

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 1ST SEPTEMBER, 2020

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 1ST SEPTEMBER, 2020.

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

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 31st August, 2020, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS 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 the live streaming of today's proceedings from the comfort of their home, their offices and mobile phones. Thank you for taking an interest in your Parliament.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, 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 Office of the Prime Minister 2017-2018 Annual Report –
Standing Committee on Justice, Law & Human Rights

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Office of the Prime Minister is primarily responsible for providing sound policy advice and support to the Honourable Prime Minister and his Cabinet. It also engages with international and regional development partners, Civil Society Organisations and the private sector.

In reviewing the Office of Prime Minister's 2017-2018 Annual Report, the Committee noted that one of the key achievements was the facilitation provided by the Office of the Prime Minister to the Honourable Prime Minister in his role as COP 23 Presidency that has made Fiji punch above its weight. It was also encouraging to note the Office's role in facilitating and conducting outreach programmes in local communities, which supports Fiji's efforts in mitigating the effects of climate change.

The review also highlighted a few pertinent issues, which the Committee discussed extensively with the Office of the Prime Minister and is covered in this Committee Report. These pertinent issues include, the:

- (1) Honourable Prime Minister's open door policy in dealing with complaints;
- (2) role of Executive Support Office in drafting speeches for the Prime Minister; and
- (3) Office of the Prime Minister's role in assisting with the COP23 Presidency and its programmes.

The Committee was also mindful of the requirements of the Standing Orders of Parliament with respect to the principles of gender equality. Therefore, as part of the discussion with the Office of the Prime Minister, it was encouraging to note how the principle of gender equality was reflected in the Ministry, beginning with one of the vital part of an institution, the human resources.

The Committee Report will also provide certain recommendations that the Committee has put forth for consideration by the Office of the Prime Minister. These recommendations include:

- (1) continued support to be provided to the Honourable Prime Minister's outreach programmes and Talanoa Sessions; and
- (2) continued support to be provided to the Honourable Prime Minister's role in taking the lead, in the efforts towards the mitigation of the impacts of climate change.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Honourable Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, namely: the Honourable Rohit Sharma, Honourable Dr. Salik Govind, Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua and Honourable Moses Bulitavu, for their deliberations and input, and the representatives of the Office of the Prime Minister for their cooperation, which assisted the Committee in its work.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend the Committee's Report on the Office of the Prime Minister 2017-2018 Annual Report to Parliament and seek the support of all Honourable Members of this 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.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

Consolidated Review Report - Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2008-2015 Annual Report -
Standing Committee on Economic Affairs

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to report to Parliament the Consolidated Review Report for the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2008-2015 Annual Report.

The Sugar Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF) was established in 2006 and produced its first Annual Report in 2008. It was established with the intention to provide research, development and extension services in the sugar industry. By national mandate, SRIF is responsible for the development and dissemination of information and technology, which could enhance productivity, profitability and sustainability of the sugar industry in Fiji.

The Committee visited the SRIF Headquarters earlier this year to be able to better understand the developments that have taken place since 2015. Honourable Members had the opportunity to meet with SRIF Officials, as well as visited some of its model farms.

The Committee, while deliberating, noted the need for strong collaboration between all stakeholders involved with the Institute, especially Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC), as well as acknowledges the importance of timely funding received by SRIF to facilitate their research and experiments.

Keeping in mind that SRIF is involved in developing new varieties amongst other important roles it plays, the Committee feels that SRIF must engage in vigorous outreach programmes to raise awareness and educate farmers on the various services provided by SRIF. They must also consistently educate, guide and motivate farmers on the benefits of diversifying into projects, like intercropping and its impact on soil health.

The Committee appreciated the key achievements over the years which included the commencement of technology transfer, setting up of Disease Control and Productivity Unit and the GIS pilot project. However, the Committee noted the need for qualified personnel in these specialised areas and recommended proper staff facilitation to be explored.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to all stakeholders for their valuable input. The Committee would like to acknowledge the Acting CEO of SRIF and his team for being prompt in answering the various queries and questions raised by the Committee.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report: the Honourable Deputy Chairperson, Honourable Veena Bhatnagar; Honourable George Vegnathan; Honourable Inosi Kuridrani; and Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau. 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 this Consolidated Review Report on Sugar Research Institute of Fiji 2008-2015 Annual Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to Standing Order 121(5), I hereby move a motion without notice:

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

Performance Audit Undertaken by the Office of Auditor-General –
Standing Committee on Public Accounts

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the Performance Audit undertaken by the Office of Auditor-General on the:

- (1) Management of Worker's Compensation Trust Fund;
- (2) Audit of the Social Welfare Scheme; and
- (3) Audit of the Fiji Procurement Office and Construction Implementation Unit.

However, the Committee also takes note of the performance audit that was also conducted for the Rotuma Government Subvention Fund - Council of Rotuma. The funds are allocated to meet the Council's operational costs, as well as the funding of development projects.

Given that there were no Council during the time of audit, the Committee had noted the Audit Findings and strongly recommend that the current Council takes note of the audit recommendations and take necessary actions in addressing those audit issues that were highlighted so that it is not repeated.

With regards to the other focussed audit areas, the Management of the Worker's Compensation Trust Fund is the responsibility of the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations; the provision of the Social Welfare Scheme is the responsibility of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation; and lastly, the Ministry of Economy which oversees the Fiji Procurement Office (FPO) and the Construction Implementation Unit (CIU).

At the outset, the contents of the Performance Audit Report on those three key audit areas were thoroughly examined and scrutinised by the Committee prior to the consultations being conducted with those relevant Departments as I have stated earlier. The consultations were carried out through interviews, collection of evidences and information from individual files, access to database and review of the individual Ministry's Standard Operating Procedures, and establishing whether compliance to the relevant legislations and regulations were adhered to.

The questions that were raised to those Ministries during the deliberation process were fully answered and the responses received were exceptionally positive. The Committee had proposed few recommendations for those Government Departments' takeaways, particularly on the audit-focussed areas that were highlighted by the auditors which need improvements.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts acknowledges the efforts and responses of those responsible Ministries and further recommends that Parliament takes note of the Committee's recommendations.

Furthermore, I 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; Honourable Vijendra Prakash; Honourable Aseri Radrodro; and Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa.

On behalf of the Committee, I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat for their timely support in the compilation and preparation of this Report.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

Report on the Annual Review of the Adoption Bill 2018 -
Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, adoption in Fiji is regulated by a piece of legislation that is more than 50 years old. Current practices and circumstances regarding adoption has made the current adoption law - the Adoption of Infants Act 1944, outdated and inadequate. Thus, an opportunity to better the current system has been realised by the Government of Fiji and the result of which is the Adoption Bill 2018.

The Bill is the outcome of the review of the adoption law by the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation with the assistance of the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Some of the main areas that the current Act lacked coverage on were:

- the finer details of the adoption processes, apart from the court processes; and
- other vital aspects pertaining to adoption, such as inter-country adoption.

The Bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights by this august House for review and scrutiny. This Report will cover the Standing Committees' role in

reviewing the Adoption Bill, to ensure that all due processes regarding the Bill has been followed and to also ensure that the provisions contained in the Bill would contribute to the achievement of the Bill's objectives.

An important feature of this Bill is that, it domesticates the Convention on the protection of children and co-operation in respect to the inter-country adoption which has been ratified by Fiji and is attached as a Schedule to the Bill.

The Act focusses primarily on the court processes for approving an adoption application and it does not address the adoption process as a whole, as a screening of prospective adoptive parents and the matching and placement of the adoptive child. Therefore, in line with the common plans and other common law countries, the Bill includes much more details about pre-court aspects of the adoption process and ultimately repeals and replaces an outdated Act.

Some of the pertinent areas which the Bill addresses are as follows, that the:

- best interests of the child concerned, both in childhood and later life, is made the paramount consideration in adoption law and practice;
- adoption is to be regarded as a service for the child concerned;
- children are protected and nurtured by providing safe, supportive family relationships intended to last a lifetime;
- effective and accountable practice in the delivery of adoption services is promoted;
- an Approved Adoptive Parents Register is kept by the Department responsible for Social Welfare;
- adoption law does not affect the child's birthright to any entitlement to communal ownership of land, communal access to marine resources and chiefly title; and
- adoption law and practice complies with Fiji's obligations under international conventions and other international agreements on adoption.

Apart from its own deliberation on the Bill, the Standing Committee conducted public consultations whereby numerous submissions were received from the general public. The Committee is extremely grateful to hundreds of Fijians who have given their submission.

The Committee, through the Parliament Secretariat and Research Unit, also looked at other jurisdictions that have similar setups to that which Fiji is aiming for by the introduction of the Bill.

The Committee in its deliberation also consulted the initiating Ministry and also the drafters of the Bill for certain amendments. Amendments were made to various Clauses and Subclauses of the Bill, and the amendments which were necessary have been made and marked in red in the copies of the Bill provided with this Report. The Committee also had roundtable discussions with the relevant Ministry with regards to certain Clauses of the Bill before finalising the Report.

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 Dr. Salik Govind, Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua and Honourable Mosese Bulitavu, for their deliberations and input; the Alternate Members who made themselves available when Substantive Members could not attend; the Secretariat; the public and entities who accepted the invitation of the Committee and made themselves available to make submissions and for taking an interest in the proceedings of the Committee and Parliament.

On behalf of the Committee, I commend the Adoption Bill 2018 to Parliament, with certain amendments to seek support of all Honourable Members of this august House for the Bill since it is

designed to have a positive impact on the lives of children, who are subject to adoption in Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, pursuant to Standing Order 86, I hereby move:

That the Adoption Bill 2018 (Bill No. 32 of 2018) be set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament on a future sitting day.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Standing Committee has now reported back and pursuant to Standing Orders 86 and 121(1), the Adoption Bill 2018 (Bill No. 32 of 2018), is now set down for consideration by the Committee of the Whole Parliament on a future sitting day.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources has given notice to make a Ministerial Statement under Standing Order 40.

The Minister may speak for 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 also 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 will now call on the Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources to deliver his Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

Water Disruption - Failure of the Automatic Transfer Switch

HON. J. USAMATE.- The Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of this House and people of Fiji, thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to brief the House on the events that had led to disruptions into the services of water to Fijians by the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) on 30th August, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fault was detected by the National Control Centre (NCC) at 10.58 a.m. on Sunday, resulting in the shutdown of all five raw water pumps that serve the Waila Water Treatment Plant. The fault was referred to WAF's mechanical and electrical team, who upon inspection discovered the burnt Automatic Transfer Switch (ATS) as the cause of the problem. The ATS was installed back in 2010 as part of outsourced works, which included the upgrading of the electrical components of the Waila Raw Water Pumping Station.

The purpose of the ATS is to provide an automatic changeover in the event of a power outage from mains power provided by the Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) to generate the power that is maintained by WAF. Those generators serve as a backup during a power outage.

Replacement of the ATS unit was completed on Sunday evening, just after 7.30 p.m. after which power to the Waila Raw Water Station was completely restored at 7.45 p.m. which allowed the Waila Water Treatment Plant to resume production to restore supply to affected customers.

The herculean efforts of WAF teams have resulted in the reduction of the period Fijians would have been without water. Such capacities have taken more than 10 years to build locally. Investigations into the root cause of the initial fault are ongoing and shall include an independent assessment which the Chief Executive Officer of WAF has already instigated. This action is being taken to ensure that WAF can take action to avoid similar situations in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government continues to invest millions of dollars to address all facets of water and waste in Fiji. These include but it is not limited to infrastructure, the extension of services in urban and rural areas, capacity building, the updating of master plans for each system and creating WAF as an employer of choice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Waila Treatment Plant is the largest treatment plant amongst the small island developing States in the southern part of the Pacific. It serves more than 50 percent of the population in the Suva-Nausori corridor in Fiji and the power outage resulted in a reduction of approximately 60 percent for the volume of water supplied to the greater Suva area. This impacted customers on the Nausori side of the Rewa Bridge, including customers living along Princess Road (from Dilkusha to Sawani) and customers along Kings Road from the Rewa Bridge up to Grantham Road, including Fletcher Road, parts of Nailuva Road, Nasese, Muanikau, Queen Elizabeth Drive and parts of Suva City.

Further, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the interconnection between the Waila and Tamavua Water Supply System allowed for the extension of the Tamavua System to cushion the impact of this unplanned shutdown. The Tamavua System was extended to supplement supply into the Flagstaff reservoir and parts of Namadi Heights that are serviced primarily through Waila. This is also an example of the systems improvements that have taken place over the years to minimise the impacts of shutdown such as this.

The Waila Water Treatment Plant has a treatment capacity of 95 mega litres or 95 million litres per day. However, due to population growth and rapid development within the Suva-Nausori corridor, water production has been increased up to 105 mega litres or 105 million litres per day to meet the growing demand in this corridor. The plant is maintained 24 hours per day and seven days a week and staffed by 11 water treatment plant operators and technical assistance.

In response to the burnt ATS, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a team of four experienced WAF staff under the supervision of the Team Leader (Mechanical and Electrical) had attended to the burnt ATS and were able to change and replace the damaged ATS within an eight hour window, restoring power to the five raw water pumps that supply Waila Water Treatment Plant. As per the last assessment at 8.00 p.m. on 31st August, 2020, restoration and supply will be gradual and is anticipated to be completed by Friday, 4th September, 2020. The Operations Team is working around the clock to restore supply to the affected customers.

Restoration efforts also depend heavily on daily consumption as these affect the volume of water that is stored within WAF storage reservoirs. Customers may experience intermittent supply during the restoration period. WAF is also providing water cartage services to affected areas that are still yet to receive water. This exercise will continue until the full restoration has been achieved.

The restoration of supply to Nausori is near completion with customers at Lakena and Kiuva slowly receiving supply, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Restoration of supply for areas in Suva is still ongoing as of Monday, 31st August, 2020. Supply has been restored to areas fed from the Wainibuku Reservoir, including Nakasi, Davuilevu, Narere, Makoi, Caqiri, lower parts of Tovata, Nepani, Laqere, Muanikoso, parts of Nadera, Nadawa and the lower areas along Khalsa Road.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, some restoration works are still underway to restore supply to areas along the Princess Road from Loa Street to Colo-i-Suva, high and elevated areas serviced by the Nasinu Reservoir, including parts of Laucala Beach Estate, PRB in Raiwaqa, parts of areas fed from Flagstaff in Tamavua Reservoir, including parts of Rewa Street, Nailuva Road and elevated areas along Ratu Sukuna Road and parts of Domain and Service Street and elevated areas within Suva City.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the normalisation of water supply will be gradual over the next four days as restoration efforts continue. The WAF Operations Team is closely monitoring the system to ensure that sufficient storage is present within WAF and service reservoirs to maintain and meet the demand of our customers. I request the public to be water-wise and use water sparingly during this time as this will also assist WAF with its target of full recovery by Friday, 4th September, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, looking ahead strategically, WAF, through the Asian Development Bank loan, will see the construction of a new 40 mega litre or 40 million litres per day water treatment plant along the banks of the Rewa River located at Viria. This new 40 mega litre per day water treatment plant will supply water, improve WAF service to its customers within the greater Suva area. This new treatment plant will provide WAF with the ability to meet growing demand.

In the business of water and wastewater services, challenges are expected to rise exponentially due to climate change and also because of the challenges of replacing old infrastructure. As such Mr. Speaker, Sir, I encourage all WAF customers to be resilient by investing in their own storage capacity capable for providing at least two days' supply of water that allows you to deal with instances such as that we are facing now.

The WAF also encourages that its customers practice water-wise and water-conscious behaviour. This will greatly assist WAF by reducing the demand and the load on its existing infrastructure as an added benefit. The customers would see a reduction in the water bills from such behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just because water is very affordable in Fiji, we must never take it for granted or use it exorbitantly. We must all make a conscious decision to use water wisely, to ensure that generations after us will also enjoy the availability and accessibility of water services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. I now give the floor to the Leader of the Opposition's designated speaker, the Honourable Aseri Radrodro. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to give a reply to the Ministerial Statement. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind the Honourable Minister that the Constitution grants every Fijian the right to clean and safe water in adequate qualities and accessible and adequate sanitation facilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have reached an all-time low and we, on this side of the House, refuse to accept that explanation, other than the laxity of Government through the Minister whose task is to oversee the necessary maintenance and rehabilitation programme of all our water resources to be done efficiently and adequately, as and when they are due.

We heard that the Ministerial Statement highlighted the ATS Switch Programme but I fail to hear from the Ministerial Statement any total preventative maintenance programme to address those issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we all know that we are now in the dry season again and apart from that Waila leak, during this same period last year, we had a similar water disruption and we had to delay the sitting of Parliament. Way back, we also had Vaturu Dam issues, in terms of the algae growth in the dam which created water distribution problems to mostly all of the Western Division from Nadroga, Nadi, Lautoka and Ba. Now, the Honourable Minister is saying that this is only a small issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our children are not attending school for the last two days and maybe for the whole week. Of course, we have many other challenges that will be faced from sanitation problems which leads to health issues. We also have economic challenges, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Businesses may face problems during this water disruptions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also are facing COVID-19 pandemic crisis and it is just a bad time and Government needs to take professional advice coming from this side of the House. It is a well-intended advice. I will say again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that over the years, we have suggested for Government to ensure that local workers are maintained for rehabilitation works, as they would also have a sense of responsibility to our people. Maybe, you can ask the Honourable Minister to address the 400 WAF employees who were terminated.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is all about monies and priorities and it is now that I would like to call upon the Honourable Prime Minister to change the Board of WAF. We cannot afford to be carrying dead weights as well, if people are not delivering up to standard, they must be removed. Leadership at that level requires people who have values with the responsibilities that they have and diligently carry out their roles to ensure persisting problems, as we are now experiencing, are always mitigated and addressed in a timely manner.

I just wanted to reiterate that the last Annual Report for WAF was for 2016 and we are now in the 2020 and 2021 period. When I browsed through this Annual Report, there is nothing at all, no mention of the Waila Treatment Rehabilitation Programme. It is only the Central Region that is mentioned and I would like to read it out, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It only states about the existing Central Bulk Supply System consisting of 17 water sources, 8 treatment plants, 38 storage reservoirs, 6 booster pump stations and 3 raw pumping stations to cater for the needs of the urban and peri-urban population in the Central Division.

The total water production in the Central Eastern Division is approximately 172.4 mega litres. That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is only talking about Central Eastern Division. There is no mention about the repairs and maintenance that have been carried out to ensure, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that there is no repeat of this ATS switch failure or whatever that failure that occurred at the Waila Station. We heard about the 40 mega litre that is now being constructed in Viria in Naitasiri along the Rewa River. There is no guarantee that this will continuously give a supply of water throughout the Central Eastern Division.

