

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 23RD MAY, 2017

[UNCORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 23RD MAY, 2017

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

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs; the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services; and the Honourable Minister for Youth and Sports.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 22nd May, 2017, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- Madam Speaker, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

POINT OF ORDER

Use of Parliamentary Languages

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to raise a Point of Order in relation to the Standing Order that refers to the use of Parliamentary languages, Madam Speaker.

You have ruled that no one here is supposed to call anyone inside the House a liar, but yesterday the Minutes will confirm that Honourable Vijay Nath, in contributing to the debate, said that lawyers are liars.

I am very taken aback by that, especially, you know we have the Leader of the Fiji Bar sitting here, and that is spoken in front of him. There are also lawyers from the other side, as well as this side. So could I please ask that he withdraws his statement?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Vijay Nath?

HON. V. NATH.- Madam Speaker, I withdraw that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, whether it is some lawyers or all lawyers, it has been withdrawn.

Misleading Statement

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to also raise a Point of Order.

Madam Speaker, my Point of Order is raised under Standing Order 74, regarding a misleading statement made by Honourable Parmod Chand yesterday. If I could continue, Madam Speaker, yesterday during the debate on the motion, I quote: "That Parliament debates the Report of the Standing Committee in Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, Reserve Bank of Fiji Insurance Annual Report, 2013 which was tabled on 23rd September, 2016", the Honourable Parmod Chand said in Parliament, and I quote from Page 1429 of the Uncorrected Copy of the *Daily Hansard*:

"... it is very important for us to note this that the CTP Premium was increased by the insurance companies some weeks before the budget announcement in 2012.

There was an announcement made that there will be a levy and I wonder if the insurance companies had prior knowledge of Government's decision and pre-empted this with the premium increase to cover the 20 percent contribution that is payable to Government. This would mean that the public is funding the 20 percent contribution to the Government and not the insurance companies.

Just before this announcement was made, the insurance companies increased their premiums by 20 percent, so basically the people of Fiji are paying for that 20 percent, not the insurance companies."

Madam Speaker, this is misleading and not true. The truth is, Madam Speaker, that the 20 percent levy was announced in November 2011 and was effective from 1st January, 2012. What we did was, we knew that Honourable Chand was not exactly accurate but we went to the Reserve Bank and got all the figures and we did a breakdown, and if I could clarify as to why Honourable Chand made a misleading statement.

Private vehicle premium for CTP for Sun Insurance in 2010 was \$110, which increased to \$127 on 1st September, 2011. The increase in premium was about 16 percent. Currently, they charge \$70 not \$127.

Public vehicle with more than 11 passengers, in 2010, the premium was \$250 which increased to \$290 on 1st September, 2011 (this is still Sun Insurance) increase in premium was 16 percent.

Trucks, in 2010, \$210 increased to \$230, increase in premium is 10 percent. Currently, that premium is \$140 not \$230. The reason Sun Insurance gave for the increase in CTP rates is that FRCA clarified that VAT was applicable on CTP.

No other insurance company, Madam Speaker, increased premium rates in 2011, except QEB, however it is important to know that QEB raised premium rates by 2 percent on 1st January, 2011, as the VAT raised was increased from 12.5 percent to 15 percent.

QEB; there was no change in premium, just prior to the 2012 budget announcement. Change in premium was made in January 2011, no changes in premium was made since then.

New India Insurance; no change in 2011 for private vehicles. Public vehicles reduced from \$290 to \$250 in 2011. Trucks; \$220 in 2010, reduced to \$200 in 2011.

Tower Insurance; private vehicles CTP, no change in 2011. Public Vehicles; no change in 2011. Trucks; no changes in 2011.

Dominion Insurance; no change in 2011. Public Vehicles; no change in 2011. Trucks; no change in 2011.

Madam Speaker, only Sun Insurance raised rates prior to the announcement on the 20 percent levy on CTP. All other insurance companies kept the same premium rate or reduced rates prior to the announcement of the 20 percent levy.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- When the Fijian Government announced the 20 percent levy, it kept the rates – it kept it. Since then, rates have come down.

The lowest CTP for public transport vehicle, with the minimum of 11 passengers, is now \$140, as compared to \$250, prior to the introduction of 20 percent levy. So, bus operators like Honourable Parmod Chand have also benefited from Government's policy to cap CTP rates.

Madam Speaker, the CTP for public transport vehicles are now lower for all companies that was in 2011.

Madam Speaker, we do know that empty drums make a lot of noise but the fact of the matter is, when that noise comes, at least it should have some truth in it. We have half-baked truths!

Can you imagine, Madam Speaker, if they have the audacity to do this in this Parliament, what are they doing outside? What are they doing outside?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So, Madam Speaker, given these facts and given the *Hansard* Report and the recording (we went through the video recording also last night, we took our time), Honourable Parmod Chand has misled Parliament and therefore, it should be noted for the record that he misled Parliament and that the comment he made that the CTP went up by 20 percent for all insurance companies is absolutely incorrect.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I will now request the Honourable Parmod Chand to withdraw all the statements that he made yesterday with regards to the insurance.

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I will have to look at it again just as the Honourable Attorney-General has gone to the Reserve Bank and the insurance companies because I very clearly remember that this happened. Some may not be 20 percent but 16 percent. Maybe what I am saying, as a bus operator, we went through that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Can I have your permission to

HON. SPEAKER.- No, you can bring it up again at any other time if you got the corrections but the Reserve Bank is a very credible institution that Parliament recognises. With that information, I would ask you to withdraw.

HON. P. CHAND.- I withdraw and will come back to this House with the facts.

HON. SPEAKER. Thank you.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to this sitting of Parliament. I also warmly welcome members of the public who are sitting in the gallery and those who are watching the proceedings on television and listening to the radio. Thank you for your interest in your Parliament.

Presentation of Papers and Documents

I had been informed that there are no presentation of papers and documents for today. We will move on to the next item on the Order Paper.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence – Review Report on the Fiji Police Force Annual Report 2015

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Fiji Police Force Annual Report 2015.

The Standing Committee is established under Section 109(2)(e) of the Standing Orders of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. The Committee is mandated to examine matters related to Fiji's relations with other countries development aid, foreign direct investment, oversight the military in relation with multilateral organisation.

The purpose of the Review was to scrutinise the Fiji Police Force Annual Report 2015, specifically on the maintenance of law and order, protection of life and property, preservation of public peace, leadership and administration of the force, legislation, budget, organisation structure functions, policies and programme of the year.

The finding of the Review and the recommendation put forward by the Committee are intended to assist the Fiji Police for service delivery of each core functions in reducing crime and keeping Fiji and its citizens and visitors safe and secure on a 24 hours, seven day basis. It also maintains and improve Fiji Police contribution to global security and world peace as mandated by Fiji's obligation to the United Nation's security mandates.

The review exercise was possible after a round of consultation with the Fiji Police Force. The Committee had identified areas of concern that need addressing to ensure the organisation as an institution efficiently and effectively achieved its goal.

Madam Speaker, I commend this Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you and please hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the contents of the report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to unanimously.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to have the floor.

Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty
Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence which was assigned to review and examine the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting with reservations made to Article 43(e) that relates to dual resident entities and more specifically, tie breaker rules of companies.

The Article applies to dual resident entities that are resident of more than one contracting State. This Report provides the Committee's review, conclusion and recommendation for oral and written submissions received and deliberated upon by the Committee as per Standing Order 110(e).

The Report is divided into four parts:

1. Part 1 covers the role and responsibility of the Standing Committee and include process in undertaking a review of the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measure to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting;
2. Part 2 provides a brief overview of the Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting;
3. Part 3 details of the Standing Committee's observation of the Convention; and
4. Part 4 provides a summary of key provisions of the convention.

Ratifying this Convention will be beneficial to Fiji in terms of:

1. Increasing detection of tax avoidance, tax evasion, base erosion and profit shifting;
2. Enhancing greater understanding of trend and patterns of trade treaties and tax treaties;
3. Improving prosecution of tax evasion; and
4. Improving cooperation between border security agencies, tax administration agencies, banks and financial intelligent units, both nationally and internationally.

Madam Speaker, I commend this Report to Parliament for its consideration.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Pursuant to Standing Order 121(5) and Standing Order 130(4) the Standing Committee has now reported back.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Levuka Public School Hostel
(Question No. 148/2017)

HON. M.R. LEAWARE asked the Government, upon notice:

The Levuka Public School hostel was burnt five years ago and it still not repaired. Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts enlighten the House as to when will the repair works commence and when will it finish?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member but unfortunately, he is not correct. As usual, they do not do their homework.

The hostel that was burnt down, Madam Speaker, in 2012 consisted of boys' dormitory, girls' dormitory and the dining hall. The contract was awarded a year after in 2013 to a construction company.

The construction works was in two phases, the girls' hostel was fully constructed and completed in 2014. So, 2012, it was burnt down, 2013, the tender was given out and construction began and in 2014, it was completed at a cost of \$388,764.51 for your information.

Madam Speaker, the boys' hostel construction was to start in the following year but there was a stoppage because the contractor did not receive the payment but there were some variations and the contractor did not complete the work.

The reconstruction of the work was considered in 2015 at a different site because there was a problem of having girls and boys on the same side that was a problem and it was decided that we will do it at a different site.

The contractor commenced work in 2016 and completed about 30 percent of the work but due to variation the contractor stopped the work and demanded more money. The Ministry of Infrastructure was re-engaged to do a proper scope of works and prepared a tender document. The tender was advertised, however, there was not a single bid received, just a small market in Levuka. So, as advertised by the Fiji Procurement Office, the re-tender was done, which is closing on 24th May.

Now the girls' dormitory, Madam Speaker, is fully functional and we look forward to getting some reasonably good bidders so that we can start with the construction work. In the meantime, Madam Speaker, we are making arrangements to look after those boys in a separate makeshift hostel. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, a supplementary question.

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Madam Speaker, in terms of a tender process and the company that was involved because in his response, the Honourable Minister said that there were some variations according to the work being done. Can the Honourable Minister enlighten the House as to how the tender process was called and the contractor that was involved in?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- The Honourable Member just does not understand if they want to run Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, can we allow the Honourable Minister to speak?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, there is a written contract for a specified amount. The contractor asked for more money, we did not have money, we have to re-tender, so the contractor when we tendered out the contractor did not bid. So we have to re-tender, if the contractor bids the contractor will be given the money. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- For five years, the boys have been up, no hostel even now. So can you give us a timeline as to when it will be completed?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- It is an incorrect information, Madam Speaker. 18 boys are now in a renovated workshop which is now a dormitory ...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- (Inaudible)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- 18 boys are in a temporary hostel, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the hostel that we are talking about is very crucial for the students of the Lomaiviti Province.

Can the Honourable Minister advise this House, why did it take so long to complete this project, especially now that other schools that have suffered during the *TC Winston* is also part of the programmes of the ministry?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, if it is my money, I will call my friend and say “this is best, can we do it”. That is what happens in the private sector.

Madam Speaker, it is taxpayers money, there is Government regulation of how the taxpayers money will be utilised.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Welcome Honourable Member, the best comment from you since yesterday – welcome.

Madam Speaker, taxpayers money, we need to follow to ensure that the money gives you the best deal and that is why the entire procurement process is being followed. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ratu Nanovo.

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Just a question to the Honourable Minister. Why did he accept the first contractor in the first place, knowing very well that this will happen? The money allocated was not enough.

(Laughter)

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO.- Do not laugh. The money that you are working for is not enough to complete the project. It is poor planning on your side.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, at times we find a lot of drama from the other side.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- We call for tender, we get to know contractors bidding for it, the engineers and the committee looks at it, how do you know that the contractor will not be able to complete the project on time?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Mataiasi Niumataiwalu to ask his question.

Fiji Debt Level
(Question No. 149/2017)

HON. M.A. NIUMATAIWALU asked the Government, upon notice:

Fiji's debt level is pegged at about \$5 billion by this coming July. The Head of the World Bank office in Suva is saying that it is "manageable and reasonable". Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications explain in layman's term what it means regarding our reserves, borrowing and investment?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member.

Madam Speaker, we welcome the statement by the World Bank Resident Representative, who made these comments in one of the local dailies.

Madam Speaker, just by way of background of information also, the World Bank is opening its first regional office in Suva. They have taken up the space on top of the new FNPF building. We understand by May next year, they will have at least 25 staff and 15 of their staff are coming in from Sydney. So they are relocating some of their staff from Sydney to Suva, which of course enhances the hub status of Fiji and indeed also enhances the financial capacity of Fiji as a premier destination for international organisations to come and be based in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, regarding the debt to GDP ratio that has been discussed, as the World Bank representative did highlight, the debt situation in Fiji is very manageable. In fact, the debt to GDP ratio in Fiji has significantly decreased and I will give you some statistics around that.

Government's stated policy has always been that we are prudent with the public finances. The contrary of course, much of the misinformation and lack of understanding, particularly from the other side of the House.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, one of the things that has actually happened both under the Bainimarama-led Government and now the FijiFirst Government is that we have transformed Government's overall expenditure mix for the proportion of operating and capital expenditure to the total budget. Essentially, as we all know that there are two types of expenses, even the household has. One is your day-to-day running of your house and the other one is your capital expenditure to build things.

Prior to 2006, the Government's operating to capital expenditure mix was 83:17. In other words, 83 percent of the money that Government spent went into operating Government day-to-day running which essentially did not have much to show for the following year, only 17 percent went into capital expenditure.

The trajectory, Madam Speaker, of course currently stands at 60:40. Now there is 40 percent of the money Government spends actually goes into capital expenditure and this is why also when you actually invest in your asset base, we are also creating an opportunity for more creation of wealth. This is what international agencies do look at, where you are actually spending the money? If the money is being spent in an area that will increase your productive capacity of the country, then obviously it is money well spent.

Madam Speaker, of course, on the other hand, we have specifically targeted those spends. We have overall has also been seen on the other side of the equation, we have reduced our operating cost too. It is not just changing the percentage, but also reduction of the operating expenditure.

On a nominal basis, Government's debt has increased over the past few years but as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and this is where we need to focus our attention on. Debt has consistently fallen across the years and is expected to reduce to 45 percent by the end of this financial year.

When the Bainimarama-led Government came into office in 2007, Fiji's debt to GDP ratio was around 52 percent. As at the end of April 2017, Madam Speaker, the debt ratio stands at 44 percent. Our medium target is to keep these ratio below 50 percent.

We do look at comparable countries like Mauritius. Mauritius debt to GDP ratio is about 63 to 64 percent, it is in excess of 60 percent in any case. Countries like even Samoa, their debt to GDP ratio is higher than Fiji. We have other countries, for example that has a lower debt to GDP ratio like Papua New Guinea, they are in their 30s but Papua New Guinea on the flip side of it has enormous pressures on their foreign reserves, and that I will also come to later in respect of our foreign reserves.

Madam Speaker, Fiji has a clean record in relation to all its debt obligations. Majority debts, Madam Speaker, this is the other important issue which is what people look at the sustainability of the debts, is your level of foreign reserve exposure, foreign currency exposure. So if you are borrowing a lot more from overseas, then you have a high exposure to foreign currency fluctuations, but if your debt is more secured towards local debts, of course your exposure is more in Fijian dollars and currently we have a 70:30 mix. So, 70 percent of our debt is actually from onshore and 30 percent is from offshore, plus or minus 5 percent either way, which is actually sustainable.

The tenure of debts locally in Fiji is in 2020 years and as announced earlier on, Madam Speaker, we have been working with the Commonwealth Secretariat to actually look at how we can bundle together many of these T-Bills that had been issued over a period of time, both by this Government and the previous governments and how we can consolidate it to actually get into secondary market trading. Fijian market has actually not been susceptible to secondary trading and which we need to get into secondary trading which will actually boost our footprint.

Of course, Madam Speaker, as you know that we also borrowed US\$200 million in 2015 through the global bond issue. We were in fact oversubscribed. In other words, it is something like \$600 million worth of people who wanted to come and buy our bonds but of course we kept it at \$200 million. In fact it was a \$250 million exposure. We paid off \$50 million and \$200 million was raised in the market.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, Fiji's total outstanding debt - you do not understand debt.

Fiji's total outstanding debt at the end of April, Madam Speaker stands at \$4.5 billion. These are the kind of people who were actually in the previous government and this is what we have inherited.

Fiji's total outstanding debt at end of April stands at \$4.5 billion, of which \$1.3 billion is external loans and \$3.2 billion is domestic loans. This demonstrates the fact, Madam Speaker, the point that I made that the nominal value of debt has increased, however, (which they do not understand) that debt to GDP ratio has declined. From a debt management perspective, the debt indicators show that Fiji's overall debt portfolio is managed in a prudent manner. The debt mixes, as I said is 70:30, plus or minus 5 percent, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the other point that is very important is foreign reserves. Now foreign reserves at the end of April 2017 was around \$2.05 billion sufficient to cover 5.5 months of imports and of course through the reserves. This is way above the international benchmark of four months of import covered the Reserve Bank follows. So this international benchmark of four months, you should have at least four months.

In 2004 and 2005 when people like them were in Government, our foreign reserves was only \$5 million. Today it stands in excess of \$2 billion, Madam Speaker, and they had only two months' worth of import capacity. The good news is that, our reserves have risen to an all-time high of \$2.242 billion this month, equivalent to 6.6 months of imports.

Madam Speaker, unprecedented, these figures speak for themselves. The fact of the matter is, they do not understand this, even when we do go out. They are now saying that foreign reserves is not important, what a pathetic response! What a pathetic response!

Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, even when you have companies, for example, Fiji Airways, when they go and invest in the A330s and when they do as an entity, for example, borrow from offshore banks, what the banks also look at is the foreign reserves of the country. If the foreign reserves is in good position, it also means that entities such as those and other State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) or even FNPF, they do want to borrow, they do want to invest and the interest rates are very, very competitive and very, very attractive. These things actually give what you call, 'a good health Bill' to the country itself. This is why you do not have third party validation by people, like from the World Bank, to say that Fiji is in a manageable position, that debt sustainability is good. The only people who think it is not are those people who have absolutely no knowledge about it.

(Laughter)

Madam Speaker, our debt forecast in the 2016-2017 Budget is around \$4.9 billion by the end of the financial year. It is fairly likely that by the end of the financial year 2016, debt stock will be much lower than the Budget projection, mainly underpinned by positive fiscal outturn, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, assessing from the 10 years' fiscal performance, our revenue has increased (they also do not know about revenue) from \$1.4 billion in 2006 when the Honourable Member was in Government, to over \$3 billion in 2017, more than twofold increase. Similarly, our nominal GDP has almost doubled to \$10.6 billion in 2017. Madam Speaker, we are in a very positive situation, and we will continue to build upon that.

Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question, Honourable Samuela Vunivalu?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. According to the World Bank, they mentioned that there is nothing to be alarmed about, of that \$5 billion. Can you elaborate further on that?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, can Honourable Vunivalu repeat his question please?

HON. SPEAKER.- Would you repeat your question, please?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, according to the World Bank Office in Suva, there is nothing to be alarmed about this \$5 billion. Can you further elaborate on that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, again, thank you, Honourable Vunivalu, for this question. The figures that I have just highlighted goes to demonstrate that there is absolutely nothing to be alarmed about. Every country knows that we are a post-colonial country, we were once colonised.

If you look at the history of all colonial countries, Madam Speaker, right from the Ratu Mara-led Government days, the Rabuka-led Government, the Mahendra Chaudhry-led Government, the Qarase-led Government and every single government in Fiji, has run a deficit, except probably three times in our history where we had a surplus, and there were actually aberrations, not the norm but there were aberrations. If you look at all developing countries in the world, they run deficits. The question is, how do you manage your deficit? What is the percentage of your debt to GDP ratio?

That is what they do not understand and that is what we are trying to educate them about. They simply look at figures and say, "Awh!" They do not understand that. An example that I used, a country like Mauritius decided to actually borrow very heavily, invest in infrastructure, built four-lane roads, built IT parts, to be able to service the African Continent. And today, their debt to GDP ratio is higher than 60 percent, but the productive capacity of that country has increased significantly.

In the same way, if we are going to build roads into parts of Fiji, for example, in Naitasiri, the Sigatoka Valley, Nabouwalu, Buca Bay, et cetera, we are actually enhancing the productive capacity of our country. People who were not able to access markets, are now able to access markets a lot quicker and a lot more easily without having a high attrition rate as far as their produce is concerned. If we are able to connect electricity to people who sell fish by the roadside who, unfortunately, do not have access to refrigeration, they have to either eat the fish or the fish rots or they sell it at half price. But if they get access to refrigeration, they can chill the fish, in the morning they bring it out, throw water on it and sell it to you as fresh fish, so the value or their income level goes up. That is what we are doing and that is what we have to do, but in order to do that, you need to be able to borrow money.

However, the point is, when you do borrow money, you need to ensure that the money goes in the right places, and your debt to GDP ratio goes down. At the same time, you have to ensure that your revenue, Madam Speaker, increases and the revenue in Fiji has increased threefold, compared to 2006. Today, our total revenue is \$3.1 billion today, before it was \$1.2 billion.

We have also, Madam Speaker, increased our productivity capacity. Our GDP value has increased and, therefore, our operational savings have also increased, therefore, reducing our need to borrow as much as we used to do before. Even though the debt in nominal terms was lower before than what it is now as a percentage of GDP, it was about 55 percent.

That is what they do not understand, they are looking at the nominal figures. The fact of the matter is that, whilst the nominal debt maybe going this way, GDP as a percentage is coming down. It is very simple.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V. R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, just a few pointers. In 2013, our debt per capita was \$4.4 thousand. If you use \$5 billion and 900,000 people, it has now increased to 5.5 per person. That to us is a more meaningful way of measuring our debt because, Madam Speaker, GDP can be

easily wiped out. It can grow, but it can be wiped out by 25 percent and the ratio could change quite dramatically and thus, will endanger this country.

Our debt, Madam Speaker, in our opinion is unmanageable because GDP is not the right way of measuring the relationship between the two. I wonder if the Honourable Minister can ask World Bank, given our vulnerabilities to the element, what is a better way of measuring the relativity between debt and the revenue capacity of a country?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister, from what I understand, the question is asking yourself to ask the World Bank. So, may be you can request World Bank to answer that question. You can ring them, but the onus is on you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the World Bank has actually taken account of all these factors. It does not have such convoluted analysis also because, Madam Speaker, the reality again is that, you do not expect a World Bank person to make such a statement in such a frivolous manner. It is not a frivolous manner, in fact, it is very rare for organisations, such as the World Bank and IMF, to make actual calls on the economies of individual countries in such a public manner. It is a very rare thing.

The fact of the matter is that, here you have the Head of the World Bank, who will be heading the regional office in Fiji, to make such a comment and that, in itself, means that these people have gone through the loopholes, through the threshold, et cetera, jumped through them all, to be able to make such a statement. They do not make these things lightly.

Just because they do not accept it, it does not mean it makes it right. The reality is, by all standards and international standards, if you look at Central Banks and multilateral Development Banks, we actually are on a very good footing. Of course, as we have highlighted in this House, we can be vulnerable to climatic events. It is not just Fiji, many countries can be vulnerable not just to climatic events. They can be vulnerable to cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis or cold blizzards, but the reality is that, for you to be able to ensure that you have strong footing and foundation in economy, you need to build the capacity. You need to build the capacity!

Miami, Madam Speaker, has hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of losses because of encroaching waters every year, but because the economy has the capacity, they are able to weather it. In the same way you have a massive earthquake in Christchurch, billions of dollars of loss, huge insurance was paid out, but does it actually affect New Zealand overall? No, because it has got a strong footing, the fundamentals are right. They have invested over the past 50, 60 and 70 years.

In the same way if Fiji needs to invest in this infrastructure, we need to get a strong footing. We need to get the fundamentals right. We do not just live upto next year. They are just living up to the elections, that is the point.

