

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

MONDAY, 5TH AUGUST, 2019

[CORRECTED COPY]

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MONDAY, 5TH AUGUST, 2019

The Parliament met at 9.31 a.m., pursuant to notice.

The Honourable Speaker took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

Hon. Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry
Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and

Communications

Hon. Lt. Col. I.B. Seruiratu, Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs

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. 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 Bulitavu

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

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Friday, 21st June, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I beg to 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, 21st June, 2019, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there being no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome - Members of Parliament

I welcome all Honourable Members to this sitting of Parliament. I hope you have had a pleasant break. I know that some of you have been working hard on Committee work, but it is good to see you here looking refreshed.

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

Welcome – Students & Teachers of Kadavu Provincial School

I also take this opportunity to welcome students and teachers from Kadavu Provincial School, I believe, from Kavala.

(Acclamation)

Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament, and I hope that your visit will be rewarding, fruitful and productive. You are most welcome.

Written Response – Question No. 116/2019

For the information of the Honourable Members, the Secretariat has received the response to Written Question No. 116 of 2019 asked by the Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu, and I thank the Minister for Forestry for furnishing the response. This has been conveyed accordingly and also uploaded on the Parliament website.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND CERTAIN DOCUMENTS

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

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the Public Rental Board 2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 77/2019*) 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 Public Rental Board 2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 77/2019*) to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, the Honourable Rosy Akbar, to table her Report. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Honourable Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 38, I present the Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Report for the Year Ended 31st July, 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 91/2019*) 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 Fiji Higher Education Commission Annual Report for the Year Ended 31st July, 2016 (*Parliamentary Paper No. 91/2019*) to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Honourable Members, I have been advised that there are no Committee Reports for tabling today. I have also been advised that there are no Ministerial Statements for today.

Honourable Members, on that note, I propose to adjourn for a 15 minutes break, while we look into other procedures for this morning. I hope I have the agreement of everyone, although some look a bit stunned.

We adjourn for 15 minutes.

The Parliament adjourned at 9.41 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 10.01 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- For the information of the Honourable Members, the Technicians are currently working on the sign language Interpreters' screen, due to some technical problems. Once that is rectified, the live coverage will be normalised. I hope everyone understands that, it is a technical glitch. We move on.

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

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION LEVY (AMENDMENT) (NO. 2) BILL 2019

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

That the –

- (a) Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2019 (Bill No. 24/2019), 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 Tuesday, 6th August, 2019; and
- (e) one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Honourable Members would see that this Bill is an amendment to the Bill that was actually passed during the Budget debate. Unfortunately, there was an oversight by Fiji Revenue & Customs Service (FRCS) in respect of including the vehicle that is to be now included within the Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy (ECAL) Framework.

The ECAL Framework, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we know, is to include the concept of the Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy within our tariff regime, and essentially the overall duty tariff being payable has been broken down into different components and one of them, of course, includes ECAL.

ECAL, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, goes towards the specific funding of various environment and climate adaptation measures that we have put in place and which is, again, presented in a separate report. So, unfortunately, this was an oversight and we are trying to correct this.

There is no overall change to the substance of the Act itself, but merely the inclusion of these vehicles within that, and this is why it was being brought about by way of Standing Order 51 because currently, it is not applicable on those vehicles - the ECAL component. Therefore, we would like to have that passed by Parliament as quickly as possible and this is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are bringing it to Parliament tomorrow for debate for Parliament's approval, and I hope the Opposition can support this in that respect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the Right of Reply from the mover.

Members may speak for up to 20 minutes. At the end of the debate, I will call upon the mover for the Right of Reply. The floor is open to anyone wishing to take the floor.

Honourable Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. We have been informed of the intent and purpose of this Bill, which is to amend or to put in order what was an oversight. So we understand that we are amending for the passage of this as well, as the other Budget had been approved totally. So, I do not expect any disapproval from this side of the House, simply because it is consequential to that and we have passed the Budget.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Are there any further Members wishing to take the floor?

I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have no further comments, but would like to thank the Opposition for their understanding. Thank you.

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

The Question is:

Pursuant to Standing Orders 51:

That the –

- (a) Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2019 (Bill No. 24/2019), 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 Tuesday, 6th August, 2019; and
- (e) one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving this motion.

Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

HON. SPEAKER.- As there are no opposition, the motion is agreed to unanimously.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I wish to clarify that with respect to the two 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 the Report will not be debated again in Parliament.

I now call upon the Chairperson of the Stranding Committee on Economic Affairs, Honourable Vijay Nath, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

**REVIEW REPORT ON THE
FIJI REVENUE AND CUSTOMS SERVICE 2016/2017 ANNUAL REPORT**

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

That Parliament debates the Report on the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2016/2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 75/2018*) which was tabled on 14th May, 2018.

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

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

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. On behalf of Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards to the Report on the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2016/2017 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 75/2018*) which was tabled on 14th May, 2018.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, in 2016, the organisation's strategic plan underwent an extensive review and is currently working with four strategic-focussed areas which are; partnership, legislation and process, people and technology.

The Committee noted that FRCS showed a 6.6 percent improvement in the 2016-2017 period compared to the 2015-2016 period, collecting a total revenue of \$2.58 billion. The Committee is encouraged by the policies and noted that a prevailing philosophy of low rate and broad base is working in terms of overall performance of FRCS.

The Committee commends FRCS for the outreach programme which not only provides information but also educates the public on their tax obligation in achieving best practices with real time, accurate revenue data and the Committee welcomes FRCS's initiative of ultimately having a centralised invoicing system that links up importers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers to the tax office.

To conclude, overall, the Committee was confident that FRCS continues to develop a robust, friendly taxation system that will maximise collection of Government revenue for the benefit of all Fijians.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the mover of the motion. Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on this motion. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs for their Report. I have some observations but before that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to convey my condolences to the relatives and friends of the victims of the helicopter accident that we had last week and also draw our attention to the importance of maintenance of those transport modes that we have, particularly for emergency and public transportation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report is quite clear on the observations of the Report from the FRCS. One aspect of the Report is the expressions of optimism by the Services on how much they were going to be collecting. Based on that optimism, I am sure those who formulated the Budget also had a lot of hope for Fiji and its people. What we would like to ask is, what happened to those figures that were projected to be collected?

I am sure the services of FRCS have been performing very well. They have been performing the roles set for them and they are all very hardworking people.

The principle of broadening the tax base or the revenue base was brought in, thought about in the Interim Government led by the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara when Fiji introduced or we ventured into the consumer tax concept of Value Added Taxing. That was to broaden the tax base and the collection so that the few or the portion or faction of the population that was generating funds was not overly taxed.

Over the years, there have been fluctuation on the figures and the percentages levied and we now have a slightly reduced percentage for VAT. However, that percentage, while it has been reduced is still a tax on all the values added. So, if we increase at the import gates, the reduced percentage is based on a bigger or a higher sale figure. So, we may be able to say that there had been a reduction of VAT percentage levied on the people, the amount they pay is still really difficult. While all that demand on the FRCS the nation has on them, they have been working very hard and I would like to commend them for what they are trying to do.

Last week, Honourable Speaker, Sir, we buried one of the managers, who was my adopted daughter and she was very highly commended by the Chief Executive Officer of FRCS who came to the funeral service. There had been quite a number of deaths in FRCS and a lot of it is related to stress, they are personally overtaxing themselves in the work they do because of the demand put on them.

We were very fortunate that the CEO spoke highly about this young manager and I said when I presented the family eulogy that the performance of this 45 year old young manager perhaps, was the result of the total effort of leadership and team commitment of those who worked in FRCS. I believe that if we were to make that revenue collection a national responsibility and they say here that they want to make the people aware and be responsible enough to give freely and joyfully to the financing of the nation.

I said in that eulogy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that at some time a few years ago, I had a very big tax bill. So, I asked this girl and said to her, “please, check this, is it correct?” She came back about two days later and said, “*Tata*, I have good news for you.” I said, “What is the good news?” She said, “The good news is that the assessment is correct.” What do you mean? She replied, “Well, *Tata*, the assessment means you received that much, so you have to pay that much,” and I said, “Alright.” I quoted the Bible verse which says, “Give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and give unto God what is God’s.” So, I painfully but joyfully paid my big tax bill because I was carrying out my duty as a citizen.

Sir, the Report has stated that they were optimistic about collection. The onus is on us as legislators and formulators of our National Budget to listen to them and be realistic about what they say they would do, and they should also be realistic rather than being too optimistic.

I commend the FRCS. I commend the Report, it is very realistic. We can only note this Report and the comments made but it behoves upon us all to make sure that our tax system is transparent, responsible and it encourages growth. It encourages people to be responsible citizens, who will faithfully, loyally and even joyfully contribute to the financing of the affairs of our nation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Honourable Professor Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

I also thank the former Committee for its Report. If you read the Report between the lines and especially the verbatim, you will see the expression or the attitude of the Executive Management of the FRCS.

I have said in this Parliament before, Honourable Speaker, and I, kind of, shared the Honourable Leader of the Opposition's observation about the pressure that FRCS is in, to collect revenue for the Government. In that process, FRCS is behaving like a judge, a jury and an executioner and in that process, we see, Honourable Speaker, the kind of 'bully management', and I would call it 'bully management'. It is an expression that I want to use to describe, maybe, some of the processes or the attitude of this Government in particular.

If you also read the verbatim and if you look at the line of questioning from the then Committee Members (and one of them, Honourable Gavoka, is here), you will see, Honourable Speaker, the concerns that have been raised by the general public with respect to the way in which FRCS has conducted its activities.

Honourable Speaker, you would remember that when I last spoke about FRCS during the Budget, I gave an example of that public notice of mandatory declaration of assets, and that was just one example of how quickly FRCS got onto a bandwagon and then realise that it was not something that they could do as quickly as they had expected people to do. But by that time, it had caused so much anxiety and stress to businesses and individuals alike because the time given to them to do or meet the requirements was not enough. So this is the kind of attitude that an organisation develops as a result of the pressure that this Government is putting on them to collect revenue to meet the expenditure obligations.

I just want to pick up on some of the observations from the Report, Honourable Speaker. On page 5, for example, FRCS is talking about how the VAT rate was reduced from 15 percent to 9 percent. But, of course, we had the environmental levy introduced from zero percent to 6 percent, and the STT rate went up from 5 percent to 10 percent during that period. But FRCS fell short of saying that while the 15 percent was reduced to 9 percent, 9 percent was also imposed on basic food items, obviously which would have contributed to the revenue collection.

In fact, one of the things that I want to point out further on, on that page is that, FRCS is actually talking about how revenue has grown faster than the growth in the economy. In technical terms, Honourable Speaker, it is revenue buoyancy which is put as 2.5:1, which means, one percent growth in the economy has led to 2.5 percent growth in revenue.

That is fine, Honourable Speaker. But, what bothers me and I have to say this, if you look at the 2018-2019 Budget forecasted income which was about \$4.2 billion and when the Budget was handed down, we saw that the forecast was being reduced by \$1 billion, down to \$3.2 billion. I know what forecasting means. The question is, how can the Government or FRCS get this forecast wrong so badly?

If the forecast was out by \$100 million or \$200 million, that is understandable, but it is out by more than a billion dollars and I do not know whether, by the end of July, the Government actually met the target of \$3.2 billion. We need to find that out. But the point is that, it is not, I suspect it is not a forecasting error. A forecasting error should be 5 percent or 10 percent but not more than 20 percent.

This takes me to say this, Honourable Speaker, and now I am very suspicious about the GDP figures that have been coming out. In fact, it appears that some of these figures have been cooked and inflated, to keep the Government's propaganda that the tax to GDP ratio is less than 30 percent, which is the standard that one would say is reasonable.

If you raise or inflate the GDP, obviously your tax revenue to GDP will be lower, so will be your debt to GDP ratio. So, I would really question the Government's forecast of GDP and indeed, the nominal GDP because you cannot get this so wrong, Honourable Speaker. I think it is very important for the people of this country to understand this.

You can see the Government's drive. I mean, the Government bragged that they did not increase VAT in the last Budget, but we have ECAL now. Yes, it is an environment tax, but it is almost like VAT. It is an indirect tax that people pay, so basically, the Report which talks about 2016-2017 period and how the Government collected a lot of revenue is also because the Government put in a lot of new taxes.

Compliance may have brought some revenue, but compliance also, Honourable Speaker, suggested that FRCS was going out, slapping fines and penalties, putting Departure Prohibition Orders (DPOs) and forcing people. I know, I have heard many stories from businesses, those who get assessments. Some big ones, those who can afford lawyers and can afford accountants, go and ask for a review but many people go and pay whatever the assessment is and pay the penalties without actually contesting, even when they know that, that should not be the figure.

I think the Report, in my view as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition said, is very optimistic but also I think it does not reflect the nature of taxation. What I suspect can only be determined if there is a proper inquiry or investigation as to how we had this shortfall and how the GDP forecast has been so good over the years.

Moving on, Honourable Speaker, we have seen a huge increase in fees, fines and charges. The recent increase in the charges for Birth Certificates and Marriage Certificates, I mean, that is alright and the justification is that it was not increased in 19 years. But increasing it by a big amount and you are comparing it with Australia and New Zealand, now let us compare everything else! Let us compare the minimum wages as well!

Honourable Speaker, I think we need to bring more scrutiny into some of these organisations which are supposed to provide a very clear and detailed objective assessment to Parliamentary Committees and not putting across the propaganda that the Government puts out in Parliament and elsewhere.

I know in the last Budget debate, the Honourable Minister for Economy agreed with me to review FRCS's operations and functions during the Budget debate. In fact, Honourable Speaker, he agreed to what I said that was happening in FRCS and he, kind of, suggested that we should mount some legal challenges to bring better tax jurisprudence in the country. So I am, kind of, happy that he has kept his word and appointed a Business Reform Committee.

However, I was looking at the people in the Committee, I did not find any independent lawyer or accountant, except those who might have been closely aligned with the FijiFirst Party and that liberated in the last Election. I hope it is not going to be one of those Committees which is going to come up with a report, and I also think of the interest of small businesses.

I find a lot of these big businesses in that Committee, and whether there is going to be a serious look at, not only the processes, I think the Committee should also look at the forecast. They should put

the Government on that map for inflating their forecast on revenue and not collecting a billion dollars in the last financial year. That is very important because we are cutting the expenditure by a billion dollars.

As I have said, Honourable Speaker, the Committee ought to look at the Government in the 2018-2019 financial year. They could not collect \$4.2 billion, they are collecting only \$3.2 billion when the economy was growing, when they were spending millions of dollars before the Election. Now, when the Budget is cut by a billion dollars, we are expecting a lower growth and you are still saying we are going to collect \$3.4 billion revenue. I mean, we want to understand this. The Committee ought to look at some of those and give some independent advice to Government, to understand why there has been this huge gap.

Another issue that I want to bring to light in relation to the Report and the role of FRCS and maybe this would be of interest to the Honourable Minister for Economy, Honourable Speaker, we have been told and I have been shown some evidence that there is selective treatment of certain taxpayers by FRCS and there are allegations that they get instructions from the top. I do not know what that top is, where that top is, and I want to give you an example.

There was a manufacturer, Honourable Speaker, in early July 2016, who was assessed to have grossly violated the concession exemption by FRCS for manufacturing a certain product and they picked that up. It is alleged that the manufacturer imported the product and falsely declared it as being locally produced. The first assessment was \$17 million in duty and then there was a second assessment which reduced it from \$17 million to \$7 million. I am told the manufacturer agreed to pay that \$7 million but later on (this is the information that I was given), he actually did not pay the \$7 million and stopped the bank from having the cheque processed, et cetera.

