

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 13TH MAY, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 13TH MAY, 2019

The Parliament met at 9.33 a.m., pursuant to notice.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

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

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

Absent

Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 5th 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 Friday, 5th 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.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of the House.

I also welcome members of the public joining us in the public gallery and those watching proceedings on television and the internet, and listening to the radio.

Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament.

Standing Orders Booklet

Honourable Members, you will notice that there is a copy of the Standing Orders which has been re-printed into a booklet, on your desk. I encourage you to read the booklet well and be intimate with the booklet. The term that is normally used, "Parliament regulates itself", so the booklet contains the Standing Orders that looks after the interests of the House in all Parliamentary Sittings. Thank you.

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

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

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

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the following Reports to Parliament:

1. Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji - 2016/2017 Audit Report on Statutory Authorities (Parliamentary Paper No. 62 of 2019);
2. Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji - Performance Audit of Preparedness for Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (Parliamentary Paper No. 63 of 2019); and
3. Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji - Provincial Councils, Volume 1 (Parliamentary Paper No. 64 of 2019).

Thank you.

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

(Reports handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, under Standing Orders 38(2), I refer the following Reports to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts:

1. Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji - 2016/2017 Audit Report on Statutory Authorities (Parliamentary Paper No. 62 of 2019);

2. Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji - Performance Audit of Preparedness for Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (Parliamentary Paper No. 63 of 2019); and
3. Report of the Auditor-General of the Republic of Fiji - Provincial Councils, Volume 1 (Parliamentary Paper No. 64 of 2019).

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, the Honourable Rosy Akbar, to deliver her Report.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Honourable Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts - 2016 - 2017 Annual Report (Parliamentary Paper No. 128 of 2018) to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, under Standing Orders 38(2), I refer the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts - 2016-2017 Annual Report to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

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

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Annual Review Report of the Fiji National Provident Fund for the Year Ended 30 June, 2018 – Standing Committee on Social Affairs

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Annual Review of the Fiji National Provident Fund for the year ended 30th June, 2018.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the agency's administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation.

As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information. The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review.

The review was made and was done in accordance with the Standing Order 109 2(b), which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social service, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the 2017-2018 financial year, conducted into the Fund's administration, structure, budgetary allocation, programmes offered, policies, challenges,

highlights, its priorities for the coming years, and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At this juncture, I would also like to thank the Chief Executive Officer of Fiji National Provident Fund, Mr. Jiaoji Koroi, and his staff for the assistance in this inquiry. And I also extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my Committee colleagues and Committee staff for their contribution and support.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, commend this Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Member, please, hand the Report to the Secretary-General.

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion, without notice, that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

Question put.

The Question is:

That a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to present the Committee's Report.

Review Report on the Office of the Prime Minister Annual Reports 2013 and 2014 –
Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, the Office of the Prime Minister is driven by the vision of having a better and modernised nation State achieved through strong and robust leadership and fair development for all.

The Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights of the last term of Parliament, was referred the Office of the Prime Minister Annual Report 2013 and the Office of the Prime Minister Annual Report 2014. The same Reports had been re-instated in this new Parliament and have been referred to the current Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Just as the previous Committee, the current Committee was mandated by Parliament to review these Reports and report back to Parliament on its findings.

The Committee took note and deliberated on the previous Committee's concise work and the deliberations done on the mentioned Reports. This Report will reiterate the work done by the previous Committee in highlighting issues from the Office of the Prime Minister's reports and the discussions held by the Committee with the Office on these.

Consideration was also given to the requirements of the Standing Orders of Parliament with respect to the principle of gender equality. As part of the discussion with the Office of the Prime Minister, it was encouraging to note that the principles of gender equality was reflected in the Office's human resource, which is the most vital part of any institution.

The discussions held also gave the Committee an indication of the great work already being carried out by the Office of the Prime Minister and the plans and efforts being put in place for the way forward for the Office. The issues noted by the Committee were given adequate responses, thus the Committee does not have any contentious matters to bring to the attention of this august House. It is worth noting that in 2013 and 2014, the Office of Prime Minister attained landmark achievements, such as a new Constitution for Fiji and the commitment towards a democratic Election.

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights of the last term of Parliament for their effort and input, which our Committee also relied on during the review process and in formulating this Report. My Committee utilised the salient information noted from the previous Committee to assist in its direction for its review.

I would also like to thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights; Honourable Rohit Sharma (Deputy Chairperson); Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua; Honourable Dr. Salik Govind; and Honourable Mosese Bilitavu, for their deliberations and input; the Alternate Members, who made themselves available when the Substantive Members could not attend; the Secretariat and Officials from the Office of the Prime Minister, who had assisted in the Committee work.

I, on behalf of the Committee, commend the Committee's Report on the Office of the Prime Minister Annual Report 2013 and Office of the Prime Minister Annual Report 2014 to Parliament and request all Honourable Members of this august House to take into consideration its content. Thank you.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion, without notice, that the debate on the contents of the Reports is initiated at a future sitting.

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

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

Question put.

The Question is:

That a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to present the Committee's Report.

Annual Review Report of the Ministry of Youth and Sports - August 2016 to July 2017 –
Standing Committee on Social Affairs

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Ministry of Youth and Sports for the period August 2016 to July 2017.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies in order to investigate, inquire into and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. The review was made and was done in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from August 2016 to July 2017, conducted into the Ministry's administration, structure, budgetary allocation, programmes offered, policies, challenges, highlights, priorities for the coming years and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank the Permanent Secretary for Youth and Sports, Mr. Maretino Nemani, and his staff, for their assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues and Committee staff for their contributions and support.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

Question put.

The Question is:

That a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting.

Does any Member oppose?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to present the Committee's Report.

Review Report on the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund –
Standing Committee on Public Accounts

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I am pleased to present the review report on the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: First Semi Annual Report for the period May 2017 to October 2017. This is my second report as Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji's authority pursuant to Standing Orders 110(1)(c) and as directed by the Speaker of the House for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is to examine and thereafter submit the findings to Parliament of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: First Semi Annual Report.

This Report has been dealt with extensively by the previous Public Accounts Standing Committee, and reviewed and endorsed by the current Public Accounts Committee. The Report was thoroughly examined by the present Committee in accordance with the directives of the Speaker of Parliament on Wednesday, 13th February, 2019.

The COP 23 Secretariat was invited to explain to the bipartisan Committee, a few grey areas that needed to be made clear to the Committee. The responses from the COP 23 Secretariat were exceptionally positive. The exercise of reviewing of the First-Semi Annual Report was a learning experience for the Standing Committee members as this was the first of its kind to be presented.

The documents were compiled and agreed to by the Committee following the review of the Annual Reports. The financial statements reflected in the First-Semi Annual Report is an unaudited statement of receipts and payments which are presented in accordance with the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Act 2017 and section 58(4) of the Finance Instructions 2010 of the Republic of Fiji issued under the Financial Management Act 2004. This is the first six-monthly account of the Fund since its commencement.

Most importantly to note, Member Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meet annually at a Conference of the Parties (COP) to consider progress against the objectives of the Convention and to facilitate further protocols, agreements and other steps. These meetings have, for example, finalised the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 at COP 3 and the Paris Agreement in 2015 at COP 21. They also set mandates or directions for future meetings.

Each year different countries assume the Presidency of a COP and chair of the supporting management body of the UNFCCC called the Bureau. At the next COP, the Presidency is handed over

to another country. Poland is the incoming presidency and will become President of COP 24 in December 2018.

At COP 22, Parties agreed that COP 23 in Bonn, Germany, in November 2017 was mandated to finalise the design of the 2018 Facilitative Dialogue. It was also mandated to advance negotiations on the Paris Agreement Work Programme so that it could be concluded at COP 24 with agreement to a rulebook or implementation guidelines for the Paris Agreement which is to start in 2020.

The Presidency of COP is an annual position at the Conference of Parties that are given to Member Parties of the UNFCCC to consider progress against the objectives of the Convention and to facilitate further protocols, agreements and other steps. The COP 23 President was Fiji's Honourable Prime Minister and the vision was centred on the "Spirit of Talanoa 1". The Committee commended the resolutions that were adopted in Bonn, Germany, following the conclusion of the 23rd Conference of Parties.

The Committee also wishes to acknowledge the members of the previous Public Accounts Committee for their tremendous effort on this Report. I also wish to extend my appreciation to all the Honourable Members of the Committee, who were part of the successful compilation of the bipartisan Report namely; the Honourable Joseph Nitya Nand (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Vijendra Prakash, Honourable Aseri Radrodoro and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat Staff, namely; Ms. Priya Chand, Mr. Mateo Lagimiri and Mr. Savenaca Koro, for their dedication and commitment throughout the review.

I commend this Report to Parliament. Thank you.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I second the motion.

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

Question put.

The Question is:

That a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to present the Committee's Report.

Annual Review Report on the Fiji National Sports Commission – January to July 2016
and August 2016 to July 2017 - Standing Committee on Social Affairs

HON. V. PILLAY.- I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Annual Review of the Fiji National Sports Commission for the period January to July 2016 and August 2016 to July 2017.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b), which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January 2016 to July 2017, conducted into the Sports Commission's administration, structure, budgetary allocation, programmes offered, policies, challenges, highlights, its priorities for the coming years, and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank the Executive Chairman of the Fiji National Sports Commission, Mr. Peter Mazey, and his staff, for the assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues and Committee staff for their contribution and support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

Question put.

The Question is:

That a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes the motion, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj to present the Committee's Report.

Review Report of the 2015 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor-General –
Standing Committee on Public Accounts

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I am pleased to present the Review Report of 2015 Annual Report of the Office of Auditor-General. This Report has been dealt with extensively by the previous Public Accounts Standing Committee and further reviewed and endorsed by the current Public Accounts Committee. This is my third report as Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji's authority pursuant to Standing Order 110(1)(c) and as directed by the Speaker of the House for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is to examine and thereafter submit the findings to Parliament of the Office of the Auditor-General's 2015 Annual Report. This report was thoroughly examined by the Committee in accordance with the directive by the Speaker of the House on Wednesday, 13th February, 2019.

It is important to note that pursuant to Section 152 of the 2013 Fijian Constitution, the primary role of the Office of the Auditor-General is to inspect, audit and report to Parliament on the public accounts of the State, the control of public money and public property of the State and on all transactions with or concerning the public or public property of the State.

Moreover, the Audit Act 1969 further provides powers to the Auditor-General to audit the whole of Government Financial Statements and reports of all entities of Government. It also empowers the Auditor-General to conduct performance audit of Government entities to assure Parliament that the entities are achieving their objectives effectively and doing so economically and in compliance with all relevant legislation.

The Committee also wishes to acknowledge the members of the previous Public Accounts Committee for their tremendous effort, namely; Honourable Ashneel Sudhakar, Honourable Mohammed Dean, Honourable Alexander O'Connor, Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

I also wish to extend my appreciation to all Honourable Members of the Committee, who were part of the successful compilation of the bipartisan Report, namely; the Honourable Joseph Nitya Nand, Honourable Vijendra Prakash, Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat staff, namely, Ms. Priya Chand, Mr. Mateo Lagimiri and Mr. Savenaca Koro, for their dedication and commitment throughout the review.

I now commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting. Thank you.

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

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

Question put.

The Question is:

That a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Annual Review of the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited for 2017 -
Standing Committee on Social Affairs

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Annual Review of the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited for 2017.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies in order to investigate, inquire into it and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. The review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January to December 2017, conducted into the Corporation's administration, structure, budgetary allocation, programmes offered, policies, challenges, highlights and priorities for the coming years, and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At this juncture, I also wish to thank the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited, Mr. Antonio Takala, and his staff, for their assistance in this inquiry. I also would like to thank my Committee colleagues: Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy

Chairperson), Honourable Salote Radrodro, Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu, Honourable Alipate Nagata and the Committee staff for their contribution and support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move the motion without notice that a debate on the content of the Report is initiated at a future Sitting. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

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

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Members opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Honourable Viam Pillay, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report on the University of the South Pacific for the Year Ended
31st December, 2017 - Standing Committee on Social Affairs

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Review Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the University of the South Pacific for the year ended 31st December, 2017.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions, organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. The review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January to December 2017, conducted into the University's administration, structure, budgetary allocation, programmes offered, policies, challenges, highlights, priorities for the coming years, and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At this juncture, I also wish to thank the Vice-Chancellor and the President of the University of the South Pacific, Professor Pal Ahluwalia, and his staff for their assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues and the Committee staff for their contributions and support.

I, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move:

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

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Honourable Viam Pillay, to present the Committee's Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Annual Review Report of the Ministry of Women, Children and
Poverty Alleviation - 2014 to 2017 - Standing Committee on Social Affairs

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation for the period 2014 to 2017.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of agencies in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the agencies' administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, functions,

organisational structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee conducted public hearings to gather additional information.

The process has proven to be an effective means of gauging its progress and maintaining a high level of scrutiny of the agencies under review. The review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues related to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review looked at nine key areas covering the period from January 2014 to July 2017, conducted into the Ministry's administration, structure, budgetary allocation, programmes offered, policies, challenges, highlights, priorities for the coming years, and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I thank the Permanent Secretary for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, Ms. Jennifer Poole and her staff, for their assistance in this inquiry. I also extend my gratitude to Committee colleagues and Committee staff for their contributions and support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend the Report to Parliament with the following Reports to Parliament, the:

- Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation 2016 – 2017 Annual Report;
- Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation 1st January 2016 to 31st July 2016 Annual Report;
- Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation 2015 Annual Report;
- Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation 2014 Annual Report;

and request all Honourable Members to consider its content.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion, without notice, that a debate on the contents of the Report is initiated at a future sitting.

Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

Question put.

The Question is:

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

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report on the Public Enterprises Bill 2019 –
Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. From the outset, it is vital for our country to keep up with our regional and international counterparts. Fiji recognised the benefits and the need for a public enterprises reform programme in the 1990s and introduced a public enterprise reform framework through the introduction of the Public Enterprises Act 1996.

However, since 1996, the dynamics of the public enterprises portfolio have changed and the understanding of international best practice, public enterprise governance, monitoring, reporting and accountability has also developed. Therefore, in order to keep up our public enterprises relevant, it is imperative that the legislation which governs public enterprises is urgently updated and aligned to international best practice.

The Fijian Government now intends to make this a reality and has introduced the Public Enterprises Bill 2019. The Bill was then introduced in Parliament and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, for review under Standing Order 51 and was mandated to report back in the May Sitting.

The Bill, amongst other things, aims to mandate that public enterprises operate on a commercial basis that is efficient and profitable. It will align the regulation of public enterprises in respect of governance and operations with the other legislations, such as the current Companies Act 2015, to ensure that there is no inconsistency. It will also ensure our legal framework is consistent with the international best practice and, if fully implemented, would result in improved public enterprise financial and operational performance.

The Committee, in its review process, conducted extensive public consultations by holding meetings in various areas around Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, including rural, peri-urban and urban areas. It also relied on the research support from the secretariat team.

The Committee is also mindful of the role it plays in contributing to the commitment that Fiji has put in place in achieving its targets as set out in the National Development Plan, therefore, also considered the Bill from a gender perspective and it noted that the Bill will apply equally to all Fijians.

The Committee also consulted the relevant Ministry and the drafters of the Bill, so as not to overlook any pertinent policy and legal ramifications of the Bill. The Committee resolved that such a consultation was essential to properly achieve the objectives of the Bill. Necessary amendments were made to the Bill which are marked in red in the copies of the Bill provided with this Report.

This Report will cover the Standing Committee's role and the process it followed in reviewing the Public Enterprises Bill 2019. It was also ensured that all due process regarding the review of the Bill has been followed and that the provisions contained in the Bill would contribute to the achievement of the Bill's objective.

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights; Honourable Rohit Sharma (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, Honourable Dr. Salik Govind and Honourable Mosese Bilitavu for their deliberations and input; the Alternate Members who made themselves available when the Substantive Members could not attend; the secretariat; the entities who accepted the invitation of the Committee and made themselves available to make submissions; and members of the public for taking an interest in the proceedings of the Committee and Parliament.

I, as the Chairperson, on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights commend the Public Enterprises Bill 2019 (Bill No. 4 of 2019) to Parliament and seek the support of all Honourable Members of this august House for the Bill since it is designed for the betterment of our beloved Fiji. Thank you.

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

(Report handed over to Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, at this juncture, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Monday, 1st April, 2019, the Public Enterprises Bill 2019 (Bill No. 4 of 2019) is now ready to be debated, voted upon and be passed at a later time. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, pursuant to a resolution of Parliament on Monday, 1st April, 2019, the Standing Committee has now reported back and the Public Enterprises Bill 2019 (Bill No. 4 of 2019) is now ready to be debated, voted upon and be passed at a later time. Thank you Honourable Members.

Honourable Members, on Agenda Item 6, I have been informed that there are no Ministerial Statements for today. On that note, we will adjourn for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.23 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.01 a.m.

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

COP 23 PRESIDENCY TRUST FUND (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

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

That the -

- (a) COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund (Amendment) Bill 2019 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Wednesday, 15th May, 2019; and
- (e) That one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members already have the copy of this Bill. Essentially, Sir, by way of introduction, the Presidency Trust Fund Act was passed by Parliament in 2017 prior to the Presidency of Fiji's COP 23.

The purpose of the Act was to set up a trust fund to finance Fiji's Presidency of the 23rd Conference of Parties, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, commonly known as COP 23. As such at the time of the Act's enactment, the Act was event-orientated and indeed, allowed for the successful presidency of COP 23.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, as we all know that the Fiji's Presidency of COP 23 passed on to the Polish Presidency of COP 24 which will now pass on to the Chilean Presidency of COP 25 which is going to be called the Blue COP.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know, the trust monies that have been gathered under this particular Fund, reports have been given to Parliament and, of course, we have had the Parliamentary Committees which has had the Secretariat appear before the Committees to explain any issues pertaining to the Trust Fund.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what this Bill seeks to do essentially is to rename this Trust Fund. Obviously, we cannot any longer call it COP 23 Presidency because COP 23 is no more but to actually call it the Climate Action Trust Fund.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know that when the Honourable Prime Minister took the onerous task of heading the Presidency, we had given an undertaking that the funds that will be expended for COP 23 will not come out of Government's Consolidated Fund, and that the COP 23 expenses will be funded through the Trust Fund and indeed, it has been funded through the Trust Fund. We raised in excess of \$40 million and, of course, the expenses of which has already been tabled in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we have also though are residual sums of money that have been left in the Trust Fund and the donors have agreed for us to implement it towards climate action. As we have said, one of the reasons for us to actually get into the COP 23 Presidency and indeed, have such a huge presence in the climate change discourse both, domestically and internationally, was to ensure that we are able to also get benefits, not just on a global level in our raising awareness but also for our own citizens and indeed, Fiji. And we have seen a number of initiatives that have actually transpired and, indeed, manifested in very positive outcomes for ordinary Fijians.

So, Mr. Speaker Sir, again, the Bill orientates the purpose of the Fund to facilitate greater climate action and today, the Honourable Prime Minister, as we can see he is not here because he is at the CAP event, which is the 3rd CAPP event that is taking place. We have got the President of the Marshall Islands, Her Excellency Hilda Heine, and we have also got the President of Nauru, the Samoan Prime Minister and various other leaders and, of course, this will lead on to the visit by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, who will be here. Again, the whole purpose is to spur ourselves on to climate action. This particular Bill, Mr. Speaker Sir, is being re-orientated, that is, we continue to engage in international climate change.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, we have got donors who are interested in actually funding Fiji specifically, and also some initiatives that we may undertake regionally in respect of climate change, thus the name change of this particular Trust Fund and this is what this Bill seeks to do.

We have also publically said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the donors have agreed that for some of the residual funds we intend to create another trust fund and that trust fund is relating to relocation. We have already identified 43 Villages that need to be moved to higher ground over a period of time and, of course, we need to fund this. And relocating villages, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not about just the physical relocation but it is also providing a holistic approach to relocation which includes, finding people alternative livelihoods, setting them up in businesses, we need to also set up infrastructure if someone or a village has been living in a particular location on the seashore for the past 500 years and to then put them up on a hill top is a complete social dislocation too, so we need to be able to address those issues. There may be ancestral burial grounds that may now be inundated with water; the entire plethora of issues need to be addressed. So taking a leaf out of this, we will also be setting up a Relocation Trust Fund and indeed, many partners have shown an interest to participate in that. Fiji has already launched a relocation guideline and I urge all Honourable Members to read that as it also looks at issues pertaining to gender, youth, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is being tabled now because it is rather a straightforward Bill but it also has an impact on our budget. We did not want to load a lot of the Consequential Bills in the Budget phase so we are bringing this to Parliament's attention and as you know, Mr. Speaker, the Budget will be presented on 7th June, 2019.

So with those introductory remarks, Mr. Speaker, I would like to recommend that we refer this for debate on Wednesday. Thank you

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have a right of reply. Members may speak for up to 20 minutes. The floor is open for debate on this Bill.

As no Member wishes to take the floor at this moment, I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank all Honourable Members for agreeing with this and it can go on for debate on Wednesday.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

The Question is that pursuant to Standing Order 51:

That the –

- (a) COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund (Amendment) Bill 2019 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Wednesday, 15th May, 2019; and
- (e) that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus on 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

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

FIJI INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

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

That the –

- a) Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Amendment Bill 2019 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Wednesday, 15th May, 2019 and
- e) that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

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

Again, the rationale for presenting this is because we did not want to upload it during the Budget Consequential Bills, so we thought to bring it now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, this does not change the substance of FICAC per se, nor the laws or rules pertaining to FICAC, except for the appointments of the Commissioner and Deputy

Commissioner which, if Honourable Members of Parliament are aware, under the Fijian Constitution, it says that laws pertaining to FICAC continue. However, there is a bit of disconnectivity and we wanted to bring it in alignment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and let me highlight that.

FICAC was established on 4th April, 2007 and, of course, it continues by virtue of Section 115 of the Fijian Constitution. Section 115(2) of the Constitution provides that FICAC shall consist of the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and such other officers as may be appointed by law.

Section 115(12) further provides that the remuneration entitlement of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner is determined by His Excellency the President, acting on the advice of the Judicial Services Commission, following consultation by the Judicial Services Commission with the Attorney-General.

Currently under the Act, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the President alone appoints and determines the terms and conditions of the appointment of the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Acting Commissioner, which obviously is not in alignment with the other provisions and other powers of His Excellency the President.

However, for the heads of other independent legal institutions under the Constitution, such as the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Solicitor-General their appointments are actually determined by the President on the recommendation of the Judicial Services Commission, following consultations with the Attorney-General. Similarly, we want to bring the FICAC provisions under this alignment where Judicial Services Commission will actually advertise, it will then do the interviews and go through the entire process as they do, for example, with the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Solicitor-General.

These are the three key independent legal arms of the State, Mr. Speaker, Sir, therefore, we wanted to bring FICAC under this particular provision too. Again, this will ensure that the Bill will ensure the mirroring of the independent legal institutions under the Constitution. As we have said, we were given two days for debate to take it forward, people can do their research and we can debate this on Wednesday. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Attorney-General. The floor is open, anyone wishing to take the floor. You have the floor, Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I wish to stand to oppose the motion and I invite this side of the House to also oppose it.

The motion is coming under Standing Order 51, therefore, it is asking that this amendment should not be referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee for scrutiny by the public. The amendment this is proposing is, in terms of the remuneration for the Head of FICAC, consistent with others, that it should also have a remit to have consultation with the Judicial Services Commission (JSC), together with the Attorney-General. I understand very well that a lot of independent bodies have been in that situation where approval is made in consultation with the JSC, together with the Attorney-General.

But we have made a point before, very publicly, that the reference of the matter to the Attorney-General must be removed, because we feel sincerely that it will impact on the integrity and the independence. So that is the reason why this side of the House is obliged more or less to oppose this Bill because we feel sincerely that the public should give its view on whether or not the reference of approval to the Attorney-General will constitute an impeachment on the independence of that office. We say that as a matter of principle and on Wednesday we will elaborate on that. So basically, never

mind if all other independent bodies' approval is subject to scrutiny by the Attorney-General, we feel that all those are wrong, you can have 10 or 11 but they are all wrong. It should not be referred and the matter should not be consulted with the Attorney-General's Office. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank you, Honourable Member. Does any other Member wish to take the floor?

There being no other Member wishing to take the floor, I now call upon Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply.

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

I am a bit confused by what Honourable Nawaikula was saying. He said he opposed Standing Order 51 but then he said he looks forward to the debate on Wednesday. The motion is actually asking for it to be referred to Wednesday for the debate.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this is a matter that we have traversed previously. To date, no one has been able to provide a single shred of evidence in respect of the consultations, having any effect on the independence of those bodies. That has never been proven.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the track record, whenever the Judicial Services Commission actually does make the recommendation, consultation does not mean approval. The reason why that is there is just in case there are elements that the Judicial Services Commission may have overlooked. For example, as we have said previously, whether a person may have some terrorism links, money laundering, that sort of thing is what we actually do check up on. The recommendation of the JSC is always brought to the fore and, indeed, that is the recommendation on which His Excellency President makes those appointments.

I also would like to highlight, as a matter of principle, and again this has been highlighted in this Parliament previously, that in many jurisdictions, for example, in Australia, New Zealand and other jurisdictions, the appointment of the judges are done directly by the Attorney-General. They do not talk about a lack of independence in those jurisdictions.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think there is no principle position that they are taking, I think it is more of a personal type of attack than anything else. Again, there needs to be some causal link shown between consultations and so-called lack of independence, which they have not proven to-date for the past five years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge that we vote on this motion in the positive, and that we are able to then thoroughly debate this particular Bill that has been proposed in respect of the amendments to FICAC. Thank you.

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

The Question is that pursuant to Standing Order 51:

That the –

- a) Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Amendment Bill 2019 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;

- c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Wednesday, 15th May, 2019 and
- e) that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Ayes')

HON. SPEAKER.- There being Opposition, Parliament will now vote.

Votes cast:

Ayes	-	26
Noes	-	21
Not voted	-	4

HON. SPEAKER.- There being 26 Ayes, 21 Noes and 4 not voted, the motion is, therefore, agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I wish to clarify that with respect to the five Standing Committee motions listed on today's Order Paper, at the end of each debate we will be voting merely to note the report, and once the vote is taken it ends there, and that the report will not be debated again in Parliament.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs the Honourable Vijay Nath to move his motion.

Honourable Vijay Nath, you have the floor.

REVIEW REPORT - RESERVE BANK OF FIJI – AUGUST 2016-JULY 2017 REPORT

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Reserve Bank of Fiji August 2016 - July 2017 Report which was tabled on 14th May, 2018.

HON. V. K. BHATNAGAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs to speak on the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Reserve Bank of Fiji August 2016 - July 2017 Report.

By way of introduction, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) is the central bank of the Republic of Fiji established in 1984 through an Act of Parliament, the Reserve Bank of Fiji Act 1983. Under the Companies Act 2015, the Bank is also responsible for regulating, supervising and developing the capital market in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, upon conclusion of our deliberations on the Reserve Bank of Fiji August 2016 – July 2017 Report, the Committee noted that the Bank successfully met its core objective of maintaining low inflation and adequate levels of foreign reserves, while ensuring a sound financial system.

An impressive achievement noted by the Committee was the growing asset portfolio which rose from \$16.8 billion in August 2016 to \$18.5 billion in July 2017, and further increased to \$19.4 billion by the end of 2017. Also, the Bank was able to generate sufficient income from foreign reserves, despite low interest rates in the prevailing market.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight some of the recommendations that have been put forward by the Committee after thoroughly deliberating on the Report.

Firstly, the Committee is fully supportive of the National Financial Inclusion Strategic Plan and would wish to see it gain momentum. There is a need for a stronger focus to replace financial literacy in terms of monitoring through core sets of indicators by the Bank. Secondly, the Committee recommends that RBF maintains adequate measures to continue to review the demand for fund in various sectors of the economy and assist wherever it can.

The Committee is pleased to note that the guideline of first homeowner facility as monitored by RBF, has increased from the previous combined household income threshold of \$30,000 to \$50,000 and that interest rates are kept at 5 percent for 5 years and can be rolled over. The Committee noted that the improved lender list has been extended to include commercial banks, licensed credit institutions and Fiji Development Bank.

However, the Committee recommends that this worthy facility be promoted extensively through the user outreach programme to create awareness. At the end of the deliberations, the Committee was satisfied with the work done by the Bank and its contribution to the overall vision of leading Fiji to economic success.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few comments to enlighten the House, as the Member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Chairperson. The floor is open for debate this morning, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. May I first of all commend the work of the Committee and the then Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji for his term of service and his presentation to the then Standing Committee of Parliament.

It was interesting for me to read the Governor's quotation from Alice Rivlin, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Alice Rivlin is a well-respected Economist in the United States, spanning many Presidential leaderships. She is now 88 years old, and has done a lot of recognised and respected work. And one of her forte is her views and plans for the USA's departure from heavy indebtedness.

I thought the Governor or the Committee might have expounded on Rivlin's views on the US debts and applied the same principles to help the RBF plan for Fiji Government's fiscal and mainly monetary policies to maintain national debts at comfortable and manageable levels, considering our vulnerable situation in terms of our reliance on external monetary forces and our local vulnerability to natural disasters, rather than just quoting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, her views about the role and functions of Central Banks, without referring to the real meaning of her words.

I believe, Mr Speaker, Sir, that she really meant that not only should Central Banks worry, they should tell Central Governments why they are worried, and what governments should plan and implement in terms of policies to remove threats that cause worry.

According to the presentation by the Governor, the Bank had a credible performance in the year in review and recorded a profit, as we have heard, of \$28.3 million and transferred \$29.4 million to Government, and that included \$2.1 million, Sir, of the Revaluation Reserve Account (RRA).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee asked when the previous devaluation was done, and it was told, 2009. That question and the answer would show the Committee and us, the Legislators of today and the people of Fiji, whether we are safely governed by our Government and whether our monetary policies are sound. This is very important at this time as we anticipate a budget of grandeur to be handed down on the 7th of next month, and what another devaluation if ventured into would mean for our small economy, especially the effect on the vulnerable in society adversely affected by a shock increase in prices and cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in his presentation of the RBF Report for August 2016 to July 2017, the Governor, mentioned that inflation in the 2016 period of the Report was, to a great extent, powered by what lawyers and Courts refer to as Force Majeure (a major force beyond the control of humans or 'an act of God'), and for that period it was the Category 5 Severe *TC Winston* which hit Fiji on 20th February, 2016, and came ashore on the island of Koro, packing winds of 300 kilometres (185 miles) per hour. This, Mr Speaker Sir, is not the time to inquire into the state of the rehabilitation of Koro villages, schools, communities and infrastructure – that time will come when relevant subjects are debated in this Honourable House.

