

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

WEDNESDAY, 18TH AUGUST, 2021

[CORRECTED COPY]

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WEDNESDAY, 18TH AUGUST, 2021

The Parliament met at 9.44 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable M.D. Bulitavu.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Tuesday, 17th August, 2021 as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament, those present in the House and those joining virtually.

I also welcome all those watching the live broadcast and the live-streaming of today's proceedings from the comfort of their home, offices and electronic devices. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Patents Bill 2020 and Designs Bill 2020 – Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

Honourable Members, as you are all aware, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights tabled its Reports on the Patents Bill 2020 and the Designs Bill 2020 on Monday and Tuesday respectively. I have been informed that the debate and vote on the two Bills will take place on Thursday.

Therefore, at this juncture, I wish to remind all Honourable Members that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 11th December, 2020, the debate on each of the Bill will be limited to one hour. I trust that the Whips will co-ordinate the number of speakers, as well as speaking times, as debate will be limited to an hour.

Vacation of Seat in Parliament - Honourable Niko Nawaikula

Honourable Members, I now address the House on the issue of Honourable Niko Nawaikula's seat in Parliament. On 26th July, 2021, I had informed Parliament that, as a result of the removal of

his name by the Supervisor of Elections from the Register of Voters, Honourable Nawaikula's seat in Parliament had become vacant.

In accordance with the powers expressly provided under the Fijian Constitution, Honourable Nawaikula challenged the decision of the Supervisor of Elections to remove his name in the Register of Voters, in the Court of Disputed Returns.

Honourable Members, the Court of Disputed Returns has now made its determination. In a Judgment delivered on 17th August, 2021, the Court ruled that, in removing Honourable Nawaikula's name from the Register of Voters, the actions of the Supervisor of Elections were unlawful, disproportionate and wrongful.

As a result of the determination by the Court of Disputed Returns, Honourable Nawaikula is reinstated as a Member of Parliament with full recognition, remuneration and benefits.

I welcome, as you all do, Honourable Nawaikula back into Parliament.

(Acclamation)

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Consolidated Review Report - Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 Annual Reports

HON. V. NATH.- The Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to submit to Parliament the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism (MITT) 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 Annual Reports.

As we are all aware, the MITT plays a significant and crucial role in Fiji's economic growth. The Ministry works with a mission to create sustainable growth of commerce and industry through innovative and sound policies that would lead to improved livelihoods for all Fijians. Innovation is an essential driver of economic progress that benefits consumers, businesses and the economy as a whole, which is why the Committee is pleased to note that the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme continued to run successfully during the period under review.

The programmes and initiatives run by the Ministry are of great importance as it serves as a livelihood to many Fijians. One such initiative is the Micro and Small Business Grants which had over 18,000 recipients during the period under review. The Committee recommended that stringent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms be implemented for all such projects to ensure that applicants complied with the conditions under which the grants were disbursed.

Furthermore, the role of cooperatives must not be undermined as it contributes towards economic development, especially in the rural sector. The Committee commended the awareness, information sessions and other services to cooperatives during the period of review, and urged the MITT to expand these services to other stakeholders, such as Landowner Trustees and Provincial Councils. The year 2016 brought its own challenges for the Ministry as it was the year Fiji had to endure the devastation caused by *TC Winston*, despite which the Ministry continued key trade negotiations, investment promotions and policy changes to enhance the business environment in Fiji and abroad.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to the Permanent Secretary of MITT and his Team for making time to submit before the Committee. Finally, I would like to take

this opportunity to thank the Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report: Deputy Chairperson, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar; Honourable George Vegnathan; Honourable Inosi Kuridrani and Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau. I also take this opportunity to thank the Parliament staff who have given their invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Consolidated Review Reports on the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism 2016/2017 and 2017/18 Annual Reports to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

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

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the 2017-2018 Audit Report on Statutory Authorities

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Report follows the Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji – 2017-2018 Audit Report on Statutory Authorities. The 2017-2018 Audit Report on Statutory Authorities covered the audits of 13 entities. The Auditor-General issued 12 audit opinions, out of which eight were related to 2017 financial statements while four were on the 2018 financial statements for the various entities.

It is important to note that the audits that were carried out on the 2017 financial year were issued with unmodified (unqualified) opinions on five or 62.5 percent of the financial statements audited for the various entities while the audit opinion of three Authorities were modified. However, the audits that were undertaken on the 2018 financial year were issued with unmodified opinions on all or 100 percent of the financial statements audited for the various entities.

The Committee noted some of the significant matters that need to be brought to the attention of this House for consideration and these include the Governance issues such as the lack of Risk Management Policies, Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plans in most of the entities. It is also important to note that more than 50 percent of the Statutory Authorities audits were delayed for the 2017 and 2018 financial years. This is primarily due to the following reasons, which includes:

- Delay in submission of draft accounts for audits or draft accounts submitted were incomplete.
- Delay in provision of management comments.
- Delay in returning the signed audited financial statements for issue of audit opinion.
- Relevant information/records not provided for audit on a timely basis.

- Authorities deciding to address issues raised in draft audit reports and resubmission of financial statements for audit.
- Delay in finalisation of the audits by the Office of the Auditor-General. This normally happens when the audit staffs are assigned to a different audit while waiting for the clients to furnish information and accounting records for finalisation of the audit.

However, the Committee noted the audit issues identified but not forgetting to acknowledge some of those entities' performances and to highlight few of those entities, include:

(1) Fiji Teacher's Registration Authority (FTRA)

- (a) The Authority in 2017 recorded a net surplus of \$14,142, compared to a net surplus of \$2,937 in 2016, an increase of \$11,205 or 382 percent. The increase in net surplus was mainly due to a decrease in administration expenses by \$36,206 due to decrease in printing and stationery expenses and computer expenses compared to 2016.
- (b) The increase in net assets by \$14,142 was due to the increase in net surplus recorded for the year ended 31st July, 2017, compared to 2016.

(2) Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC)

- (a) The Commission had signed a five-year \$7,328,947 agreement with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) of New Zealand on 27th June, 2016 to improve the Higher Education Sector and Commission's internal capabilities.
- (b) In the MFAT project funding, a variation was made to allocate \$220,000 as diminishing assistance towards management remuneration for three years. This variation was approved and signed off by DFAT Development Manager and FHEC Board Chairperson on 26th November, 2016 and \$100,000 was released to FHEC in the 2016/2017 financial year.
- (c) The Commission's net asset increased by \$14,640 or 4.6 percent in 2017, compared to 2016. This was due to decrease in deferred income by \$441,717 or 19.1 percent when compared to 2016.

(3) Fiji Meats Industry Board (FMIB)

- (a) The Company recorded a net profit in 2017, compared to a loss recorded in 2016. This was largely due to the sale of three acres of leasehold land to the Fiji Police Force for the construction of Nakasi Police Station.
- (b) There was an increase in net assets in 2017, compared to the balance in 2016, which was largely due to the increase in cash at bank and increase in account receivables. The increase was due to sale of land to the Fiji Police Force for the construction of Nakasi Police Station.
- (c) A sum of \$654,750 was received in cash while \$245,250 was booked as accounts receivable (final payment to be received from Fiji Police Force) for the sale of land.

(4) Public Rental Board (PRB)

- (a) In 2017, PRB's net assets had increased by \$851,204 or 4 percent, compared to 2016 and this was mainly attributed to increase in property, plant and equipment, which increased as there were some additions and the capitalisation of repairs and maintenance to the properties of the Board.

- (b) In addition, trade payables and accruals declined significantly which was due to decline in trade creditors and accruals by \$701,172 as the Board cleared most liabilities in 2017 compared to 2016.
 - (c) Further, in 2018 the net assets also increased by \$478,899 or 2 percent, compared to 2017. This was mainly attributed to the increase in deferred revenue as the result of the capital grant received for the Simla Housing Development Project.
- (5) Fiji National Sports Commission (FNCS)
- (a) In 2018, the total revenue of the Commission increased by 50 percent or \$3.25 million due to increase in the sporting grant received by the Commission.
 - (b) Also, the total expenditure also increased by 50 percent or \$3.2 million in 2018, compared to 2017 due to increase in sports grants and international coaches' salary in 2017, compared to 2016.
 - (c) Net assets increased by \$33,071 or 11 percent in 2018, compared to 2017. This was mainly attributed to decrease in liabilities due to the decrease in deferred revenue. This was mainly because of the grants utilised in 2018 which were held in 2017.
- (6) National Fire Authority (NFA)
- (a) The NFA's net operating surplus increased by 61 percent or \$1,902,101 in 2014 compared to 2013. The increase was mainly due the increase in revenue received from fire levy contributions and government grants during the 2014 financial year.
 - (b) It was also noted that NFA's net assets had increased by 41 percent or \$5,005,845 in 2014, compared to 2013. The increase was mainly due to the increase in cash and cash equivalents balance by 79 percent or \$3,535,190, trade and other receivables by 16 percent or \$301, 886, and in addition to property, plant and equipment of \$3,086,652.

It is important to note that the novel coronavirus disease renamed as COVID-19, was declared by the World Health Organisation as a global pandemic on 11th March, 2020. The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, therefore, in place necessary health precautionary measures to control the spread of the new virus strand outbreak.

In view of the above, Standing Order 112(1)(b) provides powers to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to compel the production of documents or other materials or information as required for its proceedings and deliberations. In this regard, the Committee resolved that entities covered in the audits to provide substantive written responses to the Committee on the issues identified and this assisted the Committee in its scrutiny process and the compilation of this report.

Given the findings, the Committee strongly encourages the Heads of those Statutory Authorities to take responsibility for the audit issues identified and take necessary actions to address them. It is pleasing to note that the clarifications provided to the Committee revealed that Authorities have taken the Auditor-General's recommendation positively and are taking necessary measures and strategies to resolve those significant matters that were highlighted.

Overall, I thank the Executives of these Statutory Authorities for providing written responses to the audit issues that were raised and measures that are in place, and the Staff of the Office of the Auditor-General for providing technical clarifications on those issues.

I also wish to extend my appreciation to all the Honourable Members of the Committee who were part of the successful compilation of this bipartisan report, namely: Hon. Joseph Nand, Hon. Virendra Lal, Hon. Aseri Radrodro and Hon. Ro Teimumu Kepa.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121 clause (5), I hereby move a motion, without notice:

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

HON. V. LAL.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Trademarks Bill 2020

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Trademarks Bill 2020 on 11th December, 2020 as part of the three pieces of legislation that resulted from the Fijian Government's undertaking in reforming the regulatory frameworks of vital sectors of the nation, including that which relates to trademarks registration.

Mr. Speaker, the Trademarks Bill 2020 aims to, firstly, define the scope of rights protected by registered trademarks; secondly, to specify the procedures for registering trademarks in Fiji; thirdly, to deter counterfeiting activity in relation to registered trademarks in Fiji; and also to ensure that Fiji's trademark regime takes account of international developments.

Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the Members of this august House, I would like to briefly set out the work that has been put into the Trademarks Bill 2020, by the Government of Fiji in bringing it to the Parliament and the work by my Committee in reviewing this piece of legislation.

Firstly, it was through the resolution and recommendation of this Parliament that Fiji ratified the Madrid Protocol and the Paris Convention in relation to trademarks. There have also been ongoing work carried out by the relevant stakeholders, even before the Bill was introduced into the Parliament, such as having numerous consultations with experts including those from the World Intellectual Property Office.

Mr. Speaker, my Committee was committed to upholding public trust in Parliament, by ensuring that there was public participation and that all such participation is given due consideration. The Committee ensured that its meetings followed the set rules of Parliament and that the meetings were open to the public and all media organisations.

Mr. Speaker, public participation was through public consultation via both face-to-face submissions and written submissions from interested individuals and entities. Majority of the members of the public that participated in the face-to-face submissions showed their support for the introduction

of the Bill, given that it aims to promote economic development. There were also submissions that raised suggestions for changes to the processes of trademark registration and comments for changes to the provisions of the Bill.

I would now like to briefly list out some of the main issues raised by the submitters and some of the contentious clauses raised are as follows:

- (1) The Bill has various phrases and words that may need to be defined or may need changes to its definition.
- (2) The Bill has certain provisions, which were considered to be vague or ambiguous.
- (3) Also, the Bill, as per the submissions received, needs to include provisions that provide for necessary matters, such as:
 - (a) protection of clients, who would like to register a trademark, from decisions of public officers;
 - (b) allowance of flexibility so that scanned documents can be used for filing for registration of trademarks;
 - (c) refunds by the Registry, for costs of advertisements and/or application fees, if application is revoked; and
 - (d) provision for timelines in which the Registry or the Commissioner must act after receiving an application.
- (4) Additionally, the Bill should provide that renewal notices are sent to owners of trademarks six months before expiry and that the protection of the trademark is only removed six months after the Commissioner has actually sent the notice.
- (5) There be provision in the Bill, which provides maximum deterrence against infringers who knowingly, or with reasonable grounds to know and engage in infringing activity.
- (6) There are provisions that require border control authorities, such as the Fiji Revenue Customs Service, to carry out border watches for infringing goods.

Mr. Speaker some of the main contentious Clauses identified from the review include: Clause 2, Clause 6, Clause 12, Clause 13, Clause 14, Clause 15, Clause 17, Clause 18, Clause 20, Clause 22, Clause 25, Clause 26, Clause 28, Clause 36, Clauses 40, 41, 43 & 44, Clauses 53 and 54, Clause 56, 57 & 58, Clause 60, Clauses 63 to 66, Clause 69, Clause 71, Clause 88, Clauses 92 & 94, Clause 96, Clause 107, Clause 114, Clauses 107 to 123, Clause 124, Clause 125, Clause 126, Clause 127, Clause 125-129, Clause 129, Clause 145, Clause 149, Clause 154 & 155, Clauses 161 & 162, Clause 166, Clause 170 and Clause 172. Mr. Speaker, issues relating to each Clause mentioned above is clearly detailed in the Report that is tabled today.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee also ensured that when it was reviewing the Bill that it takes into account the Bill's impact on Fiji's efforts in achieving the targets set out in the national development plan, which in turn contributes to Fiji's overall commitment and obligations towards the global agenda – the sustainable development goals. And it was encouraging to note that the Bill aims to meet Fiji's goal on improving the business sector and the economy and that the Bill was designed to impact all the people living in Fiji, irrespective of gender.

Mr. Speaker, just as it has been done for other Bills, my Committee had extensive deliberations on all the issues raised and also relied on clarification from the Office of the Solicitor-General and the

consultants from the World Trade Organisation and Intellectual Property Offices from around the region. This process ensures that all these relevant issues were appropriately addressed and that the objectives of the Bill were preserved. Following this, the Committee had extensive deliberation, and after which, the Committee came to a consensus on its position on the key issues that had been identified from the review.

Mr. Speaker, as you may note from my earlier comments; there were numerous Clauses in the Bill that attracted comments from persons that participated in the public consultation. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I will focus my concluding remarks on the issues raised on the Bill on the main stance of the Committee regarding the issues.

In regards to the issue raised on various interpretations and references and the recommendation for these to be addressed through amendments; the Committee noted that on one-hand, the definitions provided in the Bill were in line with international standards, that is, these mirror the provisions in the international legal instruments, such as the TRIPS Agreement and similar laws in other jurisdictions. Additionally, the World Intellectual Property Office provides clear interpretations and descriptions of phrases and terminologies that relate to trademarks.

On the other hand, the Committee also notes that certain interpretations could be made clearer and thus, recommends for these to be amended. One such good example is the reference to ‘convention country’ in the context of the Bill, whereby necessary amendments will have to be made that provides the necessary reference.

In regard to certain provisions being vague and ambiguous, the Committee noted that there were cross-referencing and drafting issues in the Bill which had caused confusion on some of the provisions. Thus, the Committee recommends for these to be amended.

On the issue of including provisions that provide for other necessary matters on trademarks registration, the Committee was advised that the provisions of the Bill sufficiently provides for all matters relating to trademarks registrations as applicable to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee also makes recommendations for a few amendments to be made to the Bill, which the Committee believes will address the issues it relates to. Firstly, the Committee noted the issue regarding the vague meaning of the phrase “words implying geographic origins” and after extensive deliberation, the Committee recommends that an amendment be made that would provide more clarity and thus, it is recommended that Clause 2 be amended to include a definition of ‘geographic origins’.

Secondly, there were vague provisions in the Bill regarding the word “Fiji”, and after extensive deliberation, the Committee recommends that an amendment be made that provides clarity to these provisions, thus it is recommended that Clause 12 of the Bill be amended to provide more clarity.

Furthermore, there was an issue with the provision providing for the period of deemed validity of a trademark in that the period was too short. After deliberations, the Committee recommends that an amendment be made so that the period provides ample and reasonable time for deemed validity of a trademark registration, thus it is recommended that Clause 69 of the Bill be amended to cater for this. Moreover, as stated earlier, there was issue with the reference made to the term “convention country” in that the provision was not clear. The Committee thus recommends that the amendment be made to Clause 170, to ensure clarity in the purpose of the provision.

Additionally, there was issue with the provision providing for transition from the current Trade-Marks Act to the new proposed law; in that it did not expressly state that the trademarks will transition into the new time frame for registration. And after deliberations the Committee recommends that an

amendment be made to provide for clarity in the transition provision, thus it is recommended that Clause 172 be amended to cater for this. Mr. Speaker, as a consequence of these proposed amendments, there will also be other changes to the Bill which includes the insertion of a new Clause and cross-referencing changes.

Mr. Speaker, we the Committee, believe that the amendments proposed to the Bill will assist in making its provisions more clear. We also believe that as we start implementing this law, this would be an opportune moment to gauge the implications of the Bill on Fiji's business sector. Given the sporadic nature of the business environment relating to trademarks; it is also recommended that this law be reviewed periodically.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, my heartfelt appreciation goes to all those that have provided support to the Committee during the review of the Bill, namely the UNDP Fiji Parliament Support Project; your Office and the Office of the Secretary-General to Parliament; the Parliament IT Team; and the Committee Secretariat Team.

Mr. Speaker, I also extend my appreciation to the Honourable Members of the Committee: Honourable Rohit Sharma (Deputy Chairperson); Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua; Honourable Dr. Salik Govind and Honourable Mosese Bilitavu for their input. The Committee acknowledges the public, key stakeholders and entities that provided their views on the Bill and for taking an interest in the proceedings of the Committee and Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee, through this bipartisan Report and consensus, commends the Trademarks Bill 2020, with the proposed amendments to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolutions of Parliament on 11th December, 2020 and 16th August, 2021, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report accordingly.

I have been informed that the debate and vote on the Bill will take place on Thursday, 19th August, 2021. Therefore, at this juncture, I wish to remind all Honourable Members that pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on 11th December, 2020, the debate on the Bill will be limited to one hour. I trust that the Whips will coordinate the number of speakers, as well as speaking times as debate will be limited to one hour.

Honourable Members, on that note, we will adjourn for morning tea and proceed again after half-an-hour. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.25 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 10.57 a.m.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development; and
- (2) Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport.

The Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the statement for no more than 5 minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the NFP or his designate to also speak for 5 minutes. There will be no other debate. Honourable Members, I wish to remind Members of the speaking time.

I now call on the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development to deliver her Statement.

Review of the Town and Country Planning Laws

HON P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and fellow Fijians, I thank the Honourable Speaker for the opportunity to present my Ministerial Statement on the review of the Town and Country Planning Laws by the Ministry of Local Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, town planning creates places where we live, work, shop and play. Without town planning laws and proper master-plans and town planning schemes, developments in the towns and cities will essentially lack direction and purpose. It must be recognised that town planners have a difficult task of dealing with various challenges, from unsustainable development and population growth to climate change. This is where urban planning becomes extremely crucial.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *Abu Dhabi Declaration* of February 2020 asserts that there can be no sustainable development without sustainable urbanisation, and no sustainable urbanisation without effective planning. Having appropriate legal framework, financial backing and human capacity are required for effective planning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had informed this House previously that the Ministry of Local Government is reviewing the enabling legislation, to ensure it is fit for purpose. Both the Town and Country Planning Act, 1946 and Subdivision of Lands Act, 1937 are no longer serving our interests. Unfortunately, our Planning and Development Guidelines cannot support new thinking in planning backed by innovative designs and technologies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since 1946, there had been minor amendments made to these Acts, particularly to the definitions and inclusion of new town planning areas under the Town Planning Orders. These amendments were made till 1973 however, since then, there were no further amendments and a revised edition of the Act bearing all amendments was published in 1978. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we know that a 70 or even 50 years old piece of legislation is no longer relevant in the field of planning. What we want for Fiji are laws that will create sustainable and resilient cities and towns; laws that are forward looking and adaptive to changing needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the objective of the review is to create a planning law that will respond very well to modern day planning principles and practices, including development controls. Fiji's Town

Planning Act sets planning standards for land-use and development through the town planning schemes and the town planning general provisions which are now administered by the municipal councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, prior to the enactment of the Town Planning Act, the Subdivision of Lands Act was enacted to institute a system of creating and reconfiguring lots. This involves altering boundaries or amalgamating lots to create allotments on which development can then be planned and executed. These legislations were loosely based on the United Kingdom's Town and Country Planning Act at that time. Both legislations were introduced to ensure a well organised planning system that controls land-use and development within its unique and localised setting in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, although the existing laws have the basic town planning and land development control provisions that are still applied today, it is worth noting that the provisions cover planning issues and land development control matters that are applicable to the types of development of the past decades. Sir, planning and development control from those past decades up till now have greatly evolved worldwide with newer planning principles and techniques introduced to respond to the changes.