Honourable Minister should also give an assurance in his Ministerial Statement that there will be continuous repairs and maintenance to be carried out on a regular basis to ensure that there is a continuous supply of water to all the households around the Central Eastern Division. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution. I now call on the designated speaker for the National Federation Party, the Honourable Qereqeretabua. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement. I am glad to know that the other side does listen to us sometimes, when we suggest the Ministerial Statement topics they should really be talking about, because clearly, the Opposition has more of the finger on the pulse of the nation compared to the Government side.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to also express our deep concern about the confusion from the other side. This morning, before the 8.30 a.m. deadline, the Parliament Secretariat emailed through three Ministerial Statements, one of which I am addressing now and two more - one from the Honourable Minister for Economy on Fiji Airways and the other from the Honourable Minister for Forests on forestry. Mr. Speaker, Sir, six minutes later, at 8.36 a.m., the Parliament Secretariat emailed to advise that two of the Ministerial Statements were withdrawn. What is going on with the Government side? Do they know whether they are coming or going, or are they still in the zombie light state keeping up the drama that is still a boom?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the failure of the Automatic Transfer Switch at the Waila Treatment Plant that has greatly inconvenienced a good crosssection of the population of Suva, as well as our students who are already trying to catch up with learning gaps due to COVID-19. This only points to one thing, the overall failure of this Government and particularly the Honourable Minister responsible, and their ability to manage basic infrastructure as is the social contract between tax payers and the State.

I am quite certain that the Honourable Minister's phone has been ringing 24/7 not from the careFiji App as the Honourable Minister Reddy believes, but due to the immense number of complaints coming from everyday citizens. That is why I am truly and I quote "a madua" unquote situation to see residents waiting for water trucks with buckets and drums, like none of you have to do, either early in the morning or in the darkness of night in places like Sakoca and in Lakeba Street in Samabula running after the water trucks to make sure they do not miss out on the water. Is this the picture of hope and prosperity that the people of Fiji need to be living proof during the year that Fiji celebrates our 50th year of Independence?

Mr. Speaker, it is our understanding that the Water Authority offers approximately 10 to 12 water cartage trucks on stand by delivering water to one-third of the nation's population who live between the Suva and Nausori corridor due to cost cutting by the Authority. Is this so? If this is true, why is it the Chairperson and his Board remained conveniently silent during this time of chaos? Then he should be sacked because this is what happens when the Board cannot table timely annual reports and Parliament cannot scrutinise what they are doing with taxpayer funds.

To make matters worse, Mr. Speaker, we now see media reports by the CEO stating that water restrictions will now apply because of depleted water levels at Vaturu and Nagado.

Mr. Speaker, I refer to the National Development Plan (NDP) and the priority setback by Government regarding water, where the Prime Minister had recently made public statements about the NDP. The government set itself such ambitious Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on water. The NDP states that for "access to clean and safe water in adequate quantities urban", 98 percent of the urban population would achieve this by 2015 and 100 percent of that urban population by 2021. I can tell the Minister right now, Mr. Speaker, that lofty goal will not be achieved even though it is SDG 6.1. The budget question, Mr. Speaker, is what has happened to the World Bank loan taken by Fiji in 2019 targeting climate-resilient infrastructure such as water?

Mr. Speaker, in closing, let me urge the Honourable Minister to table a motion in this House for a public inquiry into the operation and function of the Water Authority of Fiji. Nip this in the bud,

the people of this country deserve better. They deserve a 100 percent access to clean running water. I thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend proceedings for refreshments in the Big Committee Room. The Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.17 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 10.50 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been advised that the motion in the name of the Honourable Viam Pillay has been withdrawn. We will now proceed to the next Agenda item.

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

**REVIEW REPORT ON THE COP 23 PRESIDENCY TRUST FUND –
FIRST SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT**

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament debates the Review Report on the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: First Semi Annual Report for the period May 2017 to October 2017, which was tabled on 13th May, 2019.

HON. V. PRAKASH.- Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the motion.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members of Parliament, as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee and the Member moving the motion, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion to debate on the Public Accounts Committee's Review Report on the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: First Semi-Annual Report for the period 1st May, 2017 to 31st October, 2017.

The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji's authority pursuant to Standing Order 110(1)(c) and as directed by the Speaker of the House for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is to examine and, thereafter, submit the findings to Parliament of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: First Semi-Annual Report for the period 1st May, 2017 to 31st October, 2017.

Mr. Speaker, this Annual Report only covers six months of the account of the Fund since its commencement. The COP 23 Presidency Secretariat was established in March 2017, to oversee and manage the operations of the Fund. Utilisation of the Fund for procurement is in accordance with the Fiji Procurement Regulations 2010. Further, a Financial Policy Guideline that is consistent with the Financial Management Act 2004 and Financial Instructions 2010 has been developed for the Fund.

It is also important to note that the Ministry of Economy had also assisted the Secretariat with its accounting functions and financial management of the Fund. In addition, the COP 23 Presidency partner, KPMG, assisted with the seconding of a Senior Accountant personnel to the Fund, who was engaged as the Manager Finance for the Secretariat for a reduced fee for six-month period commencing from 31st July, 2017 to 31st January, 2018.

Sir, this Committee Report has been majority contributed by the previous Standing Committee on Public Accounts. In the Committee scrutiny process, the COP 23 Secretariat was invited to explain to the Committee, and the responses were generally positive. In this regard, the financial statements reflected in the First Semi-Annual Report is an unaudited statement of receipts

and payments which are presented in accordance with the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Act 2017 and Section 58(4) of the Finance Instructions 2010.

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

Each year, different countries assume the Presidency of COP and Chair of the supporting management body of the UNFCCC called the Bureau. The next COP, the Presidency is handed over to another country. Poland is the incoming Presidency and will become President of COP 24 in December 2018.

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

Sir, at the time of this Annual Report when first, COP 23 Presidency Secretariat office was based at Level 9, Suvavou House. There were seven staff managed by the Executive Director, John Connor.

The Presidency of COP is an annual position at the COP that are given to Member Parties of the UNFCCC to consider progress against the objective of the Convention and to facilitate further protocols, agreements and other steps.

Mr. Speaker, the resolution adopted in Bonn, Germany, following the conclusion of COP 23 was divided into four main spectrums:

- (1) Negotiations;
- (2) Global Partnerships;
- (3) Regional Initiatives; and
- (4) Domestic Initiatives in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji has been engaged in pursuing outcomes that will assist Fiji and the Pacific in dealing with climate change. In addition, Fiji, in its role as President of COP 23 negotiations guided the progress on certain key aspects of the negotiations and oversaw the launch of a number of new initiatives. Details of those are categorised as follows, under Negotiations:

- 1) 2018 Talanoa Dialogue;
- 2) Implementation Guideline;
- 3) Finalisation of Gender Action Plan;
- 4) Historic Breakthrough in Agriculture;
- 5) Finalisation of Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform;
- 6) Adaptation Fund;
- 7) First Open Dialogue between Government and Non-State Actors;
- 8) Suva Expert Dialogue on Loss and Damages; and
- 9) Launch of the Fiji Clearing House for Risk Transfer.

Under Global Partnerships, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the:

- 1) Launch of Ocean Pathway Partnership;
- 2) Launch of InsuResilience Global Partnership;
- 3) Bonn-Fiji Commitment;
- 4) Health Initiative for the Vulnerable; and
- 5) America's Pledge.

Under Regional Initiatives, Mr. Speaker, Sir:

- 1) Climate Action Pacific Partnership;
- 2) Launch of NBC's Regional Hub;
- 3) Blue Carbon for the Pacific Climate Finance; and
- 4) Insurance Incubator Rural Electrification Fund.

Under the Domestic Initiatives in Fiji:

- Fiji Water and Wastewater Project;
- Low Income Household Insurance;
- Sovereign Green Bond;
- Legal Readiness for Climate Findings and Climate Change Act;
- Launch of Fijian NBC Implementation Roadmap;
- Launch of Fijian National Adaptation Planned Framework;
- Launch of new Ministry of Waterways; and
- Launch of Fiji's Climate Vulnerability Assessment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Account Statement of Receipts and Payments for the period ending 31st October, 2017, the Committee was informed that interest is earned on monies held in the Operating Account.

The Secretariat received a refund from the Grand Pacific Hotel when the final reconciliations revealed certain contracted services were not utilised during the Climate Action Pacific Partnership Conference.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the payments made by COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund, includes:

- (1) Conference costs that involved payments made to External Professional Services, Climate Action Pacific Partnership Event and the Pre-COP Event.
- (2) Travel-related costs included the media tour, outreach programmes and the utilisation of the remaining balance in which the Committee was informed that the balance of the funds and further contributions will be utilised to continue to support the engagement of the Fijian leadership and a national delegation at UNFCCC and other relevant meetings, including: COP 23, May and September 2018 Intersectional, Petersburg Dialogue, Global Climate Action Summit, Pre-COP 24 and COP 24.

It will also provide for continued Presidency support services and the management of COP 23 Secretariat, Ocean Pathway, National Climate Day 2018 and further outreach and engagement with Pacific colleagues.

- (3) The next important event is the Annual Climate Action Pacific Partnership Conference at the Grand Pacific Hotel (GPH) that was held on 26th July, 2018 - 27th July, 2018.

- (4) The COP 23 Secretariat has appointed an independent auditor – PricewaterhouseCoopers, to audit the financials of COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund and is in the process of concluding the audit.
- (5) The Committee was informed that the funds have been accounted on cash basis, with expenses realised when paid.

Mr. Speaker, with those few comments, as the Member moving the motion, I thank you for the opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. Honourable Members, the floor is open for debate on the motion. Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As a Member of the Public Accounts Committee, I would like to share some small sentiments in terms of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund 1st Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as you have heard, this is a report that has not been audited. It is a six-monthly report of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Account. The Committee had deliberated on an unaudited report so whatever was given to the Committee by the Secretariat at that time, we had to take it at face value. It is also one of the Trust Fund Account that is being maintained by Government that also adopts the financial regulations of Government. I will also talk on that a little bit later, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Importantly, the expected outcome of the COP 23 Presidency that was highlighted in the Report, the form inspected that probably we would like to hear from our Climate Champion in terms of the negotiations and the global partnerships and regional initiatives and importantly, the domestic initiatives in Fiji that we will probably have to cover in the next COP 23 six-monthly Report that will be discussed later during the week.

However, Sir, funding for COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund was received through donations. As highlighted in the Report, a total of \$24 million was also received through this Trust Fund Account. One important aspect of donations that were received from Italy, the European Union, Luxembourg, Australia, India and New Zealand is that, one portion highlighted of around \$4.3 million was listed as 'Others'. This is something that we had also inquired in our deliberations in the COP 23 Presidency as a whole, to inquire whether the other donors of this Fund could also be listed but, unfortunately, that was not provided for by the Secretariat.

Importantly, Sir, on Presidency Services, as being alluded to by the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, the utilisation and accounting of this Fund was through the adoption of the 2010 Finance Manual of Government. We had also inquired on the proper and transparent disbursement of this Fund, so we were yet to be advised whether proper tender processes was followed and advertisements in terms of the utilisation of this Fund. We know it is quite a big amount, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of around \$8 million to be utilised within a six months' period, so we see that as a concern. As I have said, this is still an unaudited account and something that the Committee could not fully deliberate on since this is the unaudited accounts of the Secretariat.

There are other initiatives that are related to travel costs, like the Bonn UNFCCC. We also note that there are some funding and initiatives that have been earmarked at the time of the interview that will be undertaken by Government and we hope to get some updates on the utilisation of funds and expenses on travel-related costs, say for Bonn UNFCCC.

I can recall that the Honourable Minister who was the Climate Champion at that time had taken a picture of himself riding an electric bike for use in Fiji. I think it is part of the climate change initiative so maybe, he can provide an update to Parliament on its implementation and when will this electric bike be available in Fiji since traffic congestion was highlighted yesterday and probably, the Honourable Minister can assist us with an update so that he can ride on it instead of his black Pajero, and save the fuel for the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, also on the media tour, there is a \$16,000 allocation only for that six months period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, issues were also highlighted in terms of the appointment of the media team in terms of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund usage of the funds. I think that will be reflected in the Second Semi-Annual Report, so I will then deliberate more on it. Other meetings, like regional meetings and Pre-COP meetings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those were some of the expenses. As I have said, for the six months period of this Trust Fund Account, the COP 23 Presidency had received a total of \$25 million through donations and they expended in the six months period a total of \$11,599,000.

That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is my contribution on the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Account and we would like to see how those funds have been effectively utilised. Probably, we are requesting the Honourable Minister who is the Climate Champion and probably the President himself, if they could give us an update on the outcomes of the effective utilisation of those expenditures. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to speak on the motion by Honourable Maharaj. It has been more than three years from the day we embarked on the Presidency of COP 23, and more than two years since our Presidency ended. Fiji's voice still rings loud and clear throughout the world on the subject of climate change, which is of vital interest to us.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to highlight once again that our Presidency of COP 23 and the leading role that we took on at the international stage has not only branded Fiji as the leading climate change advocate, but has also directly and indirectly benefitted Fiji. These benefits have been by way of but not limited to accessing affordable finance, more international engagements, donor funding for specific climate adaptation and mitigation projects in Fiji and, of course, positioning of regional initiatives based in or staged from Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the work goes on and we continue to push very hard at every opportunity for the world to be much more aggressive in fighting climate change, and to be much more ambitious in our goal. We fight for affordable access to climate finance, for funds for resilient infrastructure, for greater efforts by the industrialised nations on mitigation and for help to the poorer nations of the world, to help them adapt.

It is a huge undertaking, Mr. Speaker, Sir. No Small Island Developing State (SIDS) has ever been able to do what Fiji is doing. It is a historic achievement and we are grateful to the many Governments and international financial institutions that provided funds to support our Presidency.

As you have heard, we have established the Trust Fund to receive those donations and administer the funds, and we have brought in an independent General Secretary to manage it. It was

done with full transparency, which our donors rightly demanded for. Those funds allowed us to meet the huge demands placed on us as COP 23 President. That work continues to this day, as we move to COP 26 and beyond to 2030 and the mid-century mark of 2050, by which time humanity must achieve net-zero emissions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. Honourable Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Sir. May I, first of all, thank the Chairman of the Committee and Honourable Members of the Committee for their Report. But I also reiterate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point brought up by Honourable Nawaikula yesterday on the substance of our reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe that we cannot help but produce the reports as we have been producing because we have been limited on what we are to report on, depending on what the various Committees get, so they are limited on what they can bring to the House. I am mindful of the democratic processes that we, as a democratic country must follow, as other older and more mature Democracies followed, and I would like to highlight the limited number of hours we have in debating national issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, students of history will recall that democracy or the word 'demokratia' in Greek, was first used in Athens about 600 BC and it was when they were defending their system of government against the mighty forces from further East (Persia). At that time, they spent a lot of time, or before that, they were calling on the people to come and give their views about how they should be governed in the days of city states and the days of plebiscites, before they went into representation - government. The government of Athens at that time defended their system. I am sure I had related this story in this Parliament about the battle against the mighty forces that were threatening the sovereignty of Greece and its capital, Athens.

We also probably heard or read about the Battle of Marathon where that mighty army was defeated by the small army of Athens. A messenger had to run with the message all the way from the battlefield to the Senate that was sitting in Athens that afternoon. He ran 26 miles and 385 yards to deliver the message that they had won, and died after delivering this message. That was the beginning of what we call now 'democracy' or 'demokratia' in Greek. Democracy is used internationally or globally now.

The essence of that is the interaction between the governors and the governed, in that old system of governance. But recently, we have adopted this and it was during my time in Government that we extended or expanded the roles of Parliamentary Committees, but they can only report on what is given to them. They cannot go beyond what the Ministries and the Public Accounts – the Auditor-General bring to their attention.

But I am glad in this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Committee asked a lot of questions in the appendices attached to the Report, and I see some very interesting questions that they have asked that perhaps, went beyond the scope of the reports they were asked to deliberate and report on.

I would like to refer to the observation that I had made before, and the name of that runner was Pheidippides, I am sure you will know that. The Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport would remember that name. Pheidippides was a messenger that ran from Marathon to Athens - 26 miles and 385 yards.

Most of the reports, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are dated, probably more outdated than simply dated, and the report and recommendations that we get back from our Standing Committees cannot be effectively used because they are out of date. But I would like to congratulate our Honourable Prime Minister for having chaired the COP in its 23rd Session. As I had mentioned in the earlier debate, I am very proud to have been involved with the first ever World Summit that was held in Rio and we sent our then Minister for Environment, the late Mr. Kaukimoce, to attend that first one. Since then, we have had 23 years of it and we are very proud to have presided over the 23rd session of that.

The late report, Sir, coming into Parliament for deliberation by our Standing Committees and the submissions and the lack of time available to Parliament to deliberate on the reports of our Committees contribute to the late consideration of these reports in Parliament. I would like to draw our attention so that hopefully, it will improve in the next session of Parliament. This being the last one for this session.

The reports are also very important to the private sector, investors and donors. I think we report on “involved funds” from the international community. In this case, it is interesting to see that some of them remain anonymous. I do not know, maybe it is nothing coming from the anonymous donor, but how we expend the funds and account for it, that is probably more important for us.

There have been instances of poor reporting and lack of full disclosures that have contributed to the decline perhaps, in investment in the country. The donors or investors, I am sure, would like to know whether the funds they donate or contribute, will be properly used for the purposes that they were asked to contribute for in the first place.

It is important for this Parliament to receive these reports in a timely manner so that we can act on the recommendations. I believe, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by law, reports should be submitted to Parliament six months after the end of each financial year. That has not been the case, perhaps it is an indication of the laxity in Government - not this Government, not the previous Government but Governments and those that are called to govern, in providing important information to the nation. I go back to democracy, and our responsibility to keep the nation informed of what we are doing and how we are leading. The people have the right to know and they hold us to account.

There are also compelling reasons why reports should be submitted and deliberated in this House in a timely manner. The value of our debate will be eroded quite a lot if there has been a long lag time between the submission of the report, the events reported on and the time we debate on them. I believe Sir, that perhaps more resources and time should be directed to ensure that the reports are tabled and debated in a timely manner rather than the average of three years down the line.

I would urge the Honourable Prime Minister and the Government to consider setting up a standard template to ensure full disclosures of information, particularly in the use of public funds and internationally sanctioned funds donated anonymously or openly to allow better and objective assessment to be carried out on annual reports produced by Government agencies and those that are funded by Government, and maintain our standing in the international community. When international players donate for a project or an activity in Fiji, they would like to see that it is responsibly used.

It is interesting to see that most of the latest reports presented to this Parliament are professionally designed. They have glossy covers and beautiful pictures inside, but as I said earlier and also brought up by Honourable Nawaikula, they are poor in substance. And I will turn to this particular Report that will be around for that period and I noted three recommendations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, made by the Public Accounts Committee and I concur with those:

- (1) Government to take a lead role in the ownership of the initiative and project on COP23 Secretariat;
- (2) Government to consider expanding insurance for agriculture and for the housing sector for low income householders; and
- (3) the development of policy guidelines and conditions that comply with relevant legislations to govern contributions from anonymous donors (they brought that up, that is why I am highlighting it) to reduce the risk of illegal activities like money laundering or tax avoidance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Trust Fund Act 2017 amended in 2019 clearly stipulates that these funds should be managed. Basically, it closely follows the requirements of the Financial Management Act 2004 in its operations, utilisation and procurement management.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 15th May while discussing the Amendment Bill on Presidency of the Trust Fund, this side of the House raised concerns about the Qorvis bid for communications contract before COP 23 Trust Fund was even created by the Act which was passed two days later. Qorvis was awarded the contract without a tender process being undertaken. We have heard the explanation from the Honourable Minister for Economy on that when we raised it here on the floor of this august House.