For me personally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this 'force majeure' robbed me of almost \$0.2 million when a friend who borrowed money from me, but could not pay in time using severe *TC Winston* as an excuse, but died before he could pay. But it is encouraging that facilities are provided by the RBF and other central banks to handle the effect of these forces on banks and clients when they happen.

It is interesting also to note that as a result of *TC Winston*, the supply of fruits, vegetables, rootcrops and yaqona were used as the group example of reduced supplies that impacted upwards on the cost of daily living, thus inflation which recorded an average of 5.2 percent, but fortunately, supply of these commodities stabilised because most are short term crops, except for yaqona which is a longer term crop and more vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather.

Whether the RBF recommended as a 'check and balances' measure the introduction of regulations for the local Yaqona Industry, I do not know, but would question the wisdom of regulating the only source of living some hardworking rural men and women have, while they themselves are already dictated to by the practices of middlemen and exporters, launching off much sounder financial platforms for their businesses. I will speak about the overregulation of the local subsistence-driven fishermen and women when that opportunity later arises in the House and will comment on the proposed Yaqona Bill if it comes for our consideration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Governor was quite buoyant and optimistic when he highlighted the external stability reflected in our level of foreign reserves standing at \$2.3137 billion at the end of the report period, sufficient to cover 5.5 months of retained imports. These, I believe, Sir, are imports that are retained for use in Fiji and does not include those that are re-exported. (I do not know how my friend Mr. Punja, his import of wheat for the manufacture of flour and the making of biscuits for export to the Pacific and the world is classified.)

The Governor went on to report that our Foreign Reserves hit a new record level of \$2.445 Billion in September of 2017, which is outside the scope of the Report being examined by the Standing Committee. That, Sir, indicates that those of us who are worried about another devaluation probably have no reason to worry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the figures sound pleasing, but it could be hiding due and unpaid import bills which when paid, would bring the actual reserve down to less than 5.5 months' worth of imports that the RBF was crowing about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Governor said in his presentation of the report that the Fiji Financial System is safe and sound, supported by a growing asset portfolio standing at \$19.4 billion by the end of the reported period. This amount is almost twice of our GDP. I hope we now all know what GDP is.

The Governor further stated, Mr Speaker, Sir, that Fiji will only the fifth country in the world and the first in the Pacific Region to undergo a Financial Sector Stability Review which concluded that with its Stress Tests, that Fiji's banking system as a whole and I underline these negative words, Sir, appears to be resilient to shocks similar to those experienced in the last 15 years. (I have underlined the later part of this statement, Mr. Speaker, for those coming on after us to relate that prevailing situation to what they will encounter in their time.)

Mr Speaker, Sir, the RBF Report reviewed by this Standing Committee was for 2016-2017 period, less than two years ago. Now, in March of this year, the European Union governments adopted a broadened blacklist of tax havens, adding Fiji and several other Pacific Island Countries to the list. The 28-nation EU set up the blacklist in December 2017, after revelations of widespread tax avoidance schemes used by corporations and wealthy individuals to lower their tax bills.

EU Finance Ministers added 10 jurisdictions to the updated list. They are; the Dutch Caribbean Island of Aruba, Barbados, Belize, the British overseas territory of Bermuda, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Oman, the United Arab Emirates (fright many of us, maybe), Vanuatu and Dominica. They join Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago, and three U.S. territories namely; American Samoa, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands who were already on the blacklist.

Blacklisted States face reputational damages and stricter controls on transactions with the EU, although no sanctions have yet been agreed by the EU States. I have underlined this sentence, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Fiji was jolted by that revelation and some of our finance world leaders, including the Honourable Minister for the Economy said it was not a major problem and that we should not worry. Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the banking system is under the direct purview of the RBF. Also interestingly, the Governor, in his presentation on financial performance mentioned inter alia and I quote, "As an important policy making institution, financial losses often result in reputational risk (the same words used in the report on our black-listing) which then translates into loss of confidence from our key stakeholders." The Governor quoted Alice Rivlin who said, 'the role of the Central Banks is to worry'. Was the Governor, at the time of his report getting worried about some of his observations on some banking activities in Fiji?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would caution us on boasting about certifications and gradings. You may recall in our younger days when the Legislative Council was still around in Fiji in our pre-independence period, a Member of the House of Representatives which was then partly elected, partly nominated and partly appointed after being advised by some of his friends to undergo some tests and assessments at St Giles Hospital, came back into the House brandishing his certificate that he was certified sane. He was quite pleased with his certificate until he was reminded by a close friend of his from Labasa, who said

to him; “Honourable Member, you are certified sane, but for the rest of us our sanity has never been questioned.”

I would also caution us on rubbishing sanctions about us and our systems. The FSSR was done by a ten-member mission team that was in Fiji for 13 days in February 2018, while the blacklisting is a decision of 28 Member European Union Countries, who set up the machinery in December 2017, only 44 days before the FSSR Mission came to Fiji. Who can tell if or if not, the findings of the FSSR were interpreted by the European finance wizards and resulted in our blacklisting?

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), who come to our Standing Committees to answer to the screening of the Committee Members, and the then Governor of the RBF had done that. Some Honourable Members of the Opposition conveyed to me their disappointments and the disappointment of their Committee Chairpersons with some CEOs and Chief Accounting Officers, who do not come when they are requested to by our Standing Committees.

These Standing Committees are set up to answer questions, to ask questions and clarify aspects of the Reports before Parliament comes to debate them. It is all about accountability, Sir, and transparency. It is not to try and incriminate or blame the Honourable Members on the front benches of the Government side of Parliament, but to tell the people of Fiji that the affairs, their governance are being executed with the highest degree of integrity and financial responsibility. I commend the Chairperson of the Standing Committee, for their probing and penetrating questions to the Governor and his Officials during their examination of the Report.

We now put all Chief Executive Officers and Chief Accounting Officers in the Government on notice that this honourable House expects from them the highest levels of integrity in the execution of their duties for the welfare and wellbeing of this nation and all its people. It is our humble duty, Mr. Speaker Sir, that the voters of this country have elected us to carry out for all those.

Referring back to Alice Rivlin, quoted by the then Governor, call on our current Governor not to shy away from calling a ‘spade a spade’, in his advice to our Government about keeping our financial institutions healthy and our debt levels manageable.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir, and I once again commend the work of the Standing Committee and thank the then Governor for personally appearing before the Committee. Thank you, Sir.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. The floor is open for debate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I wish to make a few observations on the Report, obviously this Parliament is asked to note.

Mr. Speaker, I have read the Review Report and especially the verbatim annexed to the Report, as well as the question and answer sessions with the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji. I am not sure why the Committee did not think it fit to actually consolidate the 2016 Report and 2017 Report with the 2017 Report and 2018 Report. I think we would have had a better report and a lot more to look at, if we had consolidated those two Reports and perhaps, save Parliament’s time in terms of looking at the work of the Reserve Bank of Fiji.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, I find the Report quite linked to RBF’s present day operations and its mandate. Of course, that is also outlined by the Governor himself and noted by the Committee. But noting, Mr. Speaker, what the Governor spells out before the Committee and the reality, I think, is two different things. And I must say that I do not agree with the Committee’s sentiments about the issue of

the conflict of interest that the Governor and the RBF might have in terms of some of the appointments of the Governor on some of the Boards, and I will talk a little more on it.

The RBF gives very sensitive signals, Mr. Speaker. In economics, we talk about the power of moral suasion, that the RBF and the Governor of the RBF have on the kind of signals that they might send to the general population, the stakeholders, especially the investors, the monetary signals.

In my view, recent statements by the Governor of the RBF has actually compromised that because Governors, when they speak, they send certain signals. And I will give you examples where I think why the Governor might have lost that moral suasion power to be able to signal issues in the economy which people are always looking at.

I have noticed some of the independent institutions, Mr. Speaker, like the RBF in a situation it is in, I mean, others like the Fiji Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC), where the CEO keeps talking about politics instead of behaving like an independent institution because the idea of them being an independent institution is very important.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. PROF. B. PRASAD.- You know that very well! You know very well what you were saying during the campaign, Honourable Minister for Economy and you should take some of the responsibility for that.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important and particularly, for the RBF and its Governor to keep that particular issue of conflict of interest in mind.

I have no problems with the positions that the Governor of the RBF holds which is mandated by the Reserve Bank of Fiji Act, like the Alternate Governor at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Asian Development Bank (ADB), chairing the Monetary Policy Committee and the Macro Economic Committee, these are provided for by the Reserve Bank of Fiji Act.

But the other part where the Committee was told, that the Minister for Economy also has the power to appoint the RBF Governor to other Boards and I think that is where the problem is. I will give you some examples of the other Boards on which the Governor is now sitting or is chairing - the Sugar Cane Growers Fund, member of the Fiji Sugar Corporation Board, Chairman of the Accident Compensation Commission and Chairman of the Major Tenders Board, as the report states.

Now, the question is, what happens, Honourable Speaker, if there is a conflict of interest or when it arises? For example, as the Chairman of the Growers Fund, as a Director of the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), I mean, we all know that the FSC is technically insolvent and owes millions of dollars to Government. So what if some of the decisions emanating out of those Boards actually require the RBF to advise the Honourable Minister for Economy or the Government, while you are a Director of a Board, when your job is to look at the interest of the corporation or the organisation.

So, that is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a very, very important issue. , The Governor may be quite competent, I have no doubt, to sit on those Boards, but the Governor also has a very important role as a head of an independent institution. Let me also say, Mr. Speaker, the whole idea or the whole issue of independence of the RBF is a very sensitive issue.

In fact, most countries actually look at the Independence Index, they look at the number of criteria and issues that the Bank does, including the role of the Governor and prepare an Independence Index to see whether the Reserve Bank is independent enough or not at any particular point in time, to

be able to act as an independent institution and provide the right signals to the stakeholders in the economy.

It would be very difficult if the Governor is also part of a Board and the Board makes a decision where the Government or the RBF has to make a decision, then it will create conflict of interest and it will compromise the RBF's role in making sure that as a chief regulator of some of these institutions, provide appropriate indications, particularly into financial institutions and commercial banks.

I was quite surprised with some of the recent statements by the Governor of the RBF himself, Mr. Speaker, commenting on social media speculations and coming out and saying there will be no devaluation. No one advises that, you do not come out and start talking about rumours.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Governor of the RBF must keep away from the rumours. The fact that the Governor is talking about, creates even more speculation about devaluation.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- If you read, Honourable Attorney- General, the literature on the independence of the RBF, you will note that the Governors do not engage in public debate based on rumours and social media, they do not, because no one talked about it.

The other thing that I was quite surprised about when this whole debate on liquidity was going on, the Governor in a public forum says, "With the stroke of a pen, I can make the required reserve ratio zero tomorrow, and raise the liquidity in the banking system". That is not the kind of statements that the Governor should be making out there in the public. Of course some countries can have zero reservation but in Fiji's case, the required reserve ratio, Mr. Speaker, is a very important component, it is a requirement and you cannot just....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...make those statements, especially using the word "I". You are compromising the RBF Board because that is why the independence of the RBF and what the Governor says is very, very crucial and very, very sensitive.

I was quite surprised that he actually said that and he also talked about the Board. He said, "We have enough cash in the Board." You do not talk about that.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- You do not talk about that in public!

I think the Committee should have raised these issues with the Governor and actually made some of those recommendations on that.

As I had said, I cannot stress the importance of the RBF as an independent institution because it is very important. When you have a situation where you are addressing a decline in economic growth or decline in variables in certain sectors of the economy, you do not make comments like that. You get the RBF Board to do that.

The other thing that I noticed, Mr. Speaker, in the Report and I do not know whether the Committee actually looked at it, there is some ambiguity in terms of the way in which the salary is determined. It says that the Constitutional Offices Commission determines the Governor's salary and there is an item listed there that it is \$287,500 in the Annual Report which was under review, was being paid to no one. And then a year later, a salary over \$335,000 in the last Annual Report ending July 2018 is being shown. So I am not sure what is happening there, whether the salary was increased by \$48,000 within the year. I do not think the Committee actually looked at that.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely do not agree with the Committee's view that because the Governor chairs some of these other Boards and sits on those Boards is not a case of conflict, it is also the perception, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the RBF. They may not be technical conflict of interest or personal conflict of interest, but I think the perception out there could create a conflict of interest....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- ...and it is very important. I know the Honourable Minister for Economy knows that, that is not right. I know he knows that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I know you are wrong.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Because if you have a situation, and I gave the example of Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), Mr. Speaker.

The Governor is a member of the Board. The Board member's responsibility is to look after the interest of the FSC and if the FSC is becoming insolvent, FSC needs more money, the Governor has to take the decision as a Director of the Board. Now, how can you say that there is no conflict of interest? I absolutely reject the view of the Committee, I am not sure what my Opposition colleagues on the Committee about it, whether they agreed with it or not, but I absolutely reject that view.

I think the next time when the Committee deliberates on the next report, I think these are the issues they should very, very carefully address and ask the Governor himself how he is managing the current appointments and the role that he has to play as Governor of an independent institution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to make a short contribution. I want to begin by saying that the leadership of the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) is commendable.

Honourable Speaker, the RBF is tasked with looking after three main pertinent issues regarding the economy from the monetary policy side:

1. to ensure that there is price stability within the country;
2. there is external stability; and
3. to provide

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, he gave a crappy contribution and we listened. We did not utter a word. Crappy contribution!

Honourable Speaker, if one has to judge the performance of the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, then you look at how the Bank has done with respect to delivery on these three key objectives.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, despite Fiji being an open economy, we have done extremely well in terms of managing inflation levels. Some continuously argue that Government should go and reduce the prices of all those goods and services when they do not know that the Government is not importing those goods and services.

However, the Government has done extremely well in terms of ensuring that essential goods, essential services, such as provision of fuel, et cetera, are under price control through the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC).

Honourable Speaker, right now, if you find out the fuel price in Australia and New Zealand and compare it to Fiji, converting the exchange rate, you will find that our fuel price is lower, because of the excellent work done by FCCC. They are revising the template and ensuring how they do the pricing every quarter.

Honourable Speaker, on the second objective in terms of the country maintaining adequate amount of foreign reserves, you would know that as an open economy, when you want to import any particular good, no one would want Fijian currency. We have to pay using foreign currency and, therefore, Honourable Speaker, we need to hold adequate amount of foreign currency reserves. What is the adequate amount? What should be the amount that we should have at a particular point in time?

Honourable Speaker, at any particular point in time, we should hold four months of import equivalent of reserves, so that if something happens, at least, we can buy time, we have at least four months. We have got more than adequate reserves, Honourable Speaker, because of the commendable amount of work done by the RBF and the leadership of the RBF.

Honourable Speaker, the third more important role of RBF is to ensure that the financial system which is the core, the heart of any economy, functions, is stable and is able to widen and deepen. If we look at Fiji's financial system both, the banking and non-banking financial systems, they have been doing excellent work under the supervision of RBF.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at the RBF's asset portfolio, in August 2016 it was \$16.8 billion, rose to \$18.5 billion in July and \$19.4 billion by end of 2017. What does that indicate? It is

how the RBF is functioning, the leadership of RBF and performance of all the staff in different sections of the RBF.

Honourable Speaker, some from the other side of the House and outside engaged in mischief-making by starting speculation not relating....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, this mischief-making must stop. Let the experts decide what they need to do. Honourable Speaker, our RBF Governor did an excellent job in killing that speculation. It would have been disastrous for this country.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, I want these people on the other side, some of them who want to become experts in economics, they have left research long time back, they should not comment on this.

(Laughter)

Leave it to the experts, Honourable Speaker, on this note I want to congratulate the RBF's leadership and I want to support them.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, I think all of us in this House should be fortunate that we have a very stable banking system in this country, thanks to the leadership of our RBF. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to this Report put together by the Standing Committee. It is typical of the Honourable Member on the other side to dilute the good work undertaken by the RBF.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I would like to highlight some of the good things the Committee was able to highlight in their Report which was that the Reserve Bank of Fiji had met its core objectives of maintaining low inflation, maintaining an adequate level of foreign reserves and ensuring a sound financial system.

From the findings of the Report, the Committee supported the National Financial Inclusion Strategic Plan. This Plan was developed for 2016 to 2020 to improve financial competency so that citizens and businesses, particularly Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSME) could manage, borrow and use money well. And I think this is where we need to congratulate RBF for embarking in this area which is extremely crucial.

Unfortunately, when we look at the way the financial sector is growing, the public and businesses somehow or the other lack that competency. They love money, they know how to use money but unfortunately, they are not able to manage that money and invest that money in a better way, and that is a very crucial work that has been undertaken by RBF.

We have also seen that my Ministry, that is, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism (MITT) and the RBF, formed a Technical Committee and they are providing technical advice to the coordination of the MSME Policy. The training, monitoring and advisory services provided to MSME is necessary to prepare business leaders and entrepreneurs. This is an important area where RBF is assisting MSME to build financial management skills so that MSME can draw their business and contribute to job creation and economic growth.

I also want to talk about the Honourable Member highlighting the conflict of interest in relation to the Governor being the Chairperson of the Accident Compensation Commission of Fiji (ACCF). I think the Honourable Member

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Except all the others.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I want to pick on this particular one because he mentioned it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the third party insurance was previously managed by RBF. ACCF is, again, managing an insurance which is the Accident Compensation Fund. Here, the Government made the right decision by ensuring that these funds are managed independently by RBF so the Governor is chairing ACCF. What is wrong with that? That is a clear indication of independence and this is where ...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- ... the Honourable Member is just trying to tarnish the image of RBF. In fact, I was at the Business Forum where comments were made by the Governor of the RBF and the reason why he spoke on this issue was because there was speculation made by the media and he had to clear the air, and that was what he did. It was a formal gathering where he was making a presentation to the private sector. It was not like he was having one-to-one discussion with the media.

I also want to congratulate RBF for having the foresight and forward thinking towards establishing this housing facility which has been helping a lot of low-income earners to own a house at a lower interest rate, and I think these are the good works that RBF is doing and we should appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to contribute to the debate on the Annual Report of the RBF. At the outset, Honourable Speaker, let me just say that it is a delight, I

am a member of the Committee to scrutinise the books of RBF. It is a very professional organisation, one that a party that was born yesterday should not take credit for. It has been there for quite some time. RBF has this culture of delivering at a very high standard and it is a little strange that FijiFirst is trying to get all the credit for what they have accomplished for this country.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, one of the issues that I would like to touch on is regarding the Pension Saving Scheme, Honourable Speaker, where the legislation has been drafted by RBF. It has been so for quite some time. I am raising in this House that it should be done quickly and we highlighted this during the deliberations.

Honourable Speaker, the Pension Saving Scheme is not going to be threatening the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF), but something that can be set up voluntarily to help people who may wish to park their money or invest for the future. I am particularly concerned, Honourable Speaker, about the baby boomers, people who were born after the war.

As you will remember, Honourable Speaker, Fiji and the world in general is getting older. There are a lot more people in the senior bracket of life now, compared to the younger generation. We remember, Honourable Speaker, there was a time when we encouraged family planning, when was that? About 40 years ago. Now, there is concern that come a time, there will be more older people in this country than the younger. It is already happening in Japan, Europe and indeed China. The One-China Policy has now been reversed because of the fear that by 2050, China will be majority on the senior side of life, fewer young people.

So it behoves us, Honourable Speaker, to set up a scheme to also help people to save for the old age. As we know, FijiFirst cruelly reduced the pension for the people of Fiji through FNPF. Cruelly!

(Honourable Member interjects)

That is a story on its own, Honourable Speaker, and one of the most cruellest acts by the people who can no longer look after their elderly. To just push them away and say, "Whatever you're getting, I will reduce it by half or whatever the percentage was at that time." So, Honourable Speaker, that is why we have been pushing.

I personally have been pushing for this Pension Saving Scheme and if you look into the deliberations, I was the one who asked for it and I have been asking that on a number of occasions, even in this House. But somehow, it is the legislation that is in progress but it has never been brought to Parliament. Can you then, through this Report and with this dialogue, prevail upon Government to bring this legislation to Parliament and let us set it up? It is for the benefit of a vast majority of our people who need some savings with some safety, especially in their senior stage in life.

Honourable Speaker, what is also delightful about RBF is that, it is totally local. At the time that we scrutinised these Reports, Masibalavu was being made the Deputy Governor and I commended it. That is another local, gaining promotion to be number two in the hierarchy of RBF.

If you look at their report, 62.5 percent of their Senior Management are females, 37.5 percent are males, and I asked them during the deliberations, "How can other agencies of Government learn from you?" The sense of retention, the longevity of service, I think it is about 13 or 15 years average for the staff of RBF. And what they did, Honourable Speaker, is hire good people, grow them and train

them. I think many in Fiji should learn from them and I bring this to my organisation that I ran at one time, the Tourism Fiji.

I just saw in the paper yesterday that they are hiring another expatriate to be the Director of Marketing. They have hired an expatriate to be CEO while we had our own people who were running that. Some of my people who were cruelly laid off by the regime in FijiFirst, some of the brightest in this country, are now doing their PhD. I spoke to them over the weekend, they are doing their PhD in tourism and aviation but with FijiFirst, they will not be able to find a place back into where they belong.

That is why it is important that we learn from RBF, they look after their people. As I said, we are impressed. We met here and then went to their premises. Also, the whole setup in there is so professional. I am so proud of them and they are all locals and that is why, Honourable Speaker, the appreciation. This side of the House will always try and develop our people.

During the last Parliament, I said in this House, quoting what FijiFirst Party said, "With FijiFirst, if you cannot do it, I will bring someone else to come and do it". With SODELPA, if you cannot do it, we will train you to do it. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I was going to actually comment on the Report itself but there is obviously a number of issues that have been raised, and thank you for allowing me the time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because I will have to be in the CAPP (Climate Action Pacific Partnership) Conference after lunch for a period of time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a couple of comments that I would like to make. Of course, we would like to thank the RBF for the sterling work that they have done. Also, I would like to respond to some of the issues that have been raised starting off with the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, under whose Prime Ministership we lost the National Bank of Fiji and at that point in time ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... I wonder if he heeded the advice of the Governor of the Reserve Bank then about the NBF and where it was heading because he talked about whether the Governor of the RBF at the moment is giving us the right advice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it, sort of, irks them when we mention these things but these are the facts of Fijian history and economic history. He talked about Alan Greenspan and the fact that he is there, therefore, the economy of USA is doing well and, therefore, our debt to GDP ratio is perhaps not the right way. But let me tell him that the debt to GDP ratio of USA is 105.4 percent, the debt to GDP ratio of the Fijian economy is 45.9 percent. The nominal debt value of USA is US\$15.8 trillion dollars, our nominal debt value is FJ\$5.6 billion dollars which is only about maximum of US\$3 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they need to understand what they are saying. Unfortunately, it would appear that the Honourable Leader of Opposition perhaps, under some wrong advice, is again frayed into the area of the black banning of the Europeans and again, he sort of spurted out information that we had already addressed previously. This was a question raised in the last session which we fully addressed and in fact the list of countries he actually read out. I do not know whether he picked that up or the people who advised him picked it up or not. They are all small States predominantly, apart from the

United Arab Emirates (UAE) and a couple of the others. Most of them are small States, they are developing countries.

As we had highlighted previously also, it is not about tax avoidance. The issues that the European Union has had with us are about the incentives we are providing to create jobs. It is about the incentives we are providing to create economic growth. That is the reason why there has been a ban.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... Mr. Speaker, Sir, the unemployment rate in Fiji is 4.5 percent, the lowest it has been in 20 years which they do not want to hear also.

HON. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The other point also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of this black banning is that, the European Union has actually done it in a completely non-transparent manner. They want us to remove the ITC incentives we are giving and because we are saying that we are not removing that, they have put us on black ban.

China is offering a similar thing and they are not putting them on the black ban. We offer regional tax incentives for the Global Head Office or the Regional Head Office in Fiji, they said that is the problem. Singapore has a similar thing which we borrowed from them, they are not putting them on the black ban, so there is inconsistency.

The general World Trade Rules under the World Trade Organisation Rules, for example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow the transparent process of rules and those rules are applicable to everyone. In the European Union case, they have written individual letters to individual countries and we do not know what they have written to them. In fact, this matter was raised at the Pacific Developing Member Countries Meeting (PDMC) which is the Pacific Governors' Meeting at the ADB Meeting. All the Ministers of Finance from the Pacific were deeply concerned about this and, in fact, I circulated to them the *Daily Hansard* of this Parliamentary proceedings and we are currently working on a draft where all Pacific Island Countries will actually be writing.

The Cook Islands is worried about it, all of the others are. They are not tax havens; Fiji is not a tax haven! We do not allow for people to bring their money and hide it under the mattress or keep it anywhere, they have to go through the entire RBF process. We apply the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) Rules. I do not know if they even know what APRA is.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is quite unfortunate of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, who generally seems to be fairly measured in his comments, maybe there is some kind of pressure and that is why he is making all these uninformed comments. Again, he frayed into this devaluation debate which one of his Honourable Members started off, liquidity debate. Honourable Professor Prasad and his cohorts from USP are making all sorts of comments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me give you the figures.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current level of liquidity (I got the figures here and the figures speak louder than what you say, Honourable Tabuya) has been around \$350 million. It is more than sufficient to meet the demands of the private sector.

Let me point out, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the SVT Government, liquidity averaged around \$25 million while it averaged less than \$100 million under the SDL Government. Under the SVT Government, it never exceeded \$84 million in their entire term. Now they are saying \$350 million is too little.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the SDL Government, one year it peaked just above \$200 million in December 2003, before falling to \$92 million in January 2004. That, Mr. Speaker, Sir! (Pointing to an Honourable Opposition Member). He is going on the size of the economy. What he is saying, therefore, our economy has grown

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other word that he added before that, I know he is getting all in a fluster because the truth hurts, but the other reason why he has not actually highlighted it is because it has grown exponentially. That is the point. Our GDP has doubled in 10 years. In 10 years, our GDP has doubled so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as they say, "Those who cast stones and live in glasshouses should never do that."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I want to highlight also is that, Honourable Professor Prasad talks about conflict of interest. Firstly, the Sugar Cane Growers Fund is actually there to lend money to sugarcane farmers, it does not lend money to Government.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- But I did not say that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The sugarcane farmer over here, Honourable Pillay, will tell you about that.

The RBF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, does not regulate the Sugar Cane Growers Fund, FSC, nor ACCF. Let me tell him one thing (Again, they are casting stones without thinking), the former Governor of the RBF, before Barry Whiteside, Savenaca Narube, sat on the FINTEL Board and on the FSC Board too.

But, Mr. Speaker, I tell you, the next two take the cake. Listen to this, "He sat on the Board of FNPF of which he is a regulator", that is a direct conflict. The most revealed, in fact, was this, "In 2000, he was the Permanent Secretary for Finance and the Governor simultaneously at the same time." Mr. Speaker, Sir, I did not hear anyone talk about that.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- She is getting all huffy and puffy. Please, control yourself!

(Laughter)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also had conversely former CEOs of FSC on the RBF Board whilst the Governor was also on the FSC Board. The reality as about independence, as about conflict is about whether someone is regulating it or not, whether there is the declaration of conflict and whether, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we as a small economy are ensuring that we have the right people in the right places, in particular, in key economic sectors.

We have the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of Fiji and a couple of the other key people sitting also on various other Boards. The Deputy Governor of the RBF sits on the Investment Fiji Board.

Honourable Gavoka talks about building the capacity, that is what is happening. We have other people sitting on various other Boards from the RBF, they do not talk about that. Who takes one or two things and talk about expatriates?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is, the liquidity situation was blown out of proportion. In certain countries, even in the USA, you will never find a congressman or congresswoman, or a House of Representative Member, ever doing what they have been doing in this Parliament. They will never go out meaningfully and wilfully undermining their US economy. They will never do that! There are certain rules of engagement, as we have said, many years ago regarding the economy because it is in our best interest. It is in our best interest to ensure that there is confidence in the economy.

God forbid, but if, for example, they sit on this side of the House, they will have to...

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Like I said, God forbid.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they will also have to deal with the lack of confidence. As we have said, there are certain aspects of the economy that should not be made of political football. We have said this continuously because it has a direct implication on levels of investment, on investor confidence and on jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Gavoka talked about Fiji, that we have ageing population, yes. Fiji is actually not the norm, we are, in fact, the aberration. Japan, yes, has an ageing population, Australia has an ageing population, many other countries, China too with their one-child policy.

In Fiji's case, 50 percent of the population is below the age of 27 and 70 percent is below the age of 40. Yes, in 40 years' time or in 50 years' time, they will also become old. But we should also realise that when we have young population, they also appropriate a lot more. When we have a younger population, a lot more babies are coming through the system too. And the reality is, we are going to continuously provide jobs, have new economic ways of thinking, not the traditional economic aspects.

So it is critically important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as all of us as elected Members of this Parliament, that we continuously become responsible about it, not score political points, not personalise matters, please, I urge you. In fact, I implore you, please do not do that, let us stick to the fundamentals, let us look at the big picture, not score cheap political points - for the next five minutes, you will be the hero on social media or for two weeks in front of a group of people, whatever the case may be. Let us look at the long term.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to, once again, highlight third party aberration is also taking place. The banks like ANZ, that has got a largest share of the market, the financial system apart from FNPF, has come out and said that this aberration, it will consolidate itself. Let us not pick on the moment when there is an aberration. Yes, globally speaking, there are some worrying signs. There is a global economic downturn which we have to prepare for.

There is a trade war between USA and China. The USA just slapped on a 25 percent tariff on all Chinese goods coming into USA. What does that mean? If it pushes that demand for Chinese products in USA, what will happen is that, China will source less raw material.

One of the key suppliers of raw material into China is Australia. What is the largest sources of our tourism market? Australia. If the Australian economy goes down, our tourism numbers will go down too, so we are taking what we call, 'anticipatory measures'. We have to put that in place, all of us, not just this side of the House. All of us need to be able to work together to do that, not score cheap political points, Honourable Tabuya. Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are critical moments when we come together as a Parliament and as a nation, to deal with global situations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are a number of measures, and as has been highlighted by the Chairman, the RBF put in place a number measures, we are currently also talking to them in putting what we call, the second generation of Real Time Gross (RTG) clearance of cheques between the banks to become a lot more efficient.