Fiji, in the past decades, from 1970s till now, has experienced big changes in development patterns and types due to increased urbanisation and the need for a wider scope of development in peri-urban, rural and maritime areas. Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are large residential, industrial, commercial subdivisions and special use, for example hotels outside main urban areas. This justifies the need to formulate this new proposed Act that aims to address the different planning methods and respond to the changing development patterns.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, inflexible provisions related to rigid planning requirements and standards, increase in illegal developments and lack of developer responsibilities, were some of the gaps identified in the existing legislations. The current Act emphasises the preparation of town planning schemes for municipalities. It does not explicitly cover the policy and planning aspect which is a fundamental component of modern planning to include macro level planning at State and regional level and also at the lower level planning which are district plans and local area plans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other important features of a modern day planning that the current Act lacks are provisions of development planning based on new technologies, for maximum return by using the land optimally. Provisions to improve and fast-track the planning process for major building applications and clear provisions to apply and improve development enforcement.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the provisions of the current town planning laws are too broad and do not adequately address some of the administrative issues that are encountered by Municipal Councils. For example, the Act mentions Rural Local Authorities and their functions. However, after the devolution of powers of the Rural Local Authorities in 2018, all responsibilities in the extended rural areas now rest with the Municipal Councils. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the revision now needs to reflect this to ensure that Municipal Councils have full authority and powers to control development in both, the town boundaries and in the extended rural areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following Cabinet approval, the Ministry carried out the review of the Town Planning laws between 2012 and 2018 and a draft was produced. We then took this draft for public consultations in the three Divisions, followed by consultations with *iTaukei* communities in the 12 Provinces. This exercise was done in-house.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2020, it was agreed that a fresh review be carried out in consultation with the Office of the Solicitor-General. This took into account feedback from all the initial consultations. The Ministry of Local Government engaged the services of Netcam Consultant to carry out the review of both Acts. A thorough desktop research was undertaken to understand and benchmark international best

planning principles and legislation applied in other jurisdictions. These principles have been incorporated in the draft Bill to suite the local planning context in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the proposed Bill is currently in its final draft after the completion of a five-stakeholder consultation convened in the three divisions with relevant Government Departments, utility and infrastructure agencies, Municipal Councils, professional bodies such as the Institute of Architects, Engineers and Surveyors, the Chamber of Commerce, *Roko Tui* of the provinces, developers and tourism association.

Mr. Speaker, the draft Bill was also reviewed by the former Directors of the Department of Town and Country Planning after stakeholder consultation. The draft Bill addressed the shortfall identified by the stakeholders who were using the planning laws. Some of the new inclusions are:

- Clearly specifying administration of the proposed Bill. This will strengthen the operations of the Department of Town and Country Planning and the municipal or district councils as local planning authorities to ensure services are more efficient and effective.
- Clear demarcation of three tiers of planning commencing from State to regional to local planning at district and municipal level. This will facilitate a well-coordinated holistic national planning with the participation and contribution of key stakeholders and communities.
- Introduction of development control with policies to streamline and fasten the approvals process with new mechanisms like pre-assessment of applications, fast-tracking approval process by development assessment panel, review of the current regulations and the use of online services.
- Strengthening enforcement to deter illegal development is also an important area that was identified by the stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is proposed that the existing Subdivision of Lands Act will be repealed and harmonised into the principal legislation for uniformity and consistency in the policies that can be applied to both, town planning and land subdivision matters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the information of the House, the proposed Bill will drive substantial changes and clarity in terms of strengthening and modernising the Department of Town and Country Planning's approach to service delivery. For example, it will allow the Department to better utilise the online platform to store, receive and process applications electronically, to reduce processing timelines. Some work in this area has already commenced, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it should be noted that illegal developments are rife in some municipalities and even in extended rural boundaries. It is, therefore, the responsibility of Municipal Councils to ensure that developments are not located in areas or zones where it can create public health problems, disturbance and nuisance to people in the surrounding areas due to the impact of its operation in a place where it is not permitted.

Development for land subdivisions are not undertaken before development approval is granted. This will deter any negative impacts on the environment and people living around the development site. Buildings are not constructed before approval is granted, as it should comply with planning requirements.

Building regulations for structural safety and public health requirements for the overall safety and wellbeing of the owner and surrounding neighbours; Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are numerous cases where buildings are partly or fully constructed without prior approval of the Municipal Councils and the Department of Town and Country Planning. In other cases, buildings are not constructed as per the

approved plans and are non-compliant. The Ministry will therefore, strengthen the support to the Municipal Councils to ensure that the enforcement teams are fully resourced to curb illegal developments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has noted in recent years that a high number of substandard building applications has been received by Municipal Councils. For example, Suva City Council received over 200 building applications in 2019 that were deemed substandard. The plans were not drawn to scale. There were issues of structural and integrity and detailed designs were merely copy and paste. Unfortunately, the existing Town Planning legislation does not provide any form of guidance as to who can lodge building applications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to curb such issues and to protect the interest of the developers and the public, the draft Bill now makes reference to applications being lodged by accredited persons. This means that only those professionals who are qualified and have the necessary experience and rather carry professional indemnity cover will be permitted to lodge buildings applications with Municipal Councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry had also engaged the services of an experienced planning consultant, specialising in planning law from Melbourne, Australia, who carried out an independent peer review of the draft Bill. The relevant comments and suggestions were taken on board by the local consultant and included in the final draft.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the final draft of the revised Town Planning Act has been submitted to the Office of the Solicitor-General for legal vetting. The Ministry will be inviting written comments from the public on the draft Bill through the Ministry's website and *Facebook* platform.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have heard during the National Budget, the Honourable Attorney-General had made the announcement that the Town Planning provisions have been changed. The provisions were changed to ensure that there is no delay in approval process. Currently, when it comes to set back and the plot ratio, in other words, how much of land can be used for development, such applications end up at Town and Country Planning Office. So, to remove all those impediments, the general provisions have been changed to allow quick decisions that could be made at the municipal council level and for better unitisation of the land, and to remove frustration which is normally faced by the developers.

What we really want is any development should be able to give fair return to the developers. So, the land should be utilised to its maximum, and that can be done now with new technologies that we have and new innovative designs that can be used. So, that is one major change that we have made to the Town and Country Planning Regulations. There are more changes that we are planning to introduce.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I look forward to the new laws, once it gets passed that will remove a number of issues that is faced by the developers and investors. As I have said, the legislation itself is so, so outdated that sometimes the regulators or the officials from Municipal Councils and Town and Country Planning only look at the laws and normally, they do not want to be creative and they just stick to that and that causes delays unless and until the planners change the design of the building or the setbacks, et cetera. Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you for allowing me to brief the House on the progress of the Town Planning laws.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister for your Statement.

Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the designated speaker for the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Tabuya. You have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to begin my reply by stating that just like everything this Government does, there is no adequate consultation with stakeholders. I just heard the Honourable Minister list those who were consulted for the final draft of the Bill, which is now going to the Solicitor-General's Office, and there was no mention of consultation with indigenous landowners. They are not the public, they are stakeholders. We have villages that are part of our urban centres and boundaries, and we have informal settlements, Mr. Speaker, that are also within town boundaries. So, why has she not mention specifically that they have been consulted?

Mr. Speaker, these villages such as Nausori Village and Yaroi Village in Savusavu, are also under the iTaukei Affairs Act. So, as expansions take place, the review must ensure that the indigenous landowners are properly consulted, because she did not mention it in her Statement.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- She is misleading Parliament. I had already said that *Roko Tui* from 12 provinces were consulted. What else do you want? Why are you saying that the consultation did not take place? We have done consultation for five long years ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Through the Speaker.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- ...with each and every stakeholder and you can have a look at the *Daily Hansard* tomorrow.

HON. SPEAKER.- Make your Point of Order correct, through the Speaker, not to each other. You have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, it really concerns the Opposition that the Honourable Minister is confused with what the *Roko Tui* are and the indigenous landowners are. *Roko Tui* are Government Officials, they are not the indigenous landowners. So, she needs to clarify what she has stated is incorrect. The *Roko Tui* are Government Officials and not the indigenous landowners themselves. So, the lack of consultation is concerning to the Opposition, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue that I would like to point out is that, them being under the iTaukei Affairs Act, they need to ensure that there is synergy between these new laws and the iTaukei Affairs Act so that we do not, once again, have confusion or lack of consultation with our indigenous landowners.

Mr. Speaker, moving on to the next point, the explosion of informal squatter settlements in our cities and towns around the country under this Government and yet, this has not been a priority for Government to provide affordable housing for our people and I have raised this so many times before. We have 15 years now, 16 years, now, Mr. Speaker, is it not in our nation's interest to keep our people in informal settlements and squatter settlements?

We need to provide something better – better services, better access to water, better access to electricity in our towns and cities. I mean, I give the example of Tuirara Farm Road in Makoi that still do not have water, just outside of Hanson's Supermarket and that particular main road. We have Ucuna Settlement in Nakasi and one particular settlement

HON. V. NATH.- A Point of Order. Mr. Speaker, Sir, she is misleading Parliament. On the Tuirara case, water meter is about to be fixed, people have paid for that meter and it is in progress. She is misleading Parliament.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Is about to be!

Mr. Speaker, I have not misled the House. They can go and check Tuirara Farm Road Settlement. If they drive all the way in, there are 12 to 14 families in that Settlement whom have not received water. They do not have a water supply. They still do not, to this day, and he needs to go and check that out as the Assistant Minister.

Mr. Speaker, just a stone throw away from the Honourable Attorney-General's residence is a settlement between Padam Lala Road and Salato Road that still do not have electricity to this day, about 10 to 15 homes which he can certainly do a service for and go and help them out.

Mr. Speaker, we need our people to have proper titles to feel secure and we hope that the Government will prioritise the movement of formalising informal settlements as they have promised from 2014.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue about rubbish disposal and I have always brought this up but I would like the Honourable Minister and the Ministry to consider what are they doing about the green waste compost that are coming out of our homes and the markets, cities and towns. Are we just going to keep dumping them in Naboro? Is there a way that we can look into converting that green waste into energy, into biogas or organic liquid fertilizer - much healthier, much cheaper and safer for our environment, Mr. Speaker, rather than the millions of dollars we spend on chemical fertilizers we import.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I am asking that vendors at this time of our markets, can they, please, be given temporary licence to sell vegetables on their private properties? Mr. Speaker, quarantine zones have become a disruption to supply, movement restrictions, bus timetables and the fear of crowds have made trips to the municipal markets untenable. What we want is the convenience to buy vegetables at your local neighbourhood store. That is why I am calling for the Minister through and also to Local Governments, please, grant these licences to support these livelihoods of our people, it would be a great help to provide these spaces.

I hope that this review and this Act will look into these concerns that we have, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her contribution, and I now give the floor to the designated speaker of the National Federation Party, the Honourable Tikoduadua, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, may I begin by, in my response to the Honourable Minister's Statement, I also want to welcome back into the House Honourable Nawaikula as you did this morning into this august House.

I would venture to even add, Mr. Speaker, that while we are relieved that *Fiji Sun* has stopped the vicious and petty vilification on the government's former Minister for Women, we were hoping that *Fiji Sun* would instead offer some thoughts about the competence of a constitutional office holder as upheld by the courts yesterday, in the case of the Honourable Nawaikula, so I thought I would just get that of the way and welcome my *tau* back into the House, in his proper place.

Mr. Speaker, the review of legislation governing roles and responsibilities as the Honourable Minister had alluded to earlier, to me, is now something like a broken record. Since 2014, we have been repeatedly told about the review of the Local Government Act. Whenever we raised the issue of municipal elections, now that so-called review has been replaced by another review process of the Town Planning laws and no one knows what actually has been reviewed in the Local Government because it

has not been brought to Parliament nor do we know what extracts of the legislation was subjected to a review and who carried out the review because I am told no ratepayers or citizens was consulted, and in the absence of democratisation of town and city councils, the Local Government Ministry keeps on micromanaging the affairs of the municipalities through special administrators appointed by the Government. Rules and Regulations are being made and enforced with the impunity, with no care and concern to the welfare of workers or the interest of ratepayers and citizens.

Special administrators do not have powers to make decisions when negotiating log of claims submitted by workers' union, but do not flex their muscles in expanding the boundaries of the government's "no job, no benefit and no work policy". Market vendors are told they cannot sell their produce at municipal markets if they are not vaccinated, and now we hear of members of the public being barred from managing the markets if they have not received their jobs. They too are under the illusion, like Government that herd immunity will get rid of the virus and result in reopening of the borders.

I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, I believe this is not going to be the case, that it will not happen that way. Now, this is a good example why our ratepayers and citizens need to exercise their democratic right to choose their representatives to make decisions in their best interest at local government level. To hide behind a review of legislation is inexcusable, in my view, almost 12 years of dictatorship in municipalities and I believe that is too much, Mr. Speaker and excessive power in the hands of the Minister for Local Government to solely decide what is right for ratepayers in disgusting. The priority of any decent and caring government should be empowerment of the people. In this case, it is not about review of legislation but restoring power in the hands of the ratepayers and citizens of the municipalities. Well, enough of this review I say, Mr. Speaker because it is becoming like NATO - No Action and Talk Only.

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

Honourable Members, we will move on to the next Ministerial Statement and I give the floor to the Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport to deliver his Statement. You have the floor.

Driving Sustainable Economic Recovery

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament, I thank you for this opportunity to make this Ministerial Statement on how the Ministry is working with all the relevant Ministries and the private sector to reopen the Fijian economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we were ready to mark one year of being COVID-contained, the second wave of the virus took a stronghold in Fiji and since 19th April, 2021, our world has actually been turned upside down, as we all know. Sir, the Fijian economy contracted by 15.7 percent in 2020, primarily due to the halt in tourism activity after the border closures and this economic performance was better than the earlier projected decline of 20 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are dealing with low consumption and business activity and unemployment which has been exacerbated by the second wave of the pandemic. However, Sir, the Fijian Government has not been sitting idle or not doing anything to commence economic recovery. Over the past year and half, we have made crucial and strategic decisions supported by budgetary initiatives.

With respect to tourism, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all these actually require careful economic planning and we began with the COVID-Safe Economic Recovery Framework in June 2020. This particular Framework set the foundation for Fiji to prepare for reopening and we successfully implemented the Blues Lanes, the VIP Lane and the audio-visual productions whilst facilitating repatriation of Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of numbers, we have to-date facilitated, in terms of the Blue Lane, we facilitated approximately \$6.5 million and 215 yachts that have been approved and the value and location has been about \$6.5 million. Quarantined cruise, the number of yachts approved was seven. This is approximately \$2.8 million. The Significant Economic Value (SEV), it actually includes luxury vacation in paradise and the number of applications approved were six and this was at Namotu Island by three; Vomo Island, Wakaya and Royal Davui. With the film, film and television cast approved, their applications approved were free and the number of people approved were 513. This was to do with Survivor Series 2020 and 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these actually enabled some form of economic activity around tourism areas and formed the platform for the Ministry and key stakeholders to discuss a market re-entry. Fiji's goal is to safely re-open travel and tourism, hopefully by December 2021, and this actually predicate that national vaccination rates.

Our preparation is largely attributed to how we have come together with the shared vision to ramp up the coordination. With the support of industry partners such as Fiji Airways, Tourism Fiji, the Society of Fiji Travel Associates (SOFTA), Fiji Hotel and Tourism Association and technical expertise of International Air Transport Association (IATA) and International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and International Finance Corporation (IFC), we have actually developed a re-opening framework. This travel proposition has two goals, Mr. Speaker, Sir. One is to actually minimise the risks and keep both, tourists and Fijians safe. The second is to ease the restrictions to maintain competitiveness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Framework will essentially look at the national and individual factors that determine eligibility to travel to Fiji. National factors will largely focus on acceptable test positivity and vaccination rates, as well as any new variant of concern and, of course, on an individual level, we will look at vaccination status. But before we get there, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are a number of checks and balances that are needed.

The COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Taskforce, commonly known as CRMT, which comprises the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport are working behind the scenes to set the conditions for international travel. We are exploring all the options at refining our criteria to determine low, moderate and high risk countries, which is commonly known as the 'traffic light system', given the evolving nature of COVID-19 and its variants.

Simultaneously, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working closely with the Market Development Facility (MDF), Tourism Fiji and FHTA to keep tabs on visitor sentiments in our key markets. In other words, undertaking comprehensive market surveys in order to strategies our re-entry. We are pleased to share that Fiji is still at the top of most people's minds as a favourite leisure destination in our key market, such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America and Canada. It is a clear signal that when we open our borders, there will be keen holiday makers who are ready to travel to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Australian Government and the MDF for their partnership in establishing the live dashboard. This can be accessed by the relevant stakeholders in the public and private sector to get the real time data for decision and policy making.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the tourism industry has received the 2021-2022 National Budget positively and are confident that it provides a solid foundation for re-opening. The majority operators are reporting a 100 percent vaccination status and putting in policies to ensure their suppliers and contractors are fully vaccinated as well.

Fiji Airways, our national airline, has launched a travel ready programme and are ready to fly. They have also been awarded a diamond certification which is offered only to airlines that provide hospital grade health safety measures. It is the highest standard for travel safeguards in a COVID-19 world by the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure our businesses are ready to receive tourists, we have our COVID-safe ambassadors visiting businesses and creating awareness on COVID-safe business operations. We are future proving our businesses and giving confidence to visitors that they will be safe in Fiji. We are also working on the travel portal and through this portal, we will offer visitors a seamless application process to enter the country. This will be a secured and a user friendly for our portal similar to that of many other tourism destinations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, last year, Tourism Fiji embarked on the careFIJI Commitment, Fiji's destination wide assurance to the health and safety visitors. The CFC is a critical instrument in building trust, ensuring that businesses are ready to welcome the visitors back in line with health and safety standards. The foundation built over the last year will now be enhanced to have in place the certification of tourism operators to be compliant with safety protocols. The CFC will also include vaccination modules, which certifies CFC approved operators where the entire team is fully vaccinated. This will go a long way when we welcome back the visitors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are two things we need to keep in mind, we need to reach our national vaccination targets and we need to maintain a culture of COVID-safe practice in order to be in a position to welcome back visitors. According to the Permanent Secretary for Health, Dr. Fong vaccine and COVID-safe precautions act as a multiple dead end or roadblock for the virus and reduces its spread and it is such an important statement; everyone needs to listen to that. If enough people are vaccinated and take precautions to reduce exposure, even the spread of Delta will hit a dead end. That is what we need to aim for because we will never achieve a hundred percent vaccination even after kids above the age of 12 years for argument sake are vaccinated.

With respect to our Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), Mr. Speaker, Sir, amongst the most vulnerable are our MSMEs. At the same time, they make up an important component of our GDP. Pre-COVID MSMEs represented 18 percent of the Fijian GDP and 16 percent of Fiji's national labour force. Since 2007 we have invested more than a hundred million dollars in MSMEs through the Ministry and through the Ministry's initiative alone. The MSMEs are critical to the success of our economic recovery and they are bedrock of any economy. Recovery is not really recovery until it is inclusive.

The Government has set the policy direction announced in the National Budget that is fit for purpose. Our policies are based on research, scientific evidence, facts (it is not plucked from thin air), consultations and I repeat, consultations with financial bodies, transport industry, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), IP and tourism sectors, retailers and MSME representatives who are also undertaking in developing policies and initiatives and this covers everyone across the board.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, data from an MCTTT-led survey on the second wave of the pandemic of more than 2,200 MSMEs revealed that 74 percent have either closed temporarily, permanently or operated on reduced hours. Sir, 77 percent have suffered more than 50 percent decline in revenue and 90 percent were not able to diversify services. These are the realities we are aware of and not shying away from. We are pleased that our 2021-2022 Budget continues to support the grass-root programmes such as our YES Scheme, the Northern Development Programme, IHRDP and the National Export Strategy (NES). Most of these programmes have been activated. We can expect expressions of interest for the NES and IHRDP to be called later this month.

Sir, MSMEs assistance does not end there. We are excited also about the \$200 million financial package rolled out by the Reserve Bank of Fiji and commercial banks; a much needed lifeline to businesses as announced by the Honourable Minister for Economy and the Reserve Bank by guaranteeing loan between 80 percent to 90 percent for MSMEs and paying interest for two years, we are freeing up their minds – think bigger and better. We are asking the banks to play bold.

We understand that the Fiji Development Bank has leap frog other banks and financial institutions in rolling out this initiative by paying out more than \$2 million to over 550 businesses. We strongly encourage other banks to come on board and play their part to collaborate in implementing this scheme. We call on the banks and financial institutions to consider easing the requirements for MSMEs to be able to access this wonderful scheme, thereby decreasing the mortality rate of our MSMEs to this pandemic.