The reason why I want to raise this and this is important for the Honourable Minister for Economy, is to understand that these kinds of things are also happening, that there are some taxpayers in this country who get preferential treatment and this was an example that was given to me. So, I hope that the Honourable Minister for Economy will look into this and find out because there are a lot of small businesses out there who are paying taxes, who do not have the time, energy and the resources to go and have their tax reassessed. So, Honourable Speaker, it is very important that these organisations become independent, transparent and accountable, not just to the Government but to the people of this country, and that is very important.

Before I conclude, Honourable Speaker, I want to repeat what I said, I am very, very suspicious now about Government's projection of its GDP figures. I would go to the extent of saying that it appears that these figures are cooked up and we need to seriously look at the forecasting. If the forecasting can get so wrong (20 percent) and I have not seen forecasting errors of more than 20 percent in my career, then it ought to be investigated, we need to get to the bottom of that because we want the people of this country to get the right information. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Professor Prasad says that he feels sincerely that the GDP figures have been cooked up and I agree entirely with him.

(Honourable Government Members interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Maybe, you can tell the House who has been cooking, who is the chef, because the problem we have is that our financial statement is bad. The Government is broke. The economy is in crisis but they will not admit it and that is the problem with this Report - financial honesty.

We should come here and we should tell the public the real situation that we are in, and we are in a bad situation. You understand that the Government is broke. They caught us in crisis. They have been talking about 3 percent, 5 percent increase or growth, but where is it? We do not feel it. Unemployment is increasing, people are being laid off.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Where are your figures?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, 300 Fulton Hogan workers were laid off in January, 2,000 are still questionable from the Water Authority, and there are 300 more. So where is this? Where is the growth? There is no growth. And they cannot admit it. Admit it, please!

How come you still have that ceiling of \$30,000 per day? How come Government is owing \$5 million to a company contracting on the roads and \$10 million to another company? How come they go back to the bank to ask for the restructure of its loan because you delayed in payment, you do not have the money. Agree to that!

How come you are increasing the very basic thing, that is, birth certificates, a 400 percent increase from \$2.25 to \$10? You got no money and you must admit it!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a point of order. I would like to refer Parliament that we are debating the Report on the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service 2016/2017 Annual Report. We are not talking about Government's financial position as we are. The Report that is being debated upon is for 2016/2017.

The Honourable Professor Prasad spoke limited about it, he meandered, of course, but Honourable Nawaikula is completely off the mark. If the Honourable Member could actually speak on the Report itself on FRCS, not Government finances but FRCS operations, that is what we are debating.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Examples of financial honesty....

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Hold it, hold it! There has been a point of order. I have been following the debate, you seem to be straying. You stick to the 2016/2017 FRCS Report, I will be very grateful. So you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am only making

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of order.

HON. SPEAKER.- We are just dealing with one point of order.

HON. J. USAMATE.- An additional point of order, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Let us hear how he answers to that point of order, and then you can take your point of order. You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you. I am giving examples there of financial honesty. Not admitting the truth! And today for the first time, the Reserve Bank of Fiji is admitting that we are in a very bad shape.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- In the FBC 8 o'clock news, he says, "Only the tourism sector is increasing. Agriculture is decreasing. Forestry is decreasing", and he used the word, "weak". He said all other sectors are "weak". Sugarcane is decreasing.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You cannot handle the truth.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. You just made the ruling that we should be focusing on the Report that is before the House, which is the 2016/2017 Report. At the end of this exercise of debate, we will talk about accepting or not accepting the Report. But what the Honourable Member is talking about is deviating totally from the ruling that you have made.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the convention in the House is that when we talk, we address the seat of the Honourable Speaker. So when an Honourable Member stands up and says, "You have no money", he is actually saying that the Speaker has no money.

(Laughter)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Listen, because by convention, we address the Honourable Speaker. If someone stands here and says, "You are lying", he is calling the Honourable Speaker a liar. I think the Honourable Member should withdraw that statement and he should be required to make sure that he adheres to the ruling that you have already done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his point of order. But he is right, the Speaker has no money.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We all have no money. The Government has no money. The Honourable Speaker has no money.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I am not talking about Government, I am talking about the Speaker. The Speaker has no money. *Areh, no paisa.* So, just stick to the 2016/2017 Report. I think you have already made your point, but you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, so I am asking please, be honest.

If you look at the Committee Report, the Committee is encouraged, encouraged for what? The Committee knows the low rate of broad-based working terms; totally wrong. You could not even collect the revenue last year and the reason for that is, you are contracted. You have to reduce the Budget by nearly \$1 billion because they did not do their work. And here in the Report for the previous year, they are saying all these happy things. "There is a lot of money", but we did not get any money and you know that. That is why our Budget was contracted.

This is what the expert says in relation to that, "Budget has been cut by \$809 million, the multiplier effect or 0.4 equals economy contracts by over \$2 million". That is the truth and that is the whole gist of this. Even the Executive Head of FRCS was very positive and this is what he said, and I quote: "FRCS has embarked on a transformation journey..." To become a world class organisation, their transition welcomes many challenges. That is what he said, very positive, but where is the money?

We look at our budget papers this year and they could not collect, that is why we are reducing. So the whole point that I wish to say is, you are not being honest. Please, tell the public the truth. If no money, no money. Thank you.

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also like to contribute to this particular debate on the Fiji Revenue and Customs Services Annual Report. As the Minister responsible for Industry, Trade and Tourism, I would like to applaud the compilation of this Report and in particular the generation of an improved economic environment that FRCS is facilitating for the betterment and sustainability of livelihoods of all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, further to the above, I would like to briefly highlight one of the issues of interest to my Ministry. Just now, the Honourable Nawaikula said that FRCS is claiming to be a world class organisation, and I would like to tell him, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that FRCS is a world class organisation.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- We welcome the initiative of having a centralised invoicing system that links up importers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers to the Tax Office, this was not done previously.

This has been an extremely important step, not only to better capture revenue data but also to provide a platform where the Government would be able to provide targeted assistance by tracking the financial progress of a business. This will allow my Ministry to provide financial assistance, training, mentoring and other forms of business support services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the key achievements in the 2016-2017 financial year was the ratification of the World Trade Organisations Trade Facilitation Agreement and the formation of the National Trade Facilitation Committee. The Committee is aptly co-chaired by the CEO FRCS. The Trade Facilitation Agreement supports the positive steps towards the modernisation programme that this Government is currently undertaking. Such mechanism contributes to the reduction in the time and cost it takes to facilitate the clearance of goods at our borders and ports.

The FRCS, together with the Ministry and other stakeholders, has been leading the reforms for cross-border and some key projects under implementation are; single window, single shipping manifest submission, time value survey and electronic screening of manifest. These process improvements will lead to significant improvements in cross-border trade.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are spearheading the re-designing and re-streaming of business approval processes and the online business, bizFIJI portal, was launched recently, that is, on 10th July, 2019. The portal provides information checklist, processes, timelines for starting a business and obtaining construction permits. This approach aims to ensure that the Fijian economy remains as competitive and business friendly as possible, attracting new businesses, maximising investor confidence and allowing Fiji's new and existing businesses to flourish.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now I would like to talk about what Honourable Professor Prasad had just said. He quoted Page 5 of the Report and he said that VAT was reduced from 15 percent to 9 percent and the report did not talk about the impact it will have on basic food items or the impact it will have on the household or what he meant was that the basic food items which the poor people will buy will attract 9 percent VAT.

But again he did not even acknowledge the fact that the social wages this Government has put in place definitely offsets the pressure on a household. Before this, there was no such thing as income. We all know that previously in a household, any person earning somewhere around \$8,700 had to pay 31 percent income tax. Now, anyone who is earning \$30,000 do not pay any income tax.

Similarly, low income earners are insured for \$3,000; there was no system like that previously. Mr. Speaker, 90,000 litres of free water was given to households, so what I am trying to say is that, yes, VAT was applied across the board but then, again, the Government had provisions. They have mechanisms to offset the household pressure that they would have on their income. So this must be appreciated, you cannot just talk about one aspect and not the other. Let us complement and take things together. That is all I have to say, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka. You have the floor, Sir.

HON.V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I wish to contribute to the debate on the motion before the House. I was a Member of the Committee on Economic Affairs and at the outset, let me just say that we are always delighted to meet with the team from FRCS. I would like to commend the CEO for a very capable team that he runs.

If you look at the verbatim report, I had also asked him what he was doing about retaining his staff. They are very highly marketable, very highly qualified people and echoing what their leader had said, that they need to be looked after and he has assured us that he has taken steps to ensure that the people who collect about 90 percent of income for this Government are well looked after. But I do commend his team, they are professionals and very committed to their work.

Honourable Speaker, the tone of the Report is one of great optimism. The reference to the economic growth of the last seven or eight years continues to come up in the Report, even to the extent, Honourable Speaker, where I asked him, “ Will you soon be making \$3 billion?” He said, “Yes, it will be within four years”, but they said it could even be sooner. So, the disappointment there, Honourable Speaker, is that, with that sense of optimism and what we saw in the Budget for this year, the huge reduction, it begins to question what this country has been told about the Bainimarama Boom.

Incidentally, Honourable Speaker, the housewives are complaining, there is no more Boom on sale. I hope that the distributor was not embarrassed that we used that Boom to demolish the Bainimarama Boom in this House.

But, Honourable Speaker, we need to be very clear on what the policies because this Government is expecting a level of revenue which has been collected quite effectively by the organisation, but it is based on foundations that are not secure or not solid. We are told that the revenue buoyancy; 1 percent economic growth contributes to 1.5 percent of revenue, 2.5 percent for Fiji. That should mean that revenue collection should be at its highest in this country, but it is not.

I agree with Honourable Professor Prasad that we will need to relook at the forecasting. They say that for a country to be overtaxed, it should be more than 30 percent tax to GDP. In Fiji, it is 25 percent. It all sounds rosy but when it comes to the Budget that we have today, the huge cut that we have had and the impact it is having on the lives of our people.

If you read the report, Honourable Prem Singh said, “more roads, more hospitals”, they said, “yes”, but look at our roads. Can I just suggest to the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, if he can

set up a pothole task force. This country, Suva, in particular, Honourable Speaker, is famous for potholes; it is in the Report. We asked, “Are you going to make more new roads?” They said, “Yes”. Can we just finish the Koronivia-Davuilevu sector there and just focus on potholes. It is tragic, it is shameful for a Government that claims to have given us unprecedented growth and unprecedented welfare of this country, that potholes are out of control.

Honourable Minister, can you just focus on the potholes, please? I drive all the way from Nadroga, and it is okay, but in Veisari and Delainavesi, it is frightening. I do not drive a pajero or a vehicle that can survive on these roads, so there must be many people in this country who wish that all the revenue being collected could be applied towards the potholes.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at the Report, there is also the question about the black economy. The World Bank believes that one-third of Fiji’s economy is still in the black. I know that we have managed to collect from a supermarket chain that owed about \$47 million or so, but black money, Honourable Speaker, is a matter of attitude, it is a matter of culture.

If you look at the Report, I also asked the question, “What is the culture was like in terms of taxation in this country?” They said, “It is improving.” But to have that culture, we have to be fair. Honourable Professor Prasad is saying that there are people who appear to be getting away with things in this country.

I bring the question to the Fiji Airways jets. We were told that they will not be paying any VAT on the purchase of these jets. I think, it is a billion dollar company. If you give it to Fiji Airways - a billion dollar company, is that not sending a wrong signal to our people? No wonder people are concealing some of their money!

The culture, Honourable Speaker, is very important. You would recall that Greece had a financial situation four or five years ago and it is still bad today. And they were bailed out by the Northern European countries, like Germany and Scandinavia. What they discovered was that, the Greeks found ways not to pay tax. And I brought this up during the dialogue with FRCS and they said, “We do have it in Fiji but it is getting better. The culture is improving.” So let us be very careful. If you give it to a huge conglomerate, like Fiji Airways, you are sending wrong signals to our people.

Honourable Speaker, again, I go back to the people at FRCS, they should be well looked after. As I said, they collect about 90 percent of our revenue and I do commend them for all the work they do, but it is the Government that should not be putting undue pressure on them. The Government should be realistic. These people can do it, but it takes leadership from that side of Government to make their targets reasonable, realistic and collectable. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to make a short contribution in terms of the report which is before the House and my contribution would be limited to the findings and recommendations as highlighted by the Committee.

I will go to Recommendation 4, which states: The Committee recommends that FRCS commence with their outreach programme and not only to provide information that will educate the public and their tax implications. When we move around the country, one of the problems that we normally hear from the people is; what is being taxed and what is not being taxed. And I think there needs to be proper awareness done by FRCS by moving around the country, so that people do not go into non-compliance and they are enhanced into doing voluntary tax compliance.

If you look at Recommendation 1, in terms of the black economy, one-third of our economy is black and how we are going bring those revenues which are out there to be collected. I think most of those who fall in the black economy, do not understand that they fall in this category of non-compliance. I think it is only the compliance that will be done, that will encourage them to understand their obligation as taxpayers and that they fall into the white economy on where we all operate. That is probably one area that this Parliament needs to note and for the Government to note, for FRCS to increase its awareness on how to reduce that portion (one-third) of the black economy.

If you look at the one-third black economy, given that this is a 2016/2017 Report and the presentation that was done here, was done on 1st May, 2018, probably just last year. What progress have we made in terms of reducing our black economy? What measures are already in place to reduce it and how has that been reflected in the increase of income or revenue collection?

Given that the current legislations proposed from the various Consequential Bills mainly target those areas which are already known for example, ECAL, it has gone up from 20 cents to 50 cents, those are known areas. The unknown areas, there is also much talk in the kava industry, the kava farmers whether this is going to come towards them too if the Kava Bill is passed and they fall into this particular economy. Those are some of the things that need more awareness and more consultation.

The other very important thing that this Report highlighted, Sir, that during this particular year, the Fiji Detector Dog Unit was established. I would like to raise this very important issue in terms of our border control and border security. I think two months ago, one of the specialised dogs for FRCS commonly known as Eto, passed away, and it specialised in sniffing cocaine and also methamphetamine.

There have been talks of an increase in illicit drugs and how we have tightened up our borders to make sure that our citizens are not affected and they do not become part of these illegal activities or to suffer from psychological or other social effects of these illicit drugs. I think probably the Honourable Minister should update us on what successful operations have occurred in terms of identifying and detecting illicit drug that have been captured by the new Unit.

Not only that, Sir, also on the illegitimate currencies that are coming in, probably whether our system are working with the FRCS. These are the two things that we probably need to take note of and we urge the Government to look into this because of our national security and also securing our borders so that our citizens are safe at all times. *Vinaka vakalevu, Sir.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Mosese Bulitavu. Honourable Aseri Radrodoro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just like to make a brief contribution on the motion before the House. First of all, I would like to thank the Committee for deliberating on the FRCS 2016/2017 Annual Report.

The point I would like to raise on this Annual Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is about the whole presentation of the Report. I think there is some deceptive element in the way the Report has been prepared, where it has not shown the full content of the operations of FRCS. It only highlights tax collections that had generated over the period of years, even in the collection table that is highlighted in the Report, it shows that it is not achieving its target.

It has set out ambitious targets in terms of revenue collection, but the actual collection as shown in the graph is falling short of what was targeted by the FRCS. So the question is, whether it is FRCS target or is it a target that was pushed down to them for them to actually work on? If it was their target,

why was there no action taken for the staff who were not achieving what they have targeted during the year?

Secondly, Sir, as I note in the contents of the Report, I think on Note 14, it highlights the Directors and Management's personal remuneration. What caught my eye is the note regarding Directors' remuneration; no remuneration is paid to Mr. Ajit Kodagoda and remuneration to the others are paid to the Ministry of Economy. The question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, how can a Director of a very important institution of Government was not being paid in terms of remuneration as highlighted in the Report?