We know some of the other Pacific Island countries are doing that to create a lot more efficiency with their banking system, so that we become lot more attractive. So it is critically important for us to ensure that the financial system, the telecommunication system and the other aspects of infrastructure all tie-in together to continuously make Fiji not just attractive for overseas investors, but to create local investor confidence and at the same time, we can provide jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Committee for their Report, and I would also like to thank the RBF, the Governor and the members of his team, the Deputy Governor and all the others for doing a wonderful job and bringing us to this stage. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. First of all, I would like to thank the Committee for their Report that is before us to debate into. I would like to make a few comments and in future, probably the Committee will have to look at it to highlight the roles of the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF).

This is something that has raised a lot of questions, Mr. Speaker. Sir. We have heard about EU blacklisting Fiji but today, there has not been any convincing explanation by RBF on why Fiji is in that blacklist.

Certain areas regarding the investor confidence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, certain sections and departments within the RBF, the Capital Markets Development Authority (CMDA) is something that is probably not been attended to by the Committee. The role it has played in terms of investment in Fiji, something that the Committee can look into in future reports on how effective is the CMDA performing its role, especially in generating investors and investor confidence in Fiji. So it can make commentaries in terms of the investment activities in Fiji and whip up the Minister for Trade in the comments that they make to ensure that there is genuine investments that are generated in Fiji.

Similarly, another area that also needs to be highlighted and brought to the fore by the Committee is the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is a department that is operating within RBF since its inception. I think Fiji has now become more reliant on overseas remittances and this is something that probably the FIU needs to branch out and set up on their own and be given appropriate resources, and not be operating within the RBF vicinity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RBF appears to be satisfied with the Government borrowings as highlighted in the Report but they are silent on the Banks restriction on lending. They are silent on the effect of ongoing reforms, they are silent on the failure of the Hundred Sands Casino and the Waila City to materialise....

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- They were still silent on the Malolo Hotel saga, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Why were they silent, when their role is the supervision of necessary attention of relevant authorities and questionable investor activities. I note that the Honourable Minister of Economy just run out because of the commentaries.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- This is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last four years, I have consistently raised my concerns on the objections that the Government economic outlook provided by RBF, like the GDP in which I have always said, in determining inclusive investor registration, no wonder they are always on the blacklist, Mr. Speaker, Sir. No wonder we are about to face possible financial meltdown.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no matter how well preserved the Government or the RBF wants to present its scenario, the reality on the ground is showing. When we drive along the common streets in Suva, probably you have also noticed it, we will see a lot of "For Sales" signs of properties that are pegged by the roadside, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A lot of "For Sales" signs, it is unprecedented. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this is also expected in all other Divisions around Fiji. What does these 'For sale' signs seem to portray, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

Again, this raises another question on the effectiveness on the role of the banking supervision, Mr. Speaker Sir. What are they doing? This is another department within the RBF. If there was something I would like to see in this Report and all other RBF Annual Reports in future, is for RBF to highlight the analysis of how the *coups* have impacted the people of Fiji in terms of home ownership, mortgage serviceability, how many have lost their properties and mortgages to the banks because of collusion and the ineffectiveness of RBF's banking supervision department, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Just for example, ANZ Bank. There were a lot of outlets prior to 2006. What has happened now? There were no comments from RBF in terms of why ANZ outlets have reduced in numbers and

locations all throughout Fiji. Those are the questions that are relevant for RBF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to report on.

The recent IMF criticism needs to be considered by RBF. Government is spending too much and every little on generating new businesses is happening. That is where RBF in its role is failing miserably. Because of political survival, RBF is wishing to be on the good side of Government and is now willing to look the other way and compromise its independence. The business and ordinary people will suffer when all comes crashing down sooner or later, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Some years back when the military and the Honourable Bainimarama took over Government, they brought in entities, for example, MWH, they brought in the People's Charter and people, such as John Prasad, Tony Fullman and not forgetting Francis Narayan to run our Ministry of Economy, Water Authority of Fiji and the Fiji Trades and Investment Bureau.

We were told Fiji was corrupt. Now, where are all these people? And these entities, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what have they done to Fiji, falling deeper into the hole?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot look the other way, like RBF, every *coup* has committed stupid and immeasurable mistakes. It is time to stop, and the RBF has to come clean on its acts and be an independent financially prudent institution that they should be. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. The last speaker on this agenda Item, Honourable Minister Vuniwaqa, you have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to make a short contribution to the Report before the House and to commend the RBF for the work that they do, in particular in relation to the Financial Inclusion Strategic Plan, which focuses on seven key areas, including the empowerment of women and people living with disabilities.

The Committee has noted the challenges in relation to financial literacy in Fiji, and I wish to also commend the work of the RBF and Financial Institutions in Fiji, in the various programmes and initiatives aimed at enhancing financial literacy. This initiatives must continue to be moved strongly under the Financial Inclusion Strategic Plan.

The population of women, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Fiji is almost 50 percent of the total population and we have over 113,000 Fijians living with disabilities in accordance with our last Census. Globally, fewer than 1 percent of the clients of Microfinance Institutions and Financial Institutions dedicated to serving the worlds financially excluded people are persons with disabilities. A vision of full financial inclusion, challenges the financial services sector to address the financial needs of our countries poor, the financial needs of women, and people with disabilities.

According to the Centre of Financial Inclusion, while persons living with disabilities make up 15 percent of the developing world's population, it is estimated that they represent only 0.5 percent of current microfinance clients and this could be the same for us in this country.

Whilst some persons living with disabilities have challenges so severe that economic participation is not feasible and ill-advised, the vast majority - 80 percent to 85 percent, have the capacity to utilise and benefit from financial services.

Secondly, in order to overcome the barriers faced by women to access and use financial services, the RBF must work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to identify the crosscutting issues that are needed to support women's financial inclusion, implement measures to close the gender

gap by supporting the inclusion of the financially excluded and unbanked women, and support the development of women-led businesses through the access to and use of financial services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these recommendations are framed under the understanding that social norms constrain women's capacity to access and meaningfully use financial services. For financial inclusion to have an impact on women's economic empowerment, livelihoods and broader welfare effects, these social norms need to be taken into account and acted upon.

While social norms change its complex, financial services and products, design and roll out can have a huge positive role to play. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Minister. Honourable Chairman, you have the Right of Reply.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. First of all, I would like to thank the Governor of RBF and his team for their excellent work. Few surprising suggestions came and to my surprise, Honourable Professor Prasad has acknowledged that the economy has grown. If the liquidity figure under the SDL Government cannot be compared, then why does he always compare debt to GDP ratio of previous Governments?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, this Report is a bi-partisan Report and Honourable Members have signed. His former colleague, the Honourable Prem Singh, a very Honourable Member who was a former leader of that party, had signed but he has also challenged his decision; very shameful to this House.

I thank all the Honourable Members who have contributed towards this bipartisan Report and I would like to thank Honourable Members for their contribution. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

On that note Honourable Members, we will now break for lunch and resume at 2.30 p.m., the normal time.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.42 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.31 p.m.

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

REVIEW REPORT - FIJI NATIONAL PROVIDENT FUND 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Fiji National Provident Fund 2017 Annual Report which was tabled on 15th May, 2018.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Fiji National Provident Fund is a defined contribution fund that provides superannuation services to its members. The operations of the Fund is guided by the FNPF Act 2011. As such, FNPF is mandated by law to collect compulsory contributions from employees and employers towards the retirement savings of all workers in Fiji. Furthermore, FNPF has evolved over the years into one of our nation's important institutions and this is not only crucial in securing the future of our ordinary Fijians but as a central pillar of our economy and the prosperity on which every member of the Fund depends on during their time of need.

The assessment made to the FNPF 2017 Annual Report was done in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) of Parliament and the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Jiaoji Koroi was called to present the Fund's 2017 annual performance on 28th March 2018.

The Committee noted that FNPF had undertaken the reforms to address the following issues;

- to ensure the long term sustainability of the Fund;
- scheme design was not the best practice;
- improve governance and transparency;
- there was no meaningful retirement income; and
- poor services delivery.

The financial and the operational results of FNPF demonstrated the commitment of its people to implement key strategies to ensure that it continues to protect the long term interest of its members.

The Fund's recruitment and selection process complies with the Employment Relations Act 2007 and as such FNPF's internal Recruitment and Selection Policy aims to ensure that the Fund selects the most suitable candidate for the job on the basis of merit and abilities, and no candidate was unfairly treated. Appointment is competency-based and right job fit.

The Committee commends the overall performance of the Fund in 2017. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson of the Social Affairs Committee.

Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate if any Member wishes to take the floor. Honourable Anare Jale, you have the floor.

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir for allowing me to contribute to the debate on the Committee's Report for 2017. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Committee that had produced the Report, the Honourable Viam Pillay and his team for the report that they have tabled for discussion today.

The Fiji National Provident Fund as you understand Mr. Speaker Sir was the brain child of the Labour Advisory Board. The Labour Advisory Board is a tripartite body established under the Labour Laws to advise the Minister on matters affecting employment in Fiji.

Fiji ratified the ILO Convention 144 on tripartite consultation some years ago. This ILO Convention promotes tripartism on consultation that deal with and promote employment and industrial relation matters in Fiji. The intention of this Convention was to try to build a good relationship between employers, workers and the Government in Fiji. There were some notable tripartite bodies that existed at that time, and they are the:

1. Labour Advisory Board;
2. Tripartite Forum;
3. Fiji National Provident Fund; and
4. Fiji National Training Council.

All tripartite and it was meant for these people to come together to discuss and recommend matters concerning the relationship of the Government, the workers and also the employers in Fiji. They were meant for that purpose, Mr. Speaker, I am not too sure of the situation at this time but I think it is very critical for Fiji that we have tripartite bodies in Fiji. This is where we augur the relationship of three important stakeholders in Fiji to work together for the common good of this country.

The Fiji National Provident Fund was established in 1966 as you understand. Mr. Speaker Sir, some of us in this House were not born at that time. The board is tripartite in nature. In 2011, the Fiji National Provident Fund Act was changed, 45 years from the time the first Act was established. Here in this Act they changed the composition on how the appointments of the members of the Board of FNPF were appointed by the Minister. In the past, representatives of employers and also represented workers sit in FNPF and they deliberate on matters concerning FNPF and the benefit of FNPF to its members. That law has changed it, giving the power of appointment to the Minister of Economy solely to make decisions.

Mr. Speaker, in 2005 under this tripartite body, Fiji was able to amass the assets of FNPF to the tune of \$1 billion. We entered \$1 billion assets for FNPF in 2005 and I commend those people who were leading FNPF at that time for their foresightedness in dealings and upholding the intention of provident fund which was to provide for people that have reached retirement age.

We have seen it survived for long and I think it is important in this House that we need to acknowledge the contribution of some people to FNPF and what it is today. People who have worked out and build on the foundation that these people have created for FNPF in Fiji, and I would like to name some of them, Mr. Speaker, Sir: Donald Cyril Aidney, Ken Roberts, Himmat Lodhia, Mahendra Tappoo, Mr. Lionel Yee, Mr. Narube, the late Ratu Jone Kubuabola, the late Tevita Banuve, James Raman and the late Isimeli Volavola (there are so many to name). I think we should be grateful to the hard work and foresightedness of these people who built the foundation of FNPF to what it is now. I would also like to mention here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there have been a lot of people who sacrificed their lives and sweated for what FNPF is today.

The coverage of FNPF, as we understand, started off with government employees. It was limited when it started in 1960s. Later on in years, after 1970, the coverage had been extended to also

cover people who worked in copra estates, people who work in cooperative shops, licensed teachers in schools around Fiji. People have to go out to promote the FNPF and educate the people about FNPF. The enforcement of FNPF at that time was by the Department in the Ministry of Labour that is responsible for enforcing the FNPF law and also to go out to the people to explain to them the FNPF and its benefit.

At the beginning, it was very difficult for people to agree to some deduction from their pay. They did not know what FNPF was going to be, but I do understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this time, FNPF is so popular, people know about the FNPF Benefit Scheme and I would to thank the people, Labour Inspectors, who did their work at that time.

I was one of the Labour Inspectors that sailed to Lomaiviti some years ago in 1972. The sea was rough, our engineer fell overboard and was lost, the body was not recovered. The FNPF has reached 50 years in 2016. This type of people are the ones that should have been sighted and thanked for the sacrifice that they gave to FNPF.

I was asked to contribute to an article that FNPF management put together to commemorate 50 years of the life of the FNPF. I declined to do that, Mr. Speaker. The reason is this, when the *coup* happened in 2006, I was the Chairman of the FNPF. My Board was removed forcibly. We were branded as “criminals” because we used then misused the money of FNPF, we misused the members’ fund, that was the reason why we were put out with our role and appointment as members of the FNPF Board.

What the government did at that time was to commission an audit. An auditor from Australia came, did the audit of FNPF and that Audit Report has not been publicised, and it is important for that Report, Honourable Speaker, to be publicised to clear my name as the Chair of that Board and also for the members of the Board who were there with me. I think it is important that the members of the FNPF should know the truth about FNPF at that time, whether my Board was there for the interest or whether we are there for our own interest.

The composition of the FNPF Board has been taken up in the Report. There is a recommendation that we need to look back at what was there in the past, and I totally agree and support that thinking.

As you understand, Mr. Speaker, we have \$49 million a month as members’ contribution to FNPF. This money comes from the wages and salaries of workers and also money that is topped up by employers in Fiji. That is the very reason why these important stakeholders need to have a say on how FNPF Fund is used in Fiji. We cannot ignore them taking into consideration what is being done and I call on the authorities in Fiji, please, think again, you are not getting the support of employers and workers in Fiji on how you utilise their money.

It is important that these stakeholders know about how their money is being spent and contribute and agree to it. There is a lot of talk about how money is being used. Is it safe to invest in some of the investments that the current Board is using? I am not too sure about that.

The Vanuatu and Solomon Island Workers Fund collapsed in the early 1970s, it became bankrupt. When reports were compiled as to the reason of this downfall and the problem about these two Workers’ Funds, the main reason that came out in the report was the Government’s interference. This is coming up again right here in Fiji. We have to think about the members of the FNPF and the sacrifice that they have given to invest into FNPF for their retirement. We need to have the right people to manage FNPF. We cannot allow FNPF to slip to a situation like Vanuatu and Solomon Islands where they collapsed because of Government interference.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am calling on Government now, please, think again. Get the workers' and employers' representatives to come and be part of the decision-making in respect of the money that comes from their own toil and not from a group of people who are disassociated and have nothing to do with FNPF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 73 percent of FNPF members have contribution that are below \$10,000. In the FNPF Annual Report 2018, it said that FNPF has a membership of 429,936 then; so 73 percent of 429,936 members is 313,853 members, so that is the situation right now.

The concerning part, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the FNPF take-out. There is a term that the FNPF Board uses in their reporting, they say "FNPF pension take-up". What has been the FNPF pension take-up all these years?

For the 2018 Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to refer to it because it is the newer Report, it says that only 5.1 percent of the people who are entitled to pension opt to take pension, otherwise they opt to take their money out, 5.1 percent or 5,644 people who were entitled to take their pension in 2018, only 288 of them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, opted to get pension. That is a big risk and a big concern for us. The FNPF was set up to provide funding for people who have invested in FNPF during their retirement age.

We have a situation here where more people are opting to take all their money and leave rather than collecting pension from FNPF which was the initial intention of FNPF, we had to think hard about this. I am asking, why are the people leaving? I think one of the main reasons is that, they do not have faith in FNPF anymore.

FNPF entered into an agreement with most of us here for pensions, some of us who agreed had opted for pension around 2004 and 2005, but I think in 2012, this Board decided to change that contract unilaterally, it was something that it was not going to get. The pension that was signed at that time was agreed to ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- To save the Fund.

HON. A. JALE.- ... but this one here is never negotiated, they put a law in place where they reduced almost in half what some people were receiving as pension from FNPF.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Listen.

HON. A. JALE.- So what is the situation now?

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. A. JALE.- People do not have faith in FNPF anymore.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. JALE.- So we need to look at a solution to this.

I am asking the Government, Honourable Speaker, that they should seriously look at having compulsory pension under FNPF because otherwise the situation will continue, maybe next year, it is going to bolt to 4 percent of those who have the right of FNPF pension take-up. So I am asking

Government, please, relook at the situation now. The intent of FNPF has been lost, how can we substitute it and I am recommending to the Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us look at compulsory pension for people otherwise those people who have lost their money will be a burden to Government through the social net. Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I just rise to make my contribution to the debate on the Fiji National Provident Fund 2017 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, there is little doubt that the Fiji National Provident Fund has been, is and will continue to be the largest financial institution in the country, unsurpassed and unmatched by any commercial bank or institution in terms of liquidity. This is because of the compulsory contributions from employers and employees who are members.

Now, FNPF has introduced the scheme to attract more membership and therefore more cash by encouraging children as young as 6 years old to join the Fund. No doubt, Mr. Speaker, this has been done with good intentions; to encourage and inculcate a culture of savings given the massive amounts of withdrawals by members instead of taking the retirement package option.

But, firstly, we would be interested to know the success rate of this new scheme of encouraging children to be members of the Fund because we know from reality that the majority of parents find it extremely difficult to save money on the face of the rising of cost of living, the struggle to make ends meet as our consumption-driven economy continues grinding to a slow but sure decline. So this policy is likely to benefit children of the upper class or rich who really do not need FNPF to save for their children anyway unless statistics are provided as to how many children of our ordinary citizens have become members, questions will continue to remain about this scheme.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, as the Report highlights, the vast majority of members who reach the retirement age of 55 opt to withdraw their savings. There is no return sufficient to support them in their retirement and as you have heard, Mr. Speaker, almost 9 percent of pension annually is just not enough to sustain them.

Mr. Speaker, this is because as the Report states, 73 percent of members do not have enough funds to sustain their livelihood after retirement and this is because 73 percent of members do not earn decent wages, simply not enough of a living wage, let alone earn enough to a mass savings. This issue has not been addressed by the FNPF Board or by this Government and the review done by Government when it was a military regime, a slashed pensions in gross breach of their contractual obligations. And the Decree later enacted without reaching the floor of the Parliament for ratification prevented pensioners from seeking redress from the Courts. And then we have a Board that is not tripartite, that is comprising of employers, employees and Government. We have a Board appointed by the Government, and Government justifies this on the basis that FNPF is a profitable institution paying dividends and interest to members each year.

But this is not acceptable, Mr. Speaker, FNPF funds are workers money. They have a right to determine its usage and they have been made voiceless. It is time that FNPF relooks at the issue of the meagre savings of over 70 percent of its members, whose balances will not sustain them in their retirement. One way perhaps, of increasing the balance is to reintroduce a Medical Scheme which was derailed following the *coup* of December 2006.

The Scheme involved 1 percent of the contributions going towards a medical fund of each member to be used for medical treatment in accordance with the FNPF Policy. If the fund for medical treatment is not used, it is then credited to the member's General Account, increasing his or her balance.

Mr. Speaker, any policy of Government must take cognisance of this special social obligations and Government must change legislation to facilitate this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I thank you, Honourable Speaker, and I raise to make contribution in regards to the recommendations that are mentioned in the Report, in particular Recommendation No. 3, and also linking that to Recommendation No. 2 and No. 4.

Recommendation No. 3, Honourable Speaker, specifically highlights the need for FNPF to address the low balances of the majority of FNPF members. And to enlighten us on that, there are about 418 members, according to the 2017 Report. And out of this 73 percent which is about 305,000, are sitting on balances that is \$10,000 and below, and that leaves a balance of \$113,000.

Also, Honourable Speaker, we will ask, what are the reasons for this low balances? According to the FNPF presentation, they had sighted one reason as low wages. And other reasons that I would like to include is the early retirement age of 55 years, which has taken off a good number of our members of active employment.

Another reason was the redundancy that was carried out by the Government in regards to the PWD workers, in regards to the recent Water Authority of Fiji workers, and there are other redundancy packages that have been offered, taking people out of active employment, therefore, out of being members of improving their membership or their contribution to FNPF.

Honourable Speaker, having said that, that we can say is a clear reflection on the high number of members sitting on 305,000 with \$10,000 and below contribution. That, in my view, Honourable Speaker, is a clear reflection of the high unemployment in Fiji. Just this morning, we heard from the Honourable Attorney-General who is not in the House, that we have investor confidence. If, indeed, there was investor confidence in Fiji, then business will be growing and this will create employment.

With employment, there will be more people contributing to FNPF, so Honourable Speaker, the very high number of FNPF members with low contributions, also suggest that a lot of our people in Fiji depend on social welfare because their FNPF is just not enough to sustain them. This is not due to, as we have heard, because they cannot save their money, no! It is not because of that, but the main reason of that is the lack of employment opportunities whereby people could be employed and, therefore, can contribute to their FNPF.

Honourable Speaker, that is one of the biggest challenge highlighted by FNPF, of having a very high number sitting on savings of \$10,000 and below. And according to their reform strategies, that is one of the reform strategies that they would like to address and that was also sitting on Recommendation No. 3.

But from a holistic perspective, Honourable Speaker, FNPF is not capable of having to raise the contributions of its members. Why is that? Because they do not generate employment and that is the Government's responsibility. And that is why, Honourable Speaker, FNPF also in their presentation highlighted the need for FNPF to work with Government because it is not within FNPF capacity to

generate employment, that is the Government's responsibility and that is where Honourable Speaker, the Government has failed miserably.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I am not saying that. I am saying that based on the 305,000 FNPF members with \$10,000 contributions and less. If, indeed, the Government is concerned about the workers or the FNPF contributors, then it should be generating more employment.

And we ask ourselves what kind of futuristic Fiji are we looking at, bearing in mind the FNPF vision is securing your future? How can FNPF secure the workers' future in this country when the majority of the FNPF contribution is sitting on \$10,000 and below?

Also, Honourable Speaker, if you go through the Report, FNPF has highlighted that, that is their number one challenge having to decrease the huge number sitting on that \$10,000 contribution and below. If you look at their achievements in regards to the reforms that have been undertaken, they have left that out because it is not within their capability to be able to do anything about it.

Honourable Speaker, if the Government is going to carry on the rate it is going, what kind of Fiji are we going to have in future?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON S.V. RADRODRO.- With that high number sitting on \$10,000 contributions and below, a lot of people are going to be dependent on social welfare, and the current rate we are going with our social welfare, it is starting to create a dependency syndrome with regards to our people depending on Government assistance. What the Government should be doing is creating employment so that people are empowered to be able to look after themselves at the end of their employment, so that they are able to sustain themselves in their retirement.

Therefore, Honourable Speaker, while FNPF is looking at trying to address the long term sustainability of FNPF, it is quite a bit challenge because FNPF is not in a capacity to do that but the Government of the day (FijiFirst Government) has failed to create employment opportunities for the people of Fiji and at the same time, is laying off people who are already in employment, just like the recent Water Authority of Fiji workers and they will add on to those who are already being unemployed.

Therefore, Honourable Speaker, if there is anything the Government can do, it must look at creating employment opportunities. And as the saying goes,

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON S.V. RADRODRO.-... "If you do not see any cranes or any construction, there is hardly any employment opportunities in the country." Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, unfortunately, Honourable Members on the other side do not undertake any solid financial analysis on issues that they wish to speak on. I will just give you a simple example.

Honourable Jale mentioned about low pension rate and said that members were suddenly given a new contract, that their pension rates will come down from 25 percent to eight percent or so. Honourable Speaker, you know very well, with our pension rate of 25 percent, your savings will only last for four years. You know that our life expectancy is higher than 59 years. We retire at 55, you use up your savings with a pension rate of 25 percent by 59, whose money will you be taking up?

Honourable Speaker, they are least bothered about sustainability of the Fund and what will happen to the young children who will come up later on to ask for pension money but they only think about themselves.

Honourable Speaker, nowhere in the world, you will find a superannuation, social security pension rate to be 25 percent. Absolutely not! No nowhere because it is unsustainable.

Honourable Speaker, ask a Class eight student, he will calculate that. Ask a Class five student ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- ... he does not understand. Honourable Speaker, it was this Interim Government that had the guts to take the bull by the horns.

(Applause)

... and do the necessary so that our superannuation institution, the only superannuation institution in this country, will be financially stable and sustainable.

Honourable Speaker, they do not read. Look at what is happening to superannuation funds throughout the world. A number of them have been bailed out because of incorrect pension rate and also mismanagement of funds. The Interim Government led by the Honourable Prime Minister had that to do, and did the right thing to fix the pension fund.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Salote Radrodoro went on and on and on about low savings rate in pensions saying, because we need to generate more employment. *Areh!* They were employed, that is why they had their FNPF contribution.

(Laughter)

If they were not employed, how would they have had their FNPF contributions?

(Honourable Member interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Now, she is saying low wages. What she should have said is that, we should look at how we can raise their wages and salaries so that their amount of deduction, 10 percent, would be higher.

Yes, that is what the Government had done. Firstly, we relooked at wages and salaries and secondly, in the long run, we need to upskill them, give them a qualification and increase their earning capacity. Look at what we are doing! Tertiary Education Loans Scheme (TELS), Toppers, Technical Colleges, et cetera, to upskill our children, make them improve their earning capacity.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Again, they do not read papers.

Look at the Honourable Minister for Education, who went to the graduation ceremony of students in Technical Colleges. Look at what the students who graduated out of those Colleges said, they never thought that they would get a qualification which would empower them to improve their earning capacity. You do not read!

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, what the Honourable Members on the other side should do is to thank the Honourable Prime Minister and the Interim Government then for fixing the superannuation that this Report shows, how sustainable the Fund is now. Thank you.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a term that I have read in my youth which is called hogwash. Absolute hogwash! Everyone in this country knows, what has happened in this country. Everyone knew in this country that if we had not done the reforms to FNPF, FNPF would be no more. So all these arguments that I am hearing are absolute hogwash. That is what we are listening to.

We know in the structure of any developing country, in your labour force, we have in this labour force in our country about only 30 percent, one-third is in the formal sector, the rest is in the informal sector. There are a lot of countries in the world where the percentages are much different, where you can have up to 90 percent of your workforce in the informal sector and 10 percent in the formal sector.

We know the investment that this Government has been putting into education to have a skilled workforce. Everyone has seen the reforms. Now, you have a child can go to school and no one is going to stop them from going to school. Why? Because we know that if we have a well skilled, knowledgeable workforce, it attracts investment. A good workforce attracts investment and that is what this Government has been doing, focusing on developing a good workforce. We have put in place all the infrastructure to do that.

The Higher Education Commission, the investment into the universities, the technical colleges, all that whole system is going through it because this Government believes....

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hogwash!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Well, you regard it as hogwash if you cannot see the big picture.

What I am trying to say is that in terms of what the Government has been doing for the past four years, it has been investing and investment. What is the proof of the pudding? The proof of the pudding is your indicator. What is a chief indicator? Level of unemployment is the lowest it has ever been in 20 years.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Lowest it has been, proven figures, not something pulled out of the air or some sort of imagination; facts and data, unprecedented level of unemployment.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Now, we talk about the fact. There is a lot of talk here about the fact that so many people have less than \$10,000. Why do they have less than \$10,000?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Why? Because of the policies that were in place until we changed the Board.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Once you change the board, you have a new group of people coming into the force, they make sure that they put in policies. I see under Recommendation 3, it says here in the FNPF's response: "One of the first steps undertaken during the reforms was to reduce the grounds of pre-retirement withdraws from 23 to just 5." That took gumption, I can use another word starting with 'b', but I would not use it. That took gumption and it required a Board that knew why it was there. It required a group of people who were fit-and-proper. I have actually....

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Cosmetic changes.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Cosmetic change, that was the reason because you had wrong policies over a long period of time because of that. A lot of withdrawals were taking place, Mr. Speaker Sir, and as a result, people had less in their accounts when they retired. So, all of these things led to that particular development. It was only when the Board was changed and the new policies came in, the reforms came in, that these things began to be addressed. I noticed the point that was made by the CEO, he says that it is going to take around 15 years or 20 years before the full impact of the reforms are felt. So, everything is built over time, over time you will see a gradual reversal.

I was looking at some of the charts that we have here, charts from page 21, Mr. Speaker. Look at all of those graphs they are point upwards, net assets, total assets going up, net surplus going up, those graphs are not going up and down, they are all going up. Over the page, look at this particular graph here. Look at these graphs. Can you read graphs? Do you understand graphs?

(Laughter)

Contributions and withdrawals; contributions going up, withdrawals went up and down. This is good governance. Contributions going up, this one's going down. Key Performance Indicator, look at the shape of that graph. The data that proves our point is shown in the graph that is before us.

So this is my point, under these reforms, FNPF is becoming a more solid institute, it is going to deliver the kind of things that we need for the people of this country. So, all the things that I have heard so far, absolute hogwash, Mr. Speaker Sir.

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

HON. V.R GAVOKA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. I also wish to contribute to the debate on the FNPF Annual Report and I would like to start off by the observation by my colleague the Honourable Salote Radrodro in the Report where she asked about the appointment of the board members and where she queried as to why the people who represented the workers were not represented in the Board. My colleague, Honourable Anare Jale, touched on the same issue.

Honourable Speaker, it is their money and they have always been part of this. But what we have today, with the change, with the amendment in 2011 by Decree, might I add, no consultation with the people of Fiji, someone decide that this is the way it is going to be with FNPF and has now become Acts.

HON. MEMBER.- Experts.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Experts.

Let me just look at this expert angle, Honourable Speaker. The Chairman of FNPF, an expat is also a Chairman of FRCS, Chairman of Biosecurity, Chairman of ATH, Chairman of Vodafone and Chairman of Fintel. This must be a superman. He controls companies that are worth billions and billions of dollars. This must be the biggest concentration of assets in the country under one man; the superman.

We hear about experts and inclusiveness on the other side of the House. There is one person who chairs all these boards, Honourable Speaker, and he happens to be the Chief Executive who owns a major newspaper in this country who benefits from most of the Government's advertisement in this country. You know what they say, you know how balanced they are in the way they report, that is pro-FijiFirst.

The Honourable Anare Jale is saying the provident funds in some of the neighbouring islands collapsed because of Government interference.

Government interference is that, they have a Chairperson, who is benefitting from Government, like the newspaper and the relationship with other boards. This is dangerous, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, the superman here, I suppose would not need much consultation to make up his mind about anything. I am worried about the investment in Fiji Airways, the scale of the members' money being spent on Fiji Airways.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It not an investment, it is only a loan.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Loans have to be paid off, Honourable Speaker, if you do not pay it off, it is written-off.

If I were in FNPF, I would insist before I lend money to Fiji Airways to bring back Qantas into the board for Fiji Airways. Qantas owes 46 percent of the share and to make sure that your loan is safe, people with resources are part of the company you are lending money to. It is Banking 101. You looked at who is behind him before you lend money to him.

