

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 26TH MAY, 2020

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 26TH MAY, 2020

The Parliament met at 9.34 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts and the Honourable M.D. Bulitavu.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 25th May, 2020 as previously circulated be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. I also welcome all those watching the live broadcast and live streaming of today's proceedings from the Committee Room and those from the comfort of their homes, offices and mobile phones. Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament.

Honourable Members, I will now deliver my Rulings on three Petitions which had been submitted to my office.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Petition for an Inquiry into Voter Card Renewal Requirements
and the Use of Married Names

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I received a petition from the Honourable Leader of the Opposition on 19th February, 2020. This Petition is being considered today, as the March Sitting of Parliament was dedicated to the urgent consideration of the COVID-19 Response Budget.

The Petition requests the following:

“To refer to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to conduct a holistic inquiry into the new requirement for birth certificates to renew voter ID card, and ban on married women using their husband's name unless they change it by deed poll with the view to protect the interest and the right to vote of all citizens, poor or rich, men and women.”

Pursuant to Standing Order 37(2)(b), the Speaker must scrutinise the petition to “ensure that the petition ... is seeking action which lies within the powers of Parliament to take.” As such, I have

scrutinised the Petition to ensure that, firstly, it requests for a clear action for Parliament to take and, secondly, such action lies within the powers of Parliament to take.

Honourable Members will note that these requirements are elaborated in the second and fourth standards listed in the Petition Standards of my Ruling on 18th February, 2020. I strongly recommend that Members consider these standards while drafting their petitions.

Firstly, I note that the Petition does not request for a clear action for Parliament to take. Honourable Members, under Standing Order 37(5), the process for the presentation of a petition to Parliament requires a motion to refer the petition to a Standing Committee for an inquiry. As such, an inquiry by a Standing Committee is an ingrained part of the petition's process and is not the action that must be scrutinised by the Speaker under Standing Order 37(2)(b).

The petition must request the specific action, such as a recommendation for a change of process in a particular matter or for a resolution or declaration of Parliament. If that action is clearly listed in the petition, the Speaker may then scrutinise it to ensure that it is an action which is within the powers of Parliament to take. This Petition does not request for a clear action and thus fails in this regard.

Furthermore, section 6(1) of the Electoral Act 2014 provides for the Supervisor of Election's power to administer voter registration and section 3 of the Act specifically provides for the responsibility and authority of the Electoral Commission over such registration and over any electoral disputes that may arise. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Section 75(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji also firmly entrenches these matters as the responsibility of the Electoral Commission.

I have made rulings, specifically advising Members of Parliament to ensure that your petitions do not seek to subvert the responsibility of the Executive and any authority as delegated clearly under written law. I do not wish to repeat myself at every sitting.

Honourable Members, I rule that this petition cannot be tabled in Parliament as:

- (1) It does not request for a clear action as required for under Standing Orders 37(2)(b); and
- (2) It does not refer to matters which are the responsibility of Parliament.

Petition for Parliament to Inquire into Domestic Violence in Fiji

Honourable Members, I now refer to the second Petition that I will rule on today pursuant to Standing Order 37.

I received a Petition from Honourable Lynda Tabuya on 3rd March, 2020, for tabling in Parliament on 16th March, 2020. As with the first Petition, this Petition is being considered today, as the March Sitting of Parliament was dedicated to the urgent consideration of the COVID-19 Response Budget.

The Petition is in relation to domestic violence in Fiji and calls for a "Parliamentary inquiry into the steps we need to take as a nation to save lives and preserve our people."

I will not repeat the provisions of the Standing Order referred to in the Ruling I have just delivered, but in the same vein, I note that this Petition does not request a clear action to be taken by Parliament. The Petition seeks an inquiry under what appears to be the presumption that Parliament itself will recommend the actions to be taken to address domestic violence in Fiji.

Honourable Members, the legislature, through the Domestic Violence Act 2009 has set out a legal framework for addressing domestic violence in Fiji. Furthermore, the Government has also sought to address this issue through the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and the Women's Plan of Action, Domestic Violence Helpline, No Drop Policy and other policy initiatives which have been discussed in Parliament through Ministerial Statements, motions, questions and reports.

The Office of the Auditor-General in August of last year, submitted a Performance Audit Report to the Speaker of Parliament on the coordination of actions for the elimination of violence against women, with specific and comprehensive recommendations for improvement. These actions are clear specific ways in which violence against women have been addressed thus far. A petition that calls for further action must clearly state what action needs to be taken, and only then may such action be scrutinised to determine if it is action which is within the powers of Parliament to take.

Honourable Members, as representatives of the people, you are drivers of action and agents of change. You are already in a position to work with the people and seek out new and innovative ways to address serious public justice issues. Outside of Parliament, you may call for dialogue and conversation but when a petition is brought to Parliament, it must come with a confident call for clear and specific action.

As such, I rule that this Petition cannot be tabled in Parliament, as it does not meet Parliament's Petition Standards and the requirements under Standing Order 37.

Parliament to Investigate Grace Road Church

The third Petition was submitted by Honourable Lynda Tabuya and states the following:

“Grace Road Church is founded on hate. Founder Pastor Sin Ok-ju has physically assaulted her followers and has promoted racism in her sermons when she publicly called the Fijian population mentally weak and taught that her followers are superior beings to the citizens of Fiji.

We request for a parliamentary inquiry into the presence, activity and business practices of the religious organisation, Grace Road Church, and that of its 400 plus members in Fiji. In the instance where our claims are validated, we demand that Grace Road Church and Korean employees of the Grace Road Group be repatriated to Korea.”

This Petition clearly requests for an action which is not within the powers of Parliament to take as it demands that, upon the validation of the implied claims of assault and racism, members of the named religious organisation be repatriated to Korea.

Honourable Members, Section 21(5) of the Constitution states, and I quote:

“Every person who is not a citizen but is lawfully in Fiji has the right not to be expelled from Fiji except pursuant to an order of a court or a decision of the Minister responsible for immigration on a ground prescribed by law.”

This is a constitutionally guaranteed right which may only be limited by express provisions prescribed by law. Parliament has not been given the mandate to limit this right, particularly in such a direct and targeted way, through the petitions process.

Furthermore, in relation to the claims of assault and racism, I note that assault is already prohibited by section 274 of the Crimes Act 2009, and inciting racial antagonism is already prohibited by section 17 of the Public Order Act 1969.

As such, it is the responsibility of the Fiji Police Force, working with interested and/or aggrieved parties, to investigate and lay charges where relevant. These are the mechanisms that the legislature has already set out to address these issues where they arise. It is not an action which Parliament itself may then take.

I, therefore, rule that this Petition cannot be tabled in Parliament as it is seeking action which is not within the powers of Parliament to take. I thank Honourable Members.

Honourable Members, on to the next Item, I have been advised that there are no papers for presentation today.

Honourable Members, I call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Review Report on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons - Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons sets out a comprehensive set of prohibitions against participating in any nuclear weapon activities. These include undertakings by member States to the Treaty not to develop, test, produce, acquire, process, stockpile, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons. The Treaty also prohibits the deployment of nuclear weapons on national territory and the provision of assistance to any State in the conduct of prohibited activities.

This Treaty has particular significance and resonance in the Pacific as a region that has suffered from the effects of more than 315 nuclear test explosions carried out by the United Kingdom, France and the United States. This Treaty seeks to address the ongoing health and environmental harm from these tests.

States Parties are obliged to prevent and suppress any activity prohibited under the Treaty undertaken by persons or on territories under its jurisdiction or control. The Treaty also obliges State Parties to provide adequate assistance to individuals affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons, as well as to take necessary and appropriate measures of environmental remediation in areas under its jurisdiction or control contaminated as a result of activities related to the testing or use of nuclear weapons.

Fiji was one of the countries that signed the Treaty at the margins of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly on 20th September, 2017. The Treaty is currently not in force. It will enter into force 90 days after the 50th instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession has been deposited. There are currently only 35 State Parties to the Treaty.

The Treaty reinforces Fiji's commitment to the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (CSA) which Fiji signed with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1973. In 2006, Fiji also

signed the Additional Protocol to the CSA which further strengthened provisions of the IAEA's Safeguards Agreement and extends the authority of the IAEA to undertake relevant inspections of nuclear-related activities.

Fiji has a Small Quantities Protocol in force which essentially reduces the burden of implementation of the provisions of the IAEA's CSA, given that Fiji is a State with little or no nuclear material.

Fiji would need to further develop its legislative framework to ensure that provisions of the Treaty and other related treaties are properly implemented. As per Article 7, States Parties can access international assistance to ensure that they are fulfilling its obligations under the Treaty.

The Committee recommends that Fiji fully ratifies the Treaty.

The Committee commends the contributions by stakeholders that assisted in the preparation of this Report.

I take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Members of my Committee, including contributions of Honourable Alternate Members – the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua and Honourable Professor Biman Prasad (Alternate Members for Honourable Pio Tikoduadua); and Honourable Mikaele Leawere (Alternate Member for Honourable Anare Jale). I also thank the Secretariat for compiling this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament. I thank you, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4)(a), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report on the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission
Annual Report 2016 – Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Honourable Speaker, the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights was referred the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission Annual Report 2016. The Committee was mandated to review the Annual Report and table its finding back to Parliament.

The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission is constitutionally mandated to promote the protection and respect for human rights in Fiji, monitor and investigate human rights issues and also to conduct awareness programmes on constitutional and internationally recognised rights and freedom.

This Report specifies the findings and recommendations of the Committee with respect to the issues noted from the contents of the Annual Report, and it is divided into three main parts which are as follows, the:

- (1) introduction;
- (2) Committee observations and findings; and
- (3) recommendations.

The Committee reviewed the Annual Report and noted key issues from it, which were then brought to the attention of the Commission as part of an extensive discussion of the work being carried out on human rights in Fiji. Some of the main areas of discussion which were noted by the Committee and formed part of its findings were as follows, the:

- (1) Commission is at the forefront of human rights protection and has done so much for human rights for the people of Fiji;
- (2) Commission has projected itself as being impartial and transparent in all its activities which is an attribute of the institution that the Committee commends; and
- (3) Commission plays a vital role in matters pertaining to human rights such as:
 - (i) instituting legal proceedings for abuse of human rights through its own Presiding Commissioner;
 - (ii) monitoring Government initiatives related to human rights;
 - (iii) monitoring of human rights protection in Fiji from an international perspective and this is realised through the Commission's alternative reports for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which the Commission submits separately from the State's UPR Report and the Civil Society Organisation's Shadow UPR Report;
 - (iv) it was noted that there is a backlog of unaudited financials for the Commission, however, it is encouraging to note that the current Commission has undertaken and is still undertaking an audit of all matters pertaining to the Commission's work;
 - (v) the Commission's work is closely aligned to the sustainable development goals; and
 - (vi) the Commission has made a lot of strides in the work of protecting human rights, however, there is a need for sufficient resources and funding for more effective human rights services.

Furthermore, the Committee was mindful of the requirements of the Standing Orders of Parliament regarding gender-related issues, and it was encouraging to note that the Commission's work is aligned to the principles of gender equality. The Commission carries out its work without giving privilege to one set of rights or a particular group over another.

At the conclusion of the review, the Committee commends the great work carried out by the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission. However, it recommends the following as a way forward and for consideration by the Commission:

- (1) The Committee recognises and notes the role of the Media in awareness on human rights, thus believes that the Media should act responsibly and hold themselves to a higher degree of professionalism and integrity when covering matters concerning human rights.

- (2) The Committee recommends that all Parliamentary Committees and the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission collaborate effectively to ensure full realisation of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a focus on human rights in Fiji.

At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights: the Honourable Rohit Sharma, Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua, Honourable Dr. Salik Govind and Honourable Moses Bulitavu, for their deliberation and input; the Alternate Members who made themselves available when the Substantive Members could not attend; the Secretariat; and Officers of the Fiji Human Rights Commission, who made themselves available to make a submission and for taking an interest in the proceedings of the Committee and Parliament.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend the Report on the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission Annual Report 2016 to Parliament and seek the support of all Honourable Members of the august House to take note of the recommendations by the Committee.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report on the International Labour Organization (ILO) - Violence and Harassment Convention 2019 - Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present the International Labour Organisation Violence and Harassment Convention 2019.

The Convention requires every State Party to respect, promote and realise the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment.

The Convention was adopted on 21st June, 2019 and came into force 12 months after the date on which the ratification of two members have been registered with the ILO Director-General.

States Parties must also, with a view to preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work, shall respect, promote and realise the fundamental principles and rights at work, namely; freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the

elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, as well as promote decent work.

The ratification of the Convention will strengthen Fiji's national laws and policies, such as the Employment Relations Act 2007, National Sexual Harassment Policy, National Gender Policy and also complement the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which Fiji ratified in 1995.

The Committee recommends that Fiji accedes to the ratification of the Convention.

The Committee commends the contributions by stakeholders that assisted in the preparation of this Report.

I take this opportunity to thank Honourable Members of my Committee, including contributions of Alternate Members, the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua and Honourable Professor Biman Prasad (Alternate Members for Honourable Pio Tikoduadua); and Honourable Mikaele Leawere (Alternate Member for Honourable Anare Jale); and the Secretariat staff for compiling this bipartisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament and I thank you, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4)(a), the Standing Committee has now reported back.

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, the Honourable Vijay Nath, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report on the Ministry of Sugar Industry 2012-2016 Annual Reports -
Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to report to Parliament, its Review Report for the Ministry of Sugar Industry 2012-2016 Annual Reports.

The Committee was referred the Ministry of Sugar Industry Annual Reports during the August Parliament Sitting in 2019. In order to have a thorough understanding of the sugar industry, the Committee conducted site visits to the sugar mills, farms and related entities in the Western and Northern Divisions.

The Ministry of Sugar Industry was formed as a separate Ministry in 2011 and produced its first Annual Report in 2012.

While deliberating on the Report, the Committee noted that the Government, in 2010, had engaged Deloitte, an international financial consulting firm from New Zealand, to carry out a review of the Industry with the sole intent to improve the Corporation's financial position. The Committee

believes that this initiative was necessary for the future of the industry and commends the Government for its vision.

I would like to extend our appreciation to all the stakeholders for their valuable input.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report, namely:

- (1) Hon. Veena Bhatnagar;
- (2) Hon. George Vegnathan;
- (3) Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau; and
- (4) Hon. Inosi Kuridrani.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Parliament staff, who have given us invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Consolidated Report on the Review of the Ministry of Sugar Industry 2012 – 2016 Annual Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Honourable Alvick Maharaj, to table his Report.

Auditor-General's Report on the Performance Audit of Preparedness for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals - Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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

Honourable Speaker, this Committee Report scrutinised and summarised the Report of the Auditor-General on the Performance Audit of Preparedness for Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Performance Audit Report covered Fiji's commitment as a United Nations Member Country in signing the 2030 Agenda which came into effect from 1st January, 2015, and has declared its commitment to take ownership of the Agenda and be responsible for the follow-up and implementation of the goals and targets over the next 15 years.

The SDGs are a universal call for action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all the people enjoy peace and prosperity. The Fijian Government has endorsed the global SDGs which aim to ensure that no one will be left behind and endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.

The Auditor-General carried out this audit to ascertain the preparedness of Government in implementing the SDGs Agenda 2030, which was undertaken under section 6A of the Audit Act 1969. The audit was conducted using the whole of government approach.

The Auditor-General had assessed the actions taken by Government since the signing of the SDGs in September 2015, in preparedness for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by determining:

- (1) The extent to which the Fijian Government has adapted the 2030 Agenda into the 5 Year and 20 Year National Development Plan (NDP);
- (2) Whether the Fijian Government has identified and secured resources and capacities needed to implement the 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan; and
- (3) The mechanisms established by the Fijian Government to monitor, follow up, review and report on the progress towards the implementation of the 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plan.

Therefore, the main findings of the Performance Audit are focused on the integration of the 2030 Agenda, resources and capacities for implementing SDGs and monitoring and reporting framework.

The Fijian Government has begun efforts to prepare for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on SDGs by integrating the SDGs into its 20-Year National Development Plan and supported with strategies for the immediate five-year term. There have also been efforts made at reviewing legislations, policies, strategies and identifying funding sources for the implementation of strategies and the creation of awareness of SDGs. It is also noted that the monitoring and reporting mechanisms are still at the early stages as the NDP is at its first year of implementation.

Nevertheless, the work on SDGs started way back in 2015. The Committee strongly encourages Ministries and Departments to work together towards the implementation of the NDP. The clarifications provided to the Committee revealed that the Ministry of Economy has taken the Auditor-General's recommendation in a positive manner and are taking necessary actions accordingly.

I would like to thank the representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Office of the Auditor-General for appearing before the Committee to provide clarifications on these issues.

I also wish to extend my appreciation to all the Honourable Members of the Committee who were part of the successful compilation of this bipartisan Report, namely:

- (1) Hon. Joseph Nand;
- (2) Hon. Vijendra Prakash;
- (3) Hon. Aseri Radrodro; and
- (4) Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu.

On behalf of the Committee, I also acknowledge the Parliament staff for their timely support throughout the scrutiny process that were undertaken, consultations conducted, compilation and finalisation of this Report.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Honourable Members, I call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, the Honourable Alexander O'Connor, to table his Report. You have the floor, Sir.

Review Report on the International Labour Organisation Protocol of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention 1981 - Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

HON. A. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Review Report on the International Labour Organisation Protocol of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention 1981.

The Protocol was formulated in 2002 as a Protocol to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Occupational Safety and Health Convention 1981. The Protocol has a total of 11 Articles and was enacted to give effect to Articles 4 and 11 of the Convention.

Fiji should adopt an expansive definition of work that includes the formal and informal sector. This expanded notion of work is going to be consistent with Fiji's vision of equality for all, enunciated in our Constitution, and it would be inequitable for workers from the formal sector and with the contract of service, written or oral, to be protected from violence while excluding workers in the informal sector.

The Committee recommends that Fiji fully ratifies the Treaty.

The Committee commends the contributions by stakeholders that assisted in the preparation of this Report.

I take this opportunity to thank Members of my Committee, including contributions of Alternate Members - the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua and Honourable Professor Biman Prasad

(Alternate Members for Honourable Pio Tikoduadua); Honourable Mikaele Leawere (Alternate Member for Honourable Anare Jale); and the Secretariat staff for compiling this bi-partisan Report.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, I submit this Report to Parliament, and I thank you, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary -General)

HON. SPEAKER.- Pursuant to Standing Order 121(1)(b) and Standing Order 130(4)(a), the Standing Committee has now reported back to Parliament.

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

Review Report on the Audit Reports of Municipal Councils for 2014 to 2017 -
Standing Committee on Public Accounts

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I am pleased to present the Committee Report on the review made to the Audit Reports on Municipal Councils for 2014 to 2017.

The Audit Report summarises and provides an analysis on the findings and results of the 16 Financial Reports of the four Municipal Councils that were audited. This Audit Report contains the financial audits of the Municipal Councils for the audits that were completed in the years 2014 until 2017.

It is important to note that under section 51(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, it mandated the Office of the Auditor-General to audit the accounts of Municipal Councils. However, there is a serious concern on the financial accountability of Municipal Councils in terms of financial reporting and making available to the ratepayers of the Councils and the public the audited financial statements.

Most importantly, pursuant to section 57(3) it states, and I quote:

“On or before 31st August in every year, the Council shall cause to be published in an English language newspaper published in Fiji and circulating within the municipality:

- (a) a balance sheet and a summarised statement of income and expenditure of the Council on 31st December immediately preceding, together with any report by the auditor thereon; and
- (b) notification that any ratepayer or any person holding any security charged upon the property of the Council may, at all reasonable time, inspect the Council’s office, the full annual statement as certified by the auditor and the Council’s annual report prepared pursuant to the provisions of section 19 and may take copies from any part of the statement of report.”

It is important to note that the Councils have expressed their commitments towards updating their financial statements to 2018 by end of 2019/2020 financial year. The issues discussed and resolved during the consultations require immediate attention of the Special Administrator, as well

as the Ministry of Local Government on improving the financial accountability of Municipal Councils.

The Committee Report herein contains 16 audited financial statements for the four Municipal Councils which are as follows:

- (1) Labasa Town Council 2014-2017;
- (2) Sigatoka Town Council 2014-2017;
- (3) Ba Town Council 2014 -2017; and
- (4) Rakiraki Town Council 2014-2017.

The three major issues surrounding the qualification of the audit opinion were due to the following issues:

- (1) Non-preparation of the financial statements under the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) for small and medium-sized enterprises as required under the Fiji Institute of Accountants Standards;
- (2) Unsupported balances recorded in the financial statements, including unreconciled variances between the Council's General Ledger balances and subsidiary records for balance sheet items, specifically the rates receivables; and
- (3) Ineffective internal controls to ensure quality preparation of financial statements and timely financial reporting to ascertain and determine the actual financial performance of Municipal Councils.

I would like to thank the Special Administrators and Chief Executive Officers and their staff from the four Municipal Councils for the valuable contributions and facilitation towards the Committee hearing and also in providing clarification on audit issues that were raised.

I wish to acknowledge the Office of the Auditor-General for their enormous efforts in resourcing and auditing of the Municipal Councils' Draft Financial Statements, as well as the Ministry of Local Government as the overarching agency responsible for the Municipal Councils.

In particular, the Committee commends the "Go Green Initiative" that is currently adopted by the Rakiraki Municipal Market which other Municipalities can tailor-made and adopt, as this could address the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) commitments, such as:

- SDG 13 on Climate Change: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; as well as
- SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

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

On behalf of the Committee, I also acknowledge the support from the Secretariat for facilitating the public hearings held with the four Municipal Councils as well as the drafting process, compilation and finalisation of this Committee Report.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note we will take a tea break. We adjourn for tea. Thank you.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.29 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.05 a.m.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

HON. SPEAKER.- The following Ministers have given notice to make Ministerial Statements under Standing Order 40:

- (1) Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management; and
- (2) Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment.