The Honourable Minister for Economy as usual, I believe, cleverly circumnavigated the process to achieve what he wanted to achieve at that time and when you look back and they were pressed for time to put everything in place before the events, I suppose he feels that he was justified at that time. Perhaps, we should not take too many gaps or take advantage of too many of these reasonable excuses to foreplan our excuses.

Section 4 of the Annual Report clearly articulates key activities to be funded by the Trust Fund - the Talanoa Dialogue, the Fiji momentum for implementation of decisions, financing vulnerable nations, inclusive processes, Koronivia Joint Work for Agriculture, Launch of Ocean Pathway Partnership, General Coalition of Climate Action and key Pacific Broad Outlines. These areas are broad and cover many different areas, but all are related to climate change.

Also interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in reviewing the receipts and payments in Annex 2 of the November 2017-2018 Report our total expenditure of \$8.6 million; the amount paid for External Professional Services amounting to \$6.1 million and the pavilion cost of \$1.2 million. In total, those two expenditures covered \$7.3 million which was almost 85 percent of the total expenditure. It would be interesting to carry out a detailed cost benefit analysis of how much of the core output of this funding has been achieved.

The next point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to make is whether there is any concrete evidence to show that COP 23 benefitted Fiji and the Pacific Region as a whole, taking into account the hype and also the grandstanding by the Honourable Minister for Economy, or is it just a hoax to allow organisations, like Qorvis working for the FijiFirst Government, to milk money out of the poor vulnerable countries in the Pacific.

May I suggest that Government considers an independent study or review to be carried out to determine the real benefits to Fiji and the Pacific nations from COP 23. There will be many lessons learnt from the independent detailed study so that improvements can be made to ensure sustainability of initiatives and programmes. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure that funding is available in the implementation of future-related programmes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu, you have the floor.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In making my brief contribution on the motion that is before us, Sir, I also take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Chairperson and Honourable Members of his Committee for the Report that has been submitted.

At the same time, Sir, in looking at Recommendation No. 2, I was wondering if this was something that I had raised earlier on in this august House on the issue of loss and damage. In this Recommendation, they are trying to provide and extend cover now to the people who are being affected. But at the same time with the issue of loss and damage, I understand the Champion of COP 23 had alluded to in one of his replies earlier on, Sir, that this Government is still looking into this.

As alluded to by the Honourable Prime Minister, this is a continuing exercise that is being addressed here, not only to the solicit funds coming in but moreso to try and implement problems that are we encounter regarding climatic change. We are now into another cyclone period. We never know, as an act of God, what might strike us but, again, how far we have gone in regards to addressing this issue of loss and damage. Loss and damage, Sir, is simply providing of cover and it is to be, from my understanding of the reply given by the Champion of COP 23, this was to be initiated or taken control of by the private sector.

In one of our most recent workshops at Natadola, when the officers of the Ministry of Economy were there to address the issues on COP 23, we had raised the question of loss and damage during a plenary session and we were then told that they had done some scoping and it was not feasible, Sir. But, again, a huge chunk of money has been set aside by COP 23 for this particular issue, especially for the cyclone-prone areas in the Pacific Region, moreso Fiji. Year in and year out, we get clobbered by this act of God and yet we have been told and the people of this country have been praised that they are quite a resilient and very strong people. But again having heard from this Report, Sir, now they are trying to extend cover, given FijiFirst's policy on providing cover for farmers, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we on this side of the House were wondering what has happened to the loss and damage policy that was supposed to be part and parcel of this COP 23. So I urge the Government of the day if they can seriously consider this again. Afterall, it is a policy matter and even though the officials have made their case known, but the question that we beg, Sir, is what happens to the policy or purported policy that was supposed to come before the House regarding loss and damage.

The second issue that I would like to raise, Sir, and this has been highlighted by the Honourable Aseri Radrodro, is on the auditing by the Auditor-General of the COP 23 Trust Fund, Sir. The name has changed, the Permanent Secretary for Economy is very much involved here, Sir. Observation of procurement and financial management regulations is also observed as provided for in the previous reports, but the auditing, I would like to ask the Honourable Chairperson of the Committee if my understanding is correct that when I was still a member of the Public Accounts Committee, we had generally agreed to the recommendation made by the Committee to seek Government's approval in asking the Auditor-General to audit this particular account. So that completes the involvement of taxpayers' funds and most importantly, Sir, the issue of the procurement regulations. So, now that we do not see it in the three recommendations, I am just wondering whether that has been left on the sideline again, or are we going to be given some kind of information in this august House as, "Yes, since taxpayers fund is involved, there is a need to complete the equation here and get the Auditor-General to audit the Report as well. Thank you Sir.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The conclusion of the Semi-Annual Report of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund is very tricky, and I quote:

“The COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund is managed in a very sound manner. To ensure proper accountability and transparency, progressive six-monthly financial reports will be published on a periodic basis and the audited financial statements on a 12-monthly basis. Consistent with funding arrangements and agreements, the Presidency also publishes quarterly updates on the COP 23 website.”

Mr. Speaker, this is from Mr. John Connor, the Secretary for the COP23 Presidency Trust Fund. The secretariat was established at Level 9, Suvavou House, of course, becoming also famous in December 2008 for being the sanctuary of Government for 48 hours, intend in strategising on low hanging fruits, the rest as they say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is history.

It is interesting indeed that Mr. Connor is talking about sound management, accountability and transparency when he himself in a Minute to the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy in September 2017, under first sight of the Permanent Secretary for Economy, saw a waiver of tender process to ensure Qorvis Communications received the contract to the tune of US\$2.295 million or FJ\$400,658,850 in consultancy services to the COP23 Presidency. Of course Mr. Speaker, Sir, as documentary evidence proves and was eloquently laid out in Parliament in May last year by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Attorney-General approved the request to waive the tender processes and that too, secretly.

Now, that is FijiFirst style of transparency and accountability. We will have what you say on this during debate, to take note of the review report of the Second Semi-Annual Report of the Fund. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, suffice to say that nowhere in the First Semi-Annual Report covering the period between March and October, have we seen any mention of Qorvis Communications, even by the Secretary himself, who sent the Minute of waiver of the tender process to the Attorney-General. From our calculations per the secret Minute, Qorvis would have earned a minimum of US\$800,000 or FJ\$1.624 million in the eight-month period between March and October of 2017.

Mr. Speaker, this is not shown anywhere in the annual reports, probably contained as part of the external professional services. But should one be surprised that the Committee and its Chairperson did not ask Mr. Connor to elaborate on each expense item as the Public Accounts Committee should do? Absolutely not!

We have a new culture of accountability and transparency as far, as the Public Accounts Committee is concerned, Mr. Speaker, that is after the amendment of the Standing Orders in February 2016, to ensure that the practice of an Opposition Member always chairing the Committee is lost forever, as long as the FijiFirst Government is in power. Therefore, there is no cost benefit analysis of expenditure incurred. It seems, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as long as the money is spent, it is alright. We will have more to say on this when the next review report is scheduled for debate this week as previously announced. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to give a few comments on the Committee's Report for Parliament to take note of the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Account for the period ending 31st October, 2017.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Government for the initiative and also for continuing our pursue for the goals on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from the first Climate Summit and also the various Protocols that Fiji has acceded to, even leading up to the Paris Agreement and the Doha Agreement that this Parliament has acceded to in the last term of Parliament.

My short contribution will be that this particular period covered our profile, building our profile as we moved into our COP 23 Presidency. I thank the Government on the theme that they had adopted in trying to show the world the situation that we are facing as oceans people, and the culture and heritage that we have through the *Bula* spirit, building up that *Bula* zones and the pavilion in Bonn to give that feeling and also appearance of what indigenous people are in the preservation and conservation of our marine and forest resources so that the world can be attentive to the crisis that we are facing, which is climate change.

I think the theme came out very well in the international arena, where we had our Honourable Prime Minister as the COP 23 President and also the Climate Change Champion. We gave out that message not only for Fiji, but standing for the region also in telling our story to the world and the plight that we are facing - the rising sea levels and effects of climate change in the region which is affecting food security, resettlement where there will be village relocations and problems related to becoming refugees in terms of climate change effects. Those are some of the things that were the real issues brought to the world stage.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again given that during this period, we were building on awareness and outreach in the Fijian community for them to connect to the mission to take this global fight to the international arena. We saw the various activities and initiatives done during community marches, carbon exhibitions, mangrove planting and other stories which are already embedded in our traditional system in the *vanua*, those are innovative solutions which they have been implementing to adapt to the challenges that they are facing so that they can protect their food sources and also their natural resources.

We are thankful that this was brought down to our primary schools when they had their oratory contest where Timoci Naulusala and Shalvi Shakshi were announced the winners and they also represented Fiji at the COP 23 in Bonn, presenting their stories on climate change in Fiji. Also videos were taken and also through visiting of villages and settlements that were affected, taking our stories and the challenges that ordinary Fijians are facing in our rural communities.

I call on the Government to continue, given that climate change is a real issue. This particular fund has been amended to Climate Action Trust Fund which has broadened the purpose of this fund and for us to solicit more funding and more climate finance so that it is factored into our budget and that we are able to meet our SDG targets and that no Fijians should be left behind.

I am talking in terms of community projects which is contained in the Report that the Committee will present on Thursday on practical projects, one of which, I also participated in called the Ridge to Reef project and also other areas that all link up to climate change and also its agencies in Fiji in project implementation, such as FLEMMA, working on solar energy and other rural community electrification projects that are in place and other needs that are on the ground that is needed for these projects to continue because it really touches the needs of ordinary Fijians out there who want to connect to development, but through sustainable means.

That is my short contribution, just to ask Government to continue to get those negotiations going, that we should not lose that momentum that we had built back in 2018, 2019 and we will continue in 2022 and beyond, even towards meeting our SDG in 2030 as mandated by the United Nations. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Defence. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to contribute to the motion as well because of my involvement in the COP 23 under Fiji's Presidency and, of course, to clarify some of the issues that have been raised during the debate this morning.

Let me begin by saying that it is quite difficult to determine the level of success because COP is not easy and we should all appreciate that. There are political interests, economic interests and of course there are social interest as well. Every party which refers to Governments and, of course, every block that comes to the negotiation, they come with their own interest and they are very protective.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition has stated that they started way back in the 1990s and until 2015, COP 21 in Paris, then they were able to come up with an agreement. That was a political agreement and we are thankful to the President of France and, of course, the US Secretary of State as well, who was very, very instrumental. I remembered the nights when the negotiations kept on going until morning and we were given a break to reassemble at nine o'clock, and it went on until five o'clock in the evening, just to come up to put the gavel on the Paris Agreement. It is not easy, therefore, it is also very difficult to determine the level of success in this COP work.

Of course, if I take one thing from Fiji's COP Presidency and this is not only during our Presidency, but it goes back to the Suva Declaration that was agreed here under Fiji's leadership, the biggest success for Fiji and Pacific Island countries is to find in the language of the COP, 1.5 degrees and 2.0 degrees as the target for all parties and non-parties as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you read the clauses of the Paris Agreement, the goal for all parties and non-parties stakeholders is to peak at 2.0 degrees and work towards 1.5 degrees because 1.5 degrees for us, is survival, that is no choice. Perhaps, that is the success that Fiji, through the Suva Declaration, took into Paris and we anchored on that – Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Pacific or the European Union and particularly those who become victims of global greenhouse gas emissions, we anchored on that language - peaking at 2.0 degrees and, of course, working towards 1.5 degrees.

Perhaps, that is the biggest success, apart from all the other negotiations that are still ongoing, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As I have stated, it is not difficult because when big economies are going to work towards 2.0 degrees even, they have to lose some jobs because they have to switch to new innovations particularly, energy, transportation and, of course, agriculture because agriculture is a big emitter as well. So, they have to weigh the benefits versus costs, so that they can achieve the aims under the Paris Agreement, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

To answer the question raised by the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu on the loss and damage, let me just say that this is an issue that is still ongoing. Of course, most developed countries particularly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are worried about the legal languages that will be used because they are afraid of compensation issues when it comes to loss and damage. Again, this plus a few others, I will not go into the details. Loss and damage is something that we always bring to the table but there has not been much progress on that.

We have the Paris Agreement and I think for Fiji, during its Presidency and, of course, leading on to Poland's Presidency, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we worked on the rule book and the guidelines and some progress on these two particular areas as I have stated, political interest, economic interest and the social interest and implications as well was something that made some of the parties very reluctant to accept some of the clauses in the Paris Agreement.

The difficult thing about COP23, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is consensus. There is no voting in COP but consensus, and it is very, very difficult. If one party stands its ground and I use the United Arab Emirates (UAE) or the Chinese and the Indians, for example, when they stand their ground, regardless of all the efforts and all the good negotiators in the room and because there is no consensus, if one party does not agree with even one language or just one word in a clause, we can sit on it for days. It is difficult, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, I just want to relate the experience on this but I am glad that I was the Climate Champion, I was not involved with the negotiations, I represent the real word, "action". The climate work is all about action and let me acknowledge GIZ, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because all the travel for the Champion and the Team was funded through GIZ and, of course, they also assisted in some of the work in the Presidency's Team, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Very briefly, on the work of the Climate Champion, let me just go back to the bike issue, of course, we would love to have bikes in Fiji but one of the difficulties that we have is, we do not have the infrastructure in Fiji yet because in developed countries, they have bike lanes. I was asked this question when I got back from Paris about the bikes. I said, "Yes, we would love to have these bikes", but it is very difficult in Fiji for two reasons. I know when I came back from New Zealand, I brought a bike but I decided if I have to live longer, I have to park the bike because of two things; one is the attitude of the drivers in Fiji and two is the issue of dogs, because we do not have special bike lanes in Fiji, so we need infrastructure.

When we talk about resilience infrastructure, this is something that we will need to work on slowly. But with the climate work, as the Climate Champion, I think a lot of benefits are coming into the country. We will not reap the benefits now but, of course, through the networks and through best practices that we have picked up as champions, as representatives of the new innovations, new researches and the new technologies, Fiji will benefit in the long term. I know that we are working very closely with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) that is based in the UAE and I am glad that in last week's paper, if all the Honourable Members are following, that is a project that has been earmarked for Ovalau, if I remember correctly, the agro-photovoltaic project.

I have talked about this innovation previously in one of the discussions, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is where you have panels but at the same time, you have agriculture under the panels and you can even do aquaculture, fish ponds under the panel. So you create energy out of the sun but at the same time, you just use those panels as a form of a greenhouse to create the environment so that you can be successful in agriculture.

As I have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are the benefits that we will reap in the long term because of our engagement in COP through the Climate Action Agenda. Of course, there are many other benefits. We have a lot of solo projects being undertaken and there are a lot of innovations into agriculture as well.

On agriculture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, before Fiji's Presidency, it was like loss and damage, it never progressed but because of the interest that I have talked about, this was one of our successes. If I mention a few, during Fiji's term of Presidency:

- (1) Indigenous people and their culture and, of course, their voices and traditional practices was pursued further and gained ground during Fiji's Presidency.

- (2) On the issue on women and youths, during Fiji's Presidency, we progressed a lot on this.
- (3) Most importantly, agriculture, we were able to socialise Fiji brand names during our COP Presidency. The agriculture framework is known now under COP as the Koronivia Pathway.
- (4) We had Talanoa Sessions. The beauty about the Talanoa Sessions and I think prior to all these, Conference of the Parties was just an event where governments are involved because parties are mainly States or Governments but through the Talanoa Session, we brought everyone to the table - parties and non-parties.

Civil societies had a voice, private sector had a voice, indigenous people had a voice, likewise the finances and all those groups that were left out during the negotiations of the Conference of the Parties because what, sort of, frustrates the non-parties stakeholders is, they have funding and they have the technology but it is the Governments that slows things down when it comes to the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Hence, there were a lot of other work that we progressed during our COP Presidency which, I think, due to time limitation, I will not go into details but perhaps, the Honourable Attorney-General can add a few on that.

As we have completed our work as Presidency, most of the initiatives that were undertaken during Fiji's Presidency is now left with a small team in the Ministry of Economy under the Director for Climate Change that has continued. But let me just finish, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again on the benefits that we get out of it, one of the benefits that we are enjoying now, particularly for Fiji is the relocation. We launched our Relocation Guideline in Katowice, Sir, but I know that we have been doing relocations prior to that. Fiji's example of relocation was highlighted and, of course, appreciated by the community and I am thankful because of Fiji's launching of its Relocation Guideline, now we are getting financial assistance for the relocation of Tukuraki, one of the villages that was affected by the landslide during the 2012 *TC Evans* and, of course, we are in the process of relocating Narikoso in Kadavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, talking about waiver, waiver is not new. The Honourable Minister for Economy has powers to waiver requests and because of the timeline, the European Union is telling us, "You need to start building in September and you need to complete this Narikoso relocation by December." Right now, we have been assured by an email from the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Economy that it is before the Tender Board and the Tender Board will make a recommendation to the Honourable Minister for Economy because if we lose out on this funding by GIZ, then we will not complete the Narikoso Project in Kadavu. Therefore, we hope that the Major Tender Board will give its recommendation to the Honourable Minister for approval so that we can continue.

With those relocations, we do not have the funds, likewise construction of seawalls and evacuation centres, these are the benefits that we will reap in the long term because of our involvement in COP 23 and, of course, in the work of the Climate Champion. That is my short contribution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank you for this opportunity.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Defence. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just very briefly on some notes, in respect of the accounts themselves, just to reiterate the COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund Act 2017 which I have here with me, came into force on 14th February, 2017. It was amended and renamed as highlighted earlier on, to Climate Action Trust Fund in 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Trust Fund originally was set up to essentially assist the Fijian Government meet its obligations under the COP 23 Presidency. One of the points that probably seems to be lost on some people is that, this is the first time that we had a Small Island Developing State that was given the opportunity to actually host the Presidency. But it was also another first that whilst we had the Presidency, we had partnered with another developed and industrialised country where physically, the location of the Presidency was there. So Germany and Fiji participated, and the bulk of their hosting of the actual Presidency itself is astronomically expensive and we did not bear any of those costs. In fact, Germany picked up all of those costs. But as highlighted earlier on, there are other associated costs in respect of, for example, when we had the Pre-COP meeting which was held in Denarau, we had over 500 to 600 people who attended it, many Leaders and the Deputy Secretary-General of the UN at that point in time also attended that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Reports that are before Parliament that have already been tabled, of course, are the:

- (1) COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: First Semi-Annual Report which is from 1st May, 2017 to 31st October, 2017;
- (2) COP 23 Presidency Trust Fund: Second Semi-Annual Report from 1st November, 2017 to 30th April, 2017;
- (3) COP23 Presidency Trust Fund: Third Semi-Annual Report from 1st May, 2018 to 31st October, 2018;
- (4) Audited Financial Report COP23 Presidency Trust Fund for the Period ending 30th December, 2016 to 31st July, 2017; and
- (5) Audited Financial Report on COP23 Presidency Trust Fund for the Period ending 1st August, 2017 to 31st July, 2018.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am also glad to inform Parliament that the following Semi-Annual Reports and Audited Financial Statements are yet to be finalised and which will be tabled to Cabinet and then presented. The auditors have already been appointed now, the first set of audit accounts were done by PricewaterhouseCoopers. The tender has been awarded to Ernst & Young and they will begin their audit work very soon and we hope to have that finalised at the end of this current year. So that is as far as the actual accounts are concerned, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is nothing opaque about that, as has been alluded to.