Qantas right now, Honourable Speaker, we are having problems with the MAX 8 aircrafts. If Qantas had been part of Fiji Airways, they would have helped in securing the equipment to replace the MAX 8. We are now securing equipment from America and one of the planes had a problem about a week or two ago.

So, this is where this Government pushes everything a side, everyone away because they happen to be part of Alliance, part of NFP, part of SDL and part of SVT and only work with their own kind, who are now becoming superman and who have become emperors in their own way. They even whisper in this country that this gentleman here is more powerful than FijiFirst. They do not even know what to do with him and he is so powerful, this gentleman here. He has put members' funds in buying two properties in Denarau, Nadi, at risk.

I am so concerned, I asked the Honourable Minister for Tourism in writing on the state of infrastructure in Denarau. Not long ago the sewer lines burst in Denarau, reported by *Fiji Sun*. There are rumblings in there, Honourable Speaker, that there can be some issues in Denarau on some of these infrastructural matters. Had it been for a proper Board, there would have been more caution in the way they lend money and not dependent on one powerful person to decide what they want to do with the members funds.

Honourable Speaker, with this talk of professionalism and being a better organisation, if they were so good, how come people went to Hong Kong about two to three years ago to watch Sevens and thanked FNPF because they collected funds from FNPF designed for the victims of *Cyclone Winston*. If they were so good, how could they allow that to happen? Because, Honourable Speaker, it is all political interference because FijiFirst want the people to feel good. You can go to Hong Kong on your money, again because they wanted to win the election and that Honourable Speaker, is a danger that we are highlighting today.

I am sure if you are listening today, that was quite enlightening, the background to FNPF that Honourable Jale had shared with us.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I would ask them a question.

(Laughter)

How many of you would understand about the background behind FNPF? I know the FijiFirst people, their history goes back to 6th December, 2006; that is all. The day they took over Government. Anything beyond that, they do not know. They talk about schooling, education, the Honourable Usamate with his hogwash statement talked about education.

Honourable Speaker, the hallmark of FijiFirst in education is TELS. SODELPA wanted it to be abolished. Today in America, Honourable Speaker, Americans in their 70s are still paying off their student loans. That is why SODELPA has said, "get rid of TELS, we do not want our people to be paying off their loans when they are in their 60s and 70s."

Honourable Speaker, we are worried about FNPF. We thank the Committee for highlighting some major issues, but we hope that in the not too distant future, some reasonable people will take over, set up FNPF and will re-engineer it to be what it was from day one. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Seruiratu you have the floor and then the Honourable Attorney-General. Those are the last two speakers.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, can we have the Honourable Attorney- General first because he has got another session with CAPP, then after that than I.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! I did not want to do it to be a family thing. That is why I wanted someone in between. Honourable Attorney-General, I will give you the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Seruiratu for giving me his time, I have to go to CAPP. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to bring some kind of intelligent debate to this current meanderings by the Opposition now and let me just focus on some of the facts.

Since the reforms, these documents are available publicly. In the 1980s, 1990s and in 2000, there were various reports including from the World Bank and various actuarial studies were done that showed that the current rate of pension payouts at that point in time would have meant that the FNPF funds would have actually finished round about by 2054.

So in other words, the young people today who are members of FNPF, who are employed, by the time they would have retired, there would have been no money for them, even though they would have contributed 30 years to 40 years of their employment life. That is a fact.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Again I urge the Honourable Members, I know Honourable Leawere is not very used to reading stuff, but he needs to go and read, given his teaching background, and you will see that these reports actually will testify exactly to what I am saying.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fund's portfolio is actually diversified and continues to grow.

In the last four years, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fund has credited over \$1 billion in interest to its members as a result of its prudent investment decisions.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- \$1 billion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is truly unprecedented. Unfortunately, I came in a bit late into Honourable Salote Radrodoro's statement, some may say it was fortunate that I was not there from the beginning but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, she did talk about those people who have less than \$10,000 in their FNPF Accounts. She is true, there are a lot of people who have less than \$10,000 and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a creation of the system that we had in place.

Before the reforms, those people who had very low amounts, they were actually getting on a monthly basis: \$7, \$10, \$15, they do not highlight that point.

After the reforms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, irrespective of how much they have contributed, even though they contributed less, no one gets any less than \$100 a month.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No one gets less than \$100, they do not highlight that point.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They do not highlight that point. When we come to this debate, when we look at these Reports, we must come with clean hands. We are here as Parliament, and I have said this before, let us debate this issue, talking through facts, through the truth. If we want to have some intellectual discussion about improving something, let us be armed with the facts and the truth, and that is the fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir, also is that there is a lot of contradictory remarks that have been made from the other side. There were comments and again we have seen the personalisation of issues. We have had Mr. Ajith Kodagoda being singled out, that is his name, that is the person they call “Superman”, but the FNPF Board, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not Ajith Kodagoda only, and by the way Ajith Kodagoda has not picked a single cent of Board fees, unlike previously, people would sit and pick up Board fees even if they sat in the Sub-Committees.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other members of the Board that constitutes the FNPF Board, there is not only one person, and the decision cannot be made by only one person, you get Board majority at the very least. I do not know if they know how Boards work, that is how Boards do work. They also have
....

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Well, you let yourself into it

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You let yourself into it by saying that.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Come on.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You come on and I am coming on, and the fact of the matter is
....

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The fact of the matter is, one person does not make the decision in the Board. Boards do not work that way.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, now we are talking about political parties.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You see, this is the level of intellectual input from the other side.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They cannot stick to the issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the issue here is this, there have been issues raised about, “This is the workers’ money. Why are the workers’ representatives not appointed?” Honourable Anare Jale was on the Board of FNPF previously. Previously, if people do not know, you have two representatives from the trade unions, two representatives from the employer organisations, two representatives from the Government. What were their level of capacity in managing a \$4 billion Fund? In most cases, zero.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- In most cases zero. Mr Speaker, Sir...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can tell you, before the Funds, Honourable Anare Jale would know about this, there was this Natadola InterContinental Project. They form the partnership with the man who was wanted offshore and he was bankrupt, he was being flown from Nadi in a helicopter to come to Natadola every time, guess paid by who? The members of FNPF were paying for it. If the cost were allowed to accumulate the way they were heading, the total cost billed for InterContinental would be over \$1 billion.

The reforms and the Board, people like Ajith Kodagoda reined it in, brought it down so you can get a good rate of return for investment. They talked about localisation, et cetera, and now they are lamenting the fact that FNPF has bought Sheraton and Western properties. This is a good thing, this is a Fijian company, a Fijian institution that has bought these properties.

The management company is obviously still buying that hotel but this is a good thing. Yes, of course, they are sewage issues which have nothing to do with the fact that FNPF bought the property, it is to do with Denarau Corporation Limited. They are two separate issues, why are we mixing it up, why all this obfuscation? Just to score some cheap political points.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, we have been told, “Oh, if Qantas was on Board then the Max 8 would have got the equipment.” Come on, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is an insult to our intelligence.

The Max 8 have been grounded throughout the world, not because Qantas is not sitting on the Fiji Airways Board and no one is stopping Qantas from sitting on the Board. They themselves left to earn the share price of their value shot through the roof, when they were there it was a blow.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition would know what happen to Air Pacific in those days and how Fiji then went cap in hand to Qantas and said, “Can you, please, contribute funds, because we have not been running the Company properly?” Their shareholding was only about 14 to 15 percent, today it is about nearly 48 percent and they have veto rights. Our national carrier had veto rights by a foreign company, that was another carrier.

Today, we have a situation where Qantas is the shareholder of Fiji Airways, they started flying their own aircrafts and they are cannibalising. It is probably in breach of the FCCC requirements in Fiji and also in Australia and investigation has been carried out in that respect. So where is the loyalty? It is the loyalty to Qantas, the loyalty to Fiji Airways.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, if the Honourable Member knew about it, the interest rate that FNPF got was a windfall, they provided funding for the purchase of the A330s.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality again is that, all sorts of things have been brought in, “Oh, about the American people who are still paying their loans at the age of 70.” What has this got to do with FNPF, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

The reality about TELS is (and they do not say this again and again), we need an element of truth to this debate. The American students when they take out loans, they are paying market interest rates.

In Fiji, under TELS, if you come from a poor family, you do not pay any interest then 0.5 percent, then 1 percent and maximum 2 percent. No, Bank gives an interest rate of 2 percent and we have an accelerated repayment system. If you pay your loan 50 percent, within a required period of time, we write-off the other 50 percent, we write-off the other 25 percent, we write-off the other 10 percent. We announced this in the Budget, why is this not being talked about? Why are we coming to Parliament without clean hands? It is a moral issue, there is moral bankruptcy on their part, because these are national matters we need to discuss in a truthful and transparent manner. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to say also that the FNPF reforms have been actually recognised internationally. I mean this is not some joke.

FNPF holds close to 35 percent of our financial deposits of cash in this country. It is not a joke to run it down and snug it all the time. If the reforms were a joke, why has the International Social Security Association given FNPF an international award for reforming the Pension Scheme?

FijiFirst does not run this International Awards Scheme. This international organisation is independent to give it under reform. It really irks me that here we have responsible members of our society because we are elected by them, that for cheap political points, we are running down this key financial institution. It is very poor.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It really is because we are doing enormous disservice to our own people, it is not good. I highlighted earlier on today that we have a global downturn in world economy. It will affect our trading partners, it will eventually snowball in to us.

We need to be all strong and united in respect of protecting our economy, boost up the confidence and work together to do that, because the strength of the economy is not restricted nor are the upturns and the downturns restricted to the term of the Government. It does not recognise Governmental terms, it goes over and beyond Governmental terms. What the Honourable Leader of the Opposition did when he was Prime Minister, will have an impact and did have an impact to what the economy is like now. What we do now and how we view the economy now will have an impact on future generations: 10 years, 15 years and 20 years down the track. That is how economies work, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and they need to understand that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you know, unemployment was talked about and Honourable Minister Usamate and a number of Honourable Members have also addressed that. They brought in WAF, everyone knows the matter is before the Courts and here we have a standard to say that we should not talk about matters that are before the Courts. Why are they doing that? Is it a game to score cheap political points? Is someone doing some fundraising because they want to score that? Let us stick to

the rules and have some form of decorum in our arguments. You may feel that somehow or the other, you have been left out in a particular argument that does not give you the latitude to then go and say whatever you like.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would very strongly commend all the people who have worked very hard at FNPF in respect of the reforms. It is not just the Board Members only, it is the staff, the senior management, we have Jiaoji Koroi, who is the Chief Executive Officer. We have the investment people who are working hard to make sure this thing works. FNPF has now formed a special vehicle with Aspen Hospital, Australia.

Now what does that mean, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I finish? It means that certain procedures will now be available in Fiji. It means that members will not withdraw their funds and take that money out of Fiji to go to India or wherever else they go for procedures? They can now do it in Fiji. The FNPF the procedures will be available here, the money stays here, our foreign exchange levels go up and then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will build local capacity in our medical system and at the same time, FNPF will be a partner in that.

And we are now talking with Asian Development Bank (ADB) during the Meeting, the Honourable Leader of Opposition was supposed to be there, he had given the indication that he will come there. I think he had responded positively, unfortunately, he did not turn up, but if he had come in, he would have known. There were so much fervour and energy about Fiji that this hospital now (FNPF will be the major investor), can actually grow medical tourism in Fiji. Most of the Pacific Island countries were excited about it, they were looking at coming to Fiji for those types of procedures. We have had discussions with the Australians, the Japanese, about setting up of retirement villages which we can do now because we have the medical capacity to do so.

Imagine the jobs they will create. You do not just say “jobs” and they come out of thin air. You have to be clever, strategic, use your intelligence, forward-looking, you have to draw up the coordinates, link everything together and our people want jobs that they want. Today, we have people who do not want to do cane farming anymore, our young people have these things, they like to have jobs linked to these things; devices, mobile phones.

We are also known to be very good with children and elderly people, and we have so many thousands of people in California giving aged care, some of you might know them too, maybe they contributed to your funds but these are the people, Mr. Speaker, Sir, who we can then certify. We are working with the Fiji National University (FNU) to get them certified, so they can provide aged care here, we can bring in the Australian, Japanese companies to create jobs for our people. This is strategic thinking, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We are investing in the ICT, FNPF is a shareholder at the Amalgamated Telecom Holdings (ATH). Currently FNPF, together with the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism is looking at developing an ICT park in Lautoka and we have got excitement by ADB and various other people, saying “Let us develop this and make it a green development.” This is the kind of connectivities we are looking at and this is what is going to improve the number, not just the quantitative number of people within FNPF but also the qualitative effects and the output of FNPF.

I very strongly recommend and I would like to thank the Committee for their work.

I would also like to, Mr. Speaker, Sir, give my heartfelt thanks to the staff and also the Board Members of FNPF who have done a sterling job. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Chairperson, you have the floor for your right of reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I, on behalf of the Standing Committee, would also like to thank the Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Jiaoji Koroi, and just recently, they have also presented that members can also increase their contributions. Honourable Simone Rasova will agree with me that there is a provision where Honourable Members can increase their contributions and according to him, the Opposition Members have already filled the forms and they have already increased their contributions up to 30 percent now with FNPF.

So, I would like to say that FNPF is really doing well, that is why the increment has been done by the Opposition Members, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, you have to co-operate with me whilst the debate on the motion is going on. When I look towards you and you take no interest in the Speaker, I do not know whether you want to speak or not. And then when I am about to close the debate, someone else gets up. You have to give me an indication so I can look at this side (Government), look at this side (Opposition) and balance the debate up. I can sit here all evening, no problem.

Honourable Members, we move on, and I call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT - MINISTRY OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND EMPLOYMENT 2010-2013 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I move that:

Parliament debates the Consolidated Review Report on the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment 2010 to 2013 Annual Reports which was tabled on 15th May, 2018.

HON. G. VEGNATHAN.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment is the arm of the Fiji Government that is tasked with ensuring harmonious and productive employment relations in the local workforce.

The core responsibility of the Ministry is to pursue the attainment of decent work standards through the promotion of fair working conditions, stable and productive employment relations,

employment opportunities, development of healthy workers and the provision of healthy and safe working environment.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs was referred the 2010 to 2013 Annual Reports of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment on 16th April, 2018. On 1st May, 2018, the Committee invited the Officials from the Ministry for a presentation on its 2010 to 2013 Annual Reports.

The Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment strives to ensure that all workers are protected against all forms of discrimination in the workplace through the design, development and enactment of modern and visionary labour laws and management system that apply and deliver real social justice in the workplace.

The Ministry actively pursued the inclusion in the application of social justice principles in all its services in particular, maintaining gender equality in all workplaces. The ensuing manifestation of fair work practices and productive workforce in the Ministry's ability to redeliver social justice and help, enhance the overall integrity and value of the public service at large.

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs of the last term, had conducted a review of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Annual Report from 2010 to 2013 and had no matters to bring to the attention of the House. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

Honourable Tikoduadua, you have the floor, Sir.

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

Honourable Speaker, what we are debating today is to take note of the Consolidated Review Report of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, five to eight years ago and it has been some time since.

Honourable Speaker, much water has flowed under the bridge, we are now in 2019. These Reports are from a period where there was no Parliament. Much of what is in here had been solicited through information provided by questions and motions.

In the last term, Honourable Speaker, we sought information on the number of cases before arbitration, employment court, occupational health and safety issues, compensation cases for injuries sustained to workers, refusal of the Ministry to sanction or supervise right balance.

There was also debate on the Essential National Industries (Employment) Decree, and this Review Report covers the period when the Decree was in existence, or at least two years from 2011 to 2013 where workers' rights were severely curtailed, Honourable Speaker.

The threat of a commission of inquiry by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) following the fears of complaints to it by the trade union movement forced Government to repeal the Essential National Industries (Employment) Decree in July 2015.

But the controversial provisions of the Decree, nevertheless were incorporated into the Employment Relations Promulgations and enacted. It was again reviewed and enacted in February 2016.

Also, Honourable Speaker, much has changed since 2010 to 2013 as far as industrial relations climate is concerned. The list of essential industries was expanded, the ILO had offered technical expertise to review this list, but the offer has not been taken up by Government.

Most of the workforce is now classified as essential. It, therefore, gives a new and difficult meaning to negotiating and dealing with grievances as far as the Ministry and union movements are concerned.

Workers are given 21 days to file dispute under the grievances procedure. Many workers missed out due to this restriction, so nothing has changed from the period of this Report that has been reviewed, Honourable Speaker.

Workers are compelled to file individual disputes and I mean, Honourable Speaker, this is ridiculous. A good example is the recent dispute on the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) saga where workers were asked to file individual dispute, instead of collective actions by the unions. It involved over 2,000 workers, whose contracts were not renewed.

Honourable Speaker, collective agreements that were nullified during the period of this Report have yet to be re-negotiated. This is because of difficulties and obstacles faced by the Unions. As a result decades of negotiated agreements providing decent working condition for workers have been derailed.

The other issue that I would like to highlight is dealing with individual grievances, Honourable Speaker, especially compensation for workplace injuries and accidents, and complaints filed by workers against employers. There is this particular case, Honourable Speaker, if you will allow me, just to mention before the House a case of a worker of a glass factory in Suva, who has been kicked from pillar to post without his problem being resolved or even attempted to be resolved.

He alleges that he is also a victim of fraudulent action on the part of the employer and I believe, as far as his allegations is concerned, he has taken it to court. He also claims that the company owes him FNPF, obviously I cannot name the employee or the employer, Honourable Speaker, as this is prohibited under the Standing Orders.

Mr. Speaker, this person was an employee of this particular company from 2008. Under the old contract since 2008, he was being paid \$25 daily and worked daily for seven days a week until 8th July, 2015.

Apart from factory work, he was also required to carry out duties at the owner's home and compound. In April 2013, he got injured while cutting grass at the owner's residence, which resulted in his right eye getting damaged. The Colonial War Memorial Hospital eye surgeon have given the report, his vision is really impaired. He was promised by the Director that he will be compensated but, Honourable Speaker, unfortunately for the poor man, nothing has been done until now.

On 18th April, 2016 he wrote to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General, but claims he did not receive any assistance at all. He claims, even the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment refused to help him, causing him to run around in circles. He claims that there was no FNPF deductions made in his account since 2008.

Now, after being refused by the Ministry on 28th April, 2016, he lodged a complaint with the then Commerce Commission now FCCC, regarding the non-deduction of FNPF by the company, but once again he was ignored, Honourable Speaker.

In 2017, the company offered him a new contract with revised pay but put a caveat in the acceptance letter which was that he must withdraw all grievances from the Ministry of Labour, and not to complain at any time in the future.

Honourable Speaker, the company went ahead and drafted a letter on behalf of the employee to the Ministry stating that he was withdrawing all his complaints but the employee refused to sign. He was then offered an hourly rate of \$2.40 an hour, well below the minimum wage rate.

He once again knocked on the door of the Ministry to follow up on his complaint but an officer in the Ministry told him that they will not force his employer into doing the right thing or even pay his outstanding FNPF, except for three years dating back from his complaint.

Honourable Speaker, the person claims and I think an FNPF officer calculated his outstanding FNPF as to the tune of a little over \$17,000. For the information of the Honourable Minister in the House today, the Case No. is GA of 2018 and Honourable Speaker, I can furnish the document to the Honourable Minister, should he be not aware or wants to appraise himself with the case of a person who is seeking justice from the Ministry.

I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

From the outset, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister and his Committee for this Consolidated Review Report for 2010 to 2013 in terms of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, Parliamentary Paper No. 74 of 2018.

From the outset, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Committee for its Report expressing the need that there was to make some more pointing recommendations other than the ones made in the Report, and to lay down the basis of a healthy and open discussion on the industrial climate in Fiji.

As the Shadow Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations while speaking in any such a debate for the first time wearing this new cap, it is my duty and honour to salute and thank all the workers, traders, professionals and farmers of Fiji for their tremendous contributions to the economy of Fiji, while their descendants continue to make meaningful contributions still to the process of our national developments at home and abroad.

May I, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, Sir, also pay tribute to the trade union movement in Fiji and applaud the achievements of the unions in respect of the workers' rights and collective bargaining, drastically improving the industrial climate here in Fiji.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the imposition of the draconian legislations, policies and programmes as supposed to the ideals and spirit of labour laws, many of those achievements are now consigned to the dustbins of history as we face another lap of struggle for the restoration of labour rights in Fiji.

Apart from the day to day administration and operations of the Ministry of Labour, Mr. Speaker, there are several pertinent important issues that need a special mention in this debate to lay down the basis of discussions on this Report, and the labour relation issues that is now in Fiji.

I do not see that we have made any progress from 2011 to 2013, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In fact, we have gone bad and are going to go worse, if we continue to play the cat and mouse games on labour relations issues.

Sir, I capture the most pressing issues which I would like to highlight in this House, as follows. Firstly, the Employment Relations Act is the key legislation to labour relations in Fiji. While 2009 enactment of the said Act was the result of an extensive consultation between the key stakeholders, the amendments, Mr. Speaker, Sir, made to the said legislation later on was not.

Following those unilateral amendments and the subsequent pressure by the ILO, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government was made to make some editorial changes to the Employment Relations Act in 2015, but they continue to fall far short of addressing the issues at heart of the workers and their representatives. Therefore, we need to have a relook at the said law and related legislations, Mr. Speaker, Sir and tidy them up. The sooner we do this, the better it is for this country.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review of the other pertinent legislations and programmes to make the Employment Relations Act with the necessary amendments effective, which would require us to review the Essential National Industries Act, Public Service (Amendment) Act and Public Order (Amendment) Act in line with the ILO Conventions ratified by Fiji.

From these experiences, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one thing is clear that we cannot live and rely on laws made and applied as per the Jeremy Bentham's theory to last us 100 years and keep us content with that. We are a developing nation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the law itself became an evolving subject, must learn to shun our ego and embrace the changes that are necessary. We have no right to oppress the people and deny them what is due to them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while welcoming the steps taken by the Ministry to review the National Minimum Wage level which we welcome, I again join all the stakeholders to plead with the Honourable Minister to take into account the views of the trade unions and the workers of this country as well as the factors pointing out to our increased cost of living, despite what we were told, "a decade of unprecedented growth." Somehow they do not tie up, is it not? Like the hogwash as mentioned by Honourable Usamate.

Thirdly, Sir, alluding to the question of productivity as a key component of this particular Ministry, we are told that the Civil Service Reforms are a part of this initiative which we refuse to buy as much as civil servants themselves. There are some serious flaws, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the review and it needs to be relooked at over the ego-centric and arrogant view of a few trumpeters herein this House and some outside. I urge them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to have a look at and study the Productivity Charter that resulted from the tripartite approach between the employers and employees before the SDL Government.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, emphasising the need and desire for the restoration of the tripartite forum. Fiji is a country where we are known for our culture resolving issues by the *talanoa* mechanism.

In every Government era, there has been issues pertaining to labour laws and rights which created tension and arrest, unease and disturbance, but we have been able to resolve all these through the tripartite approach. The present impasse is no different and I invite the Government to take up the

challenge to negotiate, facilitate negotiations and allow the necessary space for freedom of expression to all stakeholders. We cannot compromise worker's rights and hold the workers of Fiji to ransom. We have no moral authority to do that.

Fifthly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a need for regular monitoring and review of OHS compliance, improving systems and processes as noted by the Committee in its Review Report in respect of dealing with Workmen Accident Compensation, investigations at workplace, reports by the workers and compliance of the employers towards their employees by payment of just wages and FNPF contributions.

I say, this Mr. Speaker, Sir, to cite one example. During the China Railways Five, workers were not issued payslips, appropriate pay for work done after hours and have their time punched by company staff. This is just one example. There may be others that need to be investigated and I call on the Honourable Minister to have a look and investigate this. How on earth and almost half a century after our Independence, we can still allow our workers to be exploited in this way? This is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, simply disconcerting.

With those observations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the Government to take these issues on board and initiate the necessary dialogue and consultation so as to pave the way forward to create an amicable industrial climate in Fiji. I see no reason Mr. Speaker, Sir, why we cannot put the "Pacific Way" to effective use at home when we advocate it at the world stage, while history has shown us more than once that this is the most effective way to resolve our problems and continue our journey forward together.

With that short contribution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Committee once again for its work in respect of this Report. We do not see a lot of issues eye to eye, but that is not in any way deterring us from exploring solutions to the many labour relation issues that confront us in a bi-partisan manner. There is no other way. No man is an island, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you very much.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the debate on the Report of the Committee on the Ministry of Labour for 2010 to 2013 and I wish to thank the Committee for their hard work in what is being presented today.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, I rise to share an issue that I believe it is critical that has been covered in this Report. As a result of this Government's Civil Service Reforms and amendments to the Employment Relations Act, this particular issue I wish to discuss and it remains an action that is pending by the Ministry of Labour. There needs to be a review of the following laws to comply with the core ILO Conventions which Fiji has ratified and this is being stated earlier:

- Essential National Industries Employment Act 2011;
- Public Service (Amendment) Act 2011;
- Employment Relations Act 2007; and
- Employment Relations (Amendment) Act 2011.

Now this is a commitment made by this Government to the ILO after complaints were filed with the Freedom of Association Committee. Now the clear demonstration of the breach of this freedom of association was displayed in the recent Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) lockout in the past week and the unjust manner that Union officials were treated.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- The matter referred to by the Honourable Member is actually before the Arbitration Court. I do not think it should be discussed at all or brought up in this House.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to correct the Honourable Member.

HON. SPEAKER.- I have not finished. Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Member, take note of what has been pointed out. You have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I wish to correct the Honourable Member as well as the Honourable Attorney-General. These matters that were discussed before the Employment Tribunal last week, the proceedings have been terminated and therefore they are not before the Arbitration Court, I wish to correct the Honourable Members.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- The issues before the Arbitration Court was issues pending from before this lockout occurred and they are matters of interest, not matters of right, Sir, that were before the Employment Tribunal. Therefore, Sir, I am able to discuss it before this august House and I will continue. Again, the union officials as you have seen were arrested and interrogated without any charges.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order. Honourable Member, my best understanding there is the matter for the organisation that she has been referring to has been referred to the Arbitration Court. I might be mistaken but if it has been referred to the Arbitration Court then it is a matter that is within the Court and it should not be discussed in this House. That is my Point of Order, if it has been referred to the Courts, we should not be discussing it here.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I can clarify....

HON. SPEAKER.- Yes, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I wish to correct the Honourable Member again that the matters are not before the Arbitration Court. It has not been instituted as a legal proceeding and again the issues that I have mentioned about the union officials being arrested and not charged, are matters of fact and they are not matters that will appear before the Arbitration Court. If the...

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, according to...

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- ... authorities have a problem with that then they would themselves institute any proceedings to say otherwise. But as it stands, these are the facts, these were what the union officials went through, they were detained and interrogated without any charge and that is a fact, undisputed fact and that is what I am referring to in terms of Freedom of Association and the need to comply with the ILO Conventions on the rights of unions and the rights of workers to be represented by unions, Honourable Speaker.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. J. USAMATE.- My reading of this situation is that the tribunal has referred this particular case to the Arbitration Court. So once the Tribunal refers it, my understanding is, I may be mistaken, but my understanding is that once it is referred to the Arbitration Court, it is actually in the Arbitration Court. That is my understanding.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, we seem to be at loggerheads here and it is starting to affect my decision.

Now, what I am going to do, I am going to suspend sitting while we sort this out. But before we do, there is a suspension motion before the House. We will have the suspension motion then we will suspend for afternoon tea while we sort out this point. I hope everyone is in agreement? Your afternoon tea will still be hot by the time we finish this.

Now, for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I will allow the suspension motion to be moved. I now call upon the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Honourable Speaker, I move under Standing Order 6:

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. It is obvious that we need to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today. We still have items under Schedule 2 and of course, Schedule 3 as well and thus the request for us to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Government in Parliament. Is anyone wishing to comment on?

Do you have anything further to say?

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

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

The Question is, under Standing Order 6:

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

Does any Honourable Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members. We will now take a break for afternoon tea and during afternoon tea, we will sort out this point that we have been going through in the last half an hour and we will resume in half an hour and continue.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.07 p.m.

**RESUMPTION OF DEBATE – CONSOLIDATED REVIEW REPORT -
MINISTRY OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND EMPLOYMENT
2010-2013 ANNUAL REPORTS**

The Parliament resumed at 4.50 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the agenda item that we were considering before the adjournment for afternoon tea.

But before we do that Honourable Members, with respect to the Point of Order raised by the Honourable Minister, Jone Usamate, I have taken independent legal advice and independently consulted the Chair of the Arbitration Court who has confirmed that there are matters with respect to the interpretation of the collective agreement which are pending before the Arbitration Court. These include a determination by the Arbitration Court on whether the Water Authority of Fiji employees were temporary employees or otherwise. This will no doubt have a substantial legal bearing on the dispute between the parties. Given that the subject matter of the issues raised by the Honourable Lynda Tabuya is indeed before the Arbitration Court, I will not allow the Honourable Tabuya to continue addressing the issue given its current status.

However, I will allow her to address other issues pertaining to the motion within the remaining time allocated to the Honourable Member. I hope that is sufficiently clear for everyone. Honourable Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir. Honourable Speaker, if I may be allowed to at least discuss as a matter of fact what the Employment Tribunal, which is a separate forum altogether, not the same court, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Tabuya, I have made the ruling. I have gone to the trouble to do that and it is quite clear. I have given you the floor so you can address the other issues, but, leave that one aside. You have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I had stated earlier the need for the Ministry of Labour and also the Government to review the laws. The laws as I had stated earlier, does refer to the freedom of association of workers and the ability to engage with unions without harassment and intimidation, and they are allowed to be able to gather on private property to exercise their rights as members of the union, Honourable Speaker.

That would include any of the workers in the Water Authority of Fiji or any other worker for that matter who are members of the union, who with their grievances should be allowed, Honourable Speaker, Sir, to gather and to get the unions to be able to advise them on issues and the way forward together as a group. That is my request to the Honourable Minister for Labour as well as the Government, to please review the Labour Laws so that it is in compliance with ILO Conventions when it comes to freedom of association.

