiatives and lessons learnt from the previous disaster operations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is working on strengthening our coordination role through the Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF) with ultimate goal to improve equal opportunities, access and basic services to building resilient communities by incorporating an inclusive packages when undertaking rural infrastructure development that will strengthen inter-agency coordination in facilitating improvements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we are all aware, the Western Division is the largest of the four divisions in the country. It has a total population of 330,000 people which is equivalent to 38 percent of Fiji's total population, spread approximately over 6,300 square kilometres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Western Division has been the economic backbone of our country for decades. Government will continue to allocate funding to key sectors in the Western Division such as sugar, agriculture, tourism, mining and forestry. At the same time, we will continue to assist rural communities through the various programmes through the whole of Government approach to raise their living standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these new projects will have a great impact on the lives of 160,000 rural people in the Western Division. The Ministry will continue working with key Government agencies and development partners locally and internationally to ensure that the most remote communities in the division, both on the mainland and the maritime islands are provided with the basic services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue to expand its visibility and services to strategic location in the Western Division. This is to allow rural dwellers to access the same Government services available to those in urban centres. The Ministry is currently finishing the construction of an office and two staff quarters in Namarai in Ra worth \$1 million which is expected to complete in the current financial year. People in this very remote part of Ra will be able to access Government services in Namarai, instead of paying transportation and travelling long distance to Rakiraki to access basic services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Central Division has a total population of 370,000 across five provinces in which 108,000 is located in the rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Self-Help Programme for the Central Division has transitioned from solely focusing on social projects to the livelihoods approach as a means of empowering rural

communities through the provision of income generating opportunities to grow the rural economy and at the same time, addressing the accessibility to basic needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through the Ministry's Community Access Road, Foothpaths and Footbridges (CARFF) Programme, Government has invested \$1 million for the construction and upgrade of 53 rural access roads and bridges. These CARFF projects not only improve access but also improve livelihoods through easier access to nearby urban centres and opportunities for economic activities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government in its commitment to improve basic Government services to the rural and remote populace, commissioned the Dada Government Station in Namosi in the last financial year by the Honourable Prime Minister. The Government Station consists of a district administration office and a government quarters. This investment by Government was \$1.4 million under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). The Ministry of Agriculture has also constructed their office and two staff quarters at the same Government Station.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is committed in improving the livelihood of all Fijians living in the rural and maritime communities and is determined to achieve this through the Integrated Rural Development Framework (IRDF) machinery.

Similar to the *Mata ni Tikina* and *Turaga ni Koro*, the District Advisory Council is an important arm of the Ministry and assists by evaluating the basic needs and development issues from communities that are outside village boundary lines or settlements and at the same time, implement self-help community development projects that will assist with economic, social and cultural development of the communities under their respective constituencies.

This year, the Ministry rolled out the revised Terms of Reference (TOR) for District Advisory Councillors which is expected to improve current practices in their administration and reporting. This TOR, Mr. Speaker, Sir, basically outlines the normal process for recruitment, selection, reporting and monitoring of performance of the members of the District Advisory Councils. It articulates a comprehensive and transparent process based on best practices and approaches for the general administration of the Councils. A key inclusion in the new guideline is the complaints procedures to standardise the process to be followed in addressing complaints on performance efficiencies and breaches of conduct outlined in the District Advisory Councils' TOR.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this new TOR has been shared with the District Advisory Council members, starting with the ones in the Central Division during their divisional District Advisory Council meeting on 2nd December, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is committed to good governance by promoting transparency, accountability and professional ethics in the way we do business, and manage resources through compliance with the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is currently reviewing its 5-10 Years Strategic Development Plan document, which will strengthen good governance to support growth in our rural communities and to drive the economy in the context of economic recovery post COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, through the IRDF, works closely with other agencies in the implementation of initiatives and measures for adaptation and mitigation. A team of officers from the Ministry and UNDP is currently in the Western Division, and have completed the Central Division in visiting selected projects and identifying solutions for

risk mitigation. The objective is to institute measures for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Members of this august Parliament will know that maritime islands in the Western Division are very prone to dry spells. These communities depend largely on rainwater harvesting and boreholes for daily water consumption which sometimes becomes unreliable when these water sources dry up. But I am glad to inform this House that early this year, the Ministry has signed an agreement with Sea Mercy, an NGO based at Denarau, for the use of its desalination plant to facilitate emergency water cartage to maritime islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last three years, Government had spent more than \$400,000 for emergency water cartage operations alone to the maritime communities of the Western Division. However, with the use of this desalination plant, Government has spent \$31,000 in the current financial year. This desalination plant has the capacity to convert 50,000 litres of seawater into drinkable water of pH level of 7 within 24 hours. It was first deployed to Kadavu and Lau immediately after *TC Harold*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the FijiFirst Government continues to be a strong advocate of community resilience which will contribute towards sustainable livelihood and in this pressing time of COVID-19, we become robust advocates of leaving no one behind.

With this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to address Parliament and also thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious Speech in this august Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistance Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management for his contribution to the debate. I now call on the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Sir. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Members of Cabinet, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, fellow Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen and to everyone who are listening or viewing the Parliament Session by radio, television or live streaming on line, *ni sa bula vinaka*.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion tabled by the Honourable Prime Minister regarding the Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Fiji Islands in opening the third session of this August House a week ago on Monday, 30th November, 2020.

With your indulgence, Sir, I warmly welcome our new representatives, Honourable Virendra Lal and Honourable Tanya Waqanika.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji had mourned the passing on Ratu Tevita Momoedonu, *Taukei Sawaieke* and a former Prime Minister last week. The *vanua* of *Vuda* has lost a favourite and a distinguished son. I had worked with Ratu Momoedonu in the Fijian Administration when he served as *Roko Tui Ba*. He distinctively stood out because of his qualifications, work experience and indeed his early structured nurturing as a young chief, together with his vast responsibilities, foremost the role of *Taukei Sawaieke* to the *Turaga na Tui Vuda*.

Ratu Momoedonu ensured that all keys historical dates in the history of *Vuda* is celebrated to ensure that the younger generations and those who come up after them understand the significance of this historical dates to the *vanua of Vuda*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the late Ratu Momoedonu effectively coordinated the successful hosting by the *vanua* of Vuda the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* that was held in Viseisei in Vuda in November 2003. Our chiefs were treated to the unique offering to the *vanua o Vuda* in terms of:

- their beautiful laid out village;
- the chiefly residence *Vunisei* of the *Turaga na Tui Vuda*;
- their dedication and respect of their tradition and culture. They respect the rules of the chiefly Viseisei Village; and
- the well prepared billeted accommodation for the chiefs and exquisite meals, their strong conviction to construct a special meeting house, Ratu Iloilovatu House.

After the jubilant *solevu* ceremony, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when each province brought to the *rara* their specially prepared gifts to the *vanua* of Vuda. I sat with him under a tree in the village green in reminisces of the successful hosting of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* and the key role which he played in the success of the meeting. His face said it all.

He was relaxed and satisfied that Vuda had prepared well, that the chiefs had expressed their heartfelt appreciation that Vuda had yet again, showed their unique strength, utilizing their resources for their visitors from all the *vanua* of Fiji, including Government delegations and through their age old traditional structure of governance and linkage had showed Fiji and the world that we the first people of the nation can achieved what we have set out to do using our own traditional structure, planning it with modern management system to host key meetings such as the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*.

Vuda has become the meeting venue for other important meetings including UN organized meeting, church and sporting bodies, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was in that meeting with the BLV that various Hindu and Muslim religious bodies presented their acknowledgement of the chief acceptance of their forefathers and the acknowledgement in recognition as Fiji citizens.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this side of the House look forward to the day when we will restore the BLV as the apex of the Fijian Administration, a role which rightly belongs to them given that pivotal role in ceding Fiji to Her Majesty Queen Victoria in 1874.

The Deed of Session remains relevant today though it is not officially celebrated, affirmed or recognized. That deed contains a united and unified forward-looking vision for Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe in that vision articulated by the chiefs of Fiji in the Deed of Cession. In ceding these islands, her Majesty Queen Victoria and her heirs expressed their desire to secure the promotion of Christianity, good governance and to increase trade and industries. These noble aims are fundamental and I believe are descriptive of the balancing of interest among the various communities that have made Fiji their home.

As a nation we have faced times of plenty and more often than not tough economic times. We have also faced political upheaval but through all these, our hope, our faith and our believe in ourselves and each other have brought us through. The struggles of our people make us strong and I see that strength and resilience reflected in our people in their efforts to put food on the table and to live amicably with their neighbours, with economic devastation and the struggle families are living through today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the approval of the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga* or the Council of Chiefs for the legal title to native land to be placed in the Native Land Trust Board in 1940, facilitated the large

scale freeing up of native land for sugarcane farming and later tourism and other major projects which are large earners of foreign exchange for Fiji today. This single act of entrusting indigenous peoples' native land into the Native Land Trust Board now iTaukei Land Trust Board and freeing it for leasing initially for sugarcane and later other uses, paved the way for the rapid development of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to commend to this august House the two significant acts being the landowning units through the Chiefs and the hard work and resilience of the indo-Fijian farmers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the two complementing acts of our forefathers have in fact cemented the first social partnership between our forefathers. The first social partnership needs to be acknowledged, appreciated and celebrated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the world is changing quickly. There are some changes being brought about in Fiji are forcing change that really should be gradual. Change should be at the pace of the people who are being governed. I acknowledge that culture is not static, language changes so does culture but change cannot and should not be forced. A more consultative approach must be followed to bring our people together rather than arbitrary approach that we have seen over the last 14 years.

A change that is forced, that is imposed without consultation, without free, prior, informed consent, is unsustainable and only creates resentment to those affected. We have seen laws decreed, promulgated or enacted to benefit selected sectors but which have disproportionate and discriminatory effect on one or more communities. Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There are at least 29 Decrees and Laws that are aimed specifically and which have a discriminatory effect on the indigenous Fijian community. This has been acknowledged and recognised by the UN Committee on Racial Discrimination in 2012 and since then, government has not seen fit to rectify this injustice. This is an injustice that needs to be rectified Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We need a government that promotes closer inter-ethnic cooperation, partnership and goodwill which will be the main-stay of our lasting peace that will prevent future political crisis. We must put aside our small differences and work together to bring about national unity and progress. Fiji and our future generations demand that we sit together and do the hard work to bring our people together. I believe that it is possible, that there is much goodwill on both sides.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President had focused on the COVID-19 pandemic which is devastating the world today. It is therefore critical that we in Fiji continue our efforts to contain the virus and remain a COVID-contained country. I give thanks to the excellent leadership at the Ministry of Health and coordination with other key agencies. To our frontline personnel manning our hospitals, the nurses, doctors, health care workers, those on our borders - we express our gratitude and I echo the call for Government to ensure that they are properly equipped and remunerated for their overtime and efforts.

For us as leaders we must continue to impress on our people, the physical distancing and precautionary measures. This is no time for laxity particularly with the festive season upon us. As the US Government did for their thanksgiving, better no hugs than Christmas in the ICU for COVID-19. The risks remain real as we saw last week with the quarantine and testing of our border staff in Lautoka who thankfully have cleared the first COVID-19 test while they remain in quarantine. We must remain vigilant, Mr. Speaker, Sir. COVID-19 is also causing a calamity in our *delaniyavu* to our people in the provinces, rural and maritime zones. As has been eloquently stated, the climate change crisis is not pausing while COVID-19 is rampant, so our people face a dual crisis with COVID-19 and the climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, clean water is a basic necessity for life. At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the Honourable Prime Minister's approval for the Water Authority of Fiji to ensure that water from the Namau Water Treatment will be supplied to the needy areas of Tailevu North including; Tai, Tai Vugalei, Namara and Verata. There is also need for installation of water pipes for Draubuta Village in Tailevu South.

Road Improvements: The villagers of Dromuna and Vatani in Kaba, are thankful to Government for the construction of roads to their village. They are currently using trucks and vans in their daily transport needs. The widening of the road will facilitate the need to have a bus service to transport them to and from their villages.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also express appreciation to the Government for the construction of the sea wall in Kumi and Dravuni in Verata. At the same time, our people in Qoma, Nananu, Dakuinuku and Qelekuro anxiously await Government assistance for the constructions of the sea wall and the river wall for Lawaki Village near QVS. I would also like to mention the needs for upgrading of Tonia Nursing Station, which currently is serving the people of Tonia, Wainibuka and Vunidawa. It needs to be upgraded to a health centre in order to cater for the very needs of the population in the areas which I have mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is no surprise that the agriculture sector has grown and expanded while the rest of the economy took a downturn this year. This is testament of what this side of the House has been advocating, led by the former Leader of the Opposition, that the focus must be on primary industries and the resource based sectors, particularly with the down turn in the world economy as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government needs to cease promoting a consumption based economy that relies on imports, and instead put its money where its mouth is and support our own citizens with their self-employment efforts, home grown industries and development of our resources including land via agriculture.

It therefore begs the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why the many licenses that strangle innovation and the efforts of ordinary people, have not been reduced by the Government, to encourage them to become self-sufficient rather than reliant on Government. The handout mentality promoted in the last 14 years must cease, not only was it unsustainable, but the Government cannot now afford it and is struggling to even support those who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the only business license that have been scrapped are those at the local level, but the initial registration fees have not been scrapped or reduced.

The current business license fees remain prohibitive for ordinary Fijians. A check with the company office reveals that business license or registration fees for businesses are still in operation. A firm needs to pay \$109; individuals pay \$10.90 and the entity, trust deed registered under title holders which can be shared and the entity management investment is \$1,090. In addition to this, for example, there are a myriad of other fees that make life difficult for ordinary Fijians, including fishing license, even for *qoliqoli* owners.