It is very important that FRCS fully declares its remuneration, because not only is he holding a top position, but he is not being remunerated accordingly. What is important is the decision that he is making as Chairman of the Board or as a member of the Board. Secondly, he was a Board Member of FRCS and is also a Board Member of FNPF. These are both big financial institutions of Government, to have a member of the Board sitting on it and chairing the Board and also as highlighted here, he was not being paid. This is ridiculous!

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Why?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- How can he not be paid? It is the decision that he is making that is very important. That is what I mentioned Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this Report is simply very deceptive in terms of what is actually happening.

When we talk about FRCS, we talk about taxation and customs. There is very little to no mention of Customs Department in this whole Report, as we know that Customs Department also plays an important role in the functions of FRCS.

One important function they also play is the Duty Concession Scheme. There is very little mention about Duty Concession Scheme. How many organisations have benefited from the Duty Concession Scheme? How many have appealed in terms of the Report? The Report which was deliberated by the Committee is lacking this information.

(Honourable Government Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The contents of the Annual Report should have shown all those activities that were carried out by FRCS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were also some initiatives that were taken by FRCS regarding the whistle blowing initiatives where people are being rewarded if they do-in tax evaders. This is not in the Report. These are very important information that should be shown and highlighted. How many have benefitted? Who have benefitted? How much have been paid out to the respective individuals using that Whistle Blowing Act.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly on staffing, as we note that this is the 2016-2017 Report, it clearly highlights there that most of the key Management in the organisation, their contracts expired on 31st July, 2019. So, as it is, their contracts have expired. What has the organisation done to ensure whether they continue their services after the expiry of their contracts or have they started the re-engagement process? This is something that is also not appearing in the contents of the Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the important thing in terms of reporting criteria, Note. 2 of the Report which says that most of the International Financial Regulation Standards have not been adopted by the

organisation. There are 14 of them and that is very critical in terms of the completeness of this Annual Report. No wonder Fiji has been listed in the black list, Mr. Speaker, Sir...

(Honourable Government Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- ...because the organisation itself even fails to adhere to the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). All the organisations, even the Fiji Institute of Accountants is enforcing organisations to adhere to the financial regulations but in this particular organisation, FRCS, being one of the most important agencies of Government in terms of collection of revenue, in terms of activities regarding duties and customs, it fails to adhere to the 14 international reporting standards, as highlighted by the Auditor-General. .

Mr. Speaker Sir, it goes to show that there is a lot of improvement that needs to be generated in terms of reporting for FRCS and for future reporting years, so that they capture everything that is happening within the organisation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Radrodoro. Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, you have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I thank the Committee for its Report. My contribution, Honourable Speaker, will be very brief.

In the 2019-2020 Budget which was cut by \$809 million, it will have a multiplier effect of 0.44 percent where the economy will contract by over \$2 billion. So, why not reduce taxes and cut revenue?

Honourable Speaker, Government should explore other means of lessening the burden to the people of Fiji where the cost of living is going up, petrol price has increased three weeks ago, yet no concessions from Government. This alone, Honourable Speaker, will impact the economy powerfully where the cost of transport increases and increased cost of production will all be transferred to the ordinary citizens to pay.

In the Honourable Attorney-General's Budget Address, he said Government took only five years to grow from \$2 billion to \$3 billion in tax revenue and now, Honourable Speaker, more fees. For example, birth certificate from \$2.25 to \$10 at the BDM Office and \$15 at the Post Office, and most of us are required to produce birth certificate for almost everything that is needed by Government.

(Honourable Government Member interjected)

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- *Vakarorogo mada!*

We were not told of these extra fees, Honourable Speaker. People with no warning have to pay more fees. More fees, fines and charges on people trying to make a living. A tax on small family businesses, for example, the Nasali River Taxi operators. Most of them hire their small boats on a weekly basis, Honourable Speaker.

(Honourable Government Member interjected)

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- This impacts on their lives.

They do not have enough funds to buy their own boats. They are trying to provide a service in the rural areas. So, to have a lifejackets, flares, torches, et cetera, including other safety equipment on board, there would be hardly any room for passengers and all their shopping and no money to purchase. So, there is the rub and the difficulty, Honourable Speaker.

What concessions can the Government provide for them to purchase their safety equipment as they hardly earn any money and they are trying to feed their families on the very little they earn? So for the FRCS, who were behind the Nasali saga and to make them drive their boats with the high cost of fuel all the way from Nasali to Draunibota, and back again is heartless and cruel. Even though, Honourable Ministers, especially the Honourable Attorney-General, with his entourage who travel in fancy four-wheeled drive vehicles, you still must have a heart for the poor who are trying to make a living.

In addition, Honourable Speaker, the Ministry of Fisheries task to contribute to the FRCS, why are they going hard to the poor struggling villagers, trying to put food on the table, money to educate their children and their family?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor Honourable Attorney-General on a point of order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member, again, is doing exactly what one of the previous Honourable Opposition Members did, she is not speaking on the 2016/2017 Report. She is talking about fisheries, she is talking about motor vehicles and talking about MSAF, which has got nothing to do with the FRCS Report. Please, if we can seek your direction to get the Honourable Member to speak on the subject matter. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. She did mention last five years, but then she started to stray. Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, please stick to the 2016/2017 Report. You have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Just because the FRCS did not collect their targeted revenue, according to the 2016/2017 Report which I have here, they are now going after the villagers and the river.

(Laughter)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- *O ira na taga moci, suwa qari* and line fishing.

Last week, Honourable Speaker, there was a husband and wife catching whatever they could to feed their family in the weekend and pleading with the Ministry of Fisheries officers that this was for their Sunday lunch and please just let them go home with it. They were roughly told, “Go and buy tinned fish from the shop.” I am letting the Honourable Minister for Health also know this because of the NCD problem.

I am bringing this up, as whilst we debate these reports, there are human faces, Honourable Speaker, many of whom are struggling with the extra fees, fines and charges they are faced with. 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 would like to speak on the 2016/2017 Report. The Report actually talks about a number of recommendations, and we wholeheartedly agree with the findings and the recommendations of the Committee.

I would like to thank the Committee for their Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Committee talks about the black economy, as many of the Honourable Members of Parliament have already addressed. There is a black economy. We are hoping that with the lower tax rates, as highlighted by the Honourable Minister for Industry and Trade, that there is a greater compliance.

Indeed in many jurisdictions, what you will see is that when there is a lower tax rate, you will find greater compliance with the tax laws. For example, the corporate tax rates in Fiji only a few years ago, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about the general broad-based tax. In fact, it used to be about 33 percent, it used to be a lot higher. Today, corporate tax rate is 20 percent, listed companies corporate tax rate is 10 percent and if you have regional and global head office, you pay a tax rate of 17 percent, so that increases compliance.

Notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we still find that there are breaches and we have repeatedly said in Parliament and indeed, prior to Parliament and outside Parliament, that there are a lot of taxpayers who actually do not comply. Of course, there are many taxpayers who do comply.

We have also said, and Honourable Professor Prasad has perhaps, not necessarily been forthright with this, that for a number of years now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that FRCS needs to view taxpayers as clients or customers because you need to humanise individual taxpayers. If you just simply start seeing them as taxpayers, you will not necessarily treat them with the level of perhaps, respect or perhaps, understanding of what their business, or what their individual financial circumstances may be.

We have also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, repeatedly said that there needs to be specialisation within FRCS. You will find that if you have a company that may have a gross turnover of \$10 million, it is being attended by one particular FRCS staff. When that person is finished, the next five minutes you have another person that comes along who may have a gross turnover of only \$300,000, and that same FRCS staff deals with those two different client bases. They are completely different. Businesses are different, their financials are different, cashflows are different and what they actual do in business is completely different.

So what we have actually said to FRCS, there needs to be specialised people to deal with the different categories of different sizes and, indeed, different segments within FRCS. We have publicly, sort of, chastised the idea of FRCS staff being very heavy-handed. I have said this in Parliament repeatedly, not only what Honourable Professor Prasad is referring to but we have said this repeatedly and, indeed, we have said that to FRCS too.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, many of the Honourable Members actually do not realise that FRCS by law is an independent body. Honourable Professor Prasad comes and says, “I have heard this, someone told me this”, about individual taxpayers. I would love him to tell us which staff member told that because he is actually complicit in actually breaching the confidentiality provisions within the FRCS Act. He is completely complicit in doing that...

(Hon. Professor B.C. Prasad interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ...because he is now getting individual taxpayer information. It is actually quite disturbing, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Opposition Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if Honourable Professor Prasad believes that there is untoward behaviour going on in FRCS, if he has the evidence as he says, I urge him, “Please, go to FICAC today and report it. Please do it, please do it.” Do not come here and get into the shenanigans and making all sorts of allegations when, in fact, he is actually complicit in the breach of the confidentiality requirements as you find it in the Banking Act. He knows that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, Recommendation No. 2 talks about the percentage of tax revenue that has been collected *vis-à-vis* the GDP and *vis-à-vis* the various benchmarks that have been set. Yes, the revenue collection of FRCS is far greater as a percentage of GDP than in Australia. Honourable Professor Prasad also then mentioned, “Well, if that is the case, then let us get the same salaries.” I mean, as an Economist, anyone knows that you do not that. This is a percentage comparison, it not about the nominal value itself, so he should understand that. If that is the case then let us all pay Australian real estate price. Let us all pay then the Australian transportation cost. I mean, it is so silly, it is so trite. It is not even worth responding to, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point, of course, is that, again, just because the revenue collection may not in certain years meet the target, it does not mean that the GDP is necessarily affected. Any economist with basic knowledge would know that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We do not need to school people about this, and in any case, the GDP figures, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and again he should know this, he is a consultant and an Academic, that the GDP figures is actually done by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics and, of course, they work with organisations, like IMF. It is not done in the Ministry of Economy.

He is saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that somehow or the other, the GDP figures are concocted. That is what he is implying. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again these GDP figures have been validated by third parties - World Bank, IMF, ADB, Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Reserve Bank of Fiji and other organisations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, Honourable Naiwaikula mentioned, “We are in a crisis, there is no money”, et cetera. I have the figures from the Reserve Bank of Fiji and Honourable Tabuya had mentioned about this sometimes back, the liquidity in Fiji as of last week Friday stands at \$551 million.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- And foreign reserves, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of last week Friday stands at \$2.1 billion...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- and the inflation rate as of last Friday was 0.7 percent.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to go back to the issue of Recommendation No. 3 about the various legislation that needs to be reviewed, and we completely agreed with that. As we have highlighted previously, there are a number of laws that are going to be reviewed and we are currently working with the New Zealand Tax Office, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in looking at our tax laws, the Customs laws in particular.

There is quite a lot of work that needs to be done in that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In fact, as we have said before, we have not actually shied away from talking about these matters, is that in the Customs area is where we find a lot of laxity in that space. One of the common things that has actually happened is that in the Customs area, we find people, for example, who smuggle cigarettes. We see there is a question there. Some businesses actually smuggle cigarettes in the containers.

We also find, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there is an under-declaration of the value of the goods that are being imported and, therefore, the VAT that they are paying is far less than what they actually should be paying and they are paying far less duty than they should be paying. But there is, of course, a need to harmonise these laws and we have got a particular process in place and we would like to thank the Standing Committee for that recommendation of theirs, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, also in respect of Recommendation No. 4 about the outreach programmes and, of course, the self-assessment, FRCS as the Honourable Members would know, that in the last year's Budget (to a less extent this year but moreso in the 2018-2019 and 2017-2018 Budget), we had actually allocated a fairly large amount of grant in respect of FRCS, updating their software to make it a lot more user-friendly and to be able to ensure that we have a lot more e-filing of various tax requirements and, of course, meeting the obligations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, someone made a comment and I cannot remember now who, in respect of this Committee that has been put in place. Again, some very trivial comments being made about it, being all FijiFirst people and people who supported us, only large businesses.

I would like to highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we actually wrote to all the individual large organisations, so Fiji Institute of Accountants, Fiji Lawyers Association, manufacturers, we wrote to Women in Business, the Fiji Chamber of Commerce, Fiji Employers Federation, the Architects Association, the Hotel Association and we wrote to all of them. Some responded and some of them did not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, given the fact that some of them did not, we actually then also approached individuals. So, for example, organisations like the Fiji Institute of Accountants, the Fiji Chamber of Commerce and Women in Business responded. But then, of course, I would like to highlight, there is a lot of allegations made about small businesses not being included.

Let me highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is not just about small businesses, it is also about getting younger people because we find more young people are getting into business. As you know we have said that young people should not only be job seekers but they should also be job creators, and there is a number of initiatives of the Ministry of Industry and Trade through the Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES) Programme, et cetera, that try and encourage them.

I would like to highlight couple of them. One of them is Adelene Tutu, who started up her own business with the fitness programme. She launched her own App. She has a TV Programme, but she has actually struggled with it. As a mother, she set up her own business, she is actually on the FRCS Committee.

We have people like Winston Hill, again, as we all know he won a medal for us. He started up his own business again. He is featured in the '30 Under 30'. These people have a network of young people, small businesses that have started up, and they are actually in the Committee. So, they will look at these things from a different perspective.

We also have a lady called Marita Manley, who actually represents all the small tourism operators - backpacker places, people who do this ancillary work we call ancillary tourism operators, taking people on tracks, walking through villages, doing village tours, so this is the association that she is representing, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, a whole range of people actually have been put in this Committee.

We have also Sangeeta Maharaj. For those who have been to the Eden Restaurant, this is another clientele of people, the restaurateurs. These are the people who have been represented on this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got the Carrier Association, they are also in the Committee. We have got the Hot Bread Kitchen. We have got John Samisoni. I am really enthused by his enthusiasm to actually be in this Committee. So, it is a whole cross-section of the people, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Of course, there are some large businesses, like the Motibhai Group, the Tappoos Group, we have got the hardware people in there, but they also represent their segment.

Gordon Jenkins, who is the current President of the Fiji Construction Council. The reason why these people have been put in, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is because they actually know or their businesses or their associations have a flow on effect to many other businesses.

Construction through electrical works, we have people who are sub-contractors, the person who does the digging of the foundations, everyone in that chain will be affected. So everyone's views will come through these people. That is how it has been selected, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank all these members wholeheartedly for being in this Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, FRCS, of course, has a lot of work to do too. We believe as a Government, in respect of lifting up the customer service in being sensitive to various business conditions in which they operate in.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to highlight, there have been years where FRCS has actually exceeded their target, but no one talked about that. When the budgeted target was set, in fact, they exceeded that. Of course, sometimes, they have been below that and a lot of it depends on the market conditions. If we, for example, have a cyclone, none of them talked about the fact that we had *TC Winston* that wiped off one-third of the value of our GDP within 36 hours, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Obviously if Nadi Town and Ba Town gets flooded, the smaller businesses have difficulty. Obviously, the revenue collected will be less, so it has a flow on effect, but none of them spoke about that.

If we really want to be candid, if we really want to be honest, if we really want to have a bipartisan approach to our economic well-being, then we need to be factually correct.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, there is a false notion of compliance. They say that compliance is only if you issue DPOs and fines. No, Mr. Speaker, Sir! Compliance is also greatly enhanced if you have a lot more outreach programmes. Compliance is also greatly enhanced, if you have simplicity in your taxation system. That is what we are trying to do. Simplicity and removing subjectivity from the application of the rules and policies, and this is one of the issues that we have continuously highlighted to FRCS.