Furthermore, Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Attorney-General who had mentioned earlier about taking this issue out to social media and the fundraising he has referred to, the workers need a voice. It is our responsibility as Members of Parliament to be there and to be the voice when they feel that they are not able to be represented aptly or that their rights are not being recognised in their workplaces. That was the role that was played there, to be able to take the causes that workers have out to the public and to the world, and to be able to gather the support and solidarity that unions and also we, as Members of Parliament, feel passionately about the cause for workers should be able to do. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the work done by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the Ministry's Annual Report for the period 2010 to 2013. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee has conducted the review of the Ministry's Report and has no matters to bring to the attention of the House and I applaud the Committee.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do wish to make an update on the need for timeliness in presentation of Reports. And before doing that, I just want to clarify few of the matters that have been raised by the Honourable Members from the other side.

The first one is on the Essential Services; I wish to inform this Honourable House that Government has agreed with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for the technical assistance, it is wrong to say that Government has made no effort. That is not the truth, the truth is that we have engaged with ILO and we have agreed for the technical assistance.

On the China Railway Group 5, there were some concerns raised by the Honourable Leawere. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to inform this House that the Ministry did receive complaints from the workers and I would like to inform the House that those matters are still under investigation for overtime hours payment, meal allowance and sick leave.

The other matter that was raised, Honourable Speaker, Sir, was a case referred by Honourable Pio, I would like to state here that the matter is before the Employment Relations Tribunal, and I do not wish to touch on that subject matter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to give some information on the updates from the Ministry. There were also some concerns raised in terms of legislation, but I believe my report will cover all those aspects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have updated our annual reports till first half of 2016 and 2017. Secondly, the Ministry's system and process certified to ISO 9001 2015, Quality Management System in June 2018 in our effort to improve overall operational management system that will result to timely and quality service delivery.

Thirdly, the Ministry had incorporated the full audited financial statements for the Annual Reports for the Years ending 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and first half of 2016 and 2017.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are already taking steps to ensure the timely clearance of the backlog for the workers compensation case and ensure that all annual reports must include some details of audited financial statements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I wish to highlight to the House some of the outcomes of the work done by my Ministry which have a really impacted on our Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2010, the Ministry continued towards the completion of the six phases of the Labour Reforms which include:

- OHS Reforms;
- Employment Relations Reforms;
- Productivity Reforms;
- Wages Reforms;
- Employment-Creation Reforms; and

- Workers Compensation Reforms

Fiji signed the Decent Work Country Programme in 2010, 2012. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also established the National Employment Centre (NEC) and the NEC Board under the NEC Act 2009.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we continue to modernise the corporate leadership and corporate culture of the Ministry with the aim to drive multi-skilling, change and innovative attitude. We activated the Tripartite Forum and implemented the Wages Regulation Order.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry's commitment is to continue to rebuild confidence and growth in the labour market and facilitating economic and social development at the enterprise, industries and national level.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry had initiated and acted on major reforms. These reforms are referred to, started in 2011 with consultation on the establishment of the national minimum wage that is fair and aligned with the ILO Convention, No. 131.

This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, had led to the implementation of the Minimum Wage Order since 2013. Mr. Speaker, Sir, a few months ago, I was going through some Hansard Reports which reveal that previous Governments tried their best to bring this minimum wage. Unfortunately, they could not. This is the first time under the FijiFirst Government that we have brought this minimum wage in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform this august House that the review of the minimum wage will start in two weeks and will no doubt provide the basis for an informed and sustainable formula for wages growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that all Fijians will appreciate the results of the review and what it offers to them in real terms and what the industry can absorb in real dollars, and not in false and misleading political promises as we heard much of this in the past Elections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the minimum wage review establishes a sustainable minimum wage rate that provides the platform for the stability of work and leads to more job-creation. That is what this FijiFirst Government is all about, sustainability and growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2012, due to the high backlog of the workers compensation cases, the Ministry established a new Occupational Medicine Unit within the workers compensation service. The Ministry adapted the Fiji impairment assessment manual and 38 medical doctors were trained in Suva and Lautoka on the assessment manual.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I remind this House once again that effective from 1st January, 2019 onwards, any workplace injuries or death arising out of and in the course of employment and injuries on any school premises will be dealt with by the Accident Compensation Commission of Fiji under a no-fault based system.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the mediation services which is benchmarked to the Singapore Mediation Centre, achieved 89 percent settlement rate that reaffirms the intent where mediation will facilitate productivity improvement, peace and progress in the workplaces throughout the country. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Once again, I rise to make a few comments for the Parliament to note in terms of the Report which is before the House this afternoon.

First of all, I would like to thank you, Sir. In the last sitting of Parliament, I think, from this side of the House, we have been asking for the availability of a legal advisor in the various Committees that we have and we thank you, Sir, that you have allowed the Deputy Secretary-General to accompany the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee for its public hearings across the country which has really assisted the Committee in its deliberations.

Onto the issue before us, Sir, given that these 2010 to 2013 Annual Reports which were tabled in 2016 in this House, the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment came to present their submission to the Committee on May, 2018. So there is a big lapse of time to when things were happening and at the same time, reforms were happening.

If you look at the slide by the Ministry, they have talked about the challenges that they faced like workmen's compensation backlog cases, length of time to deliver decisions filed in court, weak operational system and processes, gaps in policies and their future plans. Also seeing how the Committee has written its recommendations to the Ministry and their responses are there.

One of the major highlights of this Report is the finding of this Committee, which is that the Ministry has not been submitting its annual reports on time. Given that we are now in 2018 and we have other pending reports as that of 2014, 2015, 2016 until the present year, I think that is something for us to note and the Minister has not answered that straight this afternoon nor the response by the Ministry when it was questioned on the recommendations of the Committee, was it answered properly? They talked about being busy doing the reforms since 1990s when the SVT Government then spearheaded the reforms of the Ministry of Labour and Employment and other international standards.

But the other thing that we come across from the Verbatim Report is where the Permanent Secretary, Ms. Daunabuna, assured the Committee that by last year, there should be a 5-year Strategic Development Plan for the Ministry counting 2018 up to 2022, we did not hear anything on that from the Minister. Their Operational Plan which should be 2018-2019 should be now current and the activities that they have done to realign their structures to best fit their organisation at this time. These are some of the things that we are looking forward to the Honourable Minister to brief us on another occasion on the progress of this document, probably through a Ministerial Statement.

Also one important note that the Committee has also put in there is the financial statement that should be submitted with the Annual Report which could help the Committee given that there is a lapse of time in these Reports and given that the Strategic Plan, the Annual Corporate Plan plus the Annual Report should reflect the actuals of what really transpired in the financial year. Those are a few things, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which I would like to contribute to the debate and for the House to take note. *Vinaka*, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau, you have the floor.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Sir. Mr. Speaker Sir, just a few points today regarding the Report. I just want to raise an issue which is probably not mentioned here regarding the monitoring and evaluation within the Ministry. How do they monitor employers in terms of their compliance with the Employment laws and regulations? For instance, I think two weeks ago there was a security guard at the Nakasi Plaza who collapsed there and also passed away.

There was an issue with the doctor who was nearby and I believe the Ministry of Health is addressing that but the important one is that, this security guard was not registered with FNPF, which means his FNPF contribution was not deducted. There are allegations that the security company owners are closely linked to probably some officials and that, Sir, is an issue which needs to be seriously addressed by the Ministry in terms of monitoring.

That is not the only security company, there is another one in Sigatoka and I have received complaints directly from them where they are not being paid, their salaries are delayed for two or three weeks and also their FNPF contributions are not paid. So, the question is, what serious monitoring is being done by the Ministry for these employers who are not adhering to the Employment laws and regulations? I do not see in the Report that there are some kind of monitoring or some data on that.

The other issue I have is also on statistics. We have discussed a lot of that in the Reserve Bank of Fiji Report. We have had the Government side enlightening us or not enlightening us but my concern today is the source of data in terms of what the Reserve Bank of Fiji is using, what the Ministry is using and what the Government side is expressing to us, and what we are encountered with? I suppose the question is, what is the source of data and the validity or maybe the truthfulness of those data?

I just want to share an article, this was in the *Radio New Zealand* in August 2017, the title “Fiji Employment Data not as good as it would seem” by an Economist. So, I do not want to blame the economist but we could ask the public, who do they believe in, whether it is the Ministry of Economy or whether it is the Professor of Economics sitting here on the Opposition side or this Senior Economist, who did an analysis of all the data released by the Bureau of Statistics, particularly on employment data? So, let me just share this:

“A prominent Fiji economist says the latest data released by the government paints a picture that’s far rosier than reality.

The Bureau of Statistics last week released the findings of its preliminary employment survey, which shows unemployment at 5.5 percent, which the government says is the lowest in 15 years.”

It is clear evidence that growth in the economy is bringing in benefits to everyone. However, the Professor states that the problem is that the unemployed are defined as those who are not working and who say that they are looking for work.

So, if they are say they are not working or if they are not looking at all, they do not count as unemployed. The trouble is, the figures that are being quoted by the Bureau of Statistics has simply put out a press release to say that the 2010-2011, the employment rate was 7.1 percent and in 2015-2016 when they did the survey, it was 5.5 percent, and that is all they are saying. They are not saying anything about this being the lowest in 15 years. So this was the interpretation.

The best way to look at what happened between those years – 2010-2011 and 2015-2016, is just go by the data which the Bureau of Statistics has presented in their press release, and what is in there gives great cause for concern because we recollect that the Bainimarama-led Government has spent massive amounts of money on infrastructure in the last five years, amounting to more than \$2 billion which is about half the size of the public debt, and had hoped that this would have multiplier effects on the economy.

But when we look at the statistics which has been given, particularly in Table 1 of the press release, it says that the people working for money in these five years declined by 4 percent. These are

people who are working for cash or money wage earners, salary earners, self-employed, et cetera. And that is an incredibly worrying thing, if you have had so many years of economic growth. Why have you not seen an increase in the number of people working for money?

Then there is a similar decline in people who are working, not for money but who are working for family, these are community workers, people who are working in subsistence agriculture, and that number also declined by massive 20 percent, that is, 16,000 people.

If you look at decreases in those years of people actually working, then the unemployment rates simply do not make sense. And unfortunately, what seems to have happened is that the total labour force appears to have gone down by 34,000, according to the Bureau of Statistics press release. If the labour force is going down, then the population is actually increasing, and then decreased by 9 percent, so there is a cause for concern. There is also like something, like an increase of 38,000 or 18 percent or 19 percent who are outside the labour force.

Unfortunately, what this press release also shows is the wage employment between these years grew by only 0.9 percent. Salary wage earners did go up, they went up by 43 percent and most of these increases are in the public sector, in other words, Government and public enterprises employing more people and those salary people more at the income levels and other income. So, we would have hoped to see these increases in low income wage earners but that has not happened.

Sir, what I am trying to emphasise here is, the statistics which we use in terms of the economic statistics, are those credible statistics because it is from the Government side and what some of these statistics analysis are saying is that, the employment we have seen and I do not think it is in the Ministry of Employment, is basically driven by public sector spending rather than investment.

So, those are the two or new employment by new investments which are basically driven by public sectors. Those are the two main concerns I thought I would raise today, one, the compliance with employment laws by certain employers and the other one is, I suppose, the validity of data which is used as a basis for analysis by various statutory organisations, including RBF and, of course, by the Ministry of Economy. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Attorney- General you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was not going to make any comments in respect to this because the Honourable Ministers had adequately addressed it. But Honourable Tuisawau had raised some issues about the economy which I feel compelled and in particular statistics, to respond to.

Rather than quoting from his telephone some unnamed person, economist who gave some unknown interview, we do not know on what date, to Radio New Zealand, we can rely more on reliable statistics and I would rather that he did his own analysis and looked at those figures, which are actually available independently from these independent institutions. Let me just highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the IMF study shows that the wages in Fiji is above the international median rates, quite significantly.

Statistics No. 2; the World Bank study has also shown that in the Asia Pacific Region, Fiji is only one of the five to seven countries where inequality has actually dropped. The reason why inequality has also dropped, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was due to various structural changes that have taken place in the economy, thereby, reducing the gap between those who have and have not, a classic point, of course, being education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I think the reality about private sector spending as percentage of GDP, if he again looked at the statistics, he will see that the private sector spending as percentage of GDP has increased. Public sector spending, of course, has increased too, but as an overall percentage, compared to previous periods, private sector spending has increased in the percentage of the GDP.

The other point I also wanted to talk about was (you probably do not know the meaning of that) employment. He talked about overemployment and underemployment. The reality, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I had highlighted, if you go to the construction sector today, there are many construction companies that are actually now bringing in workers from overseas. These are local companies, not Chinese companies, because there are many people in Fiji who, either have gone overseas because of construction in the trades area, so as I had highlighted in Parliament before, when Christchurch had the earthquake, we had lot of our trades people who were sought after, in fact, they were poached by the New Zealanders. New Zealand has the crisis in respect of tradespeople, so a lot of them stayed back.

Secondly, New Zealand also has a shortage of teachers, for example, in Maths, Physics and those practical areas. Our teachers have gone there. As I had highlighted again in Parliament in the last session, in one week, a New Zealand company poached 25 high voltage lines people who do work for EFL. They went to New Zealand too.

There is a lot of attrition, as a result of movement of people. So the reality is that, we find our construction companies, bringing in workers for example, from Bangladesh, Indonesia and Philippines. This is a big phenomenon we have to deal with. And in particular with the young population that is highly digitally connected, in terms of their priorities as to which sectors they want to work in, is changing quite significantly.

But this is the employment landscape and one of the issues that many of the Honourable Ministers have highlighted about how we have good strategy in place to be able to engage people in new areas of employment. This is something that is fundamentally must be understood.

Unfortunately, the analysis by the Opposition side is really rudimentary. They are very rudimentary. They are not aware of what is actually happening on the ground realities. I accept, yes, there would be companies that may be, for example, security company that has not paid someone's FNPF, or not paid the right salary, it does happen. That is why the law is there, to ensure it does not actually happen. If it does happen, then there are consequences to that.

What is really interesting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, the trade unions are actually absent, hugely absent from those sectors where lots of exploitations are taking place on the ground - the construction sector, retail sector. Why? Because it is very hard for these big trade unions used to go into individual companies and deal with what they call 'consider small matters'. As we have said in Parliament, they are highly concentrated in Government or Government-related entities. That is where they are mainly present.

And if you see all the disputes being created, that is where they are doing it. But in areas, if you go to some of the retail shops, we ourselves have had discovered. We were discussing with Honourable Usamate when he was Minister for Employment previously and with the current Minister for Employment. That is where the exploitation takes place, in the construction sector.

Now one of the areas that we are trying to address and which we will address in the Budget, is about how people are being paid their wages. If you go to many construction sites, what do these employers do? What do construction companies do? They say to them, "Look, we will pay you cash, take this." So a lot of people, sort of, feel, "Alright, I am going to get cash in my hand, as opposed to me having to go to the bank." That is how they entice them. So they do not do their FNPF, they do not pay

them their meal allowance, they do not pay them the wet allowance, they do not pay them the overtime. These are real problems which we are addressing. The Minister is also addressing that through raise mechanisms. So these are real ground issues. It is not about, “Ah, the Government is allowing this to happen”, the Minister does not sit there and say to the security company, “Hey, do not pay them the right salary, do not pay their FNPF.” Obviously, he does not do that. So we need to put this into perspective.

When we come to this Parliament, again, I am saying this the third time today, let us be factually speaking, let us be rationale about it. This is the problem that we need to address, let us work on it together. If the Honourable Member has this particular security guard, he should immediately bring it to the Minister’s attention, so he can then go and deal with that company, send his labour officers to deal with them and that is how we need to curb this, and it is a problem in which we need to deal with it together. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I give the floor to the Honourable Chairperson for your right of reply. You have the floor.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have not further comments. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson.

Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of ‘Noes’)

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

**REVIEW REPORT OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE –
SPECIAL PROJECT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 2014**

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report of the Public Accounts Committee on Special Projects for the year ended 31st December, 2014 which was tabled on 8th March, 2018.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now invite the Honourable Chairperson on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to speak to the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; as the Chairperson of the current Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion on the review made by the Public Accounts Committee on the Audit Report for Special Projects for the year

ended 31st December, 2014 which was tabled in Parliament on 8th March, 2018. Given the content of the Report, it was noted that the Report was for the year ended 31st December, 2014 and the issues noted may not be current. The future Report would explore the issues which may exist currently in those entities that were audited.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, for information purposes, first, I will elaborate on the Special Project Audit which was usually undertaken by the Office of the Auditor-General in Section 7(a) of the Audit (Amendment) Act 2006, to allow the Office of the Auditor-General to carry out a special audit or special investigation and for this case, it was the Audit Report on Special Project for Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) and Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) for the year ended 31st December, 2014.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that the special audits that were conducted for FRA and WAF were specifically focussed on the Asian Development Bank Fund Projects. Also note that both, audit results for these two entities have unqualified audit opinion.

Sir, although the audit issues raised were from 2014, but, given the time that has lapsed and the Committee's recommendation on FRA and WAF, the Committee is anticipating that by now the two entities should have taken steps and implemented some PAC recommendation in moving forward so that come the next audit, these issues are reduced particularly in their audit reports for special projects.

Furthermore, it was pleasing to note that both audits conducted for FRA and WAF had unqualified opinion which is known by the auditor's office as a clean opinion and the financial statements are presumed to be free from material mis-statements. However, FRA and WAF should take serious consideration on the issues raised by the auditors in every aspect of focus in the audit and try to improve its overall systems and processes in the overall management and monitoring of projects funded by international donor agencies such as Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Finally, I commend the effort of the previous Chairperson of PAC Committee and Members in the compilation of this Report. We are looking forward for FRA and WAF to take the Committee's recommendations positively in addressing the issues that were raised by the auditors during their special project audit.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, with these few comments, as a member moving the motion on this PAC Committee Report, I thank you for this opportunity. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. The Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor. We are open for debate.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. Allow me to make a few comments to the debate. The motion that is before the House is for the Members to debate the Public Accounts Committee Special Projects for the year ended 2014.

I have looked at the Report that is prepared and there are few recommendations. My feeling, Honourable Speaker, is that the recommendations are two simplistic. More could have been put into it and I sincerely feel that one of the contributing reasons is because the Public Accounts Committee should as before be headed as Chairman by the Opposition.

HON. MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I sincerely say that. If the Opposition was to have been the Chairman of this Report ...

(Inaudible interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... a lot more would have been achieved, a lot more recommendations because it relates to tremendous, very substantial abuse of funds and mismanagement in these areas. And therefore recommendations should have been much, much more. They should have used their power to call upon people who are implicated and even to recommend recommendation in relation to those.

I wish to demonstrate that by looking at the Audit Report for that period, and it shows very clearly the extent of bad management, abuse and even corruption affected by the Government. The question is, why did the Government allow this to happen for all that time 2010 to 2014? Seriously, the special projects that the Public Account Committee looked into were:

1. Emergency Flood Recovery Project;
2. Fiji Road Upgrading Project (FRUP) Stage III;
3. Suva/Nausori Regional Water Supply and Sewerage Project (ADB Funded)

ADB was here last week and if they knew the extent of how the money that they lent were abused, there will be having second thoughts of giving money to Fiji.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I will give you examples later.

1. Suva/Nausori Regional Water Supply and Sewerage Project (ADB Funded);
2. Sustainable Energy Financing Project (World Bank Funded);
3. Fiji Flood Emergency Response Project Grant No. 0283 Fiji (ADB Funded); and
4. Institutionalising the Monitoring and Telecommunications Reform Project.

And to go through some examples, take for example, the Fiji Roads Upgrading Project Stage III – “... estimated at appraisal in 1997 to cost \$125 million ...” and the project was implemented with the financial assistance from the ADB loan in 1997 and topped up by \$50 million from Fiji. And you look at the abuse that, that side of the House inflicted on that money.

Late payments to ADB and that amounted to about \$18 million. What did the auditor say? The audit note that the ADB’s position of payments relating to the claim for China Railway First Group for 2012 were applied for and paid in 2013; one year later and of course it must have incurred interest.

Accessibility of information: Honourable Speaker, the audit was not able to obtain and review any progress report from either the Project Management Unit of the Fiji Roads Upgrading Project or the contractors. Furthermore, minutes of the meeting between FRA and the Consulting and supervising engineer and related contractors of the project were also not available. So without information, how do you expect auditor to do the review?

Then Honourable Speaker, in relation to the Suva/Nausori Regional Water Supply and Sewerage Project. This is where a majority of abuse was inflicted and in here the Government of Fiji Project had been implemented with the financial assistance of ADB for \$47 million and the project was estimated to cost \$236.9 million.

The first issue that was raised by the Auditor-General was in relation to the variation. The variation, Honourable Speaker, happened when contractors put in their first estimation, then they increased it and those variations are supposed to be approved by WAF's Board and in this instance, \$1.6 million of variations were not approved by the Board. So the issue states that the variation indicates that ADB may have been reimbursed much more than they should. So that is a wastage in relation to public funds.

The other point that the Auditor-General raised was delays in project completion. The audit noted that rehabilitation of Kinoya Sewerage Treatment Plant Project was delayed due to many reasons including project engineers inefficiencies, delay in submission of drawing plans and that Technofab Engineering Limited (TEL) was issued practical completion date of work by 30/08/13, but one year later, still the project was not completed.

On Project Physical Assets, they did not have a register to indicate what assets were there so the auditor noted that the project financial statement for the year up to 2013 disclosed total project physical assets of \$1.8 million and the following anomalies were noted:

- The Water Authority of Fiji did not have a fixed assets register for something as basic as that and under that Government.
- The ADB funded Suva/Nausori Regional Water Supply and Sewerage Statement of Expenditure for the year showed equipment purchased for National Water Quality laboratory totalling \$676,388 but audit could not establish if the National Water Quality laboratory equipment is adequately recorded because there was no register.
- It noted that the above finding indicates that the project asset disclosed at cost in the notes may not be correctly stated, but they did not even have a good record keeping. Then it goes on.

Contract agreements not provided, something very basic. Before we do a project, you must have a contract but audit noted that in the absence of contract document, audit could not verify whether the project works were carried out in accordance with the contract agreement. This is Water Authority of Fiji.

Going on, Mr. Speaker, installation of sewerage reticulation pump station in Fletcher Road. What did they see? The contract noted that the cost of this was \$3.02 million and the contractor was supposed to install seven sewerage reticulation pumps. But what happened was that they found that the expenditure incurred for the project as at 31st December totalled \$14 million and included the cost of \$540,000 incurred for sewerage civil works and listen to this, Honourable Speaker, \$1.8 million incurred for consultants. Where in this world would you pay that kind of money for consultancy? Yes, and did you not sack them later but it was too late. They were already incurred so bad management, unprofessional conduct is costing us.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Who was the CEO?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I do not know, you tell us. You were in Government.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Variations not approved by WAF for Suva Point Sewerage Plant. Audit noted that the variations to the contract awarded to Fletcher Limited were not approved by WAF and as a result, these expenses were not properly authorised. It is sad to hear all these. This is public money. It is not even their fathers' money. This is our money. This is taxpayers' money.

Package Samabula North Reticulation, China Railway No. 5 Engineering Group and you are still engaging China Railway and see what it is getting in 2012. Contract No. 44 for Samabula North Sewer was awarded to China Railway Engineering Group Limited for \$6.2 million. The supply and installation of new local pumps were not done on time. Variation not approved by WAF. The WAF allowed variation totalling \$1 million to the contractor which was not allowed by the board and these variations were approved by project contractors, Mr. Roly Hayes, Mr. Timoci Turaga and Mr. Maikali Naikawakawavesi. All these were not members of the Board, seriously, this money belongs to us and you are abusing it.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Let us go to the next one. The Suva/Nausori Regional Water Supply and Sewerage Project (ADB Funded) and the total amount that was allocated for this at that time was \$23 million from the Government of Fiji. The first unprofessional behaviour that they did in relation to that was the Upgrade of the Waila and Tamavua Water Treatment Plant. The initial cost of the backwash treatment was to be \$4 million and the tenders were not called for the backwash treatment and sludge disposal; very basic things.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- So?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- So we are losing money. That is my whole point. We are losing money because of their bad management. They are abusing it and you should be sacked. They should be kicked out. So the whole point that I am saying is in relation to this report, Honourable Speaker. There is more and I have time.

Contract agreement not provided. The WAF engaged Fletcher Construction for backwash treatment and sludge disposal at Waila and Tamavua Water Treatment Plan. The capital works were carried out by Fletcher Construction for \$3.4 million. Review of this project revealed the following anomalies:

1. Contract Agreement should be properly maintained for reference, however, the Water Authority of Fiji claimed that Alum Solid Project was a variation according to the Report awarded to Fletcher Construction and hence there was no separate contract. So, that was a wrong claim as a result, audit could not verify the performance, security of \$349,000 and the bank guarantee of \$197,000. In a nutshell, what they were doing was that, contractors were supposed to have 8 guarantee by way of a bank guarantee or something. In this case, when the contract expired, Water Authority of Fiji continued to engage them without those.
2. Variation or Project cost and scope of works not approved by Water Authority Board. The Project Engineer, one Mr. Serekokoko Yanuyanurua made several variations in the project price during the project implementation project. However, four of the variations which included downward variations of \$30,221.65 and upward variations of \$74,268.45 to the contract price were not approved by the Water Authority of Fiji, and you have this person approving it. Who is he? This is not his father's money, but you act like it is your father's money.

3. Performance Bond: The audit noted that the Water Authority of Fiji did not require the contractor to renew its Performance Security expiry date until the date of project completion.

I think the Public Accounts Committee is the mother of all the Parliamentary Committees and it is important that you should put someone from the Opposition because we are only here to ensure that you do your work properly, to guarantee transparency and unless you change that, you have these kinds of things happening over and over again. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. The Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, you have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I will just speak very briefly to FRA (Fiji Roads Authority) and then Water Authority of Fiji. First of all, with the FRA, this \$17 million loan was from ADB and it was provided as assistance in rehabilitating flood-damaged infrastructure as a result of the flooding in January 2009.

My very short contribution, Mr. Speaker, is on how these development projects that are funded like with the ADB, affect the people in these target areas.

Mr. Speaker, Item 1.4 of the Report talks about re-gravelling of Koronivia Road which is 3.8 kilometres; Lokia - 3.1 kilometres; and Toga, Naqavoka - 4.0 kilometres.

For the past 10 years, Mr. Speaker, at almost every Rewa Provincial Council Meeting, including the one held last week in Dreketi, there were complaints by the people of Toga about their 4-kilometre road from the Davuilevu Junction to Navatuyaba Village. This includes the Irish Crossing linking the main Kings Road to the Toga Delta Area. What the people of Toga have said was that, when contractors like Fulton Hogan serviced their roads, they were much better off as Fulton Hogan consulted with them, listen to their issues and addressed their concerns, including tarsealing roads in front of the schools and there were a very few pot holes.

However, when China Railway Fifth Group Limited took over (and this is mentioned on Page 6 of the Report), their road is now worse than it ever has been. Fifth China Railway are deaf to their calls, there is no consultation, roads are not maintained, road bridges have thick para-grass on either side, drains are not cleared with water pooling in the middle of the road and big pot holes resulting in this 4-kilometres stretch.

The Irish Crossing, Honourable Speaker, was under water for two weeks last month, resulting in people being marooned with no bus services and difficult in getting to work and taking their produce to the market. Because of the extreme weather conditions, the sick just had to suffer in silence bearing their pain as there was no way out of the situation.

The latest news from the Rewa Provincial Council last week was that, any new alternative access does not look promising because of all the issues they have with the contractors so this does not look like their problems are going to be remedied any time soon. So, the people in Toga are just holding their breath hoping that it will not be far too long and meanwhile pray that the powers that be who are over on the other side are aware of their plight as highlighted in the media and will try to do something to help them.

The Koronivia Road users had just had their 3.8-kilometre road gravel and they are thankful for that.

In Lokia, the 3.1 kilometre, at the end of the road just by the bridge, the buses, because there is not enough space according to how that road has been constructed, there is not enough space for the bus to turn around so they have to work 500 metres from where the bus stops and where they get to the bridge. So, in wet weather which we been having a lot of lately, it has been very difficult for them, especially when they are travelling on public transport. So, they have requested that that be looked into and the diggers work on the drains and the road verges be cut as in their words as per “PWD days” to minimise potholes.

Now on Water Authority, Honourable Speaker, on the WAF in Section 3 of the Report which is on the Suva-Nausori Regional Water Supply and Sewerage Project which is ADB-funded, the statement of expenditure states that the majority of expenses as was highlighted by Honourable Niko Nawaikula was incurred for consultancy services for this project.

My concern, Honourable Speaker, is that the WAF did not call for tenders for the trickling filter project for the Kinoya Waste Water Treatment Plant which is the largest sewerage treatment system for the Suva Urban area.

This trickling filter project is crucial to the proper functioning of the sewerage plant as it provides waste water treatment system. This is where aerobic conditions are maintained. Without this, you have the odour that emanates now and then from Kinoya.

On Page 21 of the Report, on Retention Security, there is mention of the third trickling filter. What was the required number to make Kinoya Plant work efficiently? Why was the third trickling filter, as was mentioned in this Report, not purchased for the efficiency of the sewerage system? For everyone’s piece of mind, Honourable Speaker, I would hope that all the components of the trickling filter project are in place and the proper maintenance and supervision is done for proper efficiency.

When the proper capital works, procurement processors and procedures are not followed as in the case of the trickling filter project then those living at the lower levels, including the Rewa River area where all the effluents are discharged cause environmental and health issues. These challenges, Honourable Speaker, have fundamental, moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored as many of the villagers live a subsistence lifestyle in the lower ridges of the Rewa River and rely on the river for their livelihood.

When the Government does not follow procedures and do not do their job well, the ordinary grassroots people suffer as in the case of *Escherichia coli* (E.coli) which is found in the Rewa River are causing intestinal infection, including diarrhoea, abdominal pain and fever. More severe cases can lead to bloody diarrhoea, dehydration or even kidney failure.

Perusing through the Report, Honourable Speaker, and reading between the lines, it is the ordinary people, the target group for all these development projects who are affected when the job is not done properly.

In the Rewa Delta area where this ADB-funded project was earmarked for, the people’s daily routine is one way, there is always low water pressure with little or no water coming through, whether it is from Waila or Tamavua. The taps during the day just have very little water trickling through. So the villagers have to fill their containers, pots and pans and empty bottles from the taps at night, bathing and doing laundry, sometimes even washing their pots and pans is high risk as these are all done in the river, where most things end up with the ever present of E.coli.

Many people in the Delta areas, Honourable Speaker, of Rewa, Noco, Burebasaga, Dreketi and Vutia and certain areas in Tailevu and Naitasiri, the SuvaNausori Regional Water Supply and Sewerage Project is just not working and supplying their basic needs for water.