For *iTaukei* land development, the Government assistance is limited and is seen to be handed out on a partisan basis with many applications still pending with the Honourable Attorney- General Office. A review of the budget allocation and amounts spent in the last five years will explain the difference between the estimated or approved budget for this land development scheme from the actual amounts that were expended in those years. I would like to urge Honourable Attorney- General to move this along and to double or triple the allocation to \$30 million, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I remain hopeful that in this parliamentary session for 2020 to 2021 where we will have more sittings than this year according to the Calendar approved

yesterday, that we will have more opportunities to cooperate and work together for the benefit of our nation.

In closing, may I wish you and all Members of Parliament, the people of Fiji - everyone watching today, a merry Christmas and a blessed, prosperous New Year - 2021. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for your indulgence. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi for her contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Assistant Minister for Health, Medical Services. You have the floor, Sir.

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

The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, members of the public watching this proceedings from the comfort of their homes via live streaming or through the radio: A very good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to make my contribution to the motion by the Honourable Prime Minister before the House that Parliament thanks His Excellency the President for his most gracious speech at the opening of the 2020-2021 session of Parliament on Monday, 30th of November, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in his most gracious speech, His Excellency the President mentioned and I quote:

“Our commitment to remain COVID-19 contained must be engrained in all of the work of this august Parliament. It must materialise through the funding we grant our frontline health officials, the equipment we provide them and through our advocacy on the world stage to secure equitable access to an effective COVID-19 vaccine. Particularly, as we look to re-engage economically with the world, the health of every Fijian must sit at the heart of our recovery. Though we remain mindful that coronavirus is only one of the many serious threats to Fijian lives, my government will continue to ensure life-saving treatments such as kidney dialysis are made both affordable and accessible to our people. And we will meet the scourge of non-communicable diseases with a national effort to strengthen Fiji's nutrition security and lifestyle changes that set Fijians on better and healthier paths. Across our efforts to provide Fijians with the best possible advice and treatment, we must deepen our collaboration across the medical field, including the general practitioners in private practice who can and must join us at the forefront of addressing every health challenge Fijians face”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you, as an advocate for HIV Aids cannot do it alone. His Excellency the President, as an advocate for diabetes cannot do it alone. I, as an advocate for tuberculosis cannot do it alone. Our heads of units cannot do it alone. Our clinicians cannot do it alone. It has to be done holistically through the inter-governmental, non-governmental collaboration and by everyone in society. As the old proverbial saying goes, “you can take the horse to the trough, but you cannot make it drink”. At the end of the day, everyone is responsible for their own health and need to be conscious to take control of what they put in their mouth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, government, through the Ministry of Health and Medical Services strives to provide basic health and medical services at levels of society and amongst the poorest sections of the community particularly the growing national epidemic of NCDs which places a lot of pressure and emphasis on our own health and medical services. In order to curb the onslaught of NCDs, practises and awareness must start in the home from as early as pre-natal care. Women who suspect

they may be pregnant should schedule a visit to their health care provider to begin pre-natal care. With pre-natal care, women can:

- (1) reduce the risk of pregnancy-related complications by following a healthy, safe diet, getting regular exercise, avoiding exposure to potential harmful substances, controlling existing conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and cardiac-related diseases.
- (2) reduce the infant's risk for complications by ceasing tobacco and alcohol use during pregnancy and which has shown to increase the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Alcohol use increases the risk of foetal disorders causing a variety of problems and disabilities for new-borns.
- (3) ultimately reduce Fiji's Maternal and Neonatal Mortality.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all pregnant women in Fiji should be able to access health facilities across Fiji at least a minimum of four times before they deliver. Women who have been healthy before getting pregnant or have had good pregnancy outcomes previously can still experience pregnancy related complications. Some common complications of pregnancy include high blood pressure (also called pre-eclampsia) which occurs when arteries carrying blood from the heart to the body organs are narrowed, causing pressure to increase in the arteries. In extreme cases, women can have seizures if their pressure is not controlled during the pregnancy.

Gestational Diabetes, this is pregnancy related diabetes, which occurs only during the pregnancy and when they deliver, it improves, though the risk increases for those women to get diabetes at a later stage in life.

Miscarriage, the term used to describe a foetal loss from natural causes before 20 weeks of gestation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is recommended that infants should be exclusively breastfed, that is, to receive only breast milk for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health, bearing in mind that some mothers cannot lactate. Breastfeeding is also an integral part of the reproductive process with important implications for the health of the mothers. At five to six months, infants should start receiving complementary food in addition to the breast milk up to 2 years of age or beyond. Breast milk is the first natural food for babies providing all the necessary nutrition and immunity for protection against diseases that the child needs for the first six months of life.

Exclusive breastfeeding reduces infant mortality due to common childhood illnesses such as diarrhoea or pneumonia and provides a quicker recovery during illness. It has long term health benefits for the mother and child such as reducing the risk of overweight and childhood obesity. Breastfeeding contributes to the health and well-being of mothers. It helps to space pregnancies, reduces the risk of ovarian and breast cancer, increases family resources and is the safest option of feeding new-borns. Mr. Speaker, Sir, while breastfeeding is a natural act, it is a learned behaviour.

Postnatal Care - the days and weeks following child birth are a critical phase in the lives of mothers and new born babies. Most maternal and infant deaths occur in the first month after birth with a number of maternal deaths occurring within 24 hours. The best practices for postnatal care are:

- To provide postnatal care in the first 24 hours to all mothers and babies regardless of where the birth occurs. A full clinical examination should be done around one hour after birth when the baby has had his or her first breastfeed.

- Ensure women and their new-borns stay at a healthy facility at least 24 hours and are not discharged earlier than required.
- All mothers and babies need at least four postnatal check-ups in the first six weeks.

Childhood obesity – preventing childhood obesity requires a co-ordinated contribution of all Government sectors and institutions responsible for policies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, national leadership is also necessary to manage engagement with NGOs, CSOs, the private sector and academic institutions to successfully implement, monitor and evaluate the impact of programmes, activities and investments. Fiji continues to experience its own pandemic on Non-Communicable Diseases. Cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension and its related complications are the main cause of mortality among the adult population. NCD risk factors such as obesity are also prevalent. The High Body Mass Index (BMI) dietary risks and high fasting plasma glucose are the leading risk factors for NCDs.

Change in food environments have negatively impacted children's dietary patterns. Increasing consumption of highly-processed food with high fat, salt and sugary foods and decreasing intake of fruits and vegetables have been documented in many Pacific Island countries. Fiji is no different.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, highly-processed packaged foods have become more widely available now than ever before, especially in urban areas though not exempting the rural and maritime communities. Diets have been found to be high in bread, noodles, rice and canned foods which are usually not nutrient dense. While traditional foods are still highly valued, they tend to be primarily consumed during special events and occasions. Obesity during adolescence increases the risk for metabolic syndrome, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and some forms of cancer.

The food and beverage industry markets unhealthy foods and beverages to children which with various strategies through high exposure and power of creative content. These dietary patterns contribute to NCDs risk factors such as overweight, obesity and eventually diet-related non-communicable diseases. Marketing and promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages pervade children's lives with unprecedented intensity and frequency, influencing their food preferences, purchasing and consumption.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in recent years, food and beverage industries around the world have begun to view children and adolescents as a major market force because of their strong influence on household food purchases, their purchasing power and as future adult consumers. Advertising seems to be more effective on the younger children who become vulnerable to lucrative advertisements. The role of so-called pester power is of concern as almost three-quarters of participants had also attempted to influence others to buy advertised products. Street advertising of unhealthy food and beverages has been found to be particularly high around schools with posters and billboards being the most common form.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sponsorship of sports events by the food industry is a significant issue in Fiji. Access to unmonitored spending has been found to be an issue with the majority of adolescents who in a study in peri-urban schools reportedly bring \$2 to \$5 on a school day for spending. The money was likely to be spent directly on less healthy food options or pooled in with other friends to do so. The food and beverage industry uses three main strategies to market unhealthy food and beverages to children which are advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

In Fiji, marketing reaches children primarily through television, radio, street advertising or signage and sponsorship of schools sports events. Studies in children aged between 11 to 18 years

have found substantial level of advertising and viewing. The study found that over 50 percent of primary and secondary school children reported watching television every day of the school week at an average of two hours per day but increased to seven to eight hours over the weekend.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure knowledge-based information, moving forward, Fiji needs to focus and strengthen its –

- (1) Health promoting school initiative,
- (2) School canteen guidelines,
- (3) School health policy,
- (4) The national nutrition policy for schools, and
- (5) Tobacco-free initiatives in all communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I make mention of the Universal Health Coverage Day which is celebrated on the 12th of December of each year and the world celebrates Universal Health Coverage Day as an official UN-designated day to raise awareness of the need for strong, equitable and resilient health systems and universal health coverage.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity to wish you, your Parliamentary staff, all Honourable Members of this august House and your families a safe, blessed and prayerful Christmas and a productive 2021. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services for his contribution to the debate. I now call on the Honourable Aseri Radrodro. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and fellow Honourable Members of Parliament. Before I rise to make my contribution to His Excellency the President's most gracious Speech delivered last week in this august House, I would like to join my fellow colleagues in welcoming the two new Honourable Members of the House, Honourable Tanya Waqanika and Honourable Virendra Lal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the same time like this last year, who knew that we would be confronted with the live changing event that would change the cause of history. A world has advance to a stage where the click of a button we connect through space with the other side of the world. One can wake up in the Southern Hemisphere and within number of hours arrive at the Northern Hemisphere. Such as being the advancement of mankind, many great nations have thought of their powers so great that they have ignored the plight of small undeveloped nations. In our busy world, we have forgotten the importance of looking out for each other. I am reminded of what the great Napoleon Hill once said and I quote:

“The *turning point* in the lives of those who succeed usually comes at the moment of crisis, through which they are introduced to their other selves.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 has affected all of us in so many ways whilst many have lost jobs and many others have lost their lives around the world, one common factor that we are all been forced to confront with is to remember that we have to take care of each other. The action of one affect the whole nation and such is the lesson that COVID has taught us. If one does not get isolated then there will be a risk that the whole community will get infected. We are been forced by this act of God to remember that humanity can only exist when we are mindful of our actions toward others.

This pandemic is teaching us that we are now living in the world that is no longer normal; it is the new normal. What we used to enjoy prior to 2019. How do we survive is the question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my colleagues have mentioned how families, companies and individuals have made amendments to their lifestyles and businesses. Government has provided some relief measures to assist our society to cope. For me, this is not the time for irrelevant arguments instead we must capitalised on the best brain that we have to move us forward. For some time now, I have been criticised in this august House of the recruitment of expatriates. The COVID-19 may have just done us a favour by sending those expatriates back home and I now urge Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to reduce some unnecessary outlandish expenditure, remuneration and utilise the skills of our local labour forces.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will ask that our Government be more creative in opening up more opportunities for our people. It is well and good that our digital platforms are widely accessible, however, Government must be courageous in supporting innovations that are adaptable to any kind of climate that we can expect.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the onus is on our leaders to be more expensive in the way that we deal with issues that will be necessary to allow us as a people and as a nation to win in this battle against COVID-19. We, as a nation, have shown our resilience overtime. This is the time to be bigger than ourselves. We do not know how long border restrictions will remain nor do we know how long trading will be affected with our international borders. We do not know how long our tourism industry will remain at a standstill but one thing we know is that, we are now presented with an opportunity to innovate our domestic market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have always been critical of our high debt levels but for now, in the new normal, I would encourage Government to explore every means available to help our nation rise above this crisis. Some experts have said, "Print dollars to circulate in our society".

A recent Wall Street Report by Bloomberg stated that with the entire industries shattered and unemployment soaring, only public spending is keeping millions of households and businesses afloat. Governments, for the time being, are running up some of history's biggest budget deficits but it is all right to do this, as these are extraordinary times which require extraordinary risk-taking.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, post-World War II, the Japanese Government spent the past quarter century, effectively financing large fiscal deficits by purchasing its own bonds. However, they have not officially declared that those bonds will be paid back and no one is under the illusion that the Bank of Japan will be fully unwinding its balance sheet.

Mr. Speaker Sir, I am urging Government to have the guts to provide money to the people. Give money to those that need money for Christmas, give to those that need money for back to school, give money to those whose rents are overdue, give money to those who have sound business plans and help them take off.

There is too much reservations and our leaders have become lame over the years. I am sure many will ridicule this idea of printing money to be given out because the conventional wisdom has long held that once you add "print money" to the physical toolkit of democratically accountable politicians, they will inevitably turn to it with abandon and trigger hyperinflation. Thus, the notion that all public spending must be paid for, either through taxes or the assumption of debts services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a widespread taboo against monetary finance rests on its presumptive political flaws, not its technical shortcomings. In fact, if implemented perfectly, financing stimulus through direct money creation has more advantage over the issuance of debt.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, mainstream technocrats now widely agree that in the wake of the 2008 crisis, too little fiscal stimulus was provided for places, like the US and the greater Europe. So it is interesting to note that leaders all over are imploring their governments to stop worrying about deficits and start comprehensively replacing the income that households, firms, companies and businesses have lost to the pandemic.

I say, "let us be human and allow ourselves to look at the benefits instead of fearing the unknown." I applaud that our social welfare recipients continue to receive their assistance. I am also grateful that our tertiary students, still receive TELS and Toppers support. This must continue unabated in the new year for this is the future sustenance of our people.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to now discuss briefly the agriculture sector. It is crucial that we invest in harvests that will be ready in one, two to three years' time. When travel restrictions are lifted, we must envisage the likelihood of an influx of visitors as people yearn to visit the country where no community transmissions occurred. Give our farmers money to support their farms and help change our landscape into farms of everything imaginable that can grow in Fiji and be utilised domestically and exported. There are many undeveloped areas, like hydroponic farming, that can be major areas of growth and innovation. Government should be spending on these types of development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sometime back, Government had talked about introducing Community-Based Rehabilitation. As expected Post-COVID-19, there is an increase in crime rate, leading to increasing number of people being incarcerated. Government needs to be innovative on how we utilise these resources to help grow our economy whilst helping rehabilitate them.