Honourable Members, as you are aware, Ministers may speak up to 20 minutes. After the Minister, I will then invite the Leader of the Opposition or his designate to speak on the statement for no more than five minutes. There will be a response from the leader of the National Federation Party (NFP) or his designate to also speak for five minutes. There will be no other debate.

I now call on the Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management, the Honourable Inia Seruiratu to deliver his statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Tropical Cyclone Harold Disaster Management Operations

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of this august House, I rise this morning to enlighten this House on *TC Harold* disaster management operations and how the Government responded to assist those who were affected.

May I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Honourable Usamate and Honourable Dr. Reddy, who were responsible for the respective Ministries - Ministry for Infrastructure and Disaster Management and, of course, the Ministry of Rural Development which the Commissioners come under, for their abled leadership and the good work that had set the platform for me when I, again, took over the portfolio as a result of Cabinet reshuffle.

Honourable Speaker, we all know that the response to *TC Harold* had been greatly challenging due to the wide geographical spread of the affected areas, as well as the global COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted the movement of people and delivery of supplies. Despite this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, all phases of our emergency response have been delivered successfully while observing our COVID-19 protocols.

TC Harold was the strongest tropical cyclone to occur in the South Pacific basin since *TC Winston* in 2016. It should be noted that Kadavu and the Southern Lau Group have been repeatedly affected by cyclones (*TC Gita*, *TC Keni* and *TC Josie*) in the past two years and were, therefore, more vulnerable to the impact of *TC Harold*. In fact for the 2019-2020 cyclone season, *TC Harold* is the third tropical cyclone to have made landfall with *TC Sarai* and *TC Tino* also impacting the Fiji Group late last year.

Mr. Speaker, one thing is very clear which I want to emphasise now, even with this double battle of COVID-19 and *TC Harold*, this Government has managed to coordinate efficiently, mobilise all its available resources and was able to reach every household and individual affected by the Cyclone. The good thing is that, we will do more and we will not leave anyone behind.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *TC Harold* struck Fiji on Wednesday, 8th April, 2020 and the Cyclone passed just south of Fiji's main island of Viti Levu, making landfall in Kadavu, impacting Nadroga/Navosa, Vatulele and the Southern Lau Group and in the process, causing widespread damage.

TC Harold affected an estimated population of 182,892 along its pathway with over 6,100 evacuees seeking shelter in around 204 evacuation centres across the four Divisions.

May I take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to, again, refer to yesterday's discussions in this august House about evacuation centres in Fiji, and I will just quote a few of the evacuation centres that were constructed from 2014 onwards:

- 2014 - Welagi Evacuation Centre, Taveuni - \$84,268.
- 2015 - Navakakai Evacuation Centre, Cakaudrove - \$56,000 plus.
- 2015 - Wasavulu Evacuation Centre, Macuata - \$51,000.
- Dratabu Evacuation Centre, Ba - \$122,000.
- 2015 - Barotu Evacuation Centre, Ra - \$49,000.
- Korovou Evacuation Centre, Naitasiri - \$73,000.
- Burebasaga Evacuation Centre, Rewa - \$98,000.
- Upgrading of Naiqila Evacuation Centre, Caukaudrove - \$16,000.
- Upgrading of Naduri Evacuation Centre, Macuata - \$12,000.
- Naqaravutu Multipurpose Centre, Tunuloa, Cakaudrove - \$24,000.
- 2018-2019 - Waibalavu Evacuation Centre, Na Gone ni Colo, Naitasiri - \$8,900.
- Namama Evacuation Centre, Macuata - \$4,000.
- Nabuidogo, Dogotuki - \$3,000.
- Bagasau Evacuation Centre.

We have a few this year and let me assure this august House that the assistance was not removed, it was only reprioritised and, of course, I had explained in detail yesterday the need to do so.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government activated its disaster response mechanism at the national level whereby Government Ministries and key stakeholders worked with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and the Divisional Commissioners at subnational level.

The NDMO and Divisional Commissioners also provided Situational Reports (SITREPS) and daily briefings on the state of response and key coordination issues to the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers, Permanent Secretaries who are members of the Disaster Council and other relevant agencies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the National and Divisional coordination was focused on the provision of lifesaving assistance and restoration of essential services, including the repair of community infrastructure destroyed or damaged by the Cyclone, such as roads, airstrips, marketplaces, electricity, communications, water supply, et cetera.

As soon as the disaster passed, Government Officials on the ground were mobilised to carry out a quick assessment on key infrastructures and to organise any urgent medical response, including medical evacuation.

Within 24 hours of *TC Harold's* impact, Government was able to mobilise an aerial reconnaissance with the assistance of the New Zealand Government with the provision of the P-3

Orion aircraft. The aerial assessment indicated significant damages in the Eastern and Western Divisions, and approximately 57,000 plus people requiring immediate life-saving assistance.

This information was analysed by the Emergency Committee that convened on 9th April, 2020 and recommended for the worst affected areas to be declared as a 'State of Natural Disaster'. This recommendation was endorsed by the Honourable Prime Minister and the declaration of State of Natural Disaster for the affected areas was gazetted on 12th April, 2020 for a period of 30 days.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the emergency relief response by Government for *TC Harold* was implemented in two primary phases. Phase I of the *TC Harold* response was deployed within five days of the passing of *TC Harold*. May I emphasise here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is mainly because of the COVID-19 restrictions and Suva was in a state of lockdown during this period, so most of the Government Officials, we have to take them from outside the lockdown areas because it took time for us to assemble them and take them to the areas before they continued with Phase 1.

A total of \$3.6 million was utilised for Phase I of response to deliver immediate lifesaving emergency food and water assistance, as well as non-food items. Restoration of critical infrastructures, such as communications, water and power supply, was also initiated immediately.

Those efforts were followed by Phase II of *TC Harold* operations which involved a second round of food, water distribution and early recovery efforts. Another \$1.2 million was for the implementation of Phase II of the *TC Harold* response. For the first time, Government also deployed a desalination plant to assist with the emergency water carting and at the same time, provide safe drinking water to affected communities.

Those two waves of relief deployment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, took place within six weeks after *TC Harold's* passing, highlighting Government's commitment to deliver much needed assistance to those in need. As of today, our relief efforts have reached about 182,000-plus Fijians in the most affected areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the sectoral impact of *TC Harold* was estimated at over FJ\$100 million based on the Government's coordinated Detailed Damage Assessment (DDA) exercise that was carried out from 13th April, 2020 to 28th April, 2020. The exercise was combined with resource-based preliminary rehabilitation initiatives and other sectoral recovery works.

Damages to the agriculture sector have been estimated at around \$27.8 million with 90 percent of crops destroyed in the worst affected areas and much of people's subsistence crops were ruined. This is quite significant, as subsistence agriculture plays an important role in food security and our livelihood.

Based on the DDA data, a total of 2,227 houses were partially damaged and a total of 961 houses were fully destroyed in the four Divisions, worth \$24.4 million. Despite the swift response by Government in the form of tents and tarpaulins as temporary shelters, the number of affected houses is quite significant and will require a major reconstruction effort.

For the first time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Forestry in partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Community Development and the National Disaster Management Office, developed a strategy to utilise salvaged logs to be considered as one-third contributions for the reconstruction of damaged houses in Kadavu and Lau. Significant damages were also recorded for the infrastructure sector, with damages to Cicia, Koro and Moala jetties, and a number of road slips in the Central Division.

The Water Authority of Fiji also recorded damages in the Central, Western and Eastern Divisions and likewise, for the energy sector. Damages to the infrastructure sector has been estimated at \$27.1 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our education facilities in the Central, Eastern and Western Divisions have sustained heavy damages at an estimated cost of \$10.7 million.

The fisheries and forestry sectors have also sustained damages worth \$8.1 million. This is largely driven by the damages to the Kadavu and Matuku Pine Schemes and damages to fishing equipment and facilities in the fisheries sector.

Damages to community infrastructure, particularly for health facilities has been estimated at \$2.6 million, disrupting the delivery of services to communities and will require quick repair or replacement, given that the restoration of such services is critical, not only for the wellness of our people but, of course, in terms of mitigating the risks of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that probably the Honourable Minister for Health will talk on this later on, but let me also mention that in the aftermath of *TC Harold* and subsequent sustained rains and floods, a lot of hospitals have reported cases of Leptospirosis, Typhoid, Dengue and Diarrhoea (LTDD). The numbers were alarming and as at end of April alone, about 3,403 suspected cases of LTDD existed, of which 1,146 were confirmed cases post-*TC Harold*. Government, through the Ministry of Health, developed a LTDD eradication campaign in a major effort to reduce disease incidence and casualties.

This was a whole of Government approach, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the mobilisation of tip trucks, dumpers and human resource to participate in the general cleaning up exercise. The Divisional Commissioners have been heavily involved in the LTDD eradication campaign at subnational level, organising the divisional clean up days for all civil servants and I also acknowledge the Ministry of Local Government for their active participation.

Government Ministries and Town Councils also worked together at the national level to remove the rubbish from selected high risk areas in the Suva area particularly, to support the Ministry of Health efforts in combating LTDD.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I mentioned, the response the *TC Harold* is especially challenging due to COVID-19 Pandemic, where unique considerations were taken into account to ensure that operational activities adhered to the restrictions enforced under the Public Health Act.

This operation was unique and will go down as one of the most complex operations of all time. Government was forced to plan around:

- Social and physical distancing;
- COVID-19 restrictions;
- Curfews; and
- Lockdowns.

In Phase I of the response, the greater Suva area was in lockdown, and all ships and personnel, including Government and Non-Government, that supported the relief effort had to be sourced from outside of the lockdown areas. During the response efforts, no international humanitarian workers outside of Fiji took part in the relief efforts. This speaks volume of what Government has done during times of normalcy by training our local people to become resilient during an emergency as such.

In light of the lockdown, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government had to charter private vessels that not only took food rations and non-food items to affected communities, but to also ensure physical distancing on board the vessels for teams that were on deployment.

Management of evacuation centres in the COVID-19 context presented a separate set of challenges. Divisional Commissioners and Divisional Health Inspectors ensured that there were alternative evacuation centres identified for those community members that were in isolation facilities.

Physical distancing rules were enforced in the course of evacuations in line with COVID-19 protocols. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services ensured that all facilities being used as evacuation centres were properly sanitized and disinfected before their closure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hard work put in by this Government and the response teams has paid off and I would like to highlight four major achievements:

- (1) No COVID-19 case has been recorded from the areas that were visited during the relief deployments.
- (2) Within 24 hours, we were on the ground with our surveillance protocols.
- (3) Within five days of *TC Harold's* passing, the first phase of emergency supplies was deployed.
- (4) This shows that Government is committed to ensuring assistance is delivered in a timely manner for all Fijians, despite the overwhelming challenges faced.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to touch on aid coordination that guaranteed assistance to our people. The Governments of Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, France, China, Japan, together with international organisations, UN agencies, local businesses, Civil Society Organisations and Non-Government Organisations, have all assisted in-cash and in-kind to Government emergency response efforts. A total of \$7.4 million in assistance has been received with \$4.1 million in cash and approximately \$3.3 million worth of assistance in kind.

Let me mention here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that not all of these money was given directly to Government. Some are with international agencies and waiting for Government to come up with requests, particularly in areas of food security, shelter, WASH kits and hygiene. So that is yet to be coordinated between the Ministries, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NDMO and the Ministry of Economy. This coordination meetings were held weekly at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a Government Team comprising NDMO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economy and the Office of the Prime Minister coordinated donor relations from the NDMO Office.

This coordinated engagement with donors on the humanitarian situation and response requirements, as well as Government priorities and assistance needs, has resulted in a number of successful international funding support, such as the:

- Successful Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) funding request of US\$1 million;
- Successful Asian Development Bank (ADB) funding request of US\$400,000; and

- Local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have, again, proven to be a valuable partner to Government in responding to the needs of affected communities in the form of relief supplies as well as counselling.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the NDMO is now facilitating the development of an inter-sectoral early recovery *TC Harold* Response and Resilience Plan that will be driven by the Ministry of Economy and line Ministries so as to ensure the development of sector-specific strategies and plans. The plan will ensure an effective transition into longer-term recovery, while building resilience in the affected communities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, *TC Harold* has been a uniquely challenging event for the Government to deal with, particularly in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Never before has twin threats of this nature been simultaneously presented to the Government to deal with and it is a testament of the commitment and hard work of all Fijians that the threats of COVID-19 and *TC Harold* have thus far been addressed in a timely and adequate manner. In fact, the Government's response has been swift and efficient, despite constraints of COVID-19 protocols.

To illustrate the efficiency of Government's response, allow me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to outline the following key milestones of the *TC Harold* response effort:

- (1) *TC Harold* impacted Fiji on 8th April, 2020;
- (2) the first aerial assessment was on 9th April, 2020;
- (3) Government declared a State of Natural Disaster on 12th April, 2020; and
- (4) the first wave of food ration and the second wave were concluded within the period of 13th April, 2020 to 28th April, 2020, as I had mentioned earlier.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government is now conducting after-action reviews at divisional and national level and will build upon the lessons learnt during the response of *TC Harold* and COVID-19 to ensure that our future preparedness and response mechanisms are robust and flexible enough to successfully tackle the increasing complex hazards that we now face.

We are fortunate thus far to have been spared the devastations of COVID-19 and have been spared the worst of *TC Harold*. We must not, however, be complacent, and I assure you that Government will do its duty and its utmost best to ensure that lives of ordinary Fijians will be protected from disasters in the years to come.

I applaud the spirit of patriotism and care for fellow Fijians that have been clearly evident and displayed by not only CSOs and NGOs but also by private individuals, groups and companies that have contributed their time, effort and wealth in assisting their countrymen.

I would also like to thank all Ministries and Organisations for contributing to the successful operation of *TC Harold* and particularly, to the Honourable Prime Minister for his able leadership. The *TC Harold* response was a multi-stakeholder approach and a good example of the need for Fijians to work together in the event of disasters as disasters do not discriminate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and my fellow Honourable Members of the House, I thank you for this opportunity to share an overview of Government's response efforts to *TC Harold*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement and I now give the floor to the Leader of the Opposition. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. MAJOR GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I apologise, on behalf of my spokesman on Defence matters, who is ill in bed for a day. I would like to commend the Honourable Minister and the Ministry, and all the workers who were involved during and the aftermath of *TC Harold*.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were talking about the Reserve Bank Report on the Insurance Report and I noticed that Vanua Levu or the North have a very small percentage of coverage and I wonder if he goes around looking at all those facilities that he had announced this morning whether they are insurable. He mentioned yesterday that they are not covered by the building standards in the normal urban areas but whether they can be negotiated so that the cost of replacement, et cetera, is partially borne by the owners and the insurance company.

He has mentioned yesterday that there are some purpose-built shelters. He mentioned also a village in Navatu. I have been to them and it is a very big hall, a shelter and named "Bainimarama Hall" and I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for building that. But that building alone in Navakaka is enough, the cost of that would be enough to cover the other smaller villages or the small *tikina* of Navatu at the bottom of the bay.

Do TFL, Vodafone, Digicel, et cetera, have insurance cover for their installations? I think they do and I wonder whether their claims can be processed in time quickly for the replacement. Coming back into the city, there are no specific debris clearance after cyclones from the City Council. We pay city rates and we expected that the debris caused by the cyclones to be quickly cleared.

The iTaukei Trust Board we discussed yesterday, whether they can also venture into traditional food sources immediately after cyclones. We know that cyclones come at maturity time for *tivoli*, wild yams, et cetera. Perhaps, reinforcing the teaching given to us by the elders of the past, "*Qo eda sa mai susu raisi tu e levu*", perhaps we can be reoriented back to the villages.

The other one, the Honourable Prime Minister will know that there was a concern about the size of the naval vessels that we receive. According to the size of the waves in this part of the Pacific, the naval vessels we are getting are too short. The very first sea state, when the flags go up, the first ships that should come into harbour are the naval vessels, and these are the ones we expect to go out for relief work. Hopefully, in the next order we can allow for that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his Statement. I now give the floor to the designated speaker for the National Federation Party, the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Firstly, I want to thank the Honourable Minister for his speech today and also thank him, and NDMO and the Ministry on behalf of my friends and the deaf community. Thank you for the inclusivity for employing Fiji sign language interpreters during the lead up to and in the wake of *TC Harold*, we are very, very grateful.

Mr. Speaker, I have been to Kadavu three times since the lockdown was lifted, travelling as far as the Village of Namajiu on Baba Ceva or the South side and to Naqalotu on the Baba Tokalau on the North side of the main Island.

Two weeks ago, when I was in my Village, we were visited by the Barge *MV Vunilagi*, carrying cyclone relief items that were gratefully received by many families. I understand the Barge was one of two sent by Government to Kadavu to deliver relief items.

The items that were being handed out and very happily received by the villagers were little wood burning stoves about so big, and upon inquiry, I was told that these stoves were donations from a Korean Company. So I want to join the Honourable Minister in thanking the Australian and New Zealand Governments and all the other governments who answered our request for help and those who came to our aid without us asking for help.

To the companies, the groups, organisations both local and from overseas who donated food stuff, tents, stoves and other relief supplies to Government in order that Government can deliver relief supplies in the wake of *TC Harold*, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. This is what friends are for. A friend in need is a friend indeed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is, therefore, a little bit painful to see people reminding us that only three years ago, the Honourable Prime Minister was demanding that Australia and New Zealand get out of the Pacific Islands Forum because they were not Pacific Islanders, as a pre-condition to him attending the Forum.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, we would like to find out how many families have accessed their FNPF to help them buy rebuilding materials. How many family members of those who are not FNPF members, have been allowed to withdraw money from their fund to help rebuild the lives of their relatives in the villages?

The expectation of the people are very high. Farmers need crop rehabilitation in the form of seedlings, not so much seeds. What happened to Agri-Care, Sugar-Care and the various Care programmes that were rolled out in late April 2018?

To end, Mr. Speaker, I wish to invite the Honourable Minister to, please, go and visit the Village of Narikoso in the *Tikina* of Ono in Kadavu. This Village was one of the first to be relocated in the Government's Climate Change Mitigation Plans with a few houses built on the relocation site; all of those houses were extensively damaged by *TC Harold*. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Qereqeretabua for her Statement.

We will move on and I now call upon the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment to deliver his Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Agriculture Sector after COVID-19 and Tropical Cyclone Harold

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members, ladies and gentlemen, good morning to you all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Minister responsible for Agriculture, I am very pleased to update the House as to how the agriculture sector has been responding so far in the wake of COVID-19 and the effects of *TC Harold*.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first, let me commend the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Health, and the many frontline personnel around the country, who have been working tirelessly to help Fiji navigate through COVID-19 thus far. It is through a clear and united national

response that the agriculture sector has also been working tirelessly and ramping up our efforts to ensure food security, and develop our vital agriculture sector to support the Fijian economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 has required us all to act decisively. For agriculture, it has provided us with the opportunity to reset and reenergise agriculture, focusing on the basics. In the last two months, I have shared with farmers, businesses and stakeholders several important initiatives that are part of Agriculture Food Security and Growth and Expansion Strategy which are central to our COVID-19 response and central to the growth of Fijian economy going ahead. This Strategy is precisely about getting back to basics, about promoting food security initiatives as widely as increasing productive capacity, strengthening our food supply chains and also about accelerating our vision to re-shape agriculture as it is ultimately the main engine of economic growth in Fiji, the rightful place where agriculture should be.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry in launching the Strategy has rallied the support of the entire Ministry, relevant Government stakeholders, organisations, entities, farmers and all Fijian households to realise our aspirations of “Grow Beyond”, which ultimately means, we are aggressive to move at an entirely next level, leading our way for a paradigm shift in agriculture and setting our intention beyond normal incremental growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Home Gardening Programme which is aimed at all households in the urban and peri-urban areas around Fiji, as at the end of last week (Friday) and within less than two months since the launch of this package, we have distributed 36,495 seed packages to households across the four Divisions in Fiji. Implemented across four waves in a relative short window, this comprised over 16,391 packages to the Central Division; 13,137 packages in the Western Division; 983 packages in the Eastern Division; and 2,142 packages in the Northern Division.

Simultaneously, over 3,842 packages were distributed to faith-based organisations, employees of non-government organisations and corporate entities, aimed at people who have been directly impacted by the effects of COVID-19. Those total packages equate to 307,176 individual seed packets that households around Fiji got, which is a phenomenal achievement in promoting household food and nutritional security.

Never before has Fiji seen such unprecedented level of activity at household level in growing their own food, supported by the Ministry of Agriculture. We are now seeing Fijians proudly showing off the fruits of their labour through the assistance provided by the Ministry of Agriculture. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is something that we all should be very proud of.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on a daily basis, I get messages, text messages, *Viber* messages, emails of households who have benefitted from this assistance and wanting to get into bigger scale commercial agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I just want to read out this email that I got yesterday, and I quote:

“Good afternoon, Sir.

Sir, I want to thank the Ministry for this initiative in providing the platform and mechanism to rejuvenate backyard farming and farming as a whole, which will help the people of Fiji. My family took advantage of this opportunity and commenced with backyard gardening during the COVID-19 lockdown and started small-scale pre-COVID lockdown.

With time, the intense interest in farming grew and saw us farm idle land beside our property in Nadi from its owner in Saunaka Village, Nadi. We started to grow our farm from subsistence to sort of a big scale now. With this, we kindly request the Ministry to assist with the following:

- More seedlings;
- Connecting to markets; and
- Any other assistance.

Sir, the above is submitted for your consideration.

Thank you

Salote Malimali
Executive Officer, iTLTB.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I am trying to demonstrate here is how the Backyard Gardening Package Assistance motivated the households to move into large scale commercial agriculture and, therefore, putting the land which was idle into agriculture. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is becoming a story throughout Fiji.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that takes me to the next initiative which is the Farm Response Package. Under the Farm Response Package, the Ministry is providing seeds and planting materials to farmers around Fiji at no cost to boost production of crops.