Subjectivity needs to be removed, the actual information given out by individual staff we have found in our experience. There one particular incidence now where we have asked FRCS to pay the duty themselves because they made the misrepresentation to a particular group. It is an organisation that went to FRCS and the staff there intimated to them, “Yes, you can get a duty waiver from the Minister”, knowing full well that the Minister does not give waiver on those things. Of course, when it came to us, we rejected it.

But then when representations were made to us and certain evidence were shown to us that FRCS made the representation, we said that the organisation has brought that particular product in and is actually a charitable organisation, religious-based organisation, we said that FRCS needs to pay the duty on their behalf because why did you make false representations to them. So that is the level of service delivery we are trying to inculcate within the FRCS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we think FRCS needs to be in the Board. I cannot understand the logic to that if a person chooses to be in a Board, then there are many people who have sat in various Boards do not want to be paid because they believe they want to contribute to their country. What is wrong with that?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Perhaps, they cannot fathom the idea that should they ever contribute to something without being paid.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is the issue. They cannot fathom that idea.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, quite a lot has been said. I would like to thank the Committee for their input into this. I think we all agree, there is lot of room for improvement in respect of FRCS itself but, of course, they have also done some good work and we would like to acknowledge the work that they have carried out.

We believe there is lot of capacity that needs to be built in within FRCS. Businesses nowadays are getting lot more sophisticated, their transaction modalities are getting lot more sophisticated, technologies that are being used are getting lot more sophisticated and they change quite rapidly, in fact, sometimes on a monthly basis. So FRCS needs to keep up to speed with that. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we wholeheartedly support the motion by the Honourable Member. Thank you.

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

I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee for his right of reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. V. NATH.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank all the Honourable Members for their contribution.

I am a bit surprised, Honourable Speaker, Sir. At times when we are out of Parliament, often we have seen our young boys probably imitating the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General and Honourable Bala. But today in this House, I saw Honourable Nawaikula imitating

Honourable Attorney-General. Being a lawyer and also a financial man, you are nowhere near Honourable Member. Probably, you have a long way to go to learn, in fact, on this system. He should have in fact asked his neighbour, Honourable Gavoka, who is a Committee Member. He would have very nicely whispered in your ears the facts and figures and understand what our mandate is as a Committee.

Honourable Speaker, the role of Committees, at this point in time, I feel that the Honourable Professor Prasad has challenged the Standing Orders of Parliament. Under the Standing Orders, when a report is given to a Committee, we scrutinise and report back. We do not have any mandate to look at the Government's financial system. It is not given to us. So, he is probably contradicting. He has to correct himself there, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Kepa mentioned that the price is rising. Madam, it is an international phenomenon. Price has gone up everywhere. She mentioned that she was asked by someone to probably report that, not to catch fish. She should report that to the police, not here. Not here! This is not the right forum. Nowhere in this Report does it mention about that.

One point, I feel that Honourable Members have lost confidence in their Committee, like Honourable Gavoka who served in the Committee, Honourable Prem Singh was a former leader, he was in the Committee and yet, I can see they are talking about their own Members, that they are not up to par.

Honourable Gavoka mentioned about the road and hospital. Of course, it is visible. Four lanes in Nadi and Nausori/Suva. We are going to do the east side of the Nadroga Bridge and of course, hospitals, you can find new Public Private Partnership hospitals coming up. Come on, wake up!

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. V. NATH.- In fact, the Keiyasi Hospital is in his district. He should be happy that in his district, they have a hospital, Honourable Speaker.

In fact, they should be thankful to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Attorney-General, who had the vision to increase the threshold from \$16,800 to \$30,000. That means more Fijian people have money in their pockets. That is why you can see a lot of vehicles on the roads.

With those words, I thank the Honourable Members. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Chair for his right of reply. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report. Does any Member oppose the motion?

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, we will now take a break for morning tea, but before we do, I want to inform Members that the cameras for the sign language are now back on but you still look the same on the screen.

The Honourable Deputy Speaker, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar, and the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu have their birthdays today.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- I am told and I need to be corrected or otherwise; same day, same month and same year.

(Laughter)

On that note, Honourable Members, we will adjourn for morning tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.41 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 12.11 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 ON THE
FIJI PUBLIC TRUSTEE CORPORATION LIMITED 2016 ANNUAL REPORT**

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

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited (FPTCL) 2016 Annual Report (*Parliamentary Paper No. 120/2017*) 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 Standing Committee on Social Affairs, during its deliberation, invited the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Limited (FPTCL) on Thursday, 29th March, 2018 to further discuss and seek clarity on various issues of interest in its 2016 Annual Report. The Committee noted that the Corporation rendered its services in terms of estates administration services, trustee services, Will making, power of attorney and other legal services stipulated and related to its mandate.

The Corporation's income is derived from fees and charges and interests on investments. The fees charged by the Corporation are as legislated and stipulated under the Fiji Public Trustee Corporation Act 2006, otherwise estate administration fees are recognised on the timing of services provided and based on the valuation of assets under administration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2016 marked the 11th year of operation since the corporatisation of the Public Trustee Office to the Fiji Public Trustees Corporation Limited and a journey full of challenges and opportunities that had contributed to the positive growth of the entity.

The Corporation in 2016 administered 74 new estates at a value of \$3.4 million, settled and distributed 34 estates at a value of \$2.65 million. It also embarked on public awareness campaigns on Wills and drafted 237 Wills. The Corporation reported that there were 123 new trusts with a value of \$191,000 and 324 trust accounts valued at \$1.7 million fully settled in 2016.

Furthermore, the Corporation earmarked its achievement through its 2015-2017 Strategic Plan which focused on recognising that vital transformation which was required for the long-term financial sustainability and viability of the organisation. FPTCL continues to be financially viable and offer services to the people of Fiji at no cost to Government.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the Committee commends the overall performance and administration of the Corporation. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairman for his motion. The floor is now open for anyone who wishes to participate in the debate. Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. Before I contribute to the debate, Honourable Speaker, I would like to be allowed to also express our condolences to the family of those who lost their lives in the helicopter accident last week. Also to the family of the late, Mr. Dixon Seeto, who gave so selflessly to the tourism industry over many years, and also Mr. Speaker, to the family and friends of the late Daniel Rae Costello, who gave such joy to many of us through his music. Life is fleeting, Mr. Speaker and we are obligated to live with purpose, kindness and with service to all as we will all answer for our actions one day. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, in contributing to the debate on the Fiji Public Trustee's 2016 Annual Report tabled on 15th May, 2018, I thank the Committee for the Report. There are just two aspects that I would like to pick out and so my contribution will be short.

The first is that the Board of Directors of FPTCL only consisted of two members and this, of course, was picked up by the Committee in 2018. For such an important Government Commercial Company dealing with the management, estates and trust under its Act, I hope that this has now been rectified in 2019.

Such a situation should never have been allowed to happen, where there is only a two-member Board. The question should have been raised about the non-transparency of such an arrangement because it gives way to collusion and even corruption, even if the Report does state that it is in line with the Companies Act 2015.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the recommendation, and the way they were worded and responded to by FPTCL seems absolutely arrogant and patronising. If this is how boards view elected Members of Parliament, then I would urge this House to instigate with some urgency some training for all boards who report to this House and the role of Parliament when it scrutinises their reports.

Allow me, Sir, to point out one such example which needs to be read out. Recommendation 5 – the distribution of interest on investments be included in the future Annual Reports and if necessary, be reviewed to ensure a fair weight of return to the beneficiaries. The FPTCL response is as follows and I quote:

“There are no legislations, policies or standards for preparing Annual Reports to outline information to be published or not. However, the Corporation's annual accounts is prepared in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standards.”

Now, my question to the Board, Honourable Speaker, is, who I hope is listening is; is this the appropriate language to be using when tabling information to this House? Even if there is no legal compulsion, the FPTCL takes its mandate from the laws that we, as legislators, are responsible for in this House.

The FPTCL is not a sovereign state, it is beholden to this House and I expect that the Committee will ensure that any of the reports tabled here by this entity are treated accordingly. And because I would certainly like to know the trends of FPTCL and its dividend payments to Government over the preceding years, and I would certainly endeavour to get this answered in due course. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. The Honourable Salote Radrodoro.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I rise to make a contribution to the Report. Even though I am a member of the Committee, I was not in attendance when this Report was being discussed with FPTCL.

However, Honourable Speaker, I wish to make my contribution, particularly in regards to Recommendation 2, and also make reference to Page 29 whereby the CEO had highlighted in his presentation of his concern that there is a need for Board members to be more than two, to ensure transparency and accountability in the operations of FPTCL, even though, Honourable Speaker, the legislation is quite clear which stipulates that membership of the Board can be two minimum or maximum of five. However, to support the principles of good governance, it is prudent that membership be increased to three, four, or even the full complement of five, rather than just the two members because power centralised on only two members is not desirable because it can breed corruption.

Honourable Speaker, we will also recall that the main reason for the 2006 *Coup* by the FijiFirst was to rid Fiji of corruption. By having this type of only two Board membership, is in total contradiction to the reasons of the 2006 *Coup*.

Honourable Speaker, then the question I would like to raise to the Government side and in particular to the Honourable Minister for Public Enterprises, is to explain why they have not considered the request from FPTCL to increase the Board membership, bearing in mind a representative from the Ministry is also present in the Board?

Honourable Speaker, one of the key findings and challenges highlighted in the Report is the high number of unresolved cases. For example, on Page 31, there were 370 cases and only 34 cases were settled and that is about 9 percent. This is due to the delays of the key stakeholders like, Titles Office, iTLTB, FRCS, Lands Department and the High Court, having their own work priorities and targets and timelines that is beyond FPTCL.

Another challenge highlighted is the lack of Will-making by members of the public, which results in the high number of cases presented to the FPTCL. Honourable Speaker, in regards to Will-making, it is a very important role of FPTCL and maybe in this House, we can ask, how many of you have done your Will? If you have not, that will make a case to FPTCL, particularly those with assets. That is one of the key roles of FPTCL, to encourage people to make Will.

Also, Honourable Speaker, another key role of FPTCL is to raise the level of awareness on their roles and functions with the members of the public. And because of the lack of awareness, that is why I am of the strong view, that is why they have a lot of cases being presented to FPTCL because of the people not making a Will, resulting in beneficiaries in conflict sometimes, in regards to the sharing out of the assets of the deceased.

Therefore, Honourable Speaker, it is important that FPTCL undertake aggressive marketing strategies to raise the level of awareness in regards to its roles and functions, to the members of the public. It also needs to work with Government to review the relevant legislation with the relevant line Ministry, and rebuild the rate of dividends that is paid out to the Government because should the FPTCL need money to be able to undertake its awareness campaign effectively, then that could be a source of their budget to be able to undertake that role, first and foremost, before dividend is paid out to Government, Honourable Speaker.

It is also important and must be noted that it is not only FPTCL that has this kind of membership in its Board, there are other institutions that have the minimum number of membership in the Boards. I

would urge the relevant line Minister to look at the membership of FPTCL first and also other relevant organisations. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a very brief contribution on the Report that has been discussed in this House.

As alluded to by the previous speakers, Honourable Salote Radrodoro and Honourable Qequeretabua, the issue of the Board of Directors, the question that I would like to pose to the line Minister is, in terms of having to come to a decision when an estate is to be finalised, what would be the quorum if there are only two Board members that are available - only one or do we need two? This is done according to the findings of the Committee where it states that there should be a full complement of the Board of Directors to be in place for transparency and accountability purposes.

Since this is a 2016 Report, I hope that something has been corrected in terms of having a Board membership where we should either have a minimum of two or maximum of five members, if that is in line with the Government regulation. If nothing has been done, then there should be some amendments to that.

The other issue that I would like to raise in this House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is about the conclusion that is in the Report. On Page 9, on expanded public awareness activities in various communities, civil society, amongst workers and to the ordinary Fijians, this is very important since most of *iTaukei* need this to be translated into the vernacular so that they will understand more of what is involved in terms of the estate or anything that is being held by the Corporation. It is very important in the sense that they should be made aware of it. Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, maybe the Ministry of Education should take up a component of that in their syllables so that students are aware of what is happening, especially in the Corporation.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I would like to highlight regarding the Report, is on the relevant legislation. A lot of the estates have the record to keep interest and the returns to be given also to the beneficiaries, and the returns also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as per the current practice by the FPTCL.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Committee for its Report.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Speaker, I wish to make a short contribution.

The first problem that I see in this Report is its content. I do not think it augurs well to the Chairman and its Committee to come to the House with a mistake in your Report. There is a repetition on Page 3, paragraphs being repeated. Please, be professional when you come to this House.

The second point that I wish to raise is, I wish to acknowledge...

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Do you want me to point it out again?

This is the paragraph, "With these words, on behalf of the Standing Committee I commend this Report." Then it repeats it again, "With these words, on behalf..." So it has been repeated.

The second point is, I agree with Honourable Qereqeretaua in relation to the arrogance. There is very clear arrogance on the staff of this Corporation coming to the Committee, and it shows very well from the content.

Just reading through Page 4, the recommendations from the Committee and the answers. For example, Recommendation 1 – Gender Composition. The answer is, “The Board membership is in line with the legislation.” It is totally not relevant to that question and very arrogant. The Committee is not asking the Corporation to address it in relation to the number of Board members. It is a gender issue, and they totally disagree with that.

You look at Recommendation 3 - to have the Memorandum of Understanding. The answer is, “This is not necessary.” It is very arrogant. You do not address that to the highest authority in the land, which is the Committee.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- On authority, yes!

The third point that I wish to raise is in relation to delay. When the Corporation was asked as to what was the reason for the delay, like the Government, it blamed everyone else. It blamed the Court - 371 cases and they only managed to resolve 31 cases.

Now, the Corporation deals with the administration of estates, meaning when someone dies and there is a Will or there is no Will, you apply for letters of administration or probate. And the first problem that they should know and every lawyer knows is that, if you delay yourself, then the problem complicates itself over and over and over again, especially when you are dealing with property. One person dies, so many IS. Those IS died, so many, many IS. And the more you leave it or the more you delay, the more it is very, very difficult to administer or settle estates.

There is an example that I have where I am dealing with the FPTCL, and it relates to the time when Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna was alive. That was in 1958. Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna owned some properties in Boron Road and Rewa Street, and some of these, he leased it out. Even now, the claims are still there. The problem with FPTCL is that, when we went to Court, they said they have an interest. They were not even aware that there was no more lease, but they are wrong because they have left the matter unresolved for nearly over 60 years now.

(Honourable Government Member interjected)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is your problem. Tell them to do their work. Tell them not to sit on their work, 60 years is something.

If you do not administer the estate, especially when you are dealing with property, then IS and IS, it becomes very, very difficult. Sometimes, even hard to resolve them.

It shows here - 371 cases, only 31 were settled. Who are they blaming? Not themselves, they are blaming the Court. It is not the Court, it is themselves!

Those are the things that I wish to raise here. I am totally correcting that and I wish those things are addressed. Do not blame everyone else. Please, do your work.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Nawaikula for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just to make a few comments, those people who actually deal with estates, in particular after death obviously, will have had some dealings with FPTCL.

I would just like to make a few comments, just some generic comments. Just to inform Parliament that when the person dies as Honourable Salote Radrodro highlighted, there are lots of people in Fiji who die without actually making a Will. In fact, there are many people in Fiji who are members of FNPF and as you know, you have a nomination form. When they nominate who is going to be the beneficiary in the event of their death, a lot of people actually do not update their nomination form.

We know a lot of people, for example, who may have become a member of FNPF before they got married, so they, for example, nominated their mother or their father or another sibling. Subsequently, when they do get married a lot of them forget to actually change the nomination form. So as a result of that, you find a lot of disputes that does arise.