Madam Speaker, any responsible government should not only think about the term of its Government, it should think about 20 or 30 years down the track. In the same way, for example, when we did this four-lane road that the Honourable Prem Singh asked about and was explained by the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport, we are actually putting our electrical cables underground. We are moving the pipes and putting them on the side of the road.

Yes, you may argue and say; "Why do it now? It means that it will cost you \$20 million more just to shift the electrical cables on the side", but guess what? Those electrical cables will never ever come down from the cyclones. So we are building for the future, that is a good spend. It may be an

upfront spend now, but it is a good spend. Taking the water pipes out and putting them on the side is an upfront spend, but for the future.

We have actually put water pipes now, than the Water Authority is going to put in three years' time, because the capacity requirement has increased. The demand has increased for Nadi, so rather than doing it three years down the track, we are doing it now whilst we are building the road. This is what you call smart spending.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Madam Speaker, there is obviously something lost on the other side.

HON. SPEAKER. - Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, the World Bank Representative who said that statement that Fiji's debt is manageable, also made a very important caveat in which he said that you must have a national development plan for obvious reasons because it allows the lenders to monitor how money is being used properly and not being abused. Could the Honourable Minister tell us, when this national development plan can be ready and tabled here?

HON. SPEAKER. - Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - I thank the Honourable Member for his interest in national development plans. As you know, there has been no national development plan since 1987. The Alliance Government had national development plans that was thrown out the window on 14th May 1987, and since then we have not had one. We are the ones who now decide to have a development plan.

There has been some delays after *TC Winston*. I have answered Honourable Radrodro's question on this and I had said that we had already gone out. If they read the papers, in particular the *Fiji Sun*, they would understand that we put up public notices on that, we announced it on the radio, in particular in rural radio stations, and we have already had the second round of public consultations. We are going through that, a draft will also be done.

We are currently using organisations, such as the World Bank, the World Research Institute to help us, for example, to climate sensitise our development plan. We need to be aware of what will happen, for example, to islands like, Taveuni, Ovalau, Kadavu and various other low lying areas in Fiji, and what will we need to do in 20 years' time. I know that they do not think that far, but 20 years down the line.

We have a demographic. Madam Speaker, currently 69.4 per cent of our population are currently below the age of 40, so in 20 or 30 years' time...

(Hon. Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Go to the Bureau of Statistics, you will get it.

... those people will become actually in the upper age category.

Madam Speaker, Japan has a super aging population. They spend a third of their entire budget on the elderly because they have a super aging population. They are living much longer, they obviously need other services for them.

In the same way, Madam Speaker, our budget spend, for example, policies on retirement age, et cetera, are targeted towards helping those people who are in the 70 percentile category of our demographics. That is where the focus is. Of course, we are not neglecting the upper 30 percent but a huge focus needs to be on the 70 percent. So we are actually getting the development plans currently being worked upon, to be able to then roll it out to members of the public. Also quite rightly as the World Bank person did say, we also will be rolling it out to our development partners so they know exactly what we are doing and what our target focus is because it is also helpful for them to be able to plan any aid that they may want to give or any development partnership that they want to develop so they know what we are going to do in four or five, or 10 or 15 years' time.

HON. SPEAKER. - Thank you. You will note Honourable Members that I am allowing four supplementary questions today because we have got time. The last question is from the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, obviously the Honourable Attorney-General says more than he needs to say to explain things, but let me ask the question; what is the total projected debt repayment interest, plus principle for 2016 and 2017, and what percentage of revenue will it be?

HON. SPEAKER. - Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Madam Speaker, I do not have the figures here with me. You can ask me via a written question and I can give it to you.

HON. SPEAKER. -Thank you. You can ask that as a written question to the Honourable Minister. Therefore, I will give the last question to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO. - Madam Speaker, the question that I would like to ask the Honourable Attorney-General is in terms of more clarity and more in layman's term. When are you expecting to pay up this \$5 billion debt? Does that mean an increase in tax, especially with the budget for 2017-2018 coming around the corner?

HON. SPEAKER. - Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Madam Speaker, I would like to answer this question because it also helps me educate Honourable Members on the other side.

The debt is not sitting there as \$5 billion. This debt, Madam Speaker, is an accumulation of the total exposure of debts. There were debts incurred by the SVT Government, the FLP Government, the SDL Government and also debts incurred by the Bainimarama-led Government and Fiji First Government. I mean, how preposterous they are to say; "Awh, the debts were incurred by the SVT Government". Of course, they were! You have a 20 year loan or a 30 year loan! That is how debts are given out. Do you not understand some basic things? You go and take out a house loan and you get a 20 year loan or a 25 year loan. You cannot say that debt just came about yesterday!

We accept the responsibility. All governments have to accept the responsibility. For example, when the Decree-led Government from 1987 to 1992 came into power, they had to pay the debt that were incurred by the Alliance Government, so they also incurred debt. When the next

Government came in which is the SVT Government, they had to pay the debts for the Alliance Government, the Decree-led Government and the SVT Government. Then when the FLP Government came in, they had to then pay the debt for all those other three or four Governments for the one short year that they, unfortunately, were in. When they left and the SDL Government came in, they also paid the interest payments and the principle for debts incurred by the previous Governments. That is the responsibility of any Government. So when I am actually pointing it out to them, they said; “No, no, no”. They do not understand that. Then they have the audacity to come and ask about debt.

We have presented in the Budget every year. They do not read the Budget Estimates because at the back of that, it gives you a list of all the debts that had been incurred, the interest payments, the principle payments, when it is maturing, when it started, they are all there! It is not like we got \$5 billion and say; “Oh, let us go and look for money and pay the \$5 billion”, it does not work that way.

(Laughter)

That is what they think! It is such a preposterous situation, and they want to be the alternative Government.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Oh!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They want to be the alternative Government, they do not even know about how debt works!

(Hon. Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Parmod Chand to ask his question.

Fiji Airways Passengers
(Question No. 150/2017)

HON. P. CHAND asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications clarify to Parliament why passengers on Fiji Airways flights are denied complimentary readership of the *Fiji Times*?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications). - Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and this is a very amusing question.

Madam Speaker, the reality is that Fiji Airways is a limited liability company, they make their own procurement decisions. That is the short answer to that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Supplementary question, Honourable Nawaikula?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The employees of Fiji Airways said that the directive to do so came from above. Can you confirm that the directive came from Government?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Who told him that?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You answer the question!

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- You answer my question.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

We need clarification on that question.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can you confirm that the Government gave that directive?

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Can you confirm who told you that we gave that directive?

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You are directed to answer that.

HON. SPEAKER.- No, you need to have a very valid question to ask in this Parliament, and not something else.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can you confirm that Government gave them that directive?

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member has stood in this House and said that he can lie. How do I know that what he is saying is the truth?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Just answer it!

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I will not accept that question to be answered further.

Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Can the Honourable Attorney General confirm that Government is a shareholder, Government provides money to Fiji Airways and can he tell the people of this country that it is not discrimination? It is the responsibility of Government to make sure that the people of this country are not discriminated. They have the right to receive another newspaper as well. It is the people who are asking this.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It is a fairly obvious question.

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Honourable Professor Prasad, I do not expect this from you.

Honourable Professor Prasad does bring a particular level of decorum and intelligence level to the other side, so let me answer your question.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I do not think that the Honourable Attorney-General should talk about what my intelligence is and what I am asking. He said that the Fiji Airways is a private company and they make their procurement decisions.

Government is a shareholder in the Fiji Airways, it provides money to Fiji Airways, and here is a policy whereby Fiji Airways discriminates against a particular newspaper which means discrimination against the people of this country, those who want to see the *Fiji Times* as well. So my simple question is whether it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that there is no discrimination?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. That was not a Point of Order, that was clarification on the question.

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I did not say it is a private company, I said it is a limited liability company, a point of difference.

Madam Speaker, Fiji Airways is 51 percent owned by the Fijian Government. But the Ministry of Economy Officials and Government Ministers do not go and sit on the Board, they have an independent Board. If they do know about corporate governance, they have their own separate constitution. The Board actually decides and makes decisions. The next thing they will be asking us is, why do you not have Nambawan toilet paper in Fiji Airways? That is discrimination.

Madam Speaker, they make decisions. For example, Fiji Airways has a commercial decision, to provide Fiji Water on board. Maybe, if some other water company gives them some donation, they might go and say, "Why do you not have this bottle of water on the plane."

Madam Speaker, the reality is that, no one is prohibited from bringing any reading material (unless it is pornography) on to the plane. But the decision to have whichever products on the plane, is a decision made by Fiji Airways. There is no prohibition on anyone to bring any reading material on the plane.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, let me just change the direction of this debate. Our tourists come from countries where the media is free. The paper that we are reading in Fiji Airways is one that speaks glowingly of the Government of the day, which may be fine for a happy Fiji, but they know better. So we, as a people, must give them the choice of the kind of paper that they should read. I think we should respect them and we show the people, Madam Speaker, that this is also provided inside the plane.

We must have both, Madam Speaker, and I do not believe it is a corporate entity that we cannot ask them to consider this because we own the airline. This is the request coming from this side and we represent the people, so we must also include *Fiji Times* inside the plane, Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, freedom of expression has got nothing to do with which product is on Fiji Airways aircraft, they are two separate issues. The media freedom, Madam Speaker, whether they come from Australia, USA, et cetera, they obviously come from different countries where they have different standards as far as the media is concerned.

As far as our media is concerned, our media is free. They publish everything they want. Their comments get published everywhere they want. They actually stand up and criticise Government, it

gets published and it gets broadcasted. I do not know what that has to do with “rather we have *Fiji Sun* or *Fiji Times* on Fiji Airways”.

When tourists arrive into Fiji, they are at liberty to go and buy both the papers. They can go and buy *Shanti Dut*, *Nai Lalakai*, it is their choice. Let them land in Fiji and buy whatever they want. We are not saying to the tourists; “Do not buy this paper” or “Do not buy that paper”, it is simple.

When I get on a plane to go overseas or travel to different countries and when I get on a Singapore Airline, they do not give me all the newspapers from Singapore.

(Hon. Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, they don't!

When you go on a *Qantas* plane, they do not give you *Telegraph* or *Sydney Morning Herald* or *The Australian*, they do not.

Madam Speaker, when you go to USA, you do not get all the newspapers in USA. When you go to the United Kingdom, you do not get all the newspapers. In fact, many airlines now actually do not even provide newspapers. Many airlines actually do not provide magazines because apparently, it adds to the weight of the aircraft and causes more fuel costs. So a lot of them are now providing those on Apps.

Madam Speaker, the reality to have that logic again, which obviously is missing to say we want the tourists to be able to read all the other media or news from other newspaper organisations, they can do that once they land in Fiji. No problem, read whatever they like!

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Lt. Col. Netani Rika to ask his question.

Status of Forests in Fiji and Management of Forest Resources
(Question No. 151/2017)

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- asked the Government upon notice :

The Forest Policy suggests the need for permanent forest estates as well as sustainable forest management. Can the Honourable Minister for Forests update the House on the status of forests in Fiji and how well are we managing our forest resources?

HON. O. NAIQAMU (Minister for Forests).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question raised by the Honourable Member on the status of forest resources in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, our forests have a forest cover of almost 1.1 million hectares, covering about 56 percent of the total landmass. The Fiji National Forest Policy emphasises sustainable forest management and improvement of the livelihoods of communities that are dependent on forest.

Our forests have always presented Fiji with enormous potentials for livelihood and economic development opportunities. Those opportunities will continue to further expand in the future, as demands for addressing biodiversity, conservation, climate change and other emerging forest-related issues grow.

In addressing sustainable forest management, my Ministry is mindful of the importance of developing proper land use planning guidelines that clearly demarcate permanent agriculture land, as well as land for other development needs for permanent forest land.

Madam Speaker, my Ministry is aware of the multiple roles of forests, ranging from the normal timber needs and economic livelihoods to the important environmental services, such as water catchment, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation. To manage our forests for the future, critical measures have to be implemented to ensure that there are exceptional resources for the future generation.

Under the Aichi Target on the conservation of biodiversity, Fiji has committed to expand its total conservation areas from the current 2.7 percent that is under long-term protection, to around 17 percent of the total forest cover to be protected by 2020. This is an ambitious target that will clearly demand the development of a sustainable financing mechanism similar to the Sovi Basin Endowment Trust Fund, to cover for the long-term management costs.

Madam Speaker, the current strategy to ensure long-term sustainability for my Ministry are threefold, the:

1. Initiative to support the expansion of forest plantations through retrospective incentive support to landowning communities as well as to scale up support for private sector engagement in establishing forest plantations.
2. Enforcement of sustainable logging policy by implementing species specific the met lineage.
3. Plan to increase the protection of high value forest stand under long-term forest conservation purposes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Ratu Kiliraki

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you Madam Speaker. In terms of forest degradation and deforestation: natural forest, 100 cubic metres have been harvested every year; Mahogany, 150,000 cubic metres; pine, 5,00,000 cubic metres; a total of 750,000 cubic metres have been harvested every year, so as the submergence of our forests into dams like in Vaturu, Monasavu and Nadarivatu. We have a \$2.3 million given by World Bank for REDD+ programme

The question is, how is the Ministry of Forests addressing all these deforestation and degradation of forests in our country? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Thank you Madam Speaker. For the information of the House, the Ministry of Forests has reviewed its harvesting plan, especially the removal of logs from the forests and just reduced to 30 percent of native species, as compared to what has been expressed in this House, 100 cubic metres.

The Fiji Pine Limited has totally reduced its harvesting quota for the whole year, from 300,000 to 175,000 cubic metres per annum. The Fiji Hardwood Corporation is just beginning its

operations and has also embarked on the reforestation programme to cater for the deforestation areas. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker, a supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. RATU N. LALABALAVU.- First of all, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for his very detailed explanation regarding the situation of our forests and its future plans. But on the issue of sustainable forest management, Madam Speaker, I would like to raise a question with the Honourable Minister as to what sort of formula does the Ministry have regarding these new policies of REDD+ and carbon emissions because you have just stated that there is a huge amount of money being involved.

What sort of formula do you have regarding the sharing of this money to the resource owners and before I take my seat, Madam Speaker, I hope it would not be like the royalty for water. We are still waiting for it because there is no formula. The FijiFirst boasted about in the *2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji*, yet we have been told in this House that there is fair share and all that, but we have not seen the light of day on that one there. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. I think it is a new question and I will respond to it on Thursday in my Ministerial Statement. Thank you Madam Speaker, and I think it is an issue on REDD+. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, I am sure that the Honourable Minister is familiar with the 2010 FEO Report on Fiji Forest Outlook in which the recommendation was made that Fiji replant 100,000 acres of land replanting as a measure against climate change as well as sustainable forest management.

Can the Honourable Minister advise this House whether that recommendation has been implemented and how many acres so far has been replanted?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, can I request the Honourable Member to repeat his question?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am sure that the Honourable Minister is familiar with the 2010 FAO Report called the Fiji Forest Outlook and in that, there is a recommendation that Fiji replants 100,000 acres as a measure against climate change, as well sustainable management forest. Could you advise the House how many has been replanted so far towards that recommendation or under your own initiative?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Madam Speaker, I think the question is statistical in nature, I will response to it in another sitting.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Parmod Chand.

HON. P. CHAND.- Supplementary question, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. P. CHAND.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his update but I am compelled to ask the same question that was posed to him yesterday in which in my humble opinion is very relevant to his ministry and to this question.

Is there a national land use policy related to all his ministry's projects and initiatives and if so, can it be tabled in this august House?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- It is irrelevant to this question, Madam Speaker.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The question is asking for information to be tabled in this Parliament and if the response could be tabled at a later day.

Thank you. I will now give the floor to the Honourable Jiosefa Dulakiverata.

Volunteer Fire Fighters – National Fire Authority
(Question No. 152/2017)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport confirm to this House the total number of volunteer fire fighters with the National Fire Authority (NFA)? Thank you.

HON. P.B. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I also thank him.

Madam Speaker, in accordance with Section 23 of the National Fire Service Act 1994, there are 6 community volunteer based fire stations and the concept of volunteer fire fighter is for the community to elect volunteers who are to represent them in the various fire stations and then trained by the NFA.

Madam Speaker, the benefit of engaging these community base volunteer fire fighters are:

1. They supplement the manpower requirement in community-based fire stations;
2. These community-based volunteers support permanent fire fighters in fighting fires and responding to any type of disaster; and
3. They are very effective in community-based fire safety awareness programmes because they are familiar with the community.

Madam Speaker, there were 96 volunteer fire fighters and a total of 42 out of 92 had been absorbed as permanent workers. Madam Speaker, the remaining 54 will be absorbed gradually, based on the minimum qualification requirement.

Madam Speaker, during my visit to the fire stations, the volunteer fire fighters requested if I could look into their salaries and thereafter I requested the Chairman of the NFA to look into this urgent issue. Madam Speaker, I have been informed that all the volunteer fire fighters salaries have been increased. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you Madam Speaker, the board members play a pivotal role in the operational running of the NFA. So, can the Honourable Minister confirm whether the appointments have been confirmed and gazetted, and if not, why not? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- At least it is the responsibility of all Honourable Members to read the Gazette, and if she would have been gone through the Gazette, she would find that they have been appointed and gazetted. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Dulakiverata.

HON. J. DULAKIVERATA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response.

Madam Speaker, as the Honourable Minister had said, 42 had been absorbed into the system. There are a lot volunteer fire fighters who have been working with the NFA but the thing is, some of these people had been there for almost ten years.

My question, Madam Speaker, is, some of the fire fighters came in because they are rugby players and they are absorbed ahead of all the people that had been working there. I ask the Honourable Minister, if there is a qualification for fire fighters to be rugby players?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, honestly, I am not aware of such incident that has happened in NFA but if the Honourable Member has got some evidence, definitely I will look into it, but there is no such thing happening in NFA.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Supplementary question, Honourable Kiliraki.

HON. RATU K. KILIRAKI.- Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The NFA, being a very important and critical organisation for the safety of the people in terms of their properties and lives and it is also important for the appointment of a CEO. Can the Honourable Minister give a timeline when the CEO will be appointed? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. MEMBER.- New answer!

(Laughter)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for his question. We have an acting CEO and also the board in place. So the board is going to advertise for the position and very shortly we are going to have a CEO. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Madam Speaker, 54 will be absorbed. Could the Honourable Minister give us a timeline as to when will this be completed?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I did mention that the remainder will be absorbed gradually and there is no such timeframe. They will have to go through exams and only then will they be absorbed. So, gradually, yes, they will, but I am sorry I cannot give any timeline.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to Honourable Ruveni Nadalo to ask his question.

Update on Community Outreach Programmes
(Question No. 153/2017)

HON. R.N. NADALO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts provide an update on the community outreach programmes and the community-run courses that the Technical College of Fiji Campuses are facilitating?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I wish to thank him for asking this question.

Madam Speaker, as you know, the Technical Colleges is a major educational strategy that this Government has adopted to ensure that we reach out to those students who are not able to make it to universities because they are not really that good in higher education stream or they do not have an aptitude in the higher education stream but they have an aptitude in the trade and skilled area. Therefore, because they are not able to make it up to Years 12 and 13, they are not able to go to the university because they have dropped out of schools.

Now, with the establishment of Technical Colleges, we were able to get these students after Year 10, to branch out into the Technical College in the technical stream and still fulfil their dreams of going to university and complete a bachelor's degree in various engineering areas.

Madam Speaker, apart from that, we also have allowed students who have dropped out or not completed their Years 10 or 9 but they are matured enough and have an aptitude in the trade area to pursue their educational dreams to the Technical College, and these Technical Colleges are strategically located throughout Fiji.

We have got 13 campuses and as rightfully raised by the Honourable Member, we do not want to establish an institution and it remains there and think that parents and students will come to the doorstep. There are some who still do not have that facilities to get the full information or come

to the Technical College campus to obtain information on how to access their child, so we have reached out to them.

There are a number of strategies to ensure that we do get full information to the students. It is important that, I mean it is throughout the economy, Madam Speaker, providing full information and having it accessible to the rank and file is very important, if you want to ensure that we get maximum benefit out of the institutions that we have established.

Now, with the Technical College, Madam Speaker, numerous strategies were adopted to reach out to the communities, village and community visits, the campus trainers made visits to the remote settlements and villages and provide information on the courses and programmes that are offered at the Technical College of Fiji in various campuses as well as how these programmes, after these students have undertaken them, to transform not only the child but the entire household and community. The campus staff also teamed up with the community police while visiting communities, villages and youth groups.

The Police team provides assistance to identify the inactive youths in the communities and supports, encourage and motivate them to enrol at the various campuses of the Technical College.

Madam Speaker, campus staff have also been involved in house to house visitation, such as in the settlements, cane belt areas because unlike villages and settlements, houses are not together. They are dispersed so this kind of places, you need to make house to house visits. In addition, the relevant Technical College staff have also teamed up with the corporate section that we established to undertake or identify those students who have dropped out from the school system and if we can get them back into the school system. So a Technical College had played a very important role in assisting us to get those students back, either back into the high school or at the Technical College.

Madam Speaker, we have also developed banners which we will place in towns early in the year before the Term 1, Trimester 1 and the same thing will be done, we will again place before Trimesters 2 and 3.

We have also distributed flyers to the people through these places. We have also got leaflets inserted in the daily newspapers. We did that in December and in January again, just prior to the starting of Trimester 1, so that those households who have access to the dailies can get the flyer, read them and see the opportunities that are there.

Madam Speaker, we also rostered our staff to go on air in the various programmes organised by the two radio stations in the respective vernacular languages, to also reach out to the public as well as respond to questions that the members of the public may have about the courses or programme that we offer out of the technical college.

Madam Speaker, we have also organised school visits once Term 3 has started. Our Technical College staff also visit schools and talk to Years 10, 11, 12 and 13 students and give them options on the kinds of programmes that we offer and also to clarify to them that this is a pathway to university.

Madam Speaker, what we want, what we have been making very clear is that the technical college programmes are not really for dropouts only, it is for students who are an aptitude in that technical area. It is not for students who are slow learners. It is there for children who have an aptitude in technical areas so that we do not want to brand this Technical College as initially that we had, that notion about this vocational programme where anyone doing vocational programme was seen differently, that these are slow learners or these are rejects, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, we want to get away from that. That is, why Madam Speaker, vocational programme was not successful because this negative connotation was attached to vocational programme and that is why we are using this terminology - technical programme, technical college Madam Speaker. So, it is important that we understand that there is some brighter future for technical education. There is massive shortage of technical qualified people in technical areas, not only in Fiji, but throughout the region and throughout the world, in fact.

Madam Speaker, these were some of the strategies that we adopted to ensure that while we have established these campuses with massive investments because to establish a technical campus for technical programmes, we need appropriate workshops and equipment. So, it requires lot of money and we have invested millions of dollars to upgrade and construct new workshops to ensure that the programme which has been vetted by the Higher Education Commission is equivalent and offered at Level 2, Madam Speaker.

We also work very closely with the Fiji National University to provide a clear pathway to Levels 3, 4, Trade Diploma and Bachelor's degree in the relevant areas of that particular subject matter. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Mohammed Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker and I also thank the Honourable Minister for his response. I did observe while he was responding information about the short courses he was giving out.

So, my question to the Honourable Minister is, would he have any data on the number of students who have been trained via short courses on and off campus last year, which is 2016? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for asking the question. Yes, I do have the data. Last year, we ran a total of 9.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- It is a statistical question.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Yes, I am prepared Honourable Member. You have a problem with that?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, when we talk about good things, they do not like, yet when there is a negative thing, they also do not like.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- They are worried about good data coming out to public.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member. Please do not respond to interjections. Just answer the question that has been asked.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last year, we provided short courses to 9,419 students. One year alone, 9,419 students were provided a short course, ranging from 2 weeks to 6 weeks, Madam Speaker.

Of this 9,419; 8,041 students undertook the short course at the various 13 campuses and 514 students undertook the short course by our trainers going out to villages and settlements.

Our campus trainers also undertook short course for 107 staff of the Water Authority of Fiji. We also trained 34 inmates at the Fiji Correctional Services. We assisted the Ministry of Youth and Sports Programme by training 376 youths who were enrolled in their programme throughout Fiji.