There are two elements to this initiative. Firstly, it is demand-driven. Farmers select the seeds they require from a range of food staple and nutritious crops such as; seeds and planting materials, taro, cassava, *kumala*, *duruka*, rice, vegetables, maize, bitter gourd, pigeon pea and cowpea, to name a few.

Secondly, all these are open-pollinated seeds, Mr. Speaker, Sir, hence farmers can produce their own planting material after the first assistance is given to them. For example, if they planted tomatoes, after they harvest they can then retain their own seeds from the tomato. It is open-pollinated, unlike hybrid seeds. We expect all these farmers to expand their outputs progressively. This approach will see a sustainable and progressive growth at farm level, where the initial assistance provided acts as an input for ongoing and sustained farm activity and growth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of last week, the Ministry has distributed a total of 108,370 planting materials to farmers in the four geographical Divisions. These include:

- Dalo - 40,000 planting materials;
- Kumala - 28,000 planting material;
- Cassava - 10,000 planting material;
- Duruka - 29,200 planting material;
- Peanuts - 75 kilogrammes of seeds;
- Watermelon - 60 packets; and
- English Cabbage - 35 packets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Farm Support Initiative also entails the supply of vegetable seed packages and seedlings to farmers in the four geographical Divisions. As of last week, a total of 1,146 farmers were assisted, as follows:

- Central Division – 192;
- Western Division – 650;
- Northern Division – 212; and
- Eastern Division – 92.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in our livestock sub-sector, the Ministry has also distributed fencing materials to migrate farmers from subsistence livestock farming into medium and large holdings. We have just acquired \$600,000 from the German Environment Fund under the Biodiversity Programme to protect our natural forest biodiversity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to protect our biodiversity, we need to fence and look after free animals. In this initiative, we are providing close to 600 farmers with fencing material. Each support package contains fencing material and along with that, we also provide them with tree seedlings of mahogany, teak and sandalwood, so that we fulfil the biodiversity requirement of that particular assistance from the German Environment Fund.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for many decades now, Fiji has remained a net importer of food, importing around \$500 million worth of food each year. Our strategy, re-emphasised by COVID-19, has been to promote import substitution, especially for food staples.

In 2019, Fiji imported over 40,000 tonnes of rice worth around FJ\$42.6 million, approximately a 4 percent increase in average volume from the previous year. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji today produced just around 8,000 tonnes of rice locally, which is around 16 percent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to state our positive steps in promoting the self- of rice, not only through seed production, but also through seed development. In 2019 we produced 75,600 rice seeds. In July, we released two dryland rice varieties – *sitara* and *cagivou* which is more conducive to be grown in drier areas such as the Western Division, and they are known to be aerobic rice variety.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with this base-work, the importance of securing our households with rice is met. We have outlined several strategies to ensure that we are able to reduce our dependency on imported rice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to assure this august House that we will do everything possible so that no one can threaten us in terms of rice security for our country which is staple. We are providing rice seeds up to 30 kilogrammes for one-acre farms to every sugarcane farmer, who is willing to plant rice. Sir, not only will it increase rice production locally but it will also complement food security and income security for the farmers involved in the sugar industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have about 12,000 rice farmers. To be 100 percent self-sufficient in rice, we need to bring in new 24,000 acres of land into production. Now, if 12,000 farmers plant one acre per year, two crops, and these are three-month varieties that we are providing, at least, if they can harvest two crops, we are 100 percent self-sufficient, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So we have begun and have provided 166 farmers with five tonnes of rice seeds, 30 kilogrammes for each farmer, which is equivalent to one acre. About four weeks ago, we handed it over to FSC because they have the infrastructure to distribute these seeds to the farmers through their sector offices. We have just received another six tonnes of rice seeds from the Northern Division which we will be handing out to FSC to give out to the farmers who are willing to put one acre into rice production.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other initiative that we have which we will be launching in Ba very soon and the Honourable Pillay has spoken to the villagers there and Tui Ba, to ask the villagers to sign up if they are willing to plant rice for their village food security and we are willing to provide free seedlings. We are looking about 1,100 villages in Fiji and if all of them can volunteer, there you go, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we will be able to solve the issue of rice requirement for the villagers. All they need to do is to communally allocate a portion of land where they will grow the rice seedling, we will provide the harvester and a portable mill to mill the paddy into rice. This was quite successful last year in one of the villages in Bua, Vanua Levu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the moment, we have got 7,000 acres of land under rice and we are looking at bringing in progressively another 24,000 acres. It will take time but we need to have the will and strategy and the right motivation to get farmers to do rice farming.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can say that if today, Vietnam which is our major supplier of rice says, "We will stop", I can say with much confidence that within three months, we will be a major local production of rice, given that we are now expanding rice production in the Western Division.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are very mindful of the long term food security and you must have heard that we have announced that over the next eight-months period, we will provide every household seedlings for long term crops, like coconuts. Every household must have, at least, one coconut plant, one drumstick plant, one breadfruit tree and *tivoli*. This should ensure that they will have this for the next 20 years to 30 years. We are targeting that within eight months, every household will be provided with these free at our cost.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have started this but at the moment, for breadfruit, we are working with the Secretariat Pacific Community (SPC) and we are now developing seedlings for the nursery. So progressively, we will ensure and we are targeting that in eight months' time, we should have this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition, we also looking at complementing livestock to diets of households. We are working with the private sector, chick providers to provide a day-old chicks to households and we are doing that as the chicks are being hatched.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that Fiji's strategic advantage lies in the primary sector, be it fisheries, forestry or agriculture and amongst these, the core agriculture sector stands tall because we have got a number of comparative advantage, given our planting seasons. We can grow crops year-round.

There were investors who came down from the US who said that they have successfully grown this crop in the USA and they want to grow it in Fiji. I said, "Why do you want to come and grow it in Fiji, when you can grow it in USA? You have large tracts of land there." They said that Fiji with the distinct advantage, we can grow this year-round and they cannot grow it there during winter.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got advantage in terms of soil condition, soil structure, soil fertility and we also have advantage in terms of water availability. Anyone would say that there is a water shortage here but it is not water shortage, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is water management and distribution that is an issue here.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in our commercial strategy, we are asking commercial farmers, "You can come to us and say that you have got 100 acres of land that you want to put under *dalo* or cassava or *duruka*. We will provide you with planting materials for free. We will also assist you with land preparation", which is available to any farmer at a subsidised cost. An acre of ploughing will cost

you about \$120, the farmer pays \$28 and we will pay the remainder and we outsource, so land preparation is a major cost to the farmers. And we are providing planting materials to large scale commercial farmers at no cost to them, but they will have to return it to us in three years' time so that we can give it to other farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of the planting material seeds that we have are open pollinated so once farmers have their own stock, they can then return their planting material and every now and then, we can give them new seeds. Seed purification that is going on in our stations will ensure that they have pure variety on their farm.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have launched a number of large scale commercial ventures and over the next two weeks' time, we will be launching a number of commercial ventures in the Central Division and Western Division. It is quite an exciting time for the Ministry of Agriculture, Sir, in terms of taking agriculture to take its rightful place in the economy where it should be.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to complement this broader agenda of growing commercial agriculture, we are also establishing nurseries and orchards. We will be establishing a number of large nurseries in the Western Division, Southern Division and Northern Division. We have just submitted a major proposal to the Canadian Government to obtain CA\$200,000, out of which we will fund small nurseries on farmers' fields in different areas which the farmers will grow their own agricultural materials, seedlings in particular.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also establishing orchards. We started with this programme last year, we are now speeding up with support from the allocation that the Honourable Minister for Economy made in the Supplementary Budget, and we are looking at establishing over the next eight months 100 new orchards of breadfruit, mango, banana, guava, dragonfruit and avocado.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the last two months, you must have heard a lot of people making all kinds of comments about the price increases in the agriculture sector. Sir, there is no shortcut solution of interfering in the market to reduce pricing, the only solution is to push in more supply into the market and the only way to do this is through the strategy that we have adopted - instead of going down and interfering in the market, we had said that we need to boost production and supply. And that is what has happened, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is what you see on the ground now, gradual reduction in prices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is massive supply of *dalo* cassava and vegetables, and prices have started to go down. If we talk about the price of *duruka*, you will see that it is now sold at \$6 to \$8 a bundle. At the same time, we have got a dedicated officer in the Ministry working very closely with Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, the airline agencies, shipping agencies and exporters, to ensure that every week when we get the schedule of ships from shipping agencies for ships going out and flights, they will obtain the volume and space available, immediately work backwards with the exporters to ensure that we fill up, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, we have got a dedicated officer now, waiting and everyday, they will supply us (myself and the Permanent Secretary) with data on the situation in terms of which exporter, who is picking up this volume, et cetera, and ensure that no space is left in the carrier.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are going big here in terms of ensuring that agricultural exports will become the leading exports out of Fiji. At the same time, we are relooking, revisiting and restructuring our research stations and I am a bit busy with this. We will be getting a paper to Cabinet and then making an announcement about how we are restructuring our research stations where we will have specialised activities in each of the research stations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement. I now give the floor to the Honourable Kuridrani as a designated speaker for the Leader of the Opposition. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to respond to the Honourable Minister for Agriculture's Ministerial Statement to the nation regarding the response to COVID-19 and the devastation caused by severe *TC Harold*. Unfortunately, Sir, the COVID-19 pandemic and *TC Harold* merely aggravated the 13 years of mismanagement of our economy, bullish and reckless spending, implementation of the wrong policy mix and the poor use of taxpayers' funds that have landed us where we are here today.

It is sad to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the FijiFirst Government overspent over the last 13 years since 2006, causing a crisis in Government finances. The nation did not have the fiscal space to respond to the predictable natural disaster, like *TC Harold*, and the inevitable global pandemic, like COVID-19. Our economic situation shows the fake claims of this so-called economic boom and unprecedented prosperity that the people of Fiji had been told and we have been having by the Honourable Minister for Economy.

As this side of the House have always stated, the Government has no money. It was living day to day with very tight cash flow and overspending when the FijiFirst Government failed to ensure a fiscal safety net and the resilience of the nation to respond effectively to a pandemic or natural disaster. Yet again, the people's funds owned by the workers of this nation, the FNPF, has been raided and abused as cash-cow to save the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Shadow Minister for Agriculture, I ask; why was there a \$15 million cut to the Ministry of Agriculture in the COVID-19 supplementary budget? Instead, an extra \$9 million was allocated to hire more Government vehicles, a total of \$29 million raised for vehicle hire. More was allocated for passport, but the \$15 million cut from the Ministry of Agriculture allocation is uncalled for.

The world is closing in. The cheap imports that we have been fed with for many years will not be available soon. That is the very reason why our farmers should be supported to feed the nation. Yet, \$15 million was cut from the Ministry of Agriculture budget, , and \$1 million of this funding is now placed under requisition under the control of the Honourable Minister for Economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is an urgent need for an agriculture stimulus package, not only to maintain but to increase production. Farmers also need assistance, for example, to pay their land leases and loan repayments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have heard from the Honourable Minister the main incentives and strategies this morning. However, I have doubt on his capability. I now ask the Honourable Minister, where is the cold storage that was supposed to be built at Kavanagasau in Sigatoka for the Salad Bowl of Fiji, that was approved in the budget of 2017-2018? Where is the cold storage that was supposed to be built in Nukuloa in Ba that was supposed to help the farmers with storage facilities?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Some farmers are still running around for poultry manure that was promised to them last year. Some farmers are still running around for planting materials and to make matters worse, Mr. Speaker, Sir, while farmers went to the Agriculture Office, most of the officers

do not even know the initiatives or programmes that have been called out by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to say to the Honourable Minister that before you announce any other initiative or programme, can you give us your Annual Reports from 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 so that we can agree to what you are talking about. Where is the good governance? Where is accountability?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wonder who is monitoring the performances of the Ministers? Who is preparing the appraisal report of the Ministers? Most of them are not performing according to the information we have received.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- He should be replaced!

(Laughter)

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Kuridrani for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the designated speaker for the NFP, the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for his statement and commend him for the “big plans” he has outlined. We have seen reports, Mr. Speaker, and have heard of him distributing chicks and handing out vegetable seeds, although many have complained about quantity and some even questioned quality. We have heard him of starting a new initiative of collecting young coconut trees that have germinated after lying on the ground for a while from trees in many family compounds.

All well and good, Mr. Speaker, but the Honourable Minister and his Ministry must realise that in this depressed economy where people struggle to buy even the cheapest of foods, like salt for cooking, they are simply unable to buy food for chicks or manure for plants. Many in the rural areas do have access to animal manure but those in peri-urban and others do not, so it is imperative that the Honourable Minister looks into this so that his initiative does not go to waste. The Ministry might like to listen to the farmers more, instead of trying to tell them how to do what they know very well how to do.

Mr. Speaker, we have also received complaints from people about the manner in which distribution of assistance has been happening. These people have called my Party Leader and my Party Office. We have received calls from Sigatoka, in particular Nabitu, that only a few farmers have been assisted. In fact, there is a claim that these farmers are very well acquainted with the Honourable Minister and certain Ministry of Agriculture Officials at district level.

This is the second time in a year that our Office has received calls from Nabitu and the complainants are very displeased and we hope that the Honourable Minister looks into this matter. Earlier this year, there were complaints about a few advisory councillors and even one Honourable Assistant Minister, being selective about which person received assistance based on political support in the last Elections. This is despicable.

Honourable Speaker, my Party Leader raised this issue with the Honourable Minister in writing, and received a written reply to the effect that no such favouritism took place. However and despite the Honourable Minister's assurance, we continued to receive complaints.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, probably a word of advice to the Honourable Minister, please, continue to do what you are doing in assisting people but, please, do not make statements that sound ridiculous and illogical while meeting and assisting farmers.

The Honourable Minister opened 2020 with how he purchased his goat. This was followed to our wonderment by him telling farmers in Rakiraki that they, the farmers and not the Government, were responsible for increasing prices. Then he told cane growers in the Western Division to plant *yaqona*. He should know that the climate in the West is not conducive to good *yaqona* yield. Then he switched to advising cane growers to diversify and plant rice.

Last week, he said he was not worried if cane growers had switched to tobacco farming due to negligible returns from sugarcane production. It is in the Honourable Minister's best interest to continue advocating sound agricultural policies, instead of becoming a farm extension or field advisor. The last thing we need in this country right now is chaos and confusion in the Ministry of Agriculture. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, we will move on. I now call upon the Honourable Attorney- General to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

LEGAL PRACTITIONERS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020

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

That the -

- a) Legal Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2020 (Bill No. 10/2020), 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 Standing Committee or any other Committee of Parliament;
- d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 28th May, 2020; 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.- 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. I will be brief about this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill seeks to amend section 3 of the existing Act, which is the composition of the Board of Legal Education. The Board currently consists of the following members:

- (1) the Solicitor-General;
- (2) the Dean of the school or faculty of law of the University of the South Pacific;
- (3) the Chief Justice;

- (4) the Chief Registrar of the High Court of Fiji;
- (5) the Dean, appointed by the Attorney-General, of a school or faculty of law of a university in Great Britain, Australia or New Zealand; and
- (6) a person having legal qualifications, appointed by the Attorney-General, who shall be the Board's Chairperson.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the composition of the Board is somewhat odd. It provides for the Dean of the School or Faculty of Law of USP to be member of the Board, but it does not take into account the fact that there are other Universities in Fiji, such as the Fiji National University and the University of Fiji, who have also Schools or Faculties of Law, that also provide law programmes and courses to tertiary students and whose Deans may be appropriate members of the Board also.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also the Act currently limits the appointment by the Attorney-General to only the Dean of the School or Faculty of Law of University only in Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. This, for example, does not allow the Attorney-General to appoint the Dean of the School or Faculty of Law of Universities, for example, in Singapore and Canada, or any other common law country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill, therefore, seeks to amend the Act to change the composition of the Board of Legal Education by removing the Dean of the School or Faculty of Law of USP, the Dean appointed by the Attorney-General of a School or Faculty of Law of the University of Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand, and replacing them with two members to be appointed by the Minister, who is defined as the Attorney-General under the Act. The proposed amendment would allow the Minister to extend appointments to the Board to any person, including the Deans of the Schools or Faculties of Law of universities in Fiji, or any other country for that matter.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill also amends section 3(5) of the Act to allow only the Chief Justice, the Solicitor-General and the Registrar to delegate to a person in his or her office as a member to the Board which essentially means, what has happened in the past with the other members being appointed, they used to send some junior people to represent them or other people to represent them as opposed to them actually appearing for the actual Board meetings themselves.

The Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which should be with Honourable Members by now, you can see two of those amendments to the substantive law and the explanation there explains itself to the amendments that we are seeking. We need to have these amendments done as we need to appoint a new set of members to the Board itself. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Attorney-General for his motion.

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.

Honourable Lynda Tabuya, you have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. We have just received the copy of the Bill and we are just skimming through it right now, but it would have been good to, again, receive it beforehand. This morning it would have been helpful to note, Honourable Speaker, to give us time at least to respond to the initial motion.

However, just reading through it very quickly, the Honourable Attorney-General is proposing that the removal of the appointment of the Dean of the School of Law (I get what he is saying about having it open to any Dean but he is not specifically stating that in this Amendment), that the seats

are reserved for the Deans or the Heads of the Schools of Law (Faculties of Law) for all schools. It actually opens it up for him to replace with two members to be appointed by him but it does not specify that it is reserved for the Heads of the Schools. That is a concern because there are stakeholders, and there is a reason they are in there because initially it was only the USP that had the School of Law but now it has opened up.

I think it should really be reserved for the Deans or the Heads of these Law Schools. So to keep those seats reserved for them is for a very good reason because they are the Heads of the Schools, they are in touch with what is happening in the schools and they operate themselves as the Heads, so they do have a stake in this and they should be members of the Legal Practitioner's Board because they also determine at the end, the Board of Legal Education, lawyers that get admitted to the bar. So they are part of this selection or allowing of lawyers to be admitted to the bar.

There needs to be reserved seats and I am just going to express that initial concern that they should be reserved for the Deans of the Schools or Heads of the Faculties of Law of any of the universities in Fiji. This is just my initial thoughts at this time, Honourable Speaker, for the House to note. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member, I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Mahendra Reddy, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise in support of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I was at the Fiji National University (FNU) as the Dean of the Business College, we had then established the Law Programme and we started running the Law Programme but for the graduates to be admitted to the bar, that particular programme should be approved by the Board of Legal Education.

Mr. Speaker, I had then taken the entire programme, made an appointment with the Board, it took me so much time to get an appointment with the Board. And then I saw in the meeting the competitor Law Dean was sitting in the meeting. At that point in time, I raised my objections saying, "How can we get a fair hearing when the competitor Law School is sitting in that particular meeting?"

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wholeheartedly support this amendment because there was a conflict of interest at that particular point in time because we were establishing a Law School where we will be competing for students from the same jurisdiction, and here we have got a well-established Law Dean sitting in that committee, trying to decide whether our Law Programme should be approved or not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support this amendment.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula, you have the floor, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I wish to oppose the motion. First of all, I acknowledge my colleague's position at the Fiji National University (FNU) and to note that he was the one who sacked me from there.

(Laughter)

I became a lecturer at FNU because one of my old friends there who was a Dean, could not find anyone. I complained, “Look, I have so much work to do, but I will come and help you” but after one week, they sacked me.

(Laughter)

Back to the motion, Honourable Speaker, the motion is asking that we consider the Amendments under Standing Order 51, and that implies that we do not invite the public to make comments in relation to this at the Standing Committee. I oppose that basically because it is an abuse. It is a blatant abuse of Standing Order 51 which allows the public to participate in the law-making process.

We must be a first Parliament in the world that passed a Budget, the last Budget, under Standing Order 51, denying even the Committee of Supply, and that is a blatant abuse of our role as a Parliament - the inclusivity of the public in the law-making process. If we pass this under Standing Order 51 and the proposal under the motion is that, it be debated within one hour, that denies the public. And just as a solicitor, in things like this, even in our appearances in matters that affect the public, the Law Society is very important to make its input. So, in this case, the Law Society’s voice on behalf of the public, on behalf of the practitioners and on behalf of the integrity of the law profession in relation to this, no matter how small it is, it will not be heard. So it is an abuse of Standing Order 51.

I feel sorry for this Standing Order (Standing Order 51), it has been abused left, right and centre. We raped it, over and over again. It is a bad impression on the House that we should be passing laws under Standing Order 51. So, I oppose the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Niko Nawaikula. Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would like to contribute to the Bill before the House this afternoon. I oppose the Bill that is being presented by the Honourable Attorney-General this morning. I take issue with the removal of the Dean of the Faculty of Law School at USP and the Dean that used to be appointed by the Attorney-General from any Faculty of Law, University of Great Britain, Australia or New Zealand.

By removing the Deans of Law at USP or any other university that is listed in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Deans of these Universities or of these Law Schools have a clear understanding of the curricula that is being taught in these Universities. And the Board of Legal Education will need to hear their advice on the changes in the curricula or whatever issue that is being discussed by the Board of Legal Education. I ask as to why should the Deans be excluded from the Board of Legal Education? Whose advice will be heard by the Board of Legal Education, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

The idea to use Standing Order 51 on this very important Bill, again, shuts out the voice of the people in this country - not only the voice of the Law Society, the student body of the Law Schools, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They should have a say, their voices should be heard in the proposed discussion in this Board of Legal Education.

I do not understand why this Bill has, again, been brought through this process of Standing Order 51. The people of Fiji have a right to be heard on this very important Bill. I oppose the motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

There being no other Member wishing to take the floor, I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General for your right of reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As we are not debating the Bill per se today, it is about the motion itself. We, of course, can debate the Bill on Thursday. But just to respond to some of the matters that have been raised from the other side, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which I am sure we will discuss further on Thursday.