Our agriculture sector is always in need of human capital, and there has to be a paradigm shift on how we view those wronged by the law. Government could identify those who are able to be released into these kind of communities, with supervision, of course. During these times, we will need human empathy, as well as ingenuity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whilst also on the issue of agriculture, our non-sugar farmers are struggling with the difficulties of overgrown grass in between *dalo* crops, with the banning of paraquat. Mr. Speaker, Sir, *dalo* farming is the livelihood of many farmers and during these difficult times we must be able to assist them manage their problem. What is the alternative weedicide that has been identified that will not kill the whole *dalo* plant like samurai. Farmers are complaining that there was no consultation done at all when the use of paraquat was immediately banned for use in Fiji.

Whilst our neighbouring Pacific Islands country farmers like Tonga and Samoa (you might have to bring the Research Paper, Honourable Minister) continue to use paraquat to assist in their weed control and export capability, Fijian farmers are now complaining that they have been suddenly impacted with changes of all sorts by the Agriculture Research Unit's decision to ban the use of paraquat and other weed killers, especially during these difficult times.

I call on Government to review this impromptu decision being taken by the Ministry of Agriculture through its Agriculture Research Unit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have alluded to innovativeness during these difficult times of economic recession. One fact that we all know is that we have a lot of unemployed youths who can be productively utilised in national programmes that Government needs to identify and use them in.

There is no shortage of activities that Government can introduce from farming programmes to value-adding business innovations to assisting the building industry, and so forth. These activities must not be confined to domestic consumption only, we must be ready for the export market when the borders open up again.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am encouraged that there will be discussions on the Landlords and Tenant Bill, the National Payment Systems Bill and other interesting Bills like the Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions Bill. These will be crucial for such a time as this and I urge Government to ensure that these Bills become practical and sensitive to the needs of our people. With massive job losses and the declining economy a lot of people are struggling to pay rent and many are struggling to meet mortgage repayments. For some time now, I have raised concerns on the high rental real estate markets and the lack of political will to introduce laws that provide some CAP on real estate markets to allow our people the ability to purchase homes within their earning capacities. The same can be said for the rental markets, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue of climate change, COVID has helped us slow down. There are reports of positive stories coming from around the globe because of the reduction of our carbon emission due to reduced global flights as well as a reduction in factory emissions.

For countries like Fiji, these are lessons that we can advocate strongly for global super powers to learn from, whilst we at the home front have to better prepare to mitigate and adapt to the changing weather patterns that is not going to stop because of COVID. We are now in the cyclone season and we see the poor conditions of our roads with some more high risks than others.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will be a difficult task to be cyclone resilient when our communities are already struggling with our current economic downturn. This is where the military and youths can be utilised in the securing of homes and properties through a programme initiated by Government and at Government's costs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask that Government be human about the times we are in. Whilst many of us are struggling to keep our heads afloat there is no need to have these exorbitant fines and fees continuously charged by entities like the Land Transport Authority (LTA), Fiji Police Force (FPF), Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) and others. I ask Government to review these entities fines and fees schedule to reflect the struggling economy we are in.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are entering the drought period again and we are experiencing a lot of water disruptions and I ask the relevant Water Authority Agencies to exercise vigilance and fairness in the provision of water services to all affected areas throughout Fiji.

Whilst providing new electricity provision may not be on Governments priority listings there are some areas where electrical connections have already been established and they are waiting for power to come through like those in the Navulokani area, Waisa, Waitaqolo, Waisere, Naterumai, Nasama areas in Naitaisiri and Sasawira in Davuilevu. Please, Honourable Minister, do consider them and give them a festive season uplift.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of heroes in our communities but many of them did not receive the 50th Independence Commemorative Medals but let me acknowledge them here - to our health workers and our front line COVID-19 resilience combat teams at our Fiji airports, FRCS, Fiji Immigration, Police and Military Forces and many others I may have missed out: We appreciate the mammoth task that you are all engaged in. Well done for keeping Fiji a COVID-contained country, please, continue the hard work.

Just before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to take this time to apologise to our SODELPA voters and those who are inclined to the work that we do. If they have become disillusioned and are unhappy with the recent disruptions and bickering that have beset our party, I wish to assure them that these are extraordinary times. We are at a juncture where political ideologies are being tested to great lengths and we strive to survive in the 21st century. Therefore we must embrace the differences in opinions and political ideologies that will arise.

We must take at heart that these issues can be resolved and our leaders will rise to be relevant for our people. On that note I personally have many discomforts over the way we have handled issues of late and whilst I object and disagree with the manner we have handled ourselves as leaders, I remain optimistic that we are governed by a righteous God, that sees all and knows all. And for that we must always reflect on the path that we have travelled and exercise wisdom on the path that we intend to travel. There must be no political enemies, just differences in political ideologies.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to all our citizens of Fiji, it is a festive season and I urge that we all look out for each other in celebrating our Christmas and New Year. I also take this time Mr. Speaker, Sir, to wish to you and all the Honourable Members of this House not forgetting the Parliamentary staff, a blessed festive season and we look forward to a COVID-free 2021. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Aseri Radrodro for his contribution to the debate and I now call on the Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament, I am honoured to give my contribution to His Excellency's speech during the opening of the 2020-2021 Parliament Session on Monday, 30th November, 2020.

I sincerely commend His Excellency for his most gracious and wise speech. Mr. Speaker, Sir, my plea to all the Honourable Members of this august Parliament - let us deliberate and respond to His Excellency's Address in good faith, with the true spirit of cooperation, courage and patriotism. Let us put our nation first, trust one another in a consolidated effort to rebuild our economy as people's livelihoods are at stake. Let us leave our own differences aside during this trying times; let us hold hands and progress towards a more united and prosperous Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President noted the priority areas for the next twelve months:

- (1) Our containment of COVID-19;
- (2) Our economic recovery; and
- (3) Our response to the climate, oceans and biodiversity crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me respond to His Excellency on these areas. First of all my heartfelt appreciation to the Honourable Prime Minister for his decisive leadership - our dedicated health officials, workers and disciplined forces, doctors, nurses, drivers and everyone who were directly involved in our shared campaign to contain the COVID-19 virus. You all have worked tirelessly and sacrificed your time and energy for the sake of all the Fijian families and our beloved nation Fiji. I salute your patriotic efforts today. These are unprecedented times and as a nation we must act decisively by taking bold steps aimed at recovery of the Fijian economy from the global health crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of today the Ministry of Agriculture has undertaken some key initiatives to cushion the impact of the pandemic in terms of food and nutrition security. Our aim is to ensure that every Fijian family continues to have access to safe, affordable and nutritious food during these challenging times. At the same time, we would like to see that those households most affected by COVID-19 pandemic, have the means and support to become more self-reliant. This is to minimise impacts of livelihoods and speed up our response and recovery process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry delivered strongly on the home gardening initiative in 2020, achieving the highest level of success rate across Fiji. In the wake of the pandemic, the Ministry understood that this event could affect the food security of households due to supply chain disruption, as well as loss of jobs and thus loss of income. Since the lockdown, the public interest in growing fruits and vegetables at home has solved. Seeds packets were purchased from linked retailers and number of free allotment to public by the Ministry of Agriculture continued to swell.

The fear of food shortages would have motivated some, but others with more time when they are at home, will have been tempted by the chance to relief stress doing a wholesome family activities and supplement their household income as well as provide food on the table. Nevertheless, we achieved an unprecedented level of activity in this area, whereas as of last week, the Ministry of Agriculture has distributed 50,185 seed packages to the public directly through the Ministry itself, through corporate organisations to their employees and through the NGOs.

This equates to over 386,000 individual packs of seeds that were given out for free by the Ministry of Agriculture. The seeds of enthusiasm for home grown food may have been solved but sustaining this is essential. It could help communities boost their resilience of their fresh food and vegetable supplies, improve the health of residence and help them live more sustainable livelihoods.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, in support of enhancing food and nutrient security for all Fijians, the village nutrition security is also one of the initiatives by the Ministry to ensure that all Fijians have access to food of acceptable quality and nutritional value. To achieve this, around 1,100 villages in Fiji will be assisted progressively with the total distribution of over 39,600 seedlings. The assisted package under this programme will include the provision of 36 fruit tree seedlings to every village. The fruit trees include; breadfruit, avocado, jackfruit, *vutu*, *kavika*, et cetera. To date, 82 villages have been covered and to accelerate this initiative, the Ministry will run these programmes where 50 villages will have fruit trees planted in a day, repeating this activity over the next six to eight months to achieve full completion of this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last September during my visit to the Yasawas, a total of 240 fruit tree seedlings were distributed in five villages of Natawa, Nagia, Gunu, Yageta and Nabukeru. The fruit tree seedlings include mango, avocado, grafted citrus and pearl guava. At the same time, seed packages of eggplant, water melon, Chinese cabbage, tomatoes, capsicum, maize, pineapple suckers and yam cuttings were also supplied to these villages. A similar intervention was carried out at Nasau and Veidrala Villages in the Ra Province with the total of 80 assorted fruit trees seedlings. A major activity was conducted in the morning on 10th October where across Fiji, 50 villages saw planting of 50 fruit trees per village that was a total of 2,500 fruit trees planted within three hours across Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know rice is one of the staple foods in Fiji today. The Ministry has developed assistance packages to address rice production in the sugar cane growing areas, non-sugar cane growing areas and community based rice farming. Recently, a rice consultation programme was conducted in Nailaga, Ba, where potential rice farmers were advised on best practices by the Ministry of Agriculture officials with technical support offered by the Chinese experts in rice research and production. Similar consultations were conducted in Nadi, Rakiraki, Dreketi and Vatubogi in Bua. A total of 60,000 rice seeds have been distributed to farmers for

planting, free of charge by the Ministry, with four rice fields and nine trainings conducted in relevant areas. It is critical that we continue momentum on this plant to overtime drive towards self-sufficiency of rice in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I came to Suva last weekend, I myself have planted three acres of rice on my own farm. There is a lot of rice planting from our farmers in the settlements and our villages and I can assure that the rice production will increase in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the climate front, the Ministry will continue to improve and better refine our preparedness, response and recovery capacity in our efforts to assist farmers recover and become self-reliant for sustainable livelihoods. Similarly, the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to promote climate smart agriculture to ensure we are more determined and resilient in facing any natural disaster that is coming on our way.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the country is approaching the cyclone season, the Ministry of Agriculture officers are now equipping themselves with climate related knowledge and skills by attending climate related workshops recently held in the West and in Suva. As of last week, our Disaster Risk Management (DRM) consultant and team were conducting disaster awareness programmes to our officers in the West and the North. During this awareness session, the forum also revealed the Ministry's current DRM Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that clearly outlines the role of every division at pre-disaster, during disaster and post-disaster. The awareness programmes for the Central Division will be held on 16th December, 2020 in Suva.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry also understands the importance of service delivery to its most important clients; the farmers. As such, from the beginning of November, the Ministry commenced the three month outreach programme called "Noqu Agriculture", simply meaning "My Agriculture" to accentuate the feeling of ownership, having *talanoa* sessions with all farmers across Fiji to increase accessibility for farmers and the general public to have our services and to further strengthen our service delivery. The aim of this exercise is to work together to accelerate the growth of agriculture sector in Fiji and discussing ways to move agriculture productivity to the next level across Fiji.

To date, a total of 86 sessions have been held out of 150 planned individual sessions that would run till end of January, 2021. I have personally been involved at present in some of the sessions in the West and North together with the leadership team of the Ministry as it is important that we live from the front on such an important programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must accept that COVID-19 pandemic has greatly infected our livelihoods, food systems and economic situation as never experienced before. As previously stated in my past Parliament's statements and said in many of my public engagements, this unprecedented crisis is an opportunity to lift our focus and effort in the agriculture sector investing in the sector will certainly quicken our recovery efforts and shape our country's future that is deserving by the next generation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is our plan to contribute to our government's plan for the economic recovery as outlined by His Excellency the President.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please allow me to also talk about the significant contribution made by the Ministry of Environment to Fiji and how this government has contributed to support every effort taken by the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President, noted the third priority as our response to the climate, oceans and biodiversity crisis.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on Section 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji states: “that every person has a right to a clean and healthy environment”. This includes the right to have our national world protected for the benefit of our present and future generations. While bearing this mandate is a huge honour, with it comes a huge responsibility and huge opportunities as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2020-2021 National Budget represents both an endorsement of the direction taken by the Ministry, as well as the requirement to diligently work with our communities. The Ministry of Environment was allocated a total of \$5,597,100.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of the impacts of COVID-19, the government is committed to managing our environment for all our Fijian communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue a dedicated enforcement to the Environment Management Act 2005. The Ozone Depleting Substances Act 1998 and the Endangered and Protected Species Act 2002 and the Litter Act 1998 to ensure Fiji's natural environment is protected. The resources are sustainably utilised. All developments are sustainable, ozone layer protected and waste is properly managed and pollution controlled.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Environment is reviewing Fiji's State of Environment Report and the Natural Resource Inventory as required under sections 23 and 25 of the Environment Management Act 2005. The State of the Environment Report is near completion and will be tabled shortly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry recognizes the business sector as a key partnership and a primary stakeholder group. The Ministry has taken major strides in ensuring ideas and solutions have permeated up, through the active engagement of the officers with the business sector. I would like to acknowledge the role played by the Ministry's EIA Business Roundtables and EIA clinics nationally. These events have continued to raise cognisance on the Environment Impact Assessments (EIA) and its permitting processes. The Ministry hosted three National Roundtable Discussions with business stakeholder and two EIA Clinics in all the three Divisions to-date this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the beginning of this fiscal year, 115 EIA determinations, 55 EIA Terms of References, 26 EIA reports, nine Environmental Management Plans (EMP), six Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP) and three Operational Environmental Management Plans (OEMP) were approved and 19 EIA reports were not approved due to gaps identified requiring additional information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, targeting the processing time taken for the EIA applications, the Ministry has shown agility and innovation through reducing the processing timeline for the EIA screening applications from 14 days to 10 days, EIA processing timeline from 30 days to 20 days and making decisions on an EIA report from 35 days to 30 days. This is subject to all required information being promptly provided. The Ministry has also created an EIA green-lane and a Gold Card Service Centre for proponents who have held a clean track record with the Department, adhering to the terms and conditions of permits/approvals issued and carrying out proper environmental management reporting and auditing. This Gold Card Service Centre is aimed at fostering a transformational approach to customer engagement within the public sector in Fiji and will improve environmental advocacy and partnerships amongst stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is working with 50 rural communities across Fiji establishing Community Waste Composting Programmes. Organic waste while easily compostable makes up an average of 65 percent of Fiji's total waste stream and often ends up in the landfill and dumpsites. This programme will help our communities sustain environments around Fiji for our future

generations, save energy, reduce the amount of waste that will need to be sent to our landfill (or burnt) and allow products to be used to their fullest extent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is lifting our sights through proactive instruments like the anti-litter think tank that was launched to tackle litter and waste management related issues. This includes modelling and creating alternative pathways for the plastic bags and the styrofoams. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fijians need to take pride of their country. Littering continues to be a menace and the solution lies within each one of us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Environment has successfully phased-out the use of Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and halons in the Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (RAC) sector in Fiji and in fire extinguishers. The Ministry has also phased out carbon tetrachloride and methyl chloroform as cleaning solvents. The chemicals, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were not only depleting the ozone layer but were also contributing significantly towards climate warming. Fiji officially ratified the Kigali Amendment on the phase down of HFCs on 16th June, 2020. The Ministry is currently in the process of reviewing the ODS laws to ensure that the licensing and permitting systems for HFCs are in place before January 2021, as required under the Montreal Protocol to which Fiji is a party to.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry through the Endangered and Protected Species Act 2002 is in the process of establishing 50 marine and terrestrial biodiversity parks across the country to protect and safeguard the unique biodiversity of our country.