We identified 73 students at their various schools, where we upgraded them through the short course and then we also upgraded in certain areas our own teachers teaching in the technical courses in our schools. For example, courses in AutoCAD, 240 of those teachers were upgraded. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, accessibility is the key to fully realising the opportunities offered by these technical colleges. For example, the one sitting at Nawaca in Bua is like a white elephant because of distance and transport problems. Students or those eligible to access this opportunity in Wainunu in Solevu Secondary School and from Lekutu are not accessible because of those problems. So, can the Honourable Minister confirm or explain to the House how accommodation facilities can be included in those facilities? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Member again do not have full information about ...

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- (inaudible)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- *Wawa.*

... the latest developments, Madam Speaker. If she would have gone to the campus, she should have noted ...

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I have been there.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... that there is a dormitory that is underway to be constructed. Madam Speaker, we are looking at...

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- White Elephant.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No. Absolutely not, Madam Speaker.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Please do not respond to the interjections.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, we have got about 80 students full time on the campus. Their concept about the campus is that only students are taught there. Over 9,000 students were taught short courses, 8,000 of them were taught on the campus and over 1,000 were taught in the community. So, the campus is actively going around running short courses in the community as well. Now, close to 100 students are enrolled on full time on a one year award programme.

Madam Speaker, we are providing RSL transportation and bus fare coupon to students who are travelling from long distance to come to the campus. Now, what we also want Madam Speaker, as raised by the Honourable Member, attract students from right in the interior and the other corner of Bua and for that, that will be on campus, we will have the dormitory ready early next year.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, and for that matter, I just want to tell the Honourable Member, we are looking at constructing dormitories in the other campuses as well. For example, Nausori, Lautoka and Nadi, Madam Speaker. There are plans to ensure that we have hostel facilities at various campuses, not all probably so that we can get students from the interior to come and stay there and undertake the full award programme, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. In consideration of time, we are giving the last question to the Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response this morning. Can the Honourable Minister confirm whether a review will be done to the curriculum of these technical schools, for example, automotive? Most of the models that the students learn are old models and are not relevant to the current technology and current trend. Will a review be conducted because it is like a waste of time to them?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, unfortunately the Honourable Member does not know that the programme we are running is the one provided by the Higher Education Commission and the qualification that we offer is the Higher Education Commission's qualification. That is the programme running.

Now, the issue about *Moodle*, Madam Speaker, we have got the latest shipments and I will give you one simple one. For textiles training, we spoke to the garment factory owners and they said that when a graduate comes out of this particular programme, we want the person to start working rather than us spending six months to train him and the problem that impaired us was that the machines that were used before, FNU used to run those textile programmes on those machines which were outdated.

So, what we did, we ordered brand new machines that actually is now used at the garment factory floor, which means the machines that they are using to train our students, that is the machine that is being used at the garment factory floor. The Same thing, Madam Speaker, that we want to do with the printer.

As you know, the technology in printery has really moved way ahead. Now, we are investing, Madam Speaker. Just recently, we bought a hybrid vehicle because there is a lot of hybrid vehicles, we want to ensure that mechanics are ready out there to fix the defects in these hybrid vehicles.

Madam Speaker, we are identifying how the technology is moving and with that, we are ensuring that our work shed are equipped with the latest machines so that students who graduate out of these campuses are relevant to the contemporary market. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, we will now adjourn and break for refreshments. We will resume at 11.30 am. Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.04 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.32 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now move on from where we left off and I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Sela Nanovo to ask his question.

Increase in Pay for Special Constables
(Question No. 154/2017)

HON. RATU S.V. NANOVO asked the Government, upon notice:

Will the Special Constables get an increase in pay?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA (Minister for Defence and National Security).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and would like to thank him for the question this morning.

Madam Speaker, old Members of Parliament will remember that the Special Constabulary was inherited from the British system of policing with the aim of providing auxiliary support for the Regular Force during national crisis, national events like the Hibiscus Festival and also during Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Operation (HADR).

The increase in the Special Constabulary's pay normally coincides with the increase in salaries for civil servants. On that question, Madam Speaker, there is no increase in the pay for Special Constables.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nabulivou?

HON. A. NABULIVOU.- A supplementary question, Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Minister tell us the total number of Special Constables who are in the Force right now?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, the total number of Private Special Constables as of today is 1,007: Corporals - 65; Sergeants - 24; Inspectorates - 11; and Senior Inspectors - 2.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Karavaki?

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, could the Honourable Minister explain to this House as to the pathway available for the Special Constables to enable them to become Regular Police Officers?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, Special Constables are recruited at divisional level and they are also trained in the Divisions. As they prove themselves, they can progress to become regular officers.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Samuela Vunivalu?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Madam Speaker, have these Special Constables been paid overtime recently, and how much?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. The overtime pay in total that was made recently was \$352,626.06.

HON. SPEAKER.- And lastly, the Honourable Aseri Radrodro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam Speaker, can the Honourable Minister advise this House whether Government is considering paying the Special Constables outstanding back-pay allowances that were still outstanding to be paid from 2006 to 2010?

HON. RATU I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, the total amount of \$352,626.06 that I have just mentioned is the figure for 2006 to 2010, and that has already been paid.

HON. SPEAKER.- Before we move on to the next question, we have visitors all the way from Sawanikula Village in Naitasiri. I would like to really welcome them to Parliament. Thank you for your interest in Parliament, coming all the way from such a rural area to here, thank you.

(Acclamation)

I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Brij Lal to ask his question.

HON. DR. B. LAL.- Madam Speaker, I would like to withdraw the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Question No. 155/2017 is withdrawn.

We will move on to the Written Question and I give the floor to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro to ask his question.

Written Question

Details of Milk Production, Consumption and Importation (Question No. 156/2017)

HON. A.M. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management provide the House with the following, the –

- (a) total milk production by dairy farmers over the last 10 years;
- (b) total milk consumption by consumers in Fiji over the last 10 years; and
- (c) total volume of milk importation to Fiji over the last 10 years.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development and National Disaster Management).- Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the question asked by the Honourable Member and I will give my answer at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, question time is over and before we move on to the next question, I would like to adjourn Parliament for just half a minute while we change the Chairmanship. Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.39 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.40 a.m.

(The HONOURABLE DEPUTY SPEAKER took the Chair)

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on to the next Item in the Order Paper.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- The following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40, the:

1. Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications;
2. Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts; and
3. Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport.

Each Minister may speak up to 20 minutes. After each Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or her designate to speak on the statement for not more than five minutes. There will also be a response from the Leader of the NFP or his designate to speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communication to deliver his statement.

Update on the Nationwide Implementation of Digital Television

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Deputy Speaker, I rise to give Parliament an update on the nationwide implementation of Digital Television, but also in respect of the background to the spectrum reallocation that has actually started in Fiji in 2011.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Government initiated spectrum management reforms and overhaul of the spectrum allocation practices in 2011, which included all spectrum that was assigned to telecommunication companies, broadcasters and other commercial users of the spectrum which, of course, included telephone and radio. The reforms also addressed legacy issues, such as the previous mismanagement of spectrum allocation, as well as to allow for the spectrum to be freed up for redeployment towards emerging technologies.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Department of Communications with the assistance of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), an expert consultant developed spectrum band plans that minimised spectrum wastage and encouraged the use of innovative technologies. As we have said, a lot of people do not realise that spectrum is like limited real estate, which is assigned to each country.

The result of this, Honourable Deputy Speaker, was the implementation of the new FM Radio and Television Band Plan in 2012 which, amongst other benefits, offered the following advantages:

- To reduce spectrum interference;
- Better quality of transmission;
- More space for new broadcasters both, on national and regional basis;

- Free up the space which introduced My TV, FBC TV and, of course, better reception over radio, for example, when travelling from Suva to the Western Division; and
- the ability to also allocate spectrum for new technologies.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, during the reform process, it became evident that there is a need for Fiji to consider migration into digital television:

- As it offered several advantages over analogue broadcasting which is currently the case, except for Suva, Nausori and Lami areas, and also in the Western Division where we have started that.
- It meant more effective and efficient use of spectrum, allowing for more services to be redeployed, so currently we have, for example, an allocated TV station for the broadcast of Parliamentary proceedings.
- A better quality of video and audio and an ability to broadcast in high definition.
- The ability to offer enhanced services, such as the use of subtitles in electronic programme guide and lower cost of operation.
- All existing analogue broadcasters could share one transmitter and offer multiple channels each. Previously the whole idea of having one tower for each broadcaster became very efficient, much upfront cost in terms of getting the services up, but now through digital television you actually get more channels but a lower upfront cost.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, Government in 2013 in partnership with ITU, finalised Fiji's first roadmap for the migration to digital television. The roadmap identified the most efficient manner for Fiji to implement the transition, which is through the establishment of a common infrastructure that could be used by all broadcasters, existing and new.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the justification for the use of common infrastructure was that, this will considerably reduce capital and operational costs for all operators and will no longer be required to maintain the individual infrastructure. All operators would have the same footprint, and would compete for viewers purely through the strength of programming, not essentially about how many towers they have. So, the ideas we did with the liberalisation of the telecommunication sector, we need to ensure that people compete for service allocation, as opposed to the infrastructure cost.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the roadmap that was put in place mandated the justification of the use of common infrastructure. It would also mean that Fiji would deploy DVB-T compression, a second generation technology that offered many advantages from the new first generation DVB-T protocol. This also ensured that Fiji adopts a cutting edge world class technology and invested in a system that will be future proof.

Given the size of the Fijian television market, it was determined that this infrastructure would serve both, free-to-air as well as pay television operators, providing additional opportunities for competition in the pay television market, as well as the means to assist the platform to become self-funding.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, deploying conditional access on all channels, including those free-to-air would also prevent piracy and protect intellectual property rights. A further benefit of a conditional access system would be to block-off the use of grey market substandard STBs or Set Top Boxes that could be imported cheaply but fail to work in the decoding system, should upgrades to

the platform be made. What this means in simple language, Honourable Deputy Speaker, is that consumers are protected from purchasing Set Top Boxes that are substandard and may not be manufactured to work correctly on what we call the *Walesi* platform. Honourable Deputy Speaker, the provision of more choices for Fijians and better quality has been the driving motivation behind the Government's determination to implement digital television.

Walesi was established as a 100 percent Government owned company in 2015. Honourable Deputy Speaker, *Walesi* was set up for all service providers on the platform, equal access in geographical reach. Competition in the sector would be significantly enhanced and all Fijians would be able to access not only better quality picture, but also have increased choices in content.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the separation of *Walesi* from any existing broadcaster or operator in the sector whether it is MaiTV, FBC TV or Fiji TV, would enable a level playing field through all its other national free-to-air and pay per view broadcasters will be treated as tenants on the platform. Additionally, there will be opportunities for *Walesi* in the future to grow into a consolidated infrastructure company, similar to Kordia in New Zealand.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, *Walesi* could, in the future, expand services to include hosting all broadcast transmissions which will not only include television, but also FM and linking services. The benefit of such a consolidation will enable economies of scale, and provide all the national linking and transmission sites to be well served by utilities and connectivity. All broadcasters will not only enjoy an enhanced reach and better technical support, but also reduce their high operating costs, especially in terms of maintaining sites that are poor or have no utility service and connectivity.

Walesi has the potential to provide the State with the future income stream for maintaining a national digital broadcasting platform that keeps pace with future technical developments and provide the source of future funding for public broadcasting, once the initial platform establishment and ongoing management costs have been covered. Honourable Deputy Speaker, a supplementary benefit of a separate wholly-owned entity, such as *Walesi* managing the platform is a future possibility of partially privatising the entity.

In September, 2014, Honourable Deputy Speaker, we began site preparation, procurement and installation of the equipment in anticipation of the rollout of the platform. Internationally accredited and world class suppliers of equipment were selected and discussions were held directly with them rather than allowing them to go through middlemen and system integrators, to ensure that the Department minimises the cost of acquiring hardware.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, test transmission, as highlighted in the House earlier on, commenced in Suva in April 2015, and once the proof of concept was accepted as has performed to expectations, future plans for national rollout was prepared, with the Department initiating a review of all transmissions sites to finalise areas that offered the best transmission options in terms of minimising costs and expanding coverage. It must be noted at this stage, terrestrial free-to-air analogue coverage only extended to about 80 percent to 85 percent of the population. Expansion to population does not mean expansion in terms of line coverage.

Through the digital platform, Honourable Deputy Speaker, it is envisaged that this would expand to, at least, 93 percent of the population coverage to terrestrial means, with the last seven percent covered using free-to-air satellite services. So at the moment, we have parts of Viti Levu even, with terrestrial coverage, they do not get any coverage so they need satellite coverage. So you could be in a gully somewhere in Nadarivatu and you will not get terrestrial coverage. But what we intend to do with digital rollout through Government is that, all those areas would be covered, even

by satellite transmission. And this satellite transmission will give free-to-air coverage to all the users, including those in the outer islands.

In actual fact, Honourable Deputy Speaker, satellite service will provide Pacific coverage also. In other words, giving Fiji the opportunity to provide content to the entire region, such as provided by the BBC World Service, for example.

A large scale public trial was launched in the greater Suva area in August 2016. The coverage, in fact, extended from Korovou down to the Pacific Harbour. The large scale trial was proceeded by a channel lottery which assigned a channel number to existing broadcasters, and, of course, we know what the different channel numbers are - FBC drew Channel 1, Fiji TV drew Channel 2, FBC's second channel through FBC as FBC Plus drew Channel 3, MaiTV drew Channel 4 and Fiji TV's second channel known as Fiji Two drew Channel 5. This lottery was held to ensure fairness in the allocation of channel numbers, and to allow equal opportunity to all the existing broadcasters to state claim to preferred numbers.

A test transmission has also been established in Nadi and the Lautoka area which has been broadcasting since the end of December, 2016. A toll free call centre was established by *Walesi* to offer assistance to viewers experiencing technical issues and to gather feedback; this is a trial period.

Currently, Honourable Deputy Speaker, there are about 4,000 households actively using the *Walesi* service and this number is expected to rise exponentially in the coming months as more sites are activated.

Walesi's Digicel reception is received by a television set using a regular UHF television antenna and a low-cost Set Top Box which retails at a maximum price of \$99.95. Of course, retailers can choose to sell this at a lower price, and we have already seen some of these boxes being sold for less than \$80. *Walesi* is open to making the boxes available to other retailers and currently, we have TFL, Vinod Patel, Tappoos, Courts and all of these companies, selling these, but obviously, we welcome others to also set these STVs. This to ensure that customers have a choice and benefit from competition between the sellers of these STVs.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, Government in its commitment to ensuring that the most vulnerable members of our society or people at the lower end of the social economic scale do not experience hardships should they wish to enjoy the benefit of Digicel services, we have implemented the subsidiary programme that allows any household which qualifies to receive subsidies on electricity bills, to receive a free set of box paid fully by Government. Honourable Deputy Speaker, 10,800 households presently qualify for the subsidy and approximately 500 households have already received the subsidy. Further refinements are being made in the implementation of the scheme which will address households that are serviced by generators or alternative energy.

Technical infrastructure challenges faced by *TC Winston*, of course, ensure that the engineering specifications of these towers that we are going to build are going to withstand speeds of up to Category 5 cyclones. *Walesi* is also making sure that transmission equipment deployed, is robust to the point of insisting upon verification the strength of steel being used in the towers through independent testing, ensuring geotechnical assessments are done prior to the construction of the towers, making use of slot antenna systems that minimise wind loading, and by building redundancies into *Walesi's* linking between sites.

Currently we have the analogue system, even though it is terrestrial, you have one line in what you call, line onsite, you have a tower sitting on this hill, you have another tower sitting there, and they must be able to face each other and that is how they actually transfer through the frequencies. If

one tower falls down, then you can lose your entire link but if, for example, you have other towers for the redundancy, if this falls down you can pick up through the other tower, so redundancies need to be built in. *Walesi* is ensuring its transmitters are deployed in a redundant configuration, including on-site spares, effectively meaning there are two backups on site should the primary transmitters have issues.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, analogue transmission coverage at present is by way of six transmission sites, currently with five sites on Viti Levu and a single site on Vanua Levu. In order to ensure maximum possible terrestrial through coverage, *Walesi* is investing into 17 transmissions sites that will be distributed across Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. Furthermore, significant investments will be made in the use of satellite technology to expand coverage to all maritime areas and rugged terrains, and to ensure that the *Walesi* signal penetrates through a hundred percent of Fiji. At the moment free-to-air television does not cover a hundred percent of Fiji.

Walesi is investing in the state-of-the-art containerised transmission solution whereby all our equipment, including transmitters, generators, battery backup and UPS systems will be housed in the purpose-built containerised modular data centre. This makes site management very easy and allows for scalability where a site can be expanded based on future requirements.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the sites will be fully redundant. We have fully redundant generators mains electricity where possible, as well as solar panels and high performing flow batteries which will ultimately mean that in most cases, the primary source for a site could be solar but with the backup generator and automatically it kicks in. This will ensure ongoing operational costs are kept to a minimum. At the moment when something happens to a site, you go in a four wheel drive to the site and fix it up and it takes months. This will also ensure that the operational *Walesi* will be environmentally friendly and a large part of its power requirements will be met through the use of sustainable energy.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this is indicative of the Government's commitment to invest in sustainable green energy solutions in line with the vision as highlighted by the Honourable Prime Minister at the COP 23 Presidency. These modular containerised data centres are currently being built and the first group of concept units will be available for commissioning in the next few months.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the digital platform has a momentum which, of course, cannot be stopped and we will see a rapid expansion of the network over the next seven months. Our target is to have this completed by December this year (2017).

The following is the attentive roll-out schedule for full commercial transmission to take digital coverage penetration beyond the current analogue coverage:

- Cakovalevu which is up on the hill that you see over here and, of course, cover Suva, Nasinu, Nausori, Korovou, Lami, Navua and Pacific Harbour. It is already active, but this will be the first site where we will install the containerised data centre.
- Sabeto that covers Lautoka, Nadi and the lower Mamanucas is already active at a low power, having started transmission in December, 2016. A full commissioned full power site is expected to be deployed in August.
- Koro-O, covering Tavua and Ba which is up in Nadarivatu, will be starting in August.
- Vunatova, covering Sigatoka will be starting in August.

- Ulivuvuya, covering Nabouwalu and parts of Bua, in September.
- Savusavu, covering the greater Savusavu area in September.
- Lololo, covering Ba and parts of Lautoka will start in October.
- Rakiraki, covering the greater Rakiraki area in October.
- Matawailevu, covering Barotu, Madhuvani and Vunikavikaloa will start in December.
- Delaikoro, covering the greater Labasa area will start in late December.

As highlighted, Honourable Deputy Speaker, in addition to terrestrial rollout, *Walesi* will be rolling out a satellite service which will be available by December or sooner, if all tests go as planned.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this satellite service will give us coverage across the entire Fijian Group where services may then be either re-distributed locally using smaller repeater sites, or the services can be picked up directly via home using an IP, as satellite services can deliver data as well as video. This will ensure that people in those remote areas will suddenly be able to leapfrog into using a technology where currently they cannot even, for example, get telephone coverage, let alone television coverage.

We have already, Honourable Deputy Speaker, started discussions with satellite operators and in the process of selecting a partner shortly. There will be no limit to sites that will be covered by the *Walesi* free-to-air channels through the use of satellite. Even the remotest parts of Fiji, such as Rotuma, Lau, Kadavu, interior of Namosi and Naitasiri and Ceva-i- Ra, will all have coverage and will all be able to access free-to-air television stations for the first time in history, and they do not even have to pay a single cent for it. At the moment, we have six Channels that are being covered by the free-to-air television which includes this Parliament proceedings being televised.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I would like to reiterate that the satellite expansion services would not only achieve universal coverage for broadcasters, but also provide the necessary infrastructure for the telecommunication services to fully penetrate rural and maritime areas that are proven to be quite challenging and expensive to connect via terrestrial means. Honourable Deputy Speaker, this further shows the Government's commitment to bridging the digital divide by providing access to all Fijians a full range of ICT services.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, it is part of the plan of Government to achieve one of the quickest and most ambitious analogue switch-off schedules ever since, switch off from analogue to digital. Early analogue switch-off will ensure that ongoing variable high operating cost for broadcasters will be replaced by a fixed monthly rental fee. This will give broadcasters certainty to plan and invest in programming, instead of infrastructure. This will also be a catalyst to attract new investors into the sector, especially in the pay television market, and in doing so introduce much needed competition where we currently have only one supplier of pay television.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, it is expected that the digital switch-off will begin in December, 2017, and be fully completed by July 2018. Most regional sites will be switched off within six months from the date they commence their commercial digital television service.

In conclusion, Honourable Deputy Speaker, the analogue to digital migration has had its fair share of challenges and the damage to infrastructure during *TC Winston* further delayed our rollout plans as *Walesi* had to go back and revisit his designs to ensure that the infrastructure that was being

built was strong enough to withstand at the very extreme suffer minimal damage during the cyclone with a magnitude such as *TC Winston*.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, *Walesi* had to invest in creating its own support structure from linking through to the provision of redundant power options to ensure Fijians have access to a high availability digital broadcasting service. There are, as I stated, five commercial stations currently available on the digital platform which Fijians can enjoy. Further to that, as well as Honourable Members of the House will be aware, as I said, we have this Parliamentary coverage being covered uninterrupted on the sixth channel.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I would like to reiterate the free to air channels are free and will remain free of charge to all Fijians. Also, a point that should be noted on that is the cost of all of this is not coming out from the budget.

We started a few years ago and the Honourable Minister for Education was the Chair of Commerce Commission where he charged a small fee of about 1 or 2 cents for incoming international calls and that fee has accumulated into a trust account and we are using money from that account to be able to invest in this area that will give access to all Fijians in respect of setting up digital television services, which is not only digital television services but also a door and window of opportunity to those remote areas into the ITC framework.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, we are confident that once the platform is fully operational by end of December 2017 will attract national broadcasters, including new pay TV operators. They will provide much needed completion and offer more choices to Fijians.

We are fully committed to complementing or implementing this roadmap which will actually be done by December of this year and after that, we will have the analogue switched off to digital television. Thank you, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. I now call on the Honourable Leader of Opposition or her designate.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Deputy Speaker. I rise on behalf of our party to reply to the Honourable Minister's Statements on this issue.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, we do commend the Government for moving forward to digital television from analogue, and the underlying objective is to give wider coverage to all Fijians in Fiji. We support this, but having said that, we have to record our concern with the way it has been implemented.

Australia became digital last year but for ten years, they both ran together, analogue and digital, and this is the way Fiji should have handled it because as we speak today, Honourable Deputy Speaker, a good part of our people do not access television. When we consider our vulnerability to the elements, this is very very serious, Honourable Deputy Speaker.

Today, the people in Kadavu, our *Tauvu* from Kadavu, do not enjoy television programmes anymore. What happens when there is a disaster? What about that warning that all of us take for granted would come through the screens? It is shocking. I am from the West, I am from Nadroga and it is shocking that people who were hit by *TC Winston*, did not have the same visual ability to see *TC Winston* approaching this country. We have to ask the question; how did we warn those in Lau and Lomaiviti that *TC Winston* was coming?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- This is bordering on criminal, it is a dereliction of duty on the part of FijiFirst to bring in this new phenomena, granted that is happening all over the world but neglecting the people. It should have been done properly, the analogue and the digital, should have run together until such time we are able to say, “You can switch off and go to digital in totality.” Like I said, Australia took 10 years to do it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- How can you sit here and say “we are for the people when you know very well that what is happening here today, they cannot see.” They cannot watch sports, they cannot even watch all the nonsense coming from the other side during this debate.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- As I said, we have to go digital, we know the use there is totally 100 percent now, but it has to be handled with care and this is the legacy of FijiFirst - big promises. All these brilliant ideas but when it comes to execution - zero. Execution is very very poor with this Government and I believe the people of Fiji will soon make up their mind about that next year.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Even today, Honourable Deputy Speaker, the people in the Suva corridor are still questioning about the quality of the reception, let alone the second phase from where we come from and you know on the spectrum, Fiji, a country of 900,000 people, have three television stations. Australia, with 23 million people, have three television stations.