As per the audit opinion that has already been carried out, we have noted that the financial reports presents fairly in all material respects that the actual payments and donations received have been and I quote, “fully in compliance with the Act, the Guidelines, the Procurement Regulations 2010 and in conformity with the application conditions set out in the funding agreement of the donors”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point that I also wanted to highlight is that, not a single cent of taxpayers’ funds has actually gone into this Trust Account. All of these funding into this Trust Account came from donors. I think Honourable Aseri Radrodro highlighted the list of all the donors and then he also talked about how there were some donors that were not listed. Yes, the reason is that, some donors do not want to be listed.

As the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing and our Climate Champion has highlighted, the negotiations around UNFCCC is highly internationally sensitive. If, for example, a donor lent money to a particular fund, then if it is publicly announced it could be seen that maybe they are influencing. So, for that very reason, they simply gave us these funds without any strings attached and said, “This is to help the Small Island Developing States to carry out its work as far as the Presidency is concerned.” That is why we have this, there is nothing sinister about that.

It would be a different story if there was going to be some form of political influence, if indeed there was going to be some form of taxpayers' funding received into the Trust Account.

Also, I would like to highlight the other point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu actually talked about which is loss and damage and the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing has already highlighted that, but just to reiterate that point, UNFCCC is a highly sensitive issue. The Honourable Leader of the Opposition talked about Rio, et cetera, but it took them nearly two decades to actually come to Paris and have some form of agreement that everyone were at the same table.

Loss and damage is highly, highly sensitive. Loss and damage in the UNFCCC process essentially means that big the industrialised countries will take entire responsibility, including financial responsibility of all the damage that has been caused to other smaller States. Those countries do not necessarily want to take that liability because the liability has got no figure on it. That is the real issue around loss and damage with the UNFCCC process.

It is not a policy issue, it is not a separate government sovereign policy issue. We, of course, from a loss and damage perspective at the sovereign level, that is why we want to have insurance, to protect our own people because no one else is going to do it for us. That is why organisations, like the World Bank, et cetera, are now coming up with insurance packages, they try and configure it for us, so we pay the premium, we take it up.

Even then, it is extremely hard because the insurance companies in Fiji do not carry the bulk of the risk, it is carried by the underwriters offshore. They do not want to necessarily take the risk. All they want is three decades of statistics before they can actually assess their risk and, therefore, put a price on that risk which translates into a premium. That is the conundrum that we are in, internationally speaking.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was very interested in listening to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and his lucid explanation of Greek democracy and how we need to adhere and subscribe to that. Indeed, it would appear that he does subscribe to it but, unfortunately, he did not in 1987. At that time, I remember and Honourable Professor Prasad, if you remember also correctly, the mantra for the Honourable Leader of the Opposition at that time was, "democracy is a foreign flower." You remember that? There were numerous articles written on that too. In fact, some went to the point of saying, "Western democracy is a foreign flower." What we are practicing today is actually western democracy. Parliament, all of these, has genesis from the English democracy.

HON. MEMBER.- It's a façade.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Nothing facade about that, but I will come to you soon.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition demonstrates what he said and some of the other contributions perhaps. But Honourable Bulitavu, I actually, for once, admire what you said and Honourable Lalabalavu too, to an extent. What the Honourable Leader of the Opposition demonstrates, either the Opposition does not want to know what is happening or they completely have ignorance of the highest order to the point of being obtuse, or have engaged in the act of obscurantism and I am telling you that obscurantism is what really applies to, in particular, the NFP. It is a deliberate act of trying to spread misinformation about something that is factually correct but they are trying to spread misinformation about it.

Honourable Qereqeretabua, no amount of gratuitous sarcasm will actually take us away from the truth. Let me get to the truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The reality is this, as the Honourable Minister

for Defence, National Security and Policing highlighted, there are a number of projects that have come to fruition. The agrophotovoltaic project which is a \$10 million project majority funded by the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), has actually come about because the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) now, is the only Development Bank in the South Pacific that is accredited by the Green Climate Fund to access funds from there. You have to jump through so many loopholes to be able to be accredited and some of that funding is actually coming through FDB.

What this would mean, apart from what the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing highlighted and the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment was also there at that launch, apart from making Ovalau a lot more efficient in terms of agricultural output, it will mean that 50 percent of the energy requirements of Ovalau will come from this renewable energy source, which means 50 percent of reduction in our usage of fossil fuel, all of which is imported, which means a positive impact on our foreign reserves and a positive impact in respect of reducing our carbon footprint.

For the information of the two Honourable Lalabalavus, Taveuni, is the next Island. We have already got Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) who had done assessments for both the Islands. This is a direct result of the high level of attention Fiji has got, the ability for Fiji to punch above its weight and the fact that the Honourable Prime Minister has been chosen as one of the top 100 Leaders in respect of the climate change discourse internationally, a third party validation of that. It has also meant, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we now have people who are interested in helping Fiji with the Climate Change Bill, which we hope to bring to this Parliament in December.

We will now go towards carbon trading. Who is going to benefit predominantly from the carbon trading? The landowners who have large forest reserves on their land, they will benefit from carbon trading. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing also highlighted, we also have now in the other Act is the Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund. We have specific guidelines. Please, go to the website, you will see it. I remember quite vividly that the Honourable Prime Minister launched that Trust Fund in New York.

The Swedes, the other Scandinavian countries are interested, and we have identified 43 villages that need to be relocated to higher ground, otherwise they will be inundated with water. It is not just simply plucking a village from one location to another, you have to find an entire sustainable livelihood for them. People who have been, for hundreds of years, ascertaining or getting their livelihood by the seaside and you suddenly you place them on top of the hill, there is a particular dislocation. It is a dislocation, it is what many people call Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) but in this particular instance, they actually have security of tenure and security of title. The fact that it is a holistic approach, obviously is a very costly affair. Now, those costs have not emanated because of our own doing, they have emanated because of decades of mismanagement of our environment.

One of the other important things that Fiji has been able to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Oceans Pathway. In the UNFCCC process, oceans were fundamentally neglected. We are now trying to squeeze in oceans into the mainstream of UNFCCC discussions, and I can tell you it is not easy. The Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing will tell you that it is not easy because, again, the bulk of the acidification and pollution is not coming from small countries like us, but obviously other industrialised countries. So to be able to get those discussions, we have now been able to have this Oceans Pathway.

Last week, I had a discussion with Lord Goldsmith, who is the Minister for Pacific Affairs and also Environment about this and asking us, what is Fiji's view on the Ocean's Pathway because they want to include it at the next COP. Fiji is now seen as a leader in this respect. We have a

working group in respect of the usage of adaptation of technology to climatic changes; there are significant issues pertaining to this.

Last but not the least, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I think is very important is the issue of the re-focusing of international climate finance from mitigation to adaptation. In our case, bulk of the funds that we require is for adaptation. In other words, we need funds to adapt to the climate. Mitigation is, for example, we are putting up a solar farm, and that is mitigation in terms of reducing the carbon footprint, but adaptation is when you are actually at the cold face of climatic events, cyclones and inundation of waters.

In the Green Climate Fund process, very little money was allocated for adaptation processes. We are now changing that. As a direct result of COP 23 and the work that we have been doing, today, we have been able to access cheaper funds through the International Development Association (IDA) funds at the World Bank because we have been highlighting the vulnerabilities of countries not just like Fiji, but other similar countries that can have decades of development wiped out within a few hours of some climatic events. As a result of that, we are able to now access those types of funds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not want to labour on all the other points, but essentially to say, if you are serious about this matter, the Honourable Bulitavu raised a number of important issues, Honourable Qereqeretabua should take a leaf out of him, they are both sitting on the same side and he should actually impart some knowledge to her.

Sarcasm is not the way forward. You need to actually provide solutions, you need to look at what has actually happened. Where are we at the cold face of climatic change? Do they even understand the UNFCCC process and how difficult it is to be able to carry out these works?

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. John Connor. He was actually a great leader in respect of starting up the Secretariat, doing all the coordination, pulling it all together, and the other people who were involved - the Baker Mackenzie team, and all the other civil servants who were involved in the entire process, the Ministers who attended various meetings, the civil servants who have actually gained a lot of knowledge in their understanding from the development of growing the linkages between climatic changes, the UNFCCC process and, of course, the impact on our people socially, economically and, indeed, politically. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. You have the floor, Honourable Viliame Gavoka.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are getting better day by day. Now, it is the Opposition's displayed ignorance of the highest order to the point of obtuse. In the previous Parliament, Mr. Speaker, my good friend, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture used to call us "intellectually incapable of understanding" which is a nice way of saying, 'you are stupid'. That was what he used in the last Parliament. You do not have the intellectual ability to understand. So, Mr. Speaker, can I just throw something across the room?

For the last 14 years, about 57 Permanent Secretaries have come and gone under Bainimarama's leadership. If you call us stupid and all those things, can you explain why 57 Permanent Secretaries have come and gone in the regime and in FijiFirst?

Mr. Speaker, what we have here is the profile of this country that has been raised through COP23 and yet, what we are highlighting here is that the execution is very, very poor of whatever they have secured for us. I think it is a sad story about FijiFirst, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Yesterday, we were talking about Housing Authority and in 2011, FijiFirst had launched a policy of affordable housing by 2020. Yet, we know that the Honourable Minister for Housing has indicated that for the last 10 years, there has been a lot of fraud and the lies within the Housing Authority. So, on one hand, they are launching a policy which sounded good but on the other hand, their execution has been very poor. And the same we see here, Mr. Speaker, with climate change.

We do not understand why the machinery of Government could not be fully utilised to manage this Fund, why it had to be set up specifically as a particular section within the Ministry of Economy? We do not understand why the procurement procedures have not been followed, allowing Qorvis to secure the contract with the fund. Mr. Speaker, this is where we are coming from, that we need to execute better and we need to be aware that we are dealing with important organisations who will hold us under various close scrutiny.

The Honourable Minister is talking about the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) and the accreditation they have received to manage some of the financing from the fund. But Mr. Speaker, Sir, the whole country today is asking, how is it that an expatriate, who is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of an Airline is now the Chairman of the Fiji Development Bank (FDB)?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What is wrong with that?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- I mean, are we so disdainful of our people that we cannot find one to chair the FDB?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Choose the best people!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Every time you hold a lawyers conference in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, you will see hundreds and hundreds of highly qualified lawyers and yet, we can never elevate them to the Bench in this country. And in any accountants' conference, we can fund the hotel in Fiji that has the rooms to accommodate them and yet, we cannot fund one of them to be the Chairman of the FDB.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Talk on the motion.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, this is the motion. We are managing funds donated by our international community. We need to be seen to be doing the right thing. They cannot see us creating controversy because someone decides that there is no Fijian who can qualify to be Chairman of the FDB and he has to bring someone from South Africa to do it.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, most of us had our doubts about COP 23. We believe that it was a waste of taxpayers' funds to be spending all that, but it is here and we just want to make sure that it is done properly and we hope, Mr. Speaker, that the full structure of the Civil Service and of the community in Fiji is used wisely to manage all that is coming our way and to maintain the relationship we have with the international community.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is my observation on this. We need to manage it better and every time I look across the room, I get depressed when I see the quality of people on the other side of the room. Mr. Speaker, it is not going to be long. I was doing my counting, the number of sittings between now and 2022 is about 10 or 11 sittings. So very soon, we are professionals who should be sitting on that

side, to manage these things better and gain the confidence that we need with our donors overseas. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was not going to speak on this motion but having heard the Honourable Attorney-General accusing the NFP of not telling the truth, far from it. Usually, the Honourable Attorney-General, Mr. Speaker, has the habit of side-tracking and not really addressing the real issues.

What Honourable Qereqeretabua said very clearly is the way in which the Public Accounts Committee has actually produced the report. I am not accusing the Members of the Committee but I think, Mr. Speaker, it is important to understand that it was this Government that actually changed the Standing Orders. They used the majority to change the Standing Orders and make the Public Accounts Committee almost irrelevant because not only they Chair the Committee now, the provision in the Standing Orders and I just read part of that from Standing Order 109(2)(d), and I quote:

“The committee must only examine how public money has been dealt with and accounted for in accordance with the written law and must not examine the merits of the underlying policy that informs public spending.”

This is the problem, Mr. Speaker, value for money is the most important thing. The Honourable Attorney-General was saying that not a single cent from the taxpayers came to this Trust Fund. When donors give money to the country, they give it to the taxpayers of this country. When the donation comes to the Government, it becomes the responsibility of the taxpayers of this country to ensure that, that money is used properly because some taxpayers in their countries are actually paying for it. So this logic about donor funds should not be accounted for in a proper manner, actually defies logic.

I think Honourable Gavoka was right, what is very important for any Public Accounts Committee in any Parliament, Mr. Speaker, is to also look at the value for money. In fact, in many countries where they have large projects, the Public Accounts Committee actually has a role while the project is being executed because that ensures that at the end of the day, the money has been spent. So what we are left with in the amended Standing Order is all the Committee is supposed to look at is how much money was spent, when was it spent and whether it has been accounted for. There is no question asked at all by this Committee or they do not have the powers to ask the value for money, which is the most important thing. That is why accounts are audited and scrutinised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this idea that you do the accounts and you do not question, sometimes even the policy has to be questioned because if the Government makes a policy and on the basis of that policy, funds are misused, then the Committee has the responsibility to look at that misuse and question that policy and recommend changes in the policy. That is the job of the Parliamentary Standing Committees, Mr. Speaker, so let us be honest.

The questions that Honourable Qereqeretabua and others, including the Honourable Leader of the Opposition asked are legitimate questions. Let us not talk about who did what in the past. I think there are all sorts of questions. (Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- The Honourable Attorney-General, Mr. Speaker, has his own political past. He was in another Party.

HON. MEMBER.- What party?

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- From there, then he came. He was their legal advisor. Actually, Mr. Speaker, he joined Peter Foster the conman in the new Labour Party.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- So let us not go back 20 years, let us deal with what is in front of us.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- I know that! I know that! So did the Honourable Prime Minister in 2006.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Both are *coup* leaders.

(Hon. A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- So let us talk about the democracy we are practising now.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Obsequious!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- That is the trait of that side. I would not call people obsequiousness, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but if he is talking about obsequiousness....

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, address the Chair, do not address the Attorney-General, address the Chair.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, you also have to tell the Honourable Attorney-General to let me speak.

I think, Mr. Speaker, when you talk about obsequiousness, it is a trait on the other side, not of this side, so let me come back to the important point.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, good governments, good leaders actually promote the Standing Committee, they actually ask the Standing Committees to do their scrutinies so that they can assess how the ministries, how the people who are using the funds are actually doing. So it is an interest of the Government as well to provide the resources to empower the Standing Committees to deal with their issues properly.

Mr. Speaker, we are not coming here with untruths, as claimed by the Honourable Attorney-General all the time. We come here with the mandate of the people. There are questions that people ask us and our job is to ask the Government Ministers on the other side to answer them. They should answer the question, instead of personalising the issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

I do not know whether I should give the floor to you, Honourable Member, since you caused the disturbance before.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- And I do not know whether it was a Verata thing because the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing was speaking, so I was rather confused. But there is a button there, all you have to do is just press it.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor. This is the last speaker.

HON. ADIL QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a short contribution from me. I noted that the Honourable Attorney-General talked at length about the Audited Accounts. We note that in its first year, those accounts are being audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers and in the second year, the accounts are with Ernst & Young. He also talked at length about western democracy, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There is something that is very intriguing to me, the fact that the Act is silent on where the audited accounts will be tabled. This is a corporate governance issue, Sir, that audited accounts are tabled for scrutiny and approval by stakeholders. Section 7 of the Act that was amended in 2019 which is now known as the Climate Action Trust Fund Act, Sir, talks about the appointment of the auditor. The term 'independent auditor' which, at first instance, restricts the Office of the Auditor-General. But this section, Sir, does not say where the audited accounts will be tabled for scrutiny. This is a normal corporate governance issue.

I note that in section 8 of the Act, it says that the six monthly report will be submitted to Cabinet and in subsection 2, it says, and I quote: "The Minister must cause a copy of the annual report to be laid before Parliament at the next sitting of Parliament..." The Act is, unfortunately, silent on where the audited accounts will be tabled at, Mr. Speaker. That is my question today. Where is western democracy?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It was already tabled in Parliament.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- The Audited Accounts.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes, it was already tabled in Parliament.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I was at the Public Accounts Committee meeting and we were told that it will not be scrutinised by the Committee and it will not be tabled in Parliament.

(Honourable Government Member interject)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I have to check that...

(Honourable A. Sayed-Khaiyum interjects)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- We are still talking about the six-monthly review report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Can you address the Chair, I am here.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I am sorry, Sir, this is my issue.

HON. SPEAKER.- I want to be part of this.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- If you include me, I will be very grateful. You have the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Sir. My issue is that this Act is silent. It does not say when the audited accounts will be tabled. It should be tabled and be scrutinised. If it has to be tabled in Parliament, then it has to be stated in the Act.

It goes at length in section 8 to state that the six-monthly report be tabled in Cabinet and be brought here, this is what we are looking at. The first six months activity report of the accounts and the second six-monthly report to be tabled on Thursday, but there is nothing about the audited accounts being tabled - where, how and when will the audited accounts be tabled for scrutiny.

If it has been tabled in this House, I cannot remember that it has been tabled but all I know we are still talking about the first six-months report of the Conference of the Parties Trust Fund. Thank you, Sir.

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

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to actually thank the Honourable Prime Minister and all other Honourable Members who have contributed towards this Review Report by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, at this point, we will suspend proceedings for lunch. Parliament will resume proceedings at 2.30 p.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.37 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.32 pm.

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

**INQUIRY INTO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF COVID-19 -
ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE**

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I move:

That Parliament resolves to establish a Special Committee under Standing Order 129, to inquire into the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and members of the Special Committee to comprise the following:

- (1) Honourable Viam Pillay (Chairperson);
- (2) Honourable Dr. Salik Govind (Deputy Chairperson);
- (3) Honourable Alipate Nagata;
- (4) Honourable Salote Radrodro; and
- (5) Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Tuisawau to speak in his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to speak on my motion, as presented before you. We note the seriousness of the COVID-19 situation on our nation, and it is critical to also note some of the reports and recommendations.

I share the position prepared by the UNDP Regional Bureau of the Asia and Pacific on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, highlighting, and I quote from the Report:

“The global recession induced by COVID-19 is escalating along a feedback-reinforced spiral. Massive production disruptions that started in China have led to a lower supply of goods and services that reduces overall hours worked, leading to lower incomes. The impact of this is compounding the immediate global drop in demand stemming from social distancing measures being enacted around the world, which are disrupting highly integrated trade links and value chains. This in turn is again putting downward pressure on supply as producers cut back their output if less of it is bought.

Furthermore, as the pandemic becomes global, lower demand from major consuming countries and worsening expectations about the economic outlook are accelerating a vicious downward spiral. As activity contracts and unemployment rises, the rapidly deteriorating economic fundamentals caused by the shock to the real economy spreads to the financial sector, risking a liquidity crisis as availability of credit diminishes and asset prices fall.

A rapid response is needed. Even if rough around the edges, a fast response is better than one that is perfect but slow. There are calls for policies that meet immediate needs - containing the virus’s spread and strengthening health systems to prepare for the next shock, including a possible recurrence of COVID-19 (as we are seeing in some of the

countries, particularly our neighbours), while simultaneously responding to the looming economic downturn. Different approaches in some countries and territories in East and South-East Asia have proved fairly successful in “flattening the curve” of caseloads, allowing them to start reviving their economies.