The Ministry of Environment together with the Ministry of Fisheries and the Protected Areas Committee (which is established by the National Environment Council) has identified 15 possible sites for Marine Protected Areas. The national public consultations have concluded and the feedback is being analysed. These sites, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are areas of high biological diversity importance and are unique ecosystems that must be protected. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank His Excellency for His most gracious and wise speech.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend proceedings for lunch. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.30 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.46 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will resume debate and I now call on the Honourable Salote Radrodoro. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition and my fellow colleagues. I rise to contribute to the debate in response to His Excellency the President's gracious speech for the opening of this new Parliament year and may I divert a bit and take the opportunity to acknowledge the former Leader of the Opposition, Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka for the great work that he has done and wish him well in his future undertakings. I also welcome the new Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu and we assure you, Sir, our support. I also welcome the two new Members, Honourable Tanya Waqanika and Honourable Virendra Lal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know you are a great advocate and a great champion for women's rights and in particular I make reference to women in politics and acknowledge and thank you for your support in assisting women politicians on both sides of the House establish the Fiji chapter of the Commonwealth Women's Parliamentary Group and together we had undertaken fundraising activities to assist our vulnerable women and at the same time, sensitise and raise level of awareness on health issues like breast cancer.

Today also marks the second last day of the 16 Days of Activism on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children which runs from 25th November to the 10th December and it is an opportune time to rethink our priorities and agenda, change the narratives and work towards improving the lives our women, protecting them from all forms of violence and discrimination. I look forward to the day when we not only see more women in Parliament but also a woman as a Prime Minister. One day it will come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year has been a very challenging one, brought about by the pandemic COVID-19 and I acknowledge the whole of Government approach together with key stakeholders engaged in Public-Private Partnership in addressing the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 but there is still a lot more we can do in partnership with the communities, with the people themselves as the drivers of change especially when His Excellency the President had highlighted that the worst is still to come in the Northern Hemisphere but who knows the worst may still to come for the Pacific region, the worst may still to come to Fiji too. No one knows, only God knows what the future holds. So how prepared is Fiji? How prepared is the Government as we continue to battle with this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also take this opportunity to sincerely thank and acknowledge all our hardworking frontline workers; the doctors, nurses, border control staff, police, military personnel, cleaners, hotel workers in quarantine stations and all those that I may have missed to mention. Let me say to the frontline workers, "we appreciate what you do, we realise you have a family, we realise you are underpaid, we realise you are understaffed, we realise that you are doing the brunt of work that has to be done. We respect you for you are the people that actually take care of people that need to be taken care of." They are our heroes because if they do not come to work, for example, to take care of the latest patients, the two crew who tested positive from the *MV Island Chief* plus the subsequent 21 frontline workers that were in quarantine, there will be more people getting sick and others more will be infected and get sick. For a small country like Fiji, how prepared is our health system in dealing with COVID patients, frontline workers and protecting the whole nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask those questions to remind Government that they must stop denying the fact that our health service delivery is good. Our health service delivery, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is in

a bad state. As we have continuously heard from this side of the House, someone had actually said that it was in a shamble. We continue to highlight this in the hope that the Government would hear us and listen to the people. All you have to do is visit any hospital, any health center or nursing station and the effect or impact of challenges like human resource constraints, equipment and infrastructure are visibly huge. For example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Nabouwalu Hospital, nurses in the delivery room have to be creative and make do with garbage bags because there was no mackintosh. And I thank the group of ladies who believe in living the world better than they found it in their kind donation.

We continuously hear Honourable Members from the other side of the House share their visitation experience in various places around the country together with Government officials but I wonder, how come they do not see or come across these kind of issues? Are they being selectively blind to these challenges, blind to our people's suffering and deaf to the cries of our people especially those in remote, rural and maritime communities?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just like any human being, frontline workers still very scared and hope and pray that they would never get COVID-19. It must be overwhelming the amount they have to go through everyday having to be in the frontline because some of us can work from home, like we in Parliament are now having zoom meetings in the various Committees. But these frontline workers cannot work from home so we cannot really say that we understand what it means to be frontline workers and therefore it is very important for us to listen to them.

So I am pleading with the Government to ensure that our frontline workers do not feel like soldiers marching into the battle field and not having enough guns and ammunitions with them. They must be protected, not only with protective gears and necessary equipment but also with some kind of financial protection package because they are taking a big chance on their lives and their families lives too.

I fully agree with His Excellency the President that they deserve much more than our gratitude. And in saying that, I even wonder, how many frontline workers dealing with COVID-19 received a medal in the 50th Anniversary of our Independence in recognition of their greater sacrifice? Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am sure most the frontline workers are women and are logging long hours managing the fallout of COVID-19 while juggling their own childcare and family responsibilities throughout the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister once stated that violence against women and children in Fiji is a national shame. The Honourable Minister for Women also echoed the same in this House and I agree with them full heartedly and also look to them as key players in Government to actualise and operationalise His Excellency the President's words that the most powerful way we lead is through our examples. And on the same note, I would like to highlight adverse impacts of COVID-19 on the following:

- (1) The high increases and the horrendous nature of violence and according to the Honourable Minister for Women who further said that Fiji is amongst the highest in the world with almost 64 percent or two out of three women have been subjected to physical or sexual violence in their life time.
- (2) According to the Fiji Women Rights Movement (FWRM) a youngest victim in 2016 was a three years old child. In 2018 it was a six months old baby. The above two indicators that I have just mentioned suggested existing legislations, policies and programmes are not achieving the targeted results to control and reduce violence against women and children.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask how? We, as a nation, hope to find answers to these menacing problems because we on this side of the House had engaged in bipartisan approach and moved motions to establish:

- (1) A commission of inquiry; and
- (2) Set up a special committee under Standing Orders 129 but unfortunately they were both defeated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I now draw attention to the recently lodged Fiji's National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls. And I believe this is the Government, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Economy and the Honourable Minister for Women respond to addressing violence against women and girls and in their own words "addressing this national shame".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me remind them the Action Plan does not include boys as the name suggests and then how or who will look after our boys victims? Let me also remind them that there was a National Women Plan of Action which had been receiving very minimal budgetary allocation. For example, for the year 2020-2021 it was \$450,000; 2019-2020 it was \$900,000; 2017-2018 it was \$1.3 million and despite the repeated call from this side of the House for an increase, the Honourable Minister for Women herself does not support it. And even targets in that National Women Plan of Action are still to be achieved and I wonder what has happened to the Barefoot College in Nadogo. I am glad to accompany you if you invite me. I will accompany you, Honourable Minister, if you do extend the invitation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whilst the Fiji's National Plan of Action to prevent violence against women and girls is the step in the right direction but the plan is not power. Implementation is power. It may be a good plan but implementation holds the key to success. And I hope to see sufficient budgetary allocation in the next upcoming budget session to be able to start making real changes whereby our missing children are found whereby there is an actual decrease in the number of women and children that experience violence and abuse.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President had reminded us on the huge socio economic burden, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) presents to us because it is a highest killer in Fiji. I believe the Government must be more proactive in helping people with the healthy lifestyle and nutritional dietary preferences in combatting NCDs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this morning I heard the Honourable O'Connor with all the side effects on the NCDs related diseases. I would urge Government to look into the importation of cheap food and drinks. For example, this packet of drink is called "marimas" and it is a very affordable and very popular with the common people, particularly the grassroots. This drink will mix into a two litre bottle, and I believe it uses artificial sweetness. This is the kind of things that I am looking to the Government for, to relook at our import policies maybe, and look at these cheap food which, I believe, contributes to the high rate of NCDs.

Furthermore, kidney failure is a big NCD-related health problem, especially with a corresponding high demand of lifesaving treatments, such as kidney dialysis, which is still not really affordable and accessible to the common people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is really sad but, unfortunately, this is the stark reality with majority of our people and that is, when they had to tell their family that they do not want to be a financial burden and they will just wait for their time to go because they could not afford kidney dialysis treatment, even at the subsidised rate of \$150 per treatment. This situation is even made worse with job losses

and the use of FNPF funds to sustain families during this present economic downturn brought about by COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I make some comments on climate change, oceans and biodiversity. In regards to education, I would plead with the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and request her that since it is after four years now after *TC Winston*, the Yacata District School is still work in progress. Right now where the children are attending classes, it is a breach of OHS conditions with the current arrangement of student classes. I would really request that this issue be looked at urgently because it is after four years now, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Whilst we are still with schools, teachers are also raising their concerns on the cessation of payment of the rural and maritime allowances. Similarly, nurses have also raised their concern on the delay in the payment of their Consolidated Allowance which, I believe, is for the rural nurses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I make some comments on the Lau Seascape. In support of those comments already been shared by Honourable Jale, and of which the Honourable Assistant Minister for iTaukei Affairs is very well versed with, the Lau Seascape Initiative is in conjunction with Conservation International and their efforts focusses on the Marine Protected Area (MPAs) *se na kena vakatabui na i qoliqoli*.

However, one of the major challenges faced by the local communities engaged in this programme is the lack of Fish Wardens to guard the MPAs. Whilst the local community is being denied the use of their protected area for food supply even though it is voluntary, , illegal fishermen fish in and around those protected areas for income generation purposes, especially at night. May I urge and request the Honourable Minister for Fisheries, if he could kindly look into this concern.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I heard from the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development in her response where she mentioned the upgrade of market facilities. May I request the Honourable Minister to also look at the Nabouwalu Market in Bua, especially now when the development of Nabouwalu Town has been shelved, even though we have continuously been hearing from 2015 the development of Nabouwalu Town.

That market comes under the Savusavu Town Council and it is in dire need of renovation. The floor is just the cement and it gets very dusty, particularly as the place is also used for eating purposes, like women sell foodstuff there. Also, the roof and ceiling are almost falling off.

I know this is something that I have raised before with the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure in regards to the passenger waiting shelter for the travelling public in Natovi and in Nabouwalu. The one in Nabouwalu still does not have lights, they tried to put solar lights but it only worked for a little while. I really request you, Honourable Minister for Infrastructure and Transport to, please, look into the lights at Natovi because the passenger traffic is really heavy, particularly at this time. Passengers have to resort or make do with lights coming in from the women market vendors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now I wish to conclude and I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year, and let us remember that Christmas is all about loving others. Thank you.

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

I now give the floor to the Honourable Rasova. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Bula vinaka*, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Ministers and Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament; I would like to support the motion tabled in the House by the Honourable Prime Minister, thanking His Excellency, the President, for his most gracious Address, and to join other Honourable Members of this august House in contributing to the debate.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to congratulate my *Tau*, the new SODELPA Party Leader, Honourable Gavoka, and thereafter the new Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu, *Turaga Bale na Tui Cakau*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also like to pay tribute and acknowledge our former Party Leader and Leader of the Opposition, who surprised us all on Monday, 7th December, when he announced his official resignation from Parliament and as Leader of the Opposition - a constitutional appointment since the opening of Parliament in 2018, which is very much regretted. The last two days have been a whirlwind, as we grappled with his exit and he leaves behind a void on the Opposition Benches. Go with God, Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Ligamamada Rabuka.

I would also like to congratulate with great pride the new Honourable Member of Parliament, another Kadavuan, Honourable Waqanika of Natumua Village, Tavuki, Kadavu, with eminent maternal links to Lomanikoro, Rewa. Finally, the SODELPA's Suva Constituency has made it to Parliament. *Vinaka* Suva. Congratulations to you as well, Honourable Vijendra Lal, welcome to the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency's most gracious Address is very much accepted. As Fiji presses forward in all its work to a drive bluer, greener and more inclusive and more sustainable development, the Government's development agenda highlighted three key priorities: Our containment of the deadly novel coronavirus; our economy's recovery and our response to the climate, oceans and biodiversity crisis.