As with the tourism sector, Sir, we want at a bare minimum a core of our industries to survive the pandemic in any form of recovery is being contemplated.

With respect to our transport sector, Sir, we acknowledge that transport is cost -cutting into all sectors of the economy and the Budget provides more than 20 transport initiatives in critical sectors of the economy. Some examples include the social welfare assistance on bus fare support for elderly and disabled persons which will continue with monthly top up of \$10 and a funding allocation of \$5 million, allocation of \$17 million for transportation assistance for more than a hundred thousand primary and secondary school students from low-income households.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, speaking about vaccines and leaving no Fijian behind, the transport sector plays a critical role in delivering vaccines to our maritime islands through the Government franchise services. Vaccines were delivered to Lomaiviti. Sir, given our geographical dispersion, inter-island sea transportation is essential by livelihood, by trade and commerce. Although this impact has (glitch) pandemic has impacted trade, it has not stopped the maritime and shipping sector from ensuring that cargo is moved to and from our maritime islands.

More than 600,000 tonnes of cargo have been moved for the economical routes and these include cargo traded routes like from Natovi to Nabouwalu and return, Suva to Savusavu, Suva to Kadavu and return and this is less in the cargo transported in previous years but this is to be expected due to the indirect impact of the pandemic. As to the movement of cargo in uneconomical routes, more than 900 tonnes have been moved and these are all cargos traded under the Government Shipping Franchise Scheme, Sir.

The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development, maritime agencies, such as Fiji Navy, Water Police, Fiji Ports and iTaukei Affairs are working together with all vessel operators, to ensure that the work continues in terms of cargo been transported and also with respect to emergency medical cases. And I commend themselves for all the assistance that they rendered us in trying to keep the maritime areas free of COVID and also the North, Sir, and they are very strict with respect to their protocols, Sir.

The exemption of foreign cargo ships also from acquiring cost of permits, et cetera, for faster movement, we all know that was mentioned in the Budget that, again, the routes are vetted and cleared in a timely manner by MSAF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to provide safe, efficient and reliable affordable shipping the Government Shipping Services (GSS) is actually giving budget for maintenance and operations of these 12 vessels. Sir, the GSS has been at the frontline of the second wave of this pandemic, particularly with respect to assistance to the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. *MV Veivueti* has been designated FEMAT Hospital provided medical services particularly for non-COVID patients and emergency surgeries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as announced in the Budget also with respect to transport, if your vehicle registration expired from July 2016, the amnesty waiver of arrears of registration will be applicable for any renewals this financial year. The amnesty waiver is extended to the following and that is registration fees, ACCF fees and road levy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition to these waivers and amnesty, the LTA has started to implement the 50 percent waiver of interest on all Traffic Infringement Notices (TIN) and I urge those who are yet to clear their fines to please come forward and do so.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will recall that the Fijian Government on the 19th of April announced relief for licence, permit, certificate and registration holders. These allowed flexibility for Fijians to undertake the relevant renewals at their ease of convenience.

Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am very happy and pleased to announce that we are announcing an extension of the period of renewal which was set to expire tomorrow, which is 19th August. As we speak, the Solicitor-Generals Office is gazetting that particular issue, Sir. We will now be extending it to 19th October, 2021. This extension applies to permits, licences and certificates for registration.

However, for vehicle owners, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are urged not to actually wait until 19th October but to renew the registration of vehicles as soon as they practicably can. This is an answer to the general public in letting us know, et cetera, and also in order to facilitate. So, the extension now is from the 19th August, 2021 to 19th October, 2021. That will give some relief to a lot of people but again, Sir, word of warning please ensure that you get it done with that period instead of all turning up to LTA on the 19th October, 2021.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all our efforts towards recovery of reopening are dependent on at least half a million Fijians been fully vaccinated. That is not a statement that I made lightly, Sir. We need to get back to work. We need to make our country feel good again. We need to ensure that half a million or so Fijians have been fully vaccinated.

It is no use pouring scorn in all of these, Sir. It is a combined whole of the country effort that is required from all Members of Parliament to go and tell everyone it is half a million that needs it. Its reduction in test positivity is also that is needed. Changing the way businesses are conducted and this is all about future proofing our businesses, we need to achieve the target to put us on a better footing for economic recovery which is something that every citizen in this country wants.

Every Member of Parliament wants to give our citizens the ability to earn a livelihood again as they did successfully before. We will be able to achieve much more, Sir, we are very resilient people. We are strong. Our history tells us how resilient we are with the opportunities of new and existing industries also emerging from the adversity of this pandemic. So, I urge everyone to please bear that in mind and please, get vaccinated. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you very much for giving me the floor.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. I now give the floor to the designated speaker for the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Gavoka. You have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for the Ministerial Statement. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Honourable Minister indicated that 91 percent of the populace have had their first jab, and the second jab is somewhere around the 30 percent. Mr. Speaker, let us not be under any illusion, COVID-19 is out of control. We should change the narrative and not focus anymore on herd immunity, but go for total immunisation of the entire country and we should try and achieve that by December this year. This can be done, not through threat, but through education and incentives. We incentivise our people to take the jab.

I was very concerned yesterday when the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Service indicated that in the highlands of Navosa, some people were saying, that they were just going to have their first jab but will not go for their second jab. That is very concerning and I heard yesterday that the uptake on vaccination is very low in the low-income areas.

Mr. Speaker, we need to incentivise our people to take the jab. Herd immunity has been debunked – it is a theory that has been found not to hold water. Countries now realise that you have to go for full immunisation, so let us aim for that by December, Mr. Speaker, and then set in place the economic recovery that will come from 2022 onwards. Firstly, let us have an economic summit. We have been asking for this for quite some time, but I believe that once we have total inoculation, 2022 could be a year of huge economic activities.

Tourism, Mr. Speaker, will be another 18 months, let us be very clear on that. It will make a difference as in the past when it happened but not in the next 18 months. Mr. Speaker, we have key resources that we will need to develop. Yesterday, we spoke about mahogany. We have the biggest stock of mature mahogany in the world, and we spoke about harvesting and value-adding.

Mr. Speaker, value-adding would enable Fiji to be the world leader in mahogany-finished products. People will talk about Fiji mahogany products in the same way you talk about Fiji Water. The reason being, we have mahogany in plentiful supply. It is right here, but we need to look at it on a gigantic scale. As I had said yesterday, Honourable Prime Minister, your attempt to develop mahogany is very feeble and very tentative. You have to look at it in a gigantic manner, in the way that our giants of the past developed mahogany in the mahogany plantations, the pine plantations and the sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, it surprises me to learn that at one point, Lautoka Sugar Mill was the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere, so Fiji has been a giant in many areas. And here, we have billions of dollars' worth of mahogany that we cannot develop, we cannot turn into a major economic base for our country. We need to focus on resources, tourism will come later, Mr. Speaker.

On agriculture, our Honourable Minister for Agriculture yesterday spoke about new initiatives and Honourable Kuridrani rightfully pointed out that he has a habit of changing the conversation. Instead of delivering on what he promised, he comes out with new initiatives to change the conversation. Can he just go back on what he promised over the years and let us turn that around and convert them into fruition, Honourable Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, we need to focus on our resources. The strength of the Australian economy today is because of its resource-based industries. It dwarfs manufacturing and everything else because they have minerals in plentiful supply, the iron ore. Here in Fiji, I say again, mahogany can make the difference for us but we need to start thinking big, not the way the Prime Minister is going on to now in a piecemeal manner that he highlighted yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we need the first step, as I said from the beginning, and that is to make sure that we have a 100 percent inoculation. It will cost money, but they are not going to have lockdown because we have been told it will cost \$1 billion but incentivising people to be inoculated could cost much less but bring in a sense of comfort to enable us to move forward in 2022.

Mr. Speaker, I just wish that the Fiji First government is listening. We are talking about driving sustainable economic recovery, it can be done with vision, with faith in our system and reaching across the aisles. We are ready to be part of it in a bipartisan manner, Mr. Speaker, but unfortunately if they continue this way, it will be piecemeal, it will be hot air and we will not get the sustainable economic recovery that they continue to believe can happen in the way they are doing things, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, that is our contribution from this side, much can be done but leadership from the other side needs to take ownership of this, take the whole country forward and we can overcome this pandemic and bring back economic activity in the country, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Prasad. You have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I also want to join Honourable Tikoduadua and take this opportunity to wholeheartedly welcome back Honourable Nawaikula into the august House. Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, his victory in court yesterday is very telling and the third court ruling actually questioning the decision and the competence of the Supervisor of Elections.

Mr. Speaker, we have only five minutes to respond to the ministerial statements. That is the rule but, Mr. Speaker, again I want to emphasise that it is quite shameful that we do not have any single motion in this Parliament to debate about Government's response, whether it is an economic recovery response, whether it is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic very specifically in terms of public health response - that is the kind of debate we should have in this Parliament but unfortunately, we do not have the opportunity. I cannot go and look at what the Minister has said in detail and respond to some of the proposals and the projections that he is making.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it is quite entertaining how the Government Ministers are using this provision in the Standing Orders, you know, when they give Ministerial Statements to actually talk about the budget provision. I know the Honourable Minister actually, if I remember correctly, was quite arrogant and aggressive about refusing to answer certain questions in his Head 34 during the Budget Committee of Supply.

Yesterday, the Honourable Minister actually took 20 minutes to answer the question and this was almost like a ministerial statement, so you know this Dorothy Dixter type question from the government is being used and obviously, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition does not have any response or the opportunity to respond to some of those. But you know the people are not convinced with those lengthy answers, in fact they get bored.

Also, Mr. Speaker, let me say that it appears that the ministers use this time to mop up and attempt to reshape opinion about what was said in the Budget when really, the real issue right now is how is public health impacting on economic recovery, on the demand in the economy and everything that the minister has said they wanted to address, rests on addressing the COVID pandemic, the public health issues and building confidence. The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is the haphazard approach - you know virus containment will only result in more containers as I said the other day. Last night, Mr. Speaker, we had another 11 deaths reported by the Ministry of Health while the virus has now hit Vanua Levu.

I was just reading about New Zealand on the other hand, with just one case they have gone into lockdown. The Government, Mr. Speaker, has to admit that their strategy in dealing with the COVID-19 virus has failed. They must start from there because part of the strategy, Mr. Speaker, in a crisis of this nature is to build confidence amongst the people. Part of the reason why our projected growth was negative growth was slightly lower, you know from 21 percent it was 15 percent because Mr. Speaker, we had about \$652 million in remittances from our family and friends and people working around the world.

This year again, Mr. Speaker, in the first three months, the remittances increased by more than 24 percent compared to the same period last year, so imagine if we did not have that amount of remittances flowing into the country, the economic recovery, the demand would be in a dire situation. I think what

we need, Mr. Speaker, is to build confidence in our public health strategy, our health facilities but I have not seen or heard from government ministers talking it, because if we do not build confidence in the resources, in the facilities that we have in our health system, in our public health delivery, in addressing that. We are not trying to get people ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Your time is up. No-one wants to listen to you.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- ... confidence and part of the reason, part of the reason ...

HON. SPEAKER.- You have run out of time.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Broken record.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Not broken record. Mr. Speaker, you should give me more time.

(Laughter)

You can laugh about it, but the people are listening.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Laugh as much as you want. The people are also listening.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been informed that there are no Bills for consideration today.

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

RATIFICATION OF THE 2005 AGREEMENT ESTABLISHING THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament approves that Fiji ratify the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Attorney-General to speak to his motion. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. On 3rd March, 2021, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence tabled its Report in relation to the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

The PIF is a regional organisation. Its aim is to enhance cooperation between the Pacific Island Countries and Territories. It was founded in 1971 as the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation and changed its name in 1995 to the South Pacific Forum, and then again in 1999, the Pacific Islands Forum, so as to be more inclusive of the forums, Oceania spanning membership of both, North and South

Pacific Island Countries, including Australia. In October 2000, the South Pacific Forum Leaders met and agreed to adopt an Agreement called the 2000 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, which was signed in Tarawa.

At a special Leaders Retreat in New Zealand in April 2004, the Forum Leaders directed to the PIF Secretariat to appoint a working group of Forum members to draft a new Agreement that updated and set out the role, functions and responsibilities of the Secretariat. In 2005, a working group of members comprising officials from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Tuvalu in consultation with the full Forum membership, developed a draft text updating the 2000 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, in accordance with the Leaders' directions from the Leaders Retreat. The text of the new Agreement was subsequently considered by the Forum Officials Committee (FOC) and endorsed by Forum Leaders and opened for signature at the meeting in Port Moresby on 27th October, 2005.

The fundamental change brought about by the 2005 Agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the recasting of the Agreement into one, which establishes the PIF as an institution encompassing the Forum Leaders as the decision-making body, supported by the Forum Officials Committee as the Executive Committee and the Secretariat. The provisions of the 2000 Agreement had only established the Secretariat and the FOC, while referring briefly to the Forum as the grouping of leaders. The 2005 Agreement, therefore, recognises the Forum as an international organisation comprising of member States, including all Forum members and other Pacific Island Countries that may accede to the 2005 Agreement.

Another key change in the 2005 Agreement is the recognition of associate members and observers to the Forum. This is a result of discussions at the Leaders' Summit in 2004, where the leaders saw the need to engage in non-sovereign Pacific Territories more closely and progressively grant them such status in the Forum. Other changes in the 2005 Agreement include:

- (1) Removal of the distinction between founding members and others;
- (2) Amending the purpose of the Forum and the functions of the Secretariat;
- (3) Revising the responsibilities and relationships of the Secretary-General;
- (4) Amendments to the privileges and immunities provisions; and
- (5) Removal of the specific details of members of budget contributions.

Currently, all the countries that are members of the Forum, 17 Member Countries, have ratified the 2005 Agreement, with Fiji being the only country left to ratify the Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the summary of the Agreement, the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum or the 2005 Agreement in short, is an international Agreement that establishes the Pacific Islands Forum. Fiji signed the Optional Protocol in 27th October, 2005 but is yet to ratify, as I had stated earlier on.

Article 1 of the 2005 Agreement establishes the Forum as an international organisation comprising of Australia, the Cook islands, Fiji, Nauru, New Zealand, Samoa and Tonga as being the founding members of the Forum, together with the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu and such other States as may be admitted to foreign membership with the approval of the Forum Leaders and in accordance with Article 11. Article 1 also provides how other Territories in the Pacific Region may be admitted as members of the Forum.

Article 2 of the 2005 Agreement outlines the purpose of the 2005 Agreement which is to strengthen regional co-operation and integration, including through the pooling of regional resources of

governance and the alignment of policies. Forum Members shared goals of economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security.

Article 3 of the 2005 Agreement provides that the decision-making of the Forum shall be the Forum Leaders meeting and outlines the manner in which meetings may be convened by Forum Leaders. Of course, at the moment, the Forum is chaired by Fiji through our Prime Minister.

Article 4 of the 2005 Agreement establishes the Forum Secretariat and its headquarters to be located in Suva, Fiji.

Article 5 of the 2005 Agreement establishes the Pacific Islands Forum Officials Committee and outlines the powers and functions of the Committee.

Article 6 of the 2005 Agreement outlines the appointment of Forum Secretariat staff including the position of the Secretary-General.

Article 7 of the 2005 Agreement outlines the functions and responsibilities of the Secretary-General.

Article 8 of the 2005 Agreement outlines the functions and the role of the Forum Secretariat.

Article 9 of the 2005 Agreement outlines matters in relation to preparation of the Forum's budget and its subsequent approval. It also states that the cost of operating a Forum shall be borne by the members in the shares determined by the Committee.

Article 10 of the 2005 Agreement outlines the legal status of the Forum and privileges and immunities accorded to each member of the Forum.

Article 11 of the 2005 Agreement outlines administrative matters including procedures for ratification, accession, entry into force and denunciation of the 2005 Agreement.

Article 12 of the 2005 Agreement outlines procedures in relation to the amendment to the 2005 Agreement.

Article 13 of the Agreement outlines procedures in relation to the termination of the prior Agreement.

Fiji is currently substantively in compliance with the Articles under the 2005 Agreement, so the ratification of the Agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is an administrative process that must be completed by all Forum Member countries. Ratification of the Agreement will further promote cooperation and strengthen international relations with other Pacific Island Countries who are members of the Forum. Therefore, I urge all Members of this Parliament to support the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his motion. The floor is now open for debate on the motion. I give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to also make some contribution to the debate on the motion that has recently been tabled by the Honourable Attorney-General just a few minutes ago that Parliament approves that Fiji ratify the 2005 Agreement established in the Pacific Islands Forum or better known as "PIF".

Sir, from the outset, it is unfortunate that it has taken more than 15 years, after we signed this Agreement in 2005, as alluded to by the Honourable Attorney-General before it is being presented to Parliament for ratification. There is a saying that it is better late than never, but the delay is a clear indication of incompetence. It has taken six years since Fiji was re-admitted to the Forum in 2014 and for this Agreement to come before this august House. Unfortunately, Sir, the delay may suggest to other regional member countries the lack of commitment by the FijiFirst Government in enforcing regional cooperation and integration, particularly at this critical time.

Sir, it also puts into question our capacity and commitment, as the treaty depositary for this agreement as alluded also by the Honourable Attorney-General and many other regional agreements and treaty as well, Sir. Fiji is a designated depositary to the 2005 PIF Agreement, in accordance with Article No. 11. Fiji cannot lawfully exercise this role, unless it has self-ratified the agreement.

Sir, I will be touching on the subject of regional co-operation and integration later on in my intervention. As a founding member of the PIF and a key player in the region, the delay in processing the ratification of this Agreement is unacceptable, Sir.

In considering this motion, this time for us as a nation, to reflect on how our former leaders, particularly the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara with the support from other regional leaders had a vision in bringing in our small island states in the Pacific together, to have a stronger united voice in the international arena and also to work together as one Pacific family for the common goal of our Pacific community.

When Fiji's first Prime Minister, the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara invoked the term, 'The Pacific Way', Sir, at the United Nations General Assembly in 1970, he was referring to Fiji's peaceful transition to independence. Over the years, the term has been used to mean doing things in ways that are mutually respectful, inclusive, consultative, contextual, flexible and allow for compromise which is sadly missing today, Sir.

The Pacific Way is a set of ideas, Sir, vision and processes that are dynamic reiterating itself under the new context while simultaneously, grounded to the core values of the Pacific. The FijiFirst Government should stop doing the opposite but, at least, consider these principles and values to bring unity to our divided nation, particularly at this time.

Our former leaders at the time strongly believed in the Pacific Way and now the *talanoa* approach in addressing international and regional issues as the most appropriate and best way forward to foster the Pacific unity and solidarity. Today, the *talanoa* session is simply a gimmick for convenience to the FijiFirst Government rather than genuine consultation. Unfortunately, today the values and principles had facilitated the establishment of the Forum are only given lip service by the FijiFirst Government.

Having said that, Sir, I am happy to say that we on this side of the House, strongly support this motion. However, we have a number of concerns that we would like to raise. The PIF has evolved over time and there is no doubt, adjustment has to be made to ensure that the organisation is relevant to the realities and needs of aspiration of the people of the Pacific today, including Fiji.

The new Agreement will establish the Pacific Islands Forum, as intergovernmental organisation at international law. It also updates the Forum's purpose and functions to reflect the vision and directions taken under the Pacific Plan. To facilitate regional co-operation and integration, the Leaders agreed in 2005 to broaden the Forum membership by establishing the new associate and observer membership categories rather than the approach taken by the FijiFirst Government in isolating or segregating some because they do not agree with them.

The role of the Forum has also been expanded beyond economic development and trade to economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security which are important elements of sustainable development for Small Island Developing States. The ratification of this Agreement will be insignificant as it is the final Act required to bring in to force the 2005 Agreement and thus, set in motion the next chapter of the Forum.

With the ratification of this Agreement, we sincerely hope that Fiji will again play its leadership role in the Pacific. To do this, we must humble ourselves and be ready to forgive, reconcile and bring unity to the Pacific Community rather than a heavy-handed or dictatorial approach. I say this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with sincerity and a lot of commitment, taking into account the current state of play on a number of pertinent issues that must be addressed with urgency:

- (1) Fiji should make every diplomatic effort in having dialogue with our Northern Pacific Nations to remain in the Forum, particularly at this critical time when we are all facing COVID-19 and the need for regional unity.
- (2) Government should get off its high horse and allow CROP Agencies, such as the University of the South Pacific, to run its own affairs. Fiji must honour its financial commitment because the majority of students are from Fiji, rather than using its grant as leverage to have its own way.
- (3) Regional co-operation is critical at this time of crisis where we would be supporting and embracing each other in preparation for our future, particularly in addressing issues such as climate change, regional trade and our collective recovery effort from the economic crisis due to the fallout of the pandemic.
- (4) It is time that the Government review the usefulness of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) and see its relevance in the context of PIF, and look at the synergy of these two organisations to minimise duplication of roles and wastage of limited resources available to the Region.