The reason why it has been left open, Honourable Tabuya, is because we have the ability to attract as many good people as possible and we do not want to restrict ourselves. We could actually have a situation, perhaps the Vice-Chancellor of a university could be appointed and the vice-chancellor could have a legal background, he/she could be a law professor. They do not necessarily have to be the Dean per se. So, by actually specifically stating the Dean, we are actually limiting ourselves.

Again, I think the issue that was raised by the Honourable Minister for Agriculture about conflicts, et cetera, that needs to be managed also. In the same way we are saying that we could have Deans and Professors of Law from other jurisdictions outside Fiji, which obviously will be critical.

In respect of the day to day functioning of this Board, general members of the Fijian public do not have anything to do with this Board. This Board specifically is about those people who want to become legal practitioners, and the curriculum has been set by the Board of Legal Education itself and the requirements by the Board of Legal Education. It is not about any average Pauliasi or Ram Prasad walking down the street that they get affected by the Board of Legal Education, no! It is about those people who have carried out studies in law. So to come here and pontificate and say, "This is going to affect the rights of people down the street", no, it will not. It is about the quality of education and the processes and the recognition of qualifications of law schools and the people who are going to get admitted to the bar - that is what it is about. Please, do not mislead the public by saying it is about ordinary citizens in that respect or day to day issues.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you can see, we are also putting in more stringent measures that those people who do get appointed to this Board. Apart from the Chief Justice, the Solicitor-General and the Chief Registrar, the others who get appointed to the Board must come through the Board. They cannot send some emissary for themselves or some substitute, and that is what has actually been happening in the past. Sometimes, we have deans sending other people who actually have no legal knowledge, just simply to represent them or represent the university. So we are trying to get the quality of the Board of Legal Education to be a lot better.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not have any further comments as we will be debating this Bill itself on Thursday. Thank you.

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

Question put.

The Question is:

Pursuant to Standing Order 51:

That the –

- a) Legal Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2020 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- b) that the Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- c) that the Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament; and
- d) that the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament on Thursday, 28th May, 2020 but that one hour be given to debate the Bill with the right of reply given to the Honourable Attorney-General as the Member moving the motion.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will adjourn for lunch and resume and take on the second Bill at the beginning of the afternoon session.

I see everyone looking very satisfied but I am just confused that when the Honourable Niko Nawaikula makes a complaint, he has got a big smile on his face and then he is complaining about the Minister who sacked him in a previous position and he has got a big smile on his face.

(Acclamation)

So these two friends confuse me. We adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.24 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 3.04 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- We are a bit thin on the ground for this session. I call on the Honourable Attorney-General to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

CYBERCRIME BILL 2020

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

That the –

- (a) Cybercrime Bill 2020 (Bill No. 11/2020), be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must be immediately referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights;
- (d) Standing Committee must report in the next sitting of Parliament and;
- (e) That upon presentation of the Report on the Bill by the Standing Committee, the Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament at the next sitting of Parliament but that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- 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, under the existing Crimes Act 2009, cybercrime offences may be prosecuted under computer-related offence provisions. These provisions, however, are proving to be inadequate, given the ever-evolving nature of cybercrime and computer-related offences in Fiji and around the world and, of course, now more so with social distancing, we will have a lot more reliance on digital technology and, indeed, digital usage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been, of course, working through a number of these issues and have had numerous consultations with the following organisations in the formulation of this particular Bill. But before I do that, just by way of background, in 2016, the Fijian Government launched a Cyber Security Strategy which, amongst other things, provide for the development of cybercrime legislation in order to ensure that a wide range of cyber issues are addressed and, in particular, a wide range of cybercrime offences are prosecuted in Fiji.

The Budapest Convention which is an initiative of the Council of Europe is the only binding international instrument that deals with the issue of cybercrimes. The Budapest Convention serves as a guideline for any country developing comprehensive national legislation against cybercrime and provides guidance and legislative requirements. It also serves as a framework for international cooperation between States and, in particular, provides avenues for member States to have access to information, as well as to share information with each other on a wider platform.

The Budapest Convention essentially requires the harmonisation of domestic criminal substantive law or elements of offences and related provisions in the areas of cybercrime, and provide for domestic criminal procedural powers for the investigation, prosecution of cybercrime offences or what we call computer-related offences and the setting up of a fast and effective regime of

international cooperation because as we know, cybercrime actually generally takes place across borders.

In this respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had in November 2019, a workshop that was held in Suva under the Council of Europe and the team of experts that formed the Council of Europe Mission to Fiji to conduct the workshops comprised the following individuals and these are well-known individuals in the cybercrime legislation space:

- (1) Mr. Matteo Lucchetti – Council of Europe;
- (2) Mr. Pedro Verdelho – Prosecutor from Portugal and Vice-Chairman of the Cybercrime Convention Committee; and
- (3) Mr. Jan Kerkhofs – Federal Magistrate from Belgium.

At this workshop participants from the following organisations reviewed and discussed in detail the provision of the Bill:

- (1) Council of Europe;
- (2) BCom IT Solutions Limited;
- (3) Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption;
- (4) Fiji Police Force;
- (5) Financial Intelligence Unit;
- (6) Ministry of Communications;
- (7) Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing;
- (8) Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions;
- (9) Office of the Solicitor-General;
- (10) Online Safety Commission;
- (11) Vodafone Fiji Limited; and
- (12) Women in Business.

Following the workshop, the Bill was distributed to the following key organisations on four separate occasions for their review and comments:

- (1) Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption;
- (2) Fiji Police Force;
- (3) Financial Intelligence Unit;
- (4) Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions;
- (5) Online Safety Commission; and
- (6) Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing.

Apart from those consultations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill was also made available to members of the public through the Fijian Government webpage for review and comments. Feedback from over 100 individuals from around the country was received, following which, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill was then finalised after taking into consideration the submissions and comments of all those who were consulted.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, given that we intend to debate this Bill at a later stage after it gets referred to the Committee which needs to bring their Report to Parliament at the next sitting of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not want to go into the full details of the Bill itself but just to highlight some of the salient features.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the key issues regarding this, of course, is the definition of key terms as provided for in line with the definitions provided under the Budapest Convention for consistency

in terminology; offences against the confidentiality, integrity and availability of computer data and computer system, such as specific computer and content-related offences; penalties for such offences under the Bill which actually are penalties for both, individuals and also body corporates; specific powers for seizure and search upon application through a judge or magistrate for a search warrant; the designation of point of contact; a 24/7 network or contact who must be available twenty-four hours and seven days a week in order to ensure the provision of immediate assistance for special investigations.

As you know recently I was sitting somewhere where that particular hotel actually had a cyber-attack and people do, do that. They break into your systems and they will start demanding money. They have what they call, “ransom hijacks”, and they actually pay them money for them to get your system back up. These sorts of things are happening all the time now. Mr. Speaker, Sir, obviously, we need some ability to be able to prosecute such offences.

Of course then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the current provision of the Mutual Assistance and Criminal Matters Act 1997, the Office of the Attorney-General has the authority to request for international cooperation or assistance. Of course, the Bill makes consequential amendments to the Crimes Act 2009, Extradition Act 2003, Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 2007 and the Juveniles Act 1973 to align certain provisions in those Acts to the provisions in the Bill.

So, with those introductory remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge Parliament to support this particular motion for this particular Bill to be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and for that Committee to present its Report to the next sitting of Parliament, given in particular the extensive consultations that have already taken place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his motion. 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.

Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have no objection that the Bill goes to the Standing Committee, which is the right thing to do. However, this is a very comprehensive Bill and it has far-reaching implications with respect to the whole issue of not only cybercrime but also the use of electronic communication, including the internet, et cetera.

If I heard the Honourable Attorney-General correctly, he is saying that the Report should come back to the next sitting of Parliament. It is possible that the next sitting of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, will be about the Budget and I do not think between now and the next sitting of Parliament there will be enough time for this Standing Committee to go around the country. I think there has to be an extensive deliberation on this Bill. The salient features of this Bill, the appropriateness of the penalties and I note also in the Bill that the fines and the penalties would come as part of regulations made by the Minister.

I think there are very serious and important issues within this Bill which need a very extensive consultation. Even though I am told that this was already out there but I think we need to give ourselves a bit more time and not just the next sitting. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Any other Member wishing to take the floor?

There being none, Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor for your Right of Reply.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fact of the matter is that, we have had extensive consultations, also online consultations, with members of the public. We have over a hundred submissions that were sent to us - comments, submissions, and also as we have said that the key agencies that are involved in the implementation of it have also had discussions.

I think one of the critical issues is that, we had the Council of Europe. As you know the European Union is very much and very strong indeed on the protection of individual rights and you will see that the Bill itself, whilst it is based on the practical implementation of the Budapest Convention, it also has a rights-based approach to the implementation of the provisions of the Budapest Convention. I think Honourable Professor Prasad can take some solace and comfort from that, that we actually worked with the experts in this area, and this is why we actually decided to bring them in.

We also have one of the key leading experts from the Asian Region, Mr. Fernando, who has been working with us. In fact, over the past 18 months, he has met all the key agencies in Fiji and he had a key hand in respect of the contributions towards the drafting of the Bill.

So I think you would find that there is ample time and, again, I would urge Honourable Professor Prasad to look at this Bill in detail, which we will have some time to look at the Bill, and you will find that it has actually been drafted in respect of international standards and, indeed, practices. So I urge Honourable Members to vote for this particular motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[Cybercrime Bill 2020 (Bill No.11 of 2020) referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights]

2013-2014 CONSOLIDATED ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT - WATER AUTHORITY OF FIJI

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, it is indeed a great pleasure to move in this Parliament the debate of the 2013 and 2014 Consolidated Annual Review of the Water Authority of Fiji.

HON. J. SIGARARA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I second the motion.

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

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- The Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; on behalf of the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion in regards

to the Committee's Review Report on the 2013 and 2014 Consolidated Annual Review of the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), which was tabled in Parliament on Thursday, 4th April, 2019.

Honourable Speaker, Sir, the bipartisan Committee Report examines, compares and analyses the performance of the Authority's administration, organisational structure, financial management, functions and programmes.

The Committee, in its review process, has identified concerns relating to the Authority's management, extension and service delivery. The review exercise was made possible through consultation and verification meetings with the senior staff of the Authority.

In its deliberation, the Committee made its recommendations and wishes to highlight a few major ones as listed below:

- (1) To improve on its Annual Financial Reporting System to be aligned with the Ministry for Economy - the FMIS;
- (2) Improve on its gender balance in terms of the Authority's staff recruitment as per SDG 5;
- (3) Be more transparent in its tender process by using other mediums rather than tender link alone;
- (4) The monitoring of water and waste management service to be more vigilant, particularly the control of algae bloom by environmental officers;
- (5) Implementation of more water supply developments in the rural and maritime areas; and
- (6) Continue improving technology and customer services.

The Committee wishes to acknowledge the Board and the staff of WAF for the work done in 2013 and 2014 and over the past years, even with nationwide challenges faced by the organisation. Overall, the Committee was satisfied with the operation of the WAF for the period 2013 and 2014.

With those sentiments, I thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the mover of the motion. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion.

Honourable Jone Usamate, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. First of all, I would like to congratulate the Committee for the work that it has done and the Report that it has put together and the recommendations that have been made which is something that, I, and the Ministry of Infrastructure and also the Board will be asked to have a look at. In the meantime, however, I thought I would like to give some updates on some of the issues that are highlighted in the recommendations that are part of this Report.

In the first recommendation, it has asked that the WAF consider the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO of WAF was appointed in December 2019. He is Mr. Barry Omundson, the person who has come to the Authority with a lot of extensive water-related background and executive management ability. He has the confidence and the backing of the Board to be able to take WAF to the next level, and we look forward to him working well with the Board

to be able to raise the performance of WAF, so that they can fulfil the mandate that it was established to deliver.

On the second recommendation that has been made that WAF should consider restructuring through its reforms to encourage accountability through its key performance indicators, WAF has now developed a draft strategic plan for the period 2020 to 2025.

Together with this, it has developed a roadmap that covers the areas of its direction, its structures, its culture and also the reform of the systems and processes that it intends to put into place. And as part of this draft strategic plan, it has identified three key areas that it needs to focus on. First of all, the area of its assets is basically water and wastewater. Secondly, looking at reforming the culture within that particular organisation in a more efficient and effective service delivery by looking at its systems and processes. This strategic plan is something that will look at consolidating and getting the basics right in terms of assets, people and the systems and processes within the organisation. That strategic plan should then form the basis of its annual business plans and develop their departmental plans and individual basic plans for all of the officers in the Authority.

On the third recommendation, it is talking about improving on Annual Financial Reporting Systems and it recommends that the WAF's Financial Reporting System be aligned with the Ministry of Economy's Financial Management Information System (FMIS). WAF has already undertaken this, it is aligning its financial reporting system to the Ministry of Economy's FMIS requirements.

On the fourth recommendation in terms of gender balance, WAF has now put in place a draft Gender Equality Policy to promote gender mainstreaming within the organisation. Currently, in terms of its employees, about 12 percent of the staff of WAF are female, but it is looking at securing more qualified females to enter into the work that is undertaken by WAF.

For the fifth recommendation which recommends that it would be more transparent in its tender process by using other mediums rather than tender link alone, I think the important point to note that tender link is a very transparent process because it opens up to competitive bidding from suppliers around the Pacific, including Australia and New Zealand and because of its open and its transparent nature, they can be up to 150,000 potential suppliers and contractors who can link on tender link.

On the sixth recommendation for WAF to consider looking to other water sources for developments, such as the Wainikavika for the Navua Irrigation Dam and also the Nawaicoba Ahkil Dam in Nadi, this is something that WAF is currently doing now. It is investigating the feasibility of using the Wainikavika or the Navua Irrigation Dam to source it as an additional raw water to supplement the raw water supply from the current Wainikavika gravity source. WAF is also looking into the second recommendation which is investigating the feasibility of using the Akhil Dam in Nawaicoba as a potential source to supply the Nawaicoba area.

The initial investigations are showing that the hill from the dam might not be sufficient to meet the sustained demand, especially during the dry season and the prolonged dry period. So you know we are now moving away from the wet season into the dry season because water level in that dam dropped significantly during this period. So there is still more tests to be carried out by WAF to confirm the quality of water and to see the capacity of the dam to sustain the level of supply that is required during the dry periods.

On the seventh recommendation on the monitoring of water and waste management services, this is something that WAF has been undertaking through its national Water Quality Laboratory which conducts monthly water sampling for water intakes around Fiji, and also does a fortnightly

testing for water quality sampling, especially for the Vaturu Dam. There is a series of exercises that it undertakes in conducting that sampling and conducting that testing to make sure that water is safe for those that use the water that comes out of our various intakes.

Also with algae outbreaks that we had in the past, WAF has learned from those experiences, it has now trained a set of qualified laboratory technicians to determine algae counts and also carry out full physical and chemical sampling for compliance, monitoring and water quality surveillance. So all of these are part of the programme to overcome the algae outbreak that we have had in the Vaturu Dam in the past. There is also a major exercise looking at desilting that particular dam and replacing undersized dam fine bubble aerators.

Plans are also in place to implement the installation of ultrasonic algae control devices in the lake to control the potential microscopic algae growth and also control any likely algae bloom that may take place in the future in Vaturu Dam. For wastewater, all receiving waters of the 11 wastewater treatment plants are monitored on a monthly basis to gauge the nutrient level and reducing watersheds at Laucala Bay and Nadi River.

On the eighth recommendation that WAF's facilities to be manned with strict vigilance to avoid unwarranted activities that may pose threats to the general public, WAF has in-house and outsource security that are in most of the critical assets. In addition to this in some of these assets, it also has caretakers in the intake areas, looking after these areas and addressing potential blockages and issues. It is now looking at installing CCTV cameras in critical sites and have a planned project on upgrading the current infrastructure which would also address issues related to OHS and security concerns.

On the ninth recommendation on the implementation of more water supply developments in rural and maritime areas, one of the major targets that we have in our NDP is to provide clean water to all the households in Fiji by the year 2030. In that Plan, we cover both, the urban and rural areas.

Over the last five years, Government has invested a total of more than \$62 million to benefit the rural and maritime areas in terms of their water provision. This cost includes rural water carting, rainwater harvesting and rural water projects.

For the maritime islands, the WAF has installed four desalination plants and also distributed rainwater harvesting tanks to these maritime islands.

In the aftermath of *TC Harold*, the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) was also involved in getting mobile desalination plants. They took out the desalination plants to the islands, I think, to Dravuni and Buliya and use these mobile desalination plants to pump tap water into the island itself, and I think that is something that we will continue to look at.

On the tenth recommendation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to improve technology and customer services, WAF has been moving in the recent past towards automating its water reticulation system using Supervisory, Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA). The central region is almost fully engaged with this SCADA system, and we are looking to hopefully complete SCADA in the central region in the next financial year. We look to progressively use SCADA systems to cover all operations of WAF.

Other technological improvements have included the:

- use of Geographic Information System (GIS); and
- use of Gentrack system that WAF uses for billing customer accounts and Complaints Management System.

The WAF has also been looking at improving its customer services in registering all customers for eBilling to reduce the cost of printing and bill postages.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we welcome the Report that has been undertaken by the Committee. We will look into and work together with the Board and Management of WAF, to make sure that they continue to enhance the level of service that they provide to the citizens of this country. *Vinaka va'levu*, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

Honourable Tikoduadua, you have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank the Committee for the Report on WAF. I recognise that it is an Annual Report from 2013 to 2014 so it has been a while. It has been six years to date when that Report was submitted before the Committee had a look at it and I think a lot has happened in-between then and now in terms of how WAF has progressed.

Mr. Speaker, talking about WAF and water, I think the underlying factor here is that, what should drive the performance of WAF is the fact that it is under the Constitution, the right of people to have access to clean drinking water and uninterrupted supply of that, be that they are in the urban area, peri-urban and rural area.

I note from the Report and also having heard the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure having said all those things about what they have done in-between, particularly from then until now, one of the issues that has really, sort of, popped out is how WAF has evolved as an institution from when it was Fiji Water Supply at that time. I remember that vividly, even though it was a reform that was done well before my time as Minister at that time and something I had inherited.

But one of the problems with WAF was trying to shape itself into a new look whilst all the adages from the past administration were still clung on to it and was unable to evolve, thereby was unable to shred all those lingering issues, particularly about the Authority that it had inherited from the Water Supply days.

Much of those issues with WAF at that time in 2013 (if we look at, I believe, in Appendix 2 of this Report), I am actually looking at WAF's responses to Members' questions and in the matrix, it talks about the way forward for WAF as it sees it. But at the same time, it also looked at some of the challenges that WAF has or continues to experience todate and much of this lists (if we look at it and I am referring here to Page 9 of the Report), some very, very lingering issues.

My concern here, Mr. Speaker, is that, despite the resources that had been given to WAF, much of these issues are still lingering todate. Listening to the Honourable Minister as he spoke a while ago he talked about strategies to be able to deal with these challenges as they are listed here in 2013 and, of course, they exist today in 2020.

In my view, there needs to be a whole rethink of this institution. Unfortunately, in reviewing and in an evolving industry and I believe we witnessed this last year as WAF was evolving, it had to shred itself and, unfortunately, a lot of people had to lose their work.

I can see that part of the strategy is trying to automate a lot of things, particularly in the rural water treatment plants. That should be an area which, I believe, we should look at, particularly now

when COVID-19 is a critical area that we would consider in making decisions, particularly about employing people and the Government, particularly WAF, would consider the plight of the workers.

When doing its reform to be able to make it better, WAF must also consider the plight of the workers and their welfare and this should be something that we should look at, going forward. I remember during the transformation of the reform from the Department of National Roads (DNR) to Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), a similar thing had also happened. What I am saying at the moment is that, they should consider the plight of the workers, particularly when doing this reform. I am considering here the massive returns and I am talking in particular here of the workers who lost their jobs in April last year, as a consequence of this reform that WAF is doing.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to raise a few issues with regards to the Report in particular, and I note here the issue of ISO Standard. It is noted in the Report that in 2019 (I am looking at Page 4 of the Report), WAF's National Laboratory had undergone the final assessment for ISO, et cetera. It goes on to say that we are now awaiting an endorsed submission from the assessment body certifying the micro-biology testing as an ISO-certified laboratory.

The reason I am raising that here, Mr. Speaker, is that, we understand that ISO Standard sets the standards on everything and in particular here, I am referring to drinking water. The Reports says that it was not quite certified yet. I am not sure whether the Honourable Minister is going to tell the House whether that has been corrected or not, because if it still has not been, then that is a matter of concern, particularly because the Laboratory is an essential element to determine whether we are drinking cleaning water or not, whether our people have access to clean drinking water.

May I say also that perhaps, they should consider that this Laboratory also look at water samples from the rural areas, not only where there are WAF treatment plants supplying water to the urban and peri-urban areas because I think what we will find is that, rural people drink a lesser standard or I suppose we can say, lesser clean drinking water for the fact that it is not treated like the water that people in peri-urban and urban areas drink.

I need to raise that here because this is one of the issues that was noted by the Committee about the Laboratory being consistent with ISO Standards or certified as ISO Standard, thereby guaranteeing the rights that is enshrined in the Constitution for the people in Fiji to have access to clean drinking water.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues also that I would like to raise here and this has always been a prevailing issue in the past with regards to WAF, is the issue of intermittent supply. I hope that the Honourable Minister will find in his strategy that he has now put into place as he has mentioned today, that intermittent water supply is going to be less consistent than it is today, and that there should at least be a quick response to the communities whose water supply has been interrupted.

This is a daily occurrence, it is actually a norm, Mr. Speaker, and if anything at all, the lesser even, people would like to have water in the tap and then if water is not available, then water should really be supplied to the people in the shortest possible time, so that they can continue to enjoy water which is something that is actually guaranteed for them under our laws.