Honourable Speaker, there are two reservoir towers in the Villages of Lomanikoro and Navaka, each with the capacity of, I think, 700,000 litres of treated water they could hold, and this was completed in 2005. Fourteen years later, it is just standing there, Honourable Speaker, there is no water. People are looking at it and I asked a man in Navaka whether they were getting any water from it, he just told me “*E sa totoka ni o ni yadravi keimami tu*”. I asked him “*Na wai?*”, he said, “*Na wai la e warai.*” What he was saying there is that, it is good because it is watching over them and when I asked him, “The water?”, he said “There is no water”.

So we are pleading with the Government, particularly, the Honourable Minister to, please, make this work for the common good and wellbeing of the people, especially, the poor and the vulnerable in rural and remote areas, whose needs are as important as those in the urban areas. I support the motion, thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee who deliberated on this Report, I would just like to make short commentaries on the Report that is before us.

First of all, the Fiji Road Upgrading projects, Stage III, this is what is being highlighted here, the late payments of ADB relating to 2012 plans. This is the period of transition when the Department of National Road was transitioned into Fiji Roads Authority (FRA). The question that I would like to ask is the management arrangement at the time, because at the time that the transition had taken place, this issue has been highlighted because staff had been terminated and removed, and therefore most of these issues that have been highlighted, there were no staff there to come up with real solutions at the time.

In terms of the management arrangement, what we see then is still happening today, especially the arrangements with the depots, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

As we note when the Department of National Road was there, depots that used to be really activated with the respective personnel to ensure that the maintenance of roads in the various centres and locations are kept up-to-date, but with this reform from the Department of National Road to FRA, we were not sure why the depots have shut down, they have all closed down. Most of the depots around Fiji have closed down and in the process, the FRA lacks the capacity to undertake rehabilitation and maintenance that is now propping up every now and then throughout Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the real issue too that needs to be addressed is in terms of management arrangement. How come MWH appointed change manager to this reformed process, then became engineers, then left all of a sudden and then the outsourcing arrangement with the Fulton Hogan. And now, they have been given to China Railway No. 5, which has also been highlighted here. We still did not know how much has been paid to Fulton Hogan and MWH in this sort of arrangement, bearing in mind, Mr. Speaker, Sir, FRA and MWH are the babies of this Government, who to-date still has failed to deliver. We talked about FNPF this morning and RBF that are already existing institutions. They came in, make their amendments but are still operating efficiently. This is one of the institutions that is borne out of this Government.

They made the reform, unfortunately, the Honourable Minister for Economy is not here when it is my time to speak so that he can be allowed to listen to all these concerns that had been highlighted. This is one of the babies of this Government – FRA, then MWH, till to-date are still a failure.

The amount of investment that has gone into FRA, it has now tripled in terms of the budget that has been given to them. I heard the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure inquiring, “Even the facts that FRA now is better than the DNR then.” Well, Honourable Minister, the facts are right in front of you.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Where?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Look at the Report. It is right there, if not, you look out, there are lots of potholes outside, bigger, bigger potholes than before, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The other issue on the WAF, another baby of this Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Associated with it is another failure, especially when all those issues that had been highlighted in the Auditor-General’s Report, just shows a simple abuse of the process. Simple processes that were not being followed in terms of project management.

And I relate to Recommendation No. 3, Mr. Speaker, Sir, whereby the Committee has recommended that all contracts relating to capital projects, the Authority must ensure that they have starting and ending dates. No expected completion date for China Railway No. 5 Engineering Group Limited for the Samabula North Sewer Reticulation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not too sure, maybe the Honourable Minister can confirm in this House, whether this is the same China Railway No. 5 Engineering that was then working on the Samabula North Reticulation, that has been appointed by FRA to look into the Central Division roadwork maintenance.

The issues highlighted then was that they were not even given a completion date, they were given a leeway in terms of conducting the project. Just imagine, now they have been given the FRA Projects, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we could just wonder what will happen to the projects that have been given to the China Railway No. 5 by FRA.

We recommend, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that FRA needs to do a self-assessment audit and the audit needs to be undertaken by the Office of the Auditor-General. There is no two ways, they need to assess how effective they have performed. After five or six years in operation, they need to conduct a value for money audit in terms of their operation for both, WAF and FRA, especially to ensure that they are working according to what they have been allocated. And also they have a delivered in terms of the purpose of their reform. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Usamate, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. First of all, I would like to thank the Committee for its recommendations and the work that it has done. All of us as Members of Parliament are always interested in the funds that are made available for the provision of services for our people. And we all know the history of how roads and water have been managed in this country. We all heard the stories about the shenanigans that used to go on in terms of water cutting, how companies were hired and many people made lots of money.

There were some people working within the Government Departments at that time, that used to make money out of this and all kinds of shenanigans went on. There was a need for a strong Government to put a reform in place, change the way that all of these was structured to make sure that we had stronger Government systems, and that is why we led to the establishment of the Water Authority and the Fiji Roads Authority to do two things.

First of all, it is not going to be a Government's business for eternity to be involved in operational things at all times. Government is to reduce over time, and need to set up organisations that do the operational part of the activities, whether you are talking about occupational, health and safety, whether you are talking about things like water, whether you are talking about things, like roads, and that was what was done at that time, the establishment of these bodies.

But, when you set up bodies like this, it is not going to be perfect overnight. The Government structures need to be put in place. May be, there were some issues that will happen too quickly, who knows? I was not around at that particular point in time, other Ministers that were involved might be able to shed some light, but the intent is clear. What is the intent?

The intent is to make sure that we can provide water to everyone that needs water. These are the objectives that we have in our 5 Year Development Plan and our 20 Year Development Plan, and there is a firm commitment to making sure that we do that. I think by around the year 2030, to make sure that everyone has access to water, that we improve the management of wastewater, that those who need access to roads are provided the roads that they need.

So the Bainimarama-led Government has put in place this organisation. It is not going to be perfect overnight, but history will show us, when you look over the extent of time that which WAF has been in operation and FRA, 20 years from today, people will thank Government for doing this because overtime, you will see the results. We are beginning to see the results now.

That is the point that I am making, it is not going to be perfect overnight. But when you look at the extended period over 10 years, 15 years or 20 years, we will see the immense impact that will have on the people of this country, so that is what I am going to say.

I thank the members of the Boards of WAF and FRA, the Management, the Chief Executive Officers of these organisations, their Senior Management, they need to be held to account for the things that happen in those organisations. The Government's role is to establish the policy, make sure that we appoint the right people and make sure they execute on what needs to be done.

I, as Minister, my job also is to make sure that these Boards and their Management, execute the things that need to be done. We want to make sure also that every dollar that is given to them, they have to spend wisely. So I appreciate the recommendations that are here.

The three Recommendations that we have, with regards to Recommendation No. 1, under the current contracts of FRA and WAF, they now include relevant Clauses on delayed damages. For FRA and WAF, the contracts are now administered according to the International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC) Guidelines, new guidelines and new systems. This is how we run organisations and how we do things. We constantly improve. The Japanese call this *Kaizen* - constant improvement of what we are doing.

So now the FIDIC Contracting Guidelines that we now give for the contractors and those who take up the jobs from FRA and WAF under this FIDIC Contracting Guidelines, they are charged for any delayed damages. They are charged at a rate of \$1,000 per day. We did not have that initially, but now it has been improved so we can hold people accountable.

We, as Members of Parliament, as Ministers, we want to make sure that the Board of FRA and WAF do their job well and the companies that win these contracts do their job well. So these sorts of new conditions allow us to be able to do that.

Recommendation No. 2 in regards to the capital projects, it should be noted that all tenders issued and received by FRA and WAF are managed through TenderLink. So there is a process that has been established, so there is no playing around with the tenders as they are managed. All tenders received through TenderLink are processed through a separate procurement unit. So having this sort of systems tries to enhance the governance of the way in which tenders are managed.

Tender evaluation is carried out and after the tender evaluation and the assessment, the recommendations are then submitted to the respective Boards for the final decisions.

All contracts issued by FRA and WAF are subject to legal vetting of the Authority's respective legal units. So, the process has been put in place to try to address some of the issues that are being manifested or articulated in the recommendations that we have here.

In addition, there is competitive bidding process that allows FRA and WAF to obtain fair price and best value for all contracted works. So no more of that funny business of giving a contract to a particular company, everyone has to compete. It has to be assessed, it goes through a proper screening process and as a result of that, the tenders are awarded.

All bids for tender are evaluated on the basis of a pre-determined criteria, so we do not make the criteria as we go along. It is already pre-determined and people know the criteria on which the tenders are going to be judged. In this criteria, it includes price, quality and value for money.

And the competitive tender process. Mr. Speaker, Sir, enables the client to choose from a wide pool of potential suppliers in order to select contractors offering the highest quality at the lowest cost, so those developments have been taking place.

For Recommendation No. 3, as I can see it is broken down into three more components. We take note of that Recommendation and this is also something that I am sure that FRA and WAF would be active on.

For the information of the Committee, details such as contracts start and end date, and requirement for the payment of performance bonds and retention sums are included as necessary clauses of FIDIC-administered contracts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we appreciate the recommendations that are here and as I have tried to highlight, some developments have been taking place to make sure that these recommendations and their effect is felt in terms of the provision of FRA and WAF. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I actually got up to break my fast and pray for you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality as the Minister has highlighted, obviously there has been such governance issues that the Report does pick up. Honourable Nawaikula did highlight that, and the names that were actually read out were names of staff. They were not the names of the fathers of this side of the House or any of the Ministers, or any of the Members of Parliament. There were staff who

were not following procedures, there were staff who make unilateral decisions on the stop and giving variations to contracts.

This is actually a spillover from the good old Water and Sewerage Department days. And I can, Mr. Speaker, stand here and talk for next two hours about the horrendous things that used to take place the Water and Sewerage Department.

There were people and I am sure, Honourable Radrodro may know some of these people, who actually worked in the Water and Sewerage Department and had their own water trucking companies. And when they needed some funds, they would turn off the valves so the water trucking companies could get the contract and go out. There was no competitive bidding.

We had people who were earning \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year, working in this Department, or less than that, who had their children in International School. How did they afford those funds? Because there was corruption. This is not to say that there was corruption in WAF when it was created.

One of the unfortunate things about WAF is that the transition was not as smooth as the transition from the Department of National Roads (DNR) to FRA. You do not see those kind of recurring problems that you have in WAF that you have in FRA, that is the point of difference.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other yardstick that we can also use in respect of seeing whether people are actually being taken to task, and I have got reports from the Public Accounts Committee from those are the days when Parliament was in Veiutu, numerous recommendations were made, no prosecutions took place.

Today, we have a businessman from Ba, he is locked up in Naboro somewhere because of corruption. We had staff who had been charged in both the organisations because of corruption. We had a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who was removed and became one of the candidates because of the laxity in management. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if problems do occur, Honourable Tikoduadua who was also the Chairman of the FRA at one point in time, the test is whether these issues are highlighted where steps are being taken, the test is when a deficiency is identified or corruption identified, whether the people are actually taken to task by way of prosecution or not. That is the test and if you look at the number of prosecutions and the number of complaints that have been made and the actions that have been taken on them, they are far more than what used to exist previously.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is, I think someone talked about ADB and the payments. Please, let me explain how ADB works. When ADB, for example, gives a loan for a particular project, Government has a component to it, sometimes. Sometimes the entire project may be ADB-funded completely.

ADB is part and parcel of the procurement requirements when the tenders actually go out. They have an input into that. They, for example, if you build a new road or a new bridge, they will require for example, a gender study. They will require, for example, the socio-economic impact on that particular environment. There are numerous studies they require and Honourable Nawaikula, for your information, that is where a lot of the consultancy fees goes into it. We have had a problem with ADB in terms of the procurement regulations. We have said to them, if there has been a bridge in a particular area for the past 50 years, if the bridge gets washed away in a flood and you are going to fund it, there is no need to do all those studies because we know impact of that bridge. It has been there for the 50 years.

So we have been through those motions regarding the requirements. This has been obviously a learning curve for both the organisations and when, for example, if a particular project is funded by

ADB, if Government is contributing 50 percent of it, ADB is contributing 50 percent of it, it is not us paying the ADB, it is us actually paying for the contract. So they are saying, “We did not pay ADB on time.” We do not give ADB any money. ADB, in fact, gives us money via the contractor by paying for the contractor’s fees. That is how we have a loan with ADB. So it is a misnomer to understand or to say that we did not pay ADB on time.

It could have been that the contribution of the Government did not go on time. Now sometimes that happens because there may be certain boxes that are not ticked off. Those are the kinds of reasons. Sometimes ADB may not pay because they will say, “well hang on, this particular variation was not approved by the board therefore we are not going to pay it unless you regularise it.” That is when you have those delays in the process.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Kepa spoke about the Rewa Delta and the problems there. She would also know that only recently, a few weeks ago, the Honourable Prime Minister did the ground-breaking ceremony for the greater Suva/Nausori Water Sewerage Upgrade. This is a \$400 million project. It will take about four to five years. Of course, it will be sequential. The reality is that we are the only Government that is addressing it. Those issues she is highlighting has been there for donkey’s years. They have been there for decades. We are the only ones now trying to address it. We have as a result of that \$400 million project, it is a reality, accept it, it is a reality. We sign on the dotted line.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I mean, I do not know how they can object to it. We have just signed on the dotted line, the ground-breaking ceremony has taken place, the works have started and it is a blended finance. In other words, the Fijian Government is giving money towards it, the ADB is giving a loan and we are the first country in the Pacific to receive actually a grant from the Green Climate Fund of about \$US32 million to \$US34 million.

Now this is being hailed across in other jurisdictions as the way to go and again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a result of that, we are seeing now a lot of interest, for example, in the Nadi River Rehabilitation Programme where we have got about four or five different development agencies wanting to fund towards that. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to highlight, yes, of course, there have been issues. There have been legacy issues that we inherited. WAF was not cleaned up as well as it should have been. Now, of course, it is being done. The CEOs and management are being taken to task.

We do need assistance from outside. There are certain areas, we have deficiencies in terms of staffing so Honourable Gavoka, we cannot always just localise for the sake of it, in the same way that he wants Qantas board members to come in, they are expatriates, they are not locals. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, like I highlighted, the stories are there. The Minister for Infrastructure has already highlighted the work programme and I would like to thank the Committee for its report. Let us look forward and work together. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I now give the floor to the Chairperson for his Right of Reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker a lot has been said. As explained by the Honourable Minister these two entities have done a lot to address these issues. We must commend the two entities for taking heed of the recommendations and improving their systems. That is all from my side, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Chair. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of ‘Noes’)

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

PUBLIC PETITION – ILL-TREATMENT OF STAFF OF GRAND PACIFIC HOTEL

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, I move:

That the Parliament debates the Public Petition for the Parliament to urgently look into the ill-treatment faced by the staff and former staff of the Grand Pacific Hotel which was tabled on 13th March, 2018.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Public Petition for the Parliament to urgently look into the ill-treatment faced by staff and former staff of the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Mr. Speaker Sir, by way of background, in 2015 a petition with 67 signatories were brought before Parliament highlighting the plight and claims of ill-treatment by the staff and former staff members of the GPH in Suva. These claims were made against the General Manager of the Hotel, the Executive team and alleged bad management and ill-treatment of GPH staff members.

The Petition was assigned to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights but later handed over to the Standing Committee of Economic Affairs, for your information. After deliberation and consideration of this Petition, the Committee was in agreement that while the issue of concern were presented back in 2014 and 2015 and have been addressed satisfactorily. It is important to note that a number of grievances raised by GPH staff has dropped off considerably since 2014 with just two filed in 2016, both of which have been resolved.

This is a definite sign that the situation at GPH has improved overall. The Committee noted that one of the contributing factors that brought about this Petition was that when the hotel opened in 2014 there was no formal human resources policies and processes in place. This has since been rectified and operations in general at the hotel are running smoothly.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker Sir, the Committee encourages employees to follow proper procedures regarding grievances as per the Employment Regulations Act 2007. Also the Committee acknowledges employees to seek membership with organisations within the industry to have a better

understanding of the practice and cultures in Fiji. Mr. Speaker Sir, with those few comments to enlighten the House as the member moving the motion, I thank you for this opportunity.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make some comments on the Report of the Committee on this matter regarding the ill-treatment of the staff at GPH. Of course, I was the one who presented the petition to Parliament on 20th May, 2015, that would have been about seven months after Parliament reconvened after many years without Parliamentary democracy in this country.

I must say that the results of this helped people believe in their Parliament of Fiji. That here was a case that had gone to just about everyone in Fiji, from the staff of GPH who were aggrieved but no one attended to their grievances conclusively and they came to the Parliament and this Parliament heard their petition and action took place. That was quite a proud moment for this Parliament to have heard this petition during that period.

As background, Honourable Speaker, we have noted that GPH, the icon of the South Pacific that had been left in a ruin for quite some time and it was revived, rejuvenated through the injection of capital from Papua New Guinea and local partners, and it was rebuilt to be the icon that it was once. Normally, in a situation like that, the GPH like in any city would become the centre of gravity for social activities. People would want to go to a place like that. It happens and there is always an iconic hotel anywhere in the world, any city of the world where people want to go and socialise, where they want to be seen with other people, appointments and the like. GPH was and is that establishment today.

What happened here, Honourable Speaker, is that a lot of our people who had served in big chains in the Western Division from Suva decided to come back to Suva. They had served in the Sheraton with InterContinental, Hilton, big names like that and they saw another 5 star hotel opening in the city and that is where they wanted to be, closer to home and working in an establishment similar to where they were serving in the West. But unfortunately, Honourable Speaker, they were horrified when they discovered that the culture of where they were, the names like the one that I had quoted was absent in this one here in GPH.

As a hotelier, Honourable Speaker, let me just say that every chain has a culture to it, Shangri-La has a culture, Warwick, Sheraton, InterContinental, Hilton, and we are very proud of that culture. Our people become part of the culture and are very proud of it. So, by coming back to Suva to a 5 star property, they would be expected to see that culture in here but as I said, they were horrified Honourable Speaker, when they were ill-treated through the breach of labour laws, unauthorised deduction of wages, mismanagement of maternity leave, oppressive labour practices, verbal abuse and unfair dismissal.

These are just some parts of what they faced. If you look at the report, Honourable Speaker, it says, due to the inordinate delay by relevant agencies in dealing with this matter conclusively, this petition was brought to Parliament; due the inordinate delay by the Ministry of Labour, Department of Immigration and the Police. They even went as far as the Prime Minister's Office, to the media. No one wanted to touch this matter. It was very sad, Honourable Speaker. It appeared that this gentleman here was a king of his own in this part of Suva and no one was willing to challenge him on the way he was behaving.

Later, we found out that he had similar issues with people in the country of Africa where he had served. Honourable Speaker, this person was just a total tyrant, he used abusive words. This was happening right here in Suva, and no one had the courage to stand up to him. They must have been

afraid of someone like that, the General Manager of a five-star hotel and he just got away with everything that he did, until it came to Parliament.

Of course, as soon as it was tabled in Parliament, it was a few days later that he left the country, he departed. I know we were proud of that, that here was someone who was behaving like a tyrant, not realising that it is a free country and that it went up to the highest body in the land, the highest lawmaker in the land where the case was heard. What was also important, Honourable Speaker, is that the fear with our people.

As you remember, Honourable Speaker, way back in 1980, when tourism began to develop, the Honourable Prime Minister then, the Honourable Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara had said at an Annual Conference in Naviti, “It shall be tourism on our terms”, you remember that, and tourism had grown with that principle, with that understanding that tourism in this country would be on the terms of the people of this country.

Unfortunately, that principle has fallen by the wayside with FirstFirst. The tyrants had been emboldened by the neglect of FijiFirst on the labour laws of this country. Why would they push these people away when they took the issues to the Ministry of Labour? The police, Honourable Speaker, even misplaced their Report. These are our children, they were treated in this manner. Honourable Speaker, it is something that I have taken issues with a lot of people in this country, with the General Managers, with the leadership, our people are still being subjected to the “f” word in this country. They are still using the “f” word against our people and I have written to a few people and I have told them to stop doing it.

In the past anyone who did that, was given 24 hours to leave the country. But I do not know what has happened to that, they are now sort of emboldened by this regime that is running Fiji today that our people are now being treated in this manner. Honourable Speaker, it is a sad example of where we are and I think everyone in this House should make it known to anyone who is a foreigner in this country to learn to know how we operate, to understand the culture of the people here, to understand what the branding of this country is, Honourable Speaker, which is “Where happiness finds you”. Happiness cannot find you in this country if you treat people in that manner.

They are the ones who introduced it, during my time it was Fiji, but if they are saying “Where happiness finds you”, and they are allowing the expatriates to use the “f” word against our people, there are going to be no happiness in this country. Honourable Speaker, we need to be very clear on where we are with our tourism. This was a good lesson to all of us, we need to look after our people, watch those who come into this country to come and manage our tourism.

The Government should be a champion to workers rather than creating an environment of fear and dissatisfaction which will impact the economy in the long run.

Honourable Speaker, we managed to stop this person, he expelled himself from the country, to me I believe it was a proud moment for us that they came to us and we took the step but it is still very much a situation where the executive branch, the Government of today need to make sure that people who come and work in this country should treat our people with dignity and respect. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to acknowledge the work done by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the findings of the ill-treatment faced by the staff and former staff of the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me put the records straight. What I have gathered and what the Ministry officials have revealed to me is that, the mover of the Petition at that point in time knew that the Ministry is very much involved in that matter.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- So he must have been thinking as to what is the best way to say a few words about those workers, then he came with that Petition. But let me say this, Honourable Speaker, that there is no truth in what the Honourable Member has just said ...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Shame.

HON. P.K. BALA.- ... that Government had its hands off on that matter, there is no truth in it. I must inform this House that the report from the Ministry reveals that the Ministry officials were very much involved in that saga.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- And as stated, the then General Manager ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- ... is no longer at the GPH. Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me make it also very clear to this august House that under the FijiFirst Government, we will not tolerate any abuse of the workers' right in all workplaces.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- ... the Employment Relations Act 2007 is very clear in providing social justice and good faith employment relation in all workplaces. The law clearly defines the rights and responsibilities of workers and employers in the employment relationship.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry will continue to protect the fundamental rights and principles of the workers and employers at work and promote fair labour practice for all persons.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as an outcome of our continuous discussion and monitoring at GPH, there have been a major reduction in the employment grievances report to the Ministry.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2016, there has been only four employment grievances, two cases reported in 2017, one in 2018 and for the information of this honourable House, all these cases have been resolved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure that this is not repeated, the GPH Hotel Executive Management has put in place 27 Human Resources Management Policy Guidelines to assist the employer and employees and we welcome this proactive approach by GPH.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for any other matter or issue that may arise between the workers and the management of GPH in future, this will be dealt with thoroughly by our conflict resolution machinery. This has been proven and highly effective mechanism in ensuring natural and social justice for all workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I acknowledge and support the recommendation of the Committee, and I thank you, Sir.

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also rise to contribute to this discussion. The way the picture was painted as if in this country, all hoteliers ill-treat their workers. This was just a one-off case and the statistics provided by the Honourable Member shows that there is very little such cases in the tourism industry. If there is, obviously we have got a system in place where grievances can be taken to and addressed. I would like to say one important thing and that is, our people had always and will remain the most important asset of our economy.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- And that includes the tourism sector. The tourism industry thrives on the unique hospitality and friendliness of Fijians, and such issues must be addressed immediately to minimise the impact on our valuable asset which is our people.

There are other countries in the Pacific who envy us just because our people, the way they serve in the tourism sector, actually makes the tourism sector do better, and we have seen that, that is the unique part or unique aspect of our Tourism sector, so we appreciate that. So the Fijian Government is committed to ensuring that the tourism industry delivers the best service, not only to our tourism stakeholders, that is the local stakeholders, but also to our international visitors.

So with those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for giving me time.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I just rise to very briefly just point out two things. I thank the Honourable Minister Premila Kumar, for saying the word, 'immediately.' One thing I would like to point out first is, I want to highlight that while reading the Verbatim Notes of the Committee, especially the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Report on the grievances of the GPH staff, I noticed that there were a number of pages missing. And I hope that the Committee deliberated on the full Report from the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and not just the pages that were reflected in the Verbatim, as it details the extent to which Government agencies were inept in addressing the issues immediately. And I know this, Honourable Speaker, Sir, because my daughter worked at the hotel during this time. She was involved in an accident where there was a fatality while she was travelling in a staff bus.

Seven months later she was asked to then present herself at the Ministry of Labour to undergo a medical report and I have all the emails, Sir. So I just want to say “thank you very much” to the Committee. I know that now the GPH is in a much better place to work in, but I just hope that in future, we will deal with these issues in a more timely manner. Thank you, Sir.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just very quickly, because of the tourism sector obviously is a very critical part of our economy, it contributes approximately 36 percent towards our GDP and is no doubt a sector that we do want to grow, but also to be able to develop better segmentation within the tourism sector. For example we want to get more movement in the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) market.

We have now seen that Suva is becoming quite a centre of regional meetings for this particular part of the South Pacific, including Nadi. Of course, the ADB meeting was an ability for us to showcase ourselves, and we are also glad that FNPF has announced the fact that they are going to start building very soon the Convention Centre. They will host about 4 ½ thousand people which gives us, of course, the opportunity to be able to host, not only large scale meetings, but also things like international boxing matches, international music festivals or concerts, et cetera, and that, of course, is tied in with FNPF exclusive licences to have a casino, could all work quite well.

But, I just wanted to highlight some issues. Honourable Gavoka raised something that was addressed, of course, by the Minister for Labour and Industrial Relations that this matter was actually before the Employment Ministry in itself. Of course, there is no doubt the particular gentleman in question, in fact, we had raised ourselves personally in the manner in which he interacted and the fact that he got our porters to wear these funny hats, that kind of reminded us that we are back in the colonial days. In fact, we lodged complaints about that, they would have seen those hats go away.

This gentleman, of course, was brought under by the GPH, as you know, GPH, as you know until recently was 75 percent-owned by a Papua New Guinean Company and therefore they had control over the management of the hotel itself. So they brought in the personnel; they are the ones who actually recruited this particular Manager.

FNPF has recently acquired the majority shares in this particular property and they are currently looking at an international chain to give their brand to GPH to ensure that we get that kind of flow through that was referred to by Honourable Gavoka and indeed the international standards, and that is what we need in order to position ourselves.

I am glad in his meanderings, he finally admitted that Fiji was a free country but also it goes to show and I cautioned him and everyone else, “Please, when we do talk about these issues, let us not become xenophobic or almost xenophobic about it.” The reality of the matter is that Honourable Gavoka has worked in the hotel industry, Honourable Qereqeretabua’s father was also Manager of the Shangri-la. They have also worked with the expatriates, they have also learned from the expatriates. So reality is that the hotel industry and majority of the hotels in Fiji, in particular, those on the outer islands, in the Mamanucas and the Yasawas, large scale investments have actually been made by foreigners.

In particular Australians and Kiwi investors, they have pumped in a lot of money, so some of them are actually on the property, some of them do have these managers and our locals have also moved up. They have also learnt from them, so let us not try and do this, it is only the foreigners who use the ‘f’ word, there are many locals who use the ‘f’ word. Let us not forget that, let us not have this dichotomous approach to everything. It is not an “us and them” situation. We, of course, were worried

about it, the kind of pictures we have been creating as if the entire hotel industry is some kind of pandemic in the hotel industry that everyone has been victimised, everyone has been some way or the other being ill-treated. That is furthest from the truth.

We, of course, have concerns about Fijians working in the Cook Islands who complained about them being ill-treated. Our people do go to Cook Islands, there have been complaints about them not necessarily getting the leave, not necessarily being paid on time. These are the kind of situations that we do need to deal with. Again, I would say that the system, of course, in certain areas have been slow.

The Minister for Industrial Relations will tell us that recently in the budget consultations we had last week, we talked about how to improve the services, we talked about how some of the outer posts or offices in Nadi and Lautoka that the Labour offices need to again lift up their game, so there is constant work, there is constant review, there is constant internal critiquing of the way the work is being done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly also, you would have seen just recently a couple of days ago, there was a ruling by the Tribunal where a GPH worker has the orders of the Tribunal was for them to be reinstated, apart from being compensated. The system is working, the Tribunal is working. We have now three Tribunal sittings, we have given more funding towards it but, please, let us not in this process, try and undermine our major economic sector which is the tourism sector.

We want to grow it, we are doing numerous right things which you do not want to recognise. There is also the synergy growing in with Fiji Airways, getting new markets, flying to new destinations, mitigating our risks by being dependent only on two markets. A number of initiatives have been put in place and I would like to also commend, in fact, some of the staff at the Ministry of Employment that have been doing the work and we want them to do better work and, of course, on the civil service pay rise and a lot of positive things are happening and we are seeing a lot of tracks in that respect, and I like to thank the Committee for their Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I forget, workers compensation was raised. I would like to invite the Honourable Member, she is absolutely right, previously, in fact in 2007, there were such a backlog of workers compensation claims, then the Honourable Prime Minister intervened and we brought in a medical doctor from the RFMF and we brought in Project officers from the RFMF to clear literally thousands and thousands of cases that were languishing there for the past five, six, seven, eight years.

We managed to clear the backlog and there is still some cases pending and, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have now set up the Accident Compensation Commission of Fiji (ACCF) which will now, starting from January of this year, deal directly on workers compensation claims and now, of course, we do not have to go to the court system, going through a lawyers like Honourable Nawaikula or whoever else that will represent people.

The court system has been taken out of the equation. We now have direct claims we made to the ACCF and, of course, it is what we call a “no-fall” situation. Let me remind the Honourable Members of this Parliament on no-fall situation means, for example, if Honourable Qereqeretabua’s daughter was travelling or she was using a machine in the kitchen, whatever it was, and if she, for example, God forbid, cut a finger, under the old system, the employer would then try and assign some type of blame to her that maybe she came in, she was hung over or negligent, that is why her finger got cut. Under the new system now, you got injured at work, you get paid out. You do not have to go to a lawyer.

There is actually a payment, for example, there are pricings on various limbs of your body as they do in New Zealand. If you are right-handed and if you, for example, lose a limb on the right side, it is a much higher compensation payout than on the left side.

The process has now been simplified, and that is what we are doing. These are the real changes on the ground that are taking place which will have a direct and positive impact on the work environment for the workers of this country.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, please let us acknowledge the work that has been done. Of course, there is a lot of room for improvements and we are working towards that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I will take the last speaker.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Committee that has done the analysis for this particular case. There is one thing that I wanted to highlight, there is, sort of, a claim made here, quite an astounding claim, that these grievances would never have been resolved, if it had not come through a petition.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Absolutely!