Honourable Speaker, a few years ago, we also amended the relevant law to include *de facto* relationships because there always used to be an issue about *de facto* relationships. There are many people, for example, live in relationships but they are not legally married *per se* and, therefore, you may sometimes find that there are disputes. Other family members come into that or sometimes people have actually been separated, have not been legally divorced, so those types of complications do arise.

In the issue of what Honourable Salote Radrodro talked about, there are many people who die, what we call “intestate”. In other words, they die without making a will and of course there are many people who die by making a will. And of course, it is not only about people who have assets, it is about everyone should make a will because invariably there would be some form of some asset, whether it is \$100 in the bank or whether it is a collection of books or whether it is one bed or whether it is a house or whatever the case may be.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Radrodro said that Public Trustee should draft wills, et cetera. Let me highlight to you as we have highlighted to Parliament that the Legal Aid Commission has got a network of legal aid officers throughout Fiji, who actually draft wills now. For any member of the public, obviously not the wealthy, but anyone or an ordinary Fijian can walk in and get their Will drafted by the Legal Aid Commission. That is the service they do provide. They also do provide services in respect of certain probate issues for members of the public who may require the services of a legal representation.

I accept, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that of course Honourable Nawaikula talked about the fact that sometimes there are delays. Yes, you as a lawyer would also know that sometimes the delays occur because of the various legal framework that actually exists. So there are certain legal obligations that are placed on FPTCL, certain obligations placed on FNPF, the High Court have their own High Court rules, so the reality of the matter is not about simply just clicking your finger and all gets done, it is a case of reviewing the relevant laws that pertain to, for example, getting a probate. What are the timeframes that is required?

As you know, for example, when you have a probate, you actually have to advertise and we found that sometimes when people do actually advertise, some family member comes in and stakes a claim. So there is a particular process you do have to go through, and we are equally concerned about the fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there are certain delays because the legal framework that has been framed for decades since before Independence, so we are going to look at how we can change the laws. We have made some amendments, for example, in respect of recognising *de facto* relationships, but there is quite a lot of work that needs to be done accordingly.

Of course, the more Board Members, the merrier and the better it is but so far, no one has shown a causal link between the minimum Director required numbers that have been on the Board or any discrepancy that may have taken place in FPTCL. No one has showed that, but I can also tell Honourable Members that the members of the Boards or the number on Boards actually have increased.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a couple of other points in respect of FPTCL. I cannot understand the comment that the response is arrogant. I do not think it is arrogant, it may have been straight forward but there is nothing arrogant about that. I think you need to come down from your pedestal, just because you sit in a Committee, does not in any way mean that people should kowtow to you. The reality of the matter is that, Recommendation 5 is factually correct to say that currently there is no legislative policy standards required in respect to the information required under Recommendation 5, but it does comply with IFRS Standards, that is what they are saying.

What we are also saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have all had discussions and we have asked the FPTCL to ensure in the next time, they do actually include information on distribution of interest on investments to be included in the Annual Reports. So that is the outcome. For the recommendations made, they did send their response, we as a Ministry have looked at the recommendations and have asked FPTCL, please include it. Whilst there may be, what they are doing is strictly, legally speaking, they are correct. So rather than trying to take a sledgehammer to crack a nut, you can work and say, “We look forward to them providing information.” It is very simple.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the other point also, we would like to highlight that the FPTCL in respect of some of the services they do provide, of course, like all other organisations, need to be improved and we will be working with them regarding FPTCL.

Honourable Nawaikula is absolutely correct. When we have a lot of members of one particular estate, it can take ages. You can see one in Flagstaff, that is sitting on the main road next to that famous restaurant, the dilapidated three, four-storey building. You can go to Berry Road and various other places. These buildings are in dilapidated state because there may have been about 14 or 15 beneficiaries. Some of them may have migrated, some of them are here, they cannot reach an agreement as to what to do with the property.

One of the things that we have been thinking about is that if there is no resolution made on a property, there should be, what we call, “a period of time”, maybe 12 years in which the members or the beneficiaries should make a decision. If they do not, then like in other countries, the State actually intervenes. And what the State does is, actually sells the property off, equally distributes all the funds and gives it to all the members because they have not been able to reach an amicable decision. There are many estates in Fiji where because of the family members not being able to reach any particular consensus as to what to do with the property that has been left in a dilapidated state, it leaves, of course, problems with the municipal councils, they do not pay the rates so it causes, you know, an eyesore overall.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is obviously a number of contributing factors and we absolutely agree, as we have highlighted previously that we do need to look at these laws. Many of these laws are very archaic and we hope to deal with it. We need to get a number of examples from overseas as to how we can actually make these laws quite modern.

I would like to thank all the Honourable Members of the Committee for their contribution and indeed, the members of FPTCL. I would like to support the motion that is on the floor. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to speak on his right of reply.

HON. V. PILLAY.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir. I have no further comments. Thank you.

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

(Chorus of 'Nays')

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

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Tobacco Control Act 2010 and Regulations (Question No. 138/2019)

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

Would the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services advise Parliament when the Ministry intends to urgently phase in plain and unbranded packaging of tobacco products in respect of the Tobacco Control Act 2010 and Regulations?

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

Plain packaging, Honourable Speaker, means that the tobacco products must be stripped off all brand, colouring, logo, decoration and promotion, and standardise the appearance of the cigarette packet, making it generic, neutral or homogenous packaging.

The policy objective of plain packaging is to deter the use of tobacco products while removing positive associations of brands with tobacco use, for example, misleading labels, such as the use of colours and words which perpetuate the belief that some types of tobacco are of higher standards than others when, in fact, all tobacco is dangerous and harmful. It does not necessarily mean, making cigarette packets plain white, black or grey as many would associate the term, 'plain packaging' into.

However, tobacco companies are prevented from advertising on tobacco products and instead, the packaging will display legislated graphic health warnings or pictures, which is also a form of plain packaging and one could *google* the internet and see the images of different forms of plain packaging and the different formulas that are being used around the world.

As a requirement under the World Health Organisation, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) would mean 100 percent ownership of the right to all sides of the tobacco packaging. In the world, Australia was the first country, Mr. Speaker, to legislate plain packaging of cigarette packets in 2012. It was not all smooth sailing for the Australian Government to enact this. They get to counter the lobbying from the industry and won a number of court cases which took a number of years. The

implementation set the precedence for France and United Kingdom to legislate plain packaging in 2017 and New Zealand law and Ireland in 2018 with many countries thereafter.

Following the introduction of the plain packaging in Australia in 2012, calls to quit line increased, individual pack displayed decreased, cigarette sales fell by 3.4 percent and there was no increase in transaction times, note defection to larger stores to make tobacco purchases had no impact on the illicit trade. A post implementation review of tobacco plain packaging was also published, this is the Australian one, in 2016, Mr. Speaker, which shows that plain packaging legislation reduced their pillow packs, increased health warning effectiveness and corrected some misconception of harms.

Mr. Speaker, some studies in Canada and Australia had explored the potential impact of plain packaging of tobacco use. An article by the International Union against TB and lung diseases in plain packaging and labelling of tobacco products suggested plain packages are less attractive and less engaging, particularly to young people. Another example under the same publication, on a survey of young people in Canada found that strong majorities liked regular packages better than plain packages and indicated that plain packages were more boring and uglier than regular packages.

Approximately one-third, Mr. Speaker, of respondents also reported that young people of their age would be less likely to start smoking, for all tobacco were sold in plain packages. This study also recorded a drastic decline with the appeal of smoking with plain packaging on most adult responses. Mr. Speaker, Sir, experiences with nations that have been able to legislate plain packaging suggested the need to do so in a systemic approach and that is what we have been doing.

The direct approach in some counties to have 100 percent ownership of the rights to all sides of the tobacco package was met with very steep opposition leading to delays in the enactment of legislation. Fiji under its current Tobacco Control Act 2010 and Tobacco Control Regulations 2012 have in place provisions for graphic health warnings which were implemented in all tobacco products in 2013 with messaging in vernacular to facilitate an understanding by local consumers.

Although the mandated percentage of graphic health warning on tobacco package is limited with 30 percent coverage of the fund of the packet and 90 percent of the pack, Fiji, however is already progressing and shifting towards what is now becoming a global trend in Tobacco Control and that is what I have been talking about is plain packaging.

National public consultation was carried out in late 2016 by our Tobacco Control Unit and the effectiveness of graphic health warnings, targeting specifically a wider range of population to get public perception on how we can better address this locally. And I say this Honourable Speaker, because there was already discussion in layman's terms out there in the community where people would say, "I like the lung cancer one better than the heart attack one." So we needed to do consultation to be really sure how best we wanted the plain packaging to be revealed, and this resulted in the development of new sets of graphic health warnings which was implemented in 2017.

To embrace the innovative pathways to reduce the overall prevalence of tobacco use in Fiji, the Ministry understands the need to review and amend our current legislation so we can fully implement plain packaging here in Fiji. Our obligation as the leadership of this nation is to create a better false misleading or deceptive packaging or labelling of tobacco products and to institute health warnings, describing the harmful effects of tobacco use on the packaging or labelling and warnings which will actually make a difference, which effectively act as consumer warnings and deterrents.

Honourable Speaker, I am proud that the Government in 2010 have progressively worked in this area to truly protect the public health of all Fijians in Fiji. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I am sorry Honourable Speaker, I did not hear a timeline. Can you tell us the time when this amendment can be tabled?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, I have gone to great lengths to try.....

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You said nothing. By this time

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I have gone to great lengths to try and describe the systemic process that is in place that begun since 2013. The extensive consultation in review in 2016, the changes that have happened in the late 2017, we are just one year away from that. But already at this moment, the regulations are being discussed, so we are hopeful that this would come in due course.

This is not something just put on the backburner, Mr. Speaker, it is something that is being actively engaged at the local level and in considerable consultations, as we have a Tobacco Enforcement Unit and also our Public Health Protection Officers are in charge. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Aseri Radrodoro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister, this process of plain packaging involves a lot of stakeholders, especially the tobacco companies and the people who use their products. Can we get an indication from the Honourable Minister in terms of the consultations they have been doing, whether the Government will compensate tobacco companies for this introduction of plain packaging? Also in terms of the impact, it will reduce so what is the target in terms of the reduction in the usage of the tobacco products?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, I have just been reiterating again. What I have been saying, Mr. Speaker, there is evidence which is the Australian evidence. The Australian evidence has shown that it decreased by 3.4 percent. The Australian evidence also shows that for those who have not started smoking, it may seem ugly or may seem cool enough, and based on those evidences is how we are evaluating and also making our consultations.

And for that to be advised of any country that has been using compensation as a method because we have not compensated. I have not heard of any country that has been compensated. I will be happy to listen if you have any evidence that compensation used, but there is none.

As I have said, this is a very comprehensive review and the process has undergone its own evolution. We cannot put a timeline to it because as the Honourable Member has rightfully said, there are stakeholders who need to be consulted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- One more supplementary question. The Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir. Just another supplementary question regarding the whole issue of tobacco, drugs, alcohol, et cetera, I think the people are confused about the FijiFirst Government's policies on these issues - the use of tobacco, drugs and alcohol in terms of not only the use but the advertisement as well. If you go along the streets there in Suva, alcohol is advertised 24 hours a day but in overseas, it is restricted to certain hours.

In terms of tobacco, I am confused because he is saying that they are amending the packaging but at the same time the Honourable Attorney-General, I think two or three months ago, opened the tobacco processing planting for British Tobacco in Nadi. So, my question is, are they supporting tobacco or are they trying to get us to stop smoking tobacco, because it is confusing? The Honourable Minister is encouraging it.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

Honourable Member, you brought this point up in the last session of Parliament and exactly what you have just said now. You are going to get the same answer. I do not have any doubt about that. But the thing is if you want to ask a supplementary question, ask a supplementary question. You have the floor to ask the supplementary question to the Minister, and make it a supplementary question.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker Sir, my question to the Honourable Minister is, is his Ministry or the Government supporting or opposing tobacco smoking, given the contradictory actions of the two different Ministers?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Firstly, Honourable Speaker, globally, not only in Fiji, smoking is being found to be a causative cause of cancer, so it is not limited to Fiji. It is a question anyone knows the answer.

Secondly, please, Honourable Member, stick to the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the second Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Vijendra Prakash to ask Question No. 139/2019.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister had to just step out, he had an important engagement, but I think meeting has exceeded the time. If we could please seek your indulgence, Sir, to push the question further down the line until he comes back. He had to meet someone from overseas. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- The third Oral Question. Are you ready to ask your question, Honourable Member?

Update on the ILO Convention No. 87
(Question No. 140/2019)

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports provide an update to Parliament on the action taken by the Government in addressing issues raised by the ILO Committee on Application of Standards for Fiji at the 108th Session in

June 2019 regarding the ILO Convention No. 87 on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Rights to Organise Convention?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji's delegation to the 108th Session of the ILO Conference in June 2019 was led by the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we value our tripartite partnership, as Government with employers and workers, this was a matter of extremely importance to Fiji. And as a Ministry, it was also important that Fiji was fairly represented and that our standing as international partners at the Conference and at the ILO, correctly represents the FijiFirst Government's working for the rights of workers and addressing issues faced by employers in a fair and balanced manner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will briefly highlight the issues that were raised by the Committee on Application of Standards for Fiji in relation to ILO Convention 87. As usual, FTUC's allegation that harassment of trade unionist continues, it requested the Government to respond in detail in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in our response to the Committee, we stated that union members have been able to organise and carry out human activities with optimum, that is, without any interference of any sort, let alone the allegation of harassment from the Fijian Government.

The Fijian Constitution ensures that all workers have the right to fair employment practice, including the right to join a trade union, and to participate in its activities. The Fijian Constitution also guarantees all workers their right to freedom of association, and to let trade union represent their workers with all the rights as enshrined in Fiji's labour legislation, and in the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee requested the Government to provide detailed information on the manner in which the designated individuals from membership on the Employment Relation Advisory Board (ERAB), and a number of other bodies. My Ministry has responded in a timely and proactive manner to meet this request.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to confine my response to the ERAB, as it was the starting point for the Committee to ask the appointments to Boards, Councils and Committees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ERAB is established under the Employment Relations Act 2007 and consists of public officers as representatives of Government, representatives of employers and the representatives of workers

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to inform this august House and also to note that due to the boycott of the process by the workers' representatives, there remains a stalemate on the appointment of the ERAB. This has been part of the continued show of non-cooperation on the part of the workers' representatives, that is, the trade unions in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government had a comprehensive set of regulations on appointments and their functions. In summary, appointments on all such Boards, Committees and Councils are based on consideration of expertise.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently there are only two outstanding matters on which we are working towards implementing, and that includes the:

1. Review of the Labour laws; and
2. Review of the list of essential services and industries whereby ILO will facilitate the workshop for the social partners.

Mr. Speaker, the Fijian Government will be reporting to the ILO Governing Body in November 2019 on the progress of the two remaining matters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the plan that we have in place and for the information of this august House, I would like to state that we are calling the ERAB meeting at the end of this month, and ILO have agreed to assist the Government, basically the tripartite partners of sending technical assistance to facilitate the workshop that the ILO have asked for it.

With those comments, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Lynda Tabuya to ask a supplementary question. You have the floor.

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

Honourable Speaker, in light of the repeated rejection of the permits by FTUC and the workers to march, there is another one this Saturday anticipated, and in light of me personally witnessing the stopping of people to visit WAF workers while they collected at FTUC, can the Honourable Minister tell us why the workers are not allowed to exercise their freedom of speech and association as guaranteed under the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji and under ILO Convention 87 and, of course, also as being pointed out by the ILO Committee of Experts. Thank you.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker Sir, this matter is before the Court.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- The Honourable Member is very much aware because I have seen her photos, she has been roaming around in Court during the court cases.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- I do not intend to respond to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Point of Order!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, the Honourable Minister is answering your supplementary question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Point of Order is that the Honourable Member is misleading the House. My question was not about any matter before the Court, it was about

members of the public wanting to visit WAF members at FTUC and also the marches that have been rejected.