So, whenever water or clean water does not reach the people, it means that the people are being deprived of the right that has been enshrined for them. So, therefore I wanted to raise those issues, particularly, with the Honourable Minister today through this intervention, Mr. Speaker, that amongst the many complaints by our people, I know this is going to take a long time to do and we accept that, many of these problems had been there for ages but that should not be an excuse, it should not be an excuse going forward.

Water perhaps is the single most essential element of daily living in a family. It should be where the priority of services should lie, it is more important than electricity. I suppose it is as much important as the clothes that people wear and also a roof over their head, and in that order, water should always be something that should always be made available to the people and whenever that is not possible, I hope that the Government or the proper authority will build capacity to be able to make that better and at the moment unfortunately, that is not happening, Mr. Speaker.

Perhaps just as the last note that I would like to raise here, Mr. Speaker, is that the Committee had raised concerns about the debts that were accumulated by WAF because of water bills that were unpaid for many reasons and it amounts to so many millions of dollars. This is an important issue.

Whilst it is a right for us to receive drinking water, people also have an obligation to pay for their water bill and when they pay for their water bill, they need to pay for a correct water bill for the amount that they have used and so capacity really should be built that it is fair on the institution, particularly the WAF that is providing the services to the people on behalf of Government, and it should also be fair to the people that are enjoying these services so that things like debts that are owed to the Service should be paid when it is due because these water rates are important so that Government is able to develop water services in Fiji by these monies that we all have to pay. Yes, it is a right but we also have to pay.

I hope that they will correct that in the Strategic Plan that the Honourable Minister has just announced and I hope that you will see in the not-too-distant future a break from the intermittent water supply and that we are able to get water consistently on our taps as it is the right to everyone in Fiji to enjoy, and hopefully it is not going to be a fight all the time between the customers and the Authority to fight them from the water which they are entitled to under their rights in the laws that govern our country. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I am going to be very quick, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a couple of points. And we can see from the COVID-19 Budget Response that we still have allocations for water carting, in particular for rural areas and also the areas that Honourable Lt. Col. Tikoduadua had referred to.

Yes, he is absolutely right that when the Public Works Department (PWD) was actually reformed, works had already been done prior 2007. Unlike Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), the transition from Department of National Roads (DNR) to FRA, there was a lot cleaner way of doing it and there was a lot of legacy issues that, in fact, spilt over into the new organisation which is WAF. Therefore, there is this issue about having a very large and overburden of bureaucracy that was actually inherited through the Department of Water and Sewerage into WAF.

Those issues did actually continue and I would like to re-echo the sentiments of the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure that the current Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in fact, has also personally inspired the utmost confidence because he has probably been someone who, in a very quick span of time, identified some of the structural issues that need to be addressed within WAF. I mean, we have people holding Regional Manager jobs and other senior positions without even having an engineering degree or engineering certification.

People who are holding senior positions are required to have specific skill sets. Electrical engineers, people who are supposedly in charge of the electrical works at WAF because they have a lot of generators, did not even have basic certification in those areas, and they were made known and

were given managerial positions. So, now, a lot of those positions have actually been advertised and Minimum Qualification Requirements (MQR) have been put in.

In fact, we have seen now some very good, young bright people come up the ranks. In fact, some of them are studying at the University of the South Pacific doing their Degrees, whilst they are also working with WAF. So, this new CEO is actually investing in the staff and the right staff, and I think that is critically important.

On the issue regarding the project workers, I mean, there is a situation we had in many Government Ministries and Departments where people who are supposed to be employed on project basis continued to work for decades and would appear that the projects never ended. Now, there is a lot more rationality to that in the sense that we are having the right people.

A lot more outsourcing now needs to be done which will mean that there is a lot more funding available for the private sector, which means that a lot more employment will be created because when you actually have people working within the civil service or those kinds of departments, there is no incentive for them to actually complete the project. This is why year-in year-out we see a lot of projects, sort of, go in from one year into the other financial year because there is no incentive for them to finish it. When they are actually been outsourced, then people have contracts, they know they will get paid for it and then they will move along to the next project.

So, I think what the new CEO is actually doing is working with the current Board which we really thank them for their insight to the period of hand-holding. We know that a number of matters are also before FICAC in respect of some of the corruptions that took place, whether it was procurement or all sorts of other things, for example, managers closing valves so that they could get trucking companies to come out and deliver water and there is someone getting cut from it, or sometimes just workers shutting off the valves so they can work overtime to get some more money. So we need to employ the right people with the right salaries so they do not go off and engage in those kind of shenanigans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a cultural change taking place. Honourable Lt. Col. Tikoduadua has highlighted some of those issues and, of course, they are being addressed. And I think with this new CEO who actually is very good, we have also seen from the Ministry of Economy perspective, we are now getting a lot more realistic budget submissions been given to us.

There is no overzealousness in saying, "We can do this project, this project, this project", when they actually do not have the capacity to do that. So we are now working with a team from the new WAF, who are actually giving us correct information and are able to make their decisions on projects based on the capacity within the organisation and also outside in the private sector to ensure that we do not go out and just get all these money for the budget but actually are unable to deliver.

Yes, as has been highlighted, this Report obviously goes back about four or five years now, and we will find that in the next report in respect of this past years or so, that a lot of significant changes actually have been made for the better. Thank you.

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

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, the Honourable Sanjay Kirpal, to speak on his Right of Reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments to make. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote to note the content of the Report.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- 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 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE FIJI ASSOCIATION OF SPORTS AND NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE 2017

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

Parliament debates the Report on the Annual Review of the Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee 2017 which was tabled on 1st April, 2019.

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

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

HON. V. PILLAY.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (FASANOC) was established in 1949 and achieved International Olympic Committee recognition in 1955.

Apart from being responsible for entering Fiji representatives into the Olympic Games, FASANOC is the organisation responsible for the co-ordination and management of Fiji Teams to the Pacific Mini-Games, Pacific Games and the Commonwealth Games. It also has a major role to play in directing technical assistance funding to its affiliates in the areas of coaching, athlete development, sports medicine and sports administration.

The agency managed to achieve its objectives in the year 2017. Some major achievements are the:

- Implementation of its Resurgence Agenda 2017, focussing on capacity building programme for the National Federations;
- Delivery of 12 Oceania Sports Programme courses and workshops on sports administration, particularly on the review of the constitution and strategic planning; and
- Development of coaches and strength and conditioning and team managers.

As a Commonwealth Games Association, FASANOC hosted the Queen's Baton Relay on November 2017. FASANOC worked in collaboration with the Fiji National Sports Commission and the Fiji Sports Council in celebrating sports excellence through the Fiji Sports Award by recognising sportsmen, sportswomen, young and upcoming athletes, administrators, technical officials, coaches and those behind the scene.

We commend the tireless work of FASANOC in inspiring the people of Fiji through sports excellence by developing, protecting and promoting sports participation and excellence. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the mover of the motion. The floor is now open for debate. You have the floor, Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to speak on the motion by the Honourable Viam Pillay. As we all know the role of FASANOC is crucial, given its responsibility of providing capacity building to coaches, administrators, athletes and volunteers around the country. As stated in the Report, Fiji has good coaches and administrators, but most lack people management skills.

Sports have a critical role in nation building by encouraging lifelong participation in physical activities that harness healthy lifestyle for all. As we all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, NCDs is rife in the country, and the promotion and development of sports play a key role in preventing NCDs, thus ensuring that we have a healthy and productive population.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has, over the years, prioritised sports development through the provision of operating grants to sporting bodies, upgrading of sports facilities and hosting of international sporting events. Government has contributed an average of around \$7.7 million over the years through National Budgets and these investments have generated economic spin-off for the country.

The economic contributions to the economy have been through remittances from people in sporting activities, which is approximately \$18.4 million annually, sports grants from overseas to \$10.3 million and contribution to our foreign reserves by approximately \$28.7 million. Although these figures have been monitored as coming through the banks or from registered foreign exchange operators, it does not include funding that sporting personalities send through mail or friends which is not captured by the Reserve Bank of Fiji. We should also acknowledge the multiplier effect that these figures have had on our economy.

There are also returns on investments, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from hosting international sporting events in Fiji. Government's contribution in hosting last year's Super Rugby match in Suva was only \$2 million. We generated an economic return, including broadcasting, of \$19 million. This signifies that investment in sports is not waste of funds, but an investment that generates positive economic returns.

Government stands ready to support Team Fiji, who will be representing our country in the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021 and encourages different sporting associations to prepare and submit preparation budgets for eligible athletes and teams for consideration in the 2020-2021 National Budget.

Based on those remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I, therefore, support the motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his contribution to the debate. I give the floor to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the Committee for this Report. I would just like to talk about two issues that were raised in this Report, one of which is lack of finance and the other is the strengthening of the voices of the athletes' programmes and the recommendations of the Committee.

The first one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is on page 6, and this is the lack of finance and I really want to speak very briefly for the so-called minor sports and two sports that I have been very involved with and interested in over the past few years have been rugby league and boxing. These are the two so-called minor sports, maybe not so much rugby league now but in the days when I was involved as a club manager, it was indeed a minor sport. But boxing, as you know, Honourable Speaker, has represented Fiji very proudly at the Olympics Games in Rio and this is one of the sports that really, really needs some financing.

The next issue is the difficulty in engaging volunteers and meeting timelines. We know right now with what has happened with COVID-19 and *TC Harold*, the volunteers who offer their services out of the love the sport are going to find it even harder to do what they do because of the love of the sport. So I am hoping that in the next budget, FASANOC will receive more funds for these two particular issues which are, again, engaging volunteers and meeting timelines and also the lack of finance in particular for the so-called minor sports. Again, I also thank the Committee. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for her contribution to the debate. Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports, you have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just want to add on to what the Honourable Prime Minister has said just now, and also a with a few comments that appeared in the 2017 Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the partnership between Government and FASANOC goes a long way. FASANOC has always been grateful for the funding they receive from Government to fund Team Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FASANOC's operational costs is met from the proceeds of its business arm and the International Olympic Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government provided a total of \$3.5 million to Team Fiji for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and from this total budget, around \$3.1 million was distributed to individual sporting bodies as preparation cost. I really do not know where Honourable Qereqeretabua is getting her views on the assistance of these individual sporting bodies because all those who are registered with FASANOC do get funding from the Government grant. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics has been postponed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on capacity building for national federations, I have been informed that FASANOC Sports Education Commission is committed to the professional development of all its athletes, administrators, team officials, coaches and volunteers.

On Item No. 3, I have been informed that the Sports Federation put a lot of importance in their four-year development plan which generally fits in with Olympics calendar and funding.

On Item No. 4, the Fiji National Sports Commission has a very good working relationship with FASANOC. From last year, there has been better coordination, not only between FASANOC and Fiji Sports Commission but also with the Fiji Sports Council and the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we, as a nation, continue to get a better grip on the pandemic and once we begin to map a road out of this crisis, we will be talking to our major sporting bodies and sporting organisations on ways to revive and restart Fiji's sporting competitions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will, no doubt, be impacted by the global slowdown but we must be prepared to continue developing pathways towards going back to full strength on the sporting front.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, I now give the floor to the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, the Honourable Viam Pillay, to speak in reply. You have the floor, Sir.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON.SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE - INQUIRY INTO THE HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE SERVICE

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move:

That Parliament forms a Special Committee under Standing Order 129 to conduct a holistic inquiry into all aspects of health and medical care service and delivery at our public hospitals and centres and the Committee shall comprise the following:

- (1) Honourable Dr. Salik Govind (Chairperson);
- (2) Honourable Alexander O'Connor;
- (3) Honourable Jale Sigarara; and
- (4) Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua.”

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad to speak on his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

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

Before I go on to the motion proper, Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister for Health, Dr. Aalisha Sahukhan and Dr. Jemesa Tudravu for their work in addressing the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I was especially very impressed with the way the two doctors spoke with clarity and detail, and I think it was very reassuring for the people of this country.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, before I go on to the motion, I want to add one more thing. This morning, Mr. Speaker, I learnt that one year from the mysterious death of the American couple, David and Michelle Paul, their families, I am told have not heard from the Honourable Minister for Health or anyone from the Ministry on what caused their death. If this is true, Mr. Speaker, it is of concern. In my view, it is simply unacceptable and I do hope that the Honourable Minister communicates with the family so that they can have some peace of mind and bring a closure to this tragedy.

Mr. Speaker, this motion was conceived before the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic but I think the motion is still very relevant and perhaps, even more relevant, given the planning that we are going to have when we reopen international travel to our shores and the sooner, the better.

Mr. Speaker, if I may say that it is a sad and unmistakable reality that there is a serious deterioration of our health services and medical care. Our extremely poor health service is a blight on our nation. There is no other way to put it, Mr. Speaker.

Go to any hospital in the country and you will see the pathetic conditions! The physical condition of many hospitals is shameful. There has been no improvement, despite us in the Opposition raising this each year.

Our hospitals, Mr. Speaker, should never run out of essential medicines or basic equipment, such as syringes or blood tests. I need not go into examples because there is an endless list of grievances that we receive daily and our colleagues in the Opposition, and I am sure some Honourable Members on the Government side also receive complaints.

But one thing is for sure, Mr. Speaker, when relatives and friends of patients admitted in hospitals have to take beddings, dressings, bandages, et cetera, then something is drastically wrong. But why are we even experiencing healthcare fragilities and that too during a pandemic like COVID-19? The answer is simple, Mr. Speaker, Fiji's healthcare system fragility predates COVID-19 pandemic.

Repeated ways of structural reforms that we have had has not created an improved level of healthcare services in both, public health and clinical services, despite some minor bumps in the last 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, all of us know that health is a basic human right internationally and constitutionally. Our health to GDP ratio remains below regional WHO standards at 4.9 percent. Our health to total budget ratio is nine percent, again, well below international and WHO standards.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 targets will be a stiff fiscal and national development exercise. Additionally, the health and economic impact of COVID-19 will dramatically affect the marginalised rural and those below and around the poverty line in the next few months. The inequity in fiscal distribution will create economic chaos.

Mr. Speaker, the public health impacts are already visible. We have already had outbreaks of dengue and leptospirosis which are already a matter of concern. Typhoid could surface in not too distance future with hygiene matters unresolved in rural areas of Fiji.

While we may have enhanced awareness that is cleaning, poor follow-up at community level with major public health constraints drags us back into the quagmire.

Mr. Speaker, to illustrate the gravity of the situation, I will outline many issues at Fiji's major hospitals, particularly CWM Hospital. The clinical services is a matter of a great concern and this is why, I hope the Honourable Minister for Health explains to us why these fundamental problems are crippling the delivery of quality health and medical care.

Based on the information that we received, collaborated with the stories of hospital patients and those who were denied proper care and diagnosis, we are raising issues that necessitate the formation of the Committee. And we do hope that this will bring to Parliament and also inform the Ministry of Health better to deal with those services.

Mr. Speaker, first, let me highlight diagnostic services, such as radiology, which is often people without x-ray reagents and films. The CT and MRI machines occasionally break down and become non-operational. Why has this been happening for a few years now, Mr. Speaker? Does the Ministry not stock software and do fast-needed urgent repairs? Do they not undergo six monthly servicing? These are questions that the Honourable Minister would like to address.

We are even told, Mr. Speaker, that urgent cases are selectively referred to the private sector for such diagnostic tests and reports. I was also astounded to learn from one patient that the MRI report has not been received, even after 18 months when it was conducted. These issues Mr. Speaker, had been raised in this Parliament on many occasions and I had personally done this since 2014.

Second is the general pathology laboratory. We are told, Mr. Speaker, that it ran out of reagents in January 2020. And test in the area of serology, endocrinology and biochemistry could not be undertaken as per the clinician's request.

Several of the large laboratory machines, we are told, needs servicing and this is a prerequisite for them to operate smoothly. Was a budget allocation for Government procurement drastically cut by 66 percent? That is a question the Honourable Minister could address. Why are clinicians working without substantial laboratory support?

I even know of an incident, Mr. Speaker, when towards the end of last year after *TC Sarai*, blood donors answered a call to donate blood to a patient urgently needing transfusion. They had to be turned away because the blood bank, they were told, had limited supply of blood storage bags.

Third, Mr. Speaker, the National Sitology Laboratory for cancer screening has been broken down, we are told. Is it operational now? We want to know this.

Is a modern sitology analyser procured in 2013 now non-operational for cervical cancer screening? Was this equipment not procured to improve methods of screening and increase the testing load to 50,000 annually from the projected current screenings of 20,000?

Fourth is, the situation is likewise great in all paramedical areas without reagents, consumables inclusive of dental services. The question remains, why does such a situation arise when each budget showcases the presence of at least a million dollars for the maintenance of imported technologically equipment and the need to put in place post-warranty service agreements, allocations for reagents which are equivalent of software, to run technology separately provided for any budget, and we have noted that.

Fifth is that the burnt-out Laundry has not been commissioned. Outsourcing is being done as an option, but we understand that no cost analysis has been undertaken. We are told that the local private company is attending to the laundry at much greater cost, and no costing analysis is available.

Sixth, Mr. Speaker, the National Dialysis Centre, we are told that the Ministry of Health is paying \$12,000 per month as rental since 2018, or around that, budget period for a non-operational facility for the last two years. If this is the case, it is gross wastage of finances Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Minister told Parliament on 17th February this year in response to a question by Honourable Qereqeretabua and a supplementary question by Honourable Viliame Gavoka that the Nephrologist working on the project had resigned, and the Ministry has recruited someone from overseas who would arrive in six weeks' time.

Obviously, more than three months have lapsed since that assurance, there is apparently no sign of that, but here, Mr. Speaker, we can give the Honourable Minister the benefit of doubt because of the travel restrictions and the person from overseas may not have arrived. But the question is, what about paying rent for an empty space at a rate of \$12,000 per month which is located in Nadera?

In February, the Honourable Minister said that Government needed to be absolutely sure that those patients coming from a family income of less than \$30,000 per annum paid only \$75 for one session of dialysis treatment and that is why they were not subsidising it in the Central and Western Divisions. I think this is a totally ridiculous explanation, in my view.

Seventh, Mr. Speaker, no additional dialysis units established anywhere. Consumable items procured in 2017-2018 are now probably close expiring because of non-action by the Ministry, because of the resignation of the only qualified Nephrologist and that too for a reason, and non-arrival of the expert from abroad.

The local Nephrologist had resigned within the first three months of 2019. Are we to accept that it took the Ministry a year to identify someone from abroad, despite kidney dialysis being a matter of life and death?

Eighth, Mr. Speaker, CWM Hospital-based Dialysis Units. We were told piecemeal repairs are done locally. The Honourable Minister should answer, if only one Unit is operational out of the four Units, and that would essentially means, Mr. Speaker, only 25 percent operational capacity.

Ninth is the CWM Hospital operating theatres. We were told that there are nine theatres in the East Wing, one Eye Theatre and three Theatres in the West Wing. We must know that if all 13 operating theatres are fully functional because late last year, a breakdown of air conditioning storage of equipment and lack of medical consumables were making most Theatres non-operational. It is important, therefore, Mr. Speaker, for all Theatres to be fully operational to ensure that there is no backlog of cases.

Tenth is cardiac laboratory, angiograms, stenting, pacemaker insertion, is a shortage of equipment and medical consumables impacting this important clinical capacity? That is the question I want to put to the Honourable Minister and also if we agree to the committee, the committee should look at that.

Again, lack of reagents medical consumables, un-serviced and un-repaired equipment naturally make the medical staff very uncomfortable, and they cannot raise concerns for fear of victimisation and mind you, Mr. Speaker, I am aware of this.

Eleventh is the standards of hygiene within the hospital environment. We have raised this before, but let me repeat some of those. Public toilets, rest facilities are below any public standard and smelling, broken sinks and taps and no toilet paper, the portrait of toilet, wash bath, door tied with an intravenous tube as was highlighted by Honourable Tikoduadua during the last year's Budget, Mr. Speaker.

Twelve, Mr. Speaker, was the Public Health Act 1934 not sent for review and updating in 2012 and 2013? Perhaps, the Honourable Attorney-General can explain why it is still perhaps, quarantined in his office.

Mr. Speaker, only nine days ago, we (myself and Honourable Tikoduadua) were at the CWM Accident and Emergency Centre to visit NFP's second longest serving President, Mr. Raman Pratap Singh, who took his last breath in front of us. We saw for ourselves how stressed the situation and

the environment was, and we realised all these hard working doctors, nurses and staff who were, in a way, very tense.

But a decent work environment Mr. Speaker, can help. A stay free environment will help, availability of adequate lifesaving equipment will help, even a fresh coat of paint and clean polished tiles will help, and when you enter the accident and emergency entrance.

Mr. Speaker, outside there are big potholes that you cannot even walk through some of those. I hope the Honourable Minister is aware of that and he will take some urgent steps to deal with it. Simply, the availability of basic medical needs will boost the morale and confidence of our health professionals.

Mr. Speaker, I have not even touch the state of other hospitals and health centres, especially the Public Private Partnership (PPP) between FNPF, ASPEN Australia to manage and provide health care medical services with the Lautoka Hospital and Ba Mission Hospitas.

Mr. Speaker, in this Parliament, I had warned the Honourable Attorney-General at that time that Public Private Partnership is a tough one. Lautoka Hospital, once the pride of our nation and appearing on Government calendars, I remember, a gift from the British Government post-independence is now as good as only the walls of a building. I spent two nights in Lautoka Hospital, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you the situation myself, first-hand experience.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- They are not even running it, what are you talking about?

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I am not talking about them running, I am saying what the status now is.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Oh, thank you, I thought you are

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Gone are the well-polished and shiny-tiled floors, simply gone are every single bit of hygiene, health and medical care facility that used to lead the way for our healthcare delivery.

