

# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

### DAILY HANSARD

**FRIDAY, 5TH APRIL, 2019**

[CORRECTED COPY]

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**FRIDAY, 5TH APRIL, 2019**

The Parliament met at 9.35 a.m., pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Members were present, except the Honourable Professor Biman C. Prasad.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 4th April, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

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

The Question is:

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 4th April, 2019, as previously circulated be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, as no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

Welcome

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

PL100 Students - University of the South Pacific and Fiji National University Law School

Honourable Members, I also take this time to welcome the PL100 students from the University of the South Pacific, as well as those from the Fiji National University Law School. Welcome to your Parliament. I sincerely hope that you will enhance your knowledge on the procedures of Parliament and that you have an educational and enjoyable visit to Parliament. You are most welcome.

Delay in Distribution – Daily Hansard

I wish to advise Members that due to the prolonged sitting yesterday, copies of *Daily Hansard* Report will be finalised and distributed later to you today.

**SPEAKER'S RULING**Motion to Amend the Sugar Industry (Amendment) Act 2015

Honourable Members, I now refer Honourable Members to the motion listed in today's Order Paper by the Honourable Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua in relation to the Sugar Industry (Amendment) Act 2015.

Honourable Members, the motion seeks to amend an Act of Parliament by way of a motion. A motion on its own authority cannot amend or repeal primary legislation. The authority empowered to make law is vested in Parliament and the President under Section 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji, which clearly states that such power is exercised through the enactment of Bills passed by Parliament and assented to by the President.

Honourable Members, there are two elements to Section 46 of the Constitution that cannot be ignored. The first is that, the only way for Parliament to exercise its law-making authority under the Constitution is through the enactment of Bills and the second is that, such process is not complete without the assent of the President.

Honourable Members, the Constitution and the Standing Orders set out a clear process through which laws may be amended or repealed. Section 47 of the Constitution clearly states that any Member may introduce a Bill in Parliament and Chapter 7 of the Standing Orders clearly and succinctly lays out the process that must be followed for the enactment of laws.

To allow the motion to proceed in Parliament would set a precedent for an alternative amendment procedure which is unconstitutional. Furthermore, even if Parliament were to entertain the motion, it is noted that it is not standard legislative practice to amend an amending law as the motion seeks to do.

Honourable Members, Section 11 of the Interpretation Act 1967 states that when an amending law commences, the amendment under the amending law are to be read and construed together with the original law. As such, if Parliament were to seek to revert the amendments made under the Amendment Act, the proper way to do so would be to amend the original law, that is, the Sugar Industry Act 1984. This is because from the date of the commencement of the Amendment Act, the amending provisions are incorporated into the original law, being the Sugar Industry Act 1984.

Honourable Members, this is further supported by Section 15 of the Interpretation Act 1967 which states that if a law that repeals another law is itself repealed, such action does not revert the initial repeal. Simply put, if a law that has altered, a separate law is itself altered, the changes made by such law are not automatically reverted. Therefore, even if the motion were to succeed it would not have the effect of reverting the amendments made by the Amendment Act.

Additionally, I refer Honourable Members to my ruling on Tuesday with respect to a disallowed question and at this juncture, I remind all Honourable Members of the implications of not undertaking adequate and further research when dealing with laws. I will reiterate that the onus is on Members to ensure that questions and motions prepared should be accurate before they are considered by the Business Committee for inclusion on the Order Paper.

Honourable Members, I am fully aware that the motion in question was approved by the Business Committee. However, I am invoking Standing Orders 18, 20 and 124(5) and, therefore, rule that the motion by the Hon. Lt. Col. Pio Tikoduadua will be removed from today's Order Paper.

I thank Honourable Members and we will now proceed to Item 5 in the Order Paper.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Point of Order, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Under Standing Order 74 on Points of Order, we, as the Opposition, wish to register our concern about the alleged breach of the Standing Orders, Honourable Speaker, Sir. And this is referring to the suspension of the Standing Orders under Standing Order 6 which was the basis of our concern yesterday as to the content and the subject matter of the speech by the Honourable Prime Minister.

Now, Honourable Speaker, Sir, under Standing Orders 6(5), we were concerned because it does not permit the suspension of a Standing Order if there has been a breach of the Constitution.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, we are concerned that the content of the speech with due respect to the Honourable Prime Minister, contained a content that breached the Constitution.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, again, with due respect the alleged breach under the Constitution ....

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you raised a Point of Order. Now, you referred to the Prime Minister's speech yesterday which has nothing to do with this ruling. And you know as well as I do and as others do too, that when the Speaker makes a ruling, there is no Point of Order. There is no question about that. That is the procedure. So, Honourable Member, you should take your seat.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- A Point of Order, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Tikoduadua, you know as well as I do and you have been a Member of Parliament now for the second time, there is no Point of Order on a ruling made by the Speaker. There is no Point of Order. The ruling by the Speaker is given and that is the end.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I acknowledge that, Honourable Speaker, and I will concur by it. It is just that I am finding it very difficult to understand in terms of the ruling that is coming from the Chair with regards to Standing Orders, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just take your seat. I have explained it very clearly in the last five minutes, the procedure that we have gone through. There are two areas that we looked at.

The Business Committee has approved it and it came through here. We put it on the Order Paper but the process is not clear or complete until it comes to the House. I could have waived this arbitrarily, but that would not be in keeping with the interests of Parliament. I have done it this way so that it is quite clear to everyone that it is the ruling of the Speaker, and the ruling of the Speaker stands.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will take the first oral question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu to ask Question No. 77/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Qualified Medical Personnel in the Health and Medical Sector  
(Question No. 77/2019)

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health & Medical Services inform the House whether or not we have suitably qualified and available medical personnel for jobs in the health and medical sector?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health & Medical Services).- Thank you Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and the Honourable Members, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. The simple answer is, 'yes'.

I would like to elaborate by informing this august House that Fiji's Medical Sector is now adequately staffed and it has been working at doing this over the last 10 years, with qualified Medical Personnel, consisting of cadre from medical, para-medical and allied health professionals to deliver quality and efficient healthcare services to all Fijians. Another unit that the Ministry of Health & Medical Services has capacity in now, is the corporate professional sector. This is so important to be able to have corporate health professionals, who actually understand health and understand the needs of health.

Honourable Speaker, positions and substantive occupants within the Ministry have been identified for each cadre by gender, whereby all substantive actual vacancies are filled or expected to be filled in every financial year, where possible. For example, we have 220 new nursing interns who are going to join us very soon, apart from 253 registered nurses that we have been taking in over the last 12 months.

Honourable Speaker, the ability to fulfil the Ministry of Health's core functions depend on the extent in which our workforce (in terms of numbers, cadres, skill levels, distribution) and so forth. In essence, it is the quantity, but also more importantly it is the quality, and that I believe is what the Honourable Member's question was about - are we meeting the needs in terms of quantity and quality? As a result, the Ministry has been undertaking a data cleansing exercise to identify anomalies on the payroll and also on the Human Resources Information System of Government.

The Divisional Heads have worked in collaboration with Human Resource to discuss these anomalies and identify strategies for improvement and these are areas we have been working with. Where positions are no longer required, these positions have been relocated or reclassified to meet the Ministry's objective and enhanced client service delivery focus.

I am proud to say that the Ministry, Honourable Speaker, remains a leading organisation where females comprise 67 per cent of the workforce, making them indispensable contributors to the delivery of healthcare services. This morning, Honourable Speaker, I just went around at Dinem House Headquarters and there was a Unit which is completely female. There were about seven of them having a meeting this morning, and I was very pleased to be able to see that this is the extent in which Health has been leading in terms of gender mainstreaming.

However, at the managerial and decision-making level positions, this is an area that is still under representation and we know and understand that it requires attention, and we are working in this regard.

Honourable Speaker, we have worked on a 10 years' Workforce Plan for 2020-2029, and the four important areas in this are:

1. Building capacity at the national, sub-national and international level for gender analysis in the workforce;
2. Reflection of gender in national health workforce;
3. Promoting the use of sex-disaggregated data in monitoring and evaluation activities at all levels; and
4. Establishing accountability.

This will always strengthen the needs of men's health, for instance, in the setting up of reproductive health services to encourage male development.

Honourable Speaker, just looking at one area which is nursing, we currently have a 32:10,000 ratio and we are working towards our target of 40:10,000 ratio. We also have support in terms of nursing training and postgraduate training. For instance we have midwifery training and this is being supported through the Ministry and also by support through DFAT.

Honourable Speaker, managing and maintaining an efficient and qualified health workforce is dependent on the Ministry's aim to provide quality healthcare, the Ministry's response to workforce challenges, the promotion of wellness and prevention strategies in a population that is challenged by NCD.

In this regard, Honourable Speaker, the Ministry has plans in place to routinely monitor changes in health services demand and align the supply accordingly, given the constant evolving health trends in the country. For instance, the Ministry will be recruiting more allied health workers in the 2019-2020 financial year to facilitate the increasing service demand from the heavily populated areas of Lami-Nausori corridor and the Sigatoka-Ba corridor.

On the same note, Honourable Speaker, the Ministry has 48 locum doctors. These are general practitioners and also specialists in the private sector who can be called upon to ensure that patients have access to the service that we need, especially during peak hours. Honourable Speaker, the use of locums is a great example of being able to use doctors from the private sector to help us make a big impact in the areas of high burden.

Honourable Speaker, priority workforce strategies is health workforce development, strengthening national health information and continuing professional development for our staff. Again, as I alluded to earlier, Honourable Speaker, it is both, the health professionals and corporate professionals that we are working on.

The Ministry of Health & Medical Services, Honourable Speaker, will continue to implement the strategic needs-based approach to health workforce recruitment, deployment, training and retention with an emphasis of increasing both, customer and employee satisfaction, through the development of a contemporary 10 years Strategic Workforce Plan expected in 2020. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Anare Jale.

HON. A. JALE.- Can the Honourable Minister inform the House when will the positions of medical officers in rural areas, which are now occupied by nursing practitioners, be rectified? And if they are not going to be rectified soon, can you tell the House how competent nursing practitioners are in terms of the work of doctors? Thank you.



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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, because of the great amount of medical students who are graduating as doctors, we have begun to roll back nurse practitioners from far-flung areas that were there before. So what has happened now is that, we are putting medical officers in these areas that were assigned as empty stations.

What we have also done, Honourable Speaker, is that we have re-worked the nurse practitioners; these are very senior nurses who have done nurse practitioner training. They are about my age in the mid-40s and they have children who desire to go to university, so we brought them back into the cities and towns to be able to support the clinical areas. For example we have a programme called 'Visiting the Home', which is when patients are discharged from CWM, Lautoka or Labasa Hospitals, they are able to stay at home and the nurse practitioner leads a group of nurses, who visit them on a regular basis about two or three times a week. This is for those patients who are still rehabilitating and need to have a visit at home, so these are some of the areas.

The other one is nursing practitioner for oncology services. We have re-classified them, brought them back in to be able to strengthen the areas that we provide for clinical care and also make sure that we have got our young doctors going out into the rural areas to be able to man that station, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to ask a supplementary question. Before I do Honourable Speaker, may I acknowledge as well the students of the FNU Law School under the capable hands of Ms. Ana Rokomokoti, the lecturer. I was also a lecturer there, before the Honourable Minister terminated my employment. May I ask the other side to please, empower the law schools. Let them be a unique law school for the FNU.

My supplementary question is this: In the villages all over Fiji, we have this concept of *nasi ni koro* or nurses for the village. Can I ask the Honourable Minister whether they come under the payroll of the Ministry and if so, can you please look into it because they have not been receiving their allowances?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, obviously it was a bit of a round circle meandering but anyway, he got there at the end.

Honourable Speaker, the village health workers are paid by the Ministry of Health & Medical Services. Quite a lot of them are receiving their pay and a few of them have not. The reasons are that we expect them to have a reporting mechanism which is signed off by our zone nurses. They are being paid \$200 a month and it is in the best interest and it is also taxpayers' money so we expect them to be able to come up with the report. In some instances, our mothers and sisters who are village health workers have been able to provide their reports on time.

The other thing is that we would also like them to have a bank account which we can deposit money into. There have been instances Honourable Speaker, where details of the bank account have not been accurate and the Ministry of Health & Medical Services has paid into that inaccurate bank account and getting money out of it is a bit of a task as we pay a \$50 fee to the particular bank that does that. These are some of the challenges in that regard.

There is a unit within the Chief Nursing Officers Department which actually looks after village health workers and is headed by a very senior professional Sister and she also looks at the continuing

professional development for our village health workers. I can assure this august House that every village health worker who has been registered will receive his or her pay if all the appropriate documents are in place. Thank you Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for the answer to that question. Through you Honourable Speaker, I would like to ask the honourable Minister how well prepared are the medical staff in rural areas to deal with mental illness? Thank you.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for that question. Mental health is part of the universal health coverage that I have been sharing for the last few days. Universal health coverage is primary health, health promotion, health advocacy, curative health, palliative care, oncology and mental health. It is the whole comprehensive package that we now offer right down to the Subdivision Hospitals and also in Health Centres.

Our Mental Health Unit is actually decentralising services; we have a unit based in Labasa and also one in Lautoka. There are challenges here and there, but I am beginning to manage that at a decentralised level. There is training at undergraduate level for mental health in both universities. There is also training at the postgraduate level and this is not limited to doctors, but also includes nurses.

We also have support from Pacific Counselling Services which also provides support in that regard. So yes, we are beginning to permeate through into the rural areas with mental health and the other small areas around that. As time goes on, with the more graduates that will come through the mill, we will be able to provide more and more services. Thank you.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for his response. As he had explained earlier, he said that the Fiji medical system is adequately staffed. My question is about the Health Centres around the country, are they staffed adequately?