Given the expected size and incidence of the economic downturn, a large part of stimulus packages should be directed towards the poor and most vulnerable. Governments should use stimulus packages to safeguard public goods such as health, employment and human security, while avoiding leakages that would enrich the well-off.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and informal enterprises are the most affected businesses, with informal workers - estimated at 1.3 billion people or two-thirds of the workforce in Asia and the Pacific - expected to be the hardest hit by the economic shock. The ILO expects a devastating 6.7 percent loss in working hours globally in the second quarter of 2020, equivalent to 195 million full-time workers - 125 million of which are in Asia and the Pacific. Migrants, displaced people and informal workers are facing a stark trade-off between safeguarding their lives and livelihoods.

The poorest will be hit the hardest by the compound health and economic crisis. The World Bank projects at least 11 million people across East Asia and the Pacific falling into poverty, even under its optimistic scenario.

Already 100 million migrant workers in India are on the move in search of safety and basic sustenance, defying a nationwide lockdown. Government should attach simple, sustainable development-oriented conditions to their stimulus packages. These can help focus support to people in need and preclude major leakages; or set the stage for improving the social safety net and extending the coverage of formal employment.

Countries should globally coordinate and optimise COVID-19 response, while seizing the opportunity to decisively make development more sustainable. The global spread of the virus in our interconnected world offers little chance of success if each country devises a health and economic response on its own. To make the response more effective and reduce the cost of the crises, strong coordination and cooperation among governments is needed, coupled with clear and transparent communication. These will help enhance governance and build public trust inside and across borders.

Fiscal space needs to be created to respond to the crisis by revising existing policies rather than applying patches to them. The optimal approach includes re-deploying existing resources to their best use, so as to avoid very large deficits that would lead to surging national debt - at a time when a sudden stop in capital inflows is a real risk in developing countries.

To this end, governments need to re-examine budget revenues, expenditures and financing, as well as contingent liabilities. Although painful, such revisions are justified on the grounds of the national emergency we are facing and the need to avoid unsustainable increases in national debt. Along similar lines and given the global nature of the emergency, global coordinated action is needed to address long-standing instances of ‘fiscal termites’ that undermine national budgets, such as transfer pricing, tax havens, tax avoidance by multinational enterprises, the untaxed digital economy and fossil fuel subsidization. Once some of the resources needed for the fiscal stimulus packages are covered from such sources, the remaining fiscal costs will become more feasible to finance.

Post-pandemic, a new social contract will be needed, featuring greatly reduced inequalities, strengthened resilience to shocks and protection of human rights. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities and inadequacies inherent in current systems. These risk reaching thresholds that could spur waves of social unrest, conflicts, mass migration and human rights violations. A new social contract needs to emerge from this crisis that rebalances deep inequalities prevalent in societies.

For the Asia-Pacific region, systemic changes to policy frameworks are needed to reduce the current high levels of inequality, raise the woefully low levels of coverage and spending on social security, and address regressive taxes and inequitable access to opportunities, while protecting human rights and the rule of law. In the post-pandemic world, decent connectivity for all will be an essential part of reducing inequalities.

The response will need to set the stage for additional elements of a strategy to “build back better”. COVID-19 comes against the backdrop of an escalating climate crisis and an unsustainable model of development based on an ever-growing exploitation of natural resources that pushes against the limits of natural systems. Rapid urbanization, increased density of human settlements, unsustainable changes in land use, and growth in animal-sourced products, coupled with the destruction of animal habitats on land and under water have all contributed to zoonosis - jumping the species barrier to humans, which gave us COVID-19. This note calls for rebuilding systems better by attending to social and environmental aspects that are critical on a decade-long horizon to attain the SDGs.

This would require shifting away from the previous environmentally sustainable development path to low-carbon development that minimizes environmental degradation, shifts consumption and production patterns, uses resources efficiently, and fosters the circular and sharing economies.

Relevant and timely information is critical to shape the response. Governments, policymakers and all stakeholders need to know where we are, where we aim to be and how much progress we are making. This underscores the importance of the provision of data to the public and promptly sharing proven and successful practices. In this rapidly changing, complex crisis, extrapolating from the past does not tell much about the future, yet we need to see the way forward.”

As presented, the motion needs to consider and report to the House on matters relating to the Government’s management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Possible topics which could be covered, Sir, include the Governments response to COVID-19 assessment and future direction, in line with the suggested framework recommended within the UNDP Framework.

Relevant and timely information is critical (as mentioned). Governments, policy makers and stakeholders need to know where we are, where they are, where we aim to be and how much progress is made. This underscores the importance of provision of data and promptly sharing successful practices, moving forward in an inclusive manner in Parliamentary co-operation.

Other issues which could be looked into are the:

- COVID-19 pandemic and international trade;
- impact on people with protected characteristics;
- the impact on businesses and workers;
- impact on homelessness and the private sector;

- impact on the food supply;
- humanitarian crisis monitoring, including vulnerable sectors of the population, education and children services;
- the need to look into a socio-economic reset; and
- further analysis of tourism, sugar - the formal economy; and the subsistence economy, seeking a sustainable balance as we move forward.

In addition to the Select Committee, Parliament could invite those with expertise relating to COVID-19 outbreak, or its impacts, or develop a COVID-19 expert database which could be used by Parliamentary staff, Honourable Members on both sides and their staff, to rapidly contact experts and gain further insights into the outbreak. Closer coordination, as mentioned, to gain partnerships with ground level workers, such as the Fiji Council of Social Services and other NGOs, Red Cross, et cetera, for rapid responses to vulnerable sectors of the economy which could have been overlooked by Government services.

We have already engaged with our international partners on COVID-19 and they, as our development partners, could be roped in for this Parliamentary effort and even as co-funders. Similar parliamentary action has been initiated in the UK, Ireland, Israel, Australia and New Zealand. For example in New Zealand, the House established an Epidemic Response Committee to consider and report to the House on any matter relating to the Government's management of COVID-19 epidemic, moving forward together. The Committee has the powers to send for persons, papers and records and is chaired by the Leader of the Opposition. It consists of 10 members nominated by different parties; New Zealand National, New Zealand Labour, New Zealand First, Green Party of Aotearoa and ACT New Zealand One.

In Australia, the select committee was also formulated on COVID-19. They divided that into sectors, for example, looking into the impact on the economic sector, also a sub-committee on pandemic health response, measures taken by government to address the health impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken by government to address the economic impacts. So the analysis and assessment is ongoing and shared between the different Parties in parliament, so it is a united effort under the parliamentary framework.

It is noted that the Government has formulated measures to alleviate COVID-19, including assistance to the unemployed through FNPF and Government contribution, removal, reduction, wide range of duties, simpler business licencing, incentives for businesses and other similar assistance. However, the Government could have looked at measures to reduce operational costs, such as further salary reductions for PM, Ministers, senior civil servants, for example, PSs; recruitment freeze and reduced grants to Government bodies.

Questions such as the following arise which could be addressed by the committee:

- Why cut the price of alcohol? There have been reports of increasing social problems, alcohol abuse, violence impact, so those are some of the social issues which could be further analysed.
- Why reduce duties on goods produced locally, directly impacting the viability? For example, pork producers have been raising this matter.
- Why reduce duties on luxury goods which might only benefit the rich?
- Why reduce the education grant by 20 percent?

Those are questions which could be addressed and assessed by the committee as we move forward and measures taken to address if there are issues to be addressed.

The question on debt, as mentioned in that report, recommendation – fiscal management and management of debt; there have been substantial tax cuts on Service Turnover Tax (STT), Environment and Climate Adaptation Levy (ECAL), departure tax, stamp duty, customs and excise duty. This will lose the Government more than \$600 million of revenue and even more, given the fact that company taxes and VAT will be seriously reduced, however, Government expenditures continue as before.

The Budget Supplement point out that net deficit is expected to grow from a -\$419 million in 2018-2019 to -\$2 billion in 2020-2021. The gross deficit which takes into account debt repayments is even larger. Strangely, there is not a single table in the Budget Supplement which shows a forward plan to reducing the massive public debt that is being built up. This can only be done, if Government makes a surplus in the Budget.

There have been concerns raised by the civil society. They have stated that a reduction of prices of alcohol and the continuation of FNPF unemployment benefit as announced in the Budget is a concern because their research shows that women and children will be affected and they are the most vulnerable. They state that women make up 48 percent of the FNPF voluntary membership, while compulsory membership stands at 59 percent male and 49 percent female. Sir, 44 percent of the accounts have a balance of less than \$10,000 within the age group of 50 to 54 years, so concerns have been expressed regarding the use of FNPF. The other issue, as I have mentioned, is the spike in alcohol purchase which is affecting mostly women.

++The lack of consultation is, again, another recommended area for improvement regarding that report between the Government and CSOs and NGOs. They stated that Government cannot simply address the complexities of COVID-19 has had on its people without consulting everyone, particularly CSOs and NGOs, and grassroots organisations that are at the frontline of humanitarian assistance. The impact of pandemic on people's health and access to health services is deteriorating, according to them. Again this kind of Committee can address that because we have been accused of maybe, political alignment or propaganda so that will dispel that kind of accusations. They are also raising concerns on the informal sector and how this sector can be addressed.

In conclusion, I would like to share Honourable Speaker's comments at the last UNDP consultations where he stressed that COVID-19 issues can be addressed nationally through the Parliamentary forum, Joint Parliamentary Committees and that is why we are raising from this side of the House on the necessity and probably the suitability of doing that. We move forward as a group and address the issue as a group in Parliament and as collective representatives of the people.

As Parliament is supposed to be an institution of consultation and cooperation, the positive outcomes of the inquiry would basically assess the current COVID-19 assistance but before that, you need to really assess the socio-economic impacts. From that, one can determine the needs and address whether we are addressing those needs in a manner which is suitable and appropriate. So some of the areas which could be covered are the:

- impact of stimulus packages on the poor and vulnerable;
- health and human security;
- social safety nets;
- methods of communication - how we are getting across to the public in terms of COVID-19;

- creation of fiscal space, revenue, expenditure, financing and debt which is, again, another separate area;
- post-pandemic social contract; and
- human rights.

What happens after COVID-19? Is the current framework for economic development still suitable or do we need to adjust it, given the movements we are experiencing right now in the economic structure of our nation? Of course looking into the future, what sustainable model of development should we formulate as we move forward after COVID-19 when we get to that stage?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are some of the suggestions in this motion. It is not a political motion but basically, it is a suggestion of a framework under which we could look at COVID-19 as a parliamentary group, as Joint Committee looking at this huge serious issue facing our nation (COVID-19) and addressing it in a logical and rational manner and also assessing, and from that assessment, looking at the needs moving into the future whether there are weaknesses or lessons learnt and, of course, for accountability and good governance, because at the end of the day we will need to account for the funds (the millions) we are now allocating for COVID-19 Response. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tuisawau. I give the floor to the Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to speak on the motion by the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member and his Party seem to have awoken up late to the fact that we have had a crisis in Fiji, indeed, throughout the world. I suppose we should be grateful that they finally have decided to notice the sacrifices we have had to make to keep our country free of COVID-19. But while Government was wrestling with the impossible choices before us, the main Opposition party members were preoccupied with squabbling over power and fighting for party leadership.

While Government was keeping the nation safe and developing policies to soften the impact of the shutdown on the Fijian people, SODELPA was feeding its obsession with chiefly power and reinstating the archaic trappings of hereditary privilege. Now, they say, “Let us form a committee to review the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is an old law of government - those who can govern will govern, those who cannot will want to form committees. But, let me indulge my colleagues for just one moment because there is one socio-economic impact that is just plain as a nose on every face in Parliament this afternoon and, that is, Fiji is COVID-19 contained. No country has a better record than Fiji in keeping its people safe from this terrible pandemic.

We have not seen a case in our communities for over 130 days.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You should be proud of that!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Yes, it came at a high cost, but a cost that was no higher than the cost borne by every other nation that took this crisis seriously and took decisive action. So, yes, people are suffering, incomes are down, jobs have been lost, businesses are hurting, so really, Mr.

Speaker, do we need a committee to tell us that or do we just want to construct a platform for more bickering and second guessing?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the \$2 billion COVID-19 stimulus package in the National Budget, together with the Fiji National Provident Fund assistance will help Fijians pull through. Perhaps, the Honourable Member somehow missed the details in the Budget, so let me review that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$100 million was allocated in Direct Unemployment Assistance for those whose jobs have been lost, or whose hours have been cut. Businesses can access \$60 million under the Disaster Rehabilitation and Containment Facility through the Reserve Bank of Fiji, available with commercial banks at the maximum interest rate of 5 percent.

More than 82,000 people who have been unemployed or had their hours reduced as a result of the pandemic have been assisted with more than \$52 million by the FNPF. Assistance provided by the superannuation fund is now in Phase 3 of implementation. As of yesterday, around \$93.9 million has been paid out to 113,000 Fijians. Of this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$68.1 million has been provided by the FNPF and \$25.8 million provided by Government.

An additional \$44.5 million was allocated to strengthen our health system and help respond effectively to the pandemic. An additional \$32 million was channelled towards social welfare services to cater for the most vulnerable in society.

In the COVID-19 Response Budget, Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$2 million was provided for a Credit Guarantee Scheme to the RBF to ensure that commercial banks feel comfortable to provide loans to SMEs. The COVID-19 concessional loan package for SMEs is a tailor-made support for majority of Fijian owned SMEs that have been severely impacted by the pandemic.

The Budget has addressed essential areas, such as health, education, food security, social protection, employment and macroeconomics, but we cannot fight this global pandemic alone, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been saying this all along. The UN has commended Government for its bold and courageous budget and we are working closely with the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund to implement policies for recovery from the crisis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, do we really need to waste time and energy to review facts that are already on the table? Do we really need to devote time and Government resources to a committee, whose main purpose is simply to provide a platform for the Opposition's usual carping and inane criticism? Are we not better off moving forward to prepare for the opening of the economy, which will happen as sure as the sun will rise in the morning? Do we need to try to repeat the analysis, the UN and the Regional Development Banks can do much better than we can and are doing?

No, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I cannot and will not support this frivolous motion and I urge its defeat. Thank you.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to support the motion which is before the House, which the Honourable Tuisawau has moved and that is for the establishment of a Special Committee under Standing Order 129, to inquire into the economic impact of COVID-19 in our country. The mover of the motion had given examples of the New Zealand and Australian Parliament taking similar approaches, that the Joint Select Committee in their system of Parliament, are able to work towards looking for solutions in the various policies that are already in place. That is

very good for the Honourable Prime Minister for New Zealand, Mrs. Jacinda Ardern, and also the Honourable Prime Minister for Australia, Mr. Scott Morrison, for having that vision.

The motion, I think is not properly understood by the other side of the House after hearing the Honourable Prime Minister. If he understands the current United Nation's Framework, it is called putting the UN Framework for social economic response to COVID-19 into action, and I think this their second phase and they are looking into the various UN agencies like UNDP and their resident representative to link up with nations on how they respond to socio economic impacts of the global crisis that we are facing.

I was hoping that the other side of the House would support this in terms of using the UNDP Fiji Parliament support project which has been in existence since its first stage in 2014 to 2018, and 2018 to date. They are assisting the capacity of Parliament and its Committees in Parliamentary work. It would be good for them to come through that framework and also participate in empowering our committees as part of their terms of reference to allow this particular Committee to look at this issue through a Sustainable Development Goals lenses to look into the various policies and allocations which the Honourable Prime Minister has already talked about.

The 2019-2020 COVID-19 Response Budget and the various programmes that government has announced. The stimulus packages and further allocations into the 2020-2021 National Budget that was announced recently. I would like to draw our attention, Sir, back to 2019-2020 COVID-19 Response Budget where the Honourable Attorney-General and Honourable Minister for Economy had moved a motion for Cabinet and also all Members of Parliament to have a 30 percent pay cut towards COVID-19. That was our national response as national leaders.

He had moved that motion during the debate of the Consequential Bill and from this side of the House, I seconded that motion. This was on the understanding that as national leaders and when we have a national crisis, we are supposed to be seen as the first to give from our pockets for those vulnerable in our society.

That would have been a line for a national leader who wants to unify this nation through crisis building on our resilient spirit as Fijians. To overcome the socio-economic impacts, that all Fijians, despite working for SODELPA, FijiFirst, NFP or any other political party or did not vote at all, they are Fijians. This particular Committee to be chaired by the Honourable Assistant Minister for Agriculture and also the Chairman of the Socio-Economic Committee, Honourable Viam Pillay. The Honourable Dr. Salik Govind, Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodoro and Honourable Filipe Tuisawau.

If you see the composition of the Committee, it is not political. The government has majority which is three and the Opposition Members are two, so they still reserve their VETO power within the Committee to follow the New Zealand and Australian models. They have already given stimulus packages, more than what the Fijian Government has given to those who have been affected. But if they could take that approach to allow the various parties in Parliament to form a select committee to provide that overarching role in also giving advice that could help government to implement targeted areas especially for the vulnerable in our society, so that no one is left behind. That is the goal.

I will just take this Parliament back to an event that was organised yesterday by this Parliament. Sir, the Fiji Parliament, in partnership with the Commonwealth Women MPs handed over sanitary kits to the Fiji Red Cross. How, you Sir, as a former patron of Fiji Red Cross, you used that capacity and your current capacity and the Parliamentary system to champion most issues. We

need to look very deeply into this particular motion on how that could be used with the same framework to channel that same concept using our UNDP Fiji Parliament Support Group.

I have just given up the whole framework on why I would support this motion, given we have the right timing at the moment. We are a developing Parliament under the UNDP Support Project. We have shown commitment to this COVID-19 Response. Everyone in this room is on a pay cut given our social responsibility and also our responsibility as national leaders to show our support to ensure that no one is left behind.

Everyone in this room is on a pay cut, given our social responsibility and also responsibility as national leaders to show our support to those who will be left behind. I hope this House, from my contribution, will look at this in a different manner; to look at this from the perspective of the national leader, to look at this from the perspective of an agent of change, to look at this from the perspective of not only legislators but as Members of Parliament and as leaders of our people that send us to Parliament to look up too. *Vinaka vakalevu, Sir.*

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- *Vinaka vakalevu, Mr. Speaker.*

I rise to participate in this debate and I want to begin by saying, I do not support the motion before the House. I was listening to Honourable Tuisawau and he went on and on, and I looked at the motion which means, to inquire into the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 whereby he touched on a lot of areas around health and I want to explain that these areas have already been covered. We completely understand the issues around zoonosis. It is something that everyone around the world have to deal with and we also completely understand that the challenge is with health and the world at the moment is not only limited to Non-Communicable Disease but also Communicable Diseases, Mr. Speaker.

I have talked about how there has been a lot of reports that have actually said that because of our coordinates where we are, that we are going to have to continue to face this climatic sensitive diseases also. So, apart from COVID-19, you also have to remember that climate sensitive disease which we continue to fight on a regular basis and that is why from the Ministry of Health perspective and the Government perspective, we work so hard and this is the first Government in the Pacific to have a Molecular Lab, such as the Fiji Centre for Disease Control. We have been able to do it on our own as a sovereign nation and if you see the other ones that have it, for example, Guam, New Caledonia and French Polynesia, they have it because they actually have other countries in which they are part of, that actually support them in that regard.