The new Ba Hospital still remains closed and we were given some timetable before, Mr. Speaker, I forgot about the actual timetable but I think we are well past that, and I hope that, that Hospital which was built as a new Hospital is opened soon. So, the question here is, why are we neglecting our healthcare and medical services, Mr. Speaker? Why are we putting our health professionals under severe strain due to lack of clinical diagnostic equipment?

We may be paying our doctors and nurses well and that is a credit to this Government, and we commend them for that, but the successful outcome of a medical treatment they induced is far greater and in conformity of the respective as a health professional himself, the Honourable Minister perfectly understands this and he knows the importance of the enabling environment, the facilities and the equipment that these professionals need to do their work properly.

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 may have taught the world the new normal way in terms of socialising would be, but we still have to learn about what decent health and medical care should be and ought to be, especially in the present days when those who can afford the best care privately overseas cannot do so. I mean, for once, Mr. Speaker, the reality has hit us and it is important for us to realise how critical it is for some of these advanced equipment to work all the time.

For many who can afford, whenever there are signs of any serious illness we can take our insurance, buy a ticket, fly overseas and have the test done there. However, for many people, this is not an option and right now, even for those who have insurance and the money, they might need these facilities at the CWM Hospital. Therefore, the pride of our ordinary citizens, Mr. Speaker, is much more crucial than what we sometimes think, and the message is very clear.

So, this Committee, Mr. Speaker, is not about making allowances, as I heard the Honourable Prime Minister say in the case of another Committee. It is not going to be a waste of money, or of any political gain. It is a Committee, Mr. Speaker, that will bring out issues and let us deal with it properly and in a timely manner. It is about the betterment of the healthcare and medical services delivery.

The Honourable Dr. Govind is a health professional himself, Honourable O'Connor is the Assistant Minister for Health, Honourable Sigarara is also an Assistant Minister, Honourable Dr. Ratu Lalabalavu is not here so I am not going to suggest his name, but Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua comes from a family, whose mum was a reputable nurse practitioner and understands the situation with respect to health. So, this is really not a political gimmick but a genuine attempt to arrive at real and meaningful solutions collectively.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I like interjections if they are witty and sensible, but my colleague, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture's interjections are such a nuisance that they are not even worth pondering on.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is not a political gimmick but a genuine attempt to arrive at real and meaningful solutions collectively, because this is what working together is about; protecting the interests of the people. I sincerely commend the motion, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad for his motion.

Honourable Members, we will suspend the debate on the current motion whilst we deal with the Suspension Motion. Before I call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament, the purpose, of course, is to comply with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times and I will allow this Suspension Motion to be moved.

I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As set out in today's Order Paper, we still have to complete Schedule 1 on the continuation of the motions for debate and, of course, Schedule 2, thus the request to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today to complete the remaining items. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Does anyone wish to take the floor to speak on this motion?

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have no further comments to make.

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

Question put.

Motions agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, what we will do now is, we will adjourn for afternoon tea and then we will open the debate after that, so those of you wishing to speak, be ready.

We adjourn for afternoon tea.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.29 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.23 p.m.

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE - INQUIRY INTO THE HEALTH
AND MEDICAL CARE SERVICE**

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off before afternoon tea. The floor is now open for debate on the motion. Honourable Dr. Govind, you have the floor.

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- Honourable Speaker, Sir, I rise to contribute towards the motion moved by Honourable Professor Prasad on an inquiry into the health and medical services. Before I give my comments on why I do not support this motion, I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank all healthcare professionals, especially those who work in the frontline of health services to prevent and control the COVID-19 pandemic. They have done a great job and I am sure that they will continue to do so as long as this pandemic continues.

I would also like to thank the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services for his great leadership in bringing the multi-stakeholder approach to fight against this pandemic. During this pandemic, the Honourable Prime Minister has demonstrated to the rest of the world of how important it is to give political commitment to our health issue of such a global nature. His leadership has been admired and his timely decisions have saved Fiji from further suffering due to this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, coming back to Honourable Professor Prasad's motion on the inquiry into the health services and why I do not support this motion, firstly, the Honourable Member should know that when you appoint someone as the Chair of an important Committee, you should, at least, have the courtesy of discussing the issue with him or her on the appointment.

(Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. DR. S.R. GOVIND.- You had discussed with me this morning and said, "You are the Chair", but what I am saying is that you should discuss the substance of the motion.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. S. GOVIND.- If Honourable Professor Prasad had done this previously, maybe he will be able to save the time of this august House this afternoon.

The review of health services is a very complex issue, Professor Prasad. While considering the review of the health services, we have to take into account a spectrum of things starting from health promotion, disease prevention, early diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation. The health system is not only about diseases, drugs, doctors and nurses, it covers service delivery issues at primary, secondary and tertiary level.

We have to know more about health human resources which not only comprise doctors and nurses, but other paramedic staff, health information system which is an essential component of health service delivery, medical production technologies, vaccines, health financing, leadership and governance issues. Thus, any comprehensive review of the health services need multiple skills of reviewers, and the current Committee which only consists of politicians does not qualify to do such comprehensive review of the health services.

Planning of this review is still not appropriate in the midst of the global pandemic and at this time, Fiji is doing well in contributing towards the prevention of a further outbreak of the virus here. At this time, limited resources should not be wasted on reviews but put to good use for the improvement of services which we already know.

Thus, in view of the above, I do not support the motion and thus, I cannot be the Chair of such a Committee. Thank you, Honourable Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to make my contribution on the motion that is before the House today and to support the motion as tabled by my leader, the Honourable Professor Prasad, on the Select Committee of Parliament to conduct a holistic inquiry into all aspects of health and medical care service and delivery at our public hospitals and centres, and the Committee shall comprise Honourable Members as listed in the motion.

Mr. Speaker, I have always been passionate about our health services and more so particularly, during this term of Parliament as I have spoken out on many occasions on my observations with regards to the health services and the medical services in Fiji today. And I base my observations and my critics of the system on my own personal experiences when I do go to different medical centres for my own medical check and also when I visit relatives and friends who are admitted in our private hospital, the CWM Hospital and Korovou Hospital, in particular. Also, my wife who is a former nurse holds a very special and intimate attachment to the nursing profession and, of course, whose friends today remain in the frontline of our health services, providing essential services with love and care to our people of Fiji.

I do not try to be critical to be personal, no! I try to be critical because I was taught that if you are critical and objective enough to point out the issues that affect that particular system and weaken it, that it would help to strengthen it and make it better. I hope that my critics about the health system is treated in that regard.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it speaks highly of why I support this motion that is before the House because looking at the health system in this very short period (I am talking about 12 months ago and even slightly before), I have personally witnessed a degree of deterioration in our health facilities. I have witnessed also the lowering of the morale of people who work within the health fraternity. I am talking here about the doctors and nurses. Not very far back, we learnt from a very senior doctor who had just left the Service, make recommendations about the public health system in Fiji and how it can be helped which is on public record. I think it speaks volume of the need to be able to relook at the whole health system in Fiji from a totally different perspective.

Now, I am saying, Mr. Speaker, I think the Opposition on many occasions have tried to bring motions like this to be able to offer alternatives to the Government, to be able to give them alternatives as a Member of the House together, providing recommendations and ways that Fiji can go forward to help solve this problem, and it is not trying to personalise it. We offer recommendations about infrastructure, health, shipping services, et cetera, in the hope that Government will have that sense of humility to accept that this is truly happening in Fiji.

There is no reason to raise anything in this House if it has no merit, there are merits for it, and I hope that by that regard, that when such a motion is being given, allowing the opportunity for both sides of the House to work together and come up with recommendations to try and help the

Government to do its duty, that Government will not say, “No, we are doing it by ourselves, that we know everything, that everything is alright.” Mr. Speaker, it is not, it is not alright.

As I have said, I visit the CWM Hospital for my own purpose and as alluded to earlier by Honourable Professor Prasad, we were at CWM Hospital to farewell one of our former party presidents who passed away at the A&E. And I witnessed with concern the entrance at the A&E and I took pictures of it.

To be honest with you, Mr. Speaker, my telephone is full of pictures with problems with our hospitals, particularly CWM Hospital. I have not posted anymore photos because the last time I had raised this issue here, the Honourable Minister said that maybe I should go and raise those issues with him. I was hoping and I want to do that, but the opportunity has arisen.

I was listening to my good friend, my fellow Standing Committee Member, the Honourable *Vuniwai* (Doctor) at the back saying why he cannot be part of this committee and I am saddened by that because I am sure he understands that there is an absolute merit in it. I am not going to come here again today, just to come and repeat everything that I have said previously because I am just imploring on Government today to recognise the fact that all is not hunky-dory, that the health system is suffering.

Mr. Speaker, the nurses in our frontline, health workers have been hailed as heroes in this COVID-19 war; the fight against this COVID-19 and absolutely they are. The least we can do for them, Mr. Speaker, is to make sure that the environment where they work brings out the best of them, brings out the best of their knowledge and ability to be able to freely exercise their work so that with this good attitude, they are able to help the people of Fiji.

Right now, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that nurses work silently. They are afraid to even come up, open their mouth, to say these certain conditions about their work are not in order. I mean, Mr. Speaker, let me say this again. Just a month ago, I went back to the same restroom, and I raised this and the Honourable Usamate said, “You really cannot base the budget of a Ministry based on the convenience facility.” I mean, this restroom speaks to me about the state of the concern and the care that the Government has for sick people and for health workers. That is what it speaks to me about.

Now, this door, Mr. Speaker, the only thing that was ever done about it was that the holes that actually had the doorknobs has now been patched with a small piece of wood. The door is actually blocked by the same block that was there, stopping the door from being closed. The nurse who is in that same toilet is unable to come out without pushing the door or shouting for someone to open it. We do not call them our heroes when we want them to be our heroes, when we want them to do the work, that we want them to serve the Government for, we should look after them.

The Honourable doctor spoke about the major sectors of the health services where money should go and the very different things that we, politicians, perhaps do not have the knowledge of, that only doctors should be reviewing the assistance for. But how can they review it if the political intention is not there to have it reviewed and made better.

Mr. Speaker, this flu tent I saw in Korovou yesterday, it has mud on the floor. I mean, Mr. Speaker, you know General Rommel in the Africa Front, he outran himself. He was exploiting his situation too much, he forgot to carry his fuel with him. His tanks were sitting ducks, he could not fire a round. Why? Because he thought he was too good running too quickly for the enemy that he forgot about looking after his own people.

Now, if we want the front-liners of our medical system and I am speaking here today and I want to raise this again, and I am raising it because the health system deals with the most vulnerable of our community and it takes love and affection, and for the people who deliver this love and affection for the recovery of our patients, we need to look after them. We need the best from them, we need to make sure, at least, our hospitals are good. X-ray films are there when they are needed. I mean, we forget about the patients, and if you go to SOPD it is a different story and that is where I go everyday.

I am saying here, Mr. Speaker, and I reiterate what I said earlier in a different motion before the House, a motion about the issue of the drug that is now and still infesting Fiji and killing our young people, our economy and our loved ones, that there is always a good reason to reach across - two brains is better than one. If you think you know it all, Mr. Speaker, you do not.

And I am asking Government today, please, take this olive branch. It is not good, the system is not good, and you need help. We are offering help, COVID-19 is going to make it worse. So, please, accept this Committee and I ask the Government to please look at it positively in that light without politics, just for the betterment of our health service. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, today I will continue to stand for this in the House because I am always a patient in the hospital. One day, hopefully, when I die, I want to get into a morgue that is actually clean, befitting my own status. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Deputy Speaker, you have the floor.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to speak on the motion on the floor. First of all, I must take this opportunity to thank our Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Health and his entire team for their continuous and tireless efforts towards containing COVID-19 pandemic. Today, we Fijians are alive, we are safe because of our leader's wisdom, his prompt actions, our doctors, nurses and each individual taking care of the wellbeing of us Fijians. *Vinaka vakalevu* Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Minister for Health and the whole of the medical fraternity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the problems mentioned by Honourable Professor Prasad is not a problem of yesterday or today, neither Fiji is the only country where we face these minor problems. I have seen improvements and I am very positive things will continue to improve. And, Sir, this is certainly not the right time to talk about polished hospital tiles when the whole world is fighting against coronavirus.

I do not support the motion on the floor, but before I take my seat, I salute all the doctors and nurses, all the medical professionals for their dedication and commitment, their care and their compassion.

I think, Honourable Members on the other side, who stood up and said that Government should clean the toilet and do the doors, instead of organising standing committees why do we not organise teams to go and clean the toilets, or assist the hospital staff to do the clean-up? We can do clean-up campaigns. We can organise that. I mean, I understand we can go in small groups and assist, instead of talking about formation of standing committees.

So, let us organise, not only us, but also those who are complaining that the Government should do this and do that. We will do it and we beseech that everyone should take this positive action or take ownership, take responsibility of assisting the whole of the Ministry of Health and

Medical Services, and the organisation. If you are complaining about clean-ups, please, think about alternatives. How can we assist?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is all I have to say.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank Honourable Bhatnagar for her contribution to the debate. Honourable Minister for Health, you have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- *Vinaka vakalevu*, Honourable Speaker. I stand to oppose the motion before the House, in my response as Minister for Health.

Honourable Speaker, it is very interesting because just this morning, the Editorial Column in the *Fiji Times* did a review and they said basically at random, they picked Fijians from all across the nation. And he asked a simple question, I find it very interesting because it is the same day that we are discussing this motion, “What do you think of the frontline medical team during this crisis?”

The first lady said, “I believe they are doing a marvellous job.” The second gentleman said, “They are doing a wonderful job.” The third lady said, “The bravest of them all, they are doing a very good job.” The fourth gentlemen said, “I think they have done a good job during the crisis.” The fifth lady said, “They are doing a good job and better everyday.” The last lady said, “Excellent service. Awareness programmes, superb, and I thank our frontline officers for their tremendous efforts to keep Fiji safe.”

Honourable Speaker, it is almost inconsiderate that Honourable Professor Prasad has chosen this difficult time to raise his motion to continue to apply pressure on the Ministry, while the Ministry is responding to a one in 100 years pandemic. We have reason to believe that this is similar to what the Spanish Flu was in 1918.

At this most difficult time, the motion is not considerate of the massive effort and commitment that the Ministry personnel are currently engaged in, and the many resources that they have at hand to support the normative functions of the Ministry of Health, the extra-normative functions of COVID-19 and the climate sensitive diseases that we have been hit with after these three cyclones.

There was a UNDP, plus (I think) USP or FNU study done a few years ago which said that because of climate changes and the fact that Fiji is smacked in the middle of some major cyclone paths, that climate-sensitive diseases is going to be something that Fiji will have to be content with, apart from COVID-19 and apart from all other things or diseases, such as leptospirosis, dengue, typhoid, diarrheal diseases, and there is really nothing we can really do about it.

We cannot change our coordinates, we cannot move away from the 180 degree meridian that we are on. We need to find a way to continue to crush, these are the things that we are faced with within the Ministry of Health.

As a Ministry of Health and as a Government, we are always in the spotlight. We receive feedback constantly, apart from the complaints line, now that we have a 158 COVID-19 line. On top of that, the public have mechanisms by which they can provide feedback into the hospitals and the health centres. They have our phone numbers, our email addresses, they *Viber* us, not only me but also the Assistant Minister and many other people within the Ministry of Health, and we are always transparent. We communicate with the public constantly on the health status of the country and what the Ministry is doing.

Honourable Speaker, in a way, what I would like to bring across today is, some of the things that have been brought forth by Honourable Professor Prasad, he is talking about some cosmetic issues that we are already doing and already changing.

I want to assure him that since this week, we have already begun on the \$750,000 Emergency Department renovations at CWM Hospital, and we were waiting for the right time. We could not do it at the beginning of the year because of COVID-19. Now, that we know that we have a handle on the disease, we now have a bit of space to be able to do it and that is why we are now doing it. That was budgeted from last year's budget.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Professor Prasad thanked me, Dr. Aalisha and Dr. Jemesa and I want to say to him today and also to the rest of Fiji, this is not a "me" show or Dr. Aalisha's show or Dr. Jemesa's show. The Ministry of Health has 6,000 staff and our young staff at the forefront are the people who actually understood what it is that is needed to be done to be able to get the job done. People like Dr. Solo in Navua, who works at the Isolation Unit, who needs to be isolated when the patients recover; people like Lice, the Health Inspector in Naitasiri; Sandhiya, the nurse in Lautoka; and Osea, the Ward Assistant at CWM Hospital.

These are people who believed in the cause and they believe that the Ministry of Health has embarked on this universal health coverage in ensuring that we are going to continue to protect the nation at large. It is not a cosmetic thing because if rugby was dependent on the fanciness of the jersey and not on the amount of tries being scored, then Fiji will never win because it is not about that, it is about the function.

One has to look at what is happening with COVID-19 around the world to realise that there had been first world countries brought to their knees. Italy, a second best health system in the world, brought to their knees. When you talk about health system, that is the second best in the world and they were brought to their knees because it is not about the cosmetics, it is about the whole comprehensive collaborative thing that needs to happen within health.

Honourable Professor Prasad talked about the Nephrologist, we do have the Nephrologist - Dr. Andias. Please, please remember that name. He is an Australian, fully qualified Nephrologist, who has been working for more than a month now. I see him on a regular basis because I go to CWM Hospital every morning, Honourable Professor Prasad. Also Dr. Yogeshni is in Lautoka providing nephology services. So, we have not lost a nephrologist, we have gained nephrologists.

There has been no respite to this Ministry for now. We had the measles outbreak in November. There were nations in the Pacific that suffered considerably and I will not name certain nations in the Pacific that suffered considerably.

I know for sure that in New Zealand about more than 2,000 New Zealanders in Auckland had measles. We also have a COVID-19 pandemic since January. Three tropical cyclones - *TC Sarai*, *TC Tino* and *TC Harold*, the flu season from February to May and the challenges with the COVID-19 restrictions.

With these responses, our resources had been tested and yet, we continue to deliver because we are supported and we have the political will of the Government of the day on our side. We have the Honourable Prime Minister, who was very interested. During this COVID-19, he was there at the Ministry of Health Head Office on a daily basis, with my senior colleagues in Cabinet on a daily basis, on Saturdays and Sundays coming up to the Ministry of Health, wanting to know what was happening. How can the whole of Government machinery support the cause? That is the interest,

that is the political will. That is the political will that I have never seen before in my 20 years as a doctor in the Ministry of Health.

We have also embarked on this additional fever clinics, the mobile fever clinics. There has been 830,000 Fijians screened in the mobile fever clinics - the most comprehensive public health campaign for fever screening ever done in any country in the world.

Massive clean-up campaigns. We have had only 18 COVID-19 cases; none were admitted to Intensive Care Unit (ICU). I have said it before and will say it again, some of them got quite sick. They were managed effectively by our people on the ground, people who are able to stay because we have been able to retain our staff because we have increased their salaries.

It is extremely ill-advised now to put further pressure on the Ministry by conducting an audit at such a challenging time as this. And I have seen over the last few months since last year this barraging of the Ministry of Health done by Honourable Professor Prasad and his colleagues in one particular day.

This is the time when we need support, not barraging of our staff, not trying to reduce the passion that they have; the passion that Dr. Solo has, the passion that our nurses have, the passion that our Ward Assistants have. This is the time to support them. Make it even worse, even before the Budget was called, I was getting messages from my colleagues - doctors working within the Ministry of Health saying, "Are we getting a pay cut?" I asked, "Who said that?" They said, "It is out there. It is in the NFP website, we are getting a 35 percent pay cut." I said "Please, please, do not believe that."

That was the same Honourable Professor Prasad who put in their website 35 percent pay cut for those 6,000 workers within the Ministry of Health, not including the nurses. Now, he stands here today and says, "It is for review." I thank the doctors, and these are the same doctors and nurses that he wanted to cut their pay by 35 percent, and he is saying that they feel bad.

Honourable Tikoduadua says, "The nurses feel their morale is low", the same Party that wanted to cut 35 percent of the salaries of doctors and nurses, 35 percent! They wrote it in their website, and I want Fiji to know that the National Federation Party wrote, "Pay cut of 35 percent for all civil servants, including the same doctors and nurses and ward assistants that are there fighting the cause.

If they come today in the midst of COVID-19 to come and say, "We feel for them, their morale is low", you made their morale low!

(Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- You made their morale low!

Honourable Tikoduadua, your Party made their morale low by putting in your website, "A 35 percent pay cut."

(Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- The strategic plan will be a rolling plan.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry has continued over the last years, building on the platforms that had been down from before. They conducted a broad evaluation of its services and formulated a comprehensive strategic plan to address key issues.

The output is the Five-Year Ministry of Health and Medical Services Strategic Plan 2020-2025. I am talking recent now, based on the platforms from what has been happening from before, that is well-informed and harmonious by the Government's 20-Year National Development Plan (NDP).

I want to say that these plans is not something that I come up with, these are plans that have come from the people on the ground. They actually talked about it, on what is needed to be able to provide a better service within this geographical area in which we serve, noting the pathologies and the type of diseases that we have.

They participate, they come up with a plan. We give them the vision; a healthy population, they have come up with a plan that they know that we can be able to use and guide ourselves as we take this nation forward in protecting the health of this nation.

The strategic plan is a rolling plan, which means every year we review because we need to be agile. That is something that Dr. Takeshi Kasai said, the Regional Director of World Health Organisation (WHO). He said, "During this time, you have to be agile as a Ministry of Health". You have to be agile because of COVID-19 and all the types of roles that your Ministries are doing, especially around the normative functions and the extra-normative functions.

We have undertaken a review of our clinical services and implemented measures to address service quality and patient safety. I talked about last year about how we rolled out the decentralisation of our clinical services, especially the specialist services doing specialist clinics, closer to our people wherever they are. During the COVID lockdown, we had Rakiraki Hospital and Sigatoka Hospital operating as Hospitals and Sigatoka continues today to operate as a hospital, doing emergency operations for our people within that area.