The issue behind this is that at Korovisilou, at times they have to go without a doctor when they have to attend to the patients in Navua, leaving their Centre without these services. The question is, Mr. Speaker, Sir; is this requirement for the doctor in Korovisilou to come to Navua, leaving his patients in Korovisilou without the service of a doctor?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you very much Mr. Speaker and I thank my cousin for that question. I visited Korovisilou now maybe five times, unfortunately we have been missing one another at Korovisilou.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Because he has not been there.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Yes, we have staff in Korovisilou, we also have a nurse practitioner and also we have support from doctors in Navua. Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why we are paid to have shortages when they do happen, I have just alluded to that we have a 67 percent female

workforce. So, apart from the normal leave, deaths, annual leaves and long service leave, our sisters also have maternity leave. So these are some of the challenges that we face especially with nurses at rural stations and also with our young doctors in small island stations, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Minister. We will move on to the second Oral Question for today, Honourable Dr. Salik Govind to ask Question No. 78/2019. You have the floor Sir.

Ensuring Good Health for our Children  
(Question No. 78/2019)

HON. DR. S. GOVIND asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health & Medical Services enlighten this House on what steps the Government will take to ensure good health of our children?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health & Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for that question. The aspiration of the FijiFirst Government is that every child will not only survive their 5th birthday but continues to thrive and realize their full potential.

A World Health Organization Level and Trends in Child Mortality published in 2018, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Division of the World Bank estimated a staggering 6.3 million children under the age of 15 who died in 2017, which is equivalent to an alarming rate of one death in every five seconds.

The same Report also stated that at a global level, the majority of child and young adolescence deaths occur at youngest ages, with the risk of dying highest in the first month of life. While chances of survival have increased in all ages, progression was uneven. When comparing some of the main key indicators between 2000 and 2017, there was a significant decline in mortality rate within the age group of 1 year to 4 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are two indicators which are markers of help development both at the national and global level. These are the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), this refers to the number of deaths per a thousand live births of children under 1 year of age.

Number two is the Neo-Natal Mortality Rate (NMR), the probable or likely of dying of a baby during the first 28 days of life, expressed per 1,000 live births. Fiji's live birth recorded 19,600 live births in 2017.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of Fiji's infant mortality rate, this is a global marker which currently sits at 18.3 per one thousand live births, this is actually below the global level which is 29 per 1,000. So, we are 18.3 per 1,000 live births, the global is 29 per 1,000 and we can see, Mr. Speaker that we are well below that.

The SDG target for Neo-Natal Mortality Rate by 2030 is 12 per 1,000 live births in ten years' time. Fiji currently sits at 11.1 per 1,000 live births; we are below that so we are doing well in terms of our neo-natal and also in terms of our paediatric care.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health & Medical Services has a well-established system in place through Clinical Primary Healthcare and now Universal Health Coverage to be able to look after every Fijian child from birth to 18 years. SDG 3 is our key pillar, and our vision for the next 20 years is to

adopt a life-course approach to maternal infant and adolescent health, with a continuum of health services extending from sexual and reproductive health services through pregnancy, delivery and childhood.

Honourable Speaker there are three levels of child care that is Ante Natal (before they are born); Maternal and Child Health; and School health, and there is provision for face to face consultation at each level with:

- 10 times in Ante Natal Care;
- 35 times in Maternal Child Health; and
- 13 times in Primary and Secondary School.

Fiji's health system provides an opportunity for each Fijian child to be seen systematically about 55 times from the first trimester through to Form 7, even outside of them just going to the hospital for a flu or fever. The system also allows early detection of abnormalities and referral for paediatric care.

Honourable Speaker the Ministry Health & Medical Services understands that early and adequate coverage is necessary, to decisively address maternal anaemia, child anaemia and places emphasis on maintaining high immunisation coverage rates for vaccine preventable diseases including new antigens; Infant Child Feeding Programme; and the reduction of malnutrition. We are also working with Government Organisations, Civil Societies and other agencies for efficient referrals.

Honourable Speaker, in terms of Curative Health, we are now continuing to improve this with expanding neonatal and infant health services, to protect and improve the care of neonates and infants. We are ensuring well equipped neonatal facilities in all divisions and well trained staff and we are providing divisional specialised and up-to-date paediatric services to all children through special teams.

Just in cancer services itself, we have twinned with New Zealand and Christchurch through Canterbury District Health Board for cancer services. We provide renal dialysis for kidney disease for our children, rheumatic heart and congenital heart management and the intensive care services. Our doctors who are running the intensive care services for children have trained not only locally but they have been overseas and trained in intensive care units overseas.

Honourable Speaker, for the sake of children in the remote areas, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services have expanded its tertiary services through a specialised outreach programme to the peripheral communities. The specialists that go into the communities are doctors who have a specialty in endocrinology; nephrology; neurology developmental; orthopaedics; and oncology visits. We also have a yearly visit by the orthopaedic unit of Shriners from Hawaii who come to look at children with bone development abnormalities. They actually choose children to take back to Hawaii especially those that are quite complex for us to treat and they look after them there.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry is thankful to the Government for its farsightedness in the provision of vouchers to all mothers as part of its pregnancy support of \$1,000, and to ensure that the mothers are able access food that is nutritious. This has also drastically changed the volume of support that delivering mothers and their child get in the first few weeks of existence and we are certain that we can only see the results in due time. I thank you Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and thank you to the Honourable Minister for Health for that presentation on the good health of our children.

I would like to ask the Honourable Minister about the growing concern for the mental health of our children as it relates to the high incidences of glue sniffing by our children under 18. This is a very huge concern in our communities, especially for the communities in Nasinu as it is readily available. Just like the sugar tax on the industries who are selling sugar water, what policies can the Government come up with to regulate or at least to put a ban on the access of glue that are sold so readily in the shops and our children are able to access it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, I thank you very much. I want to assure the august House that no child is born sniffing glue, it is a learned behaviour. Because it is a learned behaviour, they could have learnt it through their peers. What the Ministry does is that it actually looks after children who are sick, looks after children who may be affected and that is what we do. We also have specialists that are there doing clinics in the health centres and also in the subdivision hospitals.

The area in particular that Honourable Tabuya was talking about in terms of mental health of our children, this is an area that we believe we need to grow in. Actually one of our Psychiatrist has a speciality in the area of child mental health diseases, so she actually helps train our mental health workers in this regard. We have been working hand in hand with our Environmental Health Inspectors and also with the Police in the community. When we are providing public health campaigns, that seems to suggest that there is a substance abuse whether it be glue or marijuana or so forth. We identify the particular areas and the particular homes if we can, we then give it to the Police because first and foremost, that is an area where the law enforcers are be able to support us in.

In terms of ongoing care if we do identify children, we do identify Fijians that need help, we have mechanisms in place in terms of, as I said earlier, the decentralised mental health programmes. Also one big area that we rely a lot of support on is counsellors and psychologists; that is one area that I would like to share with us today; they provide a lot of support to the Ministry of Health & Medical Services especially Pacific Counselling Services.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWARE.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for highlighting the issue about young children and their health. I would like to go back to the free milk that was started by the former Minister for Education. Can the Honourable Minister confirm that his ministry is working closely with the Ministry of Education in terms of confirming the issue of free milk to schools, especially in terms of expiry dates and other issues that affect them? Is his ministry working closely with the Ministry of Education in that regard? Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, that question I will direct to the Minister for Education. During morning tea, we can have one small discussion.

HON. SPEAKER.- This is the last supplementary question. Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, you have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just before we come to health curative measures, good health for children and human beings is basically dependent on the food we eat apart from physical or mental exercises, et cetera. What can the Government do to restrict advertisements on processed or junk foods and increase advertisements on healthy living style of food?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, in yesterday's discussion about Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) one of the things that I was talking about is that Government has been working on taxes or we have increased taxes on tobacco, alcohol and so forth and we have reduced taxes on imported foods. The other area that Honourable Minister for Agriculture has been talking about is increasing the supply chain in terms of agricultural produce and ensuring that we have food security.

Honourable Speaker, the challenge that we have in Fiji as I have alluded to in the NCD statement that I made the other day, is not limited to Fiji. It is a global challenge and our children are also seeing it on the global scale. As I said earlier, World Health Organisation (WHO) has made it a global commitment to target the reduction of NCD, and as for children the obesity in childhood as a global initiative.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We will move on to the third oral question for today. Honourable Adi Qionibaravi, you have the floor.

Repayment of Grant to iTaukei Affairs Board  
(Question No. 79/2019)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry inform the House on the current status of repayment of the grant of \$20m to the iTaukei Affairs Board that was converted into a loan by the Bainimarama Government after 2006?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- (Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to the question from the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. I am quoting from the Fijian Holdings Ltd report of 2011 which stated that on July 2010, the Board announced that \$20 million would be provided to the iTaukei Affairs Board, formerly known as Fijian Affairs Board on commercial terms to repay the \$20m loan from Government that was invested by the iTaukei Affairs Board in the company in 1991. The loan agreement was finalised on 16th August, 2010.

Continuing from that, Honourable Speaker, the short answer to the Honourable Member's question is, yes. The amount has been fully repaid to Government.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Prime Minister. Yes, you have a supplementary question. You have the floor.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My supplementary question to the Honourable Prime Minister is, can the Honourable Prime Minister please advise the House on what the \$20 million loan was for? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Again, I am quoting from the report by Fijian Holdings and that they have provided a timeline that will answer any queries from shareholders with regard to the Government loan of \$20 million.

In September, 1987, the Government of the day announced its "9 Point Plan" where one of the points was the "desire to accelerate the participation of Fijians in businesses in Fiji".

In August 1989, the Government of the day provided the \$20 million interest free loan to iTaukei Affairs Board as part of its “9 Point Plan”. The loan repayment was to start in 1999 and finish in 2008. Concurrently, the iTaukei Affairs Board used the proceeds from the loan to buy 20 million B class shares with a par value of \$1 per share.

In December 2002, an Act of Parliament was passed to convert the loan to a grant to iTaukei Affairs Board. Consequently iTaukei Affairs Board approved the transfer of 10 million ‘B’ class shares to iTaukei Trust Fund Board and 10 million shares to the 14 provinces to be held in trust by the iTaukei Affairs Board.

In June 2010, the Government decided that the \$20 million issued to iTaukei Affairs Board in 1989, should remain as a loan from Government and is to be repaid as soon possible.

In July 2010, the Fijian Holdings Limited (FHL) Board approved a \$20 million loan to iTaukei Affairs Board to facilitate the repayment of the loan from iTaukei Affairs Board to Government. This was a commercial loan at a market-based interest rate. iTaukei Affairs Board subsequently used the loan proceeds to pay off in full its loan with Government.

In August 2010, the relevant loan agreement was signed between FHL and iTaukei Affairs Board and there was also a tripartite agreement between FHL, iTaukei Affairs Board and iTaukei Trust Fund Board. Accordingly, the semi-annual dividend payable by FHL to iTaukei Affairs Board and iTaukei Trust Fund Board will be used to make the loan repayment to FHL. As such, both iTaukei Affairs Board and iTaukei Trust Fund Board will not receive cash dividends from FHL until the \$20 million is fully paid together with interest.

From 1997 until 2004, FHL paid \$1.0 million annually in dividends for its ‘B’ class shares. From 2005 till 2009 it paid \$2 million per annum. In 2010, FHL paid out \$2.5 million and in fiscal year 11 (FY11) it will pay out \$3 million to its ‘B’ class shareholders. As of 30th June, 2011, FHL has paid out a total of \$22 million in dividends to its ‘B’ class shareholders. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his reply to the question especially on the confirmation of payment of the loan. At the same time I also take this opportunity to thank previous governments, especially the government of the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei (SVT), for their foresight and wisdom in having that grant and it has see-sawed from being a grant to loan, loan to grant and finally I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for the submission given just a while ago.

The supplementary question that I would like to raise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is can the Honourable Prime Minister explain as to what the status now of the *solu ni yasana* that is still being continued to be paid by the members of the respective *yasana* to the Provincial Councils. Will it continue, now that we have this big investment and the dividends all coming in, Sir? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I am afraid, Honourable Speaker, the *solu ni yasana* has nothing to do with this loan. They will I guess continue as usual. As you know, Honourable Speaker, these funds actually started as a loan and not as a grant, because it was later turned on as a grant. It was loaned in 1989 by the Interim Government and from the start it was intended to be repaid. Now the Honourable Qionibaravi has conveniently left out a bit of history out of her question but I supposed that is to be expected.

In 2001, the SVT government tabled a Bill to convert that loan into a grant with no strings attached and no repayments necessary. I am sure that was good news for the Honourable Member given that she was sitting on the Board at that time, but it was not a move that encouraged prudent financial practices and respect for government revenue. We cannot set the precedent that government loans will be converted into grant money otherwise every time we give the loan, there will be an expectation that the money need not be paid back; a mindset that would undoubtedly lead to financial mismanagement. Only in extreme circumstances, Honourable Speaker, should the option to convert a loan to a grant ever be put on the table, but this was not on an extreme circumstance as proven by the fact that the loan has since been fully repaid.

The iTaukei Affairs Board initially repaid the loan through an arrangement with Fijian Holding Limited and the iTaukei Trust Fund Board as I have mentioned from the report by Fijian Holdings. As we hoped, prudent measures were introduced by the iTaukei Affairs Board towards the settlement of that loan arrangement. In 2013, the loan arrangement with FHL was fully settled by the iTaukei Affairs Board. The end result, Honourable Speaker, is that Government finances have been respected and more responsible financial measures have been developed and the loan has been fully repaid.