Whilst we wholeheartedly support the motion, we urge the Government to, please, exercise restraint and wisdom in fostering regional co-operation among our neighbouring States.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to remind us of two messages by the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, which I believe is an inspiration and a lesson for our leaders today. First was at the 30th Anniversary Celebration of the Pacific Islands Forum where he said, and I quote:

“It was we, the old men who dreamt dreams. I now call on young men and women to see visions. For where there is no vision the people perish.”

Rather than trying to force unacceptable ideologies and practices to our people.

The second quote that I wish to bring to the attention of this august House, Sir, was made in one of the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara’s address to the Pacific Vision Festival that was held in Auckland, New Zealand, on 26th July, 1999. He said, and I quote:

“From where I stand, I do not see the lost people of the South Seas, the defeated and despairing shrunken shadows of those who went before. What I observe are the proud descendants of some of the most remarkable explorers and settlers who ever lived. We carry the cultural and historical inheritance of our ocean navigators of peerless skill and courageous kin, who crossed vast distances before the tribes of Europe had ventured forth from their

small part of the earth. Our forebearers populated islands scattered over the world's greatest stretch of water, covering a fifth of the planet's surface. It was one of the most amazing migrations in history, a triumphant testimony to human endurance, fortitude and achievement."

Sir, with those remarks, I fully support the motion that is before this august House. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Kepa. You have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In supporting the motion before the House, I note with interest that Fiji is the last member of the Pacific Islands Forum to ratify the 2005 Agreement establishing the Pacific Islands Forum which was signed in 2005 by the Prime Minister at the time, the late Honourable Laisenia Qarase.

It is somewhat ironic, Mr. Speaker, that the host country of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) has taken 16 years to ratify the very Agreement that espouses and formalises the regional standing of the Secretariat. By the same tenor or token, I note and welcome Fiji's assumption of the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum earlier this month.

I would also like, at this stage, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate the Honourable Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa, who has always supported Pacific Women MPs. Like her father before her, the late Honourable Fiame Mata'afa, Samoa's first Prime Minister also worked with other leaders into bringing their countries together as a Pacific community, together with Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara of Fiji, Prince Tu'ipelehake of Tonga, Hammer DeRoburt of Nauru and Sir Michael Somare of Papua New Guinea - they worked together in the Pacific Way. I only hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Government maintains consistency in Fiji's engagement across all regional activities, including supporting the expeditious resolution of outstanding issues at the University of the South Pacific, a leading tertiary institution for not only our young people but that of the Pacific Region also.

We also ask Mr. Speaker that the Chair of PIFS who is also Fiji's Prime Minister, to be kind and understanding and just to be fair - provide the resources to everyone. On the grant that has been passed in Parliament - disburse the grant in a timely manner and pay in full, not use it as a ransom or as a bargaining chip to undermine the work of USP while making self-serving demands that cause problems, leading to far-reaching implications like the relocation of the Office of the USP Vice-Chancellor to Samoa.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Is it legal?

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Very much. Just because you were not part of it, it does not mean that it is illegal.

We ask the new Chair of PIFS (who is just sitting across the room here), be a statesman and not use derogatory, degrading remarks which we have been hearing made by him in the past few days when USP has been brought up, so we just ask him to be a statesman and a gentleman.

Referring briefly, Mr. Speaker, to the review of the USP 2018 Annual Report recommendations - will the BDO Report, together with the USP Council Commission's Action Plan be tabled in Parliament, Mr. Speaker, and that was to be by the mover of this motion in February 2020, so where is it, Mr. Speaker? Secondly, another recommendation was that, USP and FRCS continue to negotiate and find a solution.

Mr. Speaker, I recall that the last time Fiji held the Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum was in 2006. Unsurprisingly, the events of 5th December, 2006 which we are all familiar with, resulted in Fiji being stripped off its role as Forum Chair, yet again in an unstable period in our nation's history and the history of the Pacific Islands Forum. As I understand, that notification of denunciation has been received from five of the 18 Forum Member States so perhaps, Mr. Speaker, bringing back the position of Roving Ambassador would better serve the purpose of also being a mender of broken relationships and that the chair leaves behind a legacy that he would wish to be remembered for. In doing so, we ask that the person taking up this position of Roving Ambassador is a local who can see the bigger picture, has Fiji's interest at heart, and not bringing in someone from overseas who will be here today and gone tomorrow, citing family or personal reasons for their early exit.

In this, Mr. Speaker, Fiji has an opportunity in its role as chair to demonstrate and restore regional solidarity to an increasingly fragmented Pacific Region. I urge the government, Mr. Speaker, to step out of its comfort zone and for once, lead through consultations, have proper *talanoa* dialogue and consistently engage with all member states and across all regional agenda and issues.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, if there is one thing we have learnt in the past year, it is that we cannot overcome our challenges alone and in isolation of each other and our neighbouring Pacific Island countries. Mr. Speaker, we pray and hope that the new chair will allow our young people to dream their dreams so that their vision goes beyond the horizon.

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

Honourable Members, time moves on. I have the list of Members who have yet to speak. I had to rearrange it. The next speaker will be the Honourable Qionibaravi, followed by Honourable Nawaikula, followed by the Honourable Tikoduadua and the Honourable Tuisawau. That is the order.

Before we take that, we will break for lunch and Honourable Qionibaravi will be the first speaker after lunch, so this time be on time. We break for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.28 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.33 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on the motion and I give the floor to the Honourable Qionibaravi. You have the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Cabinet Members and Honourable Leader of the Opposition, I rise to contribute to the debate on the motion before the House that Parliament authorise the ratification of the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum.

Before I continue with my contribution to the debate, I would like to offer my sincere apologies to you, Mr. Speaker, Sir and the Honourable Members of the House for causing a little bit of confusion before lunch today. I was on mute and I found it difficult to press the button to unmute, so my sincere apology, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the people of the Pacific are the beneficiaries of our visionary leaders, who work together to implement their collective vision for a more secure future for the people of the Pacific by establishing the PIF in August 1971, as the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation. Their aim was to cooperate regionally on common concerns through making the most of what was often very little in terms of resources.

The late *Turaga Bale na Tui Nayau*, who had also led our young nation to gain Independence and his Government had contributed greatly in terms of major assets, including the Monasavu Hydro Project, the Vaturu Water Dam, the construction of major highways, bridges and airstrips around Fiji, to name just are few. He was a great leader of the region, formulating the phrase “*The Pacific Way*” which is strongly advocated and practised. This philosophy guided the region’s leaders’ approach to political, economic and social challenges.

I also acknowledge the Prime Ministers who had followed the *Turaga Bale na Tui Nayau* - Major-General (Ret’d) Rabuka, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhry, the late Mr. Laisenia Qarase and Honourable Bainimarama. The Pacific Way is now coined as the Talanoa Dialogue which Fiji successfully introduced at the COP 23, where our Honourable Prime Minister put Fiji on the world map in co-chairing COP 23 with Sweden.

Mr. Speaker, the Government championed *talanoa* in international forums but sadly, it cannot practice this at home. The most recent example being the lack of *talanoa* or consultation on Bill No. 17 of 2021, now Act 22 of 2021. Consultation is happening after the fact with the people and landowners are merely informed rather than participate in the preparation of the law that has far-reaching effects on the fundamental property rights as landowners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we acknowledge the supportive role of the Pacific Islands Forum which had enabled Fiji’s leadership achievements under COP 23. Fiji has a duty of care for smaller island states and not just as its national interest. Fiji is well positioned to use the Pacific Way as means of engagement with the region. Fiji should have the political will and moral responsibility to do it because the Pacific Island Leaders look up to Fiji as the centre of the Pacific. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I endorse the earlier call to the position of Roving Ambassador for the Pacific be promptly considered by Government.

At this juncture, I would like to digress and pay tribute to the retired Roving Ambassador for the Pacific, the late Mrs. Litia Makutu Mawi, a fellow old girl, who had earnestly carried out the responsibilities for the betterment of Fiji and the Pacific nations. I acknowledge her husband, Mr. Pita Mawi, their children and grandchildren, who had all contributed to their mother and grandmother’s many years of exceptional public service to our nation. May she rest in peace, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, the recruitment of a Roving Ambassador for the Pacific would ensure that he or she is able to dialogue with Pacific Leaders on problematic issues, so that we do not repeat the current impasse where our Micronesian leaders have started the process to leave the Pacific Islands Forum. The fracturing of our region is squarely at the hands of our current crop of leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the *Turaga Bale na Tui Nayau*, former Prime Minister and President of Fiji had coined *The Pacific Way*, his vision was for a Pacific where people of different races, opinions and cultures can live and work together for the good of all, can differ without rancour, govern without malice and accept responsibility as reasonable people intent on serving the interest of all. That, Sir, is the commitment and responsibility that is called of us as national leaders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we, the Members of the House, have a solemn duty to lead wisely for the benefit of the people of Fiji. We have a duty to prepare our young men and women through our homes, the churches and the education system to have a vision for their future.

Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a great crisis in Fiji now more than ever. We must come together just as the regional leaders did in the 1960s and 1970s. They learned to work together for the good of the people. We, the Members of this august House, must also come together. We should begin with our working collectively in a bipartisan approach to tackle the many issues before the nation, starting with COVID-19.

Just as the establishment of the regional organisations in the 1960s and 1970s, gave the people of the Pacific hope for their future, the coming together of the two sides of the House will be such a boost to the people of our beloved Fiji. I call on you, Honourable Prime Minister, to accept the hands that is offered across the aisle, let us work together, let us *talanoa* and device solutions for the good of our people, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I conclude with the quote from our late eminent Statesman, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who said and I quote: "In a multiracial society, trust, understanding and tolerance are the cornerstone of peace and order."

I support the motion before the House.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please, allow me to thank you most sincerely before I get into the motion, for welcoming me back into the House and with that the prayers, the rosaries and the novenas and the support of many people. With that, Mr. Speaker, the lawyers Mr. Valenitabua Senior and Junior, Mr. Jon Apted and Mr. Graham Leung all these people have allowed you by their efforts to invite me back into this House this morning. So, thank you very much and that is from my heart.

With that, Mr. Speaker, let me say that the Court scrutinised what your Office did and I am happy to say that his conclusion is that the Court finds the Speaker acted in accordance with the Constitution of the Law at all times. What the Court was not happy about is the action of the Supervisor of Elections. The Court found that he acted unlawfully. Firstly, the Court said my use of this name here, "Nawaikula". I do not have to be and this applies to everyone, we do not have to be registered in the Birth Certificate to use another name and that goes by common use and that is common law.

The concern there is that, as Supervisor of Elections, he should know what laws applies. The second point that the Court said was that, he had a discretion, the SOE did not allow the matter to go to

this stage because he has a lot of discretion. He could have just said, alright, fair enough, Mr. Nawaikula, I will give you an opportunity to change it. So, that is the concern and that is the reason why it concluded that he acted unlawfully contrary to law and disproportionately.

That is very serious for the Office of the Supervisor of Elections. More serious than that, he took advantage of the Office of the Speaker and it caused great embarrassing to the Office of the Speaker, in acting unlawfully that allowed the Speaker to terminate my seat unnecessarily because of his unlawful act. The Speaker has to do that

However, in any way, there is a good thing that came out of this. The decision yesterday was a win for democracy because in any democracy, we need a very strong judiciary in the court process. The decision yesterday was a message out to the ordinary people that you can rely on the rule of law. You can rely on the independence of the Court to protect you. So, for that, I am very, very happy, Mr. Speaker.

Now, coming to the motion. The motion is asking Parliament to approve that Fiji ratify the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum. This side of the House agrees and will support that but in supporting that, there are many serious questions, let me say this, Mr. Speaker, which the Government must answer and I wish to start off by putting those questions across to the other side. I am sorry that the Honourable Attorney-General is not here but I would have requested him to note down these questions and then answer them during his right of reply, because these are the questions that go begging in relation to the obligation that we are being asked for.

We want to ratify this, it is not just a document; its history has grown from the 1960s. You might remember, Mr. Speaker, the South Pacific Commission then at a meeting in Papua New Guinea, the Honourable Prime Minister at the time, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara with Sir Michael Somare, walked out because they were dictated upon by the colonialists, and from there gave birth to this Forum. First, it became the South Pacific Forum, then later became the Pacific Islands Forum so they did extend that, and that is the history of it.

The questions that go begging, now that Parliament is being asked to ratify this, and if the Honourable Minister or Attorney-General can answer this, he should advise the House as to the reason for the delay? Why has it taken 16 years for the Government to ratify something which we have legacy, something which Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, in his good vision has established, something that brings the cultures, the regions of the Pacific together? That is the first question, and he is just walking in.

Let me just repeat that - I was just telling Mr. Speaker that in your right of reply, can you, please, inform the House the reason why it has taken 16 years from 2005 to now, what is the cause of delay? The second question that goes begging with this is, why did Fiji decide to form a rival - PIDF in 2011? Here, we have the sacred organisation that was started by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and then we decided in 2011 to start a rival organisation, manned especially by the Melanesians. What is the reason for that? Could you, please, answer that in your right of reply - you do not have to say it here? Give the reason why you decided that, and what is the delay?

The other question is, if the Honourable Attorney-General can advise the House as to why was Fiji suspended from the Forum in 2008? What were the reasons? Then, if he could also advise us the reason why - when Fiji was then a member and now that we are going in to ratify this - why did Fiji not commit itself to holding the General Elections in March 2009, as recommended. What happened at that time?

The Forum recommended and demanded Fiji to hold the General Elections in 2009, and we all know what happened; instead of holding the Elections, that side of the House abrogated the 1997 Constitution.

In April, there was a march ...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You are still living in that era.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, let me answer that. The Honourable Minister is saying that we are still living in that era - it is your legacy, it is your history that defines and creates what you are. If you do not go back to make good to what happened then, what hope do we have? You are an academic, you went to USP, you should know.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Are you looking at the future or are you looking at the past?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Without the past, you cannot have a better future, and the whole reason why we are ratifying this is the past, and let me tell the Honourable Minister what the past is. The past is like this: Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara was one of the father figures that formulated the Forum; for what? Regionalism - to protect all those member States so that none of them were left behind, so that Tuvalu is not left behind, so that Tonga is not left behind because that is our Pacific culture - *vuvale*, the Pacific Way and *talanoa* which you were trying to adopt, the other side.

You should read it. Those were established by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and I am recommending to them, go read the Pacific Way. You are now using what was defined by who? By Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara more than 30 years ago - *vuvale*, the Pacific way, consensus and *talanoa* and you moved out of that. You are only paying lip service to that. You are not living it. That is my point.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- That is your view.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is not my view, that is a fact. What I am trying to tell that side is - let us not ratify this simply to get some money because you have got no money. You want donations from Australia and New Zealand. That is your reason. That is your reason.

Mr. Speaker, I am telling them that we give our commitment. We should commit ourselves to the values and obligations in the 2005 Agreement and a signature for that has been recommended - let us have a Roving Ambassador. I can tell the other side what they have done. Regionalism - where are examples of regionalism? Are you supporting USP? You are interfering with USP and because of that, they have run away to Nauru.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Talk to the NFP Leader!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Air Pacific, Mr. Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Fiji Airways!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Why did you change it to Fiji Airways? Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara specifically put that name there, Air Pacific because we were concerned for Niue, Samoa, all those others.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And because of some kind of nasty nationalism, they took that away and put Fiji Airways there, so where is your commitment to regionalism? Mr. Speaker, you know I talk about Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara a lot of times and I sincerely feel that we have not given him enough credit. This was one of his babies and it is all about ...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- The baby has grown up.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, let us be serious. When we talk here, we talk on merit. When you answer me, you talk on merit.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Do not have a conversation between you two.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The reason is that I support values and obligations of the Pacific Islands Forum. It is all about regionalism and one of the reasons for that was because Ratu Mara saw that. In a big country you cannot leave others behind and that is why he coined that term, the Pacific way, *vuvale* and all those, and that is why we are living it. But I am saying here is that, that side of the House has not committed itself to regionalism and the example that I have given was USP.

There is another example that the Honourable Minister can answer to us. Why do you have to have two universities? You have the University of the South Pacific, then you also have Fiji National University - you can go here to study law and the government is paying for both. Stupid! Very stupid! Government is paying FNU, government is paying about 50 percent, spending money here and spending money there. My only conclusion is stupidity, Mr. Speaker. They can laugh but you tell me. What is the reason?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What about Samoa?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Samoa? It does not matter. Solomon Islands can start their own university, but in Fiji, what is the reason for having two universities and you pay for this university and you pay for that one. You pay for the salaries of the tutors and lecturers here and you also pay for the tutors and lecturers there. Stupidity! That is why you lost all this money. In 16 years you have lost all the money. Reckless! This kind of recklessness and now no money.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, he is telling me to shut up. The Honourable Prime Minister is telling me to shut up.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, he is telling you to sit down.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Prime Minister is telling me to sit down. Maybe he does not want to listen to this because it is hurting him.

You lost all this money. Where is your money? You do not have any money. This year alone, this House has been asked to pass a debt of \$2 billion. Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$2 billion for what? My point is this, it is alright to ratify but let us give some full commitment, let us leave it. What did we do to Palau? We did not support Palau and that caused the US to shame us. You were not invited. When the President of the US invited the leaders to the climate change, Fiji was left out. The Marshall Islands was invited, so you should read between the lines what is the message there and what is the message from the USA. Please, this is why I am asking...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you for the entertainment.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is not an entertainment, you are an entertainer, you are an entertainer.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You are lying, that is your problem.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You are the liar!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my point is this, let us have a Roving Ambassador and with a Roving Ambassador, we can have someone who can go around the Region to see their needs to enhance all those corporations.

My second request is please, let us give a commitment, let us not destroy what Ratu Mara has put for us. Ratu Mara put USP there and Air Pacific there, and what do we do? We are destroying that. That is the best we can ask for. We ratify but we commit ourselves. Do not just ratify because you want money and aid from Australia and New Zealand. Please, no.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to debate. I now give the floor to the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This Agreement introduced by way of a motion for ratification has undergone intense scrutiny by the Honourable Members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. I am also a Member of this Committee and had the opportunity to hear and question organisations and regional experts on the aspects of the Agreement and the Pacific Way, the basis of the Convention of the then South Pacific Forum in 1971.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 50 years on, despite the Pacific Islands Forum always being headquartered in Fiji, it changed largely due to the vision and statesmanship of a founder leader of the Forum - Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. We are becoming the last Pacific Islands Forum member nation to ratify the 2005 Agreement. In the year when Fiji became the Chair of the PIF, it is even more important for ratification as the nation is not only the headquarters of PIF, but the depository of the Agreement. The ratification will give us *locus standi* and reaffirm our position not only as the founder member, but as a regional leader.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report of the Committee and the recommendations clearly show the work that the Honourable Members put into the scrutiny process. Many pertinent questions were asked of those who made submissions, including the then Madam Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A clear and unmistakable threat emerged from this scrutiny and that is the Pacific Way of doing things in the region of which we are supposed to be a leader.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Fiji version of the Pacific Way is *talanoa*. We have achieved many great things in the past through *talanoa* - by talking to each other, instead of talking at each other. Despite our own internal political squabbles, compounded by political upheavals which did antagonise our regional friends because Fiji is the one that introduced *The Pacific Way*, expanding the infamous *talanoa* into regional dialogue, negotiation and consensus building. This brilliant initiative came from our Prime Minister at the time of Independence, the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, who a year later, was instrumental in forging regional solidarity to form the Forum to deal with issues in the Pacific way by talking and not forcing.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we have stumbled and veered our course, so much so that we became an outcast amongst those who had stood shoulder to shoulder with us in our triumphant days and during our times of tragedies. Fiji was suspended from the Forum in 2009 due to non-compliance of resolutions and assurances by us to return to democracy. *Talanoa* and the Pacific way were confined to the dust bin which effectively meant crashing the late Ratu Mara's vision. They were replaced with 'my way' or the 'highway syndrome'.

Regionalism and duty of care for Smaller Island States was ignored by the then Military Government. Narrow and parochial interest shaped the then Government's policies and vision on what regionalism should be. The Military Government wanted everyone to dance to their tune. A good example of this was taking away of the regional Fiji School of Medicine (FSM) and converting it as an institution under the then newly created Fiji National University.

Sir, FSM had a proud regional reputation but Fiji did not care and this has continued unabated, even after resumption of democracy. The Government's obsession with the University of the South Pacific (USP) is a painful example of this. It ultimately led to the expulsion and declaration of *persona non grata* of USP Vice Chancellor, Professor Pal Ahluwalia. This act by Fiji was the worst example of trashing regional solidarity and the Pacific way. Fiji has not stopped there. The Government has withheld grant to USP until it also complies with its directives. Now that is a shame, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on Monday, 16th August, 2021, the Honourable Prime Minister confirmed his obsession with USP when he meandered and started attacking the NFP leaders, Honourable Professor Prasad, Honourable Qereqeretabua and I instead of correctly answering my questions. Obviously, irked by NFP leader's statement early (glitch) rightly condemned the Honourable Prime Minister for labelling the citizens of Fiji as "uneducated" to justify his reason for not having lockdown. The Honourable Prime Minister told Honourable Professor Prasad to go and help the students at the corrupt University of the South Pacific. Now, this is the sad indictment of affairs that we have now, Mr. Speaker.