HON. J. USAMATE.- I will tell you, I think this is an offence against the hardworking people, working in the Ministry of Employment, who did a lot of hours in trying to address this.

(Hon. V.R. Gavoka interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- I tell you this because I have worked in that Ministry and I know the way in which they carry out their work.

When there is a grievance made, before you make a decision, you have to get the full story, always. Whether you are talking about a disciplinary issue or a grievance issue, I always say, sometimes when people describe their grievance, they describe it as something like this, it is round. But you have to see the whole thing first, before you can make a decision, and going through that process takes time.

I think we should salute the hardworking staff of the Ministry of Employment, the Director of Labour Standards and his Labour Inspectors, who go out of their way to make sure that they try to address these sorts of issues. They try to resolve the issues, they get all the information and they try to come up with a decision. Where it fails, they take it through mediation.

One of the hallmarks of the legislation that we have in labour is that, there is a focus on self-regulation. They try to come up with a solution. When it fails, then they go to mediation where the two parties try to agree on a solution. When that fails, they go to the tribunal, so there is a set process. But it is not just when someone complains today, we take whatever that person is saying as literal truth and you make a decision, no! There is a process.

There is a process for natural justice to make sure that when you come up with a decision, it is the correct decision. So I stand here to applaud the hardworking civil servants in the Ministry of Employment, the Director for Labour Standards and his staff who had worked very hard, people in the Mediation and people in the Tribunal, who had worked very hard to bring natural justice to the employees of GPH. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Chairperson, you now have the floor for your right of reply.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have no further comments, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

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

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will now take a break for dinner and we will resume in a hour's time. We are adjourned for dinner.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.49 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 7.55 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with our Agenda. I now call on the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

**RECOGNITION AND COMMENDATION FOR MEDICAL
CHARITIES AND FOUNDATIONS**

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Honourable Speaker, I move:

That this House recognises and commends the good work of the various Medical Charities and Foundations, who carry out specialised medical surgeries in Fiji.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I support and second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members. I now invite the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu to speak to the motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker Sir, allow me to begin by thanking this House for granting me the opportunity to move this motion and I respectfully call upon each and every Honourable Member of this House, to support this motion and the spirit of appreciation for this noble Charities and Foundations and selfless and generous men and women, who give up their time and their skills to bring these surgeries not otherwise readily available in Fiji, to serve our people in need of these life-saving surgeries.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the various medical charitable and foundations in Fiji continue to touch the lives of our citizens, not only in the field of medicine but also contributes to building a healthy community.

Mr. Speaker, although there are a number of various medical Charities and Foundations that work in Fiji, allow me to commend to this august House three organisations that I am familiar with.

The first one is the Loloma Foundation, Mr. Speaker Sir. The Loloma Foundation originated when Dr. Lance Hendricks was asked by Ms. Linda Kwasny (Lalati Resort owner) to bring a cataract team to Lalati to care for the people of Beqa Island.

Prior to this, Dr. Hendricks organised visiting Professors from ScrippsHealth and University of California, San Diego, to teach in the postgraduate training programme at the Fiji School of Medicine in the field of anaesthesia, surgery, paediatrics, internal medicine, et cetera.

He originally came to Fiji for surfing at Tavarua Island. He also organised reconstructive surgical teams from California, who travelled to Nadi, Sigatoka, Labasa, Lakeba and Vanuabalavu Hospitals in different years.

In 2012, the Loloma Fiji Charitable Trust was formed to assist with the Loloma's work in Fiji. Sir, the Loloma Foundation's mission is to provide sustainable, medical, dental and infrastructure to rural communities in the South Pacific, who would otherwise have no access to basic healthcare.

The Loloma Foundation is a California-based 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 2001. The board members consist of six medical, dental and business professionals who share a common goal to improving the lives of the people of the South Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last 18 years the Loloma Foundation has accomplished the following:

- Shipped and distributed \$US34 million worth of medications, medical and dental supplies and equipment to Fiji and the Solomon Islands;
- Organised and implemented 72 medical/dental missions in Fiji and Solomon Islands;
- 9,800 patients have been treated by their volunteer physicians;
- 382 cataract surgeries carried out;
- 941 general surgeries carried out; and
- 8,996 dental procedures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Loloma Foundation believes that it is also important to build a healthy community beyond providing basic medical and dental care. It strives to enable people to provide for themselves. Welfare does not build character. To achieve that, they have undertaken the following:

- Joint funding (co-financed with village participation) of sustainability projects;
- Village solar projects;
- Clean water through catchment and storage tanks;
- Stocking libraries with children and adult books;
- Building kindergartens in rural villages;
- Providing 1,500 backpacks and educational materials to kindergartens and primary grades;
- Training teachers who are certified by the Fiji Kindergarten Project;
- Scholarships for primary and secondary students; and
- Village bakery businesses.

In addition to this, Mr. Speaker, the Loloma Foundation has also undertaken the following:

- Demolition and reconstruction of all bathrooms at Taveuni Hospital and Taveuni Conference Rooms in the Out-Patients Department;
- Repainting of the interior of Taveuni Hospital;
- Arranging and funding of patients transport to Taveuni Hospital from as far as Yasawa Islands;
- Providing lodging and food for the Taveuni surgery patients;
- Distributed \$US30,000 in food supplies to Taveuni Island along with medical help and basic repair work post-*TC Winston*;
- Reconstruction of Navakawau Primary School post-*TC Winston*; and
- Built a 16 station computer laboratory at South Taveuni School.

With respect to renovation, Sir, two separate teams transformed the 40-foot container into a permanent break room for the medical and surgical teams in Taveuni. It has a kitchen, bathroom and is climatized. Shelving and lighting was added to the existing 40-foot container. Another astounding group of dedicated and hard-working volunteers worked tirelessly through hot weather, often long into the night to tend to all the surgical patients.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me now add a few words on The Mission at Natuvu Creek which is situated on 750 acres and encompasses an extinct volcano that reaches an altitude of 1,200 feet, rain and bamboo forest in the beautiful clean ocean shores of Buca Bay. It lies on the eastern coast of Vanua Levu, built to serve the rural people of Fiji, the Mission at Natuvu Creek offers an expanding array of medical services, health and wellness education, development of jobs and grassroot industries and assistance with education from pre-kindergarten through high school.

Sir, the Mission serves as a base for visiting individuals, families, university students and teams seeking to serve the people of Fiji and enjoy Fiji's unspoilt beauty. The Mission at Natuvu Creek is a non-denominational faith-based and non-profit organisation founded by the Tooma Family Foundation, the construction of the Mission started in 2003. It is registered in Fiji as a charitable organisation since 2006 and opened to the public from 2008 to present. It is a free of charge medical clinic.

Since the beginning, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Natuvu Mission received medical and non-medical teams from different locations around the globe. To name a few locations, they had the privilege of working with doctors coming in from United States of America, Canberra, United Kingdom, Argentina, New Zealand and Australia among others. They received 17 groups and more than 500 volunteers every year. From 2008, more than 20,000 patients had visited the mission seeking for health improvement.

Sir, the procedures are dependent on the specialists that every team brings. Ophthalmologists have done cataracts, pterygium, corneal transplants and general consultations. Surgeons performed cleft palates and cleft lip surgeries, skin grafts for burnt patients, lipomas, bumps and lumps, tumour removals and many procedures under general and local anaesthesia.

The Mission at Natuvu also provides dental assistance to patients with periodontal, surgical and restorative needs. The Mission at Natuvu started with the goal of providing health care education and training for the communities in Buca Bay, but instead have received patients from all around Fiji. That opened the Mission to a much bigger desire to help not only those in Buca Bay but as many people as they can.

One of the plans for the future of the Mission is to open a laboratory for blood tests. This will not only help doctors at the Mission, in patient's treatments but also to prevent and detect disease in early stages and to find proper treatment. The limitations of the Mission are the surgeries that requires patients to stay for many days to recover. But these limitations opens the door to the idea of working with the district hospitals to have the opportunity to overcome these limitations.

The next organisation which I wish to speak on is the Rotary Taveuni Club with the Rotary Foundation and Rotary International which had completed the 13th Annual Taveuni Eye Project in 2018. Sir, the people of Fiji are on board to serve and treat the blind who are numerous and helpless. Rotary is the only group offering surgery to children in Fiji. The Rotary model is different, in that they offer full patient service that rural Fijians cannot afford to pay. Remote villagers cannot get to that treatment on their own so they go to them with eye assessments and then guide them to and from the surgery.

The goal of the Taveuni Eye Project, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to give sight to children and adults from more remote and rural areas of Fiji. Taveuni Eye Project focuses on those, especially, children in remote rural areas and those who without our help, would not have any quality of life. The Fiji blinds are numerous, poor and they need our help. The patients come from all over Fiji as Rotarians go to where there is a need not fulfilled by Government.

The project seeks to upskill local nurses and assessing and caring teams plus making sure to involve many in the local communities in the project. Thus, the Rotary is making the project a truly Fiji project; two-thirds of the team who now carry out the project are from Fiji.

Sir, the international surgeons, nurses and logistics people are all on board with Rotary to ensure that the project is a success every year and no payment is made to them. They fund their own travel and living costs for two weeks. Surgeries, laser and other operations were completed in 10 days in 2018 included:

- Cataract surgeries - 227;
- Pterygiums - 97;
- Others - 2;
- Yag Laser treatment - 1;
- Total eye sight restored to sight - 328; and
- Slit lamp investigations - Plus 41.

Therefore, the total number of medical procedures that were completed was 369 patients. Patients who had a procedure – 218 adults and 6 children with a total of 224.

The Rotary Fiji Taveuni Eye Project care model is from home to home including carer support both ways and at hospital, all food, transport and accommodation, added to this is the surgery, medical supplies and there is a holistic model for the poor, remote and disadvantaged blind of Fiji. In the pamphlet it states:

1. Rural Fiji travel is expensive (Rotary does not charge);
2. Accommodation is expensive (Rotary does not charge);
3. The total project cost in 2018 for the Taveuni Eye Project was FJ\$194,650, of which 81 percent was spent in Fiji at an average cost of FJ\$475,000; and
4. From 2007 till 2018, Taveuni Eye Project had done a total of 3,407 procedures.

Sir, allow me to take this opportunity to acknowledge a great friend, mentor and a true Rotarian who passed away, Mr. Geoffrey Amos. For those who do not know Mr. Geoffrey Amos of Raikivi House, Matei, he was instrumental in school construction, school quarters construction, medical groups to Taveuni that helped thousands. He was a pillar of Rotary Club in Taveuni, he did not seek recognition for whatever he did, and he did it for self-reflection and progress of Taveuni Island. Service before self was encrypted in his heart. He believed in making life better for education and health.

The good work of these organisations would not be possible without the very help of our own:

- Government through the Ministry of Health and Fiji School of Medicine;
- Transportation services in the shipping industry;
- Hoteliers and business community in Taveuni and Qamea; and
- Countless and tireless volunteers both internationally and locally.

Mr. Speaker, they also encounter challenges. One of the challenges is:

1. Volunteer nurses and doctors registration here in Fiji for two weeks when they come down to help in our communities;
2. Customs/freight/duty on rotary items especially what “A team” may need during their volunteer work. It would be appreciated if the Government could assist in any way; and
3. The cost of acquiring medical equipment and supplies and then moving them to the mission sites is essential with the annual expenditure.

Let us take into account, Mr. Speaker, Sir the hard work that is being put by selfless individuals, philanthropists, generous corporate bodies and Non-Government Organisations here at home and abroad who spend hours, weeks, and in several cases months or even years to raise funds for charity and more for specialised medical surgeries. They do not know the beneficiaries in person but they perform all such with a view of humanity.

Sir, there is a need to appreciate how funds are being managed, channelled and used. These charities while helping the poor and needy by their acts also enshrine the high ideals and principles

pertaining to accountability, good governance and transparency in their conduct, if anything than a good model for leadership training, prudent financial management and how to pool our scarce resources together in drips to make the difference that is needed in a society by putting service before self.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to recognise Fiji as one of the Pacific States with a developing economy and being prone to climate change risks as well as man-made disasters has been suffering poverty of access. This has kept a large section of our people living in rural and remote areas deprived of basic services. Then there is always a cost to everything that is being done and that being so, even those living in the informal settlements and without an income base in our urban centres suffer from poverty of access. Among many other things they cannot afford to have access to, is specialised medical surgeries.

Let us commend, Mr. Speaker, the generosity of these charitable foundations who have come to our shores and those who have been launched here by our very own caring people for bridging the socio-economic divide by funding our specialised medical surgeries. In some cases, they have ventured to go beyond and provide after surgery assistance and recuperation while extending their services by making substantial investments and creating meaningful jobs for the local people. These are all praiseworthy work that they are doing in Fiji for humanity for which they deserve our unanimous commendation and salutations.

What is important for us while recognising this partnership is to nurture it and allow the necessary scope and space to strengthen and enhance the level of engagement between all stakeholders by the sharing of knowledge, pooling of resources and training local medic-ethic personnel, preparing them to take charge of specialised training and research in the future, adding value to our health and medial sector, human resource and empowering the people of Fiji via good health and longevity.

To all these organisations, I say thank you:

- for your courage and conviction for leaving behind all that is familiar and comfortable to serve others;
- for your compassion, awareness and for seeing the need and responding;
- for sharing your skills and knowledge to help improve the lives and build the capacity of those who have not had the same good fortune of opportunity and education;
- for knowing that the experience you will leave and the people you will encounter will teach you more than you could have imagined;
- for your patience, respect and perseverance, change is never easy; and
- for your kindness, care, love and being the inspiration the world needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to sum up by quoting the late Mother Teresa, a Catholic nun who mobilised the mission to serve the masses in Calcutta, India, and eventually touched by the plight and kindness of the people there naturalised herself as a citizen of India and committed her entire life to the cause and service to humanity. She once said and I quote: “I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I have profound pleasure on behalf of the Opposition, to express our sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the various medical charities and foundations that carry out specialised medical surgeries in Fiji.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I commend the motion before the House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his motion. The floor is now open to anyone wishing to contribute to this motion. Honourable Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you. I wish to contribute to the motion. We hear from Honourable Lalabalavu the Tumour Foundation, the Rotary Club and The Loloma Foundation. The Tumour Foundation and the Loloma Foundation as he says, 'has a clinic that is located in Buca Bay', that is where I come from, and as they say, 'Buca Bay is always nice.'

But, Honourable Speaker, I think this House should unite in thanking these charities. I know there are teams that come through the Yasawa to Rabi Island. Last week, I hear an interview by the heart team for rheumatic hearts by the experts.

In the Loloma Foundation or the clinic at Natuvu, what will happen is that whenever a team comes, they will distribute pamphlets to each and every village in the area and also at Savusavu and elsewhere. And the experience is, that not only our people from those localities come to Natuvu. We have heard people that come right from the Yasawas, right from Ra and right from all around Fiji. The experts include eye specialists, an eye specialist doctor is stationed there all the time, and they check your eyes for free and they give out spectacles. Then teams come around every now and then, bone specialists, the dental specialists also come around often and that happens.

The community is not only there, but the whole of Fiji are benefiting from the good works that are done by these people. They are doing it for free, they are giving up their time, they are spending their own money to come to Fiji for all that, and I think both sides of the House should be thankful for that.

Moving forward, I have just been informed by the Honourable Minister for Health that Tukavesi will be upgraded to a Divisional Hospital, and I hope that they can work together. These are experts in their own field from overseas who do come here, and I hope to see a time when the Ministry of Health can work with the clinic where local health officers, medical officers can go into those clinic to observe on specialised skills and vice versa. That to me is the way to go and it is a way to acknowledge the goodness that these experts bring to Fiji, and a way also to thank them. Thank you.

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

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute to the motion. First of all, I would like to sincerely thank Honourable Dr. Ratu Lalabalavu for acknowledging the contribution of many, many charitable organisations both, national and international, that come to help and improve the health of our people here in Fiji.

Many of these charitable organisations come on an annual basis, but most of them also provide services on continuing basis in Fiji, and it will be very difficult to name each and every one of them because there are several of these organisations who have been coming over the years. Just a few weeks ago, I had a personal experience of what a specialised emergency surgical intervention would do if provided at the right time, at the right place and this could have saved a very patient's life.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, and here I am citing the sudden and unexpected loss of my dear wife, Dr. Nalin Sharma Govind, who possibly could have been saved if such emergency services would have been provided for her.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must say that the FijiFirst Government has taken the lead in bringing Fiji's health services to the next level, the development of tertiary health services in Fiji which will provide the best of essential surgical care to the general public. The Public Private Partnership initiative being implemented in Lautoka and Ba Hospitals is going to largely contribute towards strengthening the tertiary and health care services in our country.

This is the first time ever that a comprehensive and systematic approach to develop tertiary care in our country has been undertaken. No other Government has ever thought that Fiji needs special care to be developed in a systematic manner instead, we had the opportunity of expert specialised visiting teams who come and provide bits and pieces of essential surgical care which is needed in our community.

I hope that this Public Private Partnership will also encourage other national and international partners to come forward and contribute so that the entire nations can have such services whenever people need them.

In view of the rising incidents of chronic Non-Communicable Diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, road traffic injuries and their complications, a world class tertiary care will always be needed here. Currently, the patients who need such care have to travel abroad at huge costs and most of that is through their out-of-pocket expenditures, so once these services are developed here, this could be minimised and our people will become less poor.

While we are acknowledging the contribution of many of our charitable organisations, we must also keep in mind that the ownership of such care rests with us; our country, our Government and coordinating such service is very essential and setting the standards for providing such care to the country is our role, and I am happy that our Ministry of Health is doing this.

While tertiary care services are being developed, let us not forget that prevention is still much better and cheaper than cure, and as many of our Honourable Members have said that leaving politics aside, we all have to join hands so that we become more responsible in promoting health and wellbeing of our people as a team and at this highest political level.

So once again, I would like to thank Honourable Dr. Lalabalavu for this motion and I hope that we will all enjoy good health.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Dr. Govind for his contribution and I now give the floor to Honourable Bulanauca, you have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I am not a doctor but I wish to support the doctors for this motion, particularly maybe because of the lack or insufficient state of funding by the State, and there is a need for modern equipment, medical professionals, medicine supplies for the rising cases of disabilities, diseases, et cetera. I fully support the motion, particularly to some of the overseas charitable organisations that have been mentioned by the Honourable Dr. Atonio Lalabalavu, but there are local charitable organisations as well that does it like Loloma Foundation, Pacifika Foundation, Kidney Foundation of Fiji, Northern Dialysis Centre in Labasa, et cetera. I wish to thank them for the work that they have been doing and in particular, my wife, who is a beneficiary of some of these organisations, particularly eye specialists who do eye treatments.

Also for Kidney Foundation of Fiji and Northern Dialysis Centre in Labasa for she is one of the beneficiaries at the Kidney Dialysis Centre there at the moment, and I stand here to recognise, thank and commend these organisations, the overseas ones and also the local ones for doing their work. It is only for us to give them, recognise them and thank them accordingly. That is all, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member and I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Health. You have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to contribute to the motion by saying that the FijiFirst Government recognises and commends the good work of various medical charities and foundations. That is something that we are very wary of. I want to begin by just sharing a list of those that I have with me here and also whilst sharing, probably talk a little bit about our interactions with them.

The first one is the Benevolent Missions International, No. 2 is Sai Prema Foundation. Honourable Speaker, Sai Prema Foundation is located here in Nasese on a land given by the Government where they have built the Nasese Sai Prema Medical Centre. About two weeks ago, the Honourable Prime Minister opened the Sai Prema Cardiac Imaging Unit which they use as their primary imaging tool when they begin to look at children's hearts as they have been for the last few years coming to Fiji to provide operations for the needy children needing open heart surgery.

In total, they have done 71 and during this visit, they did 17 and which our contribution as a Government was support in terms of their meals, helping them a little bit with accommodation but also in paying for the valves which the children needed. That will come to more than a \$100,000. I was also at the farewell lunch where I stood on behalf of the Government and the people of Fiji to thank them for all their hard work over the years and the fact that most of them were volunteers from all over the world. Some of the nations which they came from were America, Asia, India, et cetera.

Honourable Speaker, the other one on the list is the Rotary Clubs of Australia and New Zealand. You have heard a little bit of the work that they have done in Cakaudrove. The three groups that the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu talked about predominantly do their work around Cakaudrove. I am talking here about groups that work all around Fiji.

So, the Rotary Clubs for Australia and New Zealand, parts of those Rotary Clubs, they have been working, collaborating with us in terms of specialist eye care around the Western Division. In Suva we have the Pacific Eye Institute which provides specialised eye care around the Central Division but in the West, this has been supported by the Rotary Club.

They have even gone into actually building small eye clinics which is a dark room where the eye can actually be looked at under certain lights and for that, we have been very grateful to them. At the beginning of the year, they came over to my office and paid a courtesy call, and I sat down with them and thanked them again for the hard work that they have been doing, and looking at ways in which we can collaborate as we move forward. And now we are talking at working together with Pacific Eye Institute.

Moving on to Pacific Eye Institute, it has been supported over the years by the Fred Hollows Foundation through funding through New Zealand Aid. This is a group that I also met at the beginning of the year and again, on behalf of the Government, I thank them for the hard work and also ask them to continue to support us as we begin to bring out a cohort of Ophthalmologists, who will be able to do the work for us in the country. And I am happy to say in this august House that we are nearing that threshold.

Mr. Speaker, the next group is the Shriners Children's Hospital of Honolulu, Hawaii. This is a group that come regularly every year in which we identify needy children who need very complex orthopaedic operations that are very, very expensive. They come, they identify the children, they take them back with their carers, they treat them sometimes one year, even up to 18 months, they pay for everything including their carer and during that period, the child has education in Hawaii. And when they come back they join our education system, but also having had the necessary complex orthopaedic operations and rehabilitation. They have yet to come this year and I intend to meet them when they come and I can thank them on our behalf.

The other group is the Friends of Fiji Heart Foundation based out of New Zealand, Mr. Speaker. This Group is made up of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, even lawyers, businessmen and this group is chaired by the former Governor-General of New Zealand and a famous son of both, Fiji and New Zealand, His Excellency Honourable Satya Nand. He chairs this Group and they have a big fundraising dinner every year.

They invited and I went across about two weeks ago, flew over on a Saturday afternoon and came back on Sunday morning just to be with them in that dinner and to thank them on behalf of the Government and the people of Fiji for all the hard work that they have been doing over years. In this dinner, it was a fundraising dinner, they had auctions. It was a big dinner in which they try and generate fundraising to be able to fund the work that they do here in Fiji.

Honourable Speaker, we also have the Open Heart International which is a group that is funded by a Pacific Island project but also supported by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church both, in Sydney, Australia, and also in Fiji. This is a Group that actually in the local arena, is supported by Honourable Tuicolo's family, who supports them in terms of helping them with food, et cetera, as they are here. We support them when they come by providing accommodation and also pay for the consumables which is the heart valves that they use, and it is estimated that this year's visit, we will be supporting them to the tune of \$200,000. They have been coming to Fiji for the last 20 years, Honourable Speaker.

The next group is the World Gastroenterology Society which has been coming to Fiji for the last seven years. They have been coming to support our young doctors, to learn how to do endoscopic operations and endoscopic viewing. They have been doing this and now reaching a stage where we have a lot of doctors around Fiji, who can be able to do this proficiently on their own.

Another Group is the Sai Medical Team, which has been coming to Fiji, again, for more than 10 years, initially headed by Dr. Chand Ram from Canberra. This Group has, over the years, helped take across to Canberra for further training our first neurosurgeon, our first neurologist and our first neuroradiologist, who all now work at CWM Hospital, not including the nurses who worked with them in theatre and nurses who run the Electroencephalogram (EEG) machine which measures the brain, and these have all been done through the Sai Foundation.

Now that they have developed that for us, I met them last week and they now want to support us in other areas around Vanua Levu, and I have suggested to them, apart from Labasa to have a think about Savusavu.

Honourable Speaker, just recently, we have been holding meetings about the Taiwan visiting team and also other teams that come and support us from other areas. There are teams that come that are supported by their governments, there are teams that come and are supported by charities, but I want to finish by saying that there are people, individuals, who actually taken it upon themselves to bring themselves to Fiji and bring other like-minded individuals. They do their own fundraising and they come across. I just want to mention two.

One is Dr. Maya, Sir, a hand surgeon, who has been coming to Fiji for the last 15 years. He has been working predominantly at CWM Hospital and has recently started coming specifically to Lautoka where he is developing the capacity in Lautoka-run hand operations because at CWM, our plastic surgeon who has now returned after three years, is doing all the hand operations. He has also been working with our Physiotherapist to develop hand therapists and will be able to look after these hands when he leaves.

Also I would like to mention a gentleman by the name of Dr. Sorial, who has been coming to Fiji now for 15 years and he is a shoulder and ankle surgeon. He has also been helping training our local doctors, physiotherapists and nurses.

Honourable Speaker, there are a few things that happen when they come, there are few arrangements that are made. First, over the years we have developed relationships where we begin to support them and making sure that they have mechanisms for registration and it is important they have appropriate registration. It is also important they have indemnification in the period that they are here.

For some of them, they are completely funded by themselves and some of them we partially fund to the tune of accommodation, meals, internal logistics and also clearance through Customs.

For some of them, they just asked us to provide something as a farewell dinner. That is all they asked for. So, there are groups that come, some are very well funded, some are not so well funded and the terms of support in terms of financial support depends on the relationship that we have.

One of the other things that we began to do is actually suggest that we have some, sort of, agreement in place in terms of how we are going to work. They have been here, how do we have our patient navigation in place, where we pick up patients that they want to see, make sure that the patients are taken to them but also ensuring that when they leave, that these patients are being looked after and looked after well, because the importance of what is done in the operation theatre is not only what is done in theatre, but it is what is done afterwards.

Therefore, we have been talking to them about making sure that they upskill the local doctors and nurses, physiotherapists, and all the other allied health services, to be able to continue the care when they leave. Identifying a person who can be the point of care, and also make sure that there are continuous discussions with them when they leave. In that way, we have a sustainable relationship.

I thank you, Honourable Speaker, for this opportunity to be able to contribute to this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Just listening to the speakers today, prompts me to perhaps, suggest to the Ministry of Health to have an allocation on a yearly basis to assist these Groups who are coming to Fiji to help in health. I was very touched and impressed by the level of support from abroad, people who care about Fiji and bring that expertise, that are difficult or non-existent in our country.

I am always surprised when people leave Nadroga to go to Taveuni for some specialised surgery or medical attention. I never appreciated the scale of what is happening in the country until what I hear today. The Honourable Dr. Ratu Lalabalavu and the Honourable Minister for Health prompted me to suggest that perhaps, in the allocation every year, we set a fund aside so that people from overseas know that Fiji welcomes them.

I have friends, who have asked me about it. I have a family friend who is a specialist for the ear, nose and the upper region, the head. A question had been asked, can we come to Fiji? And it just creates a pathway to make it is easier for them to come.

Collectively, there are lot of services that I am hearing today. That, perhaps, is something that we can consider.

Honourable Dr. Govind spoke about tertiary care. From a tourism perspective, Honourable Speaker, one thing we must appreciate today is that the ageing population, the ageing traveller, is now not very comfortable coming into Fiji, because of the healthcare. Even outside of Australia people in their 70s and 80s prefer to go to Asia for their holidays because they know that if something happens to them, there are medical facilities in the Orient, that they can rely on. Fiji is still a question mark.

As I have said today, in the developed world, the population is getting older and that would be a huge part of our tourism. If we do not set up the proper medical facilities in here, we will lose out on the senior travellers, who are known to be very big spenders and who would be the future of our tourism, looking at the market segments that we want to develop going into the future.

These are some things that we need to consider, and do it very, very quickly. As we heard today that Japan is already on the very senior side, Australia is also becoming that way, so from a tourism perspective, we need to attend to this very, very urgently.

I would wish that we relocate that partnership that we have in Lautoka to come to Nadi. You may remember some years ago, we had this project in Nadi where the tourism people wanted to build a new hospital in Nadi. It was headed by Andrew Thomson and his wife, to build a totally new hospital. But we felt short and I think the funds went to Government to improve the Nadi Hospital. That was the realisation that Nadi needs a hospital of that standard.

I say Nadi because you have the Coral Coast, Nadi is closer to the Coral Coast and that is the heartland of tourism, the Coral Coast, Nadi and the Mamanucas.

Lautoka, I believe, is not suitable, if you are trying to set up something that will also cater to the tourists. I am not talking here about health-tourism, people who come there for treatment; this is to give assurance to that segment of the market, the age segment, comfort in choosing Fiji as their holiday destination.

Those are some of the thoughts I thought I would share today with the House and I do agree with Honourable Dr. Ratu Lalabalavu, that we need to commend the work of these people who have been helping Fiji in this very special way. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for his Right of Reply.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments. *Vinaka*.

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

The Question is:

That this House recognises and commends the good works of the various Medical Charities and Foundations who carry out specialised medical surgeries in Fiji.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Noes')

HON. SPEAKER.- As no Member opposes, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Livestock Disease Compensation (Question No. 85/2019)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment inform Parliament on the basis that the Ministry arrived at a figure of \$4 per kilogram as compensation to be paid to farmers for eradication of their cattle affected by brucellosis and bovine tuberculosis?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the Honourable Member for asking this question. This question will enlighten him and enlighten other Honourable Members who are not aware of the basis for choosing this figure of \$4, I believe that is what his asking.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, livestock disease compensation is paid to farmers whose animals are culled as a result of it being singled out that that particular animal has a particular disease. In this case, we are looking at tuberculosis and brucellosis and these diseases are quite serious in a sense that is also classified as zoonotic disease, where that disease can be transmitted from animals to human beings.

Honourable Speaker, this compensation is for the value of the animals culled to help the farmers compensate for the loss of their animals and also to help the farmers rehabilitate in terms of buying a replacement animal.

Honourable Speaker, this is practiced worldwide for the management of specific livestock diseases because at the end of the day, it is the property of the farmer who has raised it to generate positive returns either through selling that particular animal or keeping it in case of dairy or selling the products from that particular animal. So it is a practice which is used throughout the world.

Honourable Speaker, at the moment as alluded to in the question by Honourable Member, we are paying \$4 per kilogramme of the carcass under an MOU signed in September 2018 between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Fiji Meat Industry Board where the Ministry of Agriculture provides a grant to the Fiji Meat Industry Board. The carcass is taken to the abattoir and as soon as the animal is taken to the abattoir, slaughtered, the carcass is weighed and the farmer is paid immediately on the spot.