There is something outstanding I had not mentioned in my answer to the question and that is that we all know that there was a difference in the shares between “A” class shares and “B” class shares, and the dividend equalisation was started in 2009. From 2013, dividends between “A” class shares and “B” class shares are now equal. We have increased “B” class shares dividend by 25 per cent every year, while keeping the ‘A’ class rates the same and within 4 years, both rates became the same.

Since 2013, dividend rate is the same for both class, and they keep rising by a small percentage every year. In 2018, FHL paid 24 per cent for both classes. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can I just ask the Honourable Prime Minister, now that the loan has been fully paid, can the government now release the control of this company to the indigenous people of this nation. If I can repeat that, now that it has been repaid, can you release the control of the company to the indigenous people?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAM.- Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Nawaikula does not seem to know what is happening around him. FHL has its own Board, it has its own Chairman and its own CEO. We do not have any hold over FHL.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- He does not seem to understand what is happening around him. Please come back to earth.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Bulitavu, you have the floor. This is the last supplementary question.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. The answer being given by the Honourable Prime Minister is incomplete, given that the iTaukei Affairs Board sold Yasana Holdings to FHL to settle the loan in 2013. That was what he did not mention there. Secondly, given that the loan ...



HON. SPEAKER.- What is your question?

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Given that the loan has been paid off, are there any plans by the iTaukei Affairs to amend the Articles of Association? To consent to the Articles of Association of Fijian Holdings, they should no longer have the power to appoint Board Members, the 'Class B' Directors, and also given that dividends are coming, how are the VKB members benefiting from the dividends that are coming back to iTaukei Affairs Board from Fijian Holdings?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Again like Honourable Niko Nawaikula, he does not seem to understand what is happening. To change the Articles, it has to be changed by the shareholders of Fijian Holdings; nothing to do with me as the iTaukei Affairs Minister. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the fourth oral question for today, the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal to ask Question No. 80/2019.

Strategies for Stray Animals  
(Question No. 80/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment update the House on its strategies for dealing with stray animals in the country?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for asking the that question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, stray animal is an issue in Fiji but it has become a serious fact to motorists, it has resulted in crop losses. Now that we are dealing with Tuberculosis (TB) and Brucellosis eradication, it is also becoming an issue in terms of ensuring the stray animal is not a means of transmission of TB and Brucellosis. So we are undertaking both awareness as well as Stray Animal Campaign. Awareness is about what these animal owners need to do to ensure that:

1. If there are owners of an animal, how should they demonstrate that they are the owner of that particular animal? What do they need to do? How does the Ministry come in to give them the Branding Certificate? And how they can do the branding and get that listed in our list of branded animals so that we know this is the owner when the owner would want to claim that animal.
2. How they need to ensure that their animal is kept within the confines of the property.

So this is the awareness part and we are doing that on a regular basis.

Now having done the awareness in the last quarter, we have now started to embark on undertaking the stray animal campaign which involves locating the animals which are outside their own property, on the roads or damaging others crop and getting them to the nearest pound. The process is that the animal is captured, transferred to a pound and then immediately when the animal is impounded. We inform the nearest police station and put notice to the police station that we have got these number of animals and their descriptions. If there is an owner who would want to claim, they should immediately get their

Branding Certificate to the Ministry and we will then release it. Of course, there are certain fees which I am going to explain in a second.

So for 10 days if there is no claim, then as per the Brand Act 1928, the animal is auctioned and when the auction is done, that money collected out of the auction is then used to pay out all the fees; the pound fees, the feeding fees, the transportation fees, all those are dealt with and the remaining money goes to the Consolidated Fund.

Honourable Speaker, the stray animal is governed by four legislations; the Pound Act 1877, the Brands Act 1928, the Dogs Act 1968 and the Protection of Animals Act 1954. At the moment, Honourable Speaker, we got 15 staff in the Stray Animal Section and we have constructed 15 new pounds; two are being constructed now, so in total and also we have undertaken repair work of existing pounds so we have got 26 pounds now. We will be constructing 5 new pounds in the new financial year should we get the budget for so that we have pounds in the close proximity and animals do not become a threat in constraint to agricultural or expansion as well as a threat to motorists. This is an issue, there has been a number of accidents over the last two to three decades which has resulted in the fatal accidents as well, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is our objectives one is to do awareness and tell the owners of the animals that you need to:

1. ensure that your animal is branded and you get a Branding Certificate; and
2. keep the animal confined to your property because people want to undertake agriculture.

There has been requests to us to provide fencing material for crops. We said “look, we do not provide fencing material to static infrastructure. We do not want to get into that. Then what will happen eventually we will find livestock all over the place then we will start fencing crops, cane farms and vegetable farms, et cetera. We do not want to do that. Fencing...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- That is not happening , not in my knowledge.

So, Honourable Speaker, what we are saying is that fencing is for mobile animals. So we are saying, “You need to look after the animals, if you have a smaller number you can tie them up but if it is a larger number you can keep them in a fence. Thank you.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, if I may begin my supplementary question with a story. Three weeks ago, I was drinking *yaqona* with my uncle in Dawa Village, Natewa. My uncle said, “Niko, you go and tell that Minister to pay \$1,500 for my cow.” Then I asked, “Uncle why?” And uncle said, “They came here in a truck, collected all the animals: horses, cows, goats (I am not sure the dogs and the cats), they took it away.” They took it to Bagata. So I asked my uncle, “Yes, uncle what happened?” He said, “I called Bagata, where’s my cow, you want me to pay for it?” And people of Bagata said, “Your cow has been taken to Seaqaqa.” So why?

The question is when you impound these animals, do you give an opportunity to the owners to come and pay you money and then you release it, because in this case obviously, it was never done, and you pay him just \$1,500 because in the village that is enough for *somate* and everything. You buy a cow for \$1,500, if you give them an opportunity to pay your money so that they can take back the cow, and if not, like in this case, can you pay him \$1,500, please?

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, as I said that I so eloquently explained the awareness process that at the awareness we tell them that if you are an owner of an animal, then you must brand it, and then we provide a Branding Certificate. If your uncle woke up in the morning and saw that the animal was missing, then you know that you could go to the nearest police station and report your animal is missing. If we had taken the animal, then you will find a notice there saying, “These were the animals that we have confiscated”, so the uncle will then come to pound and then show to us the Branded Certificate.

If the uncle’s animal is not branded then Timoci will come and say, “No that animal is mine.” How do I say that that animal belongs to your uncle?

(Honourable Member interjects)

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Address the Chair, do not talk across.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, we do not collect the animals from a private property. No. By definition, it is a stray animal. Stray animal is where an animal is loitering in a public place or into someone else’s property. That is a stray animal.

HON. SPEAKER.- I think we have covered this question enough and we will move on to the next question. I give the floor to the Honourable Jese Saukuru to ask Question 81/2019.

Rural Water Supply Scheme – Progress of Implementation  
(Question No. 81/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services update this House on the progress in the implementation of the Rural Water Supply Scheme to our rural and maritime communities?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Saukuru for his question about Rural Water Supply Schemes. Most of our water comes from surface water in Fiji and about 97 percent of that, 3 percent comes from our bore holes. We know that a lot of our people in the urban areas and peri-urban areas enjoy water that is brought into their homes, and also the challenges that we have for our rural communities and villages. Some of them have to harvest rain water, some of them have to dig bore holes or walk to the nearest river or creek to fetch water. This is something that Government has been trying to address because access to clean water is a fundamental right in the Constitution.

We know also that water in itself is something that is a crisis all over the world. It is being seen to be something that every country in the world is trying to address. So it is important that we provide the lending hand to people in the rural areas.

Water Authority of Fiji is tasked to ensure that our rural communities and villages have the same access to these water supplies.

Within your Government, Mr. Speaker Sir, as I mentioned before for our 5-year and 20-year National Development Plan, our aim is 100 percent access to clean and safe water to be realised by 2021 for urban areas and 2031 for rural areas and realising this entitlements will move us closer to achieving the targets that we have for SDG 6.

For our Rural Water Supply Scheme, there are basically three objectives that we have to:

1. provide the access to water supply;
2. fulfil Government's obligation under Section 36 of the Constitution; and
3. reduce the water carting costs to these rural non-metered areas.

Over the last three years, the amount of money we have invested has grown from around \$7.2 million in the year 2016 to \$27 million in the years 2017 and 2018 and the number of projects that we have done for rural areas has increased from 51 projects in 2016 to 179 projects in 2017.

For the 2018 and 2019 Budget, if you look at the budget booklet, I am sure the Honourable Member has seen this one, this year there is \$27 million that has been budgeted there for rural water schemes nationwide. This money includes the building of new water supply systems, piping waters from rivers and creeks, the ecological purification systems, building new reservoirs and pipeline works to individual homes or common standpipes; a lot of villages where they just have common pipes.

The booklet also identifies the 132 projects that are earmarked to be completed by this year and that will benefit around over 24,000 people in the various rural areas. For this 132 projects, there is \$18.7 million that is being set aside for that particular programme and as I had mentioned before, that includes the Ecological Purification System (EPS); a system that uses natural ways of purifying or cleaning the water using algae, microbes and microscopic small animals to get rid of the impurities in water. Impurities are eliminated and decomposed by the biological communities which lives in an upflow gravel take at sand.

So, the system of this actually replicates the natural phenomena process that we have in the surroundings around us to purify water instead of adding chemicals. It is done naturally. That is something that has been quite successful. In 2015 for this EPS, Government had \$2 million that we set aside to install 58 of these EPS projects all around Fiji and that budget has continued to increase over the years from 2016 to 2017, \$1.4 million for EPS Projects in 2017-2018, another \$1.5 million for these EPS Projects, 22 EPS Projects and for 2018-2019 another \$1.4 million for 41 of these projects. So, approximately 27,000 Fijians have benefited from this EPS Projects receiving clean water.

The Ministry works with Water Authority of Fiji. A lot of these projects are now done by Water Authority of Fiji but the Ministry goes out and undertakes inspections and installations, monitors the water quality to make sure that it meets the standards that are required. There are also investments in Rainwater Harvesting System and Water Carting, an allocation of \$4.5 million will continue to fund the Government's subsidy programme for Rainwater Harvesting System to assist people living in rural areas. The Government funds a 75 percent subsidy for systems that will allow for the collection and storage of rainwater by Fijians living in peri-urban and rural areas.

Households that want to be part of this system, they need to construct that cement base and the Water Authority of Fiji will then provide the 5,000 litre water tanks. To-date there are about almost 11,000 of these water tanks that have been distributed for around almost the 54,000 people all around Fiji. Water Authority of Fiji is also providing rural water carting to those non-metered rural communities at an actual cost of \$10.8 million against a budget of \$6 million. Even though we have the budget of \$6 million, we know that there is a need to cart water, it will still be done because water is an essential part of life.

So, today we are happy to say and we can be proud to say that approximately 84 percent of Fiji's total population have access to treated and reticulated water supply in terms of access to waste water facilities, 35 percent of the total population has access to waste water facilities. The Ministry has already taken timely steps to providing clean and safe water to the rural communities with the implementation of the rural and EPS projects, and provision rural and EPS budget to Water Authority of Fiji who will ensure that we are able to continue this programme and improve the water supplies quality for rural schemes.

A very important role needs to be played by the village water committees, very important because it is mandatory that we have these committees in our various villages and settlements. They are given the responsibility to effectively operate and maintain the rural EPS, once they are operational and Government will continue to inspect and monitor them.

To ensure the sustainability of rural EPS projects, it is important that the stakeholder collaborations are coordinated well and I urge all members of our communities to continue to work together so that we can all receive safe and clean water at all times. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Before I give the question for a supplementary question, Honourable Members, I do not intend to take morning tea today.

If you are thinking of morning tea break, I do not intend to take it. I intend to complete the Order Paper today, and not leave it to another occasion. So you have the freedom to go in and out and have morning tea, you know that, I do not.

Honourable Jese Saukuru, you have the first supplementary question.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I wish to thank the Honourable Usamate for the clarification on the status of our water in rural areas.

I thank you for the 100 percent achievement, according to the NDP, achieving 179 installation of rural water supply projects. My supplementary question is: I wonder if we have achieved the same for the maritime areas for the desalination plants. Can the Honourable Minister update the House of how many desalination plants we have installed for maritime communities? Thank you.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I do not have the exact data on the number of desalination plant, but I am looking at this Budget Booklet that we have that there are some money set aside here for desalination plants in Viwa Island. I think these are for maintenance, there are existing plants because I notice the one in Vanuavatu, I have been there and I know that there is a plant there, and also Tavewa and Kia Islands, so the amounts of money that are currently in the Budget book are for existing ones.

I would urge the Honourable Member to send me an e-mail if there are other specific locations you are interest in, and I can find out if there are things budgeted for those ones, so I can give a specific answer.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Salote Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I thank and acknowledge the comments by the Honourable Minister.

For your information, Honourable Minister, the tanks in maritime islands are almost all the time remaining empty because there is no rain and they still face very problematic access to safe drinking water, so what options are there to pursue in regards to borehole. For example, in Yacata, there is borehole there which was done by the SVT or SDL Government. I had brought it up to the attention of the Commissioner Northern for servicing and repair services because that is also hindering the work on the construction of the Yacata District School with no water.

HON. SPEAKER.- Ask your supplementary question.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- The supplementary question is: what other options are there apart from tank like borehole or the servicing of the existing water pump that is in there, or maybe the other option as highlighted by Honourable Saukuru. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think the Honourable Member has answered her question while she was answering.