Most of all, Fiji lost its Micronesian friends by derailing their hopes of a Micronesian candidate becoming the next Secretary-General of PIF. Now that Fiji has become PIF Chair, it is time to reset the regional compass and restore regional dignity and solidarity. At least, for once, the Honourable Prime Minister adopted the Pacific Way and apologised to our Micronesian friends. He should do the same to the region over Fiji's attitude and actions towards the governance of USP and re-establish the supremacy of regional solidarity and unity over self-serving interest of our Government.

In this regard, the Honourable Prime Minister should not be swayed by anyone in his capacity as PIF Chair, including the Honourable Attorney-General, who has led Government's charge to try and discredit a regional institution. Mr. Speaker, I support the motion that is before the House today.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution. I now give the floor to the Honourable Tuisawau. You have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister and Cabinet and Leader of the Opposition, I rise to contribute to the debate on the motion to ratify the 2005 PIF's Agreement. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are living in extraordinary times and need to take extraordinary measures to cushion the impact of changes that are currently taking place at a pace that we cannot control. We are currently facing three changes including globalisation or integration, the impact of climate change and most importantly the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Small Island Developing States, we must continue to realign ourselves so that we are not left behind and do not miss out as other nations progress through the necessary adjustment to adapt to the changing environment. It is time to revisit actions and initiatives taken by our former leaders and lessons to be learnt so that we can reposition ourselves not only in the region but in the broader international community. Through their long term vision, we become associated with a number of international and regional organisations.

The concept of regionalism and regional cooperation is still very relevant today as it was in 1971 when Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Fiji's Independence leader and statesman advocated the Pacific Way as already mentioned.

As a unique value engrained in our Pacific traditional culture as a basis for regional cooperation through *veilomani*, *veinanumi*, *veidokai* and *duavata*, that is, empathy, sympathy, mutual respect and deference as opposed to arrogance and self-interest. Fiji must return and advocate the Pacific way because it is obvious that we have lost our way in favour of self-interest under the FijiFirst Government.

On some of our Leaders' vision regarding Pacific regionalism, this includes a region:

- of peace, harmony, security, prosperity where we can live free and worthwhile lives where cultures and traditions and religious beliefs are valued, honoured and developed;
- respect for good governance, sustainable management of resources, democratic values and human rights; and
- partnerships with our neighbours and beyond.

It is the creation of our institutions and processes at the regional level with objectives to strengthen the ability of Pacific citizens and governments, to identify and tackle our said challenges, addressing capacity constraints difficult to address alone and to get us more working closer together and reduce our vulnerability.

Our existent regional architecture also incorporates an advisory, Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) made up of 10 inter-governmental organisations which already demonstrate the value of regionalism. This includes Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), University of the South Pacific, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), Pacific Community (SPC) and Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agencies (FFA), et cetera.

Forum members throughout history have worked together to share collective objectives particularly on issues of critical importance. We have worked together on collective diplomacies including within the UN Convention on Law of the Sea and Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Ongoing efforts by the Forum throughout its history to support self-determination is another issue for aspirations of Pacific Island Countries and Territories.

The establishment of the Pacific Islands Forums Fisheries Agencies in 1979 was to support the management control and development of the region tuna fishery.

In 1985 the Treaty of Rarotonga to ensure the Pacific region remains a nuclear free zone which is still relevant today. And of course, Pacific regional assistance to Nauru 2003 to 2009 and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) mission which has undertaken under the *Biketawa Declaration*.

In 2009 the State of Pacific Regional Report offers a 2050 vision of the Pacific Blue Continent which seeks to embrace Pacific Islands Forum leaders agreed vision on the Pacific. We, as a nation must continue to support Pacific regionalism, Sir and the vision and plans of our regional leaders as stated.

Let us not jeopardise that vie arrogant leadership. Fiji must exercise wisdom and vision to ensure that Pacific regionalism remains viable as we face the challenges of today and the future such as the COVID pandemic and climate change.

Sir, this is in line with 1.1.7 of the findings of the Committee, that is, and I quote: "Fiji has a duty of care for Small Island States and not just its national interest" and, of course, 1.1.8 in the Committee findings where it states, and I quote:

“Fiji is well positioned to use the Pacific Way as a means of engagement within the region. Fiji should have the political will and moral responsibility to do it because the Pacific Islands look to Fiji as the centre of the Pacific.”

With regards to PIF, a key issue is regional unity and this was undermined recently as the tussle for the position of the Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, as we had witnessed. The report indicated that the decision of five Micronesian States to withdraw from the 18-Member Forum in the wake of former Cook Islands Prime Minister, Henry Puna’s controversial selection as its next Secretary-General has splintered the grouping and sparked concern about the wider geopolitical ramifications.

Marshall Islands’ diplomat beaten to the PIF’s top job who believed the gentleman’s agreement meant it was the Bloc’s turn to hold the role, which is the Micronesian Bloc, who was among members of the panel discussion. He congratulated Puna on his success and wished him luck for his future but warned Pacific regionalism was suffering from serious flaws at the very time where effective regional approaches were needed the most. “The withdrawal of the Micronesian members was much more than a difficult election”, he mentioned.

We have honestly struggled to take our home-grown priorities into the large organisations. We are often shunted off into smaller states grouping (the Small Island States) whose outcomes generally do not agree to see the light of day. It is a time for compromise, Sir, however, we applaud the efforts which are currently being undertaken regarding the communications to the Micronesian States. Only three of the five Micronesian nations have formally started the 12-month withdrawal process with Nauru and Kiribati, the holdouts for now.

In a recent discussion, it was noted that the greater bureaucratisation of the Secretary-General’s process, along with other organisational changes within the Forum would help make the change of heart more appealing. Leaving the institution does not mean we are leaving the Pacific, our islands have not moved and we remain where we were on the map, and that would be a good starting point in the discussion with them.

Another panellist stated, and I quote:

“I believe it will undermine and fracture regionalism in a way we have not seen since the Forum’s inception in 1971. Again, this is a key issue in the recent PIF’s Leaders meeting, attempts were made to woo the Micronesian leaders back but we are not sure how that work as there was no concrete response.”

I support the suggestion by my colleagues in the appointment of a Pacific Roving Ambassador by the Pacific Islands Forum Chair, the Honourable Prime Minister with specific terms of reference to liaise with Micronesia and also to re-engage with our Pacific partners. I refer to findings 1.1.5 in the Committee Report, which states and I quote, “By ratifying, Fiji would strengthen its leadership role and avoid fragmentation of the Pacific Islands Forum which look to Fiji for guidance on issues of national interest”.

With reference to finding 1.1.11 in the Report, which states and I quote, “Fiji should ratify the 2005 PIFs Agreement as Pacific regionalism and the Blue Pacific depended on it - PIF, SPC, FFA and all CROP agencies depend on it. The future of our region, the education of our children in regional institutions depends on it. As incoming Chair of the PIF in this post COVID-19 era, Fiji has to continue to protect the Pacific and take on the reins of Pacific’s regionalism and save the vulnerable populations”.

With reference to CROP which USP is a member, we know the efforts of the Fiji Government at USP, however, they may view it but the fact of the matter is that, it is undermining the University of the South Pacific and also the current utterances by the Honourable Prime Minister that Fiji's young people are attending a corrupt institution as USP. I urge the Fiji Government to please stop undermining USP, pay its contribution and play its leadership role as PIF's Chair in accordance with the sentiments expressed in the findings of the Committee.

In particular, we have seen the recent deportation of the Vice-Chancellor of USP and again, as I had mentioned before, there is a need, Sir, to revise our immigration laws in terms of the deportation rules. Again, in line with what is in the Committee findings, Fiji has a duty of care for small island States and not just its national interest.

Sir, I refer to the other issues which are impacting on PIFS, particularly the decolonisation process and that was one of the original purposes - the original noble intentions of the Pacific Islands Forum. I refer in particular to New Caledonia and West Papua. Let me read PIF's communique on 8th, October 2020, I quote.

“The Chair of PIF has reaffirmed the importance of open and constructive dialogue on the human rights situation in West Papua. In line with the Forum Leader's decision in Tuvalu in 2019, the Forum Chair has this week written to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights requesting an update on the invitation for a mission to West Papua.

The Forum's Chair further reaffirmed the Forum Leader's call for parties to protect and uphold the human rights of all residents and to work to address the root causes of the conflict by peaceful means. This comes following the recent escalations in West Papua including the shooting death of Pastor Yerima Zanambani last week.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretary-General Dame Meg Taylor echoed concerns about recent reporting and fresh allegations of human rights situation in West Papua. She stated, without the appropriate access of independent media, civil society or human rights groups in West Papua, it is difficult to verify the reports from opposing groups. Nevertheless the reports and footage are disparaging and I remain deeply troubled with the conflict and human rights abuses in the Region. I recognise that COVID-19 pandemic has refocused the Region's attention and rightfully so, however, this does not mean that we should negate our continued advocacy efforts on key Forum priorities such as the situation in West Papua.

We continue to actively advocate and engage on urgent priorities such as climate change and oceans in addition to that. The issue of West Papua has been on the Leader's agenda since the year 2000 and through the involvement with Pacific civil society became the standing Leader's agenda in 2015.”

Sir, I must emphasise that Fiji must support West Papua and Kanaki as associate non-Forum members of PIFS, other regional organisations and MSG. I urge the Pacific Islands Forum, through the Chair, our Honourable Prime Minister of Fiji, to urgently pursue and realise the proposed and agreed Pacific Islands Forum mission to West Papua as agreed by our leaders.

On the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), as already addressed by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, I note in the Budget the amount of \$1.2 million for their operations. As stated, the PIDF is duplicating the Forum and other established regional organisations and there is a need to wind it down. I would propose that \$500,000 of the \$1.2 million savings should establish a liaison office for West Papua and Kanaki in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ensure continued dialogue between the

Kanaks, West Papuans and colonising states of France and Indonesia, with the objective of achieving self-rule and self-determination for the Kanakis and the West Papuans as soon as practicable.

Thank you, and I support the motion to ratify the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I give the floor to the Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. You have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank you for the opportunity for allowing me to contribute to this debate on the motion to approve that Fiji ratify the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Forum was established, as we all know, as a regional organisation for a purpose, and that was to amplify the collective voice of Small Island Developing States in the Pacific, specifically on matters of utmost regional importance at the international forum. I am not going to - like the previous speakers - engage in nonsensical arguments about historical things that have happened before and things that are not relative.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But they are important.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Yes, but there is a forum for it.

Let us not forget the great achievements made through the cooperation of the Forum island countries in the past in relation to nuclear testing, in relation to fisheries resources, in relation to security, in relation to climate change, in relation to environmental protection and importantly, in relation to trade and there remains, Mr. Speaker, Sir, much more unrealised potential for the Forum to realise.

The Opposition's insinuation that Fiji is not playing its part in the Forum, is actually very misguided. Fiji is the founding member of the Pacific Islands Forum and nothing can change that. We are the Forum Leaders Chair and the Chair of the Trade Ministers Forum. We actively participate in the Forum, trade and other related Forums that will lead to strengthening of regional integration for the benefit of its people. We play a pivotal role in bringing the Region together as a strong, trade and economic bloc.

Our participation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Forum is not passive, it will never be passive. We stand by the fact that we always say that we must always protect our policy space at the same time. We are a developing country and we must do so. We are helping shape the regional agenda, weather issues related to climate change, socio-economic issues or trade related issues. That is why it is important that Fiji officially ratifies the amended 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not to say that we are not active or we were not active participants in the Forum, *au contraire*, we have been. Fiji is a regional leader and the current Forum leaders Chair will show commitment and provide confidence to other members and also for other Pacific Island countries willing to join the Forum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the trade front, regional grouping such as the Forum are becoming more important now due to increase in globalisation. Every effort is being made to simulate intra, regional and global trade to raise living standards, to provide employment and to enable consumers to enjoy a greater variety of goods. Trade Agreement, such as the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement, the success of the Cotonou Agreement and the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement are all produced, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with a shared vision by the Pacific, not only preferential Trade Agreements by multilateral

Trade Agreements such as the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, are also negotiated collectively as a Region, so that our voices are heard by large developed countries.

We get into arguments and we forget about what Fiji has done and what Fiji does for the whole of the Pacific. Not only preferential Trade Agreements, but multilateral Trade Agreements. People must remember that such as the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement are negotiated collectively, as I said - collectively as a Region, so that all our voices are heard by the large developed countries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji at the Forum Trade Ministers Meeting held in July 2021, set a regional target also for vaccination against COVID-19. Having an integrated regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic will allow for increased benefits for our economies and the livelihoods of the Pacific people. Through the years, the Pacific Region has weathered numerous setbacks and challenges by remaining united and addressing our problems together, and ratifying this Agreement will strengthen our approach through regionalism and our solidarity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's leadership in the Forum will ensure that the regional institution looks at collective responses and solidarity that will enable economic recovery. The Pacific's greatest strength is our partnership, our shared vision and goal, and we need to leverage this and use it. And I am sure everyone speaks the same language when I say that. They all do that, just want to say the different way. And we need to leverage this and use it as a platform to strengthen our hub status and use that as a basis to integrate into the global trade arena.

Mr. Speaker Sir, with those few words, I support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the floor on this particular issue. I rise as the Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs to speak in response to some of the issues raised as well as in support of the motion that is being tabled that Parliament ratifies the 2005 Agreement establishing the Pacific Islands Forum. This is evident through our commitment in our National Budget for this financial year and the years before.

I will spare no effort, Mr. Speaker, to continue to work with my colleague leaders and ensure that these regional organisations continue to serve their purpose. It is also important to say that with these commitments, regional organisations also have standards and expectations that they need to meet. They need to be accountable, failing this, Mr. Speaker, we will also not shy away from setting the record straight and ensure that they are made accountable. Why should it not be? My Government functions on the principle of good governance, as I emphasised yesterday in responding to Honourable Bulanauca, Honourable Qereqeretabua and, of course, the Honourable Leader of NFP.

Mr. Speaker, the Pacific Islands Forum is the premier political regional body in the Region and we have just celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Pacific Islands Forum early this month with the theme, "Security and Prosperity in Unity". None of them mentioned this in all their irrelevant statements. In looking at the journey of the Forum over the last 50 years, Mr. Speaker, there is much that the Region has achieved together including collective action on decolonisation, nuclear disarmament, sustainable oceans management, and of course our push for the greater climate action.

In view of those achievements, I recognise the important juncture in which Fiji is taking up the chairmanship of the Pacific Islands Forum. A key focus of my tenure as Chair will therefore be to restore our regional solidarity which is very important and rebuild trust and confidence in our relationship as a Forum family. I intend to do just that, Mr. Speaker. Most assuring was the support of the President of

the United States of America, first time ever, who addressed the Forum for the first time since his establishment, on my invitation.

This is the level of commitment that we are talking about in our regional and international collaboration. Pacific leaders have entrusted me with the responsibility to lead the political dialogue process to resolve the current impasse in the Region. I am pleased that the political dialogue process that Fiji proposed has been approved by all Pacific countries and I am fully committed to have ongoing dialogue with our Micronesian family to nurture understanding and find an amicable resolution.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding our regional political challenges, our long term aspirations and visions on where we are headed as a Region and we will need to remain firmly on our horizon, I am also pleased that during Fiji's chairmanship, the Region will be considering and adopting the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. This is the first for the Pacific Islands Forum; none of them mentioned this.

The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent will personify our ambitions for a sustainable and inclusive future for all Pacific people where no one will be left behind. It will be our shared vision. It will uphold the cultural, economic and strategic aspirations of all peoples and States across our Blue Pacific Continent. Fiji is leading this work with Vanuatu and we intend to approve the strategy when the Pacific Forum Leaders meet in Fiji in early 2022.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, connected to this is the quality and the type of Pacific regionalism required to address our current and emerging challenges, in looking at the changing priorities, the geo-political dynamics and competing interests in the region. Fiji proposed in Tuvalu in 2019 that there be a review of the Regional Architecture. This was based on the need for a Regional Architecture that is fit for a purpose, so that we are able to achieve our Sustainable Development Goals. I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, that this proposal was approved by the Leaders in 2019 and this work is now ongoing. Again, none of them knows this, none of them understood this. They are all speaking on irrelevant statements.

The review of the Regional Architecture, Mr. Speaker, will go hand in hand with the development of the 2050 Strategy and will be the defining aspect of the 2050 Strategy. This review will address all the issues raised today regarding our regional institutions. It will ensure that we have a Regional Architecture that is fit for a purpose, responsive to its members, relevant, and works for the interests of our Pacific people.

I will also add here, Mr. Speaker, that within the Regional Architecture, we see the role of the PIDF been complementary to the PIF, as it brings a unique format to the region with the inclusion of the private sector and the civil society organisation in its fold. The PIF does not have this.

Mr. Speaker, collective action by sharing sovereignty has never been easy. As we look to the future, we see great potential for improved collaboration and cooperation in our Pacific region, a region that has supported Fiji in our global leadership achievements, and a region which Fiji has a duty of care as the hub. We see great opportunities for development and innovation. I see the commitment by Pacific Leaders for collective action.

I have heard their commitment to solidarity and unity and to a Pacific value at our Leaders Retreat two weeks ago. This is what makes us unique as a Pacific. This is our strength. It is what I share with the PIF, we would rely on to solve our differences, build trust and reaffirm our collective commitment for a better Pacific for all. I remain confident, Mr. Speaker, that as always, Fiji will do its part to emphasise unity and solidarity in the region, and to ensure that we remain committed to the goals and purpose of the PIF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly, as a founding member, host to Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, Fiji's ratification of this Agreement is an important step in forwarding and promoting regional solidarity and unity.

I thank the Chairperson and the Members of the Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs and Defence for their work and fully support their recommendation that Parliament ratifies the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum. But before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a couple of comments that have been made by Honourable Members of the Opposition who have been saying irrelevant statements here.

Honourable Qionibaravi and Honourable Kepa have been talking about the Roving Ambassador, we have a Roving Ambassador. The post of Roving Ambassador still exists in the Ministry. Given our chairmanship of the Pacific Islands Forum, we have one of the most respected person in the Pacific and former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, as my Special Envoy for the Pacific Islands Forum. This is in line with the Government's commitment to the region and he has been working nonstop, even before we took over the chairmanship. They do not know that.

Honourable Nawaikula has asked why has it taken long for Fiji to ratify, Fiji was suspended from the Forum - a decision the Pacific regretted. This is something that through our leadership, we will not allow any other country to go through. Hence our commitment to resolve the impasse facing the region now.

Fiji just fully joined the Forum in 2019 at the Leaders Meeting in Tuvalu. We began the ratification process after re-joining the Forum. This is the reason why we are here today, debating this motion, Mr. Speaker. It was unfortunate that it has taken us long to ratify this Agreement but it was outside of our control.

(Honourable N. Nawaikula interjects)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I have just explained that to Honourable Nawaikula, it went through this ear and went out the other ear. I hope Honourable Nawaikula and Honourable Tikoduadua understand this process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, USP and regionalism, even though we are committed to the operation of regional organisation, we also need to keep them accountable, Mr. Speaker. Honourable Members on the other side understand and know this, they are all ducking under the table and they do not want to face what is in front of them. We will not shy away from keeping regional organisations accountable. It is a position that we have always maintained in regional discussions, and we will continue to make.

We all know, Mr. Speaker, why we did not have the Elections in 2009, as everyone has been harping about, we all know why.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBERS.- Why?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Here, this is why. Remember this, this was the one on your table on the first day you were here.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Honourable Kepa, do you remember this? It was on your table the first day you came in.

(Honourable Member interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- That was your remark, that was your comment.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- For what?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- That you have not seen this before.

Honourable Tikoduadua, on regional dialogue, Mr. Speaker, it is important for everyone to know that Fiji is now leading the *talanoa* on resolving the impasse in the region. I have had the pleasure of meeting all the Pacific Island Leaders two weeks ago. I note that regionalism has not been excellent over the years. It continues to be a challenge, but I can confirm with everyone that Fiji's Chairmanship in the Forum will bring about the change the region deserves. We will try and reset the regional compass (not Honourable Tikoduadua's compass), at least, that is my commitment, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Tuisawau mentioned the Pacific Way. Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate the 50 years Anniversary of the PIF, it is clear we have come a long way. At the same time, we have also realised the many challenges that we have had at times. These challenges not only relate to our sustainable development but more so, our solidarity as a group.

The Pacific Way is what we have now, having a place in the political dialogue to resolve the issues we have at hand. This remains a value and principle of our leadership in the region. The Pacific Way, Mr. Speaker, will continue to be our means of regional engagement and cooperation. This is the commitment of my Government.

Mr. Speaker, on the duty of care to other Pacific Island States, in fact, this has always been a commitment of my Government and this is one of the reasons why we established the PIDF. We realised that even though we were suspended from the PIF, the Pacific countries are still dependent on us. We therefore, established the PIDF as a medium to channel our assistance and assist other countries.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, this is the reason why we established a new division of the Roving Ambassador in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We are development partners to countries in the region, Mr. Speaker. We have many Memorandum of Understanding with Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), and have been assisting them and we will continue to do this, Mr. Speaker, and I am confident to say this now. As I have said, the PIDF, has civil society participation which PIF did not have. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his contribution to the debate.