Honourable Speaker, this rate of \$4 per kilogramme was determined in the late 2018 when the average market price offered by the butchers to farmers for TB carcasses were around \$3.50 or below.

So to ensure that we do not discourage farmers, the Ministry at that particular point in time, Honourable Seruiratu was the Minister then, decided that they will peg the rate slightly higher than that. Honourable Speaker, in some countries these rates are revised on a monthly basis, some countries their rates are revised quarterly or six-monthly. We are looking at revising the rate later this year, but determining the rate at that particular point in time, what was the going rate which was around \$3.50 or even less, even it was at \$3 a kilogramme at that particular point in time. Thank you.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Supplementary question, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for the answer to the substantive question. Honourable Speaker, the Minister is aware that the dairy farmers in Tailevu had suffered badly as a consequence of these two diseases. And the whole idea behind the \$4 is not adequate to get the cattle stock back, particularly in milking stock to the numbers that they were obviously. What other plans does the Minister have to try and improve the pasture or try and get the cattle numbers for these farmers up to a level whereby they can be more productive particularly within milk industry? Thank you.

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, there are couple of ways of doing that. One is that we are at the moment undertaking a nationwide testing for TB and brucellosis and hiving out those cattle which are clear from TB and brucellosis. So once we are able to do that, in a particular area that is how we have done it in the Western Division, then the farmers can buy cattle from that particular area which is totally demarcated as free from brucellosis and TB; that is taking time.

The second way is, we are looking at, maybe it will take about three or four years' time, at the moment we cannot import live animals because of diseases in Australia and New Zealand. And therefore basically we do not want to import a new disease in the country and again suffer as we are now suffering from some of the other diseases. So instead, the Ministry last year decided to get fertilised eggs (embryo) in test tubes, bring it over and implant it in cows here and the cow will then get pregnant and give birth. So these are fertilised eggs in equal embryo.

Now we have got a stock of about 80 of those now and then about let us say, six months old so it will take time. It is a slow process, but it is 100 percent guarantee that there is no transmission of diseases. Now with this, there is another dimension why the Ministry decided to get the embryo, is because these are high yielding cattle, three times more carcass weight we will get and secondly, at the moment the average daily milk, Honourable Tikoduadua was talking about milk affecting the dairy farmers.

At the moment, the average milk per cow per day is around 5 litres to 6 litres in the Central Division and 8 litres in the Western Division. With the ones that we have got senepol, these cows can yield up to 25 litres of milk per day per cow. So that is the whole idea is to really support the industry by giving them high yielding cattle, both beef and dairy as well. So that is the agenda and that is what we are doing now. It is a slow process but 100 percent sure we are not going to transmit or introduce any new disease in Fiji.

We are also now talking to Biosecurity Authority of Fiji. I had two meetings with them to see how we could import live animals and establish a dairy cattle farm, an intensive one, where they will be there, no cattle could come from outside, and none of these new cattle (the new one that we import) will go outside, so we are talking to Biosecurity and seeing whether they will allow that.

Honourable Tikoduadua also talked about what support we are giving to these farmers in terms of assisting them with the existing cattle that they have, so that they could beef up their yields in terms of pasture.

As I said we are assisting them in both cut and carry pasture as well as normal field pasture. We are assisting them in providing them with the seeds for the pasture. For cut and carry pasture, we have got this new project where for medium and large farms, we are providing them with the seed stock with

a high yield, high protein pasture and we are assisting them to plant half an acre in their fields and then they can expand it themselves.

Those are some of the strategies that we have got to assist the farmers to recover from the loss of cattle, but it will take time. At the end of the day, we will have to free up our cattle sector from these two diseases which is having a major impact. For Australia, it took them 14 years to eradicate TB and brucellosis from their cattle, so it is not an easy task. They spent millions of dollars. We have started and we will have to do this to ensure that we are able to sustain our dairy and meat industry. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Member, you have the floor on supplementary question.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Supplementary question. Can the Minister inform the House how many animals have been removed upto now?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, the breakdown is as follows:

- 2014 – 121;
- 2015 – 1,531
- 2016 – 1,024;
- 2017 – 874;
- 2018 – 1,681; and
- Up to March 2019 – 351
- Total of 6,382 have been removed and were found to be carrying TB and brucellosis.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir, supplementary question to the Minister. What assurance can you give consumers that the milk that they drink or the beef that they eat are not from brucellosis affected cows?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, the milk is pasteurised and it has been proven that the milk will not carry the disease.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next question.

Progress of Namosi Dam Number 3 – Nadi Watershed Management Project
(Question No. 86/2019)

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

Can the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment provide a brief progress on the construction of the Namosi Dam Number 3 of Nadi Watershed Management Project?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Honourable Speaker, as part of the flood mitigation strategy for the Nadi District, Government decided to build a constructive retention dam upstream; the two major rivers; Nawaka and Namosi. The primary objective of the retention dam is when there is heavy rain then these dams will retain water and release it slowly rather than all the water coming down at one particular point in time.

Honourable Speaker, four dams have already been constructed, two in the Nawaka River upstream and two at the Namosi River. This dam that he is talking about is the third dam on the Namosi River. Work for this dam started on the 18th of June last year. Contract worth \$1.8 million was given to a construction company, Multi Works Limited.

The dam consisted of a total length of 30 metres. The dam/weir up to five metres, 8.5 metres up to the top of the guide wall, two box culverts for discharge of water in the dam and one box-fixed ladder to allow for fish migration from downstream to upstream. Sometimes when these dams are constructed, people forget to realise that upstream from the dam, the households may not have fish which they usually used to so the fish ladder was also part of the project.

Honourable Speaker, todate we can say on an average, 80 percent of the work is completed. The trash rack installation - 40 percent completed; concrete coping - 40 percent completed; construction of the weir body - 100 percent completed; weir crest - 100 percent completed; the concrete block partition wall - 100 percent completed; the compacted hardcore fill and sand - completed 100 percent; guide walls - 65 percent completed; anchor walls - 55 percent completed; the placing of the concrete culvert box for the fish baffle - 100 percent completed; the foundation - 100 percent completed.

Honourable Speaker, the construction activities performed until today, 80 percent is totally done, 20 percent is left and so we are looking at this probably completed in another two to three months' time. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Matanitobua.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Honourable Speaker, I am very concerned when he talks about the Namosi Dam, the Namosi Dam is in Nadi or in Namosi?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Nadi.

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

(Laughter)

There is no dam in Namosi, Honourable Reddy. I want to fight with him but ...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, there is a dispute. I talked to the people, I know this was raised last time too. They said that no, it is called "Namosi Dam". I have been told categorically, I told them, "No, there is a dispute, it is called Mosi." They said, "No" so I want to go by the experts down there but I will check again. But look, let us say, we have not solved this. Thank you.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, perhaps you can build a dam in Namosi.

(Laughter)

Honourable Bulanauca.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, the Honourable Speaker, Sir. Just a supplementary question on whether compensation is payable also for similar dams in the future, is compensation payable to the landowners, and if, yes, are they being paid? Thank you.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Honourable Speaker, this issue about compensation, we do not deal with that. The proper process was that, the permission from the landowners was taken and to construct a dam there to retain the water. It is not that we are going to use the water for consumption or generation of hydroelectricity, et cetera. But we also said that we will assist the landowners in doing aquaculture or agriculture activity there and providing them with assistance, but I do not think there was any case for compensation for that.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Radrodro.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. Just a question to the Honourable Minister in terms of the ongoing monitoring and implementation of the projects, can you advise whether there has been an Environmental Impact Assessment done and who is monitoring that in regards to the project? I am asking the Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, of course, any project of that nature we will have to do the Environmental Impact Assessment. That was done and approved by the then Department of Environment under the different Ministry and there was an environmental construction management plan which is being used by the Ministry of Waterways to ensure that that plan is adhered to during the construction phase as well as post construction. So, there is regular visit by the EIA officers from the Department of Environment to ensure that that particular plan is adhered to and the contractor has that particular plan and our engineers from the Waterways Department have that plan. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister, I give the floor to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to ask Question 87/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Waiver of Tender Requirements Under the Procurement Regulations 2010
(Question No. 87/2019)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications explain to Parliament the key criteria used in the waiver of tenders on purchase of goods and services above \$50,000 as required under the Procurement Regulations 2010.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker Sir, the requirements are actually set out under clause 32 of the Regulations which is on Emergency Purchases and it is all detailed there. I suggest the Honourable Leader of the Opposition have a look at that, and then under clause 48, it says "Waiver of Tender Procedures" in respect of what the Government Tender Board (GTB) can do and, of course, in clauses 3 and 4, it sets out in other instances where these waivers can be granted. Thank you.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I rise to ask a supplementary question: Why was not the waiver provisions applied for the renovation of the Opposition offices that was applied for some time ago?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I do not understand the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat the question, Honourable Leader of the Opposition?

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker Sir, I believe the Minister had just glossed over the requirements for the waiver. Those were not applied when we asked for renovations for the Opposition Office. Why was the waiver of tender not applied?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish the Honourable Leader of the Opposition had actually asked that supplementary question as a substantive question, then I could have got the details. I do not know what year he is talking about? When was the application made? I do not have the details. How can I answer the question when it is a substantive question?

If he asked me the substantive question, I would have provided the answer. Why do we have to do this shadow-boxing? Ask me the straight out question and I will provide the details. I do not know what period he is talking about.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, the question is very clear. The Opposition Office asked for renovations to be carried out to enlarge the facility provided for the Members of Parliament in the Opposition because of the increased numbers. We have got a response that our application or request was not approved and I read, "... This serves to inform your Office that the Department's request of the Acting Secretary-General for the waiver of tender was declined by the Government Tenders Board. Based on the decision of the GTB, the Department has now proceeded on the request for the advertisement of the Tender Works, and we are still waiting."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Office is crowded.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is rather baffling because if you read Regulation 32(1), it says:

- (1) emergency purchases shall only be considered where there is an extreme emergency brought about by unforeseeable events;
- (2) A procuring Ministry or Department can engage in emergency procurement only in the following circumstances –
 - i) In the event of a natural disaster such as a cyclone, flood, earthquake, tsunami, whirlwind, landslide, forest fire or drought;
 - ii) In life or death situations;
 - iii) In the event of an outbreak of disease from either human, plant or animal; or
 - iv) Where there is an urgent need for goods, services or civil works and engaging in tender proceedings would be impractical due to time constraints or cost factors, but provided that the circumstances giving rise to that urgency were not foreseeable by the procuring ministry or department.
- (3) In relation to sub-regulation (2)(ii), 2(iii) and 2(iv), agencies must seek the approval of the Minister before undertaking any emergency procurement.
- (4) All submissions must be processed and analysed by the Fiji Procurement Office before submission to the Minister.

Waiver of Tender Procedures

- 48(1) The Board may approve that tenders procedures be waived where -

- a) There is only one supplier capable of supplying the goods, services or works; and
 - b) A supplier has been nominated by an aid agency which is fully funding the procurement.
- (3) Where the Board has given approval not to seek tenders, they must do so in writing.
- (3) If it is impractical to comply with Regulation 30(1) in relation to the provision of legal services, the Attorney-General may apply to the Minister for Finance to be exempted from Regulation 30(1).
- (4) If it is impractical to comply with Regulation 30(1) in relation to the provision of urgent infrastructure development and services, the Minister for Finance may on this basis exempt such particular infrastructural services from complying with regulation 30(1).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the waivers are actually given in exceptional circumstances and the regulation clearly sets that out or there is only one supplier, the general principle of it.

In relation to what the Leader of Opposition is asking, I cannot recall what it is. If he asked me a substantive question, I could have gone and got all the details but generally I am answering the question. Generally what happens is that when, for example, there is construction works required, we want the tenders to be called. If for example there are certain areas where there is inability to get someone, then the GTB would actually grant a waiver, they themselves do that.

So if you, for example, call for a building of something in a very remote place, and you know no one else will provide it or, for example, if we want to call for tenders for the supply of oxygen in the hospital, there is only one supplier in Fiji. That is the only person or company you can buy it from, those are the circumstances.

There have been instances, of course, for example, when we do refurbishment in our overseas missions, you cannot call for a tender for the Brussels Office to be refurbished. No one from Fiji will go to Brussels, so what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does, they go and get quotes through the Embassy or if they want to buy a vehicle because it is impractical to issue a tender from Fiji if Fijian companies want to apply to go and fix up Embassy Office in Brussels. So, when the exceptional circumstances come about on various services or for example, if there is an emergency, we have got the Secretary-General from the United Nations coming to Fiji, if, for example, you have to pay for certain things like hotel bills, et cetera, obviously we cannot go and call for tenders and that is when you make the exception too.

In case of any office refurbishment or upgrade in Parliament and outside Parliament, obviously it does not have to be done tomorrow. And we have said to all the agencies that if you have tried all these agencies and we can wait, we can call a short term tender, instead of having four weeks to six weeks, we can call for a 10 day tender. We should go through the tender process.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I think we move on to the next Question.

The next Question, Question No. 88/2019 has been withdrawn, so I hope the next Member is ready for his Question.

I give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka to ask Question No. 89/2019.

Status of Ownership of Fiji Pine Limited
(Question No. 89/2019)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Honourable Attorney-General, Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament on the current status of the ownership of Fiji Pine Limited, taking into account the extension of leasing?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Honourable Attorney- General, Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Last year on 16th May, I gave a Ministerial Statement on this topic, and I have the *Hansard* here and I hope the Honourable Member looked at it. It sets out in detail about the ownership of the Fiji Pine Limited. I can tell the Honourable Member, through you Mr. Speaker, that ownership arrangement has not changed, the permutation has not changed.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Honourable Speaker, when the leases were extended, the landowning units were of the understanding that they would be paid lease premiums before the bonus was paid last year. They are still waiting and they are still unclear on the ownership of Fiji Pine, as they understood to revert to them after a certain period, going back to the beginning of the Fiji Pine Scheme. So can that be clarified, Honourable Speaker? That is:

- (a) the lease premiums, when are they going to get it? Your promise has not happened.
- (b) Whether the ownership would revert to them as originally intended?

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member would know, he has worked in the private sector, that ownership has no bearing on the leases that a particular company becomes the lessee of, it has no bearing on the ownership of the company. So Fiji Pine goes and takes out a lease through the iTLTB and pays the lease money to iTLTB, and then iTLTB does the distribution of the rental money, the lease money. The ownership structure is different. Whether the ownership structure changes tomorrow or there is no change, that company will still want to go and take out the lease, and the lease is issued by the iTLTB.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I again had highlighted this, a widespread consultation was carried out by Fiji Pine Trust. This was again done through the assistance of the Honourable Minister for Forest and he can testify to that, and Fiji Pine Limited.

The pine landowners almost unanimously expressed the interest to continue with the current ownership structure. This is because of the first time in its history, in 2013, under the Bainimarama-led Government and the FijiFirst Government subsequently, Fiji Pine landowners started receiving benefits in the form of lease security bonus payments. They had never received that.

Honourable Gavoka, there is no point looking to the other side. The fact is that, they had never received it.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- It was part of the plan.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- No, the plan obviously never eventuated under previous Administrations, Fiji Pine has been there since 1970s, taking up four decades. Let us be realistic! These are the direct benefits to the landowners who lease their land to Fiji Pine.

In 2018, \$7.16 million was paid. We are now told, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by the Executives, that they also expect to get another round or record year of profits which will again, be passed on to the landowners. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca, you have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question but before that, I understand, there was a resolution at the Board that by year 2025, the ownership be reverted to the landowners. Where has that gone to?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I completely do not understand what Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca is saying.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Well, can I explain on that so that you can understand.

HON. SPEAKER.- Ask your supplementary question and he might answer it.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, he does not understand my question. So I need to explain to him the question so that he can answer.

HON. SPEAKER.- If you ask the question properly, he probably would understand it.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Well, the question is, has the resolution of the Board for Fiji Pine Limited in 1991 and 1992, that the ownership of the pine should revert to the landowners by 2025, where has that resolution gone to? How has that been implemented? Has the Government implemented it or not? Why not?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly I cannot rely on any information from the Honourable Member and I do not know what he is talking about. Either he had not seen the resolution or he could be making it up and by the way, this is 2019 not 2025, again six years ahead of your time.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next question. I give the floor to the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal to ask Question No. 90/2019. You have the floor.

Status of Laboratory Services in Fiji's Healthcare System
(Question No. 90/2019)

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I ask my question, I wish to congratulate the Nadi Soccer Team for winning the Fiji Fact 2019.

My question is:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the status of Laboratory Services in the Fiji's Healthcare System?

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

The simple answer is, Fiji's laboratory services are very well and very good and it has reached that because of a lot of investment that has taken place. Efficient, reliable health laboratory services are essential and fundamental components of any strong and effective health system and are integral both, clinical and public health functions.

The World Health Organisation defines a medical laboratory or clinical laboratory as one way where tests are done on clinical specimens or samples to be able to obtain the following:

1. vital information about the health of a patient, and this is crucial because in some patients up to 70 percent of the clinical decision is based on laboratory testing;
2. to determine the cause of treatment and clinical management of the patient; and
3. to inform authorities and government on the accurate approaches, so as to be able to address the disease burden of the population level as required.

An article by Sarah Brown from the University of Washington on the review of the laboratory capacity in the United States of America, records that an 18,000 pathologists exists in USA with a ratio of about 5.7 per 100,000 people with 250,000 accredited clinical laboratories across America alone. This figure is consistent with the first world countries.

When we look at the context of the developing world, there is a severe shortage of both, quality laboratories and laboratory professionals. The World Health Organisation about a month ago, sent out a circular saying there is shortage of about 18 million health professionals worldwide, which include doctors, nurses, laboratory professionals, x-ray professionals, physiotherapists, nutritionists, dieticians, et cetera.

In some of the Sub-Saharan countries, they have one pathologist for 500,000 people. In a country like Haiti which has millions of people, they only seven pathologists.

Honourable Speaker, the Pacific Laboratory Network which is also the Pacific Public Health Surveillance Network, LabNet and PPHSN for disease control, has members from across the 22 countries in the Pacific Region under the guidance and advice from WHO and South Pacific Community, and has established a regional criteria based on WHO Global Laboratory Accreditation Process.

The LabNet has three networks or three levels of public health laboratories at Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3, where level applies to the primary role of a laboratory the Network and not to its capacity. Level 1 laboratories are those of the PPHN member countries and territories. This level is closest to patients that initially are facing health break alert. Level 1 laboratories collect samples from suspect patients and when possible, use screening test. They should have already access to Lab 2 or Lab 3 Lab confirmation services for selected diseases.

Under those criteria, Fiji has 18 Laboratories altogether qualified as Level 1, that includes our three Divisional Hospitals: CWM Hospital, Labasa Hospital and Lautoka Hospital, and 15 Subdivisional Hospitals. The Subdivisional Hospitals did not have this capacity and the FijiFirst Government has made sure that, that capacity is now in place.

Level 2 laboratories are regional reference labs that perform the next level of confirmation tests for L1 Labs. In the Region, there is only four countries and that is Guam, French Polynesia, which is supported by the Institute Louis Malarde of France; New Caledonia is supported by the Institute Pasteur of France; and I have much pleasure in also stating in this august House that the fourth one is our

National Public Health Laboratory in Tamavua. We have been qualified and classified as Level 2 Laboratory.

Level 3 reference labs are usually international recognised labs located in first world countries and in the Pacific Rim, this mainly Australia and New Zealand and the United States.

Laboratory services in Fiji started more than six decades ago at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital, before going on to Lautoka and Labasa. The service was further decentralised under this Government to close the gaps of the turnaround time by setting up laboratories in selected Subdivisional Hospitals right around the country and I have said 15 of them. And that also includes, not only the equipment, but also the laboratory scientist or laboratory technician to be able to do the test.

Guided under the Allied Health Decree and the National Quality Standard of the Health Laboratory, the laboratory machines are crucial in ensuring its:

- Results for complex tests to confirm the diagnosis of both, Communicable Disease and Non-Communicable disease.
- Test and determine the general wellbeing of people.
- Allow Clinicians to prognosticate the disease allowing them to decide the best suitable treatment for the patients.
- Quality treatment through the provision of blood transfusion service in the country.
- Pathology Laboratory service provides test results that can predict the effectiveness of certain disease treatment and also help clinicians monitor the patient's response to treatment.
- The provision of credible information and data that alerts the health services of possible outbreaks of Communicable Diseases. Just to give an example, within a particular area, they are picking up patients with certain illnesses, maybe leptospirosis, leptospirosis testing is done. If they pick up there is a continuous increase in the number of patients who serotype or the blood type is showing leptospirosis, then an outbreak is called.

That is why it is important to have these lab facilities right at the doorstep of every Fijian.

The Fiji laboratory Services have a three tier structure with the National Reference Laboratory located at CWM Hospital which covers both, the Central and Eastern Divisions.

The two Divisional Labs - Lautoka and Labasa and the 15 Subdivisional level Labs. There are 147 sample collection centres, 56 of them in the Central/Eastern Division, 51 in the West and 40 Centres in the Northern Division. These sample collection centres are Nursing Stations and Health Centres around the country.

Fiji's laboratory services in our main hospitals also have certain departments that specialise in certain areas giving important epidemiological information and also providing support for our clinicians in the work that they do. Thank you Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. A.T. NAGATA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question directed to the Honourable Minister. What specialist laboratory unit is available in Fiji?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. In terms of the specialist units, we have the Haematology Department which looks at the blood itself and this looks at certain tests like the blood count, haemoglobin which is important in women who are pregnant and also early testing for blood cancer such as leukaemia.

Then we have the Micro-Biology Department which tests for bacteria and viruses also and for identification of TB. They may use certain discharges from the body or even samples from stool and urine.

There is a Serology Department which is responsible for testing for sexual transmitted diseases; HIV and AIDS.

The Bio-Chemistry Department which looks at the chemical components of the body and the Histology Department which looks at cells and tissues that are taken away for testing to see predominantly whether they may be cancerous or not. So these are the several units or some units that exist within the laboratory department.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, my supplementary question to the Honourable Minister is the Government planning to subsidise patients who urgently need laboratory services not available in public hospitals?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, all the laboratory tests that should be done in a Government hospital, if at any reason it is not being able to be done at a Government hospital and has to be done outside, we have made it very clear that Government pays for those services. So we have been paying for those services, if we had to, for example, if one of our machines was not working well and we had to take it to a private laboratory, we made sure that we actually paid for the services. There have been instances where people have actually gone themselves and they have alerted us but we have made it very clear that we were providing that service, but we were not able to provide the service for whatever particular reason and therefore we will pay for the service. So we have done that, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We move on to the next question. I give the floor to the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa to ask Question No. 91/2019. You have the floor, Madam.

E-Ticketing Student Transport Assistance Subsidy
(Question No. 91/2019)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts update Parliament on the current status of the allocation of funding for the e-ticketing Student Transport Assistance subsidy?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, e-ticketing is one of the ways in which we render transport assistance and this focuses on students who mostly travel by bus. Of course, there are other modes of travelling including RSL carriers, boats and even horse back where a voucher is used as a mode of payment under the transport assistance programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this funding provides for transport assistance for those students whose parents have a combined income of less than \$16,000 per annum. In the 2018 and the 2019 financial year, \$25 million was allocated for the transport assistance programme, as we are approaching the end of the financial year, I can inform the House that we have spent the full amount allocated. Sir, 114,791 eligible students from primary, secondary and technical colleges campuses are beneficiaries of this transport assistance scheme.

Mr. Speaker, the transport assistance has been in existence since 2009 and is one of our successful initiatives to ensure that we do not leave any child behind. This is aimed at ensuring that children go to school and from school safely each school day. It drastically reduces the financial burden and, indeed, worries about safety for parents. This Government believes that we need to invest in such programmes to eliminate barriers to equity to quality education for our children as we continue to build a solid foundation for our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said the programme supports RSL and boats, private or community service providers through allocating vouchers which they submit and are then paid. Please also remember that the Ministry also provides boats in some schools to address their transport challenges. Of course, there are not many horses which are part of the transport assistance programme but they are in Namosi and the interior of Viti Levu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry works with Vodafone as the solution provider, the Office of the Attorney-General and the Department of Information and we have recently added LTA as part of our coordination mechanism. The Ministry also plans to include the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation so that a coordinated approach is taken for all users.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the beginning of each academic year, the head of school coordinates the collection of applications and collects the pay slip from parents or guardians and where these do not exist, a statutory declaration is required. The Ministry then authorises the issue of card with the support from Vodafone.

The new e-ticketing system was introduced in October, 2017 so it remains fairly new as well as innovative with Vodafone introducing new top-up machines at main urban centres around the country from last month. Of course, it is a challenge to administer such a large network to provide transport assistance. We have an ongoing challenge of students who lose their cards on a daily basis, whose cards are abused by parents even stolen by other students and even used by other family members.

The children themselves who abuse cards for non-school related activities and indeed sell their cards to the local market. In addition, our estimate is that about 1,000 cards are lost by students on a weekly basis. It is for this reason that in 2018 we introduced a policy that the first card will be replaced at no cost but thereafter \$5 will be charged for each replacement card.

Mr. Speaker, Sir and the Members of the House would agree that we have to instill a sense of responsibility in both students and parents. It seems that our parents and students are now more accustomed to the system of redeeming the e-cards. However, we continue to seek improvements to

make their lives easier so that we do not have complaints and long queues outside the Ministry offices in the first week of the term.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the support from Vodafone, we are implementing a whole new level of transparency and traceability for the use of public funds. Every single dollar loaded onto a card can be traced on where, which bus company and at what time it was tapped. We are now finalising an analysis to compare this information with identifying whether the student was in school that day or not. We will take action on this information. This basic monitoring mechanism that ensures accessibility and an enabling system for students to attend school without having to worry how he or she will pay fare for the next trip. We encourage the public, parents and students to call on our toll free assistance number 162 and we surely provide assistance to those who have issues with the loading or tapping of their cards. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- A supplementary question, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Minister for her response. It is week two of Term Two, Honourable Speaker. Students from Tailevu, Naitasiri and Rewa are queuing up at the Vodafone office in Nausori after having visited the Nausori Education Office but they are told that the money has not yet been paid in so no top up. Meanwhile parents have to pay for the free bus fares. So my question is because this is apparently a Fiji-wide problem especially in the rural areas, when will students' top-up be done and how long will this top-up last? Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir and I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can clearly inform this House that it is not a Fiji-wide issue.

We do receive cases when terms begin. There are many reasons to that and of course, the reason highlighted by the Honourable Member that there was no funds, funds have been allocated and given to Vodafone. In many cases what happens is parents and students wait until the last day to go and redeem and top-up their cards.

In many cases we advise them to go to Vodafone outlets and some even queue up at the Ministry headquarters but with the availability of machines around the country, this should not be a problem and I parents and students to ensure that the cards are topped up well before the school starts. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the next question. Now, I give the floor to the Honourable Viam Pillay to ask Question No. 92/2019. You have the floor Sir.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +25
(Question No. 92/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation brief Parliament about the BPfA +25?

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA (Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation).- Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action or the BPfA is a landmark

document for advancing the rights of women and gender equality worldwide. This was agreed to in 1995 and coming up next year is the 25th anniversary where governments are now being called to carry out a comprehensive national level review process that involves relevant stakeholders at all levels so as to benefit from the experience and expertise. The national review highlights the priorities of Government in the next five years, achievements of the past five years, challenges and setbacks for the advancement of women and gender equality in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker Sir, by means of background, Fiji submitted its Country Progress Report in 2015 collectively with Pacific Island countries and territories through the SPC which provided an overview of the major achievements and challenges since the passage of the BPfA in 1995 including updates on areas of concern as well emerging issues. For this particular review, we are carrying out a national review, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which will shortly be submitted to the UN. Thank you.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for that explanation on the Beijing Platform for Action. The question is, what are the challenges that have affected the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women? Thank you Honourable Speaker.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir. That question will require another whole new session sitting. We are currently compiling the Report, Honourable Speaker. We have done two forums, two sets of consultations with all relevant stakeholders, we have also called for public submissions from individuals and organisations, and we have received those submissions. There has been a zero draft that has been put together with the assistance of a consultant writer that was funded by the UN Women and we thank the UN Women for the huge support that they are giving us as a Government to put together this particular review.

We now have a draft that is ready for final consultation before it will go to Cabinet and also to the Solicitor-General's Office for legal vetting. Once that report is out, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Parliament will be enlightened on the contents that are in there after receiving submissions from members of the public. So, I think we are a bit ahead of ourselves in relation to that question. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, we will now move on to the first Written Question and I now call on the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu to ask his Written Question No. 93/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Written Questions

Kilometres of Tarsealed Roads, Costing and Contractors (Question No. 93/2019)

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management and Meteorological Services inform the House how many kilometres of road have been tarsealed since the Fiji Roads Authority was established in 2012, details of costing and how many contractors were engaged?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Disaster Management, Meteorological Services).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under the Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, we will go on to the second Written Question and I now give the floor to the Honourable Ro Tuisawau to ask Question No. 94/2019.

Legal and Compliance Requirements for SMEs
(Question No. 94/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development explain the legal and compliance requirements for SMEs?

The following types of businesses and how these requirements have facilitated growth in SME business activities, small passenger tourism boats, small passenger boats, small tourism backpackers on *mataqali* land, small restaurant catering businesses on *mataqali* land, all diving operations and village-based scenic....

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, the question has been revised in the Business Committee and the question you should ask is the one in the Order Paper.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Honourable Speaker, as an elected Member elected by my constituents, the original question that went to the Business Committee was the one which I submitted and the one which was approved is not in line with the question posed by my constituents.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, your question was refined and I do not have any doubt when it is going to be answered, it will probably cover most of the points that was raised. But it was such a long question, in fact, it was five questions if I looked at it strictly was a, b, c, d, e and f. So one question is one question.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you are not the Minister who was being asked this question.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development. You have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Industry, Trade, Tourism, Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we move on to the third Written Question for today and I call upon the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa to ask Question No. 95/2019.

Fisheries Licences – Processes, Terms and Conditions
(Question 95/2019)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Would the Minister for Fisheries inform Parliament on:

- a) the criteria for obtaining the licence to fish and sell;
- b) the process, terms and conditions with regard to the said licence;
- c) how many licences have been issued; and
- d) the breakdown of locality in the last 24 months?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would like to table the answer to the Written Question now in the House.

(Written answer tabled and handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his prompt reply.

Honourable Members, question time is now over.

Honourable Members, thank you for your contributions and co-operation today. We will now adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.30 a.m. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.51 p.m.