Firstly, on the deadly novel coronavirus, I would like to thank all the truly patriotic and hardworking:

- Health, Police, Border and Quarantine Officers in Lautoka, Navua, Suva and Labasa;
- Frontline nurses, doctors, technicians and other auxiliary staff, including General Practitioners;
- Hotel workers, pilots, flight attendants;
- Airport ground staff;
- Local farmers for the nutritious fresh food supplies for the sick and those who arrived from overseas by air or by sea, who are all under quarantine for 14 days;
- Faithful quality food importers and suppliers;
- Local chefs, bus drivers, taxi drivers; and
- Members of our Disciplined Forces, who deserve more than our gratitude.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Ministry of Health for the Fiji COVID-Safe Economic Recovery Framework, based on the core principles of stopping importation, breaking chains of the virus transmission, ensuring health system readiness and COVID-proofing Fiji businesses and society at large.

Whilst the nation and everyone around us take pride that we are a COVID-contained country in the middle of the Pacific, His Excellency urges you and I, "Do not forgo the health practices and habits we successfully adopted this year, where some of us lapse caution during the Tailevu-Nadi Farebrother challenge this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our stakeholders have worked very hard and sacrificed too much to weaken our strengths of containment, and I urge all Honourable Members to continue to be COVID-19-contained advocates. Its containment starts with you for the sake of all our citizens of Fiji, with all our families and loved ones.

It is in everyone's high hope that the World Health Organization (WHO) will secure equitable access for us all to an effective COVID-19 vaccine in the not too distant future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency's vision on Fiji's economic recovery touches every life in Fiji, given the official redundancy number from the hospitality industry around 115,000. However, the number that have requested FPNF deductions is more than 200,000 workers which is quite alarming.

For the economy's recovery in the Ministry of Fisheries, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Fisheries for his reply to His Excellency's gracious Address. The Ministry of Fisheries has a challenging Vision, that is, "To have the best fisheries in the Pacific region" with a Mission "To sustain, manage and protect Fiji's fisheries". Its Values is, "Excellence, integrity, innovation, inclusiveness, professionalism and accountability".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with that stated, it is unfortunate that the COVID-19 restrictions, the Budget Estimates of 2020-2021 which has been further decreased by \$589,000 with an RIE of \$2.2 million and the budget of \$15.5 million, are some negative effects that the Ministry will restrict itself to achieve its Vision, Mission and Values. The Ministry of Fisheries contributes 1.8 percent of our GDP and 7 percent of Fiji's total export earnings.

Given the contributions to GDP of 2.8 percent in 2014, its highest of 8 percent in 2015, unfortunately, decreased to the current 1.8 percent from 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, and we are already in December 2020. What are some of the strategies currently implemented by the Honourable Minister for Fisheries that will assist in the increase, or double of the GDP by 3 percent this year or 2021? What are some of the new initiatives in place that the Ministry of Fisheries is exploring, to help boost the aquaculture sector, given the low production of Tilapia fries, prawn post-larvae and brackishwater?

We have noted challenges, resulting in the establishment of the Inshore Fisheries Management Division within the Ministry. The Honourable Minister should enlighten this House on the progress of collating coastal fisheries data, and what measures have been adopted in terms of fisheries, monitoring and compliance for inshore and coastal fisheries?

The National Fisheries Policy is an overarching document of the Ministry which all the other Ministry's policies should be aligned and guided from. Why has it taken the Ministry so long to finalise its National Fisheries Policy, which has been in the consultation process since 2016?

The Honourable Minister should enlighten this House on the progress of its efforts in working towards meeting the 30 percent Marine Protected Area (MPA) commitment signed in 2005 by the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kaliopate Tavola.

In Fiji's effort to combat Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and in ensuring the proper conservation and management of our offshore resources, how is surveillance mechanism, such as Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) is complemented, considering it is only installed on licensed longline vessels? However, the new Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) is on trial on other vessels monitored on real time.

The curbing of illegal fishing either inshore or offshore, through these digital safety nets will decrease this criminal activity, hence increase our export stocks of albacore, bigeye, yellowfin to Japan, USA, New Zealand, Australia, Germany and United Kingdom is part of His Excellency's economic recovery plans. Always in question are the issue of long line fishing licences and authorisation to fish in Fijian waters and Areas Beyond National Jurification (ABNJ) where the target species are albacore, yellowfin and bigeye.

People like me from the maritime zone always ask why there are so many Chinese flag vessels all over Fiji. It is because they are chartered by local indigenous business operators under the Charter Agreement, an initiative by the Fiji Government to assist the local operators to buy their own long line fishing vessels at the end of the Charter period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, how many locals have got the long line vessels with their Fiji flag. The licencing of long line vessels makes significant contribution to Fiji's economy, from the revenue collected from the licence fees and on issuance of permits and authorisation. One core project of the Fisheries Research Division is the marine resource inventory survey which is mandated to carry out biological and socio-economic surveys in the 410 *iqoliqoli* in Fiji and compile resource profiles for the respective areas. The question is, if the Ministry of Fisheries is revamping its resources in upgrading management skills and professional monitoring of key cultured species like marine shrimps, sandfish, seaweed, fresh water prawns, tilapia, grass carp and ornamental fish to better facilitate and upgrade income revenue on Fiji's economic recovery.

Economic recovery in the sugar industry somewhat puzzles the nation, why has it been left far behind by responsible Government Ministry, given that it was once thriving and a number one Government revenue earner since the Ratu Mara Government in the early 1970s. I believe under the Prime Minister, former Party Leader and Opposition Leader, Major-General (Ret'd) Sitiveni Rabuka; under former Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhary and the former Prime Minister, Laisenia Qarase; but until late under the FijiFirst Government. This is the economy recovery formula for you - officially 53 percent that were unemployed because of the economic impact of the deadly novel coronavirus were from the Western Division.

Currently there is only one field officer attending to 900 farmers. In some areas there is one field officer attending to about 700 or one field officer for 500 farmers. The current tonnage of cane per hectare is only 40 to 45 tonnes - it should be about 85 to 90 tonnes per hectare as always argued from the Opposition Chambers. Please - why is Government waiting to be told to recruit the unemployed 53 percent unemployed - train them within the Fiji Sugar frameworks as field officers. These unemployed citizens have so much experience gained from their past employment, employ these 53 percent unemployed in the west, divert the Government's subsidy (which I call freebies or vote-buying tactics by the FijiFirst Government). Please, revive the Fiji Sugar Industry for the sake of Fiji's economic recovery and for the sake of His Excellency the President's request.

Remember that His Excellency the President mentioned three times in his gracious speech that, "... my Government will continue the progressive realisation of the Constitutional rights of our citizens; my Government will continue to ensure that life-saving treatments such as kidney dialysis are made both affordable and accessible to our people; my Government has led by example within the Fijian Civil Service where there have been no pay cuts below the rank of permanent secretary."

Do you hear the change of the Government's punch line? I wish to tell the nation that the boastful trend of the famous "My Government" by the Honourable Prime Minister has now changed. On the *Facebook* page, I quote - "As always, your Government does more than just listen. We deliver development that changes lives for the better." After 14 years, the phrase "Your Government" finally comes to life. I have always recognised that all governments are the people's government but

remember, do not be mistaken by sugarcane snakes of the west. Economic recovery comes in many forms - socio-economic, economic and natural resources.

I would like to take us to the Goundar Shipping No. 3. I came from Kadavu on the 25th of November, 2020 - it reversed all the way from Kavala to Suva. I want to ask the Honourable Minister for Transport: who gave Goundar the licence to reverse all the way from Kavala to Suva? And again on Saturday, someone called me right from Nabukelevu and said that the Goundar Shipping No. 3 traveled from Suva to Kavala, Kavala to Vunisea and could not go to Tavuki because it could not start, but it reversed all the way from Vunisea to Suva. I think I have spoken to the Director of Transport if they can review that.

I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for Education (stop laughing Honourable Attorney-General) who mentioned Kadavu Provincial Secondary School, Richmond Methodist High School and the sponsorship by the Government of Japan for about \$1.2 million. Since *TC Harold* Kadavu Provincial Secondary School has lost about 12 of its 16 teachers' quarters and three primary school classrooms but we thank the United Nation for providing tents for the school to use. I must ask the Government if they can - it is almost eight months but nothing has been done for the provincial school but I know Government has a policy of not leaving any child behind so do not leave Kadavu behind. I thank the Government of Japan and I would like to thank Government for the relocation of Narikoso – thank you to the Honourable Ministers that came - the people of Narikoso, the *Tikina* of Ono and also the province of Kadavu are very thankful for that. And also the new station at Kavala Bay - I thank the Honourable Minister for Defence and also the Honourable Prime Minister who came to open everything at Kavala Bay.

But apart from that, I would like inform the Honourable Minister for Waterways that the villagers of Nasau in Nabukelevu have given their 1/3 (about seven thousand eight hundred dollars) for their waterways to be done around the village - it is almost two years now but nothing has been done. They called me this morning to ask you in the House if that could be taken care of before Christmas.

Also, I would like to refer my speech, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the attack by the Honourable Maharaj on Honourable Kuridrani in reference to the Honourable Attorney-General. I was brought out from my village in Kadavu by FICAC and accused for lying about my place of residence, but I accepted it as lawful. But on the obstruction of justice - if you are being charged outside this Parliament Chamber - I think the Honourable Attorney-General as a learned person, you do not have to resign but you can just step aside so that justice can prevail.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to conclude by reviewing our revenue estimate trends which increased from 23.7 percent of GDP in 2009 to 27.5 percent in 2019-2020. Revenue estimate trends increased from \$1.4 billion in 2009 to \$3.5 billion. Government has over estimated resulting into poor budgeting. Instead, the Government's expenditure trend is driving revenue rather than revenue driving expenditure. Expenditure on the percentage of GDP continues to increase from 27.6 percent in 2009 to 30.2 percent which continues to increase with the implication that Government is crowding out the private sector. Our debt percentage of GDP is declining but in value it continues to increase from \$3.1 billion to \$5.6 billion in 2019-2020 and about \$9 billion for 2020-2021. Operating expenditure is hovering at 20 percent of GDP whereby the capital expenditure is 10 percent of GDP. It brings to mind the words of that song, I quote:

“We know they are lying
They know they are lying
They know, we know they are lying
We know, they know, we know they are lying

But they are still lying”

To conclude, I bid the merriest wishes for the festive season to His Excellency the President, to you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to all the Honourable Members of Parliament, the hard working staff of this Department of Legislature and to all the people of Fiji. I pray that we will keep in mind our neighbours who may be struggling through this season and let us all lend a hand where we can, to spread the true message of the season of love, sharing and giving, *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Rasova for his contribution to the debate and I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, the Honourable Dr. Reddy. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of the House, I rise this afternoon to deliver my contribution to this august Parliament in response to His Excellency the President Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konousi Konrote's opening remarks on Monday, 30th November for 2020-2021 parliamentary session.

Before that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to welcome the two new Honourable Members to this House, Honourable Lal and Honourable Waqanika.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank His Excellency the President for his most gracious speech. His Excellency the President very rightly laid the platform for the new session of Parliament for Government to focus on three priority areas:

- (1) Our containment of COVID-19;
- (2) Our economy's recovery; and
- (3) Our response to climate, oceans and biodiversity crisis over the next 12 months period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I share the sentiment of His Excellency on how Fiji was able to contain COVID-19 within our borders. For that, I must salute and sincerely acknowledge and thank our Honourable Prime Minister's strong and decisive leadership, all our health workers, doctors, nurses and management, members of the disciplined forces who have made a relentless yet successful effort to keep us all safe throughout these trying times.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture also did its best to assist all Ministries to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 on the household as outlined by the Honourable Assistant Minister. Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we are continuing with our programmes to assist households concerning food and nutritional security we are at the same time leveraging agricultural growth in the national interest. In doing so, we will be able to raise national income as income of all those who participated in the agricultural growth process: the landowners and the resource owners; farmers and labourers; input suppliers; financiers and improve the livelihood of households in rural and maritime areas. We will be able to secure our households with regards to their food and nutritional requirements. We will be able to bring in much needed foreign exchange via exports of our agricultural produce and agriculture products. We will be able to save our foreign reserves by substituting imported agricultural produce and agricultural products. We will be able to bring in idle land under productive use. We will be able to take the market to the doorsteps of the rural farm households and create a rural economy.

We will be able to create employment opportunities and improve livelihoods of our rural and maritime households.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can assure this House that we are all on our way to assist with the economic recovery process as requested by His Excellency the President. Mr. Speaker, Sir, by closer collaboration with exporters and farmers, we are expanding commercial agriculture throughout Fiji. We are facilitating the formation of farmer's clusters and contracting them with exporters thus guaranteeing them with market and output price. We are providing these farmers with planning materials, land clearing and land preparation support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, via this model, we have brought in thousands of hectares of new land under the commercial agriculture. We have infiltrated new areas for commercial agriculture, areas where people never thought that they too could participate and benefit from export earnings. These areas include, Tailevu, Naitasiri, Kavanagasau, Nabitu, Serua, Nadarivatu, the remote villages in the heartlands of Viti Levu, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Nawairuku area in Rakiraki, Udu Point/Qaranivai area, Wainikoro, Seaqaqa, Bua, Savusavu, Kadavu, Lau, Yasawa and Taveuni.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have brought hope to these interior and maritime communities that they too can participate and benefit from a growing agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have said in a number of times that when the economy grows, when the agriculture sector grows, then if you are able to get maximum people to participate in that growth process and the rewards from the growth will be spread to these maximum people like the landowners, the input suppliers, the labours, the households, farmers, et cetera. The trick of the trade is Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to ensure that;

- (1) the agriculture sector grows and expands and creates surplus; and
- (2) a lot of people participate in the growth process rather than one or two large giant commercial operators.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, next week on 18th December, our Honourable Prime Minister will open the Highlands Agriculture Day at Navatusila Village. The Honourable Prime Minister will launch the Agricultural Marketing Authority's Rural and Maritime Strategy, hand over planting materials for the *yaqona*, *dalo*, cassava, vegetables and fruit trees to farmers and also hand over a tractor to the Navatusila farming cluster.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this group in Navatusila right in the heartland, in the interior of the Province of Ba, they never thought they would ever have a tractor of their own. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is just the beginning of how we are taking commercial agriculture to the rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through our partnership with the Fiji National Provident Fund, we are making these farmers members of the Fiji National Provident Fund. They too deserve to secure their retirement with pension, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our commercial agriculture efforts are now bearing fruits. With Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) alone, we are now pumping back in the rural, interior and maritime regions a sum of \$350,000 every month. This is an increase of 88 percent, when compared to 2019 the amount that was pumped into rural and maritime area.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$350,000 to one entity, one exporter alone is a massive amount of money that goes to the rural and maritime community. Agricultural production has been steadily increasing and for the first six months of 2020 (January to June), the total crop production was recorded around 162,000 metric tonnes, as compared to 145,000 metric tonnes that was recorded for the same period (first six months) last year. In 2019, the sector contributed \$725.8 million to the National GDP with a growth rate of 5.7 percent, compared to 2018.