We now have the last speaker before the right of reply, the Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing. You have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the motion before the House and, of course, to lend my support to the motion that is being tabled, that is to ratify the 2005 Agreement establishing the Pacific Islands Forum.

Let me first acknowledge Honourable Members of the Opposition for supporting the motion and, of course, I do acknowledge our past Leaders as well - the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara; the late grand chief, Sir Michael Somare; and the so many other Leaders. Their vision remains and, of course, I think that is something that the current leadership, not only for Fiji but for the region is committed to, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Let me just put some context to the issue and answer some of the questions raised by the Honourable Nawaikula. The two serious questions as to why it has taken 60 years to ratify and a few other regional issues that I will try to answer very quickly, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let us go back down memory lane.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji was not suspended in 1987. I say that again, Fiji was not suspended in 1987 from the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), nor was it suspended in 2000. Let us separate Fiji as a sovereign country, and I say that again because that is very critical. Fiji is a sovereign country. It makes decisions on its own and, of course, we have Fiji as a member of the region and we have to understand the politics within Fiji and the politics within the region, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In 2008, we were suspended. Honourable Nawaikula did state that one of the reasons why the Forum was formed was for it not to be dictated by the colonialists and this is exactly why this re-emerged in 2008 because of the events that led into 2008, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is the logical process of reasoning behind the question that he is asking and why does it take us to ratify until now, today.

I am trying to get to this, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Fiji as a sovereign State, we stood up as a sovereign State. We stood up against the powers of the region and other Forum friends. We lost some of our few friends, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because Fiji as a sovereign State, has to decide what is good for the country and for the future of its people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Constitution was abrogated in 1987. He has not recovered from the events lately. I am talking about strategic paralysis. Look at his arguments about the university, so it tells us that he is still suffering from strategic paralysis. Let me finish, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You have April 2009, the 1997 Constitution was abrogated by you.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Fiji as a sovereign state, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and regionalism, Fiji's role within that regionalism and the politics within the region is something that we need to get to. As I have said, we lost a few friends. That is normal. That is part of shaping the nation and moving the nation forward. We are a small and young independent country, trying to make its footing in global issues and regional issues, so we are progressing slowly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are the events that shaped and moulded us, so that we can come to where we are today and we are better off than where we were years back. That was what I was trying to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We were suspended in 2008. Was it done in the Pacific way? I ask that question again, was it done in the Pacific way?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Because you broke the law.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- 1987? They were suspended in 1987. That is what he is trying to point out.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We were suspended, why is it taking so long? There was no Parliament between 2007 until 2014, because the ratification under the Constitution has to come through Parliament, so it is logical, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why it took so long.

Let me go on, in 2014 we had our friends back because they appreciated our Constitution. We had elections and what happened in the Forum? We were invited but participation was at ministerial level only. Until 2019, when the leader in Tuvalu, for the first time ever participated as a leader, we got back into PIFS in 2019. That is the logical process of reasoning that I am trying to tell this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So we picked up the document as a sovereign country, we looked into it and then the process began. So there we are today. It is logical.

Regionalism, Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite this, Fiji has always been actively involved with the issues of the region. We have never shied away ...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- USP?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I will come to USP later. We have never shied away from that responsibility and that responsibility will continue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we came together as a Region under Fiji's Presidency for COP with the Suva Declaration which finally ended up in the text of the Paris Agreement. There was a compromise in the language, instead of the 1.5, it peaked at 2 but worked towards 1.5 - that was Fiji's leadership in the Region because of the issues that confronted us. And it is the biggest threat we are facing today. We have not shied away from that responsibility. That is the Pacific Way.

The World Ocean Conference in 2017 and I happen to be wearing the badge for that Conference. It says the Sustainable Development Goals and in the middle you have the waves - that is the ocean. Fiji's leadership, together with Sweden and the ocean is so important to all Pacific Island Countries. Again, although we have talked about this regionalism and the issues, we have never forgotten our Pacific Island countries, particularly, the Small Island States, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

As alluded to by the Honourable Prime Minister, Fiji is now the Chair and through this chairmanship, the President Biden addressed the leaders and of course, he is working towards bringing back hopefully our Micronesian brothers again. These are the sovereign decisions that are taken by the leaders at a sovereign stage and we respect those decisions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I am optimistic that it does not take away Pacific regionalism and, of course, the Pacific Way. I am hopeful that through the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister, we will have our Micronesian brothers back at the Forum.

On Universities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, why create FNU when we have USP? Mr. Speaker, Sir, look at the developments that are happening within the region. Samoa is investing heavily on its own university.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- So, does that mean that Fiji does not need another university?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Solomon Islands have their own university and yet the Honourable Member comes up with this idea, with all due respect, asking about the logic behind FNU.

Sir, USP, it is unfortunate but I would say, this is my own personal opinion, I always likened Professor Grewal to Dr. Yash Ghai. He came into the country with good intentions, et cetera, but we are the ones that ruined and contributed towards the saga that is happening at USP. I am saying this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, particularly, my observation, the issue at USP is because of the political allegiance of Fijian academics that really corrupted or influenced the way Professor Grewal did his duties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, well before the USP saga, I came back and as Minister for Defence started asking our sources to bring us some information because I got questioned about USP in Brussels by the then Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa – what was happening in USP and if Fiji could allow the Vice Chancellor to continue with his role, et cetera, not interfere with the investigations. I asked the Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa, “What investigations are you talking about?” I came back into Fiji, dug to try and find out information at USP, I have come to the conclusion, Sir, I say that again, “it is the Fijian academics at the University of the South Pacific that greatly influenced the way he did what he did at the university and it is sad”. I leave it at that.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Defence. I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note that all the Members who have spoken, none of them have actually objected to the actual ratification of the treaty. However, they have, of course, made a number of comments. Sir, in respect of that, and a lot of that has in fact been covered very adequately by the Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Seruiratu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like to, if I could please seek your indulgence because a lot of the Members of the other side did raise a number of issues that were not particularly relevant to the ratification of the treaty itself. One of them was made by Honourable Tikoduadua about asking for the resignation of the Supervisor of the Elections because of the Court of Disputed Returns decision yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he would know as a former Permanent Secretary and someone who has worked as a civil servant that a number of times, there are challenges to administrative decisions and all the rulings do not necessarily go in the favour of the administrator who has made that decision. It does not, therefore, mean that, that person actually has to resign; it is a very cheap shot.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what they should be saying is that, obviously the courts are independent which they have claimed at other times that it is not. What they should be saying, as Honourable Nawaikula will tell you and we welcome him back, I may not necessarily agree with all the rationale or the ratio in the decision itself, but that is the Court’s ruling. And the court, in fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has said

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, thank you. The Honourable Attorney-General is misleading the House. I have never said anything of what he has just said in the last three minutes - that never came out on my intervention. I can give you the script. So, there is nothing about the Supervisor of Elections after all. I do not know where that came from. He is misleading the House and I would like the Honourable Attorney-General to withdraw it because it is not in my name.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we should be saying, as any good lawyer would tell us is that, this is what we call the development of jurisprudence. Laws are made then the courts actually interpret the laws where the law is open to interpretation. That is what we should be looking at, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make is that, Honourable Gavoka, spoke earlier on about getting the entire population vaccinated. At the moment, we are vaccinating people over the age of 18 years. It has been scientifically proven that the vaccines that is currently available is appropriate for those above the age of 18 years. I certainly do not want my four-year old daughter to be vaccinated at the moment because science does not tell us that it can be done. At the moment, some countries are trying out those over the age of 12 years, so I think it is really quite obtuse to suggest that we should vaccinate everyone without any science-backing to it.

The reality of the matter is, Honourable Gavoka, as a leader, needs to sort out Honourable Bulanauca who says we should not get vaccinated at all, that there is a chip in place. Again, science needs to be built up. Some countries are actually now saying they will vaccinate using Pfizer, in some countries over the age of 12, and some countries are now looking at Moderna, but certainly it has not come out in wholesale that all those people below the age of 18 years can actually be vaccinated, so we will wait until then.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in respect of the actual treaty itself all the Opposition Members spoke about Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and his contribution to the creation or his hand in the creation of PIFS, or in the lead up to PIFS. No one has ever questioned that. That is not the issue. We all acknowledge that. We all know that he was one of the leading statesman in the Pacific in particular from the newly independent states, and in fact when Fiji became independent, Samoa was one of the first colonised countries that became independent, followed by Fiji and then Papua New Guinea subsequently – that they were the people actually did this regional collaboration. We are not questioning that. Of course, however, we have to acknowledge the fact that times (since 1970s) have changed significantly. We all know that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a much higher level of literacy. We have a population demographic that is skewed towards people below the age of 40 or in some cases below the age of 18. We have more citizens in schools and universities. The proportion of females in universities and high schools is much higher than what it was in 1970 to 1975 or even 1980 or 1990. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have mobile phones where people have access to social media. We have more transnational crime in the Pacific transporting of people, drugs, et cetera.

We have, Mr. Speaker, Sir, large movements of people, Tongans, Samoans, Fijians living in Australia, New Zealand and West Coast of North America; higher frequency levels of climatic events. We have had over 13 events since 2016. The largest storm in the Southern Pacific came in 2016 and wiped off one-third of the value of our GDP in 36 hours.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, climate change is an existential threat. Tuvalu and Kiribati can go under water very soon with the current level of sea rises. The global temperature is rising at 1.2 degrees now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, pre-industrial level. We have, of course, climate refugees now across borders within borders. We have moved six villages to higher ground internally. There is another 40 that have been marked. None of what I have just said now were featured back in 1970 - things have changed, the way we interact.

We have a Forum Leaders Meeting through a digital meeting, none of that was possible back in the 1970s. We have to deal with these matters differently. These are new challenges, we have a pandemic

in place. All of these have changed since 1970. It does not, in any way, mean that those people who formed PIFS or the lead up to PIFS are, in any way, being questioned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it was the Honourable Nawaikula and some of the others talked about the Pacific Way, the *Vuvale*, et cetera, these should simply not be words, they need to be practised. Where was the *vuvale* spirit, Honourable Nawaikula in 1987 and in 2000, when people were being booted out? Where was that kind of family communal relationship with people? Where is the *vuvale* spirit that our Opposition Members are always obsessed with ethnicity rather than viewing every citizen of Fiji as one?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, the *Talanoa* spirit has been internationalised by our Prime Minister through the UNFCCC process through our hosting of COP or the Presidency.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Do not say 'Oh', it is actually a fact, it is a reality and you want to actually ignore that - this is the problem, you see.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You are empty drums making a lot of noise, you obfuscate issues, that is what you are, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. MEMBER.- *Oilei*.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The reality of the matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, Fiji is a leader in climate change. The Honourable Prime Minister is actually seen as a leader and indeed many people claim to be the father of the Small Island Developing States, not just in the Pacific, but in the Caribbean, in the Indian Ocean, it is because of this leadership, it is because of the leadership of Fiji.

You have Antonio Guterres over here, all of you were lining up to shake his hands, that is why he came to Fiji, because of that leadership, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and then Biden attending the Forum Leaders Meeting, digitally or non-digitally, no President of the USA has ever attended the Forum Leaders Meeting, and that is a fact. Now, if, as they claim, we have no credibility, no nouse about it, no leadership roles, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they would not have attended, Antonio Guterres would not have been here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, the credentials of Fiji is now so highly regarded, we have the Prime Minister just addressed a Leaders' Meeting that has been hosted by United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is now going to host the next COP 26 in Glasgow. Fiji is asked to contribute at various leadership in the Forum meetings and also internationally regarding finance and climate change, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Lalabalavu had asked, what is the practical implication of not ratifying this? Well in practice, it has made no impact. There has been no repercussions, notwithstanding the fact that we have not ratified, Fiji has been chosen to be the Chair, so in practical sense, there is no repercussions for Fiji, of course, we will be carrying out this administrative matter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they have also said that we have not followed the Pacific Way of consensus and they have used USP as an example. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have attended some of these meetings, and I can tell you, apart from the decisions that have not been adhering to basic laid out processes in the relevant charter of USP, the statute, the Standard Operating Procedures, the Council Members at the behest of power have berated the Fijian pro-Chancellor, selected by Fiji, his second term, no complaints about him, a former Ambassador of Fiji to Washington, no problems with him, the moment this raucous starts by

Pal and his crew (“Mortley crew”, I call them) then suddenly, even the Opposition is now berating a former Ambassador of Fiji, who has performed so immaculately in his role as a ProChancellor. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reports he gave have been debunked. They have undermined him significantly, both from this House and outside the House.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Shame, shame!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Professor Prasad, a former member of USP who has got specific interest in USP, has not made a single shred, not made a single statement in respect of ensuring, at the very least, that the reputation of Winston Thompson is protected.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Shame, shame!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- But for political reasons, they have slandered him, they have defamed him and they have also done that to the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, the Council talked about consensus in the Pacific way. The Council members have basically bulldozed their way, by having sheer numbers, by voting, and there was nothing consensual about that. We, ourselves, have said, “Let us have a consensual agreement”, but they bulldozed their way through that.

They do not come and mention this in Parliament. Not at all! No *vuvale*! No accountability, as the Honourable Prime Minister said. No governance structures, Mr. Speaker, Sir and yet, ironically, we are being accused of that. That is the irony in all of this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition had asked about Fiji’s contribution, et cetera. Sir, we are the largest grant member country. To put it into perspective, Nauru’s contribution to USP is \$127,000.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Very poor!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The President of Nauru, who led this charge for a few months, they contribute \$127,000 which is 0.003 percent. We contribute 80 percent. Now, that is just a member grant.

Since 2014, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has contributed about \$140 million to USP by way of TELS fees and Toppers fees, and I am not even taking into account those students who have gone in privately. Until today, as we speak, Fijian students attending USP who are on TELS or Toppers, we are still paying their fees. We have the largest number of students at the Laucala Bay Campus, so we are still contributing, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Nawaikula, sort of, in his zeal to protect USP at all costs, in fact, debunked the idea of Fiji having another university. He forgot that Fiji National University (FNU) is actually a consolidation of various other institutions that existed prior to FNU. The FNU is made up of the Fiji School of Medicine, the agricultural school, maritime school, the FNTC, so is it not better to bring it under one roof, reduce your administrative costs, reduce your operational costs and have one university? Of course, that University, Mr. Speaker, Sir, also offers courses to Fijians that USP does not offer. A number of courses offered at FNU is not offered at USP.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Doctors!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the kind of pedestrian-type of contributions we are getting. Even when Honourable Seruiratu said Samoa has its own, so what? That is different. *Areh!* What are we talking about?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is that, I think Honourable Nawaikula also missed the point and just to reiterate what Honourable Seruiratu highlighted, he asked, why were we suspended post-December 2006? But what we are trying to demonstrate, what Honourable Seruiratu is trying to demonstrate was that, in 1987 when Rabuka carried out two *coups* in Fiji, shot a bullet over here in this Chamber, two *coups* ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- And a bomb.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... we had five years of Decree-led Government. Despite that and despite the lot of atrocities that took place, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know most of you supported the 1987 *coup*, I know most of you supported the 2000 *coup*. Let us call a spade a spade. That is fine, that is why you do not want to talk about it. That is a fact. I mean, let us agree on that.

The fact of the matter is that, despite the two *coups*, despite the five years of Decree-led Government, Fiji was not suspended from the Forum. Despite the Prime Minister of Fiji at that point in time in 2000 being held captive for 56 days with members of his Cabinet, riots in Suva, despite that and then another Government being appointed without elections, Fiji still was not suspended from the Forum.

However, on 5th December, 2006, post that it gets suspended. What it demonstrates, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the mechanisms of the Forum, and that is what Honourable Seruiratu was saying. What it demonstrates and what it goes to show is what the Honourable Prime Minister was saying - the architecture of the Forum. What it demonstrates that geo-political influences had an influence on the decisions made by the Forum. A lot of people do not realise that in 1987, we still had the Soviet Union. A lot of people do not realise that all these things actually had a decision of geo-political considerations. Honourable Nawaikula, that is what we are trying to demonstrate to you. I know there is a kind of amnesia regarding pre-5th December, 2006, but if you want to contribute, you need to be able to talk about these matters openly in a transparent manner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we talk about standards and adherence to international standards. Just very briefly, it is this Government that has ensured the ratification of the nine core international Conventions - ICPA, ICCPR, Convention on Disabled Persons, Convention Against Torture, all those Conventions were ratified by this Government. The removal of the proviso, I think in Article 12, on CERD, all of that was done by this Government – the Bainimarama-led Government and the FijiFirst Government. We need to be able to acknowledge that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I sometimes listen to what Honourable Members talk about and the way they talk, Epeli Hau'ofa who was an academic, those of you who do follow the academia, Honourable Professor Prasad should know this, he was based at USP. He was a Sociologist too and in one of his readings, he says through his observation that, 'in the Pacific at times, it is the elite who decide what is culture and it is the commoners or the poor people who are supposed to live that culture.' And I think that is completely demonstrative of the SODELPA philosophy that we are seeing today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I recommend that we support this motion.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move the suspension motion. You have the floor.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Very briefly under Schedule 2, we have eight Oral Questions and one Written Question and thus, the request to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on the motion. Is there anyone wishing to take the floor.

There being none, I call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to ask if there is any other thing you would like to add?

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- No, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- If there is none, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will take a break. The House is suspended for half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.15 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 4.46 p.m.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Contact Tracing and Swabbing - COVID-19 (Question No. 164/2021)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament if contact tracing and swabbing of people suspected of COVID-19 has stopped?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Mr Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member, for that question.

Mr. Speaker, contact tracing is a key component of a Public Health Response to any infectious disease and I alluded to this in great detail in my Ministerial Statement on Monday and it is important for interrupting change of transmission. It is the process of identifying, assessing and quarantining people who have been exposed to someone who has been affected to the COVID-19 virus. It could also help people identify those who are at risk of developing severe disease and know them earlier so that if they had been exposed, we could actually rescue them or get medical help quicker to them.

The principles of contact tracing remain the same whether we are dealing with the old variant or the newly identified variant. While this variant is more transmissible, timely contact tracing as part of the quarantine contact is even more important. We have also used the digital proximal tracing which is like the CareFiji App and the gist of digital contact tracing speed and accuracy.

Mr. Speaker, from mid-June the current COVID-19 outbreak specifically in Viti Levu, the Suva-Nasinu Containment areas continues to escalate, with positivity rates going above 10 percent which meant that there were many cases in the community. Throughout the outbreak until after 22nd of July, Fiji was testing 3.5 to 4.5 per thousand population which is the recommended level by WHO and partner universities when you have community transmission to the extent which we have.

Therefore as a strategy which I have again alluded to and the Permanent Secretary had talked about in his various statements, is that we have transited to a mitigation phase. The question that is posed by the Honourable Member is the question that I have seen been put out in social media and also in some form of main stream media. I can also tell you that, that question in terms of thinking that we are not testing or we are not doing contact tracing, is in a way also quite hurtful to the healthcare workers who are involved in this area because they continue to do so.

The whole aim of the mitigation phase is to slow transmission in the targeted communities specifically areas that may not be infected as much as we have, reduced severe infection on the vulnerable population and reduce deaths amongst the severely COVID 19 and community engagement, which is where the Government effort involving Permanent Secretary's teams are out there doing the profiling.

For the new areas of interest, for example, when we had the case in Nabouwalu, there was obviously extensive contact-tracing done. The testing strategy happens on the symptomatic and the vulnerable, the teams were receiving results in 24 hours. We had testing available to Fiji CDC with RT PCR and GeneXpert; testing was available at the Tamavua Hospital with GeneXpert; testing was

available at CWM with GeneXpert; testing was available at Nadi, Lautoka Hospital and we also have the RD antigen test which is also being used.

Honourable Speaker, apart from the drive-through vaccination, we also have the drive-through testing and swabbing that is available now. That is all manifested signs of testing and swabbing and also targeted contact-tracing in the midst of the challenges that we face at the moment. I want to reassure to you, Honourable Speaker, and the august House that in no way has testing and contact-tracing dropped. The means by which it is being done is focussed on the targeted groups in the places of widespread community transmission and in places where there are areas of interest of new cases, it is actually utilising the old principles that we were using before. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We move on to the next question.

Honourable Members, the Honourable Pillay is not feeling well and I have given the question to be asked by the Honourable Government Whip, the Honourable Maharaj. You have the floor.

RFMF Operations Affected by COVID-19
(Question No. 165/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament how the operations of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces have been affected by COVID-19?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. Again yesterday, I did answer a similar question on the role of the Fiji Police Force and I am thankful for this opportunity to also share before this august House in answering this question about the work that the RFMF is currently undertaking in terms of COVID response and, of course, some of their normal duties as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Again, I begin by offering my gratitude to the frontline workers including our health workers and members of the Disciplined Forces and, of course, together with all the Government officials that are working with the Ministry of Health in our fight against the pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Very briefly, for the RFMF in terms of their engagement with the various tasks in support of the Ministry of Health are as follows: quarantine security; contact-tracing; and swabbing. For testing, we have the FEMAT Security, EOC Operations, particularly, for Suva (including Nasinu) and DMO Central and, of course, in the West as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir. On the border, they are monitoring, patrolling and providing security. They also undertake disinfection of vessels in Natovi and Suva, and the 'Blue Lane' for visiting foreign yachts.