The problem here is the cost of production by the local television stations, it is becoming too much for them. So to crowd the market with so many players will only degrade the quality of television that we get in terms of local production ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ... and I just hope, Honourable Deputy Speaker, that the consultant from New Zealand who came ten years ago to consult for FBC is not doing this. He should not be making any recommendations, he should not be driving this, because one thing we know about FijiFirst is that arm’s length is not something they understand.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Things should be run on an arm’s length basis and having this guy, if he is still doing it, then that would be a cause for some serious concerns.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, we support digital but done properly, not in the hands of FijiFirst. Thank you.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Member. I now call upon the Leader of NFP or his designate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Deputy Speaker. We also support the migration from analogue to digital television and I fully understand the objectives behind it, I think we support that as well. I want to at this point also raise the issue of implementation.

I have also said this that you can have very good intentions, you could have a very good roll out plan but we could end up having things going wrong and that is why Honourable Deputy Speaker, I think it is important for us on this side of the House to raise some questions and I have no disagreements with what the Honourable Attorney-General said with respect to the plan and the ultimate objective of the migration from analogue to digital television. I think that is an international trend that makes technological sense and I think it will provide better services to our people.

So in that spirit, I just want to raise a number of questions and I am hoping that the Honourable Attorney-General at some point will bring this out so that the people who did ask some of these questions originally can have some answers. In fact, as the Honourable Attorney-General himself admitted, there are problems so far and you can make that out from the number, I think he said only 4000 have actually taken that up.

So, I think there are issues of implementation and issues of how people are going to get onto this and benefit as planned within the timeframe but if I can just ask some of these questions.

Firstly, since FBC is managing Fiji's digital TV, and we have no problems, project overseen by the Department of Communications.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is not managing (inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- That is the clarification that the Attorney-General came up with, but that was the original impression that came out.

The second one is, if that is the case, then we need to understand the payment system for the use of the *Walesi* platform by other TV stations and also, as you quite rightly pointed out that there could be other players coming into the system. Will *Fiji TV* and *MAI TV* transmitters that they are using now are going to become redundant and what is the process there?

The other question that I have and some people have asked this as well, is if, I do not know if you have alluded to some of those but in the event that the *Walesi* turbo is offline; what sort of backup will be there? We are looking at the technological backup there.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We are building redundancy.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Yes and I am not sure whether the redundancy will be the backup at all times you know.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- So, there is no redundancy for *Fiji TV* on skilled management performance.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- So yes but yes that is what I am saying that, if we are moving into this we need to be sure whether we have all those technological backups because we will not have the option as the Honourable Member said that the analogue will be gone, so obviously, we need to have that understanding.

The last question really is, if from my understanding, if there is blackout on the *Walesi* platform, whether there will be a backup from a technological point of view that can deal with that

in a short period of time? So, these are, Honourable Deputy Speaker, questions that I would like to raise as part of this roll out plan and perhaps the Government needs to look at this carefully and bring out more in public so that people actually understand the whole roll out plan and how it is going to be implemented and where and how they can benefit without having any difficulties. Thank you Honourable Deputy Speaker.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Member. I now call on the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts to deliver his statement.

Extra-Curricular Activities in Schools

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Deputy Speaker, Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Members: I will thank the Honourable Deputy Speaker for giving me this opportunity to speak on a topic which I have been mentioning lightly during the past ministerial statement and that is about Extra Curriculum Activity in schools and about holistic development of our children.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the mission of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts is to provide a holistic and empowering education system that will enable children to realise and fully appreciate the inheritance and potential, all of which will contribute to a peaceful and sustainable nation or development. We are looking at developing our children for nation building for future Fiji.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this holistic approach to education does not allot academia an isolated or elevated important but it is strongly and appropriately paralleled with curriculum perspectives and a range of extra-curricular activities. And this Honourable Deputy Speaker, is well aligned to the Philosophy of Education in Fiji and the National Curriculum Framework which places the child at the centre of learning and contributes to the development of the child spiritually, intellectually, culturally, socially, emotionally, aesthetically and physically.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I rise to inform and update the Honorable Members of this House on the extra-curricular activities being implemented in schools and our strategies put in place by the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts to ensure that these activities are thoroughly supported and made available to the students, thus, promoting and enhancing holistic development of the child that we have.

Extra-curricular activities in schools are all those activities that fall outside the realm of the normal academic curriculum of the school and in which students participate outside the normal school timetable, but which are organized by the school for the benefit of the students.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, as I said this is outside the normal curriculum but organized in a manner that should not affect the academic performance of the child as well as give some degree of choice to the child, the child can say that I for some reason or the other do not wish to participate.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, implementation of the extra-curricular activities in schools has received mixed responses from students and teachers, parents and stakeholders alike. These activities are sometimes seen by some people as an unnecessary expense and irrelevant to a child's development, taking up valuable time that could have been better utilized in studying to achieve better grades.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth, for research has shown that there is a strong association between student involvement in extra-curricular activities and improved attendance in school, behavior and academic performance. From strengthening the mind

to promoting better time management skills and prioritizing, to raising a child's self-esteem and confidence to always striving for excellence, extra-curricular activities can propel students to excel in much more than just their academic endeavors. It gives them confidence. It gives them opportunity to learn outside the materials provided through text books and through curriculum. It instills a level of discipline Honourable Deputy Speaker and contributes overall to also building future leaders.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, high endurance, sporting activities, trains a child to maintain a patient attitude and enhances resilience in the face of intense difficulty. Essential skills in management and leadership can be learned in a leadership-oriented club, while public speaking skills can be refined in oratory/debate or speech clubs. Further, Honourable Deputy Speaker, tertiary institutions are now not only looking at academic grades but at the extras that students involve themselves in, which also reveal a lot about the students themselves.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, also the labor market now are going through in detail the curriculum vitae of children to see what differentiates the child from the rest of the applicants. So, nowadays parents also are now taking interest in seeing how their child could fit in to the different kinds of extra curriculum activities that are offered through the school.

From the outset, Honourable Deputy Speaker, I wish to accentuate the significant role parents play in supporting their children in these activities and yesterday, Honourable Deputy Speaker, I had provided at length the work that we are going to involve parents involve in the child's work and development in education throughout our school system.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I now wish to highlight the various types of extra curriculum activities offered by our ministry per schools. The mechanisms that are in place to support the implementation of these activities and how these activities have enhanced the academic performance of the child participating students.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, let me take a moment to discuss these activities. The activities may be discussed are divided into 2 types which are Competitive and Non-Competitive activities and range from academic to art, music, individual and team sports to disciplinary activities such as, cadet training, religious activities and celebrations of special days or international days.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, recently, the Ministry launched the National Green Olympiad, an online competition targeting Years 58 students. Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Science & Technology Competitions launched in March and the Oceans Anti-Pollution Competitions encourage students to engage in oratories, quizzes and poster competitions that enhance their understanding of contemporary environmental issues and help us build noble citizens out of our children that comes out our primary and high school system.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, you would not believe that the children who comes out when this curriculum be revised that these activities that we are offering out our school system, our children are ahead of children that comes out from some other schools when they belong to developed countries Honourable Deputy Speaker.

The National Essay Competitions organised by selected organizations for special days such as, Constitution Day, Mother Tongue Day, International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, Discourse against Suicide, International Day against Child Labour, et cetera allows students to explore these relevant issues and learn of international conventions and responsibilities of both the country and themselves.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I believe the level of reading the students do, the level of unearthing of literature that they undertake in order to participate in competitions relating to these areas that we are encouraging through our school system.

Also, Honourable Deputy Speaker, you will not believe how we are mobilising the people behind these children, their parents, friends and relatives who would assist the child so that the child can do well. Added to this, Honourable Deputy Speaker, we have national physics team, individual competitions, Commerce Money Smart, Language (*iTaukei*, Urdu and Hindi) Oratory and Essay Writing and Poster Competitions.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Art encourages observance of such days in schools so that students are duly informed of these very important issues.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, one of our child from the recently launched Energy Olympia Competition who won the top 100 percent mark in that Online Energy Competition will be presenting at the conference this weekend, at the Sustainable Development Conference. That is the level of preparedness we have done through these competitions.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, music and visual arts tap into the child's inert capabilities. The annual Kula Film Awards challenge students to explore and develop talents in dance, art and drama and I encourage some of the Members here if they have time, to go and watch the final performance of the Kula Film Awards and you will see some of the finest products that these little children out of our school system have been producing. These activities, Honourable Deputy Speaker, present the opportunity for creativity, enhancement of skills and visual learning and perseverance in perfecting dance moves or artwork.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, you will not believe the kinds of creative talents our children have and it require a little bit of tap, a little bit of support from us, as well as the private sector to see how we could get these talents out and give them an indication that they too can have a brighter future in some of these creative areas that they have.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, athletics is an area that speaks for itself. The 2017 track athletics games, the biggest yet since its inception, was held in April, and involved almost 87 percent of all secondary schools around our nation, with 2,495 athletes participating in the games. Dubbed the largest secondary school athletics meet in the Southern Hemisphere, attracting talent scouts from Fiji and overseas, the athletics game has been a platform for many young athletes who qualify for regional and international championships, and a mentionable number have gone on to enrol in prestigious overseas universities that are further developing their sporting talents. These national athletics events, for secondary and primary as well, provide students with an opportunity to be exposed to a wider competition and a platform to showcase their talents.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I do not think there is any other country that is organising the athletics meeting that we have at that level and most of you who have attended this athletics meet at the national stadium, the entire atmosphere is very different, and you can see how children are so enthusiastically demonstrating their talents.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Deputy Speaker, they do not like to hear good things about our children. They are jealous, they do not have respect for our children.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, for children who may struggle economically but excel in sports, success in these national level competitions heightens the child's self-esteem and keeps them engaged and away from unwarranted societal evils. It is anticipated that upon acquiring the scent of success in sports, students carry it right through from extra into curricular. There are qualities and values that sports help to build and enhance. These values together with dedication, determination, planning, time management and the obsession to excel, guide the child to keep on the track of success, a way after burning the tracks in a national sports competition.

Madam Speaker, other sports like swimming and team sports such as rugby, soccer, netball and hockey, not only continue to hone the relevant talents in students, but teach them about life skills and the opportunity to advocate against Non-Communicable Diseases. Team work; a very marketable quality, is nurtured and enhanced in this type of group or team sport activities that we organise through our school system.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, Fiji is blessed in terms of having a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. It gives an opportunity to develop a well-rounded, well-educated with wisdom future Fijians, so therefore, we are using our school system to ensure that our children do have solid understanding of our various religious activities. As such, we organise and observe in schools various religious days which are marked in the calendar. Our ministry provides write-ups, sanctioned by the relevant faith-based group and we give it to the children in schools to read it out to children so that every child understands about the different religious values and marked special days.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, without doubt, language is a critical component of culture. Extra-curricular activities are encouraged across all vernacular languages to enhance and strengthen cultural identity, and especially on International Mother-Tongue Day and International Day for Cultural Diversity. Schools are encouraged to celebrate their unique identities in the hope that it will instil pride and the need to value their culture and rich heritage.

Special days like Fiji Day, *Girmit* Day invoke a sense of belonging to students who have strengthened confidence in their identity and acceptance in our country. We want our children to understand what is special about them being a Fijian and we want them to understand and have thorough knowledge about our own heritage.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, Military Cadet Training continues to be an activity opted for by heads of schools for instilling discipline in students. In 2016, 12 schools have implemented cadet training. The cadet training instils discipline in children which is then followed by a host of values and virtues because the Ministry's mission is to engage in lifelong learning so that we produce worthwhile citizens.

In addition, Scouts, Girl Guides and Brownies are offered especially at Primary school level. In 2016, 9,048 Primary school boys from all around Fiji had been registered under the Fiji Sports Council and carried out scouting activities in their respective schools.

Similarly, in 2016, 4,854 primary school girls from all around Fiji had been registered and carried out Girl Guides' activities in their respective schools. Involvement of students in these activities help them to develop skills such as self-reliance and teamwork, and encourage active outdoors activities that have lifelong benefits, including building resilience against common stress thus, achieving more in life.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the ministry firmly believes in the positive impact that participating in extra-curricular activities have on students, and so provide several platforms on which students may engage in these activities. At a time where education systems are exploring the

possibilities of decreasing or cutting funds for extra-curricular activities, our ministry is making grant allocation for sports and extra-curricular activities through the Free Education Grant (FEG).

Honourable Deputy Speaker, our ministry's policy on Tuition Fee Free Grant for Primary and Secondary schools stipulates that 10 percent of the FEG grant is allocated towards ensuring that we meet the needs of these extra-curricular activities.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, our ministry recognizes the importance of striking a balance between student involvement in extra-curricular activities and academic studies, and ensuring safety of students participating in these activities. This is clearly stipulated in the Policy on School Excursion that explicitly illustrates our Ministry's stand on extra-curricular activities, that experiences of students outside the school premises contribute to the development of their understanding, skills and attitudes; that the provision of opportunities for students to learn from the wider community builds on and reinforces the school curriculum. Keeping students in check against excessive involvement has been attained with the support of parental engagement.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, apart from having a positive impact on academic performance, extra-curricular activities provide real life experiences that students would not otherwise obtain from the formal curriculum. Students reap as rewards from these activities positive behaviour and values such as team spirit and leadership which will lead to better grades and ultimately successful school competition and provision of the product which is confidence and understands about the society as well.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the offices of the Ministry of Education has continually engaged in publications which create interest not confined to the prescribed curricular but also on the activities surrounding the subject. The Hindi Primary Section of the Curriculum Advisory Section publishes a newsletter a newsletter called '*Nav Jyoti*', the English Primary Section publishing a newsletter called '*English Bites*' in the *Fiji Sun* and also the Vosa Vaka Viti Primary Section making regular contributions to the *Na i Lalakai* to ensure that we do keep up in these vernacular areas writings. These publication are strong initiatives to go beyond the classroom to reach the children.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the School Broadcasting Unit (SBU) is continuously broadcasting on all aspects such as, behaviour and moral values through its English broadcasts of moral stories. All extra-curricular activities which are organised are further explained and shared using the SBU.

The Ministry of Education is mindful of the many schools' geographical locations, thus carrying out our best to reach all students through the radio. In this endeavour, Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Ministry is not only advocating for, but also actively immerses itself into the pre, during and post stages of organised activities.

In conclusion, Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Ministry will continue to deliver on to our commitment as per our Mission and Vision, ensuring that every child has a chance to reach his/her potential by enjoying the vast opportunities provided by an all-encompassing education system. We firmly believe that every opportunity must be made available to every child to discover and develop his/her strengths and talents, and have the means and know-how to address challenges and so become a well-rounded citizen.

It doing so, Honourable Deputy Speaker, we dare not use-lip service in this national priority. We have already entered into this paradigm shift; let there be no iota of doubt that extra-curricular activities are an integral part of any child's development because they provide an important

component of the bedrock of holistic development. I do not see any other better way forward to arm our young children, our nation, and our future in terms of holistic development. Thank you.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. I will now call on the Leader of Opposition or her designate to speak on the statement.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Honourable Deputy Speaker, I would like to respond to the Ministerial Statement by the Honourable Minister for Education on extra-curricular activities in schools and the concept of holistic education. Extra-curricular activities are important and an integral part of holistic education in order to groom and induct our productive citizens. It helps in inculcating the moral and social values in students, enabling them to live a healthy and exemplary life with the view of living the personal social life to the full.

However, Honourable Deputy Speaker, the success of extra-curricular activities is highly questionable for a variety of reasons, rendering that the concepts of holistic education are vast. Honourable Deputy Speaker, PEMAC teachers are underpaid and I will request the Honourable Minister to look into this, to ensure that they are paid for the extra time and effort they put into the organisation and conduct of the extra-curricular activities in the schools, which I believe can be well taken care of by the upcoming 2017-2018 Budget. Furthermore, Honourable Deputy Speaker, there must be a clear pathway for PEMAC teachers in as far as their career path is concerned.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, a lot of extra-curricular activities are being conducted in schools on *ad hoc* basis which needs wider discussions amongst stakeholders. Schools do this as a formality to compete a particular code or to fill up a cultural or social obligation. The schools find it as a social obligation responsibility and if that is the case, we can never achieve the ideals and principles of holistic education. Students must be motivated to participate fully in these activities.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, schools should be encouraged to come up with their own extra-curricular activities that are found in their respective communities. For example, wood carving, canoe building, weaving, sewing are activities that some places in Fiji and schools can adopt and be strengthened and included in the curriculum.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, in sports, I believe the issue of insurance for students while participating in extra-curricular activities is important as students, parents and guardians need protection in case something happens. I strongly feel that there is a need to consider the logistics of ensuring our students when they participate in extra-curricular activities. Also, parents and old scholars bear the full cost of training, food, gym work and they pay for professional coaches when they have sporting activities.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, there are concerns raised about quality teaching time used for extra-curricular activities. Most students, teachers, parents and management strongly object to that. The mechanics of how to incorporate these activities needed to be planned, and I urge that the stakeholders be consulted and their views be taken on board.

Last year, Honourable Deputy Speaker, there was a consultation by the Ministry of Education with selected schools and what was amazing was the tone used by Ministry Officials which was basically threatening School Managements and intimidating the Heads of Schools present to accept the 12 policies on which the consultation was taking place on an "as is where is basis", so much so that representatives of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji which manages a number of schools in Fiji, walked out of the consultations, saying that it was a farce and was a showcase as well.

In summing up my response, Honourable Deputy Speaker, I call upon the Honourable Minister to engage with stakeholders, something which he talked at length about, which is the key to re-establish the lost period of dialogue and consultation amongst schools which can be translated into holistic education, so that we can come up with the policy and programme which is owned by all and not only a few, as has been the case in the last three years. Thank you.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. I will now call upon the Leader of NFP or his designate.

HON. P. SINGH.- Honourable Deputy Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement. Once again, it is always entertaining that the Honourable Minister finds it fit to give little updates and dangle carrots like this when we, on this side of the House, know full aware that the Ministry of Education and the quality education of our children is continuously challenged.

Extra-curricular activities, Honourable Deputy Speaker, for our children are critical for their holistic development and for our educators, finding the right balance against academic pursuits can be very challenging at times. We know full well that the academic pursuit for excellence for our students right now are burdensome for both, teachers and their learning opportunities.

Many teachers are now condensing their curriculum within the first two terms in order to leave the third term for revision and remedial work. The fact of the matter is that, the curriculum of our children and the status of it need major analysis and scrutiny because the results of the curriculum and *ad hoc* amendments to it without a proper holistic curriculum development process will spill over into universities, vocational centres and ultimately, the ability of our young people to obtain gainful employment.

Our NFP leader, Honourable Deputy Speaker, has been relentless in his calling for an Education Commission to assess and analyse the education system in Fiji within a year or less. The last Education Commission Report was produced in 1999. We stand by that call, it is now an urgent priority.

Unfortunately for this Honourable Minister, his 2016 initiative to introduce yoga as an extra-curricular activity which he backtracked later on to make it optional, is a stunning example of questionable approaches by the Ministry of Education. The Honourable Minister is better placed, reverting to fundamentals of quality education. The present curriculum extends school hours for exam class students and also take up Saturdays to cater for the condensed curriculum for the two terms.

With that Honourable Deputy Speaker, the contemporary Hindi and *iTaukei* that are compulsory under the Constitution to be taught at primary level, have become an optional because of the lack of teachers and I give you an example. Some primary schools in Nadi do not make it compulsory on these two vernaculars and this is where the Ministry should be putting more effort on.

Finally, Honourable Deputy Speaker, extra-curricular activities, we agree, are not the realm of the curriculum. These are activities which are designed to suit the children from communities based around the schools. We have rural, maritime and urban students who are all geared up into one basket and now, this is becoming a very challenging situation in Fiji, as far our education system is concerned. I urge the Honourable Minister to look at it specifically in areas of concern so that we can have a holistic development as a nation, and in their pursuit of no one being left behind, this is where the Honourable Minister should be putting his words and not ...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Enough!

(Laughter)

HON. P. SINGH.- ... specifically addressing what suits FijiFirst.

These Ministerial Statements are nothing but campaign strategies, Honourable Deputy Speaker, and I urge the Honourable Minister to put his mouth and stop campaigning on this ground and do not use children as an example of tomorrow where the elders have been through. Thank you.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, at this point, we will adjourn for lunch. Lunch is being served at the Big Committee Room. Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.41 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.32 p.m.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- We will continue from where we left off before lunch. I will now call upon the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Environment, Infrastructure and Transport to deliver his statement.

Government's First Home Buyers and Fire Victims' Grant

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Honourable Deputy Speaker, I rise to inform this august House on improving accessibility and reducing processing times for two very important innovations:

1. The Government's First Home Buyers; and
2. Fire Victims' Grant to all Fijians.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, home ownership is a platform for social stability and a better Fiji by meeting a fundamental right of all citizens - that of fair access to housing.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, in line with the provision in the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and the objectives of the National Housing Policy, one of the Government's top priority is to increase home ownership for Fijians. Affordable housing and home ownership are part of everyone's dreams and ambitions. The FijiFirst Government has made a huge difference in making those dreams true for an increasing number of Fijians.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, it is a no-brainer that the purchase of a home is the best investment that any Fijian can undertake. Mortgage is seen as a positive debt, for the simple reason that buying a home puts an end to the dead rent that people pay, and paves the way for family security on an incremental investment.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the First Home Buyers Grant is an initiative of the Government. There has been no such initiative in the past.

HON. RATU N.T LALABALAVU.- Says who?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Says he.

(Laughter)

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.B. KUMAR. – Honourable Deputy Speaker, it should have been thought of and delivered many, many years ago.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- As with many such initiatives and innovations, it takes the foresight and vision to meet pressing needs of all Fijians.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the FijiFirst Government had the foresight and vision to deliver the First Home Buyers Grant and continue to improve on the processing and accessibility model from day one.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, Government through the Department of Housing has entered into mutual beneficial partnerships with the financial institutions to provide this grant. The overall objective is to improve Fijian lives through the purchase and construction of their first homes, alleviating housing shortages and providing an alternative to other forms of mass housing.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the FijiFirst Government processed the First Home Buyer Grants for the first time in 2015. This was a response to providing a 'kick-start' to many aspiring home owners. This policy enables home owners to either purchase their readily built home through the \$5,000 grant or the purchase of land and construction of home through the \$10,000 grant.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this grant applies to those Fijians, whose annual earnings are below \$50,000 and are above 18 years of age. Since its inception in 2014, the Government has set aside a budget of around \$20 million for first home buyers, and to be applied through the First Home Buyer Grant Policy. A team of officers at my Ministry carefully assessed all applications for the First Home Buyers Grant, providing due diligence to protect the interests of homebuyers, the Government and lending agencies. This also includes assistance from the Solicitor General's Office in the vetting model and technical requirements to be undertaken while assessing applications.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, allow me to elaborate on the processes and procedures towards due diligence, improving accessibility to the grants and reducing its approval and grant period. The Ministry's Assessment Committee deliberates and approves the applications before the grant assistance is dispersed to the commercial banks. To-date well over 1,000 Fijians have been assisted through this programme, with the total of \$8 million being paid to Fijians all over the country. This is just a start, hang on.