So, a substantial real growth rate of 5.7 percent. This growth has been influenced by our key commodities such as *yagona*, *dalo*, cassava, ginger which you will agree with me have been impacted by our continued successful research activities and policies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, importantly, the volume of exports for the first eight months of 2020 have increased by 15 percent, compared to the same period in 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite all the restrictions like the curfew, the locked downs, increase in freight rates this is a substantial achievement that we have made, 15 percent increase in the volume of export for the first six months of this year, relatively with the first six months last year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is indeed heartening to note that our efforts through the programmes implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture are yielding positive returns. The Reserve Bank of Fiji announced through its November Economic Review that the Fijian economy is envisaged to contract by 19 percent in 2020, compared to the earlier estimate of 21.7 percent of contraction and stated that this is from a higher than expected growth in the agriculture sector.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I have just read out the dollar value. I have just read out the dollar value. Read the *Daily Hansard* tomorrow.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Whilst the lower than anticipated declines in the wholesale, retail, trade, restaurants and hotel, the manufacturing and construction sectors also contributed to this positive shift. Mr. Speaker, Sir, agriculture has and will continue to play a pivotal role in our economic recovery process that His Excellency outlined.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- We are also looking at boosting local rice productions as outlined by Honourable Pillay. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are determined to reduce the import bill, which currently stands at around \$40 million. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in few weeks' time we will be launching a major new rice production strategy for the next two years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total of 24,000 acres of land is required to bring if you want to have a 100 percent self-sufficiency. Over the last 12 months, we have made a small but significant progress in raising local rice production, full sufficiency cannot be achieved overnight, but will be achieved progressively. Our Ministry is also focusing on enhancing research and development to fully support our strategic priorities. From 2019 to 2020, the Ministry has released a number of new varieties in *dalo*, pigeon peas and rice, which are suitable to the local condition as well as high yielding varieties. Mr. Speaker, Sir, research is continuing on promising varieties for other crops so that we can contribute towards increasing, improving in productivity or yield by introducing new high yielding varieties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Ministry will also be releasing two new breeds of cattle that was initiated by the former Minister for Agriculture. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also continuing with our breeding programmes for other livestock such as sheep, goat, chicken and piggery. We are pushing on with our ongoing programme upgrading farm roads to create market access for farmers. From 2019 to 2020, the Ministry has upgraded a total of 42 farm roads, covering a distance of 62 kilometres. This will continue into the new financial year, aimed at upgrading 150 farm roads covering a distance of

378 kilometres. This road upgrade plan will ensure improvement of 64 new farms roads in the Central Division, 38 farm roads in the Western Division, 33 farm roads in the Northern Division and 15 farm roads in the Eastern Division.

Whilst this will take longer than 12 months to complete, we are building on our long term development programmes to support the farming communities so that adequate resources can be secured. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also considering the construction of additional new farm roads for about 30 kilometres. Our Ministry will continue to engage with partners such as Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), farmers, exporters, food processors and Agriculture Marketing Authority of Fiji (AMA) to pursue product development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have alluded to earlier on that if you want to expand market for our agriculture produce, one way to do is to develop agriculture products. There is a limit to the extent to which we can expand the market for agricultural primary commodities. I think the shift should be towards developing products and we are working very closely with food processors as well as some of the private sector organisations who want to get into the food processing such as AGRANA, a company out in the Western Division.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry also very successful conducted three consecutive agriculture shows in the Central Division, Northern Division and Western Division in October, which was aimed at showcasing agriculture products and produce to agriculture enthusiasts and stakeholders who are interested to venture into agriculture. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is also pursuing avenues towards improving information and communication system through digitisation to enhance service delivery and engagement with our external stakeholders.

The Ministry will continue to support the use of new technologies and information, ensuring the agriculture sector remains competitive in a rapidly digitising world. Like other line Ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture is taking advantage of available online platforms to convene local, regional and international meetings from their respective offices or homes.

Also, the Ministry will be signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Communications and the other major telecommunication companies like Digicel, Vodafone and Telecom Fiji in our effort to improve communication and service delivery. At the same time, we will be working on implementing a Farmer Management Information System so that we can ensure all relevant information on farmers and agricultural production is captured to promote agribusiness, achieve faster service delivery, and to allow quicker decision making. Information systems have been revolutionised virtually every sector of the economy and agriculture will not be an exception.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue to work on its strategic priorities as highlighted in its 2019-2023 Strategic Plan considering the 16 initiatives post-COVID-19 as the basis of achieving the overall objective of these priorities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, His Excellency the President noted the third priority concerning our response to climate, oceans and biodiversity crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Waterways and Environment is undertaking numerous activities concerning the above to protect our biodiversity and our communities from climate change. The activities by the Department of Environment was aptly highlighted by Honourable Pillay.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will provide a brief update on the activities of the Ministry of Waterways.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Waterways was established by recognising the fact that the management of Waterways and the preservation of Fiji's natural environment shared several inherent linkages.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this was the vision of our Honourable Prime Minister and announced by the Honourable Minister for Economy three years ago, noting how important now it is to protect our communities, our infrastructure, our household from changes in climate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the only country in the entire Pacific region to have established and dedicated Ministry of Waterways, we get requests for information every now then, every time, at least on an average of once a week about the activities that we are doing and how other countries can emulate in the Pacific region, as well as in small states in every Caribbean region, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has positioned itself appropriately to deal with the worsening impacts of climate change (for example coastal erosion, riverbank erosion, deepening challenges to our irrigation system). The establishment of the Ministry reflects the Government's long-term vision to direct the much-needed focus, care and support to the nation's most affected populace today and in years to come. The Ministry strives to live up to the expectations of the Government and communities at every possible juncture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have undertaken numerous projects in the above areas of watershed management, drainage and irrigation, riverbank and coastal protection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, concerning the watershed management, we have completed the establishment of five flood retention dam on Nawaka and Mosi River.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are continuing on our works on how our watersheds around the country need to be protected as any activity in these watersheds will affect downstream communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are very mindful of what is happening in our watersheds, what is happening upstream and we need to ensure that we develop a Code of Conduct of those who are working upstream in our watersheds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, downstream, we are spending a substantial amount of our resources to operate and maintain seven irrigation systems located in Central and Northern Divisions. The total area under the scheme is 2,274 hectares. On an annual basis, we are spending a lot of money to maintain these irrigation systems, to ensure that our farmers continue to undertake agricultural activity to the commercial level out of this irrigation system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also continuing our drainage and flood protection works. Under this program, we continue to maintain the entire public drain system in Fiji without a single cent being levied to the farmers which used to exist prior to 2006. This government removed the levy from our farmers, our public community in the rural areas and the government is now picking up the entire bill to maintain public drainage system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you know, our coastal communities are now being threatened by the rise in sea level. With the establishment of a dedicated Ministry of Waterways, we have now taken on ourselves to ensure that we protect these communities. The Honourable Minister for Economy about three years ago, dedicated the budget with the fee securing our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now decided that we will protect these coastal communities by establishing nature based solution seawall.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is based on the fact that the international communities are now recognising they could deal with the problem caused by nature, we need to develop a solution outside or using nature itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of us, not only this side but the other side have seen our work in terms of protecting the communities by establishing a nature-based seawall.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Honourable Prime Minister commissioned a number of nature-based seawalls in Viro Village, Raviravi Village in Macuata, Nabukadra Village in Ra. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will be completing 18 seawalls in this financial year alone.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, never ever before that level of seawalls were done to protect (in one financial year) our coastal community. Two more seawalls are ready in Malomalo and in Naividamu in Macuata. The Drekeniwai Seawall is about to be ready, Nananu Village seawall will be ready in a month's time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the rapid work to protect our coastal communities because we had gone outside the textbook, outside the template to develop a cheap, eco-friendly, nature-based solution so that we can rapidly secure and protect our coastal communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is operating towards self-sufficiency and has started to develop our resources – our mangroves and vetiver grass nurseries, so that they can continue to protect our communities. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members: I thank you all for your attention. I thank His Excellency the President, Major-General (Ret'd) Jioji Konrote, for his gracious statement and I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Thank you, *vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment for his contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, I thank you for your contributions today. We end this item there for today and we will continue with the next speaker tomorrow, but we move on.

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

INCOME TAX (AMENDMENT) (NO. 3) BILL 2020

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

That –

- (a) the Income Tax (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 2020) be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 11th December, 2020, but 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 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.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to preface my comments by saying that we had intended to present this Bill and the other six to seven we are introducing today on Monday but given the fact that we had a number of changes in the Chambers and the numbers required to move 51, that is why it has been brought to today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as with this Bill and the others that will be presented today, these are very minor amendments. In fact, some of them are actually correcting some of the typographical errors that occurred in the ones that we will be seeing.

What is essential, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is, including in this particular amendment, the definition of “permanent establishment” to actually include the lessors of foreign craft, aircraft engines and aircraft parts and not to be deemed to be permanent establishment for tax purposes in Fiji. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- 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. The floor is open. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I heard the Honourable Attorney-General explain why the Bill was not presented on Monday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have issues with respect to minor amendments so I am not specifically speaking about the Income Tax (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill that has just been presented. I think we are going to have some more Bills presented but I just want to make a general point and I hope that the Government will take this into account.

My concern has been, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while we have Consequential Bills, that is fine after the Budget, we debate and approve it, but I think this kind of habit building on from the Government side to fast track a lot of Bills, in fact, I was just looking at the number of Bills that we passed this year.

I think 37 Bills that went through this year, about 34 went under Standing Orders, I understand most of them, of course, were Consequential Bills. But the fact remains, Mr. Speaker, that when we pass these laws, sometimes the amendments are very small but the implications are quite substantial. I am speaking from the point of view of what people are telling us.

In fact, as I said earlier in my presentation that some people were telling me about, even Cabinet Ministers and Members of the Government side not knowing exactly the kind of Bills that have been passed, the laws that have been passed.

This morning I gave an example of people wanting to know about the new Passport Bill, the Citizenship Bill, the changes in the Immigration Act. People come to us as well asking about when these laws were passed, sometimes these laws are not known by the people and I think it creates a lot of difficulty. I know people go to the Ministers first, they actually write to the Ministers, they call the Ministers and when they do not get the kind of response that, they come to us and that is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to raise this.

Some of the Bills while minor in terms of amendment actually have quite a serious implication on how people understand those laws and the changes. One of the advantageous of giving sometime, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for even minor amendments is for us as Honourable Members of Parliament as well to understand those laws better, get experts as we not all are experts in those areas, so we need experts to actually tell us what the implications are.

Many times, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have also found out that even Government officials, civil servants are not familiar with the changes in the law and when they explain to the people and when we look at what has been passed in Parliament, sometimes when you look at the rationale and the intentions of the law, it comes from the discussions that have taken place. I always actually go and read the Committee Reports on Bills because it gives you a much better understanding, the arguments for and against the changes and what are the implications.

So that is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it is very important for us to try and not push these Bills under Standing Order 51 even if it means going to the Standing Committees in between two sittings of Parliament. I think that will give enough time for, not only Members of Parliament but also the public and especially the civil servants and those who are tasked in terms of the implementation of some of these changes to the law so that they are able to understand better and explain this better.

I would in future suggest to the Honourable Attorney-General, Mr. Speaker, that we try and at least present the Bills a week or two earlier so that people, not only in Parliament but outside to have some idea of what is coming to Parliament and then they will follow the debate and they will understand once the Bill is passed as to its implications better. I would urge the Government side to get a bit more organised in terms of bringing these Bills so that we have a better strategy to ensure that people actually understand the changes in the law and how they are being applied. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion that is before the House. This side of the House really has no issue with regards to the Bill that is before the House and also looking forward to it coming through Standing Order 51 given the assurance by the Honourable Attorney-General that it is just a correction to the current Act that is in place, and also to amend definition in terms of section 2 of the Act, to clarify what is the leases of foreign aircraft engines and parts.

Also one of the good things that I will probably contribute to when we come to the substance of the Bill is given the proposed amendment that will provide incentives for those in the business of leasing aircraft engines and aircraft parts in Fijian companies. Not only that, due to connectivity and transport within the country, maritime areas and rural areas, we hear most of us always talk about the fares of the aircrafts and also the servicing of those non-economical routes. This will be a Bill probably that will allow our Fijian companies to benefit in terms of getting those parts and those products which are normally offered by foreign companies. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Bulitavu. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just very quickly, I thought we will be able to debate this on Friday but the Honourable Prasad is usually skewed with statistics. He said 34 Bills but he knows bulk of it was actually through the Budget which he actually referred

to the Consequential Bills.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of them related to it but he still went ahead and said 34 Bills. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in fact a lot of these amendments was not going to, in fact, in any way hinder the work by the civil servants of various statutory bodies. In fact they are the ones who brought it to us.

In this particular Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Honourable Bulitavu has picked up quite correctly, if the Members on the other side actually understood this, we debated this Bill actually in the Budget time and we have taken away the discretionary power of the Minister responsible for Finance. Before, what actually happened the Minister who was actually given discretionary powers, he became rather subjective. One of the things that we are trying to do is to remove discretionary powers of Ministers. In the same way, before the Minister for Immigration had discretionary powers to give citizenship to anyone. We removed that a number of years ago.