They assist in the conduct of vaccination drives, awareness and security, the extraction and retrieval of positive and primary contacts from homes to isolation facilities, conduct food distributions to the general public in lockdown areas, renovation of COVID-19 Men's Ward in CWM, the preparation of FEMAT and isolation facilities, the movement and the transportation of medical stores and supplies, and setting up of emergency operating centres to name a few, Mr. Speaker, Sir and all Members of the august House should appreciate the diverse responsibilities and the huge task that the RFMF is given during this pandemic fight.

On the other hand, I also wish to state that the RFMF continues to assist the Ministry of Health in some other areas. I will mention about their assistance at CWM Hospital in the preparation of meals while they were doing some repairs at the kitchen facility in CWM Hospital and of course, we are also assisting in the set-up of the emergency care coordination centre and the centre is currently being set up with the request from the Ministry of Health for the provision of non-clinical response to evacuate COVID-identified personnel. That includes the deceased as well, to hospital for alleviated response.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, very briefly on its regular activities in conjunction with COVID operations, again this is the challenge and I did state yesterday, same with the police, we need to work smarter. We have to create bubbles and in terms of bubbles, Mr. Speaker, Sir, apart from the RFMF camps in the various Divisions, in the Western and in the Central Divisions, we also have schools being used for Suva.

We also asked for the use of Nabua Primary School, Sir, and of course Ratu Sukuna Memorial School and Suva Grammar School as well. This is to have separate bubbles so that work can be maintained and of course, keep the spread of the virus to a minimum amongst the members of the forces. I did state earlier in the House that, particularly with service personnel, when one is down, the whole team goes with that particular individual because of the way they operate, whether it be a section, platoon or company and so forth, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, the infantry units continue with their normal work, Mr. Speaker, Sir, particularly in terms of the normal patrols in the various areas and also the training continues, particularly the preparation of our personnel for pre-deployment training either at Black Rock or other camps, including the members of the reserve at Nasinu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, so that also continues and may I also highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the work undertaken by the Fiji Navy despite COVID and even the Chief of Navy had a few of the crews despite being positive, they were in their bubble, they just continued with their normal patrols, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The *RFNS Savenaca* conducted three maritime security and fisheries law enforcement patrols in our EEZ and pockets of high seas adjacent to our maritime boundary and that also included joint patrols with the Australian Navy and the French Navy and during that period, they conducted about 45 boarding in total, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

RFNS Kacau and *RFNS Volasiga*, these are the hydrographic vessels, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they were working in the Nadi waters conducting surveys and re-surveys on updating our navigational charts. The *RFNS Kikau* has also conducted three onshore patrols, ensuring that our fisheries are protected and the number of local inshore vessels boarded totalled 35. All those again, Mr. Speaker, Sir were done under contactless and strict COVID-19 protocols.

For the RFMF engineers, may I also highlight that despite COVID-19, work for our RFMF engineers continued. They have personnel at Nausori, Vunidawa, Sawani, Lami, Navua, Korovou and in the quarantined facilities, and in Savusavu as well for the Blue lane. A total of 132 personnel are involved. And for projects, this also continued with Namoli Kindergarten. This is in Vanua Levu, close to Labasa Town, that saw 10 personnel deployed for a duration of about 42 days. Also in Lovelove, there was a project by the Commissioner Northern, so the RFMF engineers assisted. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Korotolutu Primary School involving two teachers quarters and, of course, as we speak, they also have their personnel at the Lekutu Secondary School.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that the Honourable Minister for Education, while answering the fourth Oral Question in today's Order Paper, will talk more about Lekutu Secondary School because it was raised by the Honourable Salote Radrodoro during her response to the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Attorney-General on Monday. I do not know when was the last time the Honourable Member has been to Lekutu Secondary School to see the work that has been undertaken already. The

Honourable Minister for Education will give the details to her, but let me assure her that Government continues to, probably the picture that she is referring to is the demolition of the structure so that the next work can continue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, she does not know that. She did not mention that two temporary structures build to Category 3 standard have already been constructed at Lekutu Secondary, and now we have 10 RFMF engineers in Lekutu. We have the Australian engineers arrived about two weeks ago, they have started the work already on purchasing or whatever. Sir, the last rotation was just yesterday bringing in the last of the component of the main construction engineering team and construction work will start for the main block next Monday.

But that does not mean that nothing has been done, as alluded to by the Honourable Member. I do not know, again, when was the last time she was at Lekutu Secondary School. Information that comes to this august House have to be factual, so I will let the Honourable Minister for Education touch on that. That very briefly is the deployment of the RFMF. Thank you.

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

HON. P.W. VOSANIBULA.- My apologies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have any question. I was thinking of making a supplementary question on the first Question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My supplementary question to the Honourable Minister is in line with my earlier question yesterday, which the Honourable Minister stated that it is not factual. I would like to refresh the Honourable Minister's mind that the breach of protocols that I said yesterday was reported in the mainstream media and confirmed by relevant authorities.

My supplementary question today to him today is; in the name of transparency, accountability, fairness and equality, can the Honourable Minister inform the House whether there has been any investigation done to the Police Officer who breached protocol in Nadi, following the arrival of the Honourable Attorney-General from India with a businessman and the Navy officers who attended the funeral in Nausori?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first the Honourable Attorney-General was never tested positive. He was in quarantine right throughout the quarantine period and was not tested positive; that is a fact.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Negative twice.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- He was negative twice, so where are they coming from? Yesterday, they asked about the RFMF personnel, today they asked about the policeman? He is all over the place?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, back to the question about why has he not been investigated for bringing the virus into the country, last year, when we had the first case brought in by the flight attendant, did they call for an investigation? Is this just because he is the Attorney-General? It is ridiculous! As I have said, it is not worth answering at all.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Such hypocrites!

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

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a supplementary question for the Honourable Minister for Defence. Last week Monday, I was called by someone at Sakoca whereby the Military Police, in that instance, apprehended a 16 year old child. Has the Military's job description changed to be a policeman in this civilian area?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, operational issues are dealt with by the Commander and the Commissioner of Police respectively, according to the Constitution - nothing to do with the Minister.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the third Oral Question for today.

Update on the Land Bank Initiative
(Question No. 166/2021)

HON. J. SAUKURU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Land Bank initiative?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. Year 2021 now marks the 11th year since we have had the Land Use Division which was established within the Ministry as part of one of Government's land reform initiatives to facilitate the Land Bank under the provisions in the Land Use Act. This programme is designed to make more land available for productive and socio-economic purposes and the Land Use Division has come a long way in facilitating this objective in making available ideal *iTaukei* and State land for optimal economic benefits. Today, this Division has designated 133 land parcels; that means 133 parcels are now in the Land Bank.

When I last made a Ministerial Statement in 2020, the figure was 119 land parcels. So there are 133 land parcels, with a total area of around 14,964 hectares and out of these 133 land parcels, 114 are *iTaukei* land of around 13,910 hectares. There are six State land parcels and 13 freehold buy-back land parcels. Presently, there are 80 registered leases administered under the Land Bank, with an additional 16 lease offers that have been issued. So the offers have been issued to the investors, and once they take them up, then these will then become formal leases.

Also, we have 77 residential lots awaiting development completion for which Government anticipates to receive a total of \$6.2 million, should these lots be sold at a conservative price for which Government anticipates to receive a total of \$6.2 million, should these lots be sold at a conservative price. If we get better prices then the amount of revenue will be higher also for the people that gave their land for this area.

The types of leases that are issued under the Land Bank include large scale commercial, agricultural, commercial lots, residential, industrial, special use, and the tourism development lease. A good example of that is the Kokomo Island Resort which just came from land that was given to the Land Bank. Also for quarrying, mining surface leases, tower transmitter leases, for heavy industrial and special water extraction.

Since 2010 the total revenue received for the leasing of these 80 leases has come to approximately \$13.3 million. For the 2020-2021 financial year revenue stood at \$2.2 million in total. Of this \$609,000 was from state land leases while \$1,613 million is revenue from *iTaukei* land leases. For the 2021

financial year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total of nine leases was issued and this was higher than the NDP target for this division which is to get six leases per annum.

Land Owning Units who deposited their lands into the Land Bank, and whose land has been leased out for mining purposes, have received two modes of payment. They are paid 100 percent of the lease money for the service lease under the Land Use Act and also, they are paid 80 percent of royalties under Section 5 of the Fair Share of Minerals Royalties Act. For example, the Mataqali Naita and Mataqali Naicobo, Nawailevu in Bua have received a total of \$1,050,267.08 from royalty payments and also \$1,580,993 from surface lease payable to the Land Owning Units.

Under the Land Bank Investment Programme another \$150,000 was allocated in the National Budget for the supply of EFL Power Pole Grid Extension for the Rural Electrification of 40 agriculture lots at Ketei Village in Savusavu.

The survey of idle iTaukei land parcels is a unique feature of the Land Use Act which requires the compulsory survey of any land parcel that is deposited in the Land Bank before the issuance of any lease. Sir, this is one thing that the landowners will get. The land is surveyed so even if it is not eventually leased out, they get a completed survey that is available for them.

In the last financial year, the Division surveyed land parcels covering a total of 82.41 acres. That survey included the three small islands located near Mualevu Village in Vanuabalavu in Lau.

Government is working to improve access to land by offering this option through the Land Bank initiative and also to achieving optimal and equitable returns for under-utilised land that is available in Fiji. This is being done through the Land Use Division – while the Land Bank would fulfil its objectives as required in the Land Use Act and most importantly to contribute towards Fiji's socio academic development.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Saukuru, you have the floor for supplementary question.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response to my question.

My supplementary question; can the Honourable Minister update Parliament on how the operations of the Land Bank and the iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTLTB) are harmonised to ensure consistency so that there is no misunderstanding among landowners?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As part of the operation of the Land Bank we have regular consultations and visits to landowners so that they are made aware of how the Land Bank operates, the returns that they can get, and the processes involved in getting the designated areas into the Land Bank and so forth. That is the sort of liaison that happens between the Ministry and the landowners and I am sure that iTLTB also does the same for the landowners.

In terms of the relationship at iTLTB and Land Use there is a regular forum where both Ministries meet with iTLTB and they discuss issues of mutual interest and how all these things are being managed. Included in that would be the iTaukei land that has been designated, that comes under the Land Bank.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Vosanibola, you have the floor to ask your supplementary question.

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; does the Ministry have officers with relevant qualification on marketing skills to support and boost the Land Bank initiative and productivity? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Sir, the whole purpose of the Land Bank is to make sure that land that is not being used is made available so when that land is identified, the Ministry also looks at what is the best possible use for that land and they make that available to investors. There is a whole lot of study that is done to make sure that it is available.

The Ministry has a lot of technical, well-skilled people, valuers, et cetera, that have expertise around land. They will market it and make sure that we can attract the best possible investors so we can have some productive use of the land that is available. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on to the fourth Oral Question for today.

Salaries Upgrade for Teachers
(Question No. 167/2021)

HON. V. LAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts inform Parliament on the salaries upgrade for teachers who have completed their relevant qualifications?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Prime Minister and Honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to answer the question, as asked by the Honourable Member. Teachers, indeed, are the backbone of any society and are role models for our children, offering guidance and giving young people the power of education. I take this opportunity to thank all the teachers while working tirelessly to ensure that our children remain focussed and engaged in worthwhile learning activities, while our schools remain indefinitely closed due to this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education aims to and I quote: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality learning and promote life-long learning opportunities for all". One of the most important indicators of achieving the SDG 4 goal is the qualification of teachers, outlined in Target 4C, and that is to 'Increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing countries.'

Mr. Speaker, Sir, equally important is SDG 9 which talks about resilience structures when it comes to education facilities. I will take a moment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to add on to what the Honourable Minister for Disaster Management spoke about, regarding the Honourable Salote Radrodro's question on whether we have fully completed Lekutu Secondary School?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the simple answer is, yes, we have completed the Category 3 structure, not only at Lekutu Secondary School, but TC Yasa damaged 126 plus schools in the North when it struck. Within six months the Ministry of Education had completed three pre-fab buildings: one for Bua District, one for Dama District Primary School and one for Lekutu Secondary School which was completed in July and if schools has opened for the second term, all our children would have gone back to these classrooms.

I do not understand why Honourable Radrodro is so focussed on Lekutu because there are many other schools that we have rebuilt during the six-month period after this year and I can go on with a lot of names, but I would not do that. So yes, for the information of the House, out of the 126 schools, two are still left because they sustained major damages and we are working on that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, coming back to the salaries for those teachers who upgraded their qualification, yes, the Ministry of Education is the largest civil service employer with 13,204 teaching staff. We have 5,634 secondary school teachers, 6,181 primary school teachers and 1,389 early childhood education teachers. Over the years, the Ministry has facilitated the educational needs of our teachers and has continuously encouraged and motivated teachers to upgrade their qualifications, not only for higher salaries but for an improved livelihood for themselves and their families.

Sir, as per the Ministry's teacher remuneration setting policy of 2018 which was implemented after the job evaluation exercise in 2017, it fully recognises qualified teachers with relevant education qualifications that include teacher training. In total we have 1,741 certificate holders, we have 4,106 diploma-holder teachers and we have 7,357 bachelors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2018-2019 financial year, a total of 406 teachers received their salary upgrades after completing their qualifications which includes certificates, diplomas and degrees. The salary upgrades were for 374 primary school teachers, nine special education teachers and 27 secondary school teachers which amounted to \$2,000,095.

In the 2019-2020 financial year, a total of 492 teacher salary upgrades were facilitated by the Ministry amounting to \$2.5 million - a total of 70 early childhood education teachers, 325 primary school teachers, four special education teachers and 93 secondary school teachers completed their relevant teaching qualifications and were upgraded to a higher step in their pay. Currently, we have 281 teachers pursuing further education, so for this budget year, we are looking at 116 teachers in early childhood care, 71 primary and 94 secondary school teachers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our teachers are studying mostly on part-time basis and when they complete and graduate, they submit their documents to the Ministry's salary section and their upgrade is facilitated in the system. In many cases, the Ministry facilitates back payments of arrears of salaries and then we align the contracts to a higher band of salary.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government is committed to providing young Fijian boys and girls with quality education. The delivery of quality and effective teaching is made possible through qualified educators and we keep encouraging our staff to upgrade their qualifications. We have quite a number of teachers who have upgraded to post-graduate studies and even Masters in Education. Unfortunately, this is not reflected in the remuneration policy - we recognise a degree as a step to the teacher remuneration policy.

It is evident from the data, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that teachers are motivated and committed at upgrading their relevant teaching qualifications and of course, qualification upgrades and completion focuses on the development of knowledge-based society. It not only improves the livelihoods of these teachers but also helps produce world-class professionals who are equipped for better job opportunities in the global market. A lot of teachers are further professionally developing themselves as I mentioned before - post-graduate qualifications and Masters in Education programmes. This gives them an added advantage if they wish to pursue leadership roles within the education system or in the private sector.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I strongly urge our teachers to continue upgrading their teaching qualifications because teachers are a fundamental condition for guaranteeing quality education for our young boys and girls. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Leawere for a supplementary question. You have the floor.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. What happens to the salaries of teachers with qualifications not relevant to teaching like a BA in Management? Are their salaries also upgraded?

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

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, like I mentioned before, the salaries of the teachers are aligned to the Job Evaluation and Civil Service Remuneration Guideline of August, 2017 and the Fijian Civil Service Salary Bands. Yes, we do have teachers in the system who do not have Bachelors in Education, but they have plain BA degrees from universities and other tertiary institutions. These teachers, should they wish to become teachers, we allow them to teach under one year to three-year contracts and we actually encourage them to complete their education units so that they can be fully qualified to teach in the system. So there is a one year to three year contracts that is given to those who do not have a teaching qualification.

Of course, the salary is also placed on a lower band from those that are fully qualified. The fully qualified teachers get a five year contract, if they have a Bachelor in Primary or Secondary education as majors and with the relevant subjects. If someone does not have the education units as required by the qualification standards within the Ministry, they are allowed to teach but we give them time to complete their units in education to be fully absorbed for a five year contract.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the fifth Oral Question for today.

Reduction in Budgetary Allocation - EMS
(Question No. 168/2021)

HON. T. WAQANIKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries update Parliament on the reason for the reduction in budgetary allocation for the Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) from \$600,000 in 2020-2021 to \$380,000 in the current financial year?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Tanya Waqanika for the question. The Electronic Monitoring System was developed through the assistance of the Food Agricultural Organisation (FAO) from 2015 to 2019, with the funding assistance on electronic equipment, in culture training and payments towards service providers.

At the end of the FAO's engagement, the Government then allocated \$600,000 during the 2020-2021 Budget year. Since the equipment and training needs had already been cared for, the amount of \$600,000 was committed towards:

- (1) Payment of six trade staff salaries, inclusive of FNPF and allowances amounting to around \$123,619.65; and
- (2) Payment to service providers Set Link International for on board and on shore service maintenance with the amount of \$476,380.35.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the utilisation of these funds, we identified that part of the funds would roll over to the 2021-2022 fiscal year. To address this, we had to make appropriate adjustments to ensure that funds are utilised to its full capacity. That is why, the 2021-2022 fiscal will reflect the reduction in the budget to \$380,000. This allocation will cater for staff pay of \$123,619.65. Additionally, the balance

of \$256,380.35 will go to any gear changes or replacement that may be needed due to the nature of EMS operating environment. So, ultimately, for service and maintenance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is similar to the question raised by the Honourable Salote Radrodro, as these projects are carried out in phases. Due to the Ministry of Fisheries diligently following laid out procedures and systems, the delay in the completion of the work for Koro and Wainigadru Ice Plants. Let me briefly touch on the process required to finalise these projects.

The construction of ice plants involves a long process, both technical and administrative in nature. All these processes must be executed with due care and due diligence to ensure that fund is utilised with optimal returns on investment back to Government. Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the process of construction of ice plant includes, but not limited to the following:

- (1) engagement with landowners and scoping for land and water resources;
- (2) inter-agency coordination to undertake scoping and land demarcations for titles and leasing arrangements;
- (3) inter-agency co-ordination to undertake scoping and drawing of plans and costing estimates;
- (4) tender put out for contractors through Government Tender Board for convening of Technical Evaluation Committee; and
- (5) upon approval, contracts done up with contractor and subsequent procurement then RIE processes takes place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, processes one and two earlier mentioned on engagement with landowners for consent on the site. Confirmation of water source and land demarcation for titles and leasing arrangement. This process is one that can prolong the construction plan. I wish to state at this juncture, that the Ministry of Fisheries will not move into steps three and five of the process above if these issues are not resolved. Mr. Speaker, Sir, in comparison for Cicia and Moala that were new stations we built three years ago, that required steps one to five compared to Rotuma where we built the ice plant within the Government Station, most of the needed mandatory steps were already covered which allows us to construct the ice plants straightaway.

Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what happened with the site that was given to the Ministry of Fisheries for Koro Ice Plant. The land that was initially cited for Koro Ice Plant was later discovered to be under dispute by the neighbouring landowning unit and also we were not able to get the consent on the majority of the landowning unit until today. The water source that was identified was located on a separate piece of land other than the one previously selected. The allocation of a budget provisioning for scoping this year will enable the Ministry to conduct another site survey with the relevant inter-agency stakeholders with Koro Island Development Community in selecting the most appropriate site.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the same shall be re-visited for the Wainigadru site and it is important that we all understand that these technical processes must be fulfilled and done right. At the first step, for steps three to five, to effectively execute when it falls through. I wish to reiterate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Ministry is well aware of the ice plants need for Koro and Wainigadru. These two sites are very much still in the plans of the Ministry and will be implemented when all technical and administrative planning issues have been checked off.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Tabuya, your supplementary question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am actually glad that the Honourable Minister has chosen to discuss further about the ice plants proposed in Wainigadru and Koro. I would like to ask the Honourable Minister a question about the practicality of building an ice plant in Wainigadru. For

those who have been, it is no place for boats to be able to safely dock, there is nothing there. It is just seashore and boats have to come up but has he considered the very close neighbouring area of Saqani, where there is a wharf that is more practical to put an ice plant rather than Wainigadru to service the same area.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. Our technical team have examined that. There are three sites within Wainigadru, so the decision will be finalised by the team that will inspect it on the ground.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the sixth Oral Question for today.

Assistance to Farmers – Purchasing of Fertilizer
(Question No. 169/2021)

HON. S.S. KIRPAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on how the Ministry has assisted farmers in purchasing fertilizer during lockdown?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I want to thank the Honourable Member, for asking this question.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to respond to some of the statements and comments made in Parliament yesterday by Honourable Kuridrani and Honourable Professor Biman Prasad in response to my Ministerial Statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Kuridrani is usual and he was all over the place asking why was the allocation for Cold Storage facility at Kavanagasau in Sigatoka and Nukuloa in Ba was not provided for. It will not be provided and let me explain.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got three Cold Storage facility constructed at the expense of the Ministry lying idle. In Keiyasi, the Cold Storage facility is lying idle functioning well, waiting for people to grow horticultural crops and store it there.