(Laughter)

Honourable Deputy Speaker, a key task being successfully implemented under the Ministry is to ensure service delivery is speedy and people-friendly. Speed and reliability are key elements of this process.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I can announce with a great sense of achievement that we have successfully cut down our processing times by more than three times. From an average of 109 days, it initially took to process an application, it now only takes 24 days to process and make decisions over an application. This is subject to all paperwork being made available. The Ministry was able to improve on the processing time, through implementing a new two-tier operating and processing system.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, armed with this new model, the Ministry will now target processing of, at least, 100 applications a month, again subject to the applications and related paperwork being made available from our other channel partners. Our channel partners include the banks, financial institutions and legal departments. This will, no doubt, be welcome news for all those aspiring for home ownership, and looking forward to the fast-track processing of their applications for the First Home Buyers Grant.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, to further increase accessibility to all Fijians, the Ministry has initiated awareness campaigns across Fiji. The first of its kind with the financial institution in Suva was held earlier this month. This is the first of a few more to come, covering the Northern and the Western Divisions. All channel partners for the First Home Buyers Grant programme were invited.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to report that the exercise was well attended and received. Discussions were positive and brought together stakeholders to further streamline processes through retreat-style workshop sessions. One of the areas agreed upon, was the development and use of smarter technologies to incorporate improved processing, vetting and approval steps to fast-track the application and decision making process.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, to boost the above exercise, we have also designed awareness campaigns for homeownership across our communities throughout Fiji. Given our increasing urban population and that most applicants for the First Home Buyers Grant are from these areas, we have targeted Fijian municipalities for our awareness programme.

For a start, Honourable Deputy Speaker, all Fijians can access through their municipal councils, information on homeownership and the First Home Owners Grant. This will ensure further reach and, of course, broader accessibility to more Fijians for the First Home Buyers Grant.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, to complement awareness and reduced processing times, we have ensured the supply side of the story, by ensuring funds are ready for the uptake at the end of the process.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, we will review, if need be, the Housing Assistance Grant for First Home Buyers Policy systems and processes to ensure that excellence in delivery is maintained and improved upon. At the same time, we will continue to work with financial institutions to offer cheaper home loan packages. While we promote this grant, we are also ensuring that sufficient mass housing stocks are available through framing meaningful partnerships with agencies, like Housing Authority. This is going to be achieved through increasing the supply and availability of affordable Housing Residential Land Lots.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, we expect about 1,706 residential lots to be made available through Housing Authority in the short to medium term. This will be for the Mass Housing Sector consumption. These include: Wainibuku – 260; Nepani - 400 lots; Matavolivoli - 400 lots and the Housing Subdivisions.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, another key area of the Government's commitment is to assist fire accident victims. A house fire is one of the most painful episode a family can experience. Home fires can cause extensive damage to property, injuries and even loss of life. Our goal is that when fire strikes, the victims get immediate assistance.

In the 2015 Budget announced by the Minister for Finance in November 2014, the Government allocated a \$1 million Government Grant towards emergency assistance for the house-fire victims, and is available to those with proper lease titles but earning less than \$20,000 and without insurance coverage for fire.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, the Housing Assistance for fire victims is targeted at those Fijians who have had their property destroyed through accidental fire. This includes, situations where the fire disaster is unforeseen and considered as a crisis. This assistance will help the family reconstruct their house and recover losses from the accident.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, in partnership with the National Fire Authority, the Police, District Office, Local Councils and the Rural Authorities, my Ministry extends a supportive hand to the needy Fijians, who find themselves in this unexpected situation. To date, the Ministry has assisted 77 fire victim households. The total cost that has gone towards this to date in the form of grant comes to about \$385,000.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, again in seeking excellence my Ministry has seriously worked on reducing the turnaround time in processing the Fire Victim Grant Applications as well. Recognising the critical need for as close to immediate delivery, my Ministry re-engineered the business process that guided the application vetting. As a result, what used to take more than two

weeks to process, now takes up to three days and in most cases, a same day service has been enabled. This is, of course, subject to all paperwork being made available.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, through all these, the Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Environment plays a very significant role in serving everyday Fijians. Our First Home Buyer Grant, as I stated, has established an active homeownership model. Research in society and housing have established that residential stability will strengthen social ties within community neighbourhoods. Hence, policies such as our First Home Buyers Grant policy and its application to increase homeownership have raised positive social outcomes, apart from providing people with a permanent roof over their heads that they can call their own.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this grant has also made a strong economic impact and promises to continue assisting Fiji and Fijians with wealth, creation and accumulation for homeowners. Research shows that the net worth of homeowners can be much higher than renters. In some cases as many as 45 times higher. Our first time homeowners utilising this grant, ideally would graduate into bigger and better housing options as years go by. Thus, our first home buyers could buy multiple homes over their lifetime and in the process, contribute to sharp economic growth and job creation.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, Government's First Home Buyer's Grant has been a life changer in the lives of many Fijians. I congratulate those who have benefitted from the First Home Buyers Grant and invite others who are eligible to apply for their chance to live their dreams. Let me assure this Parliament and all Fijians that my Ministry will strive to provide service excellence through ensuring speedy and efficient delivery that ticks the box on the due diligence on this grant and all other policies in place.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, on this note, I thank you.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Minister. I now call on the Leader of Opposition or her designate.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Deputy Speaker, this Housing Assistance and First Home Buyers Scheme is another example of the Government promising services to the public but not delivering, and we are very familiar with that in this House. The Honourable Minister promised election (municipal election) and the Honourable Minister for Education promised that students will be in their classrooms by January 2017, but they are still out there.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this Statement has come at a timely hour when we have statements given by representatives from his own Ministry in the *Fiji Sun*, by his own Permanent Secretary, Mr. Joshua Wycliffe, and the Director for Housing, Mr. Kolinio Bola, admitting the shortcomings of this very Policy.

The Permanent Secretary admitted that they do not have a system in place to process this application and if you allow me to quote him, he said, "The reduction of the turnaround time for the processing of the First Time Home Grant would require competent staff, systems and processes." You do not have that. In the last four years, you only managed 1,000 and they promised and promised, but they could not deliver, and that is not all. What else did you he admit? He admitted that you abused this money.

(Laughter)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Point of Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me finish!

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You sit down!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Point of Order! Can you sit down? I am looking at you.

Honourable Deputy Speaker, this is not the first time.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- (Inaudible)

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Do you have patience to listen? You've just come two days ago, so have patience!

(Laughter)

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- He had made a very serious allegation on the abuse and I take that as an offence. I want the Honourable Member to withdraw that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Member, before you proceed, would you like to withdraw your statement?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me quote to you from your own Permanent Secretary.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Member

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- "Additionally, the Government has also subsidised residential subdivisions, like the Matavolivoli in Nadi, through grants. The Government provided a grant of nearly \$5 million..." from this money that was supposed to go to the first home buyers.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- You don't know what's happening.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you are addressing the Chair.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is not *Fiji Times*, this is *Fiji Sun*.

(Hon. Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And that is abuse - an abuse of the process and you will answer to that in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. That is not on, you know it is timely as well because they are now having an investigation on Lagilagi. If you go to *Island Business* it says there.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Oh *Island Business*!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- As well as an admission from his own Director Housing of the sum of \$5 million that you had bond to the First Home Owners under this policy, abuse on Lagilagi and can I tell you now Honourable Deputy Speaker? This is now under investigation by FICAC. Under investigation, especially if you allow me to quote "Investigation of sold land on the 120

families who occupy flats at Damodar Housing Subdivision of the Fiji capital - at least 20 do not qualify. So, what are they doing there?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Who runs it? Do you know who runs it?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I do not know ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- but that is under investigation here. That is not for me to know but 20 people who should not be there are there and then it goes on. The Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption has opened a file to investigate the finances and affairs of the Peoples Community Network and that is not the end of the matter. Here, back to the Director Housing, what did he say? What he has submitted, he has submitted to your failure, your own shortcomings that you are not doing anything.

First, he says 'since the inception of the programme in 2014, within the last four years, the government gave \$10 million, out of which \$1.47 million was expended, was assisting only 180 First Home Buyers. Then he goes on, note that our rate of utilisation is quite low, it is not being utilised. What are you doing, sitting on your back?

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He has noted in the Auditor General's Report that utilisation at the time was only 14.7.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- Point of Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Sit down.

HON. P.B. KUMAR.- At times, I have joked with him, nothing new but the manner in which this Honourable Member is behaving is becoming unparliamentarily and Honourable Deputy Speaker, he said that 'What are you doing? Relax, what is that? I will request the Honourable Deputy Speaker, not for him to withdraw but I want you to warn him.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Member. You carry on.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let me just finish first.

I quote again from Kolinio Bola, Director Housing Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Environment. "For 2017 this year a grant of \$10 million was allocated by Government, we wired out \$3.2 million to assist one of our programmes, the Lagilagi Project, this one. So you are giving money for purposes which are now under investigation, that is where the money that should have gone to the First Home Buyers is going.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Member. Thank you for your contribution. I now call upon the Leader of NFP or his designate. Thank you.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you Honourable Deputy Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his update and I cannot agree more with him when he talks about affordable housing, home ownership, these are very very important ingredients of happy families and good quality of life for our people. Actually, Honourable Nawaikula read the stuff from the *Fiji Sun*, I

also was going to because I was a bit confused Honourable Deputy Speaker, when the Honourable Minister was talking about and then I actually appreciate that he did admit that the scheme is not working very well.

And that he is putting in place measures to improve that. I also want to say this Honourable Deputy Speaker that some of these statements in many ways are really campaign speeches by some of the Honourable Ministers on the other side because Honourable Deputy Speaker, they said to us, in fact the Honourable Attorney-General was quite emphatic where he was saying "we are campaigning".

I actually want to say to you Honourable Deputy Speaker, and to the Government side that we are actually not campaigning. We are actually doing a lot of party work; you know we have branch meetings, we have AGMs, unlike them and we have a big AGM coming up on 3rd June and I want to invite the Honourable Minister, former member of NFP to join us.

(Laughter)

He will understand, but Honourable Deputy Speaker, as I have said before and I want to make this point again, as I have said very clearly the policies are very noble, very good policies, many countries have First Home Buyers support the fire victims, a grant of \$500,000 is allocated in the Budget. This is very positive but again Honourable Deputy Speaker, I want to labour this point a little bit more because it seems that it is not getting on to some of the Honourable Ministers on the other side.

In terms of policy, when you put out a policy, the first thing you need to understand, is how the policy is going to be implemented; how the opportunities provided under those policy for people are not abused and there are already questions about those who might benefiting and not benefiting. The Honourable Minister rightfully talked about opening up new laws but there are allegations of people getting lots who should not be getting lots because there are criteria about the income and this is what I want to point out to the Honourable Minister, that we need to put in place a proper monitoring system, because if you do not have a very efficient, effective monitoring system, the process will be abused.

For those the policies are intended to help are not necessarily going to get help, if there is no proper monitoring and evaluation in a very periodic manner and that is what I want to labour and ask the Government to look at this very carefully. I think this is important, I know there has been analysis of the Home Grant and as Honourable Nawaikula said, there has been a lot of questions raised by people within the ministry and that is why I was a bit confused in terms of the figures that the Honourable Minister provided and what the Ministry's statement are saying themselves with respect to the rate of utilisation, which is quite low.

So, I hope the Honourable Minister will look at what was reported on 13th May 2017 and the statistics that he read out in Parliament with respect to the utilisation of the grant and whether a thorough analysis has been made as to that utilisation and whether the people really who should have benefited from that have actually benefited. Thank you Honourable Deputy Speaker.

HON. DEPUTY SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Members we have now come to the end of the Ministerial Statement for today. I will now adjourn the House to allow the Honourable Speaker to resume the Chair for the rest of the sitting this afternoon. Thank you.

(The HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair)

HON. SPEAKER. – Thank you Honourable Members, you may be seated. Firstly, I would like to thank the Honourable Deputy Speaker for sitting in for me in the last session. We will move on to the next item on the Order Paper.

FIJI SERVICEMEN'S AFTER-CARE FUND (AMENDMENT) BILL 2017

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

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

- a) The Fiji Servicemen's Aftercare Fund (Amendment) Bill 2017 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) The Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) The Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) That the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament today, Tuesday 23rd May, 2017; and

that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply be given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. SPEAKER. - I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Public Enterprises, Civil Service and Communications to speak on his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the reason why we would like an amendment to this Bill is for it to be considered for budgetary purposes as it does have an enormous impact on the budget.

By way of background, Madam Speaker, the Fiji Servicemen's After-care Fund Act 1944 as its title suggests was enacted in 1944. It came into effect on 2nd June, 1944, to provide for the establishment and administration of a Fiji Servicemen's After-care Fund as it was called then.

Under the Act, Madam Speaker, the Fiji Servicemen's After-care Fund is used and applied for a number of purposes including the aid and care of service persons who have served in active service operations and the aid and care of the wives, the widows, children and other dependents of the service persons who have served in active service operations including now we should say spouses because we have females now of course who served offshore too.

Given that the Fiji Servicemen's After-care Fund benefit service persons and their families, the definition of "service person" in the Act is critical. At the moment, Madam Speaker, the scope of the definition of the service person who will qualify for funds under this Act is limited. It only applies to members of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) who have served in active service operations and members of the Fiji Police Force and the Fiji Corrections Service who have served in active service operations, provided that these two members from the Fiji Police Force and Corrections Services serve with the RFMF.

We have a situation where we have had police officers and prison wardens who have gone offshore and provided service for international peacekeeping duties or other international services, but because they did not serve with the RFMF, they are not entitled to or have not been entitled to the aftercare fund. This Act essentially, Madam Speaker, the amendment simply seeks to make an amendment to the definition and that is, that even if police officers and prison wardens have gone off, for example, to Sudan or various other places, and served in those areas without having served with the RFMF they will still qualify.

It is a simple amendment and obviously, Madam Speaker, we would like this and this is of course been discriminatory. We would like to make this amendment and there are of course, unfortunately some of these servicemen have passed away, but, at least their spouses and their dependents will now be entitled to the After-care Fund which they are entitled to under the law.

Madam Speaker, as I have highlighted and I can talk about this in the debate later on as to how many members will get affected, the reason why we are making this amendment is because we are actually locking in the figures for budgetary purposes. We want to do this very earlier on, we have got a number of policies we want to address, and as the Bill proposes, Madam Speaker, is that this is just a simple amendment and it only has two clauses,

Clause 1 says; "What is the Amendment Act hold?"

Sub-Clause 2 of Clause 1 says: "When it will come into force?" which is from the new financial year, which is 1st of August.

Clause 2, which is the last Clause, simply says; "As a person who has served in active service operation, means a member of the disciplined force as defined in Section 163(1), in one of the Constitution and has served in active service operation".

So it includes everyone, they do not actually have to have served with the RFMF, that is the only amendment. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER. - Thank you. The motion is now open for debate. I now invite input from Members if any? There being no other input, Honourable Attorney-General would you like to make concluding statements?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - No, thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER. - Thank you. Parliament will now vote. The question is that:

- a) The Fiji Servicemen's Aftercare fund Amendment Bill 2017 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) The Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) That the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- d) The Bill must be debated and voted on by Parliament, Tuesday, 23rd May, 2017.

and that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving the motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of "Noes")

HON. SPEAKER. - There being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously. Thank you so much Honourable Members.

The next item on the agenda, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament, passed today 23rd May, 2017, the Fiji Servicemen's Aftercare (Amendment) Bill 2017 will be debated and voted upon today. The debate will be limited to one hour and I call upon the Attorney-General to move his motion.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. —, Madam Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament passed today, 23rd May, 2017, I move that the Fiji Servicemen's After-care (Amendment) Bill 2017 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

HON. SPEAKER. - Thank you. Do we have a seconder?

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM. - Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Fiji Servicemen's After-care Fund Act 1944 was essentially there to provide the system to those who have served in those days servicemen who have served offshore and then there was an After-care Fund that was established at that point in time when the fund was established, Madam Speaker, as a matter of interest, the Act said; "there shall be and is hereby established a Fund which shall be known as Fiji Servicemen's Aftercare Fund and shall consist of the sum of \$44,588 pounds and 9 pence standing to the credit of an account at the Suva Branch in the Bank of the New South Wales, and titled the Fiji Patriotic Fete Account, together with any subscription of donations which may hereafter be paid to the Fund and any income occurring to the fund from the investments made with the fund moneys".

That is what started off this After-care Fund, but as we know also, Madam Speaker, is that successive governments have contributed to this fund and we make manual allocation which also entitles widows and other dependents to be able to receive funding under this particular Act, but as had been highlighted in the introduction that we found that over the years and as given the genesis of this particular Act in those days, we only had men who went off to serve in overseas operations only from the then Royal Fiji Military Forces.

We do not have police officers, for example, going off nor prison wardens, of course as time progressed and Fiji of course became involved in other international duties including the peace keeping duties outside Fiji in the Middle East in particular. We have a lot more people going offshore and of course as a part of that we had police officers that used to go with the RFMF and also prison wardens. But, subsequently we also found that police officers were also sent on their own and also prison wardens went off to on their own to different parts of the world where they served for international duties. However, given the limitation in the substantive law, the After-care Fund only applied to those Fijians who were part of the RFMF, members of the RFMF, or had served together with the RFMF.

Madam Speaker, today we have, for example, in the Fiji Police Force, something like approximately 1400 members on the Fiji Police Force have served abroad in active service operations without the RFMF and of this number about 1,000 members have retired or passed away, 400 of them are still currently serving as police officers who have served offshore and, of course, from the figures that have been given to us, that there are something like seven members at the Fiji Corrections Service who have gone and served abroad, in particular in South Sudan and they of course will not be entitled to the After-care Fund, should we not make this amendment.

So, Madam Speaker it is only fair that we recognise these Fijians who have gone offshore, served in international duties without auspices of the RFMF and they need to be entitled to this. Should Parliament approve this amendment, we of course will be getting rid of discriminatory practice and also it will enable us to be able to then factor into the budget as to what will be the cost implication.

This will come into effect from 1st of August, which of course means that even though they maybe police officers who served without the RFMF and have unfortunately passed away, their widows will also be entitle to whatever After-care Fund is, their entitlement under the Act under the current provisions.

So with those introductory remarks Madam Speaker, I urge that Parliament actually show our support to these men and women of Fiji, who have set offshore and that we actually vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, the motion is now up for debate and I invite input, if any.

There being no input, I would like to give the floor to Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- If I may Madam Speaker, I would like to contribute to this motion and as indicated earlier on, we are in full support of this amendment. We know how much our people have contributed to peacekeeping in many parts of the world and they have made us proud.

Going back as far as 1978 up-to-today, it is always difficult in understanding how a small country like Fiji, in this small corner of the Pacific can contribute so much to world peace in some very volatile areas and for which we honour our servicemen. We salute them for their contributions in all those difficult theatres in troubled spots around the world.

Yes, we fully agree that our police officers and our prison officers should also be part of this body and they should be cared for in the way that was intended back in the 1940s.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of issues that are there from the association. I believe their number today is about 30,000 altogether. I am talking about the military side. They are quiet, as I said, we are all proud of them; very proud of what they have accomplished and putting Fiji's name in a map in a manner that I can only say is honourable, and as we have said that Fiji punches above its weight when it comes to peace keeping.

There are other issues that are before us. Before Governments and they know that, they have made some approaches to Governments to relook at some of the issues between 1978 and today. We understand, Madam Speaker, that from the time they began in 1978, to 2002, some US\$250 million dollars had been paid to Fiji through the work of our peace keepers, and that is quarter billion dollars, in US currency they we have contributed to our economy.

They are looking for ways to improve some of their conditions and I believe it is incumbent upon all of us here today to receive them in the spirit that rewards them for what they have done for us.

I speak for our side of the House fully supporting this but also that going forward in the Budget process that we include more for them in keeping with the expectations which are realistic compared to what they have contributed this time. Not only financially, but also in raising Fiji's profile all over the world. So Madam Speaker, we are all for this, we support it, but as I said, let us

also consider those issues that are brought up to Government and to some of us here to be also resolved in the coming months. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Bulitavu.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you Madam Speaker, I concur with my Honourable colleague and also want to support this particular motion which is before the House, for a long overdue amendment to the definition of service person. Probably that is provided in this particular amendment. I think the Honourable Attorney General is quiet correct that this particular provision have been discriminatory and had disqualified police officers and also for those in the correctional services.

Although there were budgetary allocations for peacekeeping missions for the two institutions but they did not qualify for an After-care Fund. Today, Madam Speaker, if you could remember too, this particular issue that was brought up in our last sitting in one of our Business Committee in regards to a particular petition too, Madam Speaker with the same spirit by the retirees of the Fiji Police Force who also wanted this particular amendment to be done. And I would like to thank Government in this regards, especially to have the vision in trying amend this particular Act and also to provide a budgetary allocation that will follow this particular amendment.

According to the retirees they were looking forward for that petition to be heard, but again as Government has now brought it up in a form of an amendment, it is now overdue. Probably after this they will be happy that they have given their lives, they have risked their lives for national duties and international duties especially serving under the United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world.

With that Madam Speaker, I support the amendment that is before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Samuela Vunivalu.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Thank you Madam Speaker. I rise to support the amended Bill in regards to these amendments of the After-care Fund. I found that after hearing some of the Opposition's speech today, that started in 1978. I am happy to see that this Government has done something about that. They should have done it this amendment before because all this time that we have been here, in the peacekeeping mission with the Police or the Corrections Service, they have been wearing uniforms Madam Speaker. The Military uniform, serving there for one year, coming back to Fiji but they are not qualified, but we are thankful to this Government for these changes, and they are qualified, and I really support this Bill. Thank you Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Netani Rika.

HON. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I rise to fully support the motion before the House. Many members of the Fiji Police Force had the privilege to serve abroad in active service and also in operational fields and this Bill will bring about hope in those retired and also those families of Police Officers, who have passed on. The amendment may it include the Fiji Police Force, and the Fiji Servicemen Aftercare Fund will bring about smiling faces tonight. We understand that many of the retired Police Officers are out there and family, widows and children. This is a great opportunity and reliving situation that will bring hope for many families.

Like I have already alluded to, there will be smiling faces tonight and around Fiji, this message this afternoon will bring unity to some families and bring about hope that there is something there for them to benefits.

With those contributions, I fully support the motion, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Semesa Karavaki.

HON. S.D. KARAVAKI.- Madam Speaker, I also rise to support the Bill before the House on the various reasons that had been referred to by the Honourable Members of this House.

However, Madam Speaker I can see that this Bill is actually being brought to the House in a very expeditious way. I would have preferred for this Bill to come to this House to make the Act standalone and not to be leaning to the Constitution because if the definition in the Constitution is changed, this definition will also change. If it is changed and it is not in corresponding to the intension that is here in the Bill, it will mismatch.

I would have appreciated if this amendment would come to the House and does not refer to the definition in the Constitution. But it can state whatever the definition is not in the Constitution, done on its own but standalone without referencing to the Constitution. That is the way I think it would have been the best way to bring it to the House.

Anyway, I raised that point because it is a point that needs to be taken into account in addressing the legal applications of this Bill. But from the outset I support the purpose of it because of the many reasons that have been revealed and explained to this House by previous speakers.

That is all Madam Speaker, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. I give the floor to the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, this amendment will attribute to our unsung heroes, who went out for a peacekeeping and never returned. Being a mother, a wife, a daughter, I feel the amendment will bring about a sigh of relief and a gift of hope and tears of joy for the sisters and mothers, who have lost their husbands. I feel that today, why the tears of joy? They will think that someone has thought of them, and this Government has cared for them. I think this thought itself will bring tears of joy to their eyes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, I support the Bill.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Pramod Chand?

HON. P. CHAND.- Madam Speaker, I rise to support this Bill and it is heartening to note, as it is said here in the Bill that there is existing discrimination against members of the Fiji Police Force and the Fiji Corrections Service, who have served in active service operations without the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces.

I believe this will go a long way. The families of those who have served in these different areas, will at least be paid and there will be something for their families when they leave their loved ones behind. So it is a very good intention and on behalf of the National Federation Party, I do support this Bill. It is so important that we can see this coming, discrimination has been removed and all these people who have served our people and our nation will, at least, have a good time and their families will live with joy.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Lt. Col. Inia Seruiratu?

HON. LT.COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I would like to support the Bill as well. Let me just state, Madam Speaker, that this is not only about those who had served from 1978 in peacekeeping missions but, of course, this is the Government that really cares about our service men and women.