Now, so someone could have been here for six months and he would be given citizenship. In the same way in this particular provision, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was approved in the Budget, we took away the Minister's discretionary power to grant exemption to a person's business to be deemed not to be a permanent establishment. So, if you look at the substantive law, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had a list of all those businesses that could actually be not a permanent establishment.

What was actually missed out and which we used a lot is for aircrafts as the Honourable Bulitavu had pointed out. So if tomorrow, any local airline (there is only Fiji Link and Northern Air) wanted to, for example, lease an aircraft, they do not have to go running up to the Honourable Minister and try and get some kind of exemption. It would already be in the law. That was the intention but in the drafting they had not put the aircraft leasing. So, everything else in this, this is simply just adding to that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

FIJI REVENUE AND CUSTOMS SERVICE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That -

- (a) the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (Amendment) Bill 2020, be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 11th December, 2020, but 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 this motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, this Bill is out of necessity. As we had announced in the 2020-2021 Budget that we would be giving out forms where people can actually apply to get concessional loans, the Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) loans.

Already close to \$30 million has been disbursed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, including people from all over Fiji. The maximum loan for micro enterprises is \$7,000, \$14,000 for small enterprises and \$21,000 for medium enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were working out the mechanics as to how these loans would be disbursed and who would disburse them. For the first time, Sir, we actually have the private sector.

So, the Fiji Commerce and Employees Federation, Fiji Institute of Accountants, Women in Business and Fiji Chamber of Commerce are working together with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism to help assess those applications. There are over 9,000 applications and nearly \$30 million dollars has been disbursed.

The best way that we came up with, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, we talked to all the different agencies that the loans would actually be disbursed by the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS). There was a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed between the Ministry of Economy and FRCS. They have already been disbursing the funds and they will be the ones who will actually be collecting the funds. In the same way that FRCS collects the payment of TELS, exactly the same thing. Whilst the Bill does look substantive, I urge Honourable Members if you go to the FRCS App now, you will see exactly the same provisions apply to them collecting loans for TELS purposes. It tells you what they can do, their recovery process, when can they have a charge if necessary, et cetera, so exactly the same application of that.

All it does, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, we need this legal provision in place now because the monies are being disbursed and FRCS just needs to have within its Act, that scope to be able to legally, not just disburse the funds but also to be able to collect the funds. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, 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.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have a query for the Honourable Attorney-General about this amendment, if he could clarify. He mentioned that FRCS is already disbursing and this Bill is supposed to allow for the disbursement but also collection of funds. If he could clarify how FRCS is already disbursing, if the law does not allow for it to happen.

I see the practicality of this Bill and why it is needed for a one-stop-shop to disburse these loans and also collect, but he has not mentioned how they have been doing so legally, when there is no law yet to allow FRCS to be disbursing these loans already. I think it is supposed to be done by his Ministry or somewhere else, but he has mentioned that they have already been disbursing the

loans. If he could just clarify that for now and then for the purposes of the debate on Friday. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I seek a simple clarification here; if the Honourable Minister for Economy could just elaborate on the powers now with the CEO, to issue garnishee. As a layman, I thought that was given by the courts, but here it is given by the CEO, and it is affecting cases, like pensioners as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as alluded to by the Honourable Attorney-General in terms of this particular Bill, I think this is also part of the consequence of the Budget and the response, and the various programmes that come with it, for example, the \$7,000, \$14,000 and \$21,000 MSME grants that many applicants are currently benefiting from in terms of starting their own businesses, trade and other things, moving into alternative sources of generating income.

Given that this particular Bill will provide the platform for the existing system already in place, I think various stakeholders have already discussed that, as alluded, and the system that needs to be adopted where money needs to be received and how it needs to be disbursed to the applicants. I think it will give clarity to applicants, especially in following up their applications and after their applications are approved, where do they have to go and who will they report to.

I think those kinds of system will give clarity on not only grants being disbursed, but also checks and balances in terms of having a proper system which this law will provide, which will safeguard the funds that will be disbursed and also for the applicants to be responsible in following up the various MSMEs that they will be setting up. That will be also affect the economic activity, given that we are trying to recover from the effects of COVID-19.

I do not really have any issues in terms of this and we are looking forward to when we debate the substance of the Bill on the time that has been prepared by the mover of the motion, then we can talk more in terms of its benefits in this particular Bill, on how we fast-track applications and also the turnaround times. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to raise a concern in relation to this motion, because I do not think the amendment is non-substantial. The motion is asking the House to approve that we limit the contributions or the views that should go into this law-making process. It will mean that those experts in the field will not be able to give their opinion because there will be no Standing Committee. We will have to debate this within one hour.

But so far as I can hear, the purpose of the amendment is to allow Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) to assess and analyse applicants, and then collect it. What is dangerous to me, in my view, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, it is taking the role of a bank and a distributor because I know and can understand what was happening before. The Fiji Development Bank was engaged, as well as the Ministry of Cooperatives. With this amendment, this will limit that and bring it all to the FRCS, but the point is, if we approve this, we will not be able to hear the views of the public in relation to this change. That is my concern in relation to the intention of this motion.

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

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In addition to the clarifications sought, we have heard the announcement that some of the loans have been disbursed and just having a quick read here that there has to be an agreement signed with the receiver of the loaned funds which is in this document. My clarification is, if they had received the funds, how does it work, because they have not signed the agreement specified here? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor for your Right of Reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just some clarification to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the garnishee powers already exists with the CEO of FRCS, for all outstanding tax purposes, et cetera. The law actually is an exact replica of the conditions that already exists in the law, but is now specific to the loans that have been disbursed to the Micro Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). It is just specifically for that.

The disbursement of funds have taken place, we do not have to have a law that tells you to disburse the funds. I think Honourable Nawaikula did not understand what I was saying. I had said that the four organisations, together with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism, are the ones who did the assessments. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FRCS did not do the assessment. They do not have the capacity nor the specialisation to do the assessments.

When we were giving grants, you complained about giving grants. Now, when we are giving a loan, you are now complaining about the loan.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The fact of the matter is, you did not listen! I had said that the assessment was actually carried out, not by FRCS, but by the four organisations from the private sector, together with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism.

Honourable Tuisawau, the agreements have already been signed. It is only upon the signing of the agreements can the funds be disbursed. I know you must be looking at Clause 4, which is an amendment of 32A, it says, "A person who is a recipient of a loan or fund disbursed by service is required to enter into an agreement with the service". It had already happened. They have already done it.

However, if you look at the bulk of it, all of it has to do with recovery. So it provides clarity and transparency about, who has what rights, because this is a loan agreement. It is a very generous loan agreement. No interest in the first year. A maximum interest rate from memory is about 1.5 percent for the bigger people and 0.5 percent for the smaller people, and they take five years to pay. So, all it does, it sets out their rights, sets out the obligation of FRCS, so there is no quandary and ambiguity about whose rights lie where and what is the process.

The reason why we deal with FRCS is because they have an office nearly in every urban centre. This makes it easier for people to go and do their repayments. Of course, they can do it electronically. They can make arrangement with FRCS, but we know that some people want to go and physically pay at FRCS, still in Fiji, so they can go to any FRCS office throughout Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge Honourable Members to read what is currently in the law, and you will see that it is an exact replica of what is already existing within the law. Thank you Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Attorney-General.

Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

OZONE DEPLETING SUBSTANCES (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That -

- (a) the Ozone Depleting Substances (Amendment) Bill 2020 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) the Bill must pass through a single stage or a single Sitting of Parliament;
- (c) the Bill must not be referred to Standing Committee or any other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on 11th December, 2020, but 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 to his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief. As you know, Parliament had actually agreed to the ratification of the Kigali Amendment which is an amendment to the Montreal Protocol and this relates to hydrofluorocarbons where we need to legislate by 1st January, the prohibition of various hydrofluorocarbons. If you look at the Bill itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it essentially just gives the penalty notices and where the Director for Environment may give an exemption because there could be something related to, say the medical field, and then the rest of the Bill is all about these formulas.

The CFCICF2CI2 - these are all the formulas which relates to hydrofluorocarbons that is found and that, of course, is detrimental to the ozone. They are ozone-depleting substances. This is why it has been brought now because our team obviously through the Ministry of Environment has been doing quite a lot of work. There has been a lot of consultations, they have been to-ing and fro-ing and of course, with the COVID-19, you know, those kinds of meetings have become somewhat difficult at times. This is why we brought this along and there is nothing, you know, in fact, it enhances our credibility and indeed our commitment to reducing the ozone-depleting substances. 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 Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for this proposed amendment regarding the regulation and regulating importation, exportation, sale,

storage and use of ozone-depleting substances. I wonder in terms of the planning of Government, in terms of looking at the vast amount of items that continue to be in our country, that have been dumped, not used anymore and I am referring to white goods like refrigerators and microwave ovens and the like, that have been left out and dumped and not collected and properly stored.

I am referring to the obligation that we would have under this particular Convention in terms of protecting the ozone layer. What are the Government's plans in terms of taking care of these types of rubbish that still continue to be in our communities to this day and are not being handled or disposed of thoughtfully in order to comply with this Convention. I am just seeking clarification from the Honourable Attorney-General in terms of regulating these but also the storage of these ozone-depleting substances. What are we doing about the amount of white goods that is still dumped in our communities and not stored or disposed of properly? I give the example of these white goods that continue to be in our informal settlements and squatter settlements that are not being stored or disposed of properly and I seek clarification on that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We have no issues in regards to this particular Bill and also this is just a consequence of the Kigali Amendment of the Montreal Protocol, also part of the domestication that Fiji needs to do in terms of putting in laws and our framework in place given that we have acceded to the amendment. The various formulas that need to be there and also given the various findings and signs in relation to ozone layer depletion, I think we really need to be changing with time and also all that is happening in the global arena, given our commitment to being a party to the Montreal Protocol. I think there is also a reporting time in terms of the domestic actions that have been taken in order to fulfil the spirit of the Montreal Protocol. *Vinaka*.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know the amendment here is not simple. It is substantial and we are forced into this situation because we need to do this by 1st January, 2021. And that is the fault of the responsible Minister, the Honourable Minister for Environment. If the Honourable Minister for Environment was attentive this would have come earlier and it would have gone through the normal process. So please

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If I could just address the issue that Honourable Tabuya raised - that is a problem for all countries throughout the world. Because if, for example, say that you are bringing in a Euro 2 car and now you have moved up to a Euro 5 car or Euro 6 car - in some countries and even indeed in Fiji - in business situations Euro 2 cars would still be running around. So their ability to combust, their ability to emit is very different to the Euro 5 cars or Euro 6 cars. In the same way if you go to all the stores that sell white goods, you will see the ratings that is actually on the refrigerator or whatever white goods you are buying like the washing machine.

Now, it kind of relates to what Honourable Nawaikula was saying - the consultations actually have been done extensively. The consultations are done with various NGOs, they are done in fact with the importers of these white goods; they are done with various other agencies to see where their technology is at and what can be done. But to address that issue that you have raised - that is not the scope of this particular Bill. How we dispose of equipment or white goods that used to emit and you have not actually clarified whether these white goods are still in operation or they are simply dumped.

So there is a point of difference. And that again, of course, a whole spectrum of law that relates to that quite specifically. Indeed, I mean in many areas where you have dumping of such things and in the same way we are currently looking at what we are going to do with the dumping of rubber tyres, it is a big problem. They not only pollute but they are also breeding grounds for mosquitoes, so you need to have long term mechanisms to deal with that. So we think of some ideas regarding that, but that is not the scope of this particular Bill.

Honourable Nawaikula, the consultation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been done extensively by the Department of Environment but the point of the matter is that all the stakeholders that would be affected directly by this have been consulted. I should take my hat off to the Department of Environment for doing a very sterling job in this respect and their commitment to it. Thank you.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

TELECOMMUNICATIONS (AMENDMENT) (NO. 2) BILL 2020

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

That -

- (a) the Telecommunications (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2020 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 11th December, 2020, but 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 beg to second the motion.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a necessity to amend this Bill because as announced during the Budget, we want to move very quickly in connecting essentially the last five percent of Fijians who currently do not have internet connectivity through mobile phones.

Honourable Kuridrani would know. His supposed constituency has a number of areas that are actually blackouts and brownouts, similarly in Vanua Levu. As announced in the Budget we are expanding in access of \$1 million connecting various nursing stations, schools, et cetera to mobile phone internet connectivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the legislation that we are looking at amending is very bureaucratic, out of date and cumbersome. There are two aspects. One is that we have what we call the universal service area and also what we call the universal service obligations. At the moment this law is very archaic in the sense and I will give you a practical example, Mr. Speaker, Sir. If we say that there is an area in Bua that is not connected, the current law is, if we identify that area in Bua then we have to call for tenders to see which mobile phone company wants to go in that area. They compete with each other and then we award a tender. In the past few years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been working together with all the mobile phone companies - TFL, all the television stations, et cetera, radio stations and we have now have an agreement between all the service providers that will have what we call shared infrastructure.

If you look at the hill outside here in Suva you will see there is about seven or eight towers on one small patch of land because everyone is competing with each other. The idea is to put up one tower only and then you will have all the different transmitters on one tower. So, people in that area can access Vodafone, Digicel, Walesi, Communication Fiji Limited (CFL), Fiji Broadcasting Corporation (FBC) but all of those people will come on one tower. So, we do not need to call a tender as to which mobile phone company wants to go there. They all want to go there so, that removes that part. But also there is now going to be a tower built for which tenders will be called to build the tower. You have to do that. But the mobile phone companies will not have to fork out that much money. We want them to actually give the money at the service-end.

If you look at the Bill also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are certain areas in Fiji, for example, Rotuma – it cannot actually be connected through terrestrial means because it is too far away from Fiji. So, there is one tower in Rotuma that has already been built by Digicel. It does not necessarily cover the other parts of the island but the technology they use is satellite - there is a lot of competition in the satellite space. So if you see, the Bill actually provides for tendering of satellite services. So, we may say that there is a remote part somewhere in Southern Lau that cannot be connected through towers but then it needs satellite technology. For that we will call for tenders where they can be the recipients of the services.