There is obviously the option of trying to harvest the rain water, but if there needs to be a borehole to access aquifers and groundwater, there is another agency of Government that becomes involved, the Mineral Resources Department, which has that capacity, and we work hand-in-hand with them.

The other one, of course, is desalination plants. Currently, one of the challenges that we have with desalination plants is the fact that we need to use fossil fuel to run them, and there has been some discussions on seeing how we can convert to use the ones that use solar systems, so that they can be much more sustainable, so these are the various options.

My Ministry will work together with Water Authority of Fiji and also with the Department of Mineral Resources, and we know that there are some Non-Governmental Organisations around Fiji, I think the Rotaract and a few others, that are involved in trying to provide water to maritime communities. In one of the statements the Honourable Member said that “most of the time”, and I wonder if someone has done the survey on that, that “most of the times the tanks are empty”. That is always the habitual thing, people say that most of the time. I am wondering, are they actually counting 365 days a year, does that actually mean that more than 50 percent of the days the tanks are empty or do we just draw this ‘most of the time’ from thin air? Has some actual analysis been done? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. This booklet was launched this week for the Fiji Parliamentary Reporters Handbook and under question time, it says “Question time is probably the most information-rich part for the Parliamentary session.”

I am grateful to the Opposition for structuring the day like this, Question time, rich in information. Honourable Speaker, I have often criticised Government for five years for golf in Natadola which cost \$45 million without attending to the water woes in the area of Natadola to Momi and Yako. When I brought this up in one of the dialogues, ...

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your question?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- ... I was told by the Minister for Tourism that they had put some boreholes in those areas. Has the Ministry monitored how well those boreholes are doing because in the

Village of Vusama, the borehole is very poor, even the animals do not want to drink the water from the borehole in Vusama.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like the Honourable Member to tell me the names of each individual animal that said that they do not like that water.

(Laughter)

We would like to talk on action. Do they have statements like this: “The animals do not ...”, which ones, we would like to know. Let me tell this House, we have targets that we have set in place by the Year 2021, we want everyone that lives in the urban and peri-urban areas to have access to safe and clean water.

We have set ourselves a target of 2031 to making sure that every person in rural and maritime areas, and let me tell Fiji that this Government delivers, what we say we will do, we will make sure that it happens.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to start my question with another story: Fifteen villages, all have applications for water source, some improvement and the first village asked, “What happen? ”*Sa kau cake.*” They have been waiting for seven to nine years, the second village, “*Sa kau cake*”.

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your question?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So what has happened is that, I wanted to check at the Provincial Administrator, they said, “*Sa kau cake*”; “Where?”; “*To Labasa*”. So what happened is that, they brought all those applications and make them sit there to wait for donors.

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your question?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- My question is: in terms of priority, can the Government make sure every request is included in that year’s budget because it is their human right. Can the Government guarantee that, it does not wait and put away the priority to wait for a donor but becomes part of the Government budget in every year, otherwise “*Sa kau cake, sa kau cake, sa kau cake; taken up, taken up, taken up.*”

(Honourable Members interject)

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think it is quite naïve, not quite naïve, it is very naïve, I would say, it is exceedingly naïve.

HON. MEMBER.- Almost ignorant.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Almost ignorant, not totally ignorant but exceedingly naïve to believe that everything that you want can be delivered at that point in time. As I have said, we have set ourselves a target by which to deliver.

In the current booklet:

- Koroivonu Village, Tunuloa will be addressed this time;
- Nadavaci Village, Natewa;
- Nakarabo, Vaturova;
- Naketei, Nasavusavu;
- Naweni District;
- Satulaki Village in Wairiki;
- Nakoso Village in Wailevu East;
- Kasavu Settlement in Cakaudrove;
- Suweni Village in Cakaudrove;
- Tacilevu in Naweni;
- Uluivalili;
- Vatu Village School in Tawake;
- Vatulele in Wailevu East;
- Wainika, Tawake;
- Waidamudamu Settlement in Wailevu East;
- Waisali Village in Wailevu East;
- Yasawa Village in Tawake;
- Uma Village, Rabi Island;
- Dawara Village, Wailevu West;
- Urata Village, Wailevu East;
- Drawa Village, Wailevu West.

These are not only taken up, they will be implemented. There will be others when we have the budget for the new financial year, others will come in but this country knows, FijiFirst Government delivers, water will come, water is coming.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! We move on.

Inshore Fisheries Management – Strategies for Improvement  
(Question No. 82/2019)

HON. R.R. SHARMA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries provide a brief summary on current challenges faced, and thus highlight some strategies and initiatives undertaken by the Ministry to improve Inshore Fisheries management, and subsequently maintaining a sustainable inshore fisheries sector?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, and I would like to thank Honourable Sharma for the question. Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to begin by stating that due to the multiple facets of Fisheries, the Ministry of Fisheries faces a range of complex challenges.



Honourable Speaker, apart from the fact that coastal resources are under threat, it is important to be reminded that being steward of Fisheries is not an easy task. For Fisheries managers, the importance of science, policies and legislations are a few of the many components that prove to be personal challenges when achieving short to long term goals.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is coupled with the need to achieve a holistic approach which is inclusive of various stakeholders who challenge themselves with time to achieve comparative advantages that contribute to the emerging issues that the Ministry has taken on.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this coupled with the growing climate and ecological threats are some of the many challenges that the whole of Fisheries sector faces. In saying this, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Fisheries is optimistic and had risen to the challenge.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, after reviewing the Ministry of Fisheries in 2017, it was obvious that coastal fisheries resources needed considerable effort if resources are to be nurtured to a healthy state.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, evidence on how the Ministry of Fisheries has addressed coastal threat is being reflected on the efforts carried out in the last two years. Collection of scientific information, legislative support, and asset for surface patrols and support for coastal communities while expanding the workforce are part of the Ministry's strategic goals.

Additionally, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Fisheries, through the formation of the Inshore Fisheries Management Division has been undertaking enforcements and the appropriate groundwork in addressing coastal priorities. Work is currently underway to review legislative support on threatened species while additional officers will be recruited to conduct inspection and data collection in all Fisheries Divisions. Budgetary submissions have been tabled to the Ministry of Economy for consideration.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this coupled with a community-based programme like the Fish Aggregation Device (FAD) Programme and trainings are other tools used by the Ministry of Fisheries to secure voluntary compliance whilst driving coastal sustainability.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is confident that with the support of line agencies, communities and the Fijian people, the threats towards coastal resources can be addressed using a collective approach which is inclusive and is driven by consensus. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Before I go any further, I would also like to convey "belated congratulations" to your appointment, Honourable Speaker.

My supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is directed to the Minister of Fisheries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we are all aware that climate change is posing significant risk to the livelihoods of many vulnerable groups, an obvious example being the fishing community in Fiji. How have the Ministry worked with communities to address climate change in the context of fisheries?

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir and I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. Similar to many nations, there are gaps in our

legislations particularly in the extent to its fisheries legislation can facilitate adaptations to the effect of climate change.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with the support of relevant agencies including regional and international bodies, Fiji intends to update its legislation to best show the goal of climate adaptation. An updated legislation will support and enforce policies that engender climate resilience. It will also foster a more holistic approach across key agencies which is critical for climate change adaptation. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Bula vinaka*, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Thank you very much, Honourable Minister for Fisheries. I take it that it has been about two years the bech-de-mer or the *sucuwalu* has been banned of all around Fiji. Our *qoliqoli* owners, most of them have things to do in the village to do some charity works, et cetera.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- The questions is coming. When will you uplift the ban? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, when will you lift the ban?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. The uplift on the ban of bech-de-mer will take quite an extensive work. The bech-de-mer has basically been over harvested and most of the fisheries areas around Fiji there is a danger that it may lead onto extinction.

We will need to have a stock check around the oceans and the various *qoliqoli* areas in Fiji. Once we have the stock and we assess the ability for reproduction, we will be able then to say when it is going to be open or what system that will be in place to assist the resource owners.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

My question to the Honourable Minister he knows and has mentioned about the harming effects of plastic products and plastic bags and the threat to the coastal food supply. I would like the Honourable Minister to outline exactly what those are and what is the Government going to do, steps to take further to deal with this threat.

HON.SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir and I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. The Government has carried out quite extensive work and basically in the last sitting we have introduced a plastic levy which hopefully will reduce the use of plastic. We have also worked with the Ministry of Environment in carrying out extensive awareness throughout Fiji on the danger of plastic in the ocean and especially micro-plastics. We are still working in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Education to try and educate our people so that they understand the danger of plastic and micro plastics in the ocean.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on to the next question. I now give the floor to the Honourable Peceli Vosanibola.

Rehabilitation Work – Levuka Heritage Site  
(Question No. 83/2019)

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts inform this House on the progress and status of rehabilitation work on the heritage sites in Levuka?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).-Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for asking this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honorable Prime Minister, Honourable Members of Parliament and our guests in the gallery, *ni sa bula vinaka* and a very good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a way of background, in 1970 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) created the International Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage Convention and Fiji is one of the 184 signatories and we signed the Convention in 1990.

Mr. Speaker, under the Convention, each State party is required to list national sites that are unique as heritage places for conservation. This brings:

- International recognition and attention;
- Technical assistance for conservation;
- Financial assistance for conservation; and
- Exclusive branding in the international tourism market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the World Heritage list includes universally significant properties that represent a world of outstanding examples of cultural diversity and natural wealth. As a result, Fiji is required under the Convention to submit to the World Heritage Committee an inventory of candidate properties for the tentative list of cultural and natural heritage sites and natural significance and have qualities of possible future heritage sites.

The Levuka Historical Town was nominated to UNESCO World Heritage List in June 2013, becoming Fiji's first UNESCO World Heritage Site. The World Heritage status means that, Levuka in its present state will remain as a snapshot, frozen in time of a critical part of our nation's development and a permanent reminder of a unique history.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government took over the project in 2005 through my Ministry, making ongoing financial commitments. For the management of Levuka World Heritage Site, the concept of 5Cs for the sustainable development of World Heritage Sites established by UNESCO formed the 5 strategic objectives of Levuka World Heritage Action Plan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 5Cs are:

1. Credibility;
2. Conservation;
3. Capacity Building;
4. Communication; and

5. Community.

Mr. Speaker, the work on rehabilitation is ongoing and requires several stakeholders to contribute to the rehabilitation of Levuka infrastructure and strengthening of the Levuka Town Council. The Levuka Town Council receives an annual grant of \$100,000 to upgrade Levuka's infrastructure and public facilities. Among other activities, this has enabled the following:

1. Rehabilitation of infrastructure within Levuka Town, like the walkways, footpaths, bus top, lights along the beach.
2. Rehabilitation of 10 historical buildings like the Queen Victoria Hall (Town Hall), Nasau Park Pavilion and the LTC Depot and work is progressing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know, Fiji's education system has its roots in Levuka with some of the oldest school infrastructure in the country.

1. Marist Convent School;
2. Levuka Public School;
3. Delana Methodist School; and
4. St. John's College.

Government supports these schools with refurbishment of the historical buildings within the school boundary. Immediately after *TC Winston*, Honourable Speaker, Sir, a rapid assessment was done on all historical buildings within the municipal town council boundary of Levuka, which is also the boundary of the World Heritage Site. Buildings were graded according to the severity of the damage they sustained.

For the information of the House, there is a total number of 190 heritage sites all across Levuka. Grants and reimbursements immediately after *TC Winston*. Funding assistance was provided to owners of the 171 buildings in Levuka whose buildings required minor repairs. Assistance was given in the form of building materials, purchase for rehabilitation works and the 19 buildings that fell in the categories above two could not be immediately assisted due to the high cost of repairs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following this immediate assistance, with the support from the Ministry of Economy, rehabilitation has been addressed in phases.

Phase 1 in 2016, in 2016 Government funded the full architectural and structural survey of 86 buildings in Levuka, at a cost of about \$600,000FJD. This was led by the Construction Implementation Unit of the Ministry of Economy, and a tender for the full architectural and structural survey of these buildings was allocated at the Government Tender Board. The building survey was undertaken in 2016 and 2017.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government further provided funding of \$150,000 to complete another 80 building reports again led by the Construction Implementation Unit (CIU). A total of 76 building reports has been produced so far as a result of this funding provision. However, 76 out of 190 buildings need further attention.

Mr. Speaker, in 2018 which is an ongoing project, Government allocated \$500,000 to the rehabilitation works in Levuka specifically for two buildings: Levuka Community Centre and the St. John's College building in Cawaci. Again this project is led by the CIU.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, on the mapping of local heritage sites, a thorough GIS mapping was conducted to record all the local heritage sites within the 26 villages on the island of Levuka. The Village Heritage Site Register was established for individual villages, a first in Fiji with the use of GIS technology.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is inevitably facing challenges including inadequate maintenance, the need for specialist support such as conservation, architects encouraging the integral role of other ministries. We are also faced with usual challenges when it comes to buildings which were often made with Oregon Timber and Coral so there is always this ongoing issue of concrete degradation, wet rot, dry rot and corrosion of iron corrugated roofs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I can just close off by saying that the total cost of rehabilitating and upgrading of the 190 buildings according to an assessment survey done in 2016 to 2018 stands at about \$29 million. So obviously more rehabilitation works will be done with budgetary provisions in the coming budget. Thank you.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, if you look at the PAFCO Annual Report that we tabled this week, there is a situation in Levuka where PAFCO would like to expand into an area where there is a heritage site. And PAFCO is willing to relocate that site, retaining its fullness and maintaining it going forward. What would be the process for PAFCO to secure the approval to do that? Thank you.