We have recently completed a supply-chain review, and we are ready to implement the recommendations of that supply-chain review. We have been very fortunate during this COVID-19 era to have freight flights with Fiji Airways, bringing back medical supplies to us. We have had a significant look at our human resource and workforce needs, and looked at the administration and corporate support, the clinical areas and public health.

So with administration and corporate areas, we have incorporated human resource processes that have improved recruitment and appointment. We have appropriate people appointed to critical roles, and has improved compliance and productivity and certainly the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) in place has been very helpful for that.

We have more exposure to specialist training and we also have specialisation of nurses progressing well. Doctor numbers back in 2016 was 474. I kept on saying that when I started there were about 200 of us. In 2016, it was 474 and by the end of this year, we will be crossing nearly a thousand, we have more than 800 now. Public health, greater opportunity for training and higher qualifications.

Honourable Speaker, our scope of services have improved dramatically and widely. The Ministry provides a wide range of complex clinical services which continue to expand. The services and personnel of the Ministry operate under 45 current legislative frameworks which govern people, systems, services, work processes, internal and external engagements, programmes and productivity.

We also have policies for different service provision, different strategies that are adopted for different needs, different work areas require different expertise, tools, equipment and infrastructure, different quality assurance methods and different capacity-building programmes and varying legislations to comply with these. A one-of inquiry will never be able to do justice to the scope of services within the Ministry of Health. More likely, if done, would be very superficial and obviously a waste of money and resources.

Honourable Speaker, I have said earlier that we have embarked on this universal health coverage. We continue to expand our scope of services but more importantly, value-add all the 200 facilities and more, that we have right across the country. We are expanding our clinical services over the last few years and with the introduction of specialist services and I have named these before - neurosurgery, urology, paediatric surgery, laparoscopic surgery, cross-linking corneal treatment and many others, these expansions are the product of a constant review of the disease load and services mode that are appropriate and sustainable.

We are all aware that last year, the Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) was certified as the only ENT service by WHO in a Small Island Developing State and in a developing nation. We have the establishment of the Level Two Laboratory Facility at the Fiji Centre for Disease Control, which has vastly increased our diagnostic capability in the public health arena, and we are increasing outreach services to the community, again, taking specialist health services closer to the people.

Honourable Speaker, our recent efforts show our resilience. The response to measles have been applauded in Fiji and in the global health scene. WHO has commended our effort. We had 31 cases in total, no deaths and more than 500,000 Fijians were immunised - more than 95 percent of the target population.

In response to COVID-19 in spite of all the challenges, Fiji has been exemplary and has been invited on a number of international forums to date to share our experiences and how we have responded, knowing the resources that we have. We have had 18 cases, we have had no deaths and we have about 83 percent recovery to date.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry has proven that it can step up and deliver. It has taken and shouldered both, the normative functions and the outbreak response simultaneously. And I have just begun by talking about what was seen in today's editorial section of the *Fiji Times*.

Honourable Speaker, overall, we want to achieve a comprehensive population level, service level and systems level in the health system that contributes towards our goal of achieving universal health coverage. Our ongoing efforts in protecting Fijians against disease, supporting them in their efforts to lead healthy lifestyles and seeking to eliminate the risk of unhealthy environments.

Conducting an inquiry will be a duplication of the current work that we do and the advice that our people on the ground are already giving us on the way that we can manoeuvre forward, and it is a waste of valuable resource that can be directed to other priorities. We are already progressing in many areas and have plans in place to further improve health, medical care and service delivery.

The motion raised by Honourable Professor Prasad is, therefore, not supported. I thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Health for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for this opportunity and I thank the Honourable Minister for his reply. I have a few points I wanted to point out, Honourable Speaker. The first point, yes, the *Fiji Times* asked the question about the frontline team but if the *Fiji Times* survey had asked, “How do you feel about the health facilities?” I think the answers would have been very, very different.

Mr. Speaker, the motion nor my NFP colleagues cast any sort of shade on our medical personnel, quite the contrary. They have praised our medical staff and our health workers.

The example you have heard, Mr. Speaker, talked about facilities. And I have to stress that COVID-19 is not the only challenge facing our health system. There are many, many reasons, many other illnesses and diseases that were here way before COVID-19, which give rise to the very reason why we need such a Committee.

Just like Honourable Tikoduadua, I am saddened that a gentleman that I really thought would make a fantastic Chairman said what he did today. I have had the honour of serving in the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defence with Honourable O’Connor and Honourable Dr. Govind, it saddens me to hear what Honourable Dr. Govind said today.

We cannot compare Fiji to Italy, Mr. Speaker, we absolutely cannot. We have heard many times of our hope to be part of this Trans-Tasman Bubble with Australia and New Zealand, and if we do not fix our health facilities, I do not think that is ever going to happen.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Sorry, Mr. Speaker, it is just empty cans.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Mr. Speaker, I visited the Vunisea Hospital two weeks ago.

(Chorus of interjection)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- And the Honourable Minister spoke about safety of patients being paramount. Honourable Minister, please, go and visit the Vunisea Hospital because I think they really, really need your help.

Our Prayer in this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, is talking about, “without fear or favour”, and I think that there is a lot of that - fear. We have talked about these issues many, many times and in the February Siting, I raised the point with the Honourable Minister, talking about nephrologists. The Honourable Minister replied but still we have not seen any action over there.

(Hon. Dr. I. Waqainabete interjects)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Alright.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- We will check again.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Honourable Speaker, again, as Honourable Tikoduadua said, we are offering the olive leaf. We get people ringing us, I have had orderlies from the CWMH ringing me, complaining that they have had to lift urns filled with hot beverages on steps when the elevators have failed. Why can they not tell that to their Minister? Without fear or favour, perhaps there lies the answer to that question.

So, I just want to wrap up, Honourable Speaker, by just saying how saddened I am that during this time when it would be great for both sides of the House to work together to help, to assist and we are not trying to score points here, we just want to make sure that all our people have the kind of health services that they deserve. 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, just a few points to add to what the Honourable Minister for Health and the other Members have contributed, I do not think any country in the world can claim that they have the perfect health system, in particular, when you provide health services through a public health system. In other words, people who go to the hospital actually do not have to pay for the full cost at the very least for the services they receive.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I remember just a few years ago I was in New Zealand and one of my children actually got ill. We had a car, in fact, before we even entered the building, the parking at the Hospital actually cost us in excess of \$15, just to park our car before we actually get to the door of the Hospital. Can you imagine if you would start charging even 50 cents at the hospital around there, if you have people parking their cars there? Obviously, that sort of thing does not happen in Fiji. The entire cost of public health system is borne by the taxpayers of Fiji, through the public health system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just to contextualise what we are talking about also in some other points, I think Honourable Professor Prasad, the mover of the motion, did say that this motion was drafted before the COVID-19 phenomena arose and actually came to our shores. That is why I was saying that perhaps, the motion could have been better placed for some other time because we are actually facing very unprecedented times in respect of what the Honourable Minister for Health has highlighted in the past couple of days regarding this particular phenomena that has hit Fiji and all the other parts of the world. I mean, in America, they have tens of thousands of people who are actually dying, in many countries, people are lying in the corridors, morgues have not been working, et cetera. Yes, we need to compare ourselves to those countries.

The reality of the matter is, as we have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, no health system is perfect. There are a number of legacy issues. But I think one point that is critically important and the Honourable Minister for Health had highlighted is that, whilst some places may not necessarily have a good-paint job, it does not mean that the surgeons who are working there do not actually provide first-class service.

Yes, it is nice to get a good-paint job, nice to have the building looking very nice and these are the areas where we are working on. In fact, we just had a discussion about a week and a half ago, about the kind of work packages we will be putting in place because many of these issues in terms of the infrastructure, issues pertaining to whether it is a paint job or whether it is the corridors or

whether it is the walls, that we want to put together various packages, in particular in the next budget to get all of these works done once and for all.

A lot of the times, yes, a salubrious environment is critical. Yes, we understand. When you walk into a place and it is painted well and the lifts are working, the steps are working and the tiles are not coming off, people do feel a lot more confident. There is no doubt about that. No one is taking that away. But the reality of the matter is that, today, the types of advancements that have taken place in the public health system in Fiji has been tremendous.

We also had numerous population movements. Some people say that half of Vanua Levu and Labasa is in the Suva-Nausori corridor. We now have, for example, a new Maternity Ward in Makoi. We have the Nadroga/Navosa Sub-Divisional Hospital that is, hopefully, going to be commissioned very soon. They would be performing surgeries. There will be x-rays, almost in the middle of Viti Levu. We have the upgraded Lautoka Hospital's Operating Theatre and X-Ray Department, the upgraded Labasa Hospital interior works and, of course, the upgrade of the CWM Maternity Unit at a cost in excess of \$50 million. We will have 125 new beds. The New Wing, you can see the works that have been carried out which will be built into international standards.

We are, of course, dealing with a lot of legacy issues. Many of extensions in the CWM Hospital, built over the past number of decades, actually were not even built to compliance standards. You cannot go around the bend and push the trolley or the bed around some of the corridors because it is not built to those specifications. The designs that were done by the Public Works Department (PWD) in those days are now lumped with a design of a hospital that is not catered to hospital standards. These are the kind of issues that you have to deal with.

Yes, when they built the toilet, they actually put timber in the toilet, built by the PWD days so obviously the timber will rot. All of these things need to be replaced. You have to understand when you actually discuss infrastructure, you have to understand the genesis of it all. Where did it emanate? How did it emanate?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, it has been highlighted that we have had challenges. Of course, as you know, doctors and nurses did receive significant pay rises, including people working in the other ancillary services. As you know and as the Honourable Minister for Health would tell us, a lot of these doctors are now coming back to Fiji. Former Fijians who left Fiji because they were not appointed on merit or bypassed or had felt that they were not given the right amount of salary, a lot of them now feel it is attractive enough.

We also, at the same time, had a very high attrition rate of a lot of people, for example, operators, x-ray radiologists and others who left for offshore. They were very good, but they will receive better salaries there - the shortage of those people in ancillary services in places like Australia and New Zealand. So, we are competing with those markets in those services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to just again address the notion. Honourable Professor Prasad mentioned the Public Private Partnership and he said he had warned us, et cetera, but the reality of the matter is that, it has not taken off at all at the moment. There has been some preliminary work being done, so you cannot judge it.

Of course, COVID-19 has now come and replaced many of these arrangements and we will actually see how those arrangements pan out. The reality of the matter is that, many countries in the world, many relationships, many contracts, we have seen force majeure clauses are being used. So these are some of the issues that we actually work through ourselves.

The other point I wanted to highlight again is in terms of the fundamental basis of the motion. If we read the actual motion itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is delving into the area of what we call the executive control where the executive actually makes decisions on policies, et cetera, not Parliament itself.

Honourable Tikoduadua said, “We are offering the olive branch.” Olive branches and things like that are spoken about in political issues, but these are not political negotiations. When you talk about medical services, it is not a political issue, you say it is not a political issue but the language you use is political. The language being used to further this motion is political.

We do not have any issue with you. You are in the Opposition, we are in Government. We do not have any political issue with you, there is no point for us to go and sign some kind of treaty, “This is an olive branch so let us have this motion on the public health system and then we can sign this treaty.” It is not! So this is why I question the rationale behind it. Therefore, it is political in nature.

When you bring motions, when you try and bring petitions that actually address issues that are addressed by the executive on a day to day basis, you have a Minister. Honourable Tikoduadua said that he used to post messages on his *Facebook*, he no longer does that and he can raise issues directly with the Minister. We can do that, you can make submissions.

Honourable Professor Prasad felt it fit to accuse Honourable Pillay or question as to why was he giving chicks or agricultural produce to various people because he thought that they were getting it simply because they voted for FijiFirst and not giving it to people who did not vote for FijiFirst. Ludicrous as the suggestion was, but the fact is he had the ability to write to him and he had the ability to respond to it. I understand the Honourable Minister for Agriculture did respond to it.

Similarly, the issues pertaining to health, you can make those kind of queries, you can make those suggestions. So you do not actually need a committee *per se* to look at it. Suppose the Chair does not want it and if you just mention it to him in passing during morning tea time, it does not mean that he is going to take it.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I question the rationale of it and the timing again. As I said to Honourable Professor Prasad that perhaps the timing is wrong, but I think it is more to that. There is a, kind of, philosophical basis behind it and I think it has got nothing to do with the fact that we need a committee.

The reality of the matter is, yes, Honourable Dr. Govind is a doctor, Honourable Ratu Lalabalavu is a doctor, the Honourable Assistant Minister is not a doctor, Honourable Sigarara is not a doctor, Honourable Qereqeretabua is most certainly not a doctor, and as we know and the Honourable Minister for Health would also tell you that many of the issues pertaining to the hospital system is to do with administration.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been a culture previously of having doctors run hospitals and a doctor maybe a very good doctor but not necessarily a good administrator. In the same way, we have economists who may not necessarily be very familiar with commercial and financial work - the workings of day to day functions. Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are the kind of things that we need to understand.

I would like to, once again, highlight that in the COVID-19 Response Budget, we had an additional funding of \$40 million that has been allocated to the Ministry of Health, and you will see that in Head 50. In fact, for the Honourable Minister for Health and his team, a lot of the

procurements actually have had to be done on an urgent basis, bypassing various tender processes because the urgency was so critical that we had to go through those processes as allowed for under the Financial Management Act and the Financial Instructions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, I would like to just question those things and I urge the Opposition that if there are issues, you need to address them. Yes, in the past, for example, equipment was bought and perhaps, not the right equipment, in the same way we discovered in the IT Department. The IT Department then was procuring computers that people who were actually accessing those did not understand it. They were buying computers that were end-of-life products that did not have the right warranty periods. Similarly, these are the legacy issues that we are going to deal with. Sometimes you have certain suppliers that actually do not want to supply to this part of the world, so these are hard-core realities.

A committee is not going to go and solve and say, “Let us buy this MRI machine.” A committee would not be able to go and say, “Alright, there are five potholes there, let us go and fix that up.” It is the Minister for Health, his team, the Permanent Secretary’s responsibility to address those operational costs. It is not the responsibility of the Legislature to address issues of the Executive. If there were some major issues where you have a commission of inquiry, where you have some minor catastrophe and Parliament is seized by that matter, you have seen in some jurisdictions, that is what happens when they have a particular committee regarding that.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to say that we all are concerned about the health system in Fiji as we all should be, in the same way, we are all concerned about the law and order situation, in the same way we are concerned about the economic situation, about the agricultural situation, about the natural disaster situation, about the infrastructure situation; all of us as Members of Parliament have that responsibility. But there are particular ways and means to be able to address that through the right channels. So if we are truly focused in ensuring that everyone will benefit from our minds being put together, and as I agree with Honourable Tikoduadua that more than one is better than one, I most certainly can tell you that the Honourable Minister is not the only one who sits there and concocts all of those things, there is a whole team of people.

In this COVID-19, we have WHO, the UN agencies and various other agencies, all working together, providing their input and that is what we are doing. In the same way, the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure works with a whole team of people. They have experts giving us advice. We take advice, we put in our own ideas, we have our own committees and we do public consultations. So, please, do not insult our intelligence by saying, “You people all sit there, you think everything is right.” We have never said that and we have never claimed that.

In fact, we have been very, very outward reaching to all the different stakeholders, perhaps we do not reach out to you directly. I remember doing it to you in 2008, but you refused to come on board. But you were quite happy to do it earlier on post-2000, I do not know the difference then but I would like to say that we actually do not support this motion at all. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I now give the floor to the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, the mover of the motion for your Right of Reply.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am actually not surprised by some of the responses that came from the other side, particularly from the Honourable Minister for Health himself.

Let me begin by saying that I think there was a lot of playing around with the terms and the words that we would like to use, but I think there was a lack of understanding of the motion at hand.

The motion actually talks about a holistic inquiry into all aspects of health and medical care service and delivery at our public hospitals and centres.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the whole health system in this country and the reason why I said that this motion was conceived before the COVID-19 pandemic was to lay the point on the table that perhaps, this is even more an opportune time for us to look at the health services.

This whole thing about Executive responsibility, I mean in most Parliaments, Mr. Speaker, parliamentary committees, we are not suggesting committees from somewhere outside of Parliament, out of nowhere, we are suggesting a parliamentary committee.

Parliamentary committees, Mr. Speaker, does not mean that you have a big pandemic or big catastrophe before you set it up, so it is the same as when we talked about the inquiry into the drug issues in this country. There is no understanding of where this is coming from. The police are dealing with it in their own way. Unless you have a holistic inquiry of what is happening in terms of the whole drug industry and where it is coming from, who are users, what are the ages and what is the demography, you need that holistic inquiry.

A parliamentary committee, Mr. Speaker, is a normal feature of Parliament. It does not mean that it is going to be a big waste of resources. This is a Government which is probably the most expensive Government in the history of this country. There is so much wastage, we have talked about it. The Auditor-General's Report from 2007 talked about it. So, when they talk about wastage of resources for a committee, that is cosmetic. They do not understand that the committee is not going to be an expensive affair. So this idea of wasting of resources and the cost of having a committee is neither here nor there.

There were couple of things that was said by a number of speakers from the other side. Let me first start with Honourable Dr. Govind. Mr. Speaker, before I respond to him, this is one Government that is actually afraid and fearful of negative publicity, so whenever the Opposition raises issues which sound negative, either they trivialise it by saying, "It's just toilets, just some paint, do not worry about it and we are going to fix it." But for the people out there, Mr. Speaker, these are very important things.

Let me just read Honourable Bhatnagar as saying, "People should go and clean the toilet. Why don't you go and do this?" I will read you a text message, Mr. Speaker, from Savusavu. This is someone listening to our debate. He says, "Savusavu Hospital is worse. Men's ward toilet, shower area, pathetic. Toilet for the general public, you cannot enter, so filthy. Thank you for raising this."

Now, I want to ask, does Honourable Bhatnagar want to tell this gentleman or whoever it is from Savusavu sending this message that they should go and clean those toilets?

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- I did not say that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is exactly what she is trying to say.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I remember, Mr. Speaker

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Point of Order.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in defence of Honourable Bhatnagar she did not say that. She was actually referring to a community-based cleaner. Everyone on this side of the House understood that. I think Honourable Professor Prasad should withdraw that. She did not say that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I think that is a ridiculous Point of Order.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- In fact, Mr. Speaker....

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- My point is, Honourable Professor Prasad should not mislead the House nor mislead the people of Fiji about what Honourable Bhatnagar had said. That is a good Point of Order and it is not ridiculous.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Member had made a statement saying there should be a community cleaner. That is what I and everyone heard. He is saying one other version but I do not think there is any difference. You have the floor.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that this issue has come in Parliament again, I want to remind Honourable Bhatnagar that once on her radio station show, I was talking about the Lautoka Hospital and how it was so dirty. She actually asked me and said, “Why don’t you go and clean it yourself?” So she is on record saying that, Mr. Speaker.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Professor Prasad has a tendency of lying always because I did not ask you to go and turn it. If you really want to hear the story, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you can allow me, I can tell the public what happened on that day, they are watching this live proceedings.

HON. SPEAKER.- Are you asking?

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR.- Honourable Professor Prasad told me that there were birds nest in Nadi Hospital and the Honourable Minister for Health should go and clean it. And I asked Honourable Professor Prasad, “If you are a responsible citizen, why couldn’t you get it done and then come here and tell me, that I am a responsible citizen and I have cleaned it.” I would have given him a salute.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, we are not talking about what you talked about over there. We are talking about this motion and this debate, so all of you, stick to the motion and the debate.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for reminding the Honourable Member.

Again, Mr. Speaker, let me say that this kind of response, this ability of the Government side to trivialise issues brought by the Opposition to this Parliament is just becoming a very prominent feature of their responses and I am not surprised that those kind of comments are coming from the other side, especially from what Honourable Bhatnagar said.

Let me come back to the Honourable Minister's response. I think he said a number of things and he used the word, 'cosmetic'. He said, "Honourable Prasad is raising cosmetic issues."

But, Mr. Speaker, when I talk about diagnostic services, intermittent breakdown of radiology services, x-ray services, CT services, MRI services, three weeks ago, someone was diagnosed with breast cancer. When I found out from the CWM Hospital at that time, the MRI was not working, those are serious issues and not cosmetic issues Mr. Speaker.

When we talk about General Pathology Laboratory, National Pathology Laboratory for cancer screening, these are not trivial issues. When people go there and they find that out, then they come to us. I know they go to the Government, sometimes they go to the Government first and when things do not happen, then they come to the Opposition as the last resort. Sometimes they come to us first and it is our responsibility, Mr. Speaker, then to bring these issues to Parliament. And we do not expect the Honourable Minister to say all these are 'cosmetic issues'.

These are not cosmetic issues. If we are talking about CWM-based National Dialysis Centre, or if we are talking about cardiac facilities, particularly clinical capacity, these are not cosmetic issues, these are serious issues.

As I have said before, parliamentary committees is not about overriding executive authority. I have said that in many Parliaments, sometimes on very small issues, if there is enough concern about a particular issue, Parliaments do set up committees and it is not about politicians politicising the issue. In fact, as politicians, we are the lawmakers. We are the people who make policies, we are the people, especially those in the Opposition side, hold the Government to account on the policies they make. And that is why, anything that comes to Parliament from the people is not trivial, it is not cosmetic. These are issues that people bring to us. So to label the motion as cosmetic, Mr. Speaker, I think is side-tracking the issue.

The other point that the Honourable Minister made, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the resources being diverted, Parliamentary Committees, as I have said earlier, is not about huge amount of resources. There is massive wastage that we can point out in Government that can be dealt with. So to use this argument, that to set up a Committee that Members of Parliament from Government and Opposition is going to be a waste of resources and time, I think it is designed to deflect the attempt to address these issues in a systematic manner.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is not just out of the fluke, this motion was brought into Parliament. As I have said, this was conceived before COVID-19 and it was brought to Parliament because we have had this constant barrage of complaints and issues brought to us as well, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Minister was saying that I have been discouraging, I have been writing about issues in the newspaper and this was before COVID-19. So this is not a new thing and we feel that despite us raising all these issues over a period of time, we ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of order.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, he has, again, misled Parliament. His latest barrage at the Ministry of Health was recent within COVID-19, it was not before COVID-19.