We also realised that it is so important to be able to have this replicated elsewhere and at this moment, I want to assure us that we are looking very closely in having this capacity also in the Western Division, to be able to look after our people in the Western Division. So, the capacity of our Molecular Lab, the capacity to be able to grow them and the fact that we are working hand in hand with our Border Health Unit with all other arms of Government, in working together in ensuring that we keep our nation safe.

We know from the Ministry of Health's perspective that we play a vital role in the economic recovery of this nation. As I have talked about yesterday, we are very keen to be able to push out into the community and to be able to do what needs to be done, to ensure that we have the capacity

in the community to be able to be ready to understand what needs to be done when there is COVID-19. At the moment, as I have said earlier, we are COVID-19 contained.

Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about here, as I have said earlier, is something that Government has already embarked on. From the beginning in January, we have talked about it, the Honourable Prime Minister was at the lead initially on the immediate health concerns but later obviously, what was being thought of is the economic aspects of it. This is something not only the Honourable Ministers in the respective Ministries have been working on but also the civil servants, who had been appointed by merit, the civil servants who are specialists in their own right in the areas of economy, trade, commerce and health. They have been talking about ways in which we can be able to bring this country together and they have set about the economic recovery plan that we have with the COVID-19 Framework, including one of the examples which has been well articulated is the Blue Lane initiative which we have discussed yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

Just before I resume my seat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just also want to share that recently there was some discussions in the New Zealand media that a few cases in Christchurch came from Fiji. It is not, Mr. Speaker, they are cases that came with the Indian contingent, they came through and transited for 30 minutes and went over to New Zealand and in no way, they picked up the virus in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said earlier, I do not support the motion before the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Tabuya. You have the floor, madam.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to fully support the motion that is before the House and that is, the establishment of this special committee which is needed and is urgent. Now, if only the Government would understand that they are not alone in this fight and this is what the effort of this motion is about, that it is a special committee made up mostly of Government Members and two from the Opposition to work together, not just to speak to each other but to consult - consult the public and the stakeholders that when we come together as a nation, that this is a national crisis that we need to solve together and this is the purpose of this motion and putting forward this special committee.

Now, the Honourable Minister for Health has talked about the obvious, which is about economic recovery from COVID-19 and certainly, how they have made Fiji COVID-19 contained. But he really should be worried more about what is causing our deaths everyday, more deaths and that is, NCDs that is killing us more than COVID-19 ever will. So he needs to focus on that and we need to look at the special committee to come together for our economic recovery.

Mr. Speaker, my contribution really focusses on one of the stakeholders that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has recognised and, that is, the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC). The ILO recognises the FTUC as a strategic and critical partner in not only promoting decent working rights of workers, but also having a pivotal role in COVID-19 recovery.

As the Honourable Minister for Employment would recall, on 20th March this year, he had convened a meeting on a tripartite plus the ILO, to open a dialogue on the impact of COVID-19. At that meeting, they collectively agreed and endorsed to have a Tripartite-ILO Rapid Assessment on the impacts of COVID-19.

However, Mr. Speaker, there were series of meetings that happened after that, but then the Government decided to go on its own and has conducted their own survey which has cost taxpayers \$75,000, conducted by the Bureau of Statistics and we are still waiting on the results of that survey. However, the FTUC has launched the ILO-funded and endorsed an in-crisis rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on employment and business.

Mr. Speaker, the survey was conducted on over 2,000 workers, who are members of the unions and these unions included the National Union of Hospitality and Tourism Industries and they negotiated with almost all of the 40-plus properties it represents on other options for its members. It also involved the manufacturing and retail sector union engaging in various discussions with the enterprise that they represent, Mr. Speaker, on the effects of COVID-19 and business downturn. It also included the Federated Airline Staff Association (FASA), as you know, the Air Terminal Services Fiji Limited terminated the employment of almost 285 workers effective immediately and we know the total number now of our employees who have been let go or are on reduced pay.

Mr. Speaker, the point that this particular Report has shown needs to be looked at by this special committee. What are the key findings of this Report and how it can help us as legislators, as policy-makers too, to make decisions that are better for coping with COVID-19?

Mr. Speaker, I will just briefly read out the findings of this Report. Firstly, from the members surveyed, most of them, about 86 percent of those workers who have not been terminated or made redundant are on leave without pay and reduced income. Mr. Speaker, it shows obviously that the unionised workers, to an extent, were being helped because they were negotiating the outcomes with their respective employers.

Another finding, Mr. Speaker, is that working poverty will increase, as affected on reduced income are taking home 70 percent less than what their family needs in a week. Almost 50 percent of affected workers on reduced income are earning 30 percent less, compared to pre-COVID-19. Now, based on the minimum wage rate and 30 percent reduced income, an average worker on reduced hours would be taking home \$75 a week.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on the Fiji Household and Income Survey in 2009, the basic needs poverty line was \$144 in 2003 and \$186 in 2009, so it can be estimated now this year that an urban family of four would need a minimum of \$260 a week. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it can be assumed that the take-home pay of majority of workers on reduced income is 70 percent below the national poverty line.

Mr. Speaker, another finding from this survey is that, productivity will further reduce if current and redundant workers are not re-skilled and supported. We thank the Government for its initiative to commit \$5 million to this up-skilling or re-skilling. However, majority of those who are currently in employment are dependent on their current jobs for income and would be left behind.

Now, if there is a further shutdown of businesses, 94 percent of workers indicated that they do not have the capacity to transit into alternate forms of employment because majority of those are living in urban areas and do not have access to land or village social safety nets.

Another finding, Mr. Speaker, unemployment will increase and consumption will further decline, if redundant workers are not re-skilled or re-transferred to employment. Mr. Speaker, 54 percent of redundant workers have not been able to secure jobs and the majority of those workers are in urgent need of income support.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, the workers risk being left behind and retiring in poverty. Sir, 99 percent of those that were surveyed want the Government to do more to protect their jobs and rights. Although 81 percent of workers surveyed indicated they benefitted from the Government announced stimulus packages, workers felt that Government should do more than buffer their income losses with their own retirement savings in the Fiji National Provident Fund.

Mr. Speaker, some of the comments that came from those surveys basically said that the Government is helping us to help ourselves. So help us to help ourselves which is on their own funds and, Mr. Speaker, they said that the FNPF should be renamed to Fiji National Disaster Fund (FNDF).

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is going to be here for a while...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- It is not a joke.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- That is what they have mentioned. Yes, it is not a joke, but that is what they have said. They are only relying on their own money and no help from the Government.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- So, this Special Committee will look at finding ways other than their own FNPF money to help them. It will be another way to use this special committee to look into this.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned over and over that COVID-19 is going to be here for a while. Is that the Government's plan, we will continue to have phase 4 up to phase 100 of dipping into FNPF? Is that the plan? Our people are not earning as fast as they can put into their General Account. They have lost jobs, yes they need to find alternate jobs but how they can continue to deposit into that account so that they can get help.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate both, the Fiji Employers Federation as well as the employees in what they have termed as the "Bipartite Recovery Action". On 1st July, 2020, FTUC and FCEF supported by the ILO, signed a Memorandum of Agreement, jointly implementing their COVID-19 Recovery Initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, it is very, very encouraging to see this that the employers and employees have come together, outside of Government. There should be a tripartite forum. We have always known the three to work together and we need the three to work together for economic recovery. We do not see this right now, the Government is working on its own, and we need this special committee to bring the three together, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is helping people or telling people to go into their FNPF. Let us note that the FNPF Board for many years now does not have representation of workers or employers on board, only Government and appointees. Now, where is the tripartite representation on the Board, Mr. Speaker, Sir? The savings of our people is by the employers and the employees, not Government! It is by employers and employees, so they need to be included or brought to the table in terms of the economic recovery.

So I am asking the Government, please, do consider this special committee to bring them together. Whatever failed in the negotiations that has led to the Government doing its own survey or

not having workers representatives on the FPNF Board, needs to be relooked at. If this special committee can broker that kind of deal, then we welcome it.

Again, I reiterate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the government is not alone, we are trying to help you. With this special committee, it really needs a nationwide response that will have both sides of the House representing 100 percent of the people, to bring in the stakeholders together to talk and to move forward for the recovery of our country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tabuya. Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, you have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I read this motion, it says, “That Parliament resolves to establish a special committee under Standing Order 129 to inquire into the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.” So, the entire contribution of the Honourable Member was about the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, so what is this committee going to do about it?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is called a problem solving research and Honourable Professor Prasad knows about it, so when someone wants to do a research, you must attempt that research or that study with an open mind. Here, you want to do a socio-impact study and then before that, you are saying, “this is the impact, people are losing jobs, people are having this,” et cetera. Honourable Tabuya read out all kinds of reports from some workers unions, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is socio-economic impact and here she wants to establish a committee to do the same thing. We have gone past that stage. We had started three months ago. The Honourable Minister for Economy came out with a special budget to deal with the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. She has she just woken up now!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a second budget which is to deal with the whole of Government approach to deal with the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. She has just woken up now. Now, she is saying that we come up with another allocation by setting up a committee.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- The motion is talking about inquiring into the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 but then she says in the same breath, that this committee will say, how do we respond to it. It is not in the motion that this committee’s job will be....

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Wait, wait, you are caught now!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Here, the motion says to examine the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and she read out all the impacts in the so-called reports, then she puts aside the motion and says this committee will find out how we should respond.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got the entire Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and every ministry is responding to how we are going to deal with the impact of COVID-

19 and more than that, to lay down the foundation for long-term growth and development. Sir, COVID-19 has come, it will go, we are here, our country will be here and we are not going to be shift away from losing sight by dealing with some temporary band aid/panadol solution. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have not lost track of setting up a solid foundation for the growth and development of Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, every Ministry, including our Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, we are working day and night to deal with immediate, medium and long term and how would we grow, secure and sustainably develop households, communities and the country. There is no need for this motion, this is a wrong motion in the first place. She is trying to make it up by saying that the job of the Committee will be to see how we respond. Why do you not get the motion right? This is wrong, take it back, withdraw the motion! Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. 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 rise to comment on some of the statements made by Honourable Tabuya. But before I do that, I am a little bit surprised by the timing of this motion because when the country was at a critical time and when we were passing through some difficult days, as highlighted and commented by the Honourable Prime Minister, the Opposition Party was busy on their leadership issue. Everyday, when you get your hand on a newspaper, instead of them talking about COVID-19, they were talking about the leadership issue. And I want to remind Honourable Tabuya, please do not use this Parliament to lobby for your Deputy Party Leader position. Stop doing that, please.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to correct some of her statements. She has been talking about this tripartite, but I will tell you the real story about this tripartite. The reason why she was saying things here was because she attended their meeting on Saturday. I think she has been misled or brainwashed by some of them who were present there.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was the Government's effort to convene a tripartite meeting in March. We tried time and again, but at the end of the day, we managed to have the first meeting of tripartite parties. And in that meeting, Government proposed that we need to have a national survey and all the parties agreed. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, after that meeting, the Unions were nowhere near to be seen. The money that was supposed to be given to the Ministry for Employment, they got that out from there for their Unions to carry out the survey.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they were not honest from day one. The reason why I am saying this, while we were continuing with this survey, they went ahead and revealed some of the data. How honest are they? Then here we have one Honourable Member talking about these Unions. I want to ask, Mr. Speaker, Sir, how honest are those Union leaders in this country?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, not only that, Honourable Tabuya has also mentioned about the Tripartite Board members. This is what I am saying, she is not aware of what is happening in and around her. They have boycotted meetings time and again. They boycotted all the meetings that was organised by the Ministry of Employment wherever the Tripartite Board members are and here she is asking, where is this Tripartite Board? What are you talking about? Are you aware and do you know what you are saying in this Honourable House? It is going to go on record, and the next generation will

laugh at you for what you were saying in this Honourable House. When we come here, we come here as Honourable Members and we must speak the truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to say that this survey is work in progress, as far as Government is concerned. We will table that report in this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We will! I assure you, Mr. Speaker, and this Parliament, as the Minister for Employment, that we will table the report, but we do not want people to be part of us and then start playing their politics. They have basically gone ahead and reviewed the data without having a final meeting with the tripartite partners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thought that I should rise and correct the incorrect statements made by the Honourable Member, so that the whole of Fiji knows what this national survey is all about. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will just make a short contribution regarding the issue in the House and in support of the motion at hand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, based on my understanding, we have been listening from yesterday until today and it seems that, that side of the House does not understand the importance and the benefits of a bipartisan approach. If we can see the situation Fiji is facing today, nothing is going right - our economy is down, the level of drug abuse is increasing, crime is increasing and infrastructure is going down and very poor. All those have been based on their decision, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday, we were debating at length about the proposal from the Opposition for a bipartisan committee to inquire into the impacts of drugs. Yesterday, they were saying in the House the programmes that they had implemented for the last five years and the strategies that they have, but it has not made any improvement. Drug abuse continues to increase, the data was explained yesterday by this side of the House. They know very well that their approaches, programmes and plans have not been working for the last 14 years. So I beg the other side of the House to understand what we mean by bipartisan approach. They have run out of ideas and plans, and that is why we are facing problems today and that is why we are giving them new ideas.

I listened with interest yesterday to their responses on the debate against drugs and now with their presentation, needless to say, what is the solution? I was sitting here watching the Honourable Minister for Agriculture. Do you know how to solve the problem? It is to find another crop that has the same value of marijuana and that just solves the problem. Focus your resources there!

How many homes have you done in Kadavu? How many machines have you put in Kadavu? How many rehabilitation of *yaqona* or *dalo* have you done in Kadavu? None! So, that is why they continue to grow that crop because it has high value and low volume, and that is the solution! Find an alternative crop closer to marijuana and you will solve the problem. That is my idea, thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport, you have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think from all the contributions, you can see exactly why no kind of committee would ever work because we are poles apart. We are absolutely poles apart in our thinking and this issue that they raise about bipartisan, it requires us to have some semblance of mind that is actually alike. In this particular Parliament, there is none, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is quite sad that there are some things that are raised and we decided to change the name of FNPF to Fiji National Disaster Fund. That is actually quite shameful. Very shameful to actually even suggest that! Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is poor in its poorest form.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to oppose the motion put forward by the Honourable Tuisawau that Parliament resolves to establish a special committee under Standing Order 29, to inquire into the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to ask Honourable Members on the other side of the House, do you really believe that this Government has been sitting around twiddling its thumbs? Do you really believe that we are not able to comprehend and see how Fijians and businesses have been impacted? Do you actually really believe that? So, there is a saying, if I may say this in the *itaukei* language, ‘*veisau na draki.*’ I think for that side of the House, it happens everyday, their weather changes everyday - one day they are here, the next day they are not. It is just absolutely amazing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they do not realise that on this side of the House, we have specialist teams in each Ministry - the Office of the Prime Minister, Office of the Attorney-General, Ministry of Lands, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Women, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Transport, working tirelessly day in and day out on this very issue. The Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Health and my Ministry, Sir, as well as other Government Departments have come together to develop appropriate recovery strategies. There has been a massive collaboration on the part of Government to actually do this.

I would like to ask the Honourable Member, have you already forgotten about the innovative and forward-looking Budget, the National Budget, that was delivered and passed last month, a Budget that was guided by the principles of creating employment, stimulating the tourism sector by reducing taxes, provision of safety for the unemployed and those with reduced hours, the provision of sustainable Government stimulus to create investments and consumption and the removal of bureaucratic procedures to ease doing business in Fiji?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want the whole House to hear this. The Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, commonly known as OECD, very recently stated that there are three ways in which leaders can revive their economies in this pandemic, and our leader, Sir, has actually covered all of these. The first one is keep supporting the people for as long as possible. We have and are doing this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, through unemployment benefits, we are doing this through benefits for the elderly and we are doing this through MSME concessional loans and the FNPF, Sir.

The second way is to help people find new work. What is happening here, Sir? We are actually doing this - skilling and reskilling of people. This work has been underway since even prior to COVID-19, Sir, the need is more now and agencies such as MSME Fiji, have redesigned their training programmes to address the present needs, Sir.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have to diversify the value chains, not shorten it, but diversify. Initiatives and incentives provided in the 2020-2021 National Budget are targeted at diversification. These, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are carefully and adequately covered by the 2020-2021 National Budget and the FijiFirst Government is in tune with what is happening internationally and how best this can be applied in our Fijian context. What more do they want, Sir?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member must remember that this is not the same playing field, we are on a completely different playing field, the entire landscape has changed. Why have a committee, Sir? Why? If they are still unclear as to what is actually being done, please ask any Minister or any Ministry with respect to what is transpiring, instead of pulling things out of thin air and coming up here and making a big show about it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member should realise that it does not take a special committee sitting behind closed doors to decide what the socio-economic impacts are. You can see the response from the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment. He is absolutely 100 percent correct. It does not take a special committee to actually do this. The impact is seen and more importantly, felt when you talk to people and see what they are actually going through.

In this regard, there has been a very consultative approach that has enabled us to draw the parameters of our recovery, Sir, the recovery that is guided by key pillars of socio-economic sustenance. These, Mr. Speaker, include:

- raising domestic demand and confidence;
- strengthening Fijian micro, small and medium businesses;
- diversifying and expanding the manufacturing base and establishing industries of the future – information technology-business process outsourcing (IT-BPO) industries;
- enhancing our value chains and market access, including bubbles;
- targeted marketing of key sectors and investment;
- improving efficiency; and
- ease of doing business by adapting to better technology and electronic business and e-commerce.

Based on this particular principle, Mr. Speaker, we have developed a COVID-19 Safe Economic Recovery Framework. Through this initiative, we have even got safely-approved yachts to come to Fiji due to the Blue Lane Initiative. Within the Framework, we have approved 66 yachts to enter Fiji, which basically means about \$2 million being pumped into the economy. This is income that we were not actually expecting.

As I have mentioned also earlier on in my Budget speech, Sir, businesses on Denarau are opening up, foreign exchange providers to repair shops and maintenance for yachts are operating fulltime. I have been informed that one yacht maintenance provider has expanded business by opening another one. Supermarkets and markets are operating longer hours in four days a week whilst retail outlets from Friday to Sunday and dive operators are also relocating to Denarau because of the increased interest in diving. Restaurant businesses are also doing better because of those yachts. Our Love our Locals Campaign has been a boost through extensive reduction in taxes in the National Budget. It has led to an increase in visitors to Denarau and other properties.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wanted to spell this out because we want the Opposition to actually clearly get this. The Fijian Government is already on top of things and we are moving ahead to create opportunities. It is too late, Sir, they have missed the boat, the horse has bolted, it is too late. The

Opposition are still dreaming about it. So many Fijians have actually contributed towards this economic recovery programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge Honourable Tuisawau and other Members of the Opposition to refrain from making such unhelpful and counterproductive motions in this august House. Instead in their enagement, they should work with Fijians and work for the greater good.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, lastly, they talk about bipartisanship, about forming committees but the minute they walk out this House, they will go into the newspaper and then sensationalise things (I know the Honourable Attorney-General will address this shortly), and then make it felt like this country is absolutely bankrupt. Well, I can tell you this much, it is not! It is not, and if you really want to get involved in bipartisan work, you should refrain from making such comments in the newspapers. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really do not know the reason why the other side are so afraid of bipartisanship. For good reason, they need only to look at their bad experiences to see the need.

The Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport will understand that if he had sought second opinion, if he had listened to this side of the House, he would not lose that \$45 million on that golf tournament in Denarau. It happened from 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018 at Natadola and we were telling him, year after year after year. It is useless. Listen to us! But he continued to do so. He thought he was the only expert, and that is the problem with you not taking bipartisan approach.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- That is the problem with you not listening to this side.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, \$45 million, and that is not your father's money, that is the people's money, you lost it! And they come here today and say, "They are the only experts".

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

HON. F.S KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, I do not take lightly to anyone referring to my father, Sir. I think he ought to withdraw that. That is an insult and I do not take that lightly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and with the greatest of respect, I ask him to withdraw that with your permission, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I withdraw that, sincerely.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you and I hope so.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But I hope you will take my point. And another good example of the failure to listen to this side, they just look at the mess they have done with the economy. We have been telling them for 14 years, "listen to us, let us do a common approach", and they did not want to.

Sir, \$4 billion was our revenue in 2017. In 2018, it came down to \$3 billion; in 2019 - \$2 billion; this year is \$1.6 billion in revenue, because they do not listen.

Debt has gone up - \$2.5 million, now it is going to be \$9 billion, for what? Because you do not want to listen, you do not want to take a bipartisan approach. And the facts speak for themselves and that is the whole reason or purpose of this motion.

The Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport said that they have started four months ago. He asked, do you really believe that Government had been sitting around doing nothing? And he said that they have started work four months ago.

The Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment said that four months ago, they have specialists in every Department. But it does not show in the Budget. If that was so, Honourable Minister, why was your Budget deducted? Why did you have only \$16 million in the Ministry of Agriculture's budget? Why did the Ministry of Fisheries? Why did the Ministry of Forestry? These are primary industries. We expected these departments to be stimulated, but where is the result of their four months? Cheating! What did those experts do? Because you do not want to listen to this side.

(Hon. Dr. M. Reddy interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Where is your stimulation? They said their department is stimulated from their own money. Well, the main thing is, you will stimulate yourself.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But this is the point. They said that they had an expert in every department, so why was the Ministry of Agriculture ignored? Why was the Ministry of Forestry ignored? Why was the Ministry of Fisheries ignored? It does not show.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You just woke up!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, they said that we were asleep, we were not asleep. You were doing nothing. It is better to be sleeping than doing nothing, and they were doing nothing.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports said that the Government was busy, as was highlighted by the Honourable Prime Minister, that SODELPA was busy sleeping. And let me just refer to what the Honourable Prime Minister said and a lot of what he said was rubbish. He said, "That side of the House woke up late". Woke up late to what?

The Honourable Prime Minister seems to be misconceived about the nature of the problem that we have, this pandemic. He probably thought that it was like a hurricane that came and went. No, it is continuing! The effects of this are continuing. It does not calm, the crisis has not ended, the crisis continues.

There is a good example here, if you just allow me, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to read from the latest Reserve Bank of Fiji's figures in August. It shows that this problem (COVID-19) continues and continues in its effect. Sir, may I quote from RBF's Economic Review for the Month Ended August 2020 – Vol. 37:

“...25 million cases recorded so far. Amongst our major trading partners, economic contraction in the second quarter is expected to be the steepest...”

That was not months ago, this is now. Moving forward, it again says, and I quote:

“...visitor arrivals plummeted by 71.8 percent in the year to July compared to the same period last year. Additionally, electricity (-9.7%), pine wood supply (-19.6%), woodchip (-5.1%), sawn timber (-27.3%), mahogany (-38.0%)...”

Those were all down or decreased, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Report also said that consumption investment created economic contraction this year - 21.7 percent, so it is ongoing. Further, building and construction activity (-27.9 percent), domestic cement sales (-13.4 percent), new lending by commercial banks (-11.5 percent) and licensed credit institutions (-54.8 percent). That is just to make a point that this pandemic or this problem is continuing. It is not like it came and went, no!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- We never said that.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Honourable Prime Minister said that, let me quote to you. The Prime Minister said, “They awoken up late to the crisis, the crisis is ongoing”. It did not stop. He said, “That we finally came late with all the sacrifice”.

HON. J. USAMATE.- He did not say that.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Then he said that we were pre-occupied with fighting the party leadership...

HON. J. USAMATE.- That's true.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- And he also said that we are reinstating chiefly power, probably a reference to the Honourable Prime Minister's law for terminating the Great Council of Chiefs.

But let me tell the Honourable Prime Minister here, those laws, in hindsight, and the more we perceive, it becomes clearer and clearer that they were totally wrong. That is even the belief by the Honourable Members who are sitting on the other side. Maybe, they did not say it. I think that is what they know inside, probably speaking for Honourable Koroilavesau and Honourable Usamate. That is what they know. What is only stopping them is because they are paid and they are threatened and they are intimidated. But as soon as the Honourable Prime Minister decides to go out, they will come to this side.

(Laughter)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Some of them, as soon as they go out from here, then they come this side and that is telling me that even while they are here, their mind, their thoughts and everything

is on this side, but they are intimidated because they are paid from that side. You just wait. So do not worry, we will come to your rescue sooner or later.

Let me come to the point. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point I wish to say is that, in relation to COVID-19, there are basically three things, in my view, that we should address namely, the:

- (1) health aspect;
- (2) job seekers and job saving programme; and
- (3) economic stimulation.

To make it simple, those are the three.

Now, you look at the mini-budget. In the mini-budget, we thought those were the only things but no, it addressed everything and it confused us. The reason was because they had no money then, they had to revise their budget, not only because of COVID-19 but because of their own financial existence. So, it is totally wrong, in my view, to be saying that. The point that we should understand is that, a bipartisan approach allows experts and other people to come in.

Going back to agriculture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, people are still jumping up and down. People are calling me and they may be calling you and said, “Look we need to look at this. We need to look at that”. They are not the experts, the UN are not the experts and the international community are not the experts, so we need to look at our own unique situation to come up with ideas. That is the whole reason for this motion. Thank you.

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

HON. RO T.V. KEPa.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I stand in support of this motion, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed everyone’s life and not necessarily for the better, but some Honourable Members on the other side, it is making them talk more nonsense.

No one has been spared from this pandemic. In Fiji, many people are, indeed, suffering. They need relief, they look to Government for help and government has to hear what the people are saying. You have to stop, look and listen and be aware. You cannot obstinately continue with policies that are out of tune with reality, like the COVID-19 FNPf Withdrawal Scheme that is making people poorer and leaving nothing for their retirement and old age.

We must deal properly with the most urgent pressing issues of the day. At a time such as this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the poor and vulnerable who are impacted and affected the most and mostly by health and economic issues. Since we have had two Budgets already this year, the COVID-19 Response Budget in March and the 2020-2021 Budget in July, the question is this, what does the economy do for the people? What does the economy do to the people? How do people participate in it? What is being done for the common good?

We have to be aware, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the economy exists for the people, not the people for the economy. When we look at the humanitarian issues facing us of no income families, single income families, low wage earners, the elderly, unemployed, poor struggling students, small business operators trying to make ends meet, the list is endless and quite depressing. Right now, Fiji’s high

rate of domestic violence within family relationships points to a breakdown of family values. Many children are being born into a violent family environment.

We have heard, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the cycle of violence. Many young people resort to drugs, we heard yesterday of the figures in 2018 and 25 percent of drugs were found in primary schools and in secondary schools, 75 percent. Many of these young people resort to drugs to fulfil unmet emotional needs caused by lack of love and belonging.

Poverty in Fiji remains a serious concern, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Increasing statistics on prostitution, planting marijuana and selling drugs are poverty indicators. There is a strong correlation between level of education and the risk of poverty in Fiji. In Fiji, the highest concentration of poor people, as we already know, Sir, are in the urban and peri-urban areas. The statistics show that poverty centres around urban and peri-urban communities, that is where we have the squatter settlements, and there are over 200 squatter settlements in Fiji. The urban drift is responsible for this and a low level of education is the cause of much of it.

For those categories of people, Mr. Speaker, Sir, paying for grounded aircraft for Fiji Airways makes no sense. Their question is, who told you people to go and buy them? When told that they do not own them, only some aircrafts, some are bought and some are leased, *areh*, what is wrong with them! Who told them to do that? A good question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Innocent people are paying the price of overambitious and reckless spending.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to undertake every effort to get our economic house in order right away. We have to fast, pray and do more good works for divine intervention that COVID-19 remains in containment, and we thank the Lord for that and the Government for keeping us safe.

When schools re-opened after the COVID-19 lockdown, the Catholic Church put into place a psychosocial spiritual process in their schools, to help teachers and students address their experiences and feelings during the lockdown, as it was a traumatic time that affected them all and mostly in a negative manner. Those interventions were for their 19 secondary schools, 44 primary schools, five tertiary and no number was given for their Early Childhood Education Centres, but this would have totalled thousands of students and their teachers.

Psychologically, so much happened during COVID-19, when children were literally locked up in their own homes for the period of over one whole school term. For Year 12 and Year 13, that is Form 6 and Form 7, they had a 14 week break and for the early childhood and primary schools, it was 15 weeks of lockdown in their homes.

Just think of that, Mr. Speaker! Whilst they were at home during this lockdown, they were confronted with parents losing jobs, parents who are on leave without pay, sickness, losing homes, less food on the table, some of them with no food at all, stress parents, violence in the home and children could not talk to their friends to share with them what was happening. Who could they talk to? They missed their friends, Mr. Speaker.

Imagine the effects this would have had on young children, whose development at this stage does not offer them many coping skills. Different experiences affect children in different ways. That is why the psychosocial spiritual processes were offered. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, the Government can take a leaf out of the Catholic Church's intervention programme, to help students and teachers, and even parents.

I am sure Ratu Kadalevulevu School (RKS) would be the better for such an involvement. Who knows what is happening at RKS is a consequence of COVID-19 consequences. Since we have some RKS old boys on both sides of the House, Mr. Speaker, maybe they could organise these interventions for the School. I am sure right now, they would want to give back something to their School. Spending one week at home is not going to do anything for those students from the School. What are you going to offer them after that one week away from school? More of the same? You already know it is not going to work, right?

So, I am strongly suggesting, Mr. Speaker, that this psychosocial spiritual process be given to students at RKS and their teachers because this would be a timely, relevant and amenable process for the school to go through right now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I rise to make a contribution in support of the motion and that is to establish a special committee to inquire into the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, we moved this motion with our genuine and sincere concern and care for our people. I will share this with the House, this motion emanates out from various visits that we made to the communities, whereas the other side of the House only visit the communities to go and cut ribbons. When they do that, the people are coming there to serve them, it is like a master and servant attitude, and the people will never share their real concerns with the Government team, with the Ministers coming in their big black vehicles with the lights going on and off and it scares them off, Mr. Speaker. They will not ever share their genuine concern on the struggles they are going through.

They will do that if someone comes in a very normal attire, even with flip flops and just walking by themselves. They can relate to that person and they will share their genuine concern about the struggles in their life. They will do that with Members of this side of the House. They can relate to us because they know, we will listen to their concerns and we will raise it in this House.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Prime Minister, there is a dress code for this august House and we have to dress accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we moved a motion on the special committee to be established to also address the drug abuse in Fiji. Again, we hear from the other side of the House that they did not support it. The Honourable Minister responsible spoke against it, Mr. Speaker, and I am reminded of Einstein who once said that doing the same things over and over and over again with their legislation, their policies and their strategies and it is not working, that is a perfect sign for insanity.”

Mr. Speaker, here we are again. Even yesterday, because they were looking at us, we could see their body language that they could very well relate to the motion on drug abuse in Fiji. They are concerned about the people because we may even have family members that fall into that category but because our system does not allow cross the floor voting and as also mentioned by Honourable Nawaikula, even though their hearts tell them that they agree with the motion, they will never dare go against that because they know it will cost them their job.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, conscious voting is out of this Parliament. If we are going to be looking at this socio-economic impact brought about by COVID-19, that is a matter of the heart because you are concerned about the people. But if you are going to be kept by the very fact that you are dictated by how you vote in this House, you are going to sit there and deny your conscience on the concern about you have for your own people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, COVID-19 pandemic is a global crisis but we must never forget the impact are critically local. And we hear from the other side of the House that they are doing what the Government is supposed to be doing in terms of their programmes. But we have said yesterday those legislations, those programmes are not working and you need to shift. You need to change. You need to address this impact brought about by COVID-19 with new policies and that you will need to do that if you have more people. You need people from this side of the House to be able to come up with constructive policies to be able to address this problem constructively and effectively.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Agriculture wants to talk about everything else but not agriculture. A lot of people are moving back to the rural areas and all the Ministry is doing is distributing seedlings. Now, it is a second wave of seeds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday I mentioned in this House that almost \$133 million worth of marijuana was uprooted from Kadavu for the last month, just from June up until now, as reported by the mainstream media. If you are a responsible Minister for Agriculture, you would come out with alternative programmes that will bring about the same kind of money that the Government is looking for. Yet, they come out with policies, like I mentioned yesterday, on the Blue Lane initiative, when they know very well that yachts that come to Fiji can very well be responsible for the hard drugs, such as cocaine, that gets washed up in our maritime islands, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I will repeat, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that this is a very irresponsible Government when they know that that kind of legislation, even though the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport said in one of the media articles that it will inject \$1 billion or something dollars into our economy but we need to have a balance in regards to the economy and the lives of our people.

If this is the kind of Government that is leading us today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, then that is why we are moving this kind of motion; they need help. You need help, Honourable Minister for Fisheries, and that is why we are offering to establish this kind of committee so that we can really engage in a bipartisan approach and go out to our people. All those initiatives, all those policies that they have mentioned, are their own - they are driven from the top down.

The best policies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will be driven from the bottom up and you will only get that kind of policies if you consult with the people, so with this kind of committee, we will be consulting people. We will call in expertise to give their views, we will call in the very people that live in the villages to come in and give in their views.

Mr. Speaker, because with COVID-19, it is the poor who will be badly affected and if the Government does not consult them to be able to formulate and design new policies that will work and then be able to use the money that they are looking for, this Budget is just a budget on paper, Mr. Speaker. Every Monday, you look for money even to pay for civil servants, so to be able to do that, you really need to go out to the people and hear them.

On the initiative that the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport had mentioned about small businesses, I was in Nabouwalu recently and people had to go right to Labasa to be able to fill their forms and get other documentation to be able to submit with that form.

Up until now, Mr. Speaker, there has been no feedback. One person came and said to me that he inquired with the Ministry and was told to keep on waiting. That is the problem, Mr. Speaker.

The initiatives may be good, policies may be good but where is the money? If there is no money then all those initiatives will be on hold until, as someone jokingly said to me, the loan comes through. This is from the people on the ground. Until the loan comes through which makes sense, only then all those initiatives, the small businesses or medium enterprises that the Honourable Minister had alluded to, may only become a reality when money is there.

On the education sector, during the COVID-19 lockdown, if the Government had remained true to their promises in the 2015 Budget where their Budget theme was, “Turning promises into deeds” and if those promises were indeed turned into deeds, then the children would not be really affected during the lockdown because their promise of one laptop per child would have facilitated the children’s continuous education at home. However, that did not happen.

Also, Mr. Speaker, it is popular on social media that there are organisations providing cooked lunches for the children. Those are concerned groups, concerned mothers that tend to have stood up to help our people because they know that some children are going without lunches in schools, yet the Honourable Minister for Education will say that all is well in the Ministry. As mentioned earlier on, the strike of the students at Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS) are a sign of the negative impact brought about by COVID-19 because they need counselling.

They may have needed counselling, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps that was not available and that is only the tip of the iceberg because of the impact of COVID-19. It is a long haul, Mr. Speaker, and if this is the kind of response that we are getting from the other side, where are we going to get to.

Yesterday, I asked the Honourable Minister for Health on the preparedness of the health facilities in Vanuabalavu in regards, for example, water, and even in the urban areas, the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure has not been able to address that. Children have stopped going to school, so our problems are going to be aggravated more because the Government has failed to relook at their policies, relook at their budget provisions and consult the people accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, it would be a good start if we start with a bipartisan committee. We know, Honourable Minister for Fisheries, that it is not going to happen but we need to sensitise and highlight this so that our people know what kind of democracy we have in this Parliament.

On that contribution, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to share some words on this.

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

HON. MAJOR-GENERAL (RET'D) S.L. RABUKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As the Honourable Tuisawau was moving his motion, I wrote this down - I will not be surprised if the Honourable Members of Parliament from the Government side would say that there is no need for this Committee to be set up because Government already has in place things for that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many of the ongoing programmes in Fiji now since COVID-19 came around are, in fact, geared towards that. Perhaps, more needs to be done and we cannot know what else, unless we come up with this bipartisan committee which will be chaired by a Government Member

and majority of the Members will be Government Members, and the Opposition will have two Members of the Committee. So it mostly will be a Government-driven committee.

During my time when I was the Prime Minister, we got either Government or Opposition private Members' Bills coming up, there would always be an attempt to amend because it was an Opposition motion, we in Government would amend it so that it still ended up as a Government motion or one that we arrived at by consensus - the amended motion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will be looking at a reset of the whole economy of the nation. Everyone is looking at that. While in the past we have been driven by our concern and our participation in international trade, I am sure there will be some room for reduction on our reliance on international trade.

The advantage of having bipartisan committees of Parliament is that they will apolitically consider the issues at hand. Before lunch, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had a very lively debate on the climate change and the contribution from the Climate Change Champion. Mr. Speaker, Sir, he was the 100 metres champion at Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS) and I am sure they will listen to him, if he goes back to try and resolve the minor issue in the school at the moment.

Before lunch, he was praising the Honourable Prime Minister for his performance during his Presidency of COP 23. A lot of the things he said were based on the Honourable Prime Minister's ability to bring sides together and arrive at a consensus on all the issues they had to discuss. That is a national trait we have - our ability to discuss and our ability to talk with one another other. And I see that in the report that we discussed in the morning, the first of the eight key activities funded by the Trust Fund was the Talanoa Dialogue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is all this motion is trying to set up - a Talanoa Dialogue in Parliament by this committee and going around, collecting information that will help the Government refine, perhaps the arrangements we have for Fiji and reset post-COVID-19 situation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. Honourable Viliame Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee must sit and carry out the work that has been outlined in the motion.

Mr. Speaker, we look at this way, that this is part of a confidence-building masses that we need to restart the economy. My colleague, Honourable Nawaikula, was reading from the latest Reserve Bank Review (RBF) Economic Review which was received today and what it says Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, there is about a billion dollars of liquidity in the banking system. But it also says that lending is down quite significantly.

There is no shortage of borrowers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I speak as Chairman of a co-operation that has programmes in place, that has its loan facilities approved before COVID-19 but right now, I need to go and convince the lenders to lend the money, and I am not alone. I was talking to one of my colleagues in Parliament, he also faces the same problem. So, what is it that is affecting the lenders not to lend? The confidence that is missing which we understand, but if anything, we need to get the private sector to continue with the projects that it had on the drawing board before COVID-19.