I am questioning the Honourable Minister as to why the workers' freedom and rights are not recognised as guaranteed by the same Convention he had raised in his answer. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, the Honourable Minister is answering your question. He is probably answering the question in a roundabout way, but he is answering your question. You have the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. For the information of this august House and in particular for the Honourable Member, I do not issue permits. The relevant agencies issue permits and not me. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Minister said there are only two outstanding conditions and undertaken and they will meet them by November. Can he clarify to the House what are these two remaining conditions are and why has it been hard for the Government to implement this from 2015; five years ago?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- He has stated it.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is what I said in my response of the two outstanding matters:

1. Review of the Labour Laws, we are unable to process this because the boycott by the unions...; and
2. Review of the list of essential services and industries whereby ILO will facilitate the workshop for the social partners.

These are the two outstanding matters that I had already mentioned and he is still asking me about these two outstanding matters.

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

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just another very simple supplementary question. When was the last time the workers had their elections? The workers electing for the members of the unions.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Trade Union?

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- No, I am asking when was the last meeting. Has any election taken place?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the best person to ask all those things is the union itself. I mean, I do not conduct elections, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Leawere.

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a simple question to the Honourable Minister in terms of ERAB. He mentioned that the unions boycotted the meetings with ERAB but the fact is that they did not because their views were not taken into consideration. What is the Minister going to do in getting the unions and having their views heard in these ERAB meetings?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- They did not boycott, shame on you.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just two weeks ago I was in Papua New Guinea attending the High Level Tripartite Forum which was also attended by the Director ILO. I had the opportunity to talk to the Director in terms of the participation by the tripartite partners and I did ask him that if one partner does not attend, we are stuck we cannot move.

I did mention to him that this is the difficulty that we have in Fiji. I have been assured that with or without, we can continue with ERAB. So, I am going to convene ERAB at the end of this month where we will extend invitation to the tripartite partners, that is, the employer, workers and the government and we will continue with the work that we are supposed to do. Thank you.

(Honourable Member interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, make sure you include the others as well.

We will take a break for lunch and we will continue with questions after lunch and the first question will be asked to the Honourable Seruiratu but if he happens not to be here, Honourable Dr. Govind, you should be ready for the question after that.

Honourable Members, we adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.56 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.48 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the agenda item that we are on. Before we do that, I would like to acknowledge the presence of visitors in the gallery this afternoon.

I take this opportunity to welcome to Parliament the Year 7 students, teachers and parents from the Levuka Public School in Ovalau. I hope there are many of you from Tanoa House there, you are most welcome and I hope that your visit to Parliament will be fruitful, knowledgeable and productive. You are most welcome.

Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the Honourable Vijendra Prakash to ask his question.

Increase of Thefts and Robbery Cases
(Question No. 139/2019)

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

Given the increase in number of thefts and robbery cases in Suva and Nasinu areas, can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs inform Parliament of the measures the Fiji Police Force have in place to address this issue?

HON. LT. COL. I. B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Foreign Affairs).- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I need to thank the Honourable Member for raising this very important question.

Let me also take this opportunity, Honourable Speaker, Sir, to acknowledge all the key stakeholders; I need to mention the Fiji Police Force, the Commissioner and his team and the policemen and women who continue to work hard in combating this increase in crime trends. Likewise, the key stakeholders; the municipal councils, both of Nasinu and Suva and the business community and of course the population at large.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is indeed a worrying trend and as Minister responsible, I am concerned and of course seeing that this be prioritised in addressing the needs in terms of the spike in the thefts and robbery cases in Fiji.

Let me put this into context as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we know Suva and Nasinu are areas that are heavily populated and it is because of the economic activities, it is the heart of the economic activities in the Central Division that attracts a lot of people within these two Municipalities namely, Suva City and Nasinu. It attracts people and at the same time creates opportunities and with these opportunities comes challenges as well. And we are well aware of that and of course doing our very best.

Let me also take this opportunity to assure this august House that we are doing our best, the Ministry and of course particularly the Fiji Police Force together with its key stakeholders to ensure the protection of the lives, properties and preservation of law and order in these two major municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, some of the strategies and the activities undertaken by the Fiji Police Force in order to address such cases in the Suva and Nasinu areas are strengthening police visibility in most of these affected areas. This is very, very important. Presence alone makes a lot of difference and, of course, hopefully it will bring necessary effects as well to those that are into such activities and, of course, with that increased presence, this is not only in but the areas that are targeted based on the assessments that are

made by the Police Force, not only in the Central Business District but, of course, in key areas, including intersections, schools and areas where there is a sort of trend in offences being committed.

It is the police visibility that needs to be seen and you would note Mr. Speaker Sir, that last weekend, there has been very significant increase in police presence particularly in the Suva areas during the night hours to support this strategy that we have in place. We have also mobilised the Police Special Response Unit, that is based in Nasinu; the Mobile Unit as it used to be known.

We have also mobilised the Police Special Response Unit that is based in Nasinu. The Mobile Unit as it used to be known, they are providing additional manpower to the Divisional Commanders and the station officers in these key areas so we are also mobilising the Police Special Response Unit.

The use of technology, it will help us a lot and we are thankful for the CCTV cameras that are installed in Suva already and these led to the arrest of members of such groups most recently and we hope and this is where we want to build our relationships together with the key stakeholders particularly the business communities in these municipalities because we need more of these cameras, the use of technology to help the Police Force being effective and efficient in the work that they undertake and of course, help in the reduction in the manpower as well in critical areas so that they can concentrate on other areas where they are needed.

Strengthening the integration with the business community, that I have already mentioned, Mr. Speaker, Sir and of course, the normal conduct and the visitation to the communities and of course, the normal investigative work which needs to be more aggressive and robust particularly on those that we have reliable information on. And, of course, the Fiji Police Force, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are progressively prosecuting those that are seen particularly committing minor offences like loitering, drunk and disorderly and so forth.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the continuing increase of Force operations procedural targeted policing. I did mention this as well that we need to be more clinical in the way we do business and of course, with the manpower and the capability that we have, together with technology, we hope that the police will act more smarter and maintain effectiveness and efficiency and of course, economising in terms of costs as well. I am thankful that the Government is continuing to help the Police Force in terms of increasing its manpower and at the same time developing the capability and the capacities within the Police Force. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. The question to the Honourable Minister, considering that in the past you had put up a police post at the Suva Market which has seen a huge reduction in crime in that area, would the Minister consider putting up a police post right beside the Suva City Library or on Victoria Parade which is the heart of where a lot of these illegal activities happen? Thank you.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Physical presence alone does not create the effect but let me assure the Honourable Member, this is where we have the new cameras concentrated on, this corridor and that is how we made the arrests previously. But of course, there is always consideration, Honourable Speaker, Sir, based on the assessments and trends that the Fiji Police Force, if there is a need for physical presence in the area, we will have to consult the stakeholders, particularly the municipal council, FRA, et cetera. It is an option. But I have talked about working smarter

within this environment and the use of technology perhaps will help us instilling, creating the same effects but minimise costs which would be good for the Government and the general public in the long term. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you for all that Honourable Minister and much appreciated. But in addition to that, are there any measures undertaken to identify the root cause of increase in sexual offences, drug offences and general lawlessness.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir. Let me assure the Honourable Member that the Fiji Police Force is putting in all its efforts to come up with the right interventions for these incidences. They are working very hard on their intelligence and analytical capability, looking at some of the trends that we have in crime.

But, unfortunately, in some instances, like sexual cases Honourable Speaker, Sir, this is more of a moral issue. This is where the partnership with our key stakeholders becomes so important, particularly with the faith-based organisations and community leaders. At the same time, awareness and advocacy is something that I have talked about for minor offences, loitering, drunk and disorderly and even the interpretation of public places.

This is something that we, together with the public, need to work together in terms of raising the level of awareness and also taking ownership in this whole of nation approach, so that we have a safe and secure Fiji and of course, attracting investors and visitors into our lovely country. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi, you have the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you Honourable Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Minister for the inner city foot patrols which had commenced last week. My question Sir, is how long will this continue for? Can we hope that this will be a common site Fiji wide and not just in the inner city areas after dark, given the increased personnel and continuous recruitment by the Police Force?

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let me assure the Members of this august House that the Government takes the role of the Police Force seriously and of course ensuring that they bring confidence to every citizen and the public at large.

And we will ensure that if and when this presence is needed we will continue to have them in the streets, but, of course there are priorities as well. But, we will not compromise our position and we will not compromise the need for us to maintain such a high level of assurance in terms of security to our people as well.

And hopefully as we again improve on technology and in the recruitment process we will continue to put the necessary efforts in the right places. It is about prioritising and it is about understanding the main efforts, so that the effects can be achieved at minimum cost. Work will continue based on the assessments done by the Fiji Police Force. Thank you, Sir.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. I must say I am very disappointed with the responses coming from the Honourable Minister, bearing in mind that women and children are the victims of these criminal activities.

And so, can the Honourable Minister explain what kind of monitoring and evaluation system or mechanism is in place to be able to gauge the effectiveness of all the strategies that has been alluded too? Thank you Honourable Speaker.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. Unfortunately, as I have stated, while the Fiji Police Force is doing its best to address the issues, at the same time we are equally concerned about the lack of responsibility shown by other key stakeholders.

In this regard, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I want to again highlight the role of parenthood, particularly parents. A lot of those that are found on the streets come from families, but what are the families doing about such cases? And not only the Fiji Police Force, but we as members of the public and particularly the parents need to take equal responsibility.

For the Fiji Police Force, there are special indicators in place to gauge the level of success of the operations that they carry out. However and unfortunately as well Mr. Speaker, we can say that some of these issues are well within our influence and unfortunately we are not taking our responsibility seriously. That is where we, as concerned and responsible citizens of Fiji, need to act together so we can address these issues. Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. The Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua for the last supplementary question.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I could just ask the Honourable Minister back to the boots on the ground and increased patrolling of the main Suva city area; can the Honourable Minister tell us how has that affected the Police Force's ability to police other areas of Suva? I know for a fact that there were break-ins at a particular restaurant in Flagstaff which got broken into and of course, we have been seeing more reports of people having their homes broken into because people know more boots on the ground in Suva means less boots on the grounds in other parts of Suva. Thank you.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let me assure this august House that it is not only about Suva but it is about these municipalities and of course we are very much actively involved in these areas as well. This is where the role of the communities becomes very important Mr. Speaker Sir and I will mention the Vatuwaqa community as an example. They work very closely with the police in terms of information sharing and supporting the police when they do come to their areas and of course, help them as well in taking the police to the right places. So, this is very, very good for us when we are building relationships and of course the role of the crime prevention committees in the residential areas becomes very very important when we are trying to address these issues.

Again, let me assure the Honourable Members of this august House that it is not only about increased presence in Suva alone but we have more vehicles now. We have motor cycles now so it is

these assets and capabilities that are strategically in place to show the general public that we are doing more in order to address the issues that we have.

Let me just urge every member of the House and of course the general public that are listening, if they do have concerns in their areas, they can contact the nearest locality so that we can respond and even come for a meeting so that we can strategise and work on solutions to address such issues. Thank you Mr. Speaker Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you Honourable Minister. We will move on to the next question and I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Salik Govind to ask question his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Pacific Labour Scheme Agreement - Vuvale Partnership
(Question No. 141/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports explain to Parliament the scheme that the Fijian and Australian Government have signed under the Pacific Labour Scheme Agreement as part of the Vuvale Partnership on 5th April, 2019?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, firstly I wish to acknowledge our Honourable Prime Minister for his visionary leadership to establish this partnership with the Australian Prime Minister in early January this year. Under the partnership, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Australian Prime Minister invited Fiji to join in this Programme. Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 5th April, 2019, the signing of the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) Agreement in Canberra paved the way for Fiji's participation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, PLS focusses on locations in rural and regional Australia that require skill levels that are low to semi-scale. The Scheme is targeting workers between the ages of 21 to 45 years, where the term of work could range from 12 months to three years, with a minimum of 12 months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the completion of their three years, the one year stand down period is allowed before a worker can be recalled by the employer or to re-apply. This stand down period allows equal opportunities to all Fijians who wish to apply for the Scheme. In addition, the one year stand down period allows workers to share their new learnt skills and experience in our local market or to start up a business initiative on their own and in doing so, creating employment space which contributes to the national economic growth. Industries that are currently showing interest in Fiji are tourism, meat worker, processing and age care.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the PLS allows equal opportunities for all Fijian workers. Our obligation is to assist in the screening process which involves police clearance and medical clearance and the normal interview process. This is to ensure that we send the right people with the right attitude and right set of mind to remain focussed and committed throughout the term of their engagement and to honour and observe their contract conditions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the signing of this MOU with Australia in April 2019, we will be sending 51 Fijians to work in the meat industry by the end of this month. Air fares and visa fees are paid by the employer and the worker will reimburse the full cost over an agreed period of time once in Australia. Mr.

Speaker, Sir, for the normal 38 hours working week, each meat worker is expected to receive A\$776.34 per week or FJ\$1,125.77, equivalent to FJ\$58,540 per annum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this only happens under the FijiFirst Government.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I commend the Seasonal Workers Programme. Yes, it has been working quite well.

Just in light of the recent court settlement in Australia between 50 Vanuatu workers and a company out of Brisbane, where they settled because there was gross violation of workers' rights and chemical exposure to those workers. My question to the Honourable Minister is; how does he ensure that this does not happen to our workers in the future? What is in the contract and how can he protect our workers as they go out to Australia that they would be looked after and this would also not happen to them? Thank you.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Before I respond, through you, can I get some clarification; is she talking about seasonal workers or PLS? There are two Programmes.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Honourable Speaker, the Vanuatu workers were also sent over through the Seasonal Workers Programme in Australia and what happened was that, there was a settlement and they won the settlement because of gross violation of their rights when they were working out in horticulture. My question to the Honourable Minister is, what can they do or what can he do to ensure that this does not happen to our workers who are under a similar seasonal workers programme? It is the same concept - Seasonal Workers Programme.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Here, we are talking about the PLS programme but she is continuing to talk about the seasonal workers. Let me assure this august House that to-date, there has been no such case in regards to what the Honourable Member is talking about in terms of our Fijian workers.

Let me inform this House that we screen these workers and I remember mentioning in this august House, that we involve the chiefs of various villages where we get these Fijian workers and they are part of this screening process. In that case, I am happy to say that a few weeks ago I was in New Zealand to promote our Fijian brand and I can say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, without any hesitation, that all the employers I met with were so happy with the Fijian brand.

Honestly, they are so happy and there was no case whatsoever in regards to our Fijians working in New Zealand and Australia under the Seasonal Workers Programme. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I do not think the Honourable Minister knows.

HON. P.K. BALA.- What do you mean?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I know because I worked there.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- In the seasonal work programme?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I was picking tomatoes. He said \$700 but then they cut off your food, your transport and ...

HON. A.SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Where did you go?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... most of the time you end up with nothing. I went to Queensland to pick tomatoes.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- When?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Sometimes ago.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is the truth and they end up with nothing. They cut off the transport, they cut off the food and nothing. So, how can the Honourable Minister and his FijiFirst Government ensure that they get maximum benefit?

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not know whether there is any truth in it.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Yes, you do not know.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Or whether he went or not but even if he went ...

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I went.