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

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

I do not have a specific answers to the process that will be required in order for PAFCO to be relocated because as you know another issue for consideration in Levuka is the topography itself and there is no room for development, we all agree with that. But I can come back with that information and provide to the House as to what process will be needed.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move onto the last question. The eighth Oral Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Vijendra Prakash to ask Question No. 84/2019.

Income Generating Projects for Youths  
(Question No. 84/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports inform the House on what type of assistance have been given to individual youths and youth clubs on the creation of income generating projects?

HON. P.K. BALA (Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports).- Thank you Honourable Speaker and I also thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Speaker, the Youth Development Centres offers assistance to youths through advisory, empowerment and capacity building initiatives including specific skills training and grants.

Honourable Speaker, one of the Ministry's goals is building pathways to success. In building values for youths that will lead to success, the Ministry not only develops, supports and provides services, capital resources facilities to empower individual youth and club but Honourable Speaker, also build partners to sustainable success through general life skills training for youth, sports, people and youth clubs.

Honourable Speaker, depending on the specific needs around sustainable success for the creation of income generation projects, the Ministry provides a range of training so that the youth and the youth clubs can start up small scale businesses and generate income for themselves and their families. Honourable Speaker, may I also add that during our conference, we were happy to hear the success stories of the recipients. These are the youths who were out of school, they had nowhere to go and the Ministry came in, they applied, they followed the procedure, they accessed the grant from the Ministry and now they have started up the small scale businesses and they are generating income for themselves and for the families as well.

Honourable Speaker, the requirement for individual youths and youth clubs to access funds, is by completion of Youth Grant Proposal Form. This will contain information and details of project objectives and outcomes of the individual and youth clubs project distribution. It includes project location, overview of the project and description on project initiation, implementation and timeline.

Honourable Speaker, that is why yesterday and even today, we were talking about this National Youth Policy because we would like to see that all of these projects are aligned with the National Youth Policy. Honourable Speaker, various examples of Ministry's assistance to the youths and the youth clubs for the creation of income-generating project has been as follows:

- Farm supplies;
- Machine tools;
- Boundary fence;
- Canteen projects;
- Uniforms and wheelbarrow for the wheelbarrow boys;
- Skills training;
- Supply of sewing machines;
- Brush cutters;
- Musical instruments;
- Crop production products;
- Barber shops;
- Sports equipment;
- Small engine repairs training; and
- Boat Masters Training Qualification; just to name a few.

Honourable Speaker. I thank you for the time.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I am grateful to the Honourable Minister in the efforts that are being made to help our youths come out of poverty and to generate income. I just like to ask the Honourable Minister, he mentioned about a conference for young people. Can you, please, explain to the House, Sir, what happened when the decision you made to ban a certain number of youths from attending the workshop to express or come with a platform and ideas that they wanted to view? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would love to see for myself the names of people that have complained to you that I had stopped them coming to the National Youth Conference. Honestly! Please, as soon as possible! Because I am not going to take this sweeping allegations in this Honourable House. This is nonsense, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we move on.

### **END OF WEEK STATEMENTS**

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for the information of the Honourable Members, a Member may speak for up to 10 minutes, with a 10-minute response by the Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speeches. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate.

I now call on the first Honourable Member, Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, to deliver the first End of Week Statement. Honourable Pio Tikoduadua, you have the floor.

#### Civil Aviation (Montreal Convention 1999) Act 2016 - Fiji's Rights and Obligations

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker. This End of Week Statement is centred around the Civil Aviation (Montreal Convention 1999) Act which was passed in this House in 2016. However, before we can get into those substantive elements, it is important that I set the context of this Act which, of course, is derived from the Montreal Convention which the House approved Fiji's accession to, in 2015.

Mr. Speaker, the Montreal Convention was passed unanimously in this august House on 18 March, 2015. The Committee tabled a comprehensive report with 5 recommendations and they were;

#### **Recommendation 1**

That the Fiji Government ratifies the Convention on the Unification of Certain Rules for International Carriage by Air (Montreal Convention) to streamline and enhance efficiency in international air transport carriage operations while providing for equitable compensation.

#### **Recommendation 2**

That the Fiji Government works with airlines to develop a joint communications strategy to highlight benefits to Fijians following ratification.

#### **Recommendation 3**

That the Fijian Government makes it easier for people and families to lodge applications to seek fair compensation and redress from airlines following air accidents.

#### **Recommendation 4**

That the Fiji Government considers the implications of the Essential National Industries (Employment) Decree 2011 in regard to safe operations of airlines and the efforts by the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji to improve their standards in line with international practice, especially in regards to the technical aspects of operations.

**Recommendation 5**

That the Fiji Government ratifies the Montreal Protocol 2014 which will safeguard the operations of aircrafts from unruly passengers.

Mr. Speaker, the Government's responses to the recommendations, dated 22 May 2015 (this is on the Parliament website) were as follows:

**Recommendations 1 to 3 (Inclusive)**

This supported and endorsed by the Fijian Government. The Fijian Government will work closely with airlines involved in the international carriage of passengers and inform the public of their rights under the Montreal Convention.

**Recommendation 4**

This is supported and endorsed by the Fijian Government. Moreover, the Fijian Government has invited and has received submissions from Fiji Airways and the Fiji Airways Flight Attendants Bargaining Unit with regards to their views on the Essential National Industries (Employment) Decree 2011. These submissions are currently being considered in light of the view of labour laws in Fiji.

**Recommendation 5**

This is noted. By way of background, the Montreal Protocol 2014 (Protocol) is an amendment to the Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed On Board Aircraft (Tokyo Convention), which governs offences and other acts that occur on board aircraft inflight. The Protocol makes important changes to the Tokyo Convention to serve as an effective deterrent to unruly behaviour, and it goes on, Mr. Speaker.

In recalling the debate on the Montreal Convention, the most salient highlights were that it was a good thing for this august House to do, and I have drawn from some of the interventions made on 18th March, 2015 by some Honourable Members on that day as captured by the *Daily Hansard*, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, by the Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar. He said and I quote:

“Madam Speaker, by ratifying this particular Convention and by accepting the recommendations made by the Standing Committee, we are now providing compensation up to US\$170,000 for passengers who suffer death or bodily injury on board an aircraft. It also covers for compensation for loss or delay in arrival of baggage and it is an advancement of the previous Warsaw Convention which was previously followed.

The major point of this particular Convention is that, it does not only cover the loss to passengers, it also provides a recourse to airline itself, in case the airline has to suffer expenses as a result of some unruly behaviour of unruly passengers.”

The next comment, Sir, was by the Honourable Prime Minister:

“The Montreal Convention 1999, establishes airline liability in the case of death, injury or delay to passengers. In cases of delay, damage or loss of baggage and cargo, our laws need to be kept up-to-date, to make sure that in the unfortunate event of an airline disaster, the travelling passenger is adequately compensated. The Montreal Convention ensures just that.”



Also from the former Minister for Tourism, what this essentially means, Mr. Speaker, is that, if there is (God forbid) a plane crash and a Fijian was to die, the airline will have to pay a minimum of \$320,000. If it was an injury and the injury is proven, for example, it is just a broken arm then it could be less but then up to F\$320,000 based on today's currency conversions.

However, the liability is unlimited, for example, if you feel that \$320,000 is not sufficient and that your representatives feel that you are, as a person, has lost a lot more, then you are able to claim more in a court of law. So, it will be for that airline to refute that they were not negligent or they did not cause or that a third party caused the accident. It is not for the passenger to prove that the airline was negligent, so this is a system which is much more beneficial. Hence over 109 countries have already ratified and are parties to this Convention.

The other important aspect to the Montreal Convention is the fact that if a Fijian was flying, for example, from Hong Kong to Paris, the person does not have to go to Hong Kong or Paris to sue the airline. He or she can sue the airline in Fiji. Of course, you do not have to sue for anything up to \$320,000 because that is available as a right, but for anything over and above that, you can file an action in the High Court of Suva High, High Court of Lautoka or Labasa High Court, for that matter.

Honourable Speaker, I am raising these assurances because we need to be both genuine and serious about the assurances we laid at the feet of Parliament when we passed the Treaty and the Domestically Codified Act.

These words and commitments we made in the House are not without responsibility. If we cast our minds back to some various accidents with very direct correlation to Fiji's aviation sector, directly related to our tourism sector, we should all be extremely cautious because of the direct accountability we all have through our travelling public in light of the Montreal Convention and the Domestically Codified Act.

The first is the tragic Pacific Flying School Cessna 172 crash on March 2018. That was a day of national sadness and I am sure none of us here has forgotten. The bigger tragedy is that on our watch as Parliamentarians who remain in the dark as to the outcomes of the investigation. We are directly accountable as a Parliament, Honourable Speaker, and it should cost us more concern that the Pacific Flying School is still committed to this day to accept aviation students most of whom are students through TELS. I recall the Honourable Mahendra Reddy who was then the Education Minister making that announcement in 2015 in the *Fiji Sun*. The question, however, is compensation allowance for such incidents there under the Act, is the Pacific Flying School even insured?

The second, of course, is the global Boeing saga and the Boeing 737 Max aircrafts in Fiji Airways fleet, where the airline shamefully dragged its feet in grounding them, when the whole of the world and other airspaces had grounded them well before Fiji did. If you are to go by the media reports during that saga, it was almost as if the Civil Aviation Authority and the Regulator of our airspace were being arm-twisted by the client of Fiji's national sovereign airspace.

It is our understanding that CAAF has absorbed many personnel who used to work for Fiji Airways. This is highly problematic if you enter a regulatory space, steeped in commercial exposure. There are two very divergent functions, secondly, during the time of confusion, it was not immediately clear who was the face of CAAF speaking as the regulator where they are afraid to do their job and allay public anxiety as the regulator.

Honourable Speaker, the Act and the Montreal Conventions and Members of Parliament, we should at the very least be guaranteed that insurance cover by the Fiji Airways is adequate in the event of

a disaster and the damage or loss of baggage and cargo by passengers and clients have improved markedly. One of the recommendations in the report in fact points to that.

Fiji Airways may believe that it is not accountable by Parliament by hiding behind its status as a company yet it has no problem spinning off public funds and I refer in this instance to the \$18 million allocation from the budget over a couple of recurring budgets in which to market the Singapore route. When someone gives a company \$18 million over a couple of years surely common decency and respect dictates that you say “thank you”, that you show thanks and if you are a company, you let the people know how you used the money by tabling Annual Reports.

The learned Attorney-General, I am quite sure will give the same response as he normally does, for example, the company that we should retrieve it from the Registrar of Companies, that would simply be wilful ignorance on his part as to accountability to Parliament by every single person who takes even 5 cents from the taxpayer. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua for the statement. I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Unfortunately, as usual he, sort of, meandered off. The Montreal Convention he started off with is actually about compensation for passengers travelling in airlines. He did talk about that but then he sort of went on about the tragedy that took place last year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as he would know that these are subject to investigations. We had brought in an investigator from New Zealand and in fact these investigations, they do not do it within a few weeks. Sometimes it can take over a year if they really want to do a proper investigation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Investigation Report has just come out recently to the Ministry and we have actually said that it will get published. In fact, it is on its way for publication. There is nothing secretive there to hide, but Mr. Speaker, Sir, again he took this opportunity to assault Fiji Airways again, the company which is the national carrier for Fiji, a company that actually helps our tourism sector to survive, a company that has now made over a hundred million dollars in profit and a company that was making enormous losses.

In respect of the MAX 737, Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, of course, we had the first incident in Indonesia when the first plane crashed and the 737 and immediately Fiji Airways got in touch with Boeing, our pilots went through re-assimilation courses. There was also new PAS that was required for the software, we have been actually working in that respect. It is incorrect for him to say that we were the only ones that were flying the Max whilst everyone else stopped. In fact, there was over, close to we understand 200 MAX flying within USA and they continue to fly even after we stopped. It is incorrect for him to say that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality is that the Civil Aviation, he talked about CAAF. CAAF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, needs to follow the ICAO standards which he failed to mention. ICAO is the International Civil Aviation Organization and they set the standards.

Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is one of the only two countries in the entire Pacific region that actually is compliant, or from the recent 2018 ICAO Safety Report indicates Fiji’s overall universal safety oversight audit programme rating over 60 percent for effective implementation or safety oversight systems. Papua New Guinea is the only other country from the Pacific to be included in this category, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We have of course recently announced publicly that we, in fact for the past two to three years have been approaching ICAO including World Bank to have a regional ICAO office setup in Fiji and use Fiji as a hub. There is an organisation called Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO), it is not very effective and we recently had an expert that came down to do the assessment. They also recognised the fact that Fiji is a good hub in that respect.

The reality of the matter is, Fiji Airways is the only airline that flies to many of the other Pacific Island countries and as I highlighted in Parliament the other day, that some of these countries we do fly to, they have enormous safety issues: dogs running on the runway and birds there, bird interference can actually even bring down a jet airliner. So we have said we want the assessment of these airlines and these ports to be done thoroughly. They need to meet the ICAO standards because it is now in their interest to ensure that they meet the standards too, Mr. Speaker, Sir

Of course, recently we had this incident with the Air Traffic Services and again, CAAF was there and CAAF kept on constantly monitoring and our safety was not actually compromised. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very unusual, normally when you have an international airport like in Nadi, you do not allow flying school. The internationally-accepted standard is, you do not have flying schools at your international airports.

If you go to Sydney or if you go to Los Angeles or San Francisco or anywhere in the world, these major airports, they do not have flying schools there. The flying school will be in some remote airstrip because then it does not interfere with your mainstream commercial flying. So that is one of the areas that we are looking at because again, apart from the fact that you need to isolate an international airstrip from your flying school areas, you also need to ensure that there is less traffic in that area and by having more traffic in that area, the Air Traffic Controllers have to not only have to monitor the international space that we monitor but there are three types of monitoring we do.