Our Christmas Island veterans who were forgotten for a long time and this Government made a pay-out to them. Again, not only that, but the Aftercare Fund does also look after our veterans who also served during the Malayan Campaign and, of course, now continuing into the peacekeeping operations.

I support this Bill because it is rather unfortunate that the previous Act only recognises the Military personnel and does not recognise services also rendered by our men and women from the Corrections Service and likewise, the Fiji Police Force. The area of operation does not discriminate whether it be a peacekeeping mission or peace enforcement or peace making mission, volatility and the unpredictability of areas of operations, together with the risks that come with it, Madam Speaker, it is rather unfortunate that the previous Act only recognises our Military personnel. And this amendment is timely, given the future of peacekeeping missions and operations.

We know for a fact that through the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and our Office of the Permanent Representative in the United Nations based in New York, there are a lot of demands for more peacekeeping operations for us to participate in, not only to the Military but, of course, members of the Corrections Service and the Fiji Police Force.

I was mentioning about the unpredictability and the volatility in the area of operations last year, Madam Speaker, we would all recall that our members of the Corrections Service who were serving in Africa, were evacuated from the mission area. This talks about the danger and, of course, the problems that we face in the peacekeeping missions. Of course, this amendment is most welcomed and it will bring a lot of relief to the families particularly, when age catches up on them. At least, they have some funding, not only to look after their welfare but, of course, medical benefits as well that come with it. So I strongly support the Motion and the Bill before the House, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Jilila Kumar?

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I also rise to support the amendment of this Bill - Fiji Services Aftercare Fund. Today is 23rd May, 2017. As we all know, this Bill was enacted in 1944. So this is the moment that all Fiji Police Officers, plus Corrections Services Officers who had served overseas, even who are deceased, this Bill will benefit their spouse. This also will be a boosting factor, Madam Speaker, to our Police Officers in Fiji and their families and also the Corrections Officers in this country. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly support the amendment of this Bill, the Fiji Servicemen Aftercare Fund Act.

HON. SPEAKER.- There be no other input, I now give the floor to Honourable Attorney-General for his right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, it is good to get a bipartisan support on this Bill to amend the Act. I think all Honourable Members who have spoken had elucidated quite accurately the reason to ensure that we do have clarity, we do have non-discrimination so that all the members of the Discipline Forces receive the same benefits.

I would like to very quickly also echo the sentiments by the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament about the fact that Government also, a few years ago, brought into the fore some form of compensation to those Christmas Island veterans. In fact, they have been forgotten.

As we know the Christmas Island incident was seen as something that they did not want to be recognised for, but Fijians were actually exposed to nuclear radiation and for years, any form of recognition by Government both, pre-Independence and post-Independence have not had taken place.

As we know, we have, of course, systematically looked at various laws and policies, and tried to bring clarity. In the same way, Madam Speaker, there was also discriminatory practice where women who had joined the Civil Service during the colonial days and should they have joined the Civil Service as a spinster and when they got married, the time of the calculation of the pension only occurred from the time they got married. So, if they had worked five years prior to that as a spinster, 10 years prior to that or two years prior to that, that was actually not taken into account and that was never calculated into the pension.

Of course, we have course corrected that, we have budgetary allocations for that. A number of million dollars was allocated. Some women were given the due recognition. So in the same way in that light, we will continue to look for various discriminatory practices in law that had previously occurred, and try and correct that. This is, again, in the same vein that we want to correct this discriminatory act and as highlighted by Honourable Bulitavu, when this matter was raised in the Business Committee meeting, the Honourable Prime Minister did highlight that we are already working on this.

This is the work that we have done. There are a couple other matters, Madam Speaker, that will also be addressed in the Budget, that may not unnecessarily require an amendment to the law, but nonetheless we will actually correct some discriminatory practices, what we call in operational matters that carried out some discriminatory practices where people have been actually marginalised.

With those few words, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank all Honourable Members for this bipartisan support and I am sure those officers and their families, who are actually listening in to us will also have a sigh of relief that they will get some payment made for them. As I have said, the Christmas Island Veterans are included, the Malayan Campaign Veterans are included, World War II Veterans are included, their families and, of course, those who started serving in the Middle East and other parts of the trouble spots around the world after 1978. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

The question is:

That pursuant to the resolution of parliament passed today, 23th May, 2017, that the Fiji Servicemen's Aftercare (Amendment) Bill 2017 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

HONOURABLE MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There be no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Fiji Servicemen's Aftercare (Amendment) Bill 2017, Bill No. 14 of 2017 enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No.....of 2017)]

HON. SPEAKER.- The next Item in the Order Paper, I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion.

REVIEW OF THE KYOTO PROTOCOL-DOHA AMENDMENT

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Attorney-General has moved the motion to refer the tabled Treaty to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with a copy of the Treaty and Written Analysis as required by Standing Order 130(2).

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), the Treaty and the Analysis stand referred to Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, for consideration and review. The Committee may table a report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

[Treaty and Written Analysis referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review]

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

REVIEW OF THE ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT - ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank – Articles of Agreement.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Attorney-General has moved a motion to refer the tabled Agreement to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with a copy of the Articles of Agreement and Written Analysis as required by Standing Order 130(2).

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), the Agreement and the Analysis stand referred to Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, for consideration and review. The Committee may table a report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

[Articles of Agreement and Written Analysis referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review]

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

**REVIEW OF THE FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT -
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE (ISA)**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence review the Framework Agreement on the establishment of the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

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

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Attorney-General has moved the motion to refer the tabled Agreement to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. I confirm that the Honourable Attorney-General has provided me with a copy of the Agreement and Written Analysis as required by Standing Order 130(2).

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 130(3), the Agreement and the Written Analysis stand referred to Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, for consideration and review. The Committee may table a report to Parliament no later than 30 days from today.

[Agreement and Written Analysis referred to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for consideration and review]

HON. SPEAKER.- For the information of Honourable Members, there are two motions from respective Chairpersons of Standing Committees; one by the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs and the second motion, by the Chairperson of Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence.

From the outset, I wish to clarify that the wording of the motions allow the Parliament to debate the contents of the Reports. At the end of the debates, we will be voting merely to note the Reports. I remind Honourable Members that once the vote is taken on the motions, it ends there and the Reports will be tabled again in Parliament.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to move his motion.

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, NATIONAL HERITAGE,
CULTURE AND ARTS – 2013 AND 2014 ANNUAL REPORTS**

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

That Parliament debates the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts' 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports which was tabled on 28th September, 2016.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson of Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak on the motion.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion before the House and the debate on the Standing Committee of Social Affairs' Report on the review that was undertaken to the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports. Given the number of annual reports that the Committee need to report back to Parliament, the Committee decided to consolidate the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts' 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports in one Committee Report.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs on 10th June, 2016, undertook a consultation with the Ministry of Education's Senior Officials to clarify all pertinent issues in the two Reports that were raised by Honourable Members. In this regard, Madam Speaker, to name some of the issues that were raised by the Honourable Members which were addressed by the Ministry of Education Officials included the:

- achievement ratings by the Strategic Framework for Change and Coordinating Office (SFCCO) on their 2013 and 2014 deliverables;
- renewal of school leases;
- number of disciplinary cases that ended up in court in 2014 and successfully cleared; and
- percentage increase in the budget for Special Education over the two years which was confirmed by the Ministry that \$550,000 was budgeted for 2015 in the same allocation as well in 2015 but in 2016, it was increased to \$1.1 million.

The other issues that were raised by Honourable Members in regards to the two Annual Reports of the Ministry of Education have been addressed by the Officials as per the official records, the verbatim notes, attached to the reports.

Madam Speaker, after gathering all the needed information from the Ministry of Education and the consultation that was undertaken, the Committee finally tabled back its Report to Parliament on 28th September, 2016.

Madam Speaker, the two recommendations made by the Standing Committee were as follows:

1. The Standing Committee on Social affairs has conducted a review of the Annual Reports of the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts for the years 2013 and 2014, and recommends that Parliament takes note of these Reports.
2. The Committee also recommends that future Annual Reports present a data to reflect gender and participation in the positions held within the Ministry.

Finally, Madam Speaker, with those inputs on the motion, I do support the Standing Committee on Social Affairs' Report that is before the House, in terms of the review made on the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts' 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports. Thank

you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is now open for debate and I now invite input from Honourable Members. Honourable Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Honourable Member, the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for tabling their Report and deliberating on the 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports of the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts.

Madam Speaker, as you know the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts is a pretty large Ministry. It has different sections as well as it is the custodian and executive arm to look after several legislations. The legislation includes the:

- Education Act;
- Examinations Act;
- Fiji National University Decree 2009;
- Substance Abuse Advisory Council Act;
- University of the South Pacific Act;
- Fiji Museum Act;
- National Trust of Fiji Act;
- National Trust of Fiji (Amendment) Act;
- Preservation of Objects of Archaeological and Palaeontological Interest Act;
- World Heritage Convention Intangible Cultural Heritage Act;
- Fiji Teacher Registration Board Promulgation 2008;
- Higher Education Promulgation 2008;
- Libraries and Deposits of Book Act;
- Fijian Teachers Registration Promulgation.

Madam Speaker, these legislations allow the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts to undertake its work relating to looking after the various Early Childhood Education (ECE) Centres, Primary Schools and High Schools.

The legislation pertaining to universities in the Higher Education Sector allows the Ministry to work via the Higher Education Commission to look after all the tertiary institutions. Madam Speaker, recently, we also amended the Higher Education Act to ensure that we provide and strengthen the Higher Education Commission to ensure that we also examine all the outside external institutions offering qualifications in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, also these legislations empower the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts to look after several statutory bodies, such as the Higher Education Commission, Fijian Teacher Registration Board, the Tertiary Education Loans Board, the National Trust and the Arts Council. The Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts also looks after the entire Heritage Section.

Madam Speaker, after looking at the 2013 and 2014 Reports, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts decided to fine tune its activities to ensure that we better deliver our activities with the resources given to us. The entire country looks forward to the Ministry to deliver better and more from the existing resources.

The resources, Madam Speaker, as with other Ministries, all these resources are obtained not that easily. Resources are limited, we vire for these resources but demands are limited.

Education is one Ministry, as I alluded to probably yesterday, that affects nearly every household and there are expectations, Madam Speaker. These expectations over the last three decades changed. Expectations of children and parents have changed, expectations of industries have changed and we need to be abreast with those changing expectations.

Technology has changed, Madam Speaker, and, therefore, requires the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts to ensure that we live up to these changes in technology, changes in demand from parents, students, school management and the industry.

Madam Speaker, I am quite pleased to note that the Report commends the work that the Ministry has done and the Report requires us to do some minor amendments. With respect to the recommendation that are here, Madam Speaker, tomorrow I will be presenting a ministerial statement, if there is slot, on our Fiji Education Management Information System, how we have fine-tuned that and it is one of the best databases that we have.

That database will address the recommendation here, Madam Speaker, which talks about providing as far as possible a breakdown based on gender. I want to assure the Committee, the Chairperson and Honourable Members of this House that tomorrow, you will note from my presentation on how the Fiji Education Management Information System database commonly known as FEMIS will be utilised to address the recommendation given in this Report.

Madam Speaker, I do also note that the Committee deliberated on the finance side, I want to let the House know that as alluded to by the Minister for Economy yesterday, since last year when the Civil Service Reform started, we re-examined and restructured our finance section and using the Open Merit System, we had recruited some of the best and the brightest minds to address some of the issues initially raised in the Audit Reports.

Madam Speaker, at the end of 2014, you would note that the Ministry of Education is one of the largest Ministry, and to take into account the operational budget is the largest Ministry. The Ministry of infrastructure and FRA, these are one-off capital grants. We are effectively one of the largest Ministry but the finance section did not have a single person with an accounting degree. The entire finance section of Ministry of Education, if you look at the fulltime staff, not a single staff in the finance section of the Ministry of Education had an accounting degree, including the Director Finance. Now, Madam Speaker, we have got two personnel with Masters Degree in Accounting, about 15 graduate personnel with Accounting Degree.

Madam Speaker, for the first time ever, in 2015 and 2016, the Audit Report has given an unqualified opinion. Yesterday, Honourable Nawaikula said that there are some exceptional ministries which had been given an unqualified report. I want to tell him that the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts is an exception Ministry. The 2015 and 2016 Reports is unqualified so these are the kinds of reforms through the Ministry of Civil Service that is now translating and delivering output, Madam Speaker, so I want to assure the Members of this House that we are determined to ensure that we give more for the existing resources that we being given through the Ministry of Economy and with that the entire Ministry, all the sections are geared towards reviewing that.

Madam Speaker, we are geared towards ensuring that our ECEs function well. As you know, a lot of enthusiasm on the ground, Madam Speaker, from teachers who are now receiving full salary from the Ministry directly. Before they used to get paid by the Ministry and how it used to be paid by the Management. Now the full salary is being given by the Ministry directly and deposited into their bank accounts. They do not have to run around and chase the management to give their salary

on time. The ECE centres have come up with large numbers because there is huge demand and the huge demand is because parents do not have to pay any fees now.

Before, Madam Speaker, because parents had to pay fees, they were keeping their children away from ECE because they could not afford to pay the \$50 to \$60 and because of that, within six months when the announcement was made last year and this year, there is a massive rise in ECE itself because there is demand for it so we are now restructuring the section to give ECE that kind of autonomy and resources so that they can manage because it is now becoming even larger than the primary section. We have 730 primary schools but we have got over a thousand ECE centres, Madam Speaker.

Of course, Madam Speaker, talking about the gender dimension that the report raised, I must say that in the ECE centres, all the teachers are female and making the kind of support that the Government has done through the grant by giving these teachers respect, dignity and economic power.

Madam Speaker, we have restructured our Heritage Section so that we have a lot of activities out there and get out students to understand about the heritage aspect. I believe there is a question tomorrow and I am going to talk about the museum open days and the role it plays.

Madam Speaker, we are working very closely with the High Education Commission to ensure that our tertiary institutions do what they are supposed to do, to ensure that children and parents who go to these tertiary institutions do get qualifications which are recognised internationally. We have restructured the Higher Education Commission Board for the first time ever. The Higher Education Commission Board has three board members who have PhDs so this High Education Commission has to deal with university professors and we needed to have a board which has credibility, who we could talk to and with our Education Commission. This is the first time ever, Madam Speaker, three persons are appointed to the Board including the Chairperson with academic background, a solid academic PhD, Madam Speaker.

The Higher Education Commission giving the more leverage, more autonomy so that they can do what they required to do, Madam Speaker. Overall, we are doing a lot of things to ensure that we have a robust and the best education system which meets the expectations of contemporary Fijians.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Committee on Social Affairs for their report. They have touched on some very salient points and if I could just refer the House to page 8 of their report under budgetary allocation. It reads "In 2013, the budgetary allocation of the Ministry of Education was \$277,126,997."

In 2014, the budgetary allocation had increased to \$370,034,000 or an increase of almost 28 percent, 28 percent from 2014 over 2013, someone is going to ask the question, "What warranted an increase on the scale? What happened in 2014?"

HON. MEMBER.- Elections.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Elections, right. So my point is this, "Let us not use the future of our children and education for Election purposes." This should have been consistent from Day 1 when the regime took over the government in 2007, 2008 and not have this huge hike on the Year of the Election.

What happened to the children before 2014? These are serious questions and it is incumbent upon us as leaders not to play politics with our children, not when we have Elections and then you go 28 percent increases on the budget.

Madam Speaker, every child should be given the key to learning and the chance to rise. Ordinary people should become extra-ordinary through education. Do not play politics with that.

Now we are going to another Elections, Madam Speaker. We have been pressing from Day 1 to provide free tuition at university yet no takers from the other side, that is not playing politics. We have been talking about it for the last few years because we know that education is key to the success of a small country like Fiji. Even the IMF has said recently that the standard of living in the world will not rise if productivity does not increase and it can only increase productivity with better investment in education and that is why, Madam Speaker, these reports highlight what should not be the way we do things in this country. Not Elections time, you increase budgets such as this. And I would just hope that going forward that we take education seriously, plan it properly and ensure that there is continuity in the level of education and facilities we provide our students. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Jone Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Once again, I would like to support the report and I would like to thank the Committee and all the Members of the Committee that gave their time to have a look at this Report. I think there is nobody in this country who does not think that education is an important thing. It is a sad indictment this afternoon as we are talking about education and the focus of the report that we try to turn it into a political football. This should not be a political football. What were the things that happened in 2013? There were a lot of good things that happened in 2013. We are talking about the period from 2013 to 2014 and the emphasis of Government at that time and what it needed to do to enhance education.

I agree totally with the Honourable Gavoka that if you think about the competitiveness of any country in the world, it is always dependent on the quality of its workforce, what that workforce knows, what they can do, and how they feel about doing it so there is always an emphasis in education in making sure that we can establish this. To do this, you need to have good teachers and in 2013, we had the establishment of the Fiji Teachers Registration Board where we tried to make sure that they have quality standards in place so that the kinds of teachers that are imparting knowledge to students meet certain levels so these are some of the developments that happen in that place. There was an emphasis at that time in 2013 of looking at vocational training.

There was an introduction of the best programme, the best employment skills training programme that came in place in 2013 to look at making sure that when people come out of the technical and vocational schools that they have skills that are aligned to the standards that are required in the industry. Now, we have taken that a step further, I think from this year or the past year, we have the development of technical colleges that will spread this out to a greater number of people in the country. So, there were solid developments that took place in 2013. There was the expansion of the provision of free text books, zoning policy that was taken place during that time, the setting up of infant schools for year one to three students. That was a dramatic development.

We used to have these young children who had to be transported and they have to go and live in dormitories when they were in class one to three away from the nurture and care of the parents. We had the establishment on these infant schools to make sure they could be with their parents and the most critical years of the forming the development of their brains that could be close to their

parents. So, we have these whole hostel developments. They were not targeted that we need an elections, no.

They were focus on trying to make sure that we can improve the capabilities of our young of our children. That once again demonstrate the commitment that govern that. During this period we are talking about the Bainimarama government not about the FijiFirst Government. That is what the experience is looking at. The year 2013 to 2014 if there is one thing that we can see there has been a consistence, consistency between what the Bainimarama was looking at and what this FijiFirst Government is at this emphasis on education. The Minister has pointed out the significant portion of the National Budget that has taken up by education this year. But there are number of other things.

One of the things I noted also in the same page that the Honourable Gavoka has mentioned is that 27.8 percent increase in education from 2013 to 2014 is not a reflection of any political agenda. It is a reflection of the importance that the government at that time placed in education. This Government continuous to have that belief. We believe that if you want to be more productive, more competitive in this world, the one of the most important things that we can have is what our people can do what they know and you will see over the past few years we continue to have this Toppers Scheme, TELS Scheme.

All focus on making sure we can have a world class workforce in this country. When you have a world class workforce, workforce invites investors to come in and earn and set up a business in here so our people can have more opportunities to be able to be employed and get money for themselves. That is what the focus has been under this Government. The Honourable Attorney-General has mentioned time and time again that our population, I think the statistics that he says about 69.4 percent of our population will be under 40. So, a lot of the things that we need to do in this country have to be focussed on our young population. What we can do to make sure that they can survive in the world that they are living in.

Knowledge is a key to productivity, Human Resource and what that human resources can do and how they work with each other in teams, how they work together in an organisations, how they create a culture in an organisation, these are the fundamentals of productivity. We will know there are other things that impact on productivity such as the volume of capital, the dipping of capital you have in a country, f but at the heart of productivity is human beings. What they know, what they can do and how they feel about and that is what this Government will continue to emphasise on.

The other thing that I have noticed from that report that I am very glad to see is the significant attention that is paid to special education. That has been something, I think all of us. When we look at our constitution we look at the rights that we have for the disabilities, we do not want discrimination in our country. So that fact that the Ministry of Education is emphasising special education is putting more money into special education. Today, we all talk about the agenda for 2013. "Leave no one behind" and what the Ministry of Education has been doing by putting more money into special education, is trying to make sure that we will give opportunities also to those that perhaps not given the full faculties of their body or their mind or whatever. Through the emphasis and special education they have an opportunity to also shine in this world.

The last thing that I was looking at, in terms, I think one of the recommendation from the Committee was to look at the desegregated data in terms of employment. I think that is an important thing. In any sort of organisation or any sort of ministry if you want to have good policy initiatives you need to have good data that is coming out that gives you a better picture of what is happening in an organisation.

It is not only true for the employment in an organisation, you want fairer employment, but also in terms of exam outputs and outcomes. Increasingly now we are seeing from the statistics that we read is that women in Fiji are seem to be doing better academically. I know that when I was at the Ministry of Health more of our young doctors that are coming out are females. More of the people that are coming out of universities are also females.

So, maybe the males are under threat to some degree, but you can only do that so out of those statements or you have good data that is coming out, that data can be convert to information, information when it is looked at becomes knowledge and that knowledge becomes the basis of good policy. You should not be making a policy just by making some statement and picking numbers out of the hat but through that focus on making sure that we have disaggregated data allows you to stratify data that comes in so you can look at things at different angles allows us to make good policy alternatives in the future.

I congratulate the Committee and the Minister and his team for continuing to work on these basic principles and tenets that the FijiFirst Government and all of us, I think we are here for. We believe in education as the way to take our country forward.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, I now give the floor to the Honourable Doctor Brij Lal. A point of Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- But I think it is important that I clarify and I hope he will come back, please Honourable Member. Very important, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell the Honourable Member, in 2013 in the primary and high school system we had 212,668 students with the introduction free education we brought in 9,477 students more in our high and primary schools system. The historical thing. In 2014, is the critical year, free education was introduced?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order! It seems that what you are saying does not qualify under the Point of Order.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Thank you, I will come back, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Doctor Brij Lal, you have the floor.

HON. DR. B. LAL.-Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to contribute to the issue that we are debating as 2013 and 2014 Annual Report of the Ministry of Education.

Madam Speaker, at that time I was the Permanent Secretary for Education and would like to put in my share of what was happening at that time. The Ministry of Education at that time was divided into a number of sections and we were looking after:

- Administration and Finance;
- Primary;
- Secondary;
- Asset monitoring;
- Curriculum Advisory Services which includes the test;
- Section which is technical and vocational;
- Examination and assessment;
- National Heritage Culture and Arts;
- Fiji National Commission for UNESCO

- Fiji Teacher Registration Board;
- Studentship Education Project
- Family Life Education Project
- The National Substance Abuse; and
- Advisory Council.

During that period of time, Madam Speaker, there were a number of policies that the ministry was looking at, some of the policy has to be revised, strengthened and brought up to par and this included:

- Policy on customer services;
- Policy on Fiji Primary and Secondary Inspected System;
- Policy on Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education;
- Policy on Occupational Health and Safety in schools;
- Policy on Early Childhood Education;
- Policy on Distribution of Tuition Grant and Supplementary Grants;
- Policy on Study and Training Leave;
- Policy on Professional Development;
- Policy on Enterprise Education;
- Policy on Excursions in Schools;
- Policy on External Examination and Assessment;
- Skills Training and Employment Policy; and
- Policy on Community use of Government School Grounds;

These were some of the policies that we are looking at, at that time and developing. The other areas of major concentration included 12 years of basic education for all. The Higher Education Commission, Fiji Qualification Council, Fiji National Education, Research Council, Fiji National University. Some of the other reforms included the ovulation of some of the exams, the fair assistance to the needy children and this is one of the area where bulk of the money was going in, that additional money that was coming. Establishment of schools in the Educational in Disadvantage Areas (EDA) and this is the time when we established schools in those areas where there were no schools, examples, Beqa, Yanuca Secondary, Nuku Secondary, Wailevu West in Cakaudrove and Lavena Primary in Taveuni, this is where the money was going into. Also this is a time when we started distributing more and more textbooks to the schools directly after *Cyclone Thomas*, a lot of schools lost all their text books and these books had to be reprinted and re-distributed that is why we needed more funds.