Joes Farm was collecting it from there and got frustrated that they go all the way up and do not find anything or sometimes nothing. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you go to Keiyasi, you will find this Cold Storage facility worth \$45,000 is there. The two cold storage facilities in Nacocolevu Station in Sigatoka, again lying idle. Sometime, it is used because farmers have their own.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is the function of a cold storage facility? When you have fresh produce, if you cannot get it to the market then you want to store it. You want to delay the process or worsen the quality of that particular fresh produce. So, Sir, Kavanagasau is about three kilometres from Sigatoka Market. Nukuloa is about two to three kilometres tarsealed road from Ba market. Why do we need a cold storage facility there?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- That was your plan.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I mean it is not there in the Budget, you should have asked me.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we are doing is we are assisting the middlemen exporters to develop their cold storage facility with one-third to two-third basis because they collect their produce. So, cold storage facility is the last resort if you are not able to get your produce with the market, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and

there are a lot of problems when you have this facility on a communal basis. People are not looking after. People are not paying the due, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Professor Prasad, as usual, did not do his homework. He came up with wrong numbers and wrong figures. He said yesterday said that there are 71,163 households. Totally incorrect.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Answer the question.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You know the problem is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I said it in the last sitting, they do not bother to read this census report which will be tabled in Parliament tomorrow which is available from the last four weeks. A soft copy is on our homepage. You should have got the right number.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Professor Prasad said that 93 percent of the farmers in Fiji are subsistence. What is wrong with him? How can you have 93 percent of the farmers in Fiji are subsistence farmers? He is talking about 1950s or 1940s, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2009 Agriculture Census, 80 percent was subsistence. In 2017 Population Census, 65 percent was subsistence farmers. In 2020 Agriculture Census, 59.9 percent are subsistence farmers. Where did they get this 93 percent; from the newspaper article? That is the kind of contribution to someone who says he is a Professor of Economics wants to make in this House and it is very embarrassing. Honestly, I am embarrassed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the kind of contribution we get from people like Honourable Professor Prasad, not only on agriculture but other subject matters. I want to make this statement here that when academics speak in public, people look up on them because they are qualified. They are supposed to do research and publication. They are supposed to develop a knowledge, he is an academic, researcher, who is supposed to develop new knowledge. When they speak, they must speak with responsibility because they will sway public opinion. They should not make willy-nilly statements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, without doing thorough research.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they could have got the census report, they were harping about it, “where is the census report?” Go to our homepage and download it.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, look at her dress code, is this Parliament? This is not a flea market.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Shame on you!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, point of order. The Honourable Member needs to withdraw that comment, it is totally unparliamentary and offensive. He is not the Speaker of the House, and if he has an issue, he writes to the Honourable Speaker. That is very shameful. That is a misogynist comment and he should withdraw it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- What is the Honourable Attorney-General laughing at?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Okay, I withdraw.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- You are condoning what your Member has spoken - shame on you!

HON. SPEAKER.- Don't talk amongst yourselves, through the Speaker, if you are going to criticise someone, criticise them through the Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Let me get to the substantive question here, Mr. Speaker, Sir. With the second round of COVID-19, farmers were requesting that on the other side of the border, we need to buy agricultural input, particularly fertilizer and pesticides and they were not able to get to the outlets in town as some of the outlets were not open and those that were opened were charging exorbitant prices.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had kept agriculture moving, we kept containers moving so that our exports will continue and bring in foreign currency. In fact, last year, we raised exports by 25 percent, Mr. Speaker, in dollar terms and 16 percent in actual volume, and we were on the ground despite the crisis observing all the protocols with the Ministry of Health who are on the ground facilitating production, supply and exports.

We did not want that particular process to be affected just because they did not have fertilizer. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we organised the transportation of 103 tonnes of fertilizer to the farmers at ex-factory price, 30 percent less than what they would pay to the hardware shops and to the other outlets which were providing fertilizer and pesticides.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was not a simple operation. We mobilised about 40 staff, utilised the Ministry's trucks and spent about \$8,000, our own fuel and all the expenses to cart fertilizer from Lautoka to the interior of Naitasiri, Tailevu, et cetera, so that farmers are able to get it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we did was, we took the orders and gave them to the fertilizer company. We picked, delivered it at ex-factory price, collected the money and gave it back to them. So we basically facilitated this and farmers were very happy with it; we did this three times. We are looking at doing it on a quarterly basis so that farmers are able to get this. It is called "Operation Westcross" and this Operation is becoming very popular and we would want to continue to support our farmers with respect to getting inputs on time. This is in addition, Mr. Speaker, to the organic fertilizer that we are delivering at no cost to the farmers in the interior.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Gavoka, you have the floor on a supplementary question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Sorry, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Minister has highlighted the situation up in Keiyasi with the Collection Centre which was built by Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and owned by the Nadroga/Navosa Cooperation. An MOU was developed that included the Ministry of Agriculture to help the *tikina* up in the Navosa Highlands to grow the produces that needed to be collected there and distributed by the distributor.

I wonder if the Honourable Minister knew this because he appears to be debunking the whole project up there. It was done properly. As an example of a lack of support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Honourable Minister, is that they could only provide one tractor for the farmers but for months it was sitting there because it had no driver. So the Ministry of Agriculture had dropped the ball in terms of the Keiyasi Collection Centre.

HON. SPEAKER.- Ask the supplementary question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- The question is, does the Ministry of Agriculture consider collection centres as viable in the way they see things today?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can take the horse to the well, we cannot force the horse to drink water. The collection centre is there. Honourable Seruiratu is there, he started it during his time. We have the market there to collect it from the collection centre, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Farmers could not meet the demand. Ask the Honourable Minister for Defence, he will tell you. They could not meet the demand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can do so much but farmers have to play their part. The collection centre has not run away, it is still there, operational, our staff and vehicles are there but they need to grow. The least they can do is grow, we can pick it up from the farm gate.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the seventh Oral Question for today.

Construction of Nasali and Toga Bridges
(Question No. 170/2021)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the construction of the Nasali and Toga Bridges?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Mr. Speaker, Sir and I thank the Honourable Tuisawau for his question. Bridges are something that are obviously very important to Government and also to the Fiji Roads Authority which is the implementation arm. In regards to the two bridges that the Honourable Member has raised, for the Nasali Bridge, FRA has concluded its feasibility studies about this bridge (glitch).

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, we cannot hear you. Press the button.

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, FRA will now have to complete the design in-house of this particular Bridge and also call for construction tender in January 2024. The programme again is entirely dependent on available funding.

Just to give in into context, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of all the other bridges that are being done in this financial year, at the moment there are 10 bridges that FRA is doing in this financial year:

- (1) Waidra Bridge - Baulevu, Koroqaqa
- (2) Wainawi Bridge - King's Road, Nausori
- (3) Waidalice Bridge - King's Road, Korovou
- (4) Yaqara Bridge - King's Road, Rakiraki
- (5) Korovou Bridge - King's Road, Tavua
- (6) Tavualevu Bridge - Tavua
- (7) Velovelo Bridge near Lautoka
- (8) Vuniyasi Bridge near Nadi
- (9) Bulu Bridge near Sigatoka
- (10) Matawale Bridge - Keyasi

So those are the bridges that are being constructed as we speak now.

In addition to this, FRA has awarded a 24-month design contract for looking at another 40 critical bridges and another three jetties, they are getting the design works. So there are bridges that are being done, those that are being designed and they are getting the design works. There are bridges that are being done, those that are being designed and also the ones that have been raised, FRA will also programme that in the activities that it has going forward.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Minister, your reply regarding Nasali and Toga Bridges because we did not get that, we got the next 10 bridges. Could you repeat the first part for the benefit of the Honourable Tuisawau and Parliament?

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir. For the Nasali Bridge, the feasibility study had been completed by FRA and what FRA has to do now, is to call for tenders for the detailed design of this bridge. This will be undertaken in March 2022. The construction of the Nasali Bridge is tentatively planned for commencement in January 2024. That time will allow for the completion of the procurement process and the finalising of all the contract documents.

For the Toga Bridge, as I had mentioned, the tender processes were already completed, a local contractor was awarded the design and the construction contract in the year 2018. But this local contractor could not undertake the physical works in the two years due to its financial difficulties. So now, FRA will have to compete the design of this bridge in-house and also call for construction tender in January 2024. The programme will also be entirely dependent on available funding that comes through the budget process.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the eighth Oral Question for today.

Engagement of Private General Practitioners Initiative
(Question No. 171/2021)

HON. J.N. NAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the engagement of Private General Practitioners initiative?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I get into the substantive answer of the substantive question, I just wanted to fact-check two things is critically important. The first one, in particular, because the civil servants who are responsible for this are very upset about it. Honourable Tikoduadua had mentioned that and I quote him: “Government wants to manipulate a captive audience that takes their personal data using their Digital Fiji infrastructure which includes digital television apps and wireless hotspots”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this statement is actually is very far and wide reaching and in fact demonstrates he does not understand what is happening. There is no taking of personal data as erroneously stated by him. In order for us to provide e-government services such as online registration of a new born, online registration of a company and online registration for COVID-19 vaccine, a person needs to give their personal details.

Consent is required for disclosure of personal data. We verify and confirm the identity of the person for the sole reason to provide the correct service. There is no taking of data as such. In fact, all the Members here, Honourable Lynda Tabuya who is very popular on social media, for her and everyone to be on *Viber* or on *TikTok* and on all sorts of other things, you have to give your personal data. When you actually get this phone going, you give your phone number, you give your address. There is more

data given of your person to these phone companies than even to Government. So it is incorrect for him to say that.

He also stated, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the cyber incident that took place and nothing was head about that incident again. Yes, there was a cyber-incident earlier this year in April, we managed the incident and as a result the public facing e-government services were back online within a timeframe and in a quick timeframe. More importantly we have been advising all Fijians every step of the way. In fact, three statements were issued by Government and this was covered by the media organisations.

The first one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was on 12th April, 2021 within 24 hours of the cyber incident, and after we have made a rapid preliminary assessment on the cause of the cyber incident and our next steps. Again on 14th April, 2021, Mr. Speaker, Sir, within three days of the cyber incident, more public facing e-government services were available. Again, on 17th April, 2021 within six days of the cyber incident, public facing e-Government services were available and more than 30 Government websites were available to the public.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point of the matter is that, due to our swift and effective response to the cyber incident and in securing the network integrity, our ITC staff and Digital Fiji staff ensured that Fijians continue to safely access e-Government services. So I fail to understand why the Honourable Tikoduadua is actually misleading Parliament and indeed making direct disparaging remarks about these hardworking civil servants. Most of them are actually very young, some of the IT geeks, some of them are very proficient in their work and I have got some example when it happened in New Zealand. It took them a much longer period than us to actually have it up and running so it is a huge feather in the cap of the team at ITC and I take exception to the fact that just for cheap political point scoring, his actually discouraged these very hardworking civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whilst I am on it too and Honourable Tabuya please, I was not laughing at you. I was laughing at Honourable Salote Radrodro. I do not have a problem with your dress, I know you are going to go to *TikTok* and make all sorts of allegations. But I want to get to Honourable Qereqeretabua and others who have made statements in this Parliament as Minister responsible for Information, it is my duty and responsibility because I have been sitting here and listening in these couple of days about articles run by *Fiji Sun* on a former Minister of FijiFirst.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue about them running any front page is nothing to do with Government, that is their choice, but what really baffles me is the mightier than how approach taken by Members of the Opposition in this respect. Let me put it into perspective, Sir. Firstly, Government does not tell *Fiji Sun* what to put on the front page. Secondly, we do not really care about what they are printing about someone's personal life. The person is no longer in the party. Thirdly, the hypocritical position that has been taken by the Members of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's newspaper articles are replete with what would one call "affairs". The *Fiji Times* led the charge, remember the tea lady incident, front page, two or three days about a former Prime Minister; full on. None of these people condemned it, but more importantly, what I found really hypocritical, not just Members in this House but outside some of the NGOs and women's groups, they did not care about the women involved. They did not say anything about them. Why? Because they simply may be commoner women?

The other one was a golf house incident, the "*kama sutra*" incident. Nothing about that; again in the newspapers. Number three, in social media recently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the female Members of the Opposition have not said anything about it, one of your own people about the car park incident. No one has come to her rescue. None of the Opposition, none of the people outside this House who were

making comments and recently an executive of a company who was charged by Police, unfortunately he got off on a technicality.

The lady had also gone to the Women's Crisis Centre, we understand; nothing happened. No one came to the defence of that lady, no one commented that this person has gone to New Zealand, now making comments from there – why? Was it because he is anti-Government or made anti-Government comments that is why they are not saying anything about him? Why were they not saying about all these other women? I should take my hat off to those women because they were publicly dragged into these incidents because of those politicians. But they did not utter a word because it is politically expedient for them to do it now, not politically expedient for them to do it then. Even the car park incident issue, you are not commenting on it because you see them as political nemesis; that is the problem and that is the hypocrisy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to get back to the issue. Honourable Qereqeretabua should make note of that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government has so far directly spent over \$350 million on COVID-19 related expenditure to assist Fijians who have been impacted by COVID-19. As part of that also, we have engaged as part of the new scheme developed by the Fijian Government to improve access to medical services during the pandemic.

Under the Scheme, the GPs and communities offered free medical services to Fijians who usually go to a public health assistance. They go to health centre, public hospital because they cannot afford to go to a private doctor. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of that, you will see in the Budget, we have allocated \$5 million for 2021-2022 Budget which is allocated for this particular Programme.

We had called for Expressions of Interest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 24 Expression of Interests were received and I would like to give a bit of background. When we called for Expression of Interest to this particular Scheme which we thought would be good, the Fiji College of General Practitioners decided to do what we call a monopolistic move. They said that we will charge the same rate for all the doctors everywhere in Fiji and I think it was quoted \$25 or \$20 a visit, and we said, "no".

We cannot have a one price fits all because a GP who may be renting a shop for his or her medical practice in Ba, the rent they pay in Ba is very different to the rent one would pay for example in downtown, Suva. So, it has to be individually priced and we saw some of the pricing we know one Doctor who normally charges \$10 a visit in Nausori, he quoted \$25.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those who actually got out of the clutches of the College of General Practitioners and made individual bids or individual expression of interest, there were 24 we found out of the 24, 17 were to our liking in the sense of the pricing was right. They were reasonable and I would like to thank all of these General Practitioners and I would like to read out their names also.

There are seven in Suva, Nausori and Nadera area; five in Nadi; one in Lautoka and four in Ba. It goes to show that the Doctors in Lautoka there was not much of an uptake.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FijiCare which are already providing services to Government for Micro Insurance Policies for farmers and those in the Social Welfare Scheme has agreed to oversee this particular scheme for us - oversee in the sense that they will verify the claims that have been made by the Doctors because that is their area of expertise. That is not the area of expertise of ours and of course then for one year they are doing for us for FOC and then in the future, we will see we will call for expression of interest for that too.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Scheme, any citizen that usually does not go to a private doctor can go to these doctors. They get services from these GPs. They get consultations. They get reviews, referrals, injections or dressings and any other minor dressings. Whatever fee is charged by the doctor, they do not pay. Government pays on behalf of the citizens. So, in a way we also decentralising the services. It reduces the pressure on the doctors and nurses who are already feeling the pressure because of COVID-19 in the public health system.

It also means that we are managing risk, in other words not many people are actually crowding in one space. So, you know with the spread of virus, it could be a lot more rampant, I mean, in a crowd of space with lots of people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we signed the agreements on 16th June. We rolled out the programme on 28th June. As of 6th August, 2021, a total of 9,026 patients have visited these GP outlets of which 2,610 visits were in Suva, Nausori and Nadera area; 3,832 in Nadi more than Suva-Nausori area; 978 in Lautoka and 1,606 in Ba. So, Ba is quite a lot and so it is in Nadi.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the claims that have been made so far is to the value of \$224,038; \$150,000 has already been paid out by the Ministry of Economy and the rest of it has been verified.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also have an additional component to this. Any of these people who actually now going and visit these GPs, they also join the Free Medicine Scheme. So, a lot of them, for example, work on the Free Medicine Scheme so these doctors if they prescribe medicines, for example, if they prescribe antibiotics, they prescribe it, they stamp it, they have been given a particular stamp and then they can take it or the patients can take it to the nearest pharmacy and get the medicine for free. So, they have been included within that particular Free Medicine Scheme also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to read out the names of the doctors, they are not that many but I think it is critically important that we acknowledge them in this Parliament because they have come forward, some of them have reduced their fees, they are willing to help Government, they are willing to help ordinary Fijians to be able to access these services.

The names of the doctors are as follows, together with their Clinics:

Areas (Nos.)	GPs Clinic Name/Medical Centre & Location	Names of Doctors
Suva (7)	Koroi's Surgery, Waimanu Road.	Dr. Netani Philip Koroi
	Makoi Health Centre, Lot 2 Vunidogo Street, Makoi.	Dr. Lalita Devi
		Dr. Keshwan Nadan
		Dr. Attishay Prasad
	Bayhealth Clinic, Rodwell Road.	Dr. Sarika Shalini Chandra
	Sen's Medical Centre, Lot 40, FNTC Road, Narere.	Dr. Shanita Devi Sen
	Om's Medical Centre, 10 Luke Street, Nabua.	Dr. Om Prasad
	Rubina Medical Clinic and Research Centre Pte Limited, Lot 67 Qarase Street, Nadera	Dr. Mohammad Wahed Ali
		Dr. Roy Farrales
	Pacific Specialists Healthcare Pte Limited, 107 Foster Court, Foster Road, Walu Bay, Suva.	Dr. Basharat Munshi
Dr. Sanson Fousaga		
Dr. Voi Solomone		
Nadi (5)	Health Masters Pte Limited, Lot 2 Bulawai Subdivision, Votualevu	Dr. Gurpreet Kaur
		Dr. Ahmed Shakeel Shariff
		Dr. Sudiksha Singh
		Dr. Nahina Naaz

	Ace Medical Clinic, Shop 1 G1, RB Jet Point Complex, Martintar.	Dr. Kaanna Goundar
	Coastal Medical Investments Pt Ltd/Dr. Naidu's Medical Centre, Shagayam Road.	Dr. Ashank Naidu Dr. Komal Sapna Singh
	Tremlin Medical Clinic, 69 Sagayam Road.	Dr. Saras Nandan
	Zen's Medical Centre Limited, 40 Lodhia Street.	Dr. Zen Min Low Dr. Ravinesh Goundan Dr. Sailasa Misimisi Dr. Alexander Cunanan Dr. Ryan Shankar Dr. Kaleli Nacika Dr. Karalaini Bataba Dr. Tupou Raqona
Lautoka (1)	Zen's Medical Centre, 15 Drasa Avenue, Corner of Nacula Street.	Dr. Arnold Samy Dr. Agnes Boyd
Ba (4)	Dr. Singh's Medical Centre, 10 Bank Street.	Dr. Diva Kamlesh Singh
	AL-Shifa Medical Centre, 3 Vaturu Street, Yalalevu.	Dr. Muhammed Saiyad Riyaz Ud Dean
	Puritan Medical Centre, Corner of Bank Road, Gaga Street.	Dr. Aashna Shabnam Rafiq
	Zen's Medical Centre Limited, Opposite Westpac & beside World (Royal) Care Clinic.	Dr. Priyanka Chandra

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are the well-meaning doctors as highlighted also, we of course, look forward to working with them. We have the allocation of \$5 million. It is quite interesting with the statistics that I have given that over 40 days (dates from 20th June, 2021 to 6th August, 2021), there have been 40 days. If we take those 40 days and extrapolate that, we are spending about \$5,600 a day in paying for these GP Services, which we believe is money well-spent because we have ordinary Fijians being able to access these medical services and similarly, we have the efficiency built-in, the ability to work with the private sector. We have the pressure being relieved off the public health system, and no doubt, if it works well together, it can formulate later on some pride of national health and insurance scheme that we are looking at, we are working with our development partners. Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the back of this, we are looking at the Aspen Medical coming online in March next year, where we will have open-heart surgery available too.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted in Parliament during the Budget that we are looking at outsourcing some of the biomedical type of services with the private sector to get better efficiency.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That is the end of Oral Questions for today. We will move on to Written Question and I give the floor to the Honourable Kuridrani.

Written Question

Status of F1 Sheep Cross Breed Distribution - 2019
(Question No. 172/2021)

HON. I. KURIDRANI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the status of the distribution of F1 Sheep Cross Breed to farmers in 2019, in particular -

- (a) how many were distributed per division;
- (b) how many farmers received this breed of sheep; and
- (c) what improvement in output was recorded from 2019 to date in the domestic sheep industry as a result of this activity?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Question time is now over. That brings to an end the proceedings for today. I thank you for your forbearance and cooperation.

We will now adjourn Parliament until 9.30 tomorrow morning.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.13 p.m.