One is the Oceanic spaces that we monitor, so beyond Nauru and all these places we still monitor that. Then we have what we call a lower level when they are approaching the Fijian territory. Then of course, you have the domestic and then, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have the flying schools. So if you get rid of the flying schools say to some other place, which could be built up as a hub for flying schools, it will reduce the traffic in that respect.

I really cannot understand what Honourable Tikoduadua was frankly going on about because he seems to be wanting to cover a number of grounds without actually focusing on the Montreal Convention. The Montreal Convention, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is about compensation and of course about people being adequately compensated. They simply just have to follow the process, Mr. Speaker, Sir. And we can be rest assured, as far as safety is concerned that CAAF is an independent organisation. CAAF has got the right type of personnel and they will continue to do their work well. Of course, they constantly are looking for people from overseas.

One of the challenges we have had with CAAF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that countries like Papua New Guinea offer three or four times the salary for the personnel that we have in Fiji. There has been a review of salaries, salaries have been increased and from that perspective, we have had people coming back now from Papua New Guinea to Fiji too. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the capacity is there and frankly, I think the Convention mentioned over here is completely a misappropriate area to do so and we can be rest assured that we are on the right track. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, we will now proceed with the second End of the Week Statement and I call on the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa to deliver her statement. You have the floor, Madam.

### Establishment of a National Education Commission

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. My End of the Week Statement is on the need for the establishment of a National Education Commission to realign the education system to meet the needs of the labour market.

The SODELPA Manifesto, Honourable Speaker, Sir, states and I quote:

“... quality education and training that is relevant to change and the needs of the labour market will be strengthened. Education is a cornerstone for social and economic development. It is also a basic human right which will be the foundation of SODELPA’s intervention. The establishment of an Education Commission to carry out a holistic review of our education system will be given priority.”

The development of education in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has been the subject of a number of National Education Commissions and Education Reports since 1909. The one in 1969 was titled “Fiji Education Commission - Education for Modern Fiji. Fast forward to 1999, at the beginning of 1999, the Ministry of Education developed a strategic education plan to provide greater focus and direction on education planning in Government as people at the time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were calling for a more wide-ranging view to re-examine, evaluate and direct the nation’s education system. So the People’s Coalition Party as a lead up to the May 1999 General Elections, included in their Manifesto a promise to set up an independent commission to inquire into the current system of education.

Having won the elections of that year, the People’s Coalition made good on their promise as in December of 1999 and with Cabinet approval, the Honourable Minister for Education at that time, Pratap Chand, appointed the six-member Fiji Islands Education Commission 2000.

Members of this Commission were Professor Kazim Bacchus , he was the Chair from Canada. Dr. Evelyn Coxanne was a Member, she was from New Zealand. Professor Royce Sadler also a Member, from Australia. Mrs. Suliana Siwatibau, Professor Subramani and Dr. Esther Williams, all renowned scholars from Fiji were also members. This Commission in line with principles of good governance consulted widely with more than 700 written and oral submissions received.

Public hearings were held in Suva, Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba and Vunitogoloa in Ra. A lot of work was carried out by the Fiji Islands Education Commission 2000 and others were brought in to help compile the final report despite the *coup* of 2000.

A summary of the contents of the report are as follows and it is in five parts:

#### **Part 1: Setting the context:**

- status report;
- a review of the social and economic features of Fiji’s society as they affect education;
- the quality of education and future educational needs of Fiji;
- challenges facing Fiji in its efforts to improve its education services.

#### **Part 2: Different Levels of Education:**

- Primary Education;
- Secondary Education;
- Early Childhood Education (ECE);
- TVET; and

- Non Formal and Adult Education.

### **Part 3: Participation, Access and Equity:**

- Education in rural Fiji;
- Facing the challenges of Fiji and Education Planning for the future;
- Other ethnic groups;
- Special education;
- The education of women and girls; and
- Education and the economically-advantaged.

### **Part 4: Curriculum and Assessment:**

- The National School Curriculum;
- Learning Languages Together;
- Living in diversity; the multi-cultural curriculum;
- Information technology and distance education;
- Arts curriculum;
- Physical education and sports; and
- Assessment and examinations

### **Part 5: Organisation, Management, Delivery of Education:**

- The administration and management of Education;
- The preparation and development of quality teachers;
- Teaching resources and related infrastructure; and
- The financing of Education in Fiji

In the conclusion part, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they addressed directions for change.

When we take a close look at the Education Commission Report 2000, we see the depth and the vision of the Commission in looking at the educational needs of the country to 2020 which is next year.

Let us compare this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to what is on offer by the FijiFirst Government. Those of you in the last term of Parliament will remember the endless chart that this is part of the reforms. When you are asking, what is that about? This is part of the reforms.

Many of us had no idea what the reforms were about; many of us has little faith in the future of these reforms just from the way the Honourable Minister was trying to sell us the idea of these reforms.

Well, it is about the 4 pillars of reform which according to the January to July 2016, Ministry of Education Report, is that, and I quote:

“As part of its commitment to inclusive learning, the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts have implemented reforms and initiatives to ensure that its goals and targets are met”.

The initiatives and the pillars of reform introduced are also aligned to SDG Goal 4 which is on Quality Education. The four pillars are:

- Pillar 1 - Content Review and Development;
- Pillar 2 - Teacher Delivery;
- Pillar 3 - Infrastructure and Improvement; and

▪ Pillar 4 - Parental Engagement.

And yet, on 15th October, 2014, the Honourable Minister for Education at the time, stated in Parliament, amongst other things, and I quote here from the *Daily Hansard* Report:

“... major changes will be made following a Report from the Education Commission that we will establish next year (that is 2015) following approval by the Cabinet.”

So what happened?

We were excited and looked forward in anticipation to an Education Commission but it was not to be. Was it that Cabinet put an end to that idea? How could it have been killed unnaturally since it was the Minister for Education himself who was stating a Ministry policy?

However, sadly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it happened nothing came out about it.

So, disappointingly, Honourable Speaker, nothing materialised from those words which was so unlike what the Honourable Pratap Chand did in 1999 and that was 20 years ago who came good on his promise to set up an independent Education Commission. Had the FijiFirst Party progressed this idea in 2015, things would be very different.

We would have maintained our high standard of education, recognised beyond our shores. Literacy and numeracy would have remained amongst the highest in the Pacific.

Instead, according to the education reforms, we kept hearing drummed into our heads in the past four years, there was drive but no direction. The driver did not know where he was going.

Students would sit exams, then exams would be removed or abolished to be replaced by classroom-based assessment. Then again, according to the reforms, exams would be reintroduced so that it would just go round and round, no wonder people were confused: the stakeholders, parents, guardians, students, probably, the ones most confused were the teachers, and none of them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, dared utter a word, knowing their job would be on the line.

Today, many children are illiterate. Certainly, they cannot read or write. Our children deserve better. Our children do not deserve to be left behind because we could not get our act together. So many of our youths are without jobs as the institutions are not providing industrial requirements, in fact they are missing the target of the labour market.

Therefore, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask the Honourable Minister for Education, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Cabinet, just as people did in 1999, now 20 years later, people are calling for a more ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Who represent the ....

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.-...certainly not Qorvis, certainly not you!

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, I asked Mr. Speaker, Sir, I ask the Honourable Minister for Education, the Honourable Prime Minister and the Cabinet, just as people did in 1999, now 20 years later, people are calling for a more wide ranging view to re-examine, evaluate and direct the nation's education system, to

give it a chance at the very least and to be on par with the rest of the Pacific. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

Honourable Members, I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, the Honourable Rosy Akbar. You have the floor.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Cabinet colleagues, Honourable Members of Parliament, once again, *ni sa bula vinaka*; and a very good morning to you all!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give my comments on the End of Week Statements, the need for the establishments of the National Education Commission, to realign the education system in order to meet the needs of the labour market. Honourable Speaker, Sir, this Government is just doing that. The work of aligning education to meet the needs of the employers for specific skills is already underway. This is part of the ongoing daily evolution of the education sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday is very different from today and tomorrow is going to be different from today, simply because changes happen every day and every hour. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the presentation of the Honourable Kepa, it is again a case of Opposition living in the past, and I would like to challenge the Honourable Member here, to put on record the achievements of her Government when it came to the education system.

The Opposition seems to be very selective in seeing, they see what they want to see and they always see what happened in the past, they do not want to see what has happened over the years when it comes to the work of this Government, especially in terms of the education system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us not go back 20 years, let us live in the present and see the achievements, the positive work that has been done by this Government.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.-... and let us acknowledge it, let us appreciate the fact that this Government has given education so much priority. Unfortunately, like I said, Honourable Members on the other side do not want to see that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government has introduced numerous initiatives under the leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, and we will continue to introduce other initiatives to ensure that we are preparing our young people for the Fiji they will inherit and the young people sitting in the gallery, I am sure they are part of this initiative.

I would like to commend and remind the House ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind this House of the commitments made by this Government. The Free Education Grant, Transport Assistance, Free Text Books, employing Pre-School teachers as civil servants for the first time so they can enjoy a regular salary; and the rights of civil servants.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa spoke about Early Childhood Education and for the first time under this Government, our pre-school teachers work as civil servants and they enjoy regular salary and the rights of civil servants.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are employing specialists in our special inclusive education schools. We have introduced the Technical College of Fiji which will now come under the Fiji National University in the next financial year. We are consolidating a fair and transparent scholarship and loan system,...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- ...scholarships and loan system that is not based on ethnicity or racial lines.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- We have allocated almost 22 percent of our Budget to education, the highest so far.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Over a billion dollars is dedicated to the education sector, Honourable Speaker.

We have introduced Civil Service Reforms, including the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) that is going to put the right people to do the job.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

(Honourable S.V. Radrodro interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, Order!

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, there will always be complaints but we want the best people to teach our children, And the OMRS is going to do that for us.

Any change, Honourable Members, is resisted and there is resistance but we will make sure that the OMRS is implemented fair and square across the Civil Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to mention in this House the introduction of conversational Hindi and *Na Vosa Vakaviti*. Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa spoke about how we build our young children to appreciate the diverse cultures that we have and the introduction of conversational Hindi and *Na Vosa Vakaviti* in Fiji Hindi is going to do that and it is the focus of the Ministry to ensure that every child from primary school to secondary school, learn the language that comes with living together.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue to look for efficiencies and improvements in the system, we will continue to improve the existing system. We are looking at social economic environmental and technological development of our country. This guides the development of the education system from preschool, primary, special, secondary to TVET and to higher education.

The Ministry is working on ensuring a seamless pathway and in line with the Nadi Declaration of the Commonwealth Education Ministers, we are promoting TVET as equally important as university qualifications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are ensuring greater co-operation across stakeholders from students, parents to CEOs, blue collar and white collar workers, to ensure that we have a learning environment which suits each individual and produces the skills that we need and require.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to have a successful education system, we need excellent teachers, we need trainers and we need qualified lecturers. We are addressing this with the five teacher-training institutions in a consolidated approach to train our teachers. Simply put, all teachers must have appropriate skills and understand the requirements of competency-based learning and our teaching has the students as our focus.

The Ministry will soon embark on reviewing curriculum to ensure that it support the four pillars:

1. Literacy,
2. Numeracy,
3. Digital literacy; and
4. Physical literacy.

For our students, our future, to flourish in the global market, technology is now essential in our pedagogic needs to reflect this. We need to introduce smart classrooms and technologically enabled learnings with e-books. We need to ensure that we have modern, fit-to-purpose curriculum which will allow our students to work in the context of artificial intelligence in the next few years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a common knowledge that our friends in the private sector complained that our universities are producing graduates who are lacking in certain skills and we are working, we are conversing with them to address that.

Our curriculum starting with kindergarten, needs to provide learning in communication, collaboration, creativity and critical reflections; the four Cs of transformative learning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji needs quality graduates that meet the expectations of the labour market now and in the future. As I had mentioned, we are working with the five institutions to ensure that we just do that.

We also need our qualifications to be trusted and respected by other countries for labour mobility. This, we are addressing through:

1. The Fiji Qualifications Framework.
2. Mutual recognition of qualifications to international accords within the Pacific.
3. Accreditation of qualifications by universities with other international institutions and professional associations. When we were debating the Reports of FNU, USP and the Fiji Higher Education Commission, I think we addressed that in detail.

4. We are also increasing monitoring and evaluation of the higher education sector, to ensure that they improve the quality of our graduates and meet our skills shortage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to understand the current and emerging realities of the 21st century, and to ensure our graduates have the necessary 21st century skills for employment and for Fiji's contribution to the international knowledge economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable former Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations, last year, initiated a review of the apprenticeship scheme. We need a new better-tailored and responsive to industry scheme which draws from international experience but operates in the Fijian context. In many countries, the apprentices are highly valued by the employers and learn valuable on-the-job skills.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to conclude, we are working with the Ministry of Civil Service to compile a list of scarce skills across Government. We are working with the Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation to update its list of scarce skills. These lists have been shared with the universities and the Vice-Chancellors have been asked to address them in line with the priorities of the Government. Where required, special consideration is given to approving specific scarce skills requests from employers, for overseas talents to support Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, there is a lot I would like to say but this Government has ensured the economy continues to grow. We cannot and we will not stop now. We recognise that education is key to ensuring economic growth, and we will not leave any stone unturned to ensure we provide the economy with the requisite skills to continue this growth. It is the right thing to do, and it is the smart thing to do, Honourable Speaker, and this Government under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister will just do that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Statement.