That is in the *Fiji Times*, we can bring out the *Fiji Times* and see. You have just written it recently within the last few weeks, within COVID-19. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- I think they are reading the *Fiji Times* too much, Mr. Speaker, which is a good thing.

Those continuous lies, Mr. Speaker, about me suggesting a 35 percent pay cut...

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Speaker, I did not lie. Within the last few weeks, he has again written some barrage against the health services in this nation. He said it was pre-COVID-19, it was not. It was within COVID-19. That is a lie! He misled Parliament. I did not lie, he lied.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, I am used to heckles and I think ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- The Honourable Minister is fast becoming probably a heckler-in-chief from the other side.

But let me make this again very clear, Mr. Speaker. As I have said, these lies that have been perpetrated in Parliament and outside Parliament by their friendly newspaper, *Fiji Sun*, that I suggested a pay cut for civil servants, Mr. Speaker, I have made this clarification very clear in this House. In fact, let me point this out.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- This is important, Mr. Speaker, I need to clarify this, because they made a big deal. This is in response to what the Honourable Minister said, Mr. Speaker, and I have the right to respond to that.

Well before the article in the *Fiji Times* that they quote, well before the COVID-19 Response Budget, the *Fiji Sun* ran an article about Nemani Delaibatiki in his so-called analysis said, "All politicians should take a 30 percent pay rise." So that was the article.

Then the *Fiji Sun* ends up in my office with a set of reporters to say, "Honourable Prasad, what is your view about the analysis by Nemani Delaibatiki? What do you think of that suggestion?" So I gave the interview.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, whenever we give the interview to *Fiji Sun*, we always record it ourselves as well and in that interview, I said very clearly that no civil servants below the Director level should ever have a pay cut. That is what I said.

That interview, Mr. Speaker, was taken away by *Fiji Sun*. The next day, they did not write anything out of that interview. That video that was recorded of my interview with the *Fiji Sun* reporter, and I need to clarify this, was out on the *Facebook*. The *Fiji Village* ran a story and it was very clear.

Mr. Speaker, this is in response to what the Honourable Minister has said because he is misleading the people of this country and he is misleading Parliament.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You are worried about your vote.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- No, I am not worried about my vote, I just need to clarify this.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Professor Prasad, I think you have already made your point clear and I do not know why you are harping on the issue. You are doing your right of reply, then do that.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, it is just that I am responding to the lies that have been perpetrated by the other side.

Coming back to the substantive point, in the end, what we are seeing of this Government is any suggestion follow a parliamentary committee which is the standard practice in most Parliaments to raise issues, parliamentary committees look into it in a holistic way. So all the points that I have heard from the Honourable Members on the other side, I think except probably the Honourable Attorney-General who made some sensible points about what the Government was trying to do, all the rest of them were playing with the words and basically did not understand what the inquiry was all about.

So, I would urge the Honourable Minister for Health and I expected better from him, I urge him to see this as an important suggestion and I know they are going to go against it but if he feels that this is not the right time to have an inquiry, I would urge him to consider this in the future as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON.SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable mover of the motion for his right of reply. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

Motion is defeated.

HON. SPEAKER. – Honourable Members, we will move on to the next Item in the Agenda.

The first question will not be asked today as the Honourable Minister to answer this question is not here, so we will move on to the second question. (Inaudible)... your part, I thought it was the carry-over of your question from yesterday.

I give the floor to the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Replenishment of Overdrawn FPNF Funds
(Question No. 65/2020)

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

As per the recommendation of the International Monetary Fund in its Report (19/57) released in February 2019, can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament whether Government has any plan to replenish the funds already withdrawn by 180,000 Fiji National Provident Fund members post-TC Winston in 2016?

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

Just to contextualise this particular question, *TC Winston* which was in 2016, within 36 hours wiped off one-third of the value of our GDP. The Cyclone caused widespread destruction, impacting about 62 percent of Fiji's population, affected 540,000 Fijians and over 30,000 households, resulted in 44 fatalities, damaged almost 500 schools and 88 health clinics and medical facilities.

Widespread damage was also sustained to the agriculture sector, infrastructure and utilities, roads, bridges, jetties, Irish crossings, et cetera. When you have one-third of your GDP wiped off within 36 hours, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is no minor event, nor is it any minor feat to actually recover from that particular position.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government launched a number of initiatives, one of them, of course, included talking to the FNPF Board and the FNPF Board itself recognised, given that 540,000 Fijians were affected, that they should also provide some latitude in respect of people being able to access some funds from their general account, so they allowed \$1,000 per withdrawal. Given the urgency of the matter and the dramatic impact of *TC Winston*, there was hardly any bureaucratic processes to go through. So anyone who was a member of FNPF, the FNPF relied on their goodwill to make the correct representations, allowed them to withdraw up to \$1,000.

Many people withdrew the funds because they genuinely needed them. Some people withdrew those funds because they wanted to go and watch Hong Kong Sevens or buy a new fridge or sofa. The reality of the matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that about \$276 million was withdrawn from the FNPF post-*TC Winston*. Of course, it depended on the contribution or the amount available in their general account.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government also, as Honourable Members of this Parliament are aware, embarked on what we call the Help for Homes Programme in which we essentially funded \$127.8 million of rebuilding of homes. We spent \$234.5 million in rehabilitating schools, social welfare top-up of \$20.2 million, other rehabilitation from the economic and social sectors of \$97.6 million, which totals Government funding of about \$480 million, plus the FNPF pay-out of \$275 million. Then, of course, the insurance companies also paid out about \$189.4 million dollars. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that was the level of injection that took place into the economy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we have highlighted in the discussions in the past two days, as we have currently now where members when they do withdraw funds, can only withdraw from their general account, they do not withdraw from their preserved account.

The IMF Report that the Honourable Qereqeretabua refers to, which I have here, actually does not talk about replenishing the funds. What it does say and I would like to read from that particular paragraph, it says, "Pension savings used to mitigate the impact of *TC Winston* should be rebuilt," not replenished. There is a huge difference.

Then it goes on to say, and I quote:

“The Fiji National Provident Fund allowed 180,000 pension contributors to withdraw up to 30 percent of pension savings, about 2.8 percent of GDP. This measure was effective in mitigating the adverse impact of *TC Winston* on many households.

However, it is also important to lay out a strategy to restore these pension savings to ensure that contributors will eventually have access to adequate pensions, especially given that a large fraction of pension members have relatively low pension saving balances at present.”

So that is the whole paragraph and you cannot take it out of context.

The difference of replenishing, of course, from rebuilding is that, members themselves can rebuild the funds. And in anticipation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the first time any Government in Fiji (since the commencement of FNPF in the late 1960s, of course, which was an idea proposed by the late A.D. Patel, the former leader of the National Federation Party), we actually have where the employers are actually paying more than the employees. It always used to be 6 percent employees, 6 percent employer or 8 percent employee, 8 percent employer but for the first time we said, 10 percent employer, 8 percent employee.

One of the reasons we did that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was obviously for two reasons, I should say. One particular reason, of course, was to rebuild the stockpile of pension in the individual employee's accounts and the second reason was, by having a higher contribution to the pension fund, it does not actually come out from the disposable income of the employee. In other words, if we said to the employee, “You also have to contribute 10 percent”, the amount of money they will be taking home every week would be less. But here, we have the pension fund increasing but the disposable income not being affected for the employee.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just highlight the amount of FNPF contributions that have actually taken place. In 2015, the total contribution for the year through FNPF deductions was \$432.2 million; 2016 - \$480.6 million; 2017 - \$546.2 million; 2018 - \$599.9 million; and 2019 - \$652 million. Now, you can see that every year it is growing, obviously it means that there are more contributions coming towards the Fund for two reasons and one of them is because the rates of pension contribution has increased because of the 8 and 10 and secondly, more and more people are being employed. When you have more people employed in the formal sector, the rate of contribution obviously will increase.

Out of that \$652 million, Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$72.4 million was the additional 2 percent that the employers paid. And I can go back and look at all the other figures I have got here; \$66.7 million in 2018; \$60.7 million in 2017; \$53.4 million in 2016; and \$48 million in 2015 (additional amount because of the 2 percent interest)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is quite a lot of work being done. Of course, as the Honourable Member would perhaps know that one of the ways of also assuring that the would-be pensioners in particular, have a safe savings for themselves once they retire is the smart level of investments that FNPF actually makes because if FNPF actually makes smart investments then the allocation of that investment goes towards the Members' funds and, therefore, they have more money and I understand FNPF has, in fact, just announced it today. I understand some additional funding for those who are pensioners, not those who are currently not pensioners who are below the age of 55 but those over the age of 55, they have been actually given a certain return now for the COVID-19 response. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that addresses the issue. Thank you.

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

We move on to the next question and I give the floor to the Honourable Rohit Sharma to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Update on Fijian Made Buy Fijian Campaign
(Question No.66/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament how many licences have been issued to products and businesses under the Fijian Made - Buy Fiji Campaign since 2018?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Honourable Speaker, Sir, over the years, one of the main efforts of the Fijian Government, under the Fijian Made Buy Fijian Campaign, was to promote and raise the profile of Fijian-made products both, domestically and also internationally, through a national branding strategy. Under that branding strategy, there were categories - the Fijian-made, Fijian product, Fijian-packed, Fijian-crafted, Fijian-grown, Fijian-assembled, Fijian-designed, Fijian-sewn and the latest is Fijian organic.

From 2018 to date, Honourable Speaker, Sir, a total of 341 businesses have all been issued licences under this Campaign by the Ministry and this brings the total number of licenced businesses to 686 with 3,482 products having been registered under the campaign since its initiation in 2011.

Mr. Speaker, it is actually really heartening to note that 69 percent of the total businesses registered are micro, small and medium enterprises and 53 percent of those businesses are Fijian-crafted licences, meaning that we are providing market access and opportunity for ordinary Fijians, particularly women in the rural and maritime-based businesses, Sir.

Sir, just a couple of other things with respect to that particular campaign, at the moment, under the Fijian Made Buy Fijian Campaign initiative, we have actually strengthened it and we are trying to do some more with it, for example, the Campaign actually builds loyalty and it also builds national pride for the Fijian products. And the campaign helps to reduce our rising import bills and the country's negative balance has the same position over the years which is more so important now as we have started our recovery phase.

The Campaign actually keeps the money in the economy, Honourable Speaker, and it drives business in confidence and helps boost our public and private investment in the infrastructure, plant and machinery, et cetera.

The Campaign also, Honourable Speaker, is now more crucial than ever. We are able to reignite some nationalism in Fijians to buy Fijian products and support Fijian businesses, and our Trade Commissions and our Missions overseas are actively participating aggressively in promoting the exports of our Fijian-made products. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We move on to the next Oral Question and I give the floor to the Honourable Veena Bhatnagar to ask Question No. 68/2020. You have the floor, Madam.

Rates owed to Municipal Councils
(Question No. 68/2020)

HON. V.K. BHATNAGAR asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on the current rate arrears for all Municipal Councils?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir for giving me the opportunity to respond to the Honourable Member's question. The collection of rate arrears remains a major issue for all municipal councils around the country. Last year, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were two amnesty periods given to residential ratepayers to clear the principal sum with their respective municipal councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the total arrears at the end of December, 2018 was \$48.1 million. By providing rates amnesty to residential ratepayers, a sum of \$5.5 million was recovered bringing down the total arrears to \$44.3 million, including the interest at the end of December 2019. This year from January to April, the Council managed to collect \$1.96 million in rate arrears. As a result, the total rate arrears is now in the sum of \$42.4 million. This does not include the rates that still needs to be collected by December 2020. If we include the uncollected rates for the year 2020 then the total rates owed by the ratepayers is in the sum of \$56 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the collections from January to April 2020 has been a mammoth task. The Council managed to collect a total of \$21.2 million from the total invoiced amount of \$34.4 million. This is equivalent to 61 percent collection rate. The current rates for 2020 that is yet to be collected is \$13.1 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year Suva City Council rate collection is the highest amongst 13 municipal councils. Suva City Council collected \$13.8 million from a total invoiced sum of \$15.7 million which is 85 percent. Sigatoka Town Council stood second in the rate collection, 71 percent of the ratepayers paid their rates in Sigatoka.

Tavua Town Council's collection rate is 65 percent followed by Ba Town Council which is 64 percent. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Labasa Town Council collection rate is the lowest, only 24 percent of the ratepayers paid their rates for 2020.

Nasinu Town Council collected 35 percent of the rate which is \$1.1 million from expected \$3.1 million followed by Lautoka City Council which stands at 36 percent. Lautoka City Council collected just \$2.2 million from \$6.2 million which they were supposed to collect. That is my update on the rates that was collected by the Councils and the rates that are owed by the ratepayers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for the reply. We move on to the next question for today and I give the floor to the Honourable Selai Adimaitoga to ask her question. I am told that her question has been withdrawn.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- There is no problem about you withdrawing your question.

(Oral Question No. 70/2020 withdrawn)

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to the next question. I give the floor to the Honourable Viam Pillay to ask his question

Further Assistance – Laid Off Workers
(Question No. 72/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament as to what is the financial and operational future of Fiji Airways due to this COVID-19 pandemic?

HON A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, actually in the guarantee motion, we discussed a number of the challenges that are faced by Fiji Airways in respect of its financial outlay, at least, in the medium to long term future. It not only includes in the short term future, meeting up with its financial obligations, but also to be able to have the means to be able to pay that on a sustained basis. And, of course, as mentioned earlier on, a lot of it depends as to when international travel will commence because that is where Fiji Airways makes its revenue from.

Honourable Qereqeretabua mentioned about the travel bubble and I hope she was not intimating that if the committee did not sit, therefore, we should not be part of the travel bubble. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the travel bubble has a life of its own. One of the key important issues to get Fiji Airways up and running, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to give the confidence to members of the public with whom we will open the travel bubble up with. So if tomorrow the Australian Government says, “Alright Fiji, you are now part of the travel bubble with us”, it does not mean all the Australians will come rushing back to Fiji. In the same way, it does not mean that all Fijians who have got a visa to Australia will go rushing off to Australia, in particular, if you do not feel safe about COVID-19. That is the main criteria at the moment that people are using.

We have seen, for example, some airlines now try blood test as you get on. I just saw an article yesterday that Iceland is talking about opening it up to tourists and that on arrival, you do a COVID-19 test which they will pay for, and then if you are positive, they are still working about the isolation point of it, the quarantine as to who is going to pay for that.

Some countries are now proposing that you do a COVID-19 test prior to boarding the plane and upon arrival at your destination. Spain is now looking at opening up its borders again, but is concerned because Britain on the other hand is saying, “If you go to Spain and you come back, you have to go into quarantine for 14 days.”

Those are some of the very complex issues that need to be addressed through with the health authorities. Of course, it has huge ramifications for the cash flow of the airline. But we have to ensure that the national carrier stays afloat or keeps its nose above water and is able to swim because the moment we have an opportunity, we need to be ready to be able to start bringing people to Fiji and travelling out of Fiji also, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

One other point in question is about the financial and operational future. I would just like to delve a little bit on the operational future because I did not talk about this yesterday. As I had highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the key measures that we will be taking, of course, we need to use our A350s, the A330s and the Boeing 737 which is the older aircraft. But if god-willing, the 737s go away and the MAXs come online, which has actually about a 15 percent fuel savings, for us it is much a better aircraft. Secondly, they are very good in short turnaround trips - your Sydney's, Brisbane's, Auckland's, Christchurch's and Wellington's.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the way we fly the crew, their training will need to completely change now. Now, these discussions that masks will now be a feature of your uniform, and the actual mask may have your uniform colours. That is what some airlines are already discussing, in fact, Fiji Airways is discussing those kinds of issues already - how you check in, when you check in and how long before you fly you check in.

A number of the Standard Operating Procedures will all change. The meals you get on the plane will change. You will probably have disposable forks and knives, go back to that, because you cannot have forks and knives because you will be re-using. All of that will change. So the staff have to be completely re-trained and, in fact, this is just simply work in progress. A lot of it is through international learning and industrial learning.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, depending on how it pans out and depending on what the health authorities, IATA, et cetera, all these organisations involved decide, will the cabin crew be required to be trained in some sort of health regulations? Will they need to carry out swabs? Will the cabin crew need to do this? All of these is going to change. You will not necessarily get meals that will be prepared on the spot as in business class, et cetera.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the de-fogging of the planes, the complete wipe-down of the planes. As you have seen that, apparently the virus hides in all these different crevices in the aircraft. So every time the plane flies, passengers get off, you have to be able to defog it, wipe it all down.

Then, of course, recently, we just saw a couple of days ago about the social distancing on the planes themselves. I think it was Air New Zealand and someone wrote an article and complained that people were sitting right next to each other. So their airline decided or some other airline it was, that they do not have to do it, this is it and some are actually practising it. So all of these will change. It will have a huge impact in respect of your capacity-to-earn per seat will change. As we know, sometimes, if you are able to sell 10 more seats on business class, you can make a lot of money, but if you do not sell those last few seats, you actually do not make money. So all of the entire operations of Fiji Airways will change.

I would say with Fiji Airways aircraft, they have talked about de-fogging, they talked about the high efficiency particulate arresters as they call them and, of course, in terms of do you need training in respect of the ventilator equipment or the oxygen mask, et cetera, people need to be trained in all of that should someone get some form of attack.

Those are some of the operational challenges, Mr. Speaker, Sir, or the new norm. Many people are now talking that we will never go back to the norm but once the norm will not be the norm. In fact, there will be a new norm, and the new norm would be, at least, some people are saying 70 percent of what the old norm was, and that would become a reality.

In the same way at the moment, in the sector of the employment for pilots, pilots all over the world do not have jobs. In Fiji Airways, we retain all the services of all the pilots, but tomorrow if this pans out a lot more longer, you might find people going off and doing other things and your ability to be able to attract pilots and, therefore, there is more supply, less demand and the overall norm for pilot salaries may come down too. So these are hard-core realities as we see it.

Of course, it is all evolving, no one can say for certain what will be the operational features exactly. We are hoping at this stage and I would like to thank Parliament for having unanimously decided to support the guarantee, that this guarantee will see it financially stable or, at least, to be able to meet its obligations into next year. And god-willing, if we are able to get the bubble up before

then, we will not actually need to access all those loan facilities that we actually applied the guarantee for.

As we have highlighted yesterday, the ADB facility of US\$50 million, this is the first time they have actually lent in the aviation sector and we are very grateful for that. It was through some negotiations, but we will not actually have to use it, because at the end of the day, Fiji Airways will actually have to pay it back. So, Honourable Speaker, Sir, that is just a quick response in respect to that question. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Professor Biman Prasad, supplementary question.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- A quick supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister explain given what he described and I agree with him, I think there are lot of uncertainties in how everything is going to pan out in the next two or three months. Assuming that, given that uncertainty, what sort of scenario has Fiji Airways put out and whether the \$455 million guarantee that we have provided, and let us say that you need to use all of it, how many months can it be sustained and what would be the scenario after that?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this point in time, the presentation by Fiji Airways is that the \$55 million is essentially to carry Fiji Airways into round about May to June next year. That will, sort of, see them for, at least, another year, but they have different cash flow projections. For example, they have done calculations. If, for example, it starts in November and we have only 20 percent of the flights, then this will be our revenue or cash flow. If they say 30 percent, in fact they have worked out about 20 different scenarios at 20 different points in time, so we looked at all of that. So the worst case scenario is roundabout May or June of next year and we have to, of course, sustain this.

Fiji Link is flying, but as you know the revenue generated from Fiji Link is not much at all. Of course, there are still people employed in that respect. As I mentioned yesterday, out of the 1,400 odd staff, about 740 still have their jobs, some will be working five days a week, some will be working four days a week, some will be working three days or two days and some may be working only one day a week, depending on which area of the operation they are working in. For example, when we do the freight flights overseas, certain engineers are required, certain people who support that flight are required, so they will need to come work.

There are others, for example, with the pilots, they constantly need to have their certification ongoing, because we cannot have any of the pilots lapse into a situation where they need to be, again, retrained and it requires nine months of training. So those are some scenarios that we have built-in. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. We will move on. Honourable Members that is the end of the Oral Questions. There are no Written Questions for today.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

Suspension of SODELPA by Registrar of Political Parties

Honourable Members, before we adjourn, as you are all aware the Registrar of Political Parties has issued a notice pursuant to section 19 of the Political Parties (Registration, Conduct,

Funding and Disclosures) Act 2013. The notice clearly states that the Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) is suspended with immediate effect on 26th May, 2020 for a period of 60 days.

I now advise Honourable Members that subsequent to the suspension of SODELPA by the Registrar of Political Parties, I have legal advice on the impact this will have on the Honourable Members concerned:

- (1) The suspension of the registration of a political party has the effect of suspending that political party and all its Members from all Parliament Sittings, including from all Committees of Parliament.
- (2) This means that any such suspended political party and all its Members cannot participate in Parliament or in any of the Committees of Parliament.
- (3) Furthermore, the political party or any of its Members cannot be entitled to any remuneration or allowances from Parliament for the duration of the suspension.
- (4) During the period of suspension, Members of Parliament of the SODELPA Party, including Caucus staff are not permitted to access the Parliament premises.

Honourable Members, the Members concerned have been duly informed and that they are suspended from Parliament for 60 days with effect from 26th May, 2020. The suspension would be reviewed once the status of the political party is determined by the Registrar of Political Parties. That is the situation at the moment.

I want to thank all Honourable Members who are here for your contribution to today's sitting and for your forbearance. Time has moved on.

We will now adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 7.18 p.m.