So, the law actually, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is being amended to make it easier and we want to do that law very quickly. As announced in the Budget we have already identified 300 sites throughout Fiji that does not have any connectivity. Some of these villages, where people live there is only five people. Some places have 200 people, some places have 20 people. If under normal rules, you say commercial market applies, none of these mobile phone companies will go there. Because to put up one power will cost say \$3 million, \$4 million or half a million dollars if not more.

Now, if there is going to be only 20 people and the unit is only \$10 a month, that is \$200 a month and the tower costs \$0.5 million, they are not going to get a rate of return on the investment. So, this is where USOs come into because of Telecommunication Authority of Fiji (TAF) collects a particular percentage of the profits of the mobile phone companies. With that, we intend to build what we call the Tower Sharing Arrangement. Put up one tower, put everyone on it.

We have a situation in Vanua Levu, one of the sites is actually leased to iTLTB. I think it is TFL and TFL has put a gate at Delaikoro. I think it was one of the other companies that also put up a tower when they want to go and fix it up after a cyclone, the TFL guys put the padlock on the gate in the access to the road. So the whole idea is to have shared infrastructure, shared accessibility to the site and they do not have to fork out that much money so we can get cheaper rates for telecommunications and those people actually get connected to mobile phone connectivity and this essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is trying to un-bureaucratise the law, get it up to speed to where we are now, so we can actually start putting up these towers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you 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 on the mover. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a short contribution, Sir, given the explanation by the Honourable Attorney-General on this particular Amendment Bill. The issue of towers on native land like Devo Peak in Taveuni, Delaikoro in Labasa, Mount Nakobalevu up here is being leased say to Telecom and then we have other companies like Vodafone and Digicel just attaching whatever they attached and they are using it. It is the turnover that accrues out of that to Telecom who is now subleasing or whatever the deal is. How are the landowners going to take a fair share here?

Right now, it is only the lease from the lessee and the lessee in this particular instance, is Telecom, only one lessee but the way they have been doing it, is exactly what you have just explained, Sir. From experience, this is something that we are trying to grapple with, especially with the Nabou tower as well. That one there is quite an important tower for TFL because it goes right out to the other side of the world. How the landowners are going to get a fair share of what comes out of that is another grey area.

I am only raising that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, given that it is an opportunity for us to raise this at this point in time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just rise to support the motion. I think all of us that have been around the islands constantly hear about the need to pick up on the black spots, especially the small isolated communities and I think we should not dilly, we should not dally, we need to get this thing done quickly so that people can get access to these sites and people can communicate faster. So, full support that this should done fast track through Head 51.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A concern that I wish to raise is the delay, we need this four years ago or five years ago. Mr. Speaker, Sir, and every time I come to this Parliament, I complain, you leave Savusavu and that is it. From Naweni to Buca Bay to Napuka - no connection, and in one village, you have to go to a rock out in the sea. In my village, we have to go there, but I am asking why the delay? Where were you a long time ago?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Four years ago, three years ago, why should we wait until now? The last time they said, when the Southern Cross cable crossed over to Savusavu, we were expecting that this will solve the problem, but no. I hope that this will come sooner than later.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, this is a procedural motion, this is not a substantial one. The substantial part is on Friday. I am giving you a bit of license, but take note of that. Honourable Minister, you can have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I want to ask the Honourable Member, where he was when right now there are two towers constructed in Cakaudrove. One is in Matei in Taveuni, and the other is next to Savarekareka in Savusavu. Those were the last two towers that had been constructed this year, so where was he when these projects were being undertaken? It tells us that he was not even in Savusavu, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue raised by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. We admit the fact that most of the leases were old leases, but then I must also say, in my experience, as a former Divisional Commissioner, in some instances, when we have leases already secured, some of the members within the landowning units are also doing their private deals with some of the service providers. This is something that we need to be alerted of and, of course, that needs to be addressed. Hopefully, we have the systems in place, particularly, together with iTLTB to address these issues but long overdue, yesterday we were with the *Mata ni Tikina* from Lau, and this is one of the issues they raised.

I was in Lau in the last few weeks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, until I got back to Suva Harbour then I had my phone on because I have Vodafone but some of the others in Lau have Digicel, I did not have the coverage. So most welcome from rural development, particularly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Search and Rescue as well. As Minister responsible for Defence, we lost *Turaga na Tui* Macuata, next to Nukubati, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is only 15 minutes, but because there was no coverage, it made it very difficult for search and rescue operations. There is a Search and Rescue Operations Bill coming up as well during the next session of Parliament, this is, of course, timely and it will help us in enhancing our search and rescue operations.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a great initiative, I support it. I just wanted to seek clarification. It is all very well to have towers throughout Fiji, but one issue that I have not heard being addressed, and I want clarification on that, is how these towers will be powered in the rural areas? They depend on generators currently.

I will give an example where the generator ran out of diesel in the tower in Vanuabalavu in Lau during the funeral of the late Prime Minister, and there was no diesel from the afternoon into the next day, there was no supply of this particular service that we are talking about. To guarantee that these towers will have a constant supply of power from the Government side

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- So very well to say there is technology and solar, but it needs to be ensured that they are installed in every town in Fiji, including Kadavu and Vanuabalavu which are currently not installed. So, for the government to ensure that they can very well tap this, as universal service but to ensure that there is also the provision of power, so that this is equitable between urban and rural dwellers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member, Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor for the Right of Reply.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just very quickly, we have been debating with the Honourable Leader of the Opposition on the lease arrangement. I think the Honourable Minister for Defence and Policing has addressed that, but also as the Honourable Bulitavu said, if there is a head lease given to someone, then if they are going to sub-lease it, they have to get the consent of the head lessor. In a lot of cases, we understand that the head lessor actually gave the consent. That is the issue, so they would have actually had some increase in the lease payments.

The other issue is that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and again, it is purely basically leasing of land and access to that land. The Honourable Nawaikula said that it should have been done earlier. Just some statistics, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the Telecommunications Authority of Fiji (TAF) Act came into being in 2008, only 9 percent of Fijians had access to mobile phone internet connectivity.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 95 percent of Fiji's population have access to mobile phone internet connectivity.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the reasons why we have had an exponential growth in mobile phone internet connectivity or broadband connectivity is the removal of the exclusivities that three of the Telecom companies had in Fiji; Vodafone, TFL or FINTEL/Cable and Wireless. I remember quite specifically the Honourable Prime Minister giving us instructions in 2008 which led to the subsequent *Radisson Accord* that deregulated the telecom sector in Fiji. As a result of this, we had Digicel coming in.

The fact that today, we have the mobile phone companies actually agreeing to tower sharing without any regulatory imposition is a big deal. We have not legally forced them to do it, but we brought them to the line by making them understand that, that is where the power lies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Lynda Tabuya talked about access to power. Yes, it is an issue where we do not have the grid, but however, a number of these towers actually have back-up generators. Some of them have standalone generators, bringing diesel to that is an issue, but I can assure you that a lot in the Telecom sector, enormous strides have been made in using renewable energy and by having only one tower, again, the probability of using solar energy in most cases, with the back-up power generator is quite enormous. That is how it will be done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Attorney-General. The Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as time moves on, we have a suspension motion to be moved. For the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I will allow the suspension motion to be moved and I call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak to his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are on the last agenda item on today's Order Paper thus the request for us to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Anyone wishing to take the floor? Since no one wishes to take the floor, do you have anything further to add, Honourable Leader of the House?

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That –

- (a) the Environment Management (Amendment) Bill 2020 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 11th December, 2020, but 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 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.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Amendment Bill essentially gives effect to the ban that we announced 18 months ago on the uses of polystyrene. As you know polystyrene is used in many areas, in restaurants et cetera, polystyrene cups, containers, if you truly want to be committed to keeping our environment clean and of course, the lethal chemicals that actually ooze out of these products has enormous and deleterious effect on our environment, our fish stocks, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Members who are being given the Bill, you will see that we have had actually widespread consultations as a result of COVID-19. We had a lot of representations from the business community, restaurants, et cetera because a lot of people, for example, because of

lockdowns, they were not able to use their stock, some had already bought their stock. So if you look at the Bill itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, clause 5, it says, "... not withstanding anything contained in the section, a grace period on and from 1 January, 2021 to 31 July, 2021 is actually provided for the offence in this section to allow manufacturers, retailers, suppliers, distributors and uses of polystyrene products to exhaust their current stock."

However, from 1st January, the raw material that is used to manufacture it will be banned. So those manufacturers of it or of this particular product, there are manufacturers in Fiji but they get raw materials from overseas, they will keep on making it and exhaust their stock and those who already have the stock in their restaurants and various other places like supermarkets, they can continue to use it until 31st July. That is what the Bill seeks to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and essentially has the offence provisions. 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. No one wishing to take the floor, Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

COVID-19 RESPONSE (HOME LOAN ASSISTANCE) BILL 2020

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

That –

- (a) the COVID-19 Response (Home Loan Assistance) Bill 2020 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday, 11th December, 2020, but 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 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.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just very quickly so the Honourable Members get some context to this. Following the COVID-19 in the first case we had, we knew that it had an impact on the jobs obviously, people have an impact on jobs, their ability to service their debts becomes affected. So we had numerous meetings with the high purchase

companies and the banks themselves. As we all know now that they had agreed to give a holiday of sorts until the end of this month.

What we were particularly concerned about (we can talk about this in detail) was in fact home loans because we do not want people to lose the roof over their heads. Hire purchase, we know some people went and got TVs on hire purchase even when they went and withdrew their thousand dollars from the COVID-19 Withdrawal Scheme that we had but our main issue was with homes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad to say that even just night before last, we had a meeting up here after Parliament with all the banks and we have come up with an agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where and had discussions with FNPF also, the banks have agreed to extend the holiday till 1st March, 2021. What we have also done in the law is that we have said that the banks should continue even after 31st March, 2021.

In the event that they cannot and there is a huge financial implication on the banks with their accounts, those members would be able to access their FNPF funds to continue to do some payments towards their loan so there is no mortgagee sale taking place. If you look at the law itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it essentially says that the mortgagee must actually provide as much assistance to the mortgagors; they must do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to have the RBF have an oversight over these accounts because homes are very important. The argument being, what is the point of preserving your FNPF even if it is a preserved account, if you are going to lose the roof over your head, if you want people to continue to own their homes?

What this law does, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is firstly ensures the banks will continue with this holiday or this arrangement till 31st March, 2021; after 31st March, 2021 the banks must use all, essentially endeavours to ensure that they can continue with those arrangements, in the event that they cannot, then the borrower can access their FNPF accounts up to 50 percent even though they may have 10 years ago accessed their FNPF account to provide equity towards the purchase of the home or the building of the home.

As a stop-gap measure, Mr. Speaker, Sir, or a buffer, we have said in these cases only, FNPF will have a charge over the property. So assuming (because we have to think into the future) that they have got this arrangement, they access their FNPF account 50 percent and COVID-19 finishes or we get the vaccines. In two years' time when everything is normal, that particular borrower may run into problems, assuming they run into problems or they decide to default on the loan.

When the bank does move in to do the mortgagee sale, because FNPF has a charge, that amount of money from the sale must go back into the preserved account of FNPF because you could have a situation, a person has used their FNPF money now, it is all right for the next two years and if they subsequently lose their home, they have lost their home and they have lost their FNPF preserved account.

We want FNPF to have a charge in the event, highly unlikely event, over mortgagee sale. So you will see all those protections are actually built into this particular provision, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

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. No one wishing to take the floor? Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir. I have no further comments.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

CUSTOMS TARIFF (AMENDMENT) (NO. 3) BILL 2020

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

That -

- (a) the Customs Tariff (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 2020 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or any other Committee of Parliament; and
- (d) the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Friday 11th December, 2020, but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving the 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 the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is again a classic example of numbers going wrong in the typesetting. If you look at the tariff item numbers, the tariff item number was 2106.10.10; that is what it was listed as. The correct tariff item number is actually 2106.1000. The "1" had been dropped in the typesetting because as you know, we had amended about 2,000 items in tariff which actually had been reduced.

Similarly, the fiscal duty had been reduced and again for typesetting errors and mistakes, the amendment was missed out. The duty, for example, we reduced some blankets from 32 percent to 5 percent and the number, they actually had a typesetting in printing error.

The other one that related to Item No. 8704.21.19 was incorrectly amended, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and again this is a typographical error.

The last was Item No. 8716.3100, these are international tariff code numbers that got missed out or dropped off the numbers but I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the policy intent has been implemented but they have just picked up these typographical errors and this is to amend that. Thank you, Sir.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think we do not have any issue from this side of the House given Standing Order 51 as a procedural matter in terms of correcting the anomalies on the typing and printing errors that exist. This particular amendment will address those five anomalies as listed in the background of the Bill. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Sir.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir and I thank the Honourable Members from the other side for their understanding.

I just wanted to bring to the attention of the Honourable Members, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have another seven Bills that we will be tabling but not for debate in this session. They will still be brought under Standing Order 51 but they will be referred to the Committee but to be brought back at a specific time because we have certain imperatives.

So, for example, we have the National Payment System Bill where we have had consultations for the past 18 months (2 years) between the Reserve Bank of Fiji and the World Bank.

We are buying some new software and the law is to actually enable that. Despite that consultation and because it is a substantive Bill, we will be tabling under Standing Order 51 but asking for the Committee to bring it back to Parliament next year April for the debate.

We have got quite a few Bills like that including the Trade Marks, Patents, Designs and the Investment Bill which we will be tabling. And of course, we have the electoral amendment laws. That, again, will be sent to the Committee but will be brought back next year in March. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of the items that we had to consider today and I thank you all for your co-operation and forbearance.

We will now adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.30. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.03 p.m.