I now give the floor to the third End of the Week Statement and I call on the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

#### Electoral Reform in Fiji

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members, I rise to give a statement on the need for an electoral reform in Fiji.

We have just completed the second General Election under the current legal framework; the Constitution, promulgated in 2013; the Registration of Voters Act, promulgated in 2012; the Political Parties Registration and Conduct Funding and Disclosure Act, promulgated in 2013; and the Electoral Act, promulgated in 2014.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many lessons have been learnt and from candidates, parties, civil society and most importantly, voters - many concerns have been expressed.

Mr. Speaker, some of these concerns are outlined in the Report of the Multinational Observer Group (MOG) 2018 Elections and the 2014 General Election. It is unfortunate, Sir, that since 2014, the Government picks and chooses to implement only minor procedural reforms rather than recognise the extensive constraints posed by the existing legal framework.

The Electoral Commission's Annual Report for 2014, also made extensive recommendations, even far-reaching than the MOG Report. It is unfortunate that for their efforts, the Electoral Commissioners appointed in 2014, their terms lapsed in 2016, the terms of office were not renewed. Even before the end of their term, some Commissioners resigned abruptly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2014 MOG Report was tabled in this august House in 2016. It was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights and three years later (the election later in November 2018), that Committee still has not completed its Report and report back to Parliament. Mr. Speaker, one would think that the MOG 2014 Report and that of the Electoral Commission for 2014 should have been prioritised, yet they did not report back to Parliament before Elections was held.

Mr. Speaker, this is the unfortunate result of the centralised control of Committees under the Standing Orders, where all Committees are chaired and deputised by Honourable Members of the Government Party.

Mr. Speaker, SODELPA and five other Political Parties made extensive submissions for an electoral reform in May 2017.

In 2014, the Opposition parties gained 40.2 percent of the vote, representing 201,318 voters. In 2018, we represented 49.98 percent, 227,094 people, so we represent about half of the voting population of this country.

Honourable Speaker, it is unfortunate that the written submissions which included 121 recommendations, was ignored by Government. As usual, this administration thinks that it is the only source of wisdom and intellect in Fiji. The failure to consult and hear the voice of the people is their hallmark.

Despite the lack of efforts by political parties to have genuine dialogue on issues critical to ensure free and fair Elections in 2018, the Supervisor of Elections and the Electoral Commission could not address our genuine concerns. The Supervisor and the Commissioners insist that it is not their role to advocate for improvements to the legal framework and the electoral system. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that it is their sacred responsibility under the Constitution to ensure and deliver on the right of the people of Fiji to have regular, free and fair Elections.

Mr. Speaker, after the experience of the 2018 Election and having seen electoral systems in real democracies, very clearly the field is uneven. Here, we have the General Secretary of the Governing Party as the Government's Chief Legal Advisor, primarily responsible for drafting of laws and the legal framework. As Minister for Elections appointed the existing Supervisor of Elections in 2014, overruling the Electoral Commission and recommends the members of that Commission. In other words, the governing Party's registered officers set the rules, appoints the referee and the rules of the committee...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- ...and is the coach of the winning team. One example of how a system from other countries is implemented and twisted in Fiji, is the 48 hour blackout. It required political parties to close down all their social media accounts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, probably by coincidence, in the recent Election, once the blackout period kicked in, the Parties and candidates removed their social media pages. Fake pages then appeared, twisting the policies of Opposition parties. This dirty campaign required massive funds and coordination.

The fake messages even went into personal email boxes of the 500,000 social media users in Fiji and with the blackout, the Parties could not correct these fake messages. Mr. Speaker, very strangely, this only happened to the Opposition Political Parties, not one attacked the ruling Party. This massively-funded campaign of lies was aimed only at SODELPA and the Opposition Parties. Mr. Speaker, that is just one example of how the rule in the Electoral Act enabled the attack on Opposition Parties, that the governing Party happened to gain from.

In other jurisdictions, the blackout only applies to TV advertisements and the media can still report on interviews with candidates. Parties and candidates do not have to go offline while rogue elements conduct a dirty campaign where the opposition are gagged from correcting their lives.

Mr. Speaker, there were flaws from calculation of voter registration and most of the processes undertaken during Election. All these would have been examined in 2018, but for the 'Level Nine Syndrome' with the prospect of appearing in court, caused such fear that a 51 hour sleepover workshop was organised very quickly to examine the low hanging fruit.

Mr. Speaker, although the registered number of voters increased by 6.5 percent from 591,101 in 2014 to 629,796 in 2018, there was a reduction in the number of voters that voted in 2018, which is around 74 percent, compared to 85 percent in the 2014 Election.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker Sir, this is a clear indication of the ineffectiveness of the awareness programme by the Elections Office of the importance for voters to exercise their democratic rights, despite the millions spent on voter education and awareness by the Elections Office. In some polling venues, the Elections Office turned up at the wrong time, denying voters their right to vote.

In addition, many voters were turned away from their nearest polling venue because their name were either in the wrong polling venue or did not appear at all in the voter roll. Many were put on the roll for a venue, whose name was similar. For example, voters from Moala in Nadi were registered in Moala, Lau and vice versa. Voters in Narewa, Navosa were wrongly registered to Narewa, Nadi. This is a basic mistake and anyone with basic information about Fiji....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- ...would never make, but apparently voters were automatically allocated by a software created by a foreign company. This denied the right to many...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- ...voters to vote. A basic and criminal mistake it should never have happened.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government and stakeholders, particularly registered political parties, must address the limitations in the legal framework to allow people to fully exercise their fundamental basic human rights.

Local observers, Sir, must be considered favourably since they are better informed on the political situation in the country, particularly Civil Society Organisations.

An enabling and clear guideline must be developed in consultation with all stakeholders, to minimise the use of public resources by the Government for political campaign, to ensure accountability and fairness.

There should be a clear demarcation on the role of the Attorney-General as Minister responsible for Election and also the General Secretary for the FijiFirst Party. There is conflict of interest in such arrangements.

The D'hondt system currently used must be reviewed to determine its relevance and practicality to our political environment, Sir.

It is unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, there is a lack of commitment from Government to ensure free and fair election, despite their regular messaging that they are committed to genuine democracy in the country. We hope that the Government will be able to review the Report from the Multinational Observer Group 2018' and table it promptly in Parliament to be reviewed by the appropriate Standing Committee.

Eventually, Sir, it is hoped that a bipartisan approach can be undertaken, where we work together in the interest of our people, to deliver their right to a free and fair elections, so that their rights to choose their Government is delivered and respected.

May I suggest, Sir, consideration be given to the appointment of a bipartisan committee to work co-operatively, to improve the legal framework for our electoral system. We owe our people no less than to ensure the legal framework actually delivers their constitutional right to a free and fair elections.

I thank you for the opportunity Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications to respond. You have the floor, Sir.

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

Mr. Speaker, just very quickly, I would like to make a few comments. The Honourable Member who made the comments, basically shows a high level of ignorance and, indeed, a selective memory and indeed, hypocrisy, Mr. Speaker. She talks about this Election (2018 Election) and the previous 2014 Election under the 2013 Constitution was somehow or the other draconian or implication thereon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2013 Constitution and the Electoral System as being formed under the Constitution, is the most transparent system and it guarantees universal suffrage. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to refer, just by context to the Honourable Member, who probably has read this and chose to ignore this, is the EU Report on the 2006 Election. And Honourable Members who were elected in the last Elections (2014 and 2018), would know and have read this repeatedly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just read out one particular because when they talk about elections, it has always been portrayed in their kind of ethnic manner and ethnic divide. It talks about universal suffrage. Let me read this:

“The constituency with the least number of voters in the 2006 Election was the Fijian (in those days were Fijian and Indian and all of that) Communal seat of Namosi, with 3,340 registered voters. The seat with the most voters required was Cunningham Open constituency with 24,087 registered voters. This unequal distribution of voters between Communal and Open Constituencies is also present within Communal and Open Constituencies. For the Fijian

Communal seat of Nadroga/Navosa, 19,044 voters were registered five times more than in the Namosi Constituency.”

What that means is, people in Namosi (3,000) voted for one person, people in Nadroga (19,000) voted for one person.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is alright, there is absolutely no understanding of universal suffrage.

It goes on to say:

“Elections conducted on the basis of equal suffrage require the equality of voting power. In principle, no vote should carry proportionately more weight than another. However, these figures show that this principle is being breached due to the major constituency of deviations present in Fiji.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we no longer have that problem and we no longer have this unequal suffrage that exists in Fiji. The reality is that, the Constitution guarantees that this equal suffrage provision will continue. In fact, the Constitution also guarantees that as using the 2014 number of voters as the base as the number of voters in Fiji increase, the number of seats must increase. So this is why we have 51 Members of Parliament because the number of voters have increased, so we have more representation.

If, in a few years’ time, the voters increase, we will get more Members in Parliament. We will probably need bigger Chambers. That is what you call democracy at work in terms of representation.

So a very quick correction, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Member talked about the Supervisor of Elections and the Electoral Commission being appointed by the Minister, again, false, she needs to read the Constitution. They are actually appointed by the Constitutional Officers Commission.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, she mentioned that because I am a member of FijiFirst and the General Secretary, that I should not be the Minister responsible for Elections. Laisenia Qarase, the Leader of SDL, was the Minister responsible for Elections, so she did not see the hypocrisy in that. This is the kind of hypocritical statements that are being made.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the irony of course, is that, now we have constitutional and legal provisions that have an enormous demarcation between the Minister responsible for elections and the actual conduct of the Fijian Elections Office and the Electoral Commission itself.

Let me take her to the actual MOG Report of 2014 and let me read out, because she went on about the MOG Report which is before the Committee. It is the prerogative of the Committee to bring the Report back to Parliament, nothing to do with us personally or this side of Parliament. The Committee has the responsibility to do that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2014 MOG Report highlighted, and I quote:

“Despite a new, unfamiliar and complex voting system, the Fijian Elections Office (FEO) administered the elections effectively.”

It made commending remarks about the 2014 Election, and I quote:

“The 2013 Constitution removed racial voting blocs. The application of this new electoral system, with a single voter roll, seemed to be understood by voters and was positively received by most voters interviewed.”

The 2014 Election was the first time Fijians voted in the common voter roll rather than ethnic rolls.

MOG Observers noted the admirable effort by Fijian Elections Office to reach out to voters in geographically isolated areas and through door-to-door awareness activities in the informal settlements.”

I am just reading some of them.

“The MOG noted the information is very technical and procedurally in nature and that the Electoral Commission had led a voter information campaign about seat allocation which included booklets published in the newspapers in a range of languages.

The Fijian Elections Polling Stations planning figure was appropriate, consistent with international best practice.

In the lead up to the election, sensitive materials such as ballot papers and seals were stored in secured facilities and under Police guards.”

Guess what happened in 2006? We had wooden ballot boxes and we had padlocks on it. Padlocks. You know what happened in 2006? When the ballot boxes used to come from all the different parts say, for example, the Central Division, that went to a one clearing house in Flagstaff, opposite the service station. Those of you who know about elections, unusual practice. Cleared there, then went to Suva Grammar School. Today, the votes are actually counted in the polling venues wherever they are cast, therefore, there is no room for interference.

Observers saw “no unauthorised persons directly were interfering with voters or the work of pre-polling staff. Voter turnout on Election Day was 84.6 percent.

The Fijian Elections Office consulted members of the Fijian National Council for Disabled Persons to discuss how the needs of the people with disabilities could be accommodated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also would like to read out the 2018 Election Observer Report. It says, and I quote:

“Efficient preparation leading up to Election day.

The Fijian Elections benefitted from robust operational planning, staff training and new technologies to improve the electoral system and enhance the transparency of its operations.

In advance of the election the FEO conducted extensive voter information and awareness campaigns across Fiji, encouraging voters in remote areas as well as young people to register and to vote.”

Let me remind Honourable Members of this Parliament, in the past, the old system, the voting age was 21, today it is 18, giving our younger people a much bigger voice.

“The Fiji media facilitated more robust debate, especially on television and radio. Parties and candidates were generally able to convey their political messages to the electorate.

Let us talk about voter turnout, it says here, and I quote:

“A voter turnout of 72.5 percent attests to voter commitment.

The MOG notes some speculation that a lower voter turnout in 2018, relative to 2014, reflected a failure of voter information.”

That was speculation.

“The MOG, however, was not persuaded by the speculation and notes that a 72.5 percent voter turnout (albeit lower than 2014) is healthy by global standards”,

even though this percentage is attributed to the adverse weather conditions on the day of the election.

“The MOG also notes that the D’Hondt formula used in Fiji is widely used internationally.”

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Read the Report!

“The MOG commends the FEO for its extensive voter information and awareness efforts well in advance of the Election. Its campaigns were highly visible and generally well-targeted to include typically marginalised voters, including women, people with disabilities, young people and those living in remote areas.

Women were well-presented in the administration of the General Election. Of FEO’s permanent staff, 44 percent are women, including 48 percent of senior staff. Of the short-term staff employed on Election Day, 57 percent were women.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MOG Report both of 2014 and 2018, is a testimony to the fact that the election system, the process that has been adhered to, they abide by international standards, Fiji recently has been given awards and recognition in respect of the work that has been done.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot has been made about the fact, “Oh, we represent 49 percent of the voters.” Yes, we know 49 percent voted for you. Over 50 percent of the voters voted for us and I have said in relation to other comments, the SDL Government, under the old system, had less than 50 percent of the votes, yet they formed Government. That is how that system works.

That cannot ever happen in Fiji again.



HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You must have majority of the people, majority of the voters who had cast their vote on that day, majority of them must vote for you, otherwise you do not get to form Government. That system is a lot better than having a skewed system where you have single member constituencies which I hope they understand what I am saying, single member constituencies based on ethnicity or even not based on ethnicity, which allows a group of people to get into Parliament where they receive less than 50 percent of the votes. In fact, they received 30 percent or 40 percent or a quarter.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, the election system and electorate process we have now is unprecedentedly most inclusive...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-...and we should continue with the system. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General.

I now give the floor to the fourth and final End of the Week Statement and I call on the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau to deliver his statement. You have the floor, Sir.

#### Changing Dynamics - Pacific Regional Geopolitical and Socio-economic Developments

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will contribute to the topic relating to Pacific regionalism and the role of Fiji. I will start off with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

The mission of the PIF is to work in support of Forum Member Governments, to enhance the economic and social well-being of the people of the South Pacific by fostering co-operation between governments and international agencies, and by representing the interests of Forum members as agreed by the Forum”.

On 2nd May, 2009, Fiji was suspended indefinitely from participation in the Forum with immediate effect. The then Chair, Toke Talagi, Premier of Niue, described the suspension as also particularly timely, given the recent disturbing deterioration of the political, legal and human rights situation in Fiji since 10th April, 2009.

The 2009 suspension of Fiji marked the first time that a country had been suspended from the Pacific Islands Forum in the history of the then 38-year-old organisation.

Following the Fijian General Election of 17th September, 2014 the Forum lifted the suspension of Fiji on 22nd October, 2014.

In 2019 (this year), the Australian Prime Minister and New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister visited Fiji, and it is commendable that the Honourable Prime Minister has agreed to attend the 2019 Forum, which I see as a very positive move on the Honourable Prime Minister’s part, and for us as a nation.

The other organisation I would like to comment on, the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) as referred to by an academic researcher at ANU. This organisation, PIDF, was inaugurated at an international conference organised and hosted by the Fiji Government and attended by around 300 delegates.

The Conference theme was Leadership, Innovation and Partnership for Green/Blue Pacific Economies and aimed to advance the vision of a united, distinctive and sustainable Pacific Society.

It had a broad agenda, including self-determination and others, such as I had mentioned, the blue economy in the Pacific.

References to the blue economy appeared for the first time and the Meeting endorsed the region's preparation for the 2012 Rio Plus 20 and World Summit on Sustainable Development.

In promoting PIDF, Fiji Government Officials maintained that there was a need for the Pacific to get our act together in the region, and would be totally focussed on the green economy.

From the outset there was some ambivalence about the inclusion of PIFS. It is perhaps not surprising that the PIFs was the only key regional CROP Agency which was not represented at the PIDF Summit.

It was apparent that some countries were hesitant to accept their invitations, at least, until they knew who else would be attending. The hesitancy on the part of some establishing regional partners, such as Japan and US, pointed to a reluctance to give endorsement to the PIDF and thereby, undermined the PIF as the key political body, through which they engage with the region.

The PIDF could not have occurred without the Fiji's Government leadership but it resonates with broader regional concerns and trends, while a direct outcome of Fiji's suspension from the PIF, but PIDF is also a product of the new fluidity in international relations, habitant by the large number of States which attended the PIDF Conference. It is also an expression of the dissatisfaction and disillusion among Pacific Island Countries with the prevailing regional order.

The PIDF was engineered by Fiji to counter PIFs, but at the moment it seems to be struggling for funding and relevance.

The Honourable Prime Minister has indicated his attendance at PIF this year, and it is the first time to review the PIDF as its original base and purpose were not as solid. It duplicates the PIF and it is ordained drain on Fiji's financials, especially taxpayers' funds with its high operational cost.

The other reason regional organisation I want to comment on, Honourable Speaker, is the Melanesian Spear Group (MSG). The MSG came into being as a result of an informal formal meeting of Heads of Government - Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and also FLNKS, the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front.

The Leaders, at their inaugural meeting, agreed to have common solidarity and positions, particularly in areas related to political co-ordination. There was emphasis on decolonisation for Melanesians. From there, they also particularly referred to the situation in New Caledonia and Papua.

I emphasise today the case of Papua in relation to the MSG. It is noted that West Papua's application for full membership of the MSG continues. The petition for West Papua to be on the decolonisation list is currently submitted to the UN.

It is important for Fiji to note and reconsider its views on West Papua, given its first position as Deputy Chair of the UN Human Rights Council.

It should be noted that just two months ago a special mission from the World Council of Churches has criticised the ongoing human rights violations by Indonesian Security Forces in the West Papua's

region after its five days visit to Indonesia and has called for more openness. It is also said that Papuan people seems to be systematically marginalised and they urge more dialogue without conditions.

Members of the Delegation were alarmed to hear from almost all the Papuans they met over the severity of the problems they continue to face till today.

They consider the current special autonomy arrangements as a favour and that most of its important elements had not been implemented. The delegation was concerned to learn that due to migration and democratic sifts, indigenous Papuans now form a minority in their own land. Land grabbing, environmental degradation and accelerated destruction of forests and river resources upon which indigenous Melanesian Papuans' depend were being depleted and exploited.

According to Papuan counterparts, the prevailing development model in the region, "is for others, not for us". Dr. Emily Welty, the Vice-Moderator of the WCC Commission on International Affairs, said: "Papuan people seems to be systemically marginalised and excluded from all areas of life."

Another publication by ANU, particularly on the issue of culture. They mentioned, and I quote:

"Most victims are innocent civilians and have nothing to do with pro-independence movements. They have become 'collateral damage' of a military and police operation, intended to eradicate the separatist movement. Another element which features frequently is labelling the torture victims with the notion of animality, referring to them as monkeys, pigs, dogs and racial notions as black or *hitam* in their language or the notion of the underdevelopment, such as primitive and stone-age. The labels of animalism and primitiveness are common in the daily attitude of Indonesians towards Papuans.

Torturers are mostly members of the Indonesian state security apparatus, the TNI (The Indonesian Armed Forces) and the Police.

The finding is disturbing because it reveals that the Indonesian state apparatus has become a major agent of terror and brutality. Instead of delivering services, the Indonesian state apparatus is willing to resort to terror and brutality as a mode of governance rather than to legal and democratic procedures. Put into the horizon of the history of Papua, this reality is even more disturbing as the practice has been basically unchallenged in the last 50 years.

The torture practice has repeatedly targeted Papuans, mainly farmers, civilians, et cetera, for the last 50 years. Aside from control, the deliberate strategy for torture also aims to de-humanise Papuans and turn them into the abject.

Under the emerging Indonesian democracy, this phenomenon has proved a serious question not only to Papua but also to the whole construct of the Indonesian State. The question is whether the Indonesian State will continue to respond with coercive governance in Papua whenever any sign arises and is considered posing a threat to national stability.

Learning from Papua's experience, any reform agenda should go beyond law, politics and security. It should address the cyclical nature of torture and the mode of governance. Understanding torture in Papua is the beginning of acknowledging the reality which exists there."

Honourable Speaker, thousands have been killed and tortured since the referendum of 1963, which is also considered as unfair by the Papuans'. I call on Fiji to change its stance on Papua, and

re-assess its relationship with Indonesia. It is totally inhumane to stand by and continue to turn a blind eye. Fiji must utilise its regional status to move the Papua case forward in the PIFS, MSG and the UN. It must support decolonisation and stop the suffering and bloodshed.

Throughout my lifetime, Honourable Speaker, I look forward to the flag of the morning star in Papua.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the content, the heading of the End of Week statement is misleading, because the content is very different to what was said.

Under Standing Orders 35(2) in respect of responses, you can have two Minister's respond, but obviously taking that same amount of time. And if I could, with your leave, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just speak for a few minutes and allow the Honourable Minister Seruiratu to talk about the foreign diplomatic relations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to talk because he talked about trade agreement, and as you know the geopolitical landscape is changing. Mainly nowadays, driven by the rising emerging economies, vis-a-vis China, Asia and what is actually happening in places like Europe. There is a global shift in many leading countries in respect of the rise of protectionism and also trade war which is a significant threat to global growth and stability.

The tit for tat trade relation, of course, relationships breaking up, for example, in the European Union (EU). How does that affect us, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

Brexit, it has an enormous impact in respect of our ability to export our sugar and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, recently, we have been very proactive and our High Commissioner in London recently signed an agreement with the United Kingdom, to ensure trade continuity with the UK, after its expected exit from the European Union.

The recent signing of the interim economic partnership agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will ensure the Fiji Sugar Corporation is able to continue sugar export to the UK, which was very critical for our sugar industry and, of course, the livelihood of 200,000 Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we have had things like the World Bank and the ADB that have been greatly influenced by some multilateral partners to restrain development finance in Fiji. We have now gotten over that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The MSG trade agreement which the Honourable Member just simply alluded to, I think, for half a sentence, has opened up a number of opportunities for our exporters to the MSG countries which has meant we have got duty-free access apart, for two or three areas.

PICTA, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are reviewing the existing trade agreement to ensure it remains relevant to today's Fiji and be able to get more business opportunities for us, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Again, we have been working on PACER Plus which I thought the Honourable Member would talk about because he talked about agreements, we have been working, of course, on the PACER Plus issues but, of course, as we had highlighted the other day, that it must ensure that it does not, in any way, deprive us of our development opportunities and the Minister for Trade, of course, has attended to those matters too.

So from the overall economic perspective regarding taxation, taxation rules around that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We believe that our economic position can be preserved through our regional co-operation through various organisations, even from PIDF which is now not just a Government organisation but it also involves NGOs and civil society.

With those introductory remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will ask the Honourable Minister for Defence and National Security and Foreign Affairs to say a few words.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Again, I rise to respond to the End of the Week Statement by the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau and I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for clarifying some of the issues, particularly with relations to trade. I will just focus on Fiji's diplomatic relations, our relations with our friends in the region.

Let me say, Honourable Speaker, Sir, that since the FijiFirst Government took office, the geopolitical landscape has changed dramatically. And such over the years, the Government has re-oriented our long-held Foreign Policy, and has allowed Fiji to be recognised globally and, of course, regionally as well as a player and, of course, in terms of leadership, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Let me say that Fiji has to continually reconstruct itself and keep its relevance to the world and to the region, to create political and economic space. That is very, very critical for us.

We are small, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we cannot maybe influence or change the world but, of course, we have to maintain our sovereignty, but we have to have as many friends as we have and at the same time, remain independent as a sovereign State.

But what is critical in this, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is creating the political and the economic space because it is not only about friendship but we have to survive within the changing dynamics. I was expecting more on the changing dynamics but unfortunately, the Honourable Member wanted to focus on Papua.

Papua, Honourable Speaker, Sir, let me just say that, firstly, we fully respect the sovereignty of the Indonesian State.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir,....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, although Fiji is small and Indonesia is big, this is a question of sovereignty and we need to respect the sovereignty of other nations and States.

The second thing probably that the Honourable Member has not mentioned in his End of Week Statement, Honourable Speaker, Sir, there was a referendum and the people of Papua have chosen to remain as part of Indonesia.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, there was a referendum but, of course, there are elements within Papua itself that have not sided with that referendum, and that is normal and that is expected. But the advice that we, as brothers and sisters, in the MSG have given to our brothers in Papua, is that the right forum to take it to, is the United Nations. That is where it will be addressed and that is where most of the MSG Member Countries stand as we speak, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

But let me also say for the region, I will just talk on a few issues very, very quickly. The Fijian Government has a clear strategy that dictates Fiji's engagement within the region, not only through the different organisations that we are party to, but also at the subregional and bilateral levels. In the past, the conduct of diplomacy and foreign relations in the region, has been determined by the form of regionalism that the region engages through the Pacific Islands Forum.

However, this has changed due to the FijiFirst Government's position in its desire to change the status quo through its Look North Policy, Honourable Speaker, Sir. As I have said, I was looking forward to the changing dynamics. As the external environment change, we should also change within, so that we remain relevant, so that we remain competitive. That is, Honourable Speaker, Sir, is why Fiji then created the PIDF.

There is a major difference between the PIF and the PIDF, particularly the inclusion of non-state actors - the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), the civil society organisations, faith-based organisations and the private sector were not part because PIF is an inter-governmental organisation. But, of course, when we form the PIDF (I am talking about the changing environment), Honourable Speaker, Sir, because in this changing environment, we have to be relevant, we have to be competitive and have to survive as a nation because we have our own aspirations and a responsibility to the people whom we serve, and that is why we are called for leadership, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

I have always stated in this august House, Honourable Speaker, Sir, in as far as our foreign relations policy is concerned, we must leave the world as it is, not as it was, or not as we wish it to be, but we must leave the world as it is. So when the world changes, we also have to make the necessary changes so that we become relevant and Fiji will continue to play that key role within the region, whether it be the MSG, PIDF or PIF. We have made our commitments to our friends and partners, and we will all move together as one for the good and the benefit of every member States and, of course, for every citizen of our good region, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank the Ministers for their responses.

Honourable Members, the hour moves on and so will we. I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

### ADJOURNMENT

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 13th May, 2019 at 9.30 a.m.

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

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

The Question is:

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 13th May, 2019 at 9.30 a.m.

Does anyone oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- Since no Member opposes the motion, it is therefore agreed to unanimously.

Honourable Members, at this juncture, I sincerely thank you all for your participation and contributions during this Parliamentary proceedings. We look forward to the May proceedings. In the meantime, there will be Easter and I wish you all a premature Happy Easter.

There being no other business for the day, or in the week or in the month, we adjourn until 13th May, 2019 at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.45 p.m.