HON. P.K. BALA.- He may be talking about 20 to 30 years back.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, no.

HON. P.K. BALA.- That was under a different Government but under this Government all the workers that we send are well protected. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Last question.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister on this scheme; how can you ensure that all those that were involved in this scheme get to deduct their proper superannuation scheme, so that they do not miss out, they do not fall through the gap in terms of pension funds and on retirements.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this point in time there is no such deduction by the...

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Why?

HON. P.K. BALA.- Answer.

(Laughter)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have had some discussion with FNPF just a few weeks ago and we are trying to get them under this programme. But let me tell you people that, that is an employer-driven programme. They dictate but we want our Fijians to be protected and FNPF is willing to come on board and do some deductions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on.

We will move on to the fifth oral question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Mikaele Leawere to ask Question No. 142/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Legislative and Policy Framework – PPP in the Health Sector
(Question No. 142/2019)

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

Would the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications advise Parliament on the legislative and policy framework in place to facilitate public-private partnership in the Health Sector?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do have a public private partnership policy. You can actually go to www.economy.gov.fj and you will find the policy there. The public private partnership policy actually applies to all sectors, thank you.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a supplementary question. Given that the Government has necessary specific registrations in place and with MIOT moving out from Suva Private Hospital, what happens to members like the police force who have their insurance entrenched in the partnership between MIOT and the Suva Private Hospital?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Members, Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Member is a bit confused. A Public Private Partnership (PPP) is when Government or Government agencies are involved in that relationship so the PPP with Lautoka Hospital and Ba Hospital is where the Government has given out the Lautoka and Ba Hospitals on a concession to a private company that is 80 percent owned by FNPF and 20 percent owned by ASPEN of Australia.

The MIOT relationship has got nothing to do with Government. MIOT had a commercial arrangement with Suva Private Hospital which is actually owned by BSP, so that relationship is between them. If there are any insurance policies in place, those insurance policies will obviously continue irrespective of who is there in Suva Private because from what I understand, (and I do not know which specific policy you are talking about) the police also get repatriated offshore.

If they are with MIOT, obviously the MIOT Hospitals in India will continue to operate and they will continue in any case. But please understand that the MIOT presence at Suva Private is a relationship between BSP and MIOT. It has nothing to do with Government. They of course, have been the beneficiaries of the tax incentive we had given because they were able to get the tax concession.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. We will move on to the sixth oral question for today. I give to the floor to the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal to ask question 143/2019. You have the floor.

Livestock Industry and Climate Change Issues
(Question No. 143/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment brief this Parliament as to the Ministry's plan for the livestock industry in terms of addressing climate change issues?

HON. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, I rise to respond to Honourable Kirpal's question on the Ministry's plan for the livestock industry in terms of addressing issues on climate change. It is a very pertinent question, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a climate change is a major threat to animal and agriculture in general through its potential effects on heat stress, food and water security, extreme weather events, vulnerable shelter and population migration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for instance projected increases in temperature, changes in precipitation patterns and extreme weather events, and the reduction in freshwater availability can have negative effects on agriculture productivity and agriculture production.

The livestock sector is affected by a decline in livestock productivity and poor health conditions of animals which lead to high mortality rates, as evident during the past droughts, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, studies have proven the responses of animal to heat stress reduces feed intake by more than 15 percent and reduces milk yield by 20 percent in general.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if this happens to the already existing low yield and milk production, then you can see what and how devastating the impact could be.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, considering climate change and its negative impact on Fiji's agricultural sector, the Ministry of Agriculture has put together a plan to ensure that we establish a resilient agricultural food system. The livestock sector and various commodity development programmes have been carefully executed to ensure sustainability and productivity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Agriculture has significantly invested in the following livestock areas to circumvent climate change issues in the national interest - genetic conservation and cross breeding programmes to the use of resilient native breeds and breeding programmes

Mr. Speaker, Sir, animal genetic diversity is critical for food security and rural development. They allow farmers to select stock to develop new breeds in response to changing conditions including

climate change, new insurgent disease threats, new knowledge of human and animal nutrition requirements and changing societal needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, conserving native animal genetic resource for future food security purpose is vital. This is due to its adaptation to local conditions and better survival rate in times of droughts and disaster as compared to exotic breeds, therefore our Ministry of Agriculture is committed to this genetic conservation programme whereby the local breeds are conserved and re-entered into agriculture registrations for cross breeding programmes of climate resilience and exotic breeds.

Local breeds of pigs for example is very resilient to diverse kinds of order, pasture as well as heat situations. They are also quite efficient in terms of feed intake, so what we are doing at the research station at Koronivia is to cross these local breeds of pigs with the imported breeds, for example, the large Landrace breed, et cetera.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also cross-breeding the local free range chicken with the meat bird chicken to gain feed efficiency as well as develop conditions amongst these high-yielding poultry which would allow them to be tolerant and also with less feed during difficult times.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the second programme is introduction of heat tolerant pure breeds through embryo transfer programmes. Sir, recently Fiji has undertaken and invested with a grant from the Government of Australia in a large bio-technology programme in the use of embryo transfer technology to boost the cattle sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, both our beef cattle and dairy cattle are very low yielding breeds that we have as compared to the breeds that we have in Australia and New Zealand which are about one-third on an average. Milk yield are about one fifth of what we get per cow per herd per day in New Zealand and Australia.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is an urgent need to bring in new high-yielding breeds which are tolerant to local conditions, but we are subjected to strict Biosecurity requirements because some of the diseases that we have in Australia and New Zealand, we do not have it in Fiji. We do not want to end up introducing new diseases which could be devastating to our livestock sector which was already suffering from tuberculosis and brucellosis. At the moment, in New Zealand it took them 40 years to eradicate their cattle stock from TB and Brucellosis. We have just started, we have not yet done testing of TB and Brucellosis in Vanua Levu.

(Honourable Members interjected)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M.REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do not want to bring in a breed that will increase a new disease given that we are at the moment involved in a lot of researches to test and eradicate our existing stock with TB and Brucellosis.

Secondly, we do not want to introduce a high-yielding breed which could come here and get infected with TB and Brucellosis. So we have adopted this embryo transfer programme which will ensure there is no transfer of any diseases. There are fertilised embryos which we get in for testing. We inserted in a female cattle and they give birth to that original breed and here, we are talking about Brown Swiss for dairy cattle and Senepol for beef cattle.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has adopted the embryo transfer technique which has been assisted by funding from the Government of Australia.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this genetic improvement technology will be replicated to the local farmers after adaptability studies and at the moment, we are developing our nuclear herd and from there then we will start multiplying to distribute it to the farm. So, in the second stage, we will also provide these cattle to the farmers and the breeder stock as well so that we can rapidly increase the provision of these high yielding cattle; dairy cattle and beef cattle.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also are mindful of the effect of drought to our livestock sector. This is a reality in the small island states where we are subjected to frequent droughts given the situation with climate change and El Nino.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you would have noted, in the past drought we have lost a lot of livestock. Yaqara is one of our largest farms where at the moment we have got five thousand herds of beef cattle. In the past during drought, we lost a lot of those cattle because of two reasons; one, we did not have adequate pasture and second was the lack of adequate volume of drinking water. To deal with both of these two, one is, we had to look at an alternative pasture source.

At the moment, the pasture that we have around the country are in-paddock pasture which has got very shallow rooting system. So, to ensure that we provide a pasture which is drought resistant, we have now introduced, thanks to the Government of China, which has got a Juncao Technology Station in Nadi, at Legalega Research Station, we have now introduced a very deep rooted, high protein content cut and carry pasture which we are now multiplying amongst the livestock farms in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Yaqara we have got over 22 acres of this juncao pasture already established. So, if there is a drought, let us say this month, we will be able to supply the cattle with this cut and carry pasture which every three months, it can be renewed. You harvest that pasture every three months, cut, carry and feed it to the livestock. We have developed an adequate source of water, should there be a drought and we have noted that these sources do not dry during the drought season. So, we are now pretty much well ready, well established to deal with a drought at the Yaqara Cattle Station.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also introduced other forms of pasture which are high in protein content to our livestock farms and we have got a set timetable and structure to provide this to all the medium and large livestock farms throughout Fiji so that they would have this pasture established in those farms. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are pretty much well established in terms of dealing with any adverse weather conditions which would have a devastating effect on our livestock sector. Thank you.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Sir, I rise to ask a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment. Can the Honourable Minister inform the House about the Fiji – Israel Memorandum of Understanding on agriculture and how does this benefit livestock breeding in Fiji? The MOU.

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the first time ever, we have got nine students who arrived in Israel last Saturday, who will be stationed at various high-tech agricultural farms for 11 months, totally funded by the Government of Israel. This is the first time, we never had it before.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are second year FNU Agriculture students, nine of them. They are now in Israel that today they probably would have been placed at different farms. Some are in farm mechanisation, some are in livestock breeding, some are in horticulture and some are in rootcrops.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and they probably know as well, Israel has got a very advanced agricultural production system. Fiji will greatly benefit when the students return as they will help with this state-of-the-art technology in agriculture production system.

This is part of the MOU which we have just advanced and I want to thank the Government of Israel and FNU, who have worked very closely with us over the last five months to make this happen. We also want to thank the Department of Immigration for supporting the students to get their public documents on time. Thank you.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Minister knows that this Government has been in power for 14 years and only today, the Reserve Bank of Fiji (RBF) says that everything else is down - agriculture production is down, crop production is down, with the exception of poultry. Beef production is down and milk production is down and with all that you had explained, how can you assure this House (that side and this side) that production will go up?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately, the Honourable Member still does not get when he says that agriculture sector is down.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had provided statistics saying that agriculture output has not declined. Agricultural output or contribution is relative to the other sectors of the economy has declined because the other sectors of the economy has grown at a higher rate.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, there is something called slope of a growth curve, growth line. The slope of non-agriculture sector is higher than the agriculture sector. That is understandable because obviously when economy grows, the surplus created in the agriculture sector is transferred to the non-agriculture sector for the non-agriculture sector to grow.

Secondly, Honourable Speaker, Sir, I would want the Honourable Member to read the latest Asian Productivity Organisation (APO) Release - Productivity of Fijian Economy which I had just received the report yesterday, Sunday, which you do not work.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, that report says very clearly that productivity in the agriculture sector has increased over the last decade, which is a very resounding complement to agriculture sector. Thanks to him.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, not everything is in a doom and gloom as the Honourable Member is saying. There are a lot of positivities out there and I suggest that the Honourable Member monitors how the agriculture sector is expanding under the new commercial agriculture paradigm.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Adi Qionibaravi.

HON. ADIL QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Towards the end of June there was a shortage of milk in Fiji that resulted in the increase of milk prices in supermarkets.

My question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to the Honourable Minister, whether there is a Dairy Industry Development Plan that will ensure that there is increase in the production of milk per cow per year, say 4,000 as in the New Zealand case? As of now, we do not know how many litres does an average cow in Fiji is producing? *Vinaka*.

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately Honourable Member does not have historical knowledge. Before Rewa Dairy used to pretty much import most of the powdered milk from outside. Recently with the reform done by the Ministry of Public Enterprises, the Fiji Dairy Limited has now expanded dairy production outside the Central Division.

Now you see that a good 40 percent of milk is generated from the Western Division, due to this reform with the Rewa Dairy which is now under Fiji Dairy Limited, so milk production is now expanding in the Western Division.

As alluded to by the Honourable Member, rightfully so that we have got a low milk production per cow per day, and that is why I just mentioned that we are now introducing a new breed, the Brown Swiss breed which has a capacity of generating 25 litres of milk per cow per day. At the moment, the milk production of per cow per day is 5 litres in the Central Division and in the Western Division about 6.5 litres, interestingly.

Mr. Speaker Sir, the strategy is to ensure that all the farmers that we have, have a better high yielding breed and secondly, we support them with good quality pasture. The pasture that we are introducing is very high in protein quality.

Mr. Speaker Sir, this is part of the overall Dairy Industry Development Programme and at the same time, we are also investing and ensuring that the farmers are able to get all the latest technology to assist them in managing their farms. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. The last supplementary question, Honourable Pio Tikoduadua.

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

Honourable Speaker, a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. I heard the Minister talked about 40 years as a timeframe for Australia to get rid of Brucellosis and TB for that matter. I think farmers in Fiji cannot wait for that long. Can the Honourable Minister give us a strategy for, at least, 20 years - half of that?

I can tell you, Honourable Speaker, that three-quarters of the dairy farmers in Tailevu are actually resorting to agriculture or *dalo* farming and rootcrop farming. You see the way that they actually dig up the land, it is no longer climate-friendly, so what is the alternative that is there? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. The Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker Sir, as I have mentioned, we are developing the nucleus herd of this new breed of cattle - the Brown Swiss per dairy and by the end of the second year, we should be able to have a larger stock to distribute to the farmers. What we are looking at is to develop, at least, for the start in year 2021, two intensive dairy farm. That is the way to go.

Rather than having large farms with cattle outside, what we are looking at is cattle intensive inside the shed while we have cut and carry pasture and corn to supplement the feed to these cattle. I think that is the way to go and that is how they have got dairy farms in Israel where it is able to supply fully the country's milk requirement. I think that will speed up our ability to raise the milk production consumption from within Fiji. I think we will be able to very quickly increase the production of milk that we supply in Fiji from within our own production services. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on the seventh Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Viliame Gavoka to ask Question No. 144/2019. You have the floor, Sir.

Update on the Acquisition of Two Airbus A350 Jets
(Question No. 144/2019)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the acquisition of the two new Airbus A350 Jets publicly announced on 2nd May, 2019?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker Sir, I would like to thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the acquisition of these two new airbuses are on track. We take delivery of the first one in November this year and the second one in December this year. We hope to commence the commercial entry into service in December this year also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, to get these aircraft up and running, we need to train our staff and currently we have two Fijian pilots and three local check and training captains who have completed their common type, what they call "rating course" with Airbus in Singapore. A further six pilots, including Fiji Airways Chief Pilot, are undergoing this training in Singapore at the moment. The majority of A330 pilots will also undergo A350 training.

These pilots will be fully qualified on the A350 before the first aircraft, Mr. Speaker, Sir, enters into commercial service in December this year. Fiji Airways expects that by 2020, a total of 88 pilots will be qualified and approved to fly both the Airbus types in the Fiji Airways fleet.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Civil Aviation Authority of Fiji (CAAF), as a regulatory authority is very involved in the certification programme for the entry into service of the A350 into Fiji. In June, the CAAF approved the A350 simulators at the Airbus Training Centre in Singapore which allows Fiji Airways pilots to undertake the common type training and the full flight simulator, line training or enhanced board training will be done on our own. A350 aircraft as approved by CAAF for both pilots and cabin crew will commence in November of this year once the aircraft is in service.

The first group of 12 of airline engineers are already engaged in the training. With the A350 aircraft, there is a total of 24 licensed aircraft engineers who will each receive 42 days training in structures and systems of the new aircraft. Training will be conducted both in Nadi and Singapore. In addition, specialist engineers will receive additional training in Singapore and the Rolls Royce Trent WXWB power plants or the engines selected for use with this aircraft. All workshop and line engineering staff will be upskilled in the maintenance and operation of the A350.

The seven Fiji Airways Cabin Crew Aviation Safety Instructors and Cabin Crew Trainers together with a designated CAAF Inspector have completed their type ratings for A350 aircraft from Toulouse in France. The training programme for the airline's 400 cabin crew is currently being finalised and delivery of this will start in early September in Hong Kong for Senior Cabin Crew and in Fiji for the rest to ensure sufficient crew are trained on the aircraft for this initial commercial operations in December. Cabin crew trainees will undergo further training on the aircraft operations in Hong Kong using the facilities of Cathay Pacific and establish A350 operator, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and a fellow oneworld alliance member.