At the same time, this is the time when there was an increase in the grants given to kindergarten to help them for the salary of teachers. It is during this time when the ministry started giving additional grants to hostel students so that they could buy balanced food for their students. We developed the Fiji Teachers Registration Board and there was need to upgrade things in this area. At the same time, both the school learning and decentralisation policies were put in and a lot of work was done at this time.

Madam Speaker, I can speak at length on this, but I would like to say this was some of the initiatives that were being done at that time and I am very proud that we are achieving the benefits of all these. I thanked the Committee that has produced the Report and I am very hopeful that this country will benefit from the good work that the FijiFirst is doing for education in this country. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I know some people stood up, can I just have your hands up again anyone else?. Honourable Mohammed Dean but I will give it to the opposition first, Honourable Salote Radrodro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. May I just make a short contribution to the debate and may I remind the House of *Proverbs 22:6* which says “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it” and my own version “educate a child in the way he should and when he is old he will not depart from it”.

We have heard the contribution in terms of the budget allocation that has been given to the Ministry of Education. It is one of the Ministry that has a very huge budget, for example in 2013, the Ministry was given \$267.1 million and in 2014 it was given \$370 million approximately. We have also heard from the previous speaker on the various policies and programmes that the Ministry had worked on or implemented. But, Madam Speaker, I would like to highlight that the effectiveness of these policies and these programmes to be able to get the value of our money that has been injected into the Ministry of Education that we are not really hearing. Before we have heard from this side of the House our suggestion, our recommendation that an Education Commission be established. It is an independent Commission that will review and evaluate the effectiveness or otherwise or the adverse effect of those policies and programmes on our society.

For example, Madam Speaker, if we had an educated society like we have heard from the other side of the House then the equation does not balance. We have very high crime rates and we have very high unemployment rates. The Ministry of Education should be looking at the bigger picture, not just to educate the children but these children become useful adults in their later years. And that is why, Madam Speaker, I again suggest that the other side of the House should consider the establishment of the Education Commission which will give us an independent view, whether those policies or those programmes are really effective or not in educating our children.

Otherwise maybe I can say same people that are giving out polices and also they are same that is saying that the policies and programmes are effective. It is a very unfair and bias way of analysing policies and the effectiveness of those policies and programmes. So if we are really to know the effectiveness of those education policies and programmes, then it should be given to an independent body like the Education Commission.

For example, Madam Speaker, there was examination that was taken away and again after few years down the line the examination was again taken back to the classroom it was again being implemented. That says a lot about the kind of policies that is coming out. You know parents are asking, are our children guinea pigs? For example, without consultation, without proper policy consultation with the public at large those policies have been implemented. Only then to realise later on that maybe it is not working but we must never forget that the people want the value of their money. Big budget allocation being given to Ministry of Education and it is a responsibility of the Minister of the Ministry not just to come here and tell us that these policies and programmes are working or we have new policies and programmes in place.

What is important is the evaluation and monitoring the effectiveness of those policies and programmes in the lives of our children so that they are not only educated but they become useful adults in the future. So that we will see a reduction in crime rates, we will see a reduction in an unemployment, we will see a reduction in maybe cost of living. So those are the kind of things that we should be looking at so that we have an educated and knowledgeable society as always being alluded to by the other side. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Mohammed Dean.

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to give a short contribution to this Report as I was also part of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs whilst we took submissions on this Report.

Madam Speaker, some of the issues that we highlighted when the officials from the Ministry of Education came was in particular to the allocation of the budget given to different sections of the Ministry. We also noted that the Government in its span of time post 2013 and 2014 has in actuality increase the budget and focus to those areas that we were a bit concerned about.

On this note Early Childhood Education we took note that now there has been an increased in the base salary structure of the teachers who are in the Early Childhood Education programme. Also there was an amendment to Fiji Higher Education Act and that was also questioned it has already been taken care of. We also noted in regards to the budget for Special Education has also increased over the years and we also note there were two important Bills that were implemented that looked more into Special Education. So those were some of the issues that were raised.

Madam Speaker, education allocation for funds should never be made, any issue regarding children should not be politicised and

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. M.M.A. DEAN.- Giving education, allocating funds to the children of our society, that is a very important social responsibility of any Government. And if these allocations are done and over the years, these allocations are increasing and improving, it is a very important social responsibility which reflects that the Government is really concerned about it.

As I have alluded to earlier, the allocations for very important Departments in the Ministry of Education Ministry that we were discussing with the Ministry, has been increased, things have improved over time, as compared to what was reflected in the Annual reports.

That is my short contribution to this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister for Education, you have had your time and you cannot be given a second time. I now give the floor to the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to the motion before the House on the Review Report of the Committee for the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports.

It was noted that the Ministry of Education's 2013 and 2014 goals were aligned to Pillar 9 of the Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress 2008, the Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio Economic Development (RDSSSED) 2009 to 2014 and the 2013 Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the education system has seen major reforms unfolding, to ensure that education is made available to all children in Fiji. The restructure within the Education Sector in 2013 and 2014, geared towards the delivery of quality education for change, peace and progress.

Pillar 9 of the Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress focusses on making Fiji a knowledge-based society. Our Government's mission was and is, Madam Speaker, to make education accessible, affordable and equitable, and to alleviate the financial burden on the parents in enhancing the realisation of our children's dreams.

Madam Speaker, todate the Government has injected a good portion of the National Budget towards education. In 2013, 11.5 percent of the National Budget was given to education which equalled to \$267 million. And in 2014, the allocation increased to \$370 million, which was 12.8 percent of the National Budget.

As per annual reports and presentations by the Ministry of Education to our Standing Committee, Madam Speaker, it was brought to our knowledge that in 2013 and 2014, there were lots of reforms. To name but a few the:

- Establishment of Higher Education Unit;
- Establishment of the Fiji Teachers Registration Board;
- Expansion of basic Compulsory Education to 12 years of schooling;
- Enforcement of the zoning policy for school intakes and enrolment;
- Provision of transport assistance;
- Provision of free textbooks;
- Setting up of infant schools,
- Advocacy and training of students and teachers on HIV and AIDS, substance abuse, violence against women and girls;
- BEST programmes;
- Tuition Fee Free Grant for all primary and secondary schools;
- Setting up of Vocational Colleges; and
- many, many more initiatives that were taken in 2013 and 2014.

Madam Speaker, and this was to deliver quality education.

Madam Speaker, as we all know, education is a constitutional right of every Fijian and given the growing recognition by the State of the importance of ECE, 2013 saw the establishment and recognition of more infant schools in many areas convenient to both, parents and children; the formulation of a new ECE curriculum and the increase in ECE salary grant, introduction of e-learning whereby there were about 20 e-learning centres established in secondary schools.

Madam Speaker, on this note, we also acknowledge the Ministry's initiative in 2013 in developing a database known as the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS). This controls the entire Education data as already alluded to by the Honourable Minister for Education. The number of schools, types of schools, names of each and every student, their background, age, names, parent details, teacher details, courses they are taking and everything is in FEMIS. It is a huge database that was developed in 2013.

Also in 2013, Madam Speaker, Special and Inclusive Education was piloted in five primary schools, accommodating children with special needs. 70 teachers received Inclusive Education training, while 20 teachers received sign language and Braille training.

Madam Speaker, the Department of National Heritage, Culture and Arts has done Fiji proud by carving Fiji's name in the World Heritage listing as well. From what we have heard from the representatives of the Ministry of Education and, of course, from what we gathered from 2013 and 2014 academic years, it had its challenges and confronts. With 12 Campuses in Technical Colleges, 93 Vocational Centres, 735 Primary Schools, 17 Special Education Schools, over 1,046 ECE Centres and 117 Secondary Schools, the task was massive and, of course, other policies and research as already alluded to by Honourable Dr Lal.

Despite all the challenges and the shortfalls, the overall performance of the Ministry in 2013 and 2014 is commendable. There were a few recommendations by our Standing Committee on Social Affairs as already alluded by the Chairperson.

Finally, Madam Speaker, with those inputs on the motion, I do support the Committee's Review Report that is before the House, the review that was undertaken on the Ministry of Education 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports. Madam Speaker, I commend the report to this House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ruveni Nadalo.

HON. R.N. NADALO.- Madam Speaker, I rise to also contribute to the motion before the House on the Committee's Review Report on the assessment made to the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts' 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports. The Committee Report captured major issues and this involved gender analysis, budgetary allocation, together with the Ministry of Education's target, outcome and output. In this regard, Madam Speaker, the Committee, in its review, noted that in 2013 the Ministry registered about 732 primary schools and 176 secondary schools in Fiji. It is also noted that the Ministry now extends its jurisdiction and now registered over 146 ECE Centres, 93 Vocational Centres and 12 Technical College Campuses.

On budgetary aspects, it was found that the total expenditure increased from 2013 to 2014 by \$10 million but the capital expenditure only increased by \$2.6 million. However, it was noted that the rationale behind this was that all projects take time to be completed, and approval process also takes time, as well as the certification of all completed projects. It was noted that once the old projects are completed, then the Ministry of Education would request for further funding for the Ministry's new project.

Madam Speaker, with those contributions on the motion, I do support the Committee's Report that is before the House, in terms of the review that was undertaken to the Ministry of Education's 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports. Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, before I make my contribution, I just want to draw the attention of the House to two things, if I could.

Madam Speaker, when I talked about the foreign reserves, we had a lot of intervention during that point in time. I did say, and this was probably when I was not wearing my glasses, I said that the foreign reserves was at an all-time high of \$2.242 billion which is the correct figure that I stated. I said this was equivalent to 6.6 months, but actually it is six months.

The other thing, Madam Speaker, I just found out also, Air New Zealand that flies into Fiji only carries *New Zealand Herald*, they do not carry any other New Zealand newspaper, I just found that out. Of course, there are a lot of Kiwi tourists, who do come to Fiji and the international flights carry the *New Zealand Herald*.

Madam Speaker, in fact, I look forward to making some positive comments. It was a pity that Honourable Gavoka started politicising the Report. Prior to his contribution, every Honourable Member who spoke about the Report commented on the Ministry, commented on the capacity of it, and he unfortunately started politicising, incorrectly stating that 'Free Education' was introduced in 2014. Actually, it was introduced in 2013.

What he should be asking is; what did his leader who is outside of this House, do when he was in Government? Since, 1987 when he carried out the two *coups* in the same year and then he was elected in 1992; what did he do until 1999? What did his leader inside this House, who was also Minister for Education, do for Free Education, Tertiary Education and Loan Scheme scholarships?

(Hon. Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, they opened the door, they have to answer for that. That is the reality, Madam Speaker, they are the ones playing politics.

The Honourable Jone Usamate very clearly elucidated what is the focus of this. The Honourable Minister for Education, who spoke earlier on and also previously, about the need for technical colleges. They are absolutely right. I agree with Honourable Salote Radrodro who is not here, that we do need to carry out evaluation. But I think even in the absence of a current evaluation exercise, the reality is that many people and every person in Fiji would agree that access to education being enhanced is a positive thing. We all agree with that. There are so many times, literally hundreds of times, I have been told by people, they said; “If only we had free education in our time, I would have been educated myself or I would have educated my children”. That, Madam Speaker, is a fact. Madam Speaker, unfortunately those who are jumping on the dynamite and their leader outside this House is saying; “We make it all free.” Why did they not have this brilliant idea before when they had the opportunity?

Madam Speaker, they also mentioned this and I want to set the record straight for this Parliament. They said; “Awh, you have been there since 2007, why have you not done it?” Madam Speaker, let me explain.

From 2007 to up to about 2013, we also had things like non-availability, non-accessibility to concessional loans. We were under enormous pressure, Madam Speaker, the conditions that they enjoyed after 1987, we did not enjoy. There were no travel bans. Even if they are related or married to someone, they dare not get appointed to Government because there were travel bans.

The reality, Madam Speaker, is this, they were on strenuous circumstances. But I can tell you, Madam Speaker, the amount of work that has been done from 2007 to 2014 is unprecedented, given the harsh conditions that they put on us.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They joined the coup of 1987 until 1992, from 1992 to 1999, the level of development and industrial infrastructure was minimal, compared to what happened in 2007 to 2014 and has been enhanced now. That is the reality, Madam Speaker, which they forget or they do not want to acknowledge.

Madam Speaker, the reality also is this, as a result of that a lot of our efforts from 2007 to 2013 (anyone carrying out an analysis would tell you), we were very much focussed on what you call; ‘hard infrastructure’. Once we started gaining access to concessional loans or funds that we used to get, in fact, went out and started building the soft infrastructure. The soft infrastructure, of course, being investment in our people, investment in education, and that was when we were able to get them. Those funding were made available to us in 2013, and that is when we started all of these. Madam Speaker, I think we need to call a horse a horse, when it is a horse, not call it a frog.

Madam Speaker, the reality is this also, the Ministry of Education, if you take into account all the amount of funding it gets through TELS, through the grants we give to USP in access of \$30

million, to FNU in a tune of about \$50 million, to University of Fiji and if we account all of that, it is nearly \$600 million that has been allocated towards the education and heritage and sector, Madam Speaker. It is again a very unprecedented amount of money that has been made available. Yes, we obviously may need to sharpen our pencils in various areas, as the Honourable Brij Lal talked about textbooks, et cetera; yes, there have been some flaws within, however there have been improvements in it. And we, through the Ministry of Economy, are very keen to ensure that money is spent wisely.

That Ministry of Education also ensures that they focus on the Education Sector as opposed to constructions which I mentioned yesterday. All these matters are being addressed, Madam Speaker, but what I would also like to mention is that, as we have announced through the Civil Service Reform, we are currently carrying out a salary evaluation exercise.

As we have highlighted, Madam Speaker, last year....

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- 2018!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You see again, these people have absolutely no understanding!

We have been coming to Parliament for the past 18 months and talking about Civil Service Reform. They oppose OMRS. The Honourable Minister for Education just talked about how he had a ministry that received \$500 million or \$0.5 billion that did not even have a qualified accountant, and they think it is fit to carry on with their system. They do not believe in appointing people on merit, or right people for the right jobs.

(Hon. Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I tell you, they're politicising, you look at the questions coming up! They are the ones now suddenly concerned about the civil servants and the Honourable Aseri Radrodoro talked about these poor civil servants and said; "Do not blame them." They will be blamed if they do the wrong thing. They will be given accolades if they do the right thing. That is the way a system should work, and must work.

So, Madam Speaker, I have reported to this Parliament that we are also looking at the entire Civil Service, in particular the specialised areas like teachers, nurses, doctors already had their remuneration increase last year and various other areas, for example, radiologists, people in the science areas and across the board. We have matched that, we have already told this Parliament, we have given our report in respect of the differences between the private sector and what we pay in the Civil Service. They rebuked that. They said; "Awh, you cannot compare it with the private sector." Of course, you can provide good benchmarking. You do not have to solely dependent on them, but it does provide good benchmarking. So, this is the next stage in what we are looking at,

We have already provided a lot of incentives in that area. The consultants, the people from our team also have been going around and carrying that, and we believe that the right people need to be remunerated. The Ministry of Education is one of the largest ministries in terms of employment. So, obviously we need to ensure that the HR capacity within the Ministry is strengthened and for us, this is what we look at. We look at strengthening these internal institutions, internal departments to have the best output and to ensure that the right people are appointed and people are remunerated accordingly. So, that is one area of focus, Madam Speaker, and I am sure the Committee may have also addressed that in that instance.

Madam Speaker, the other issue that I would also like to highlight is in the Heritage and Arts Section. I completely concur with the Honourable Minister for Education in respect of what he talked about in his earlier Ministerial Statement, that we need to develop the capacity of our young people in the area of arts. There is enormous capacity, there is enormous talent, and I concur with the Honourable Minister for Education. If none of the Honourable Members in this Parliament have been to the Kula Film Awards or the Dance Awards, please go to that, because it is such a great celebration of the talent of the young people of this country. You look at the short films that they are making, you look at the types of dances that they are doing, the fusion that are being carried out.

Many elderly people are completely unaware of what is actually happening in the high school area, and we need to develop that. In fact, when we were in the Yokohama at the ADB Conference at the opening ceremony, when the President of the ADB spoke and the Emperor's son was there, they had the youth orchestra. And I remembered sitting there, Madam Speaker, and thinking to myself, we should have this in Fiji. We should have our youth exposed to things like classical music. I am sure there are fantastic violinists, fantastic other type of instrument players amongst our youth. We are currently, as far as arts is concerned, we are giving a very narrow perspective of what is arts. Unfortunately, some of the arts, they get exposed to R&B pop music only. I am not saying it is bad, it is good, but we need to have a whole range.

In terms of visual arts, yes, some of these short films that are being made, some of these talents will probably wither away after they finish, so we need to capture that.

If you make a movie in Fiji and you want to get a 48 percent rebate for your film, you must have people from the FNU's Film and Audio Team to come and work for you before you will actually be entitled to that. We tried to nurture that talent but there is a lot of opportunity, Madam Speaker. We are also looking and at working in conjunction with the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, looking at establishing a National Art Gallery for Fiji.

A National Art Gallery is very critical. There are many artists in Fiji, who we believe are exploited because they do not have a proper avenue to display their arts. We must nurture that. We have of course, the Corrections Services through people like Jane Ricketts. They have nurtured the hidden talent of many of our prisoners through the Yellow Ribbon Programme. We can actually go and buy their arts across Korovou Prison in that gallery that they have got. A lot of tourists actually go there, and they are tapping into that too. It is an earning for these artists, but we must also be able to provide an avenue, not just for our high school students but those who leave high school to be able to display their talent. So that is one area, Madam Speaker.

The other area, of course, is the area of drama, plays. We used to have that in Suva in the Fiji Arts Play House, but we need to nurture that. The sign of development of in arts, music, literature, drama, film is a sign of a country being able to celebrate its culture, being able to showcase its culture, to be able to nurture the artistic creative talent of individual human beings in that country. That is what is very critical.

What the Honourable Minister also talked about in respect of the various programmes they carry out, about being able to understand the cross-cultural perspectives, to be able to shed your expression. There is a lot of talk about freedom of expression, et cetera, but arts is a fantastic way to express what you are really thinking, drama, play, is a way of expressing what you are really thinking. It is a way of making a social commentary of what is happening in our society. That is what arts and drama does, that is what plays does. And we do not actually have that much of focus.

I am sure everyone in this Parliament would agree that if we are able to develop that, we will be able to nurture this untapped talent in our country. So as we are working with the Honourable

Minister and his team, we hope to be able to make some new strides in this area. It is very critical, Madam Speaker, because Heritage and Arts is not just simply about the Museum. The Museum is good, it is now developing, and funds are being allocated to the Museum. It is not just about the past but it is also about celebrating the future. It is also about positioning yourself for the future to ensure that that future when it is caught in the past, is actually celebrated also, and that is very very critical, Madam Speaker. We also hope that through this Ministry, we will be able to augment that area and provide that real opportunity for our young people. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That under Standing Order 6 that so much of Standing Orders 23(1) is suspended so as to allow the House to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. in order to complete the debates on Motion 4 and Motion 5 as listed in today's Order Paper.

HON. A. SUDHAKAR.- I second the motion, Madam Speaker.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will just finish this particular motion before we adjourn for a break. I now invite the Honourable Minister for Women and Poverty Alleviation to have the floor.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE - MINISTRY OF EDUCATION 2013 & 2014 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Madam Speaker, I have a short contribution in relation to the Report being debated upon. I would like to, first of all, thank the Chairperson and the Standing Committee on Social Affairs for their Report and in particular, on Recommendation No. 2 where they are recommending that future reports presenting sex desegregated data to reflect gender equality and participation in the positions held within the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, this is in line with our National Gender Policy of 2014 and as Minister for Women, I would also like to take a further step and ask for sex desegregated data for Heads of Schools. From data extracted from the Civil List for the period 1990 to 2012, it is evident that female teachers outnumber male teachers in the education sector, but when it comes to Heads of Schools that changes. There are more male Heads of Schools than female Heads of Schools, and the gap is quite substantive, Madam Speaker.

There are a lot of factors that can play a role in this. The Civil Service Reform with the Open Merit System is great for making sure that the right persons with the right qualifications and merit, occupy these important positions in the Education Sector. The question we got to keep asking ourselves though is, why is it that females are greatly outnumbered by males in the Education Sector?

I believe that in the Education Sector, representation of females at Heads of School level is very important because here, we are talking about the care of children and I am sure that the House would agree, that if you were to talk about the care of children and to put our hands up as to who should be looking after a child, a man or a woman, more would say a woman rather than a man because of gender-stereotyping that permeates the society. But then when we are talking about leadership positions in the Education Sector, this picture changes.

It is interesting because my predecessor, when opening a Conference last year on the Pacific Education Conference in around September 2016, Honourable Minister Rosy Akbar told the Conference that she was asked irrelevant questions which focused on her gender rather than her skills when applying for a job. And I am certain that this is the same scenario that a lot of female teachers meet out there when applying for jobs. It may not be intentional, unconscious-bias, it is very prevalent in our society, particularly when we are talking about gender.

In that particular speech, Honourable Akbar stated that come to promotions, school managements would rather have a male principal than a woman principal, that is the truth. I am a living testament of that and I do shy away from saying that because those are the barriers, Honourable Members, that we have to break if you want us to have a balance in this sector, and I could not agree with that statement more.

Madam Speaker, I have alluded to the National Gender Policy of 2014 and the hallmark of it in relation to gender-mainstreaming in the Civil Service. Recommendation No. 2 goes a long way in fortifying this in the Education sector. I would like to plead also with the other Standing Committees when they do deal with matters pertaining to the relevant sectors in our society, to draw particular attention on the representation of females. In saying that, I am not saying that there should be 50-50 percent of male and female in leadership in the Education Sector. What I am saying is that, our minds should be drawn to the imminent gender inequality that exists in the various sectors and maybe, if we were attuned to these differences and gender-stereotyping in society, we would be more attuned on how we should behave, the kind of questions we should ask when dealing with positions in our leadership.

Madam Speaker, very briefly, that is my contribution to the debate at hand and I support the Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I really did not want to speak on this motion but having heard some very useful contributions from both sides, I do want to contribute as well.

Madam Speaker, I think we need to put the whole idea of Budget and the increase in the allocation of Budget for the Ministry of Education or for any ministry in the context of the outputs and outcomes, and I will define what I mean by outputs and outcomes. But let me first talk about access and quality. Access is very important and I have said this in this House that there are some very positive aspects of developments within the Ministry of Education such as, Special Education, emphasis on pre-school and an increase in allocation of funds. These are very important access contributions through budget which means through more facilities, more technology and all the infrastructure that is needed to provide access in those particular sectors.

However, Madam Speaker, I think we must not lose sight of quality and this is very, very important because when you talk about access to education in this country, we have had fairly good success in achieving access in the 1970s, 1980s, and I think it might be useful for some of the Government Members to do acknowledge the fact that Fiji has had a pretty good education system, following on from the colonial period.

People like myself, for example, we went to school, we had what we call remission of fees. I went to Labasa College I still had remission of fees. I got a Government scholarship, if I had not got a Government scholarship in 1981 to come to the University of the South Pacific, Madam Speaker, I would not be here. My parents would have never been able to afford sending me, not only

to primary school but to secondary school as well as to the university. So, I think we, in this House, need to have a bit of humility and understanding of what happened in the past so that we can link the two, the past and the present and think about the future because it is no point in totally discrediting the efforts made by leaders of the past, ministers of the past and how we all come up to this point.

Madam Speaker, I have never stood in this House and support or provide any justification for any kind of *coups* in this country and I do not think anyone should do that. But let me come back to this whole idea of quality. This is why I have been labouring this point pretty consistently and at the expense of repetition, Madam Speaker, and that is the need for an Education Commission to look at what had happened, what had transpired in the education system over the last 10 or 12 years.