A cabin door trainer, specific to the A350 has been procured for installation for the Fijian Aviation Academy, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As we all know that the Government in its vision and foresight wants to set up an aviation academy which provides a seed funding of \$1 million and Fiji Airways as you would see those of you who drive through Namaka, will see it all coming up. And over there we will have the door trainers specific being installed and the slider door. Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the commercial preparation for the introduction of the new aircraft are underway with the first seats in the new aircraft already available for sale in Fiji Airways reservation system.

The aircraft will fly the flowing rotation, Nadi, Sydney, Nadi, Los Angeles and back to Sydney via Nadi. The aircraft will also operate some flights into Auckland once approved by the respective regulatory authorities. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Airways has to work closely with Airports Fiji Limited because it is a very big aircraft and of course the loading and off-loading of passengers has to be worked out in the logistics.

But the A350, if I could take this opportunity Mr. Speaker, Sir, gives us the opportunity to do much longer haul flights. In other words, we could actually go beyond Los Angeles, there is talk about even going to as far as Chicago. Chicago, basically Mr. Speaker, Sir, is a good destination because it is closer to the Eastern Sea Board of USA, also closer to the Northern Sea Board of Canada and of course going in the Western direction, we could go even as far as Chennai.

So this gives us the capacity, the A350 will have 100 percent flat beds and of course the number of facilities and amenities on the aircraft which will really position Fiji Airways as we know the Fiji Airways recently won two international awards and the second one, of course, is one of the best aircraft or airline in the Pacific outrunning Honourable Gavoka's favourite airline, Qantas and Air New Zealand and various other airlines. Thank you.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. It is disturbing that we picked these planes because Singapore Airlines refuse to take them which means there was no planning on the part of Fiji Airways, that something came up and they thought it was a good idea to buy it.

Honourable Speaker, I say this because Fiji Airways has a family of aircraft known as A330. It has the A330, A300 there is a new one in the market called the A330 NEO (New Engine Option). It could do the work of A350 but keeping the platform of A330 in place which would lessen the cost of training, of engineering because using the same A330 platform. So why did Fiji Airways react this manner to buy

something that Singapore Airlines did not want? Why did they not stay in the same platform and go for the new A330 NEO? Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is incorrect to say Singapore rejected A350. In fact I recently flew in an A350 Singapore Airlines.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if Singapore Airlines rejected A350, why would they have simulators based in Singapore with an A350 simulator? It is incorrect to say that they have rejected A350, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, no one is flying in to rush. I know Honourable Viliame Gavoka has a proclivity for Boeing but the reality of the matter is that Boeing recently, as you know what has happened to 737 MAX?

(Hon. V.R. Gavoka interjected)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no mad rush, they have been actually working on this particular project, looking at the Dreamliner, looking at the A350 for the past two years. I would not call it a rush, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all things taken into consideration, of course, we are also looking at updating our current A330s with the NEOs, the new generation and again, there has been an offer on the table. So all of these things have worked out. It is really quite unfortunate that here is our national airline, which has recently won two awards, it is doing well, it is going into a new era, long haul of destinations; it is very interesting.

The Honourable Prime Minister had a meeting with the Japanese Foreign Minister who is in the country and we also had discussions with him earlier this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are talking very highly of Fiji Airways, talking about the fact how we have gone back into the Narita market and again these are what we call high end destinations when we have products like the A350 et cetera, it puts us in a much better position. So please let us not run down our national carrier with unfounded allegations, unfounded and unsubstantiated facts.

We need to give a boost to the crew, the pilots and the staff of Fiji Airways to say that we as a Parliament are actually supporting our national airline. We have been through the throes in respect of trying to get the right aircraft. It is a very competitive industry; it is not an industry you make willy-nilly make statements because you will actually undermine the confidence.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you Honourable Speaker. The Honourable Minister had mentioned in his answer about the off-loading and loading of passengers with these new aircrafts. Related to that I just like to ask the Honourable Minister to confirm about the ground handling services that is currently done by the ATS for the last 35 years, will that be taken over by Fiji Airways and if so when will that happen? Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the operational management of Fiji Airways is not carried out by the Fijian Government. We do not sit here and run the Operations Manager of Fiji

Airways. Yes, of course Fiji Airways has expressed its interest to do its own ground handling. Fiji Airways has also expressed an interest to do its own catering.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, unfortunately I have to bring this up now that the Honourable Member talks about and I know she has got a political stake in ATS.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, only recently there was a sweep done of the lockers of people who offload the bags in our planes. We have found numerous personal items of people that have been taken out of their suitcases. At the moment Fiji Airways is actually thinking about putting cameras in the luggage hall of those planes because when these people go in, they actually take things out

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It is a police case.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is easy for her to say it is a police case. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the problem when you have people who do not necessarily engage all faculties at the same time.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Just answer the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the police will say where is the complainant. The complainant's gone, the complainant is not in the country, we are currently looking at amending those laws it is not about simply going with policeman.

It is also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, about having the right culture within the organisation. Numerous, numerous occasions where people's stuff are being taken out of these bags. People sit in the planes, bags are going in, bags are coming out and things are being taken out.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, organisations like the Air Terminal Services (ATS) needs to understand that in the modern day of running airports and airline services, we need to have a lot of professionalism. So, regarding the fact that this is why I am trying to get to you as to why

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Answer the question.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Just listen!

Why organisations like Fiji Airways would want to do their own ground handling? Why Fiji Airways would want to take the luggage handling be done by themselves? Why Fiji Airways would want to do and have their own catering because of these shenanigans that actually go on and it will make sense. There is absolutely no exclusivity in place as far as the legal framework is concerned and we believe that if there is an airline, there is a capacity to be able to provide whether it is engineering services, catering services, luggage services, ground handling services

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Not possibly.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They can do so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. What are the terms of this agreement between Fiji Airways and this *Dubai Aerospace Enterprise capital*?

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was hoping the Honourable Member would not ask any question given his recent public pronouncements. But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is a commercial decision between the parties.

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

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Regarding the Honourable Minister for Economy on the ATS, I think that is a very unfair statement his making; generalising the workers as thieves because he has not provided any figures and his just generalising that all of them are stealing and implying from that, that Fiji Airways should be taking ground handling services which is totally unfair on the workers. That company has been formed partnership between the workers and Qantas and the original agreement which ...

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your question?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- ... resulted in that partnership today. So, the question which was asked was not answered whether Fiji Airways under his leadership intends to take over the ground handling, putting at risk about 400 jobs, of course, they will advertise and that is what we want to know.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, the Minister has answered that question sufficiently. He has answered that. We will move on to the next question. The eighth oral question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Viam Pillay to ask Question 145/2019.

Services for Cardiac Disorders
(Question No. 145/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament of the current services available for Fijians in relations to cardiac disorders?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for that question. From the outset, Honourable Speaker, I would like to say that the three Divisional Hospitals (CWM, Labasa and Lautoka) provide specialist cardiac services. In addition, this occasionally is also provided at subdivisational hospital by visitation of the three big hospitals.

The daily admissions and management of patients with cardiac disease such as acute chronic syndrome those who have complete heart attacks or unstable angina with or without complications, heart failure, arrhythmias and rheumatic heart disease with valve replacement. Internal consultations are done and multi-disciplinary care for patients and multi-organ disease involvement.

There is also in-patient echocardiography for booked and emergency cases. Echo is also done now at clinic setting and we have been working also in partnership with the Sai Prema Foundation, they have a new echo unit which is available here in Nasese for children. We also have the opportunity to do echo in our Intensive Care Unit using portable echo machines.

At CWM Hospital, our team provides emergency pacemaker insertion for those Fijians who have complete heart block or severe bradycardia or are in unresponsive to medical treatment for some form of arrhythmia. The outpatient services consist of weekly cardiac clinic carried out in the cardiac clinic in

the three main hospitals where new cases that are being referred are diagnosed and treated and also discharged patients are being followed up.

We also have patients who are on long-term treatments, such as being on anti-coagulation because they have a risk of having another heart attack or those who had a rheumatic heart replaced in the past, they need to be on warfarin or anti-coagulation, they are actually being seen in this clinic.

Also in the outpatient, we have outpatient cardiography, this is run by consultant physician who has an interest in cardiology and we have a cardiologist in-house at the CWM Hospital and also those with cardiology interest in Lautoka and Labasa. Even though there may be a consultant, they may also have a team with them and these are junior doctors who are training to be cardiologists.

We also perform outpatient exercise testers and the outreach echocardiogram services or echo services are provided by CWM to rural and community based centres such as Nakasi Health Centre and Nausori Health Centre, Korovou Sub-Divisional Hospital, Vunidawa Sub-Divisional Hospital and Navua Sub-Divisional Hospital. This is something that was not there in the past as we are moving towards universal health coverage and having a presence on the ground in utilising the facilities that we have in place as a platform to be able to send the specialist with their equipment to be able to provide this service.

Honourable Speaker, we also have visiting cardiac teams and in every year we have about four teams that come and visit our hospitals and these are from centres and hospitals of excellence abroad. They collaborate with our local staff, some of our staff have been working with them for about 10 years and have grown in their experience and exposure and they provide services for both children and also adults.

There are cardiac screening and investigation, follow-up care, echocardiography, angiography or angioplasty and surgery for those who have congenital heart conditions such as a hole in the heart to be simple in the words that I am saying that we are using today. Also searching for valve diseases such as rheumatic heart and emergency surgery for chronic arteries as and when required.

The visiting teams have been coming for more than 20 years and the initial team that is still coming is the team out of Australia, initiated through Sydney Adventist Hospital and recently over the years, this also involved the Friends of Fiji Heart that come out of New Zealand. We also have the Sai Prema and also another institution that comes, so now we have four, initially one.

The visiting team and specialists also provide training for our staff on the skills and knowledge that are transferred to our local teams for ongoing care. In addition, we also have referral of cardiac patients that are complex, for example there may be patients that our local specialists see and are referred to the visiting teams as they come; the four of them and they may actually view as being risky to be able to undertake a very difficult complex procedure here locally. These patients apart from the patients that are being found through other pathways are being referred overseas.

Into this, Government in the 2018/2019 Budget allocated \$2 million for overseas referral of which a \$350,000 alone was for cardiac cases and this is for operation cost, accommodation and air fares. In this year's budget, it is estimated at around \$1.5 million to \$2 million that will be used for visiting for overseas referral and again it is estimated at about \$350,000 or lesser because we are working towards that Public Private Partnership (PPP) that has been discussed earlier today and in the hope that in the next year, as this begins to pan out even more, that there will be availability of complex specialists, open heart and even cardiac procedures, and the cost of sending Fijians overseas will drop.

So in essence, Honourable Speaker, there is a very complex variety of cardiac diseases that can be treated locally, both by our local cardiologists and also those who visit us regularly. I must also say

that we have a number of private health facilities, such as the Madras Institute of Orthopaedics and Traumatology (MIOT) Pacific Hospital, the Nadi International Clinic and the visiting team comprehended by those who come from overseas and support our local Fijians. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, you have the floor.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister for Health and I thank you so much for that reply which is quite detailed.

The question that I would like to raise is to do with Parliament. Do you have any plans or what sort of services are available when the House sits, especially for Parliament or the Parliament precincts for heart cases in Fiji? We have had some experiences in the past and the Honourable Speaker knows that quite well, that happened in the former Parliament down there at Veiuto. So, that is the question I am raising, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE. - Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker and I thank the Honourable Member for that question. Recently in the last two or three sittings of Parliament, we have had, on the request of Members which we made available, our people coming down from CWM Hospital. They came did the clinic, tested blood pressure, sugar, weight and height, with a view towards NCDs.

Personally, I have been in discussions also with the Secretary-General around how we could be able to make the Parliament more NCD friendly in terms of the meals that are provided, the opportunities for breaks for Parliamentarians to go for walks and utilise the beautiful Albert Park that this Government has provided.

Honourable Speaker, I am also of the view that may be as Parliamentarians, we need to take more responsibility in championing NCDs and also issues around the heart. Unfortunately, a lot of Fijians do not have a dedicated General Practitioner or a doctor that they visit regularly, and I would encourage all of us, Parliamentarians, to please, have a doctor that you visit regularly on a monthly visit, take your blood pressure, sugar, et cetera.

But again, the visits by the Ministry of Health is something that we want to make in every Parliamentary sitting with your concurrence, Honourable Speaker, as a mechanism to be able to gauge and see whether people are actually improving in regards to blood pressure or not. Those who have been identified, certainly will follow the pathway to be sent up to CWM Hospital to see the specialists that are available there. Thank you.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for the answer to the question that was directed to him.

Just by way of a supplementary question and before I do that, I would like at this stage, also acknowledge the doctors at the Cardiac Unit at CWM Hospital in particular, and I thank all the doctors for the hard work that they are doing.

Honourable Speaker, with all the good plans about developing the areas of service within the Cardiac Unit, there is problem with the supply of medication. I would just like to ask the Honourable

Minister, when would the Pharmacy at CWM Hospital be able to issue medicine or pills that are prescribed by the doctors at the Cardiac Unit? Would you also look at recordkeeping because I had this experience last week where I had an echocardiogram test done two months ago and did not reach the doctor that looked at my case?

It was done, but it is just improving the processes to make sure that it gets to the doctor for review. That is the process within and if you would just like to have a look at that. It is just those two issues. Thank you.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for that question. All within the Ministry of Health, we are working very hard to be able to improve the efficiencies in which we do things.

Certainly mechanisms and stumbling blocks in the past is something that is unacceptable to us. We know that there are old habits and these old habits need to move because the life of all Fijians are very important, and it is important to be expedient in the way that we do things.

I am very keen, Honourable Member, certainly when you have issues in particular like this, please do not hesitate to raise it with us or the Medical Superintendents or the complaints line or raise it with me personally, because as I have said earlier we are very keen. We know that there are complaints, we want to deal with it appropriately.

If there are staff involved, we want to ensure that particular disciplinary processes are in place to deal with it and if it is process problems, we need to ensure that we solve those process and make sure that we look after the life of all Fijians. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

We will now move on to the first Written Question for today and I call upon the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, to ask her Written Question No. 146/2019. You have the floor, Madam.

Written Questions

Update on the Tobacco Control Act and Regulations (Question No. 146/2019)

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

Would the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services provide Parliament with the number of violations of illicit trade and importation of tobacco by offence type as per the Tobacco Control Act and Regulations; the fees or fines levied; and Divisions where the offences was carried out by the Ministry's Tobacco Control Enforcement Unit from the years 2014 to date?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Honourable Speaker, if I may, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. For the second Written Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Peceli Vosanibola, to ask Written Question No. 147/2019.

Update on the Status of the 4 Million Tree Initiative
(Question No. 147/2019)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Forestry update Parliament on the status to date (numbers, species and location) of trees planted since the announcement of the 4 Million Trees Initiative which was launched by His Excellency the President on 8th January, 2019?

HON. O. NAIQAMU (Minister for Forestry).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. For the third Written Question for today, I give the floor to the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa, to ask Written Question No. 148/2019. You have the floor, Madam.

Update on the New Policy Initiatives
(Question No. 148/2019)

HON. RO T.V. KEPA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts provide an update Parliament on the new policy initiatives put in place by the Ministry since 2014 and clarify which policies are now fully implemented and which are still being piloted in school?

HON. R. S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Honourable Speaker, I will table my response at a later sitting date, as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. Honourable Members, Question time is now over.

Honourable Members, that concludes the agenda for today and I thank all Honourable Members for your contributions to today's sitting. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9.30 a.m.

Afternoon tea will be served in the Committee room. Parliament is adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.15 p.m.