Madam Speaker, we just heard Honourable Bril Lal talking about his time as Permanent Secretary when Mr. Filipe Bole was the Minister for Education in the Bainimarama-led Government and there were many reforms. In fact, he talked about some of the reforms like, doing away with certain exams and then we had the new Minister for Education coming in and reinstating those exams. What we were saying at that time is, you cannot have something today and then someone else comes in and changes it, even no government should do that.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- It should have been done through proper assessment.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Let me define for the benefit of the Honourable Minister for Education, who is making a lot of noise there. Let me define for him what he is doing.

Madam Speaker, he is focussing on outputs.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Yes.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- When you talk about outputs, there is a difference between outputs and outcomes and he does not understand that, Madam Speaker. Let me define that for him. When you talk about outputs in the education system, in all his Ministerial Statements, the Honourable Minister for Education has been describing and counting. In other words, how many technical colleges had been set up, how many students had been enrolled there, how many students had passed but...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... he has never, in this House, talked about the outcomes. Even pass rate is output, so he does not understand the difference. The outcomes means.....

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Teach yourself.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Madam Speaker, I will encourage him to go and google the difference between outputs and outcomes and he will understand what I am saying because the outcome means the difference it is going to make. For example, Madam Speaker, we have got 10 technical colleges, you put so many students into technical colleges and you provide them with these courses. You get the number at the end of the day and say; "These many people attended", but what difference do they make? You go today and ask this question to all the employers in this country, Madam Speaker, and they are struggling to get technical people.

We have said in this House many times that the Honourable Minister for Education should go back and look at that. In politics, Madam Speaker, we always talk about good politics and good policy. Good politics is not necessarily good policy and good policy sometimes is not necessarily good politics. He is playing good politics at the expense of good policy.

That is what is happening, Madam Speaker, and they talk about politicisation. In fact, it is very important because education is very, very important. You cannot experiment good politics, for example, when the Ministry announced one laptop per child, it is viewed as good politics. A case of simple good politics without thinking about whether it was a good policy and whether the policy was going to be implemented or not, this is the kind of mixing that they do with good politics and bad policy. That is what is happening, and let me come back to this idea of data.

I was actually quite amused when Honourable Usumate was talking about the quality of technical education. Madam Speaker, he knows very well. Actually, he is being economical with the truth about what is happening to technical education in this country because when we had vocational setups in schools and this morning, we heard Honourable Nawaikula talked about students having difficulties because when we had vocational programmes within the school, in fact, a better policy would have been to strengthen those vocational programmes infrastructure in those schools ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...so that the students had no difficulty in getting in. So, Madam Speaker, what was happening, there was a very clear path. I know, and I can give you some very good personal examples of my nephews who I felt were not doing very well,...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Everything you!

(Laughter)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...we put them into technical vocational schools.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- (Inaudible)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I know, Madam Speaker, the Honourable Minister cannot fathom the truth, and that is why he is yelling on the other side. He must listen because he is the Minister for Education. He goes around the country telling everyone what to do and he is refusing to listen to

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

HON. MEMBER.- Sit down!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You are not the Speaker, alright.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Madam Speaker, Point of Order. Under Standing Order 60(1), it says; "When speaking, Members must confine their observations to the subject under consideration." We are not considering here the relatives of the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad that he has been talking about, we are talking about the Bill that is before us. Let us stick to the topic of this conversation.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, consider the principle of relevance to your speech.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was merely providing an example of what happens to a student who used to go to a vocational school at that time and how the link was to the old FNTC and how those skills were properly taken further when students came out with Stage 3, Stage 2 and Stage 1 qualifications where they used to become very, very qualified people whether they were electricians, plumbers or mechanics. You go and talk to the employers today.

This is what I am saying, Madam Speaker, that an Education Commission, an expert group, would have looked at all these data and would have analysed what was going on, then come back and inform Policy. This is how you make a good policy. And then you also change the policy because you are reviewing. So I think this is very, very important. We would belabour this point for a while and let me just use this occasion, Madam Speaker, to say to the Honourable Minister for Education that he is not the Speaker because he kept telling me to sit down. So I want to tell him that he is actually not the Speaker, you are the Speaker, Madam, so stop telling me to sit down, Honourable Minister for Education.

Let me come back to the final point, Madam Speaker, and that is the reforms. The Honourable Usamate talked about world class workforce; yes, I agree with him. I think the Honourable Attorney-General also talked about that, we agree with that but what I am saying is, we need to link what we are providing for students in these technical colleges, in schools, in other universities and then we should determine the outcomes. The output is fine, you can have all the data. You can have all the big data and there is a difference between what I call, 'big data' and 'small data'. Big data, you can say how many schools, how many students are coming, what is the pass rate, how many graduates are coming out, but the small data will tell you the difference that those outputs are going to make, and that is what is sadly, Madam Speaker, lacking in the approach that the Ministry of Education has taken so far and I hope that the Government as a whole will actually look ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ... at that and concentrate on the outcome, which means the quality of education. I agree, I had said this that I support the Government's policy on bus fare, on access, on increasing the allowances and salaries for teachers but, Madam Speaker, that is providing access but unless we concentrate on quality, we would be in serious trouble in the future and that is why it is very, very important for us not to lose sight of the outcomes, which means the quality and that can be determined through proper scientifically-driven experts looking at how things have changed from one reform to the other and whether there is a need to continue with those reforms or to change course and look at something different. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak in reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to inform this august House that the debate should have been focussed on the contents of the Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts 2013 and 2014 Annual Reports and not politics, as said by Honourable Gavoka and Honourable Professor Biman Prasad.

Madam Speaker, just to highlight the practice of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, that we only deal and deliberate on issues of concern on each Annual Report. We do not deal with outside issues but focus on what was referred by Parliament to the Committee. In this case, this was the process taken in the review of these two Annual Reports in which all the issues in the two Annual

Reports raised by Honourable Members were addressed and well clarified by the Ministry of Education Officials.

Madam Speaker, the Committee is a bipartisan one which have the contribution of both sides of the House and the Report was signed by all the Honourable Members. There is also a Secretariat Team which assists the Committee in providing relevant information to the Committee and I would like to also thank them for their support. I would also like to thank the following Honourable Members:

1. Honourable Ruveni Nadalo;
2. Honourable Veena Bhatnagar;
3. Honourable Salote Radrodro;
4. Honourable Anare Vadei; and
5. Honourable Mohammed Dean.

With those additional comments, Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Parliament will now vote, to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, we will now take a break and we will resume our sitting at 5.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.05 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.29 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. As we begin with the next motion, I would like you to take note of the comments made by the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, that we speak only on the issues as covered within the period of the Report and not outside of that.

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION – 2013 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. SPEAKER.- I call on the Chairperson of the Standing on Foreign Affairs and Defence to move the motion.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation Annual Report 2013, which was tabled in Parliament on 29th September, 2016.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Madam Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak on the motion.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, by way of introduction, I would like to highlight a number of significant achievements made by the Ministry during the reporting period, and this include the:

1. Fiji's Chairmanship of the G77 Plus China, the largest and most influential voting bloc in the United Nations.
2. "Look North Policy" 'Friends to all - Enemy to none' which symbolises the pivotal point of Fiji's transition in each foreign policy after the imposition of political sanction in 2009.
3. Inaugural opening of the Pacific Island Development Forum (PIDF). The establishment of PIDF herald a new era for Pacific Small Island Development States in taking greater control and ownership of what is the largest oceanic continent in the world. The PIDF is a specific catalyst, mobilising and mainstreaming action in support of sustainable development through green economy in Pacific Islands.
4. Fiji Chairmanship of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), which also took centre stage during reporting period as a member country celebrating their 25th year anniversary in Fiji.

Madam Speaker, the findings and recommendations put forward by the Committee were intended to assist the Ministry's service delivery in the future. The Committee raised five recommendations after the Ministry's submission to the Standing Committee, which are as follows:

Recommendation 1

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation to undertake a cost benefit analysis of each overseas Mission. The Committee was interested in understanding the role of Government return investment on the various overseas Missions.

Recommendation 2

The Ministry to undertake a maintenance assessment of Government owned overseas properties and address any maintenance issue. Government properties in Brussels, Canberra, London, Wellington comes under the Ministry of Public Enterprises which is also responsible for the maintenance of these properties.

Recommendation 3

That the Government consider revising a Foreign Service Regulation (FOSR) for children of diplomats. The Foreign Service Regulation at the time of submission, the regulation was under review;

Recommendation 4

The Government encourages the Ministry of Foreign and International Co-operation to retain experienced diplomat at each headquarters, to build capacity that the Ministry in pushing forward Fiji's Foreign Policy for the present demand and future trend. For a Retention Policy of returning diplomats, the Ministry has indicated its wish to retain its successful returning diplomats.

Recommendations 5

That the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation to review the cost of living and associated expenses of Fiji's diplomats and families posted in overseas Missions. The cost of living in most overseas Missions abroad is very high and it varies according to the country's standard of economy.

Madam Speaker, those are the five Recommendations of the Committee. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The motion is now open for debate and I invite input from Honourable Members. Honourable Minister for Defence?

HON. RATU. I. KUBUABOLA.- Madam Speaker, first of all, let me say thank you to the Honourable Lt. Col. Netani Rika, the Chairman of the Committee, and also the Honourable Members of the Committee. I would like to make a very brief contribution to this motion as I was Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs at that time.

In 2013, Madam Speaker, I think most of you Honourable Members will recall it was a very difficult time up to that time before the General Elections in 2014. We were alienated by our neighbours down South from the international community. They tried their best, even right up to the United Nations to try and stop our peacekeepers from doing peacekeeping. But as we developed our Foreign Policy on the 'Look North Policy' and also 'Friends to all and Enemy to None', we were very fortunate, Madam Speaker, that we created some friends, friends who stood with us, like China, Russia and even France, who supported us at the UN Security Council. And they stopped the attempt

by our two neighbours through friends at the Security Council to try and stop our peacekeeping missions.

Also, during that year, Madam Speaker, as being outlined by the Chairman, we had a lot of outcomes. Unfortunately, the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad is not here, because if he look at the letter from the former Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Robin Nair, on 28th September, 2016, he will note the number of outcomes that was achieved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, and they were big outcomes too.

Madam Speaker, let me just refer to the Chairmanship of the G77 Plus China in 2013 of 133 member countries, and that is the largest bloc in the UN system. We are very fortunate for a small country like Fiji to Chair that big bloc in the UN system.

Also, Madam Speaker, that year, we were the President of the UNDP, and our Ambassador Peter Thomson, was the President. It was the first time for a Pacific Islander to be the President of the UNDP. The UNDP, as you know the Secretary-General at that time was the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Ms. Helen Clark, and it was good that we held the Presidency.

Also in the outcome, Madam Speaker, you will notice that we were members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of 120 members, also in the UN system. So we were very fortunate that we achieved all these. Therefore, I would like to thank the Committee for this Report, Madam Speaker, because it outlines some of the achievements as I mentioned before, that was tabled by the former Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

Madam Speaker, during that year, we were just waiting for Elections, our two neighbours and some friends of the two neighbours were very difficult to Fiji and as we developed our Foreign Policy, the 'Look North Policy', they were very surprised that we were able to stand alone and since then, Madam Speaker, our Foreign Policy has been independent. Before that time, I told the Foreign Minister of New Zealand and also the Foreign Minister of Australia that Suva does not listen to Canberra or Wellington anymore, that we are truly independent, that we make decisions on our own and that policy of 'Look North' and also of the 'Friends to all and Enemy to None' was very, very effective as far as our Foreign Policy was concerned.

The PIDF as mentioned in the Report, Madam Speaker, was a development over two years. As we progress from the Engaging with the Pacific, the PIDF was formed.

So, Madam Speaker, I just want to make those brief remarks in reference to the Report and again, I would like to thank the Committee for the Report on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation 2013 Annual Report. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Jilila Kumar?

HON. J.N. KUMAR.- Madam Speaker, I would like to rise to also give my contribution to the debate before the House on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation's 2013 Annual Report. I also share the same sentiments that the Honourable Chairperson for the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence and also the then the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Honourable Ratu Inoke Kubuabola, of what they had alluded to, and I would like to reiterate those sentiments.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to state that the general performance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2013 was a success in terms of international relations and achievements, despite the hardships that the Honourable Minister had alluded to. This was due to their foresight and initiative

to establish diplomatic relations with all members of the United Nations. In this regard, Madam Speaker, in 2013, the Ministry managed to sign diplomatic relations with 173 countries, which brought up the total number of diplomatic relations that they had to 149, out of 192 countries.

I also wish, Madam Speaker, to highlight some very important events that the Ministry undertook in 2013 and the first one was the State Visits by the Honourable Prime Minister, who made three State Visits that year. The first one was his visit to Papua New Guinea and it was in that visit that the Papua New Guinea Government promised to give Fiji a total of \$50 million for the General Elections in 2014. In that meeting also, Fiji and Papua New Guinea established a bilateral relationship in terms of establishing Business Councils and scholarships.

The second State visit, Madam Speaker, was the Honourable Prime Minister's visit to Russia. Our bilateral relationship was also established and as a result, the Russian Government donated military equipment worth millions of dollars and also visa exemption to their country.

The third visit was to China. During this visit, a number of MOUs and MOEs were signed. In this regard, Madam Speaker, the Ministry must be acknowledged for the bold step they undertook for this successful State Visits.

Another achievement, Madam Speaker, by the Ministry is the Climate Change negotiations. In this regard, Madam Speaker, the Permanent Secretary then, Mr. Yauvoli, became the Chair for that Negotiation Sub-Committee on Climate Change and Fiji was leading this negotiation in the United Nations which led to the Paris Agreement. This great success has also led to the appointment of our own Honourable Prime Minister to be the President of COP 23.

Another success that the Ministry achieved that year was the establishment of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). They also chaired the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG). The Ministry also hosted the South Pacific Commission Conference here in Fiji, which was a Ministerial Meeting, they hosted the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Preparatory Meeting, and they also hosted a meeting leading up to more SIDS Meetings that was held in 2014.

With those few highlights, Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their great work and achievement in their leading role as Fiji being the hub of the Pacific. I and also would like to acknowledge their commendable Policy that states 'Friends to all and Enemy to None', and this really embedded well in the Report. Therefore, I salute them for their vision and fully support this Report. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I thank the Committee for the Report. I would like to say that a number of issues in their Recommendations they have highlighted will be addressed not only through the OMRS system but also the remuneration evaluation exercise that is currently being undertaken and as you know, will be implemented soon.

However, I want to point out a correction that needs to be made. It says that the Mission is probably owned by the Fijian Government, it says that the Ministry of Public Enterprises is responsible for the maintenance of these properties, to be allocated an annual sale of \$300,000 is actually not correct. The Ministry of Public Enterprises does not get \$300,000 for the maintenance of this property. The maintenance, at least, at that point in time is given to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they are responsible. Currently, the Ministry of Public Enterprises is looking at participating in these properties but they are not actually managing it for the maintenance, et cetera. It is done by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs directly.

The Ministry of Public Enterprises currently as has been announced in our Budget Statements previously, is working with FNPF to see whether some of the Government-owned properties overseas can be purchased by FNPF to increase their portfolio, and Government will become a tenant. We own some very exclusive properties, in particular in London which is near the famous Hyde Park and it is worth in excess of about (the last valuation I recall a few years ago) £7 million. That is the worth of that one single property. It is a four-floor terrace-type property and it was, of course, for a number of years quite neglected.

Since then Government has carried out, through Ministry of Foreign Affairs, some works on that. It has been improved. So, at the moment, there has been a cost benefit analysis done. We do, as highlighted in this Report, Madam Speaker, own properties in Brussels, Canberra and one of the properties in Canberra actually has asbestos in it. This was bought in the 1960s or 1970s. The Australian Capital Territory Government actually has a buyback scheme so they actually buy back properties and they fix it up or demolish it to get rid of the asbestos because they want to get rid of asbestos.

We, of course, have two properties from my understanding, in Wellington. One of them, of course, does not meet the new standards that the New Zealand Government has put in for earthquake resistance. These properties were bought some time back, so the New Zealand Government also has some issues with the property, and they are looking at how we can be able to meet those standards.

So, a lot of the properties that we do have, in fact, are aging properties. So we have been in discussions with FNPF. Of course, there are tax implications that needs to be considered because as we know that Diplomatic Missions and foreign governments do not actually have to pay tax. There are some governments, of course, that have gone down the path of simply renting properties. Some of the respective superannuation companies or firms or funds in some countries have gone ahead and purchased their own properties and the Government then actually leases the property for them. So, the superannuation actually gets a return on the property, but the fact of the matter is that, that property offshore is owned by the people of that country.

Similarly, there has been some work going on in the background in respect of doing those assessments to ensure that those properties are actually looked after and that you actually build a portfolio, your foreign portfolio of the superannuation fund.

So, those are some of the work that is going on in respect of the property, but I just want to highlight that to you, Honourable Chairman of the Committee, that it is not correct to say that Ministry of Public Enterprises is actually responsible for the maintenance. The Ministry of Public Enterprises, at this point in time, is actually looking at how we can perhaps, get FNPF to participate in the ownership. But, of course, we are not saying that it will actually happen, it possibly could happen, depending on the cost benefit analysis of it. And also take into consideration that many of these assets we own were bought in the early years - post-Independence or pre-Independence, and they need a lot of work on them too. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bulitavu?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Madam Speaker, probably just a small contribution to the motion that is before the House. Probably I will agree that this was a bipartisan Report and I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for saying that they are currently doing some improvements in regards to certain recommendations that are listed in this Report.

Madam Speaker, one of the noticeable areas which was presented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the retention of foreign diplomats. That is an area where most well-polished diplomats

who have left the Ministry for other better job offers coming, for example, from the MSG and if you would remember Mr. Yauvoli, he had a lucrative offer so, if they could be awarded with better pay to consider also the cost of living, especially in overseas. They have been calling for a cost of living adjustment, given the different rates that apply overseas. Those are some of the issues that are very important, that needs to be taken on board, to look into the issues of these diplomats to retain.

The other issue, Madam Speaker, was referred to by the Honourable Attorney-General. There was a letter by the then Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Robin Nair, and I think the Committee had relied on that in regards to the properties owned by the Government which was said to be under the Ministry of Public Enterprises. I think the Report was premised on that and whatever that was submitted to the Committee. So, it is not the findings of the Committee, it was what the Ministry had provided information for which the Committee relied upon as rightful and factual information, so the Committee was not, in any way, trying to mislead or provide incorrect information.

For the unity of the Committee and also for the best interest of the Committee, Madam Speaker, I think this particular Report is a bi-partisan one. With the Budget coming up, we look forward for better budgetary allocation, given that one of the other areas which was also highlighted by the Committee is the constraints faced by this particular Ministry, given the widespread of duties and responsibilities and the new culture of trying to extend and open up other Missions abroad.

With that Madam Speaker, I support the motion that is before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- Madam Speaker, a Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order?

HON. A. SAYED- KHAIYUM.- I did not say the Committee was misleading, what I simply did was to correct. It is factually not correct just because someone gives you a letter, it does not mean it is factually correct. The Committee obviously relied on the representation made by the then former Permanent Secretary, but we just provided the correct information to say that we need to make note of the fact that the Ministry of Public Enterprises does not have the administration of these properties. That is all I was saying.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you for the clarification. Honourable Viliame Gavoka?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, I wish to commend the Committee on its Report that I believe has given us an appreciation of the work carried out by the Ministry and highlighting those important aspects of the work overseas.

Let me just, at this juncture, Madam Speaker, caution the House not to be too critical of our neighbours because of 2006, Fiji's problems were self-inflicted. They tried very hard in 2006 to reconcile the parties, so that they could avoid the overthrow of the government and we can understand their disappointment that people went ahead and overthrew the Government. They put a lot of their capital into Fiji not to have a *coup* but they were unsuccessful. And I would just caution us as leaders, people who have known these two countries that we temper our criticism of them.

We all remember, Madam Speaker, after *TC Winston* when everyone was paralysed, when there was darkness around us, when we did not know what was happening, the next day the New

Zealand and Australian warships turned up and brought us that first glimmer of hope that helped the recovery that we see today. So I would just caution us to be a bit tempered in that area. Thank you.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- (Inaudible)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Madam Speaker, the comment has been made, criticising these two Governments and I just stand up here to defend them because I think it is very unfair to be criticising...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- (Inaudible)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ...these two countries now. Our country fell into the hands of people who did not listen to reason, otherwise, we would not have suffered all that we had suffered from 2006 until today.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What about 1987 and 2000?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- They tried very hard to help us, Madam Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- (Inaudible)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I am not making any apologies about 1987 and 2000 but they say, “Two wrongs does not make one right”, something like that.

So on that note, I just want to start with that, Madam Speaker, but let me go through some Recommendations here.

Recommendation 1, that the Government requests the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation to undertake cost benefit analysis of its overseas Missions. I think it is very valid and a very valuable observation. We all remember South Africa, we went in there one day and all of a sudden we said “No, we are going to Ethiopia”, and we wondered, did someone make a cost analysis of this? We deserve better, we cannot just open an office somewhere and then a few years later we say; “We do not want this place anymore we go up to the North”. So that is a quite useful observation here.

Madam Speaker, on Recommendation 2, I was going to ask about the revaluation of these properties. I know the address in London is a very special one and I congratulate the Government for their foresight to buy the building at that time. I know my colleagues across the aisle would not have the kind of foresight to do something like that.

I am always reminded about Australia, Madam Speaker, when they bought a property in Tokyo soon after World War II and today, its worth is in the stratosphere. So let us look after those properties and keep them. I remember at one time, someone was talking about selling them, please, do not do that. Those are assets of our Fiji overseas and we should keep them.

On Recommendation 4, Madam Speaker, about the growing capacity, I believe some time back the Honourable Minister spoke about growing specialist career diplomats. I wonder where we are on that. I thought there was going to be some recruitment of some specialists with proper graduate degrees on diplomacy and international relations. I wonder what is happening to that, but it is very useful that the Committee has highlighted this because that is what we need, career diplomats as what they are dealing with are very complex. They are always getting more and more complex where they

need to be trained, they need to be specialists and represent us in all these overseas treaties, and the like.

Our Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs and I went to Singapore to attend some seminar there for the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Singaporean people were the ones who were conducting the seminar and even they said that WTO is a labyrinth of rules and regulations, and even they were having trouble understanding all those. That is the indication of the scale of the challenge, and I am grateful to the Committee for highlighting this. We must grow our people to become diplomats.

Other than that, Madam Speaker, I believe our Foreign Affairs people should be given all the support they need. We have put the past behind us, we all want to move forward, but all we are saying is, “friends to all”, let us not rubbish our close neighbours. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. There being no other input, I will now invite the Chairperson of Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to speak in reply.

HON. LT. COL. N. RIKA.- Madam Speaker, as alluded to by the former Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, 2013 was a very challenging year for the Ministry and what they have achieved, they have done greatly on their achievements.

The G77 Plus China was probably the biggest Instrument that we had in the UN, apart from what we have achieved in progress now and the snowballing effect from G77 Plus China, the Presidency of the General Assembly and now, the current Chairman of COP 23, and that is a great achievement, starting from 2013.

I appreciate the Acting Prime Minister, Honourable Attorney-General for his correction made on Recommendation 2 on the Mission properties and the correction is accepted.

Madam Speaker, we are now in 2017 and many changes have occurred ever since 2013. Regulations were reviewed, new policies are in place, some responsibilities have been shifted to other Ministries and improvements have been made on those issue that arose from 2013.

I also take this opportunity to show my appreciation to all those who have contributed into the debate this evening, and not only that, I convey also the appreciation to the Ministry for the hard work they have put in, in that challenging year (2013) and, of course, those years after.

With those few comments, Madam Speaker, I commend the Report to the House.

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

Question put.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

HON. MEMBERS.- No.

HON. SPEAKER.- There being no opposition, the motion is therefore agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, the Leader of the Government in Parliament had moved the suspension motion earlier for the Parliament to sit beyond 4.30 p.m., to complete its business. Therefore, the two Opposition motions in the Order Paper today is not being accommodated.

That brings the end to the business of today's meeting. The House is now adjourned until 9.30 tomorrow morning. Thank you Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.05p.m.