Government makes the case that building the Prime Minister's Office is good for the economy, employing people and, indeed, I see other projects around the country that are progressing. Some of them I would classify as low priority, that they can be pushed aside for this time until things get better. Also during the debate on the Budget, I have said that the private sector has a huge schedule of projects that are ready to go but right now, are having problems securing the funds from lending institutions.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to build the confidence and this committee will help create that confidence. Any little work we do to meet, to have dialogue on issues relating to COVID-19, will help build confidence. I was lamenting yesterday about the fact that we will meet now in this Parliament, and we next meet in early December, and we all know that every time this Parliament meets, the country is buoyed by a feeling of goodwill, a feeling of belief that their leaders are meeting and are resolving issues. Even if we do not agree, the fact that we are talking helps create confidence.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge that we support this motion that this committee should go and meet and help create the dialogue that we need to have in the community and help recover the economy and help the socio-economic aspects of our country. I know that we all have stories to tell but for me, I have lived in Nadi for a great many years and it was only last week that I went back to Nadi and to see Nadi Airport being desolate, totally shut down, was quite painful.

So, that is really, as we all know, impacting on our country and we should do everything to try and revive our economy and this committee sanctioned by Parliament will go a long way in creating the positive vibes out there and possibly, help lenders lend money and for projects to take off. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fully support this motion. Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have, in fact, a fairly (if you like) technical response to this motion itself which I do not support. But listening to the contributions from the other side, I feel the need to actually respond to some of those responses that were provided from those who spoke on the motion itself.

Before I do that, suffice to say, only to reiterate that we have had widespread public consultations before the Budget. We had in fact went out publicly, we were in the Towns of Sigatoka, Nadi, and Lautoka. We also had consultations in Suva with a number of organisations, including the Employers Federation and Chambers of Commerce. We had also said that people could make submissions online and, of course, we had two individuals who are politicians who responded and as I have mentioned earlier on, Savenaca Narube and Mick Beddoes. Indeed, they have provided alternative budgets. Of course, the Opposition, both SODELPA and NFP, continuously failed to give in an alternative budget.

They do tend to cite Australia and New Zealand when it suits them but actually if you look at the budgetary process in those two countries, the Opposition actually always, not just when it is COVID-19, provide an alternative budget. The Leader of the Opposition will go out and provide an alternative budget, et cetera. But of course this tradition has not caught fire with Honourable Members of the Opposition here, nor have they during the Budget debate and the contributions in the response to the Budget announcement, ever provide an alternative. They only were ...

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Yes we provide the budget, but they did not provide an alternative. All they simply did, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was, as I have said, provide airy fairy, not even alternative but basically criticism for the sake of it. As I have highlighted earlier on today that the Opposition thinks to either engage in obscurantism which is basically misleading people or, in fact, just ignorant of certain things.

I must admit, I was quite flabbergasted by listening to Honourable Tabuya when she said that the FNPF should be renamed FNDF. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Honourable Member is actually chastising, not just the organisation but also those people who work in that organisation. On my phone, I have a *viber* group - FNPF COVID-19 and withdrawals and I have the entire FNPF Board, the CEO of FNPF, Alipate Waqairawai, Amelia, Pravinesh Singh, Rusiate, the Permanent Secretary for Economy and Sherry from Fiscal Planning, and everyday, sometimes on an hourly basis, we get queries from people sending us *viber* messages and we get their matters addressed. On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is undermining the hard work those people are putting in, the staff at the very branches who are working hard to deal with those applications.

On the other hand, FNPF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has nearly 38 percent of our cash reserves. It is the major financial institution. In fact, when it shifts its term deposit from one bank to the other, it can actually shift interest rates. That is the level of leverage FNPF has. Any responsible Member of Parliament who is, at least, a bit knowledgeable or, at least, cares about the financial system in Fiji and the value of the superannuation funds, not just of us, but all the young people in Fiji, who are currently contributing to this Fund, so when they actually retire they will get a good return and good pension, she has just undermined that. That is the level of irresponsibility in this quest to make some political gains. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the type and quality of contribution we expect from a supposed committee that is going to use their word on a bipartisan manner, to look at the ills of COVID-19. It does not offer confidence at all on this side of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for her knowledge also, the General Account of FNP has almost tripled in the last 10 years. In fact, prior to that, withdrawals as a percentage of contribution was much higher than the actual contributions themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me also clarify the point about having employee representatives, if you look at superannuation funds throughout the world, of course, there are some jurisdictions where superannuation funds have been what we call, brought into the private sector by individuals companies. If you go to Australia, there is no statutory body *per se*, but their individual private companies provide superannuation fund facilities.

You do not actually get employee representatives. What you do get, Mr. Speaker, Sir, are people who are good at managing funds. It is not about representation of different groupings, it is about people who can manage funds. I do not need to go into the detail of what happened to FNPF and the various World Bank reports and actuarial studies that said that the manner in which FNPF was being run previously prior to reforms, all the monies would have finished by 2052.

(Hon. V.R. Gavoka interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It is a fact, Honourable Gavoka, wake up! Read the report, it is a fact.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Tabuya who talks about the union members who should be present, they were actually present when the law did stipulate we need the employee representatives. They were picking up \$150,000 and \$180,000 a year in director's fees. They would sit in a board,

sub-committee, they get paid allowance on the same day; three or four allowances. They get thousands of dollars of telephone bills jacked up because they sat.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Change the representative, now she says. So now it is been individualised.

My point being, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, in the same way, if you are going to have a bank and they need to manage the funds, if you have a life insurance company, they need to make investments, just because you are the worker representative does not in any way mean the investments will be a lot better. You need the right person for the right job. The current FNPF Act says that you must have people on the Board with various skill sets.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is quite worrying that I am getting this kind of comments from people who supposedly work in the private sector. The fact of the matter is that, the FNPF fund is in a lot better position than what they ever were.

I would also like to reiterate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister for Employment and I were involved in the Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) earlier on. The union representatives failed to attend the ERAB Board meetings. It is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not lost on people because these union representatives are also members of political parties. Honourable Tabuya belonged to one of them, so obviously in respect of their contribution, it is determined by their political fortunes or what they believe would be their political fortunes. This is the level of hypocrisy that we are seeing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I want to make is that the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport highlighted the fact that we have the COVID-19 Fijian Economic Recovery Framework. I wonder how many of the Opposition Members have actually read it. It is a detailed document that sets out in sync with the health measures that need to be put in place, and that need to be actually implemented with the view, whilst managing their health risk, opening up the economy.

Honourable Salote Radrodro has completely debunked the Blue Lanes, despite explaining to her. She is so mono-focussed like some of the members in FNPF on one particular issue and everything else becomes irrelevant. Running and managing the economy whilst looking at all the various contributions to the economy, you cannot be simply mono-focussed. It is a question of managing those risks, so I would like her to go and tell all those Fijians who have now been re-employed at Port Denarau and some of them have gone out to the Mamanucas after the arrival of the 60 or 70 odd yachts, that there is going to be a regatta between the islands during the Independence Week - 10th October, 2020. How many Fijians will be employed? They will be able to earn some living.

On one hand, they talk about unemployment, yet on the other hand, they do not want those people to be employed. Every single country in the world today faces drug problems. Drug usage in Australia has increased significantly. My brother in law who is actually a school teacher will tell you. Children coming to school scratching their arms because they are on ice. It is a problem there too. They also allow yachts. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the problem with the Opposition. They simply cannot comprehend or actually fail to comprehend these issues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again she misled Parliament. I had said yesterday and the Honourable Minister had also highlighted that the MSME we announced yesterday, the applications are being processed. There were 9,000 applications, \$60 million to be paid out in the next few weeks, being assessed by individual Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) that have got expertise - Institute of Accountants, Chambers of Commerce, Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation. All these organisations are putting up their hands fee-free, not charging us any single cent, working till midnight to process these applications because tomorrow, if someone gets this fund and they do not deserve it, you will come running here and say, “You giving freebies. You are buying votes.” We realise it is taxpayers’ funds and that is why it is going through a level of scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have to read this particular text message that I received last week from this gentleman who I have not actually met. He said, and I quote:

“A very good morning to you, Sir. Sometimes when you are exasperated by the court here led by Biman, please remember the words of the great Bruce Lee. If you point a finger away to the moon, you will miss all the heavenly glory if you concentrate on the finger. These people will never accept the good things. It will be easier to write on water than to talk sense into them. Wishing you a very happy and blessed weekend and God Bless”.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are numerous examples of this. I also wanted to highlight this. Honourable Salote Radrodro again, I am just going to stay with you for a little while, she said that she saw the people on this side of the House who have this look in their eyes, that we have conscious voting, they would have voted for that particular motions. Honourable Member, if I were to say to you, the number of times, the number of the Members on the other side had come forward to us and said, “we agree with you in private”, half of your side would be empty.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I see some of them shaking their heads and saying, “Do not say it.”

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to correct Honourable Nawaikula. He said that the budget for agriculture was not increased. In fact, the budget for agriculture was increased. The budget for Forestry actually was increased. The budget, of course, for Medical Services was increased. If you look at some of the new policies announced from some of the other Ministries, there are strategic moves in place to be able to make sure that they are a lot more responsive.

He said that we had said Government revenue is \$4 billion, we have never projected that. Please, correct that. If you look at all the Budget Estimates, we have never estimated budget revenue to be \$4 billion.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is no doubt that COVID-19 has affected the entire world, we all agree with that. There is no doubt that some of the fundamentals of economics need to be looked at throughout the world.

On the issue of sovereign debt, just google it. Nearly every hour there is an article coming out by some experts. There are new articles now coming out that debt by Government is not a bad

thing, the United Kingdom has almost tripled its level of debt and so as USA, all those Governments have got enormous levels of debt. A lot of them are doing that to just spur economic activity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, we have to even to re-look at our Development Plan. Our 20 Year Development Plan, the timelines need to be looked at because as we have said, we do not know when this COVID-19 pandemic will finish, we do not know whether it will actually ever go away. It may be one of those illnesses or diseases that we will simply have to live with, and there may be a vaccine in two years' time, we do not know that. In the same way people lived with polio for decades. Then someone came up with a vaccine and polio was eradicated in many parts of the world. That is the reality and that is the new norm. The way we travel and when we get to travel, will change forever. So, we will have to relook at our Development Plans.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 95 percent of the countries in the world are projected to have negative per capita income growth in 2020. We are not in this alone. What does also bother me, Mr. Speaker, if you talk about bipartisan support and I am saying this again, Honourable Qereqeretabua has made this scene like some lifetime objective of hers, to go and tell everyone in Fiji, not to download the App. I find it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, such an abominable statement to make, hugely irresponsible statement to make. Hugely irresponsible!

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- A point of order, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think the Honourable Attorney-General has just misled Parliament and misled Fiji. At no time, I have ever said to the people in Fiji not to download the App and if you read the *Daily Hansard*, you would know exactly what I said. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will rephrase that. Honourable Qereqeretabua has not, in any way, supported the downloading of careFIJI App. In fact, she has said that this is some form of rebellion. She was quoted in the *Fiji Times*, she did say that, it is a form of rebellion. In other words, eking on people to do so.

Our download of careFIJI App now has just crept over 70,000. We have approximately 630,000 registered voters in Fiji. In other words, those people are of the age of 18. The Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, very proudly says that 40 percent of Australians have downloaded the App, which is very similar to Fiji. In fact, the level of intrusion into the privacy areas, ours is far, far less intrusive, in fact, minimal. Theirs is a bit more. Singapore, same source code, and that is what is used as one of the demarcators, as I have said that is the norm. Investment Australia, they are now putting trackers on you, anklets or bracelets, to see the people's movement, if they have got COVID-19 or suspected of COVID-19. Here we are asking people to have a simple App that will help us to be able to market ourselves better. We want to open our borders, whilst managing our health risks. We want to get our hotel workers employed, we want Fiji Airways to fly, and we want flight attendants to get their jobs, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It cannot happen, unless we take all these measures.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as far as the Budget is concerned, in fact, quite surprisingly, we have received enormous levels of support from the private sector in respect of the feedback on the Budget, even from quarters that we did not expect, frankly. Now, it is not about whether you have a committee and NFP is there, SODELPA is there, the level of confidence, of course, is affected. The rest of the world have their level of confidence affected. If you are going to have hotels that are not going to be filled, if the workers do not necessarily have their continuous work, obviously those people who normally provide services, who will build buildings to service them, will not build it. What we are trying to do is provide more and more incentives, over of the top incentives so to speak, so that they are incentivised and take opportunities and the storyline that we are also saying Mr. Speaker, Sir, better to build now and be ready when things open up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wanted to just highlight this particular issue and just very quickly, again, reiterate, because there seems to be a huge lack of understanding in respect of the Budget process itself. We have a macroeconomic committee that consists of the Reserve Bank of Fiji, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Commerce and Trade, Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Infrastructure, Investment Fiji, Fiji Bureau of Statistics and FRCS. They are constantly looking at these figures. It is an independent body that come up with their own figures, in respect of what Honourable Nawaikula had read out.

Honourable Nawaikula read from that report, absolutely right! Those set of figures are exactly what is happening with the rest of the world, we are no different. If tourists stop coming to Fiji, if we do not have the garment demand from Australia and New Zealand obviously, all those areas will be affected, electricity will be affected. If a garment factory that runs for five days in a week and now they are going to run for only one or two days, obviously there will be no excuses of electricity.

So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again very quickly, as highlighted by the Honourable Prime Minister, the UN has spoken to us and we are working with development partners ADB, World Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, IMF, JICA they working extremely closely with us. Therefore, I would urge the Honourable Members that rather than focusing energies in trying to set up this Committee, let us look at how we can work together in the community, provide that level of confidence, come together and support the policies because this level of negativity, I can assure you, is not generated at all in other jurisdictions from the Opposition. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I was going to end it but I will give you the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief. I just wanted to pick up from the Honourable Attorney-General's concluding remarks and I think he is right, we can build confidence in our community and part of the problem with that, for example, this Government needs to think about why people are talking about it, why some people are reluctant because they seem not to trust this Government.

I think there is a total lack of understanding of the role of parliamentary inquiry committees, Mr. Speaker. I heard Honourable Reddy saying, "Oh, bipartisanship means two parties this side". Bipartisanship means Government and Opposition, but it is an issue, Mr. Speaker.

In the past, we have moved motions for inquiry on health, on sugar, on drugs and the Government rejected. Now, look at the state of those sectors that we wanted to look at. Mr. Speaker, I think there is fear that this Government has because they are so busy trying to make themselves look good, that they feel if there is a Committee that somehow the Opposition is going to hijack it and use it for political purposes because they keep talking about politicising the issue. That is not the objective, Mr. Speaker.

I have heard a lot of the arguments from the other side of the House because we are criticising Government and we cannot sit in a committee, that is not true. Once you form the committee, for example, if this committee goes to parts of the country together and says, "Look we need to find out what is happening, we need to talk about this App, all of you need to download this App", if it is coming as a collective voice from Parliament, it will increase, it will do it, it will help people to have confidence. That is why, Mr. Speaker, it is very important at this time when you have a crisis to build confidence. They do not seem to understand that politicians can build confidence and especially, when they come together from the Government side and the Opposition side. Some of us

are not here just to think about politics, we are here to put some ideas across on behalf of the people because we also go to the people.

I know the Government side goes and we go there as well. And sometimes they feel more confident in raising issues with us than with the Government because there is a certain level of fear in the community. In fact, people always tell me, “I cannot say this, please do not take my name in Parliament because I might not get this.” This is how fearful people are, and that is why I am saying that sometimes the confidence can come if we have some committees.

So, even if we argue that the Government has all these committees, that the Honourable Attorney-General was saying, we know that. But a bipartisan committee is not only about making the Government look bad or finding out the wrong that they do, it is also about holding the Government as a bipartisan committee to account as to what they do.

As one of my colleagues from this side said, the Government Member is chairing the Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They have three Members, there is no problem. I will give you an example. In fact, when I was the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, the three Government Members that I had were the best in that Committee. We worked very well, in fact, they were doing a better job than what I expected. They were asking the right questions, they were doing the right things. So committees do not....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, actually the Honourable Member caused more damage about the App when he actually did not know. The Honourable Attorney-General actually explained it very clearly in Parliament how it works. It was not only once, he said the wrong thing twice. That actually killed people’s confidence.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- No, people were calling me, Mr. Speaker, and asking, “What is Honourable Reddy saying?” I said “No, no, maybe he has made a mistake”. But then when I read the *Fiji Times*, he actually made a mistake and repeated it twice. So, let us not pretend that Government had all the information but the fact of the matter is that, Government Ministries and Departments and Government Ministers do not always have the full information. Therefore, a committee of this nature would have been helpful.

This Report by the ILO, even the recommendations that they have made and the findings that they have on workers and businesses, actually can be quite useful, and there are other various reports. So, a committee can bring all that together. I think when we talk about socio-economic issues, the Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, might have a macro picture of what is happening at the macro level but there are a lot of social problems that we see when you talk to people. This can be well understood and policies targeted through this committee and relevant recommendations made to relevant Ministers can help, so it is a good motion.

It could have inspired confidence, it could have brought the Opposition and Government together, but this Government is so fearful about politics because they are busy politicking. I can see

that and that is why it is actually quite sad that even right now, they do not seem to get this. So, Mr. Speaker Sir, I would urge the Government to try this one out. Let us see how the Opposition does not play politics and the Opposition is prepared to deal with it. Try this!

The Honourable Prime Minister talks about how we are going to waste the resources but that Mr. Speaker, Sir, is nonsense. It is not about resources, it is about getting the Opposition and Government to work together. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Tuisawau, your reply.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank all Honourable Members for their comments. I know that we have gotten back and forth with various levels of comments and this motion, I will just stick to the technical aspects of it. I was thinking along the lines of treating it along the lines of COVID-19 situation in Fiji as a project and how we manage that as a project. So, the proposal was really a proposal for co-management of COVID-19 response as a nation, which is why it is a proposal, along those lines, plus as a bipartisan proposal.

The motion is not limited to that. When the committee addresses it, of course, when you look at socio-economic impact, you cannot just address that as it is on its own. So, there are interrelated issues, for example, when you look at impact, you also need to understand the needs that are related to those impact. So a needs analysis, impact assessment and then the measures taken to address, which has been raised by the Government and, of course, articulated by them in the 2020-2021 Budget.

The other important element of that is assessing and evaluating those measures. I will just touch on that a little bit in order to understand the logic of what I am trying to get through or to convince Honourable Members of the House on this motion. As I had mentioned, it needs impact and then measures which have been formulated by Government. The question is, how do you adjust those measures? How do you monitor and evaluate those measures?

They have mentioned that there are in Government Ministries, specialists in the different fields of Health, Ministry of Economy, et cetera, of course, we appreciate that, , but the motion is from Parliament. What is the role of Parliament as representatives of the people? How do we participate in that? From the 2020-2021 Budget, we have various measures and the question is how do we measure that?

You would do that through the monitoring and evaluation framework, so let me just go through that briefly. You describe how people, data and time interact. For example, people who are involved in this process are important, in the sense that in the measures, we need data on how these are implemented, how effective are these and whether the outcomes have been achieved. So we need to know who is capturing and analysing data, the implementation, any partner organisations and civil society groups and beneficiaries, so it is really important to bring all those groups which have been mentioned by the Government, especially to gather the data needed.

The data is needed to provide all possible evidence of change. What changes have been brought about by these measures in order to effectively address COVID-19, provide information, the status of those, assess relationships within the implementation and, of course, address the cross-cutting issues - gender, the environment and that may be HIV/AIDS and youth disability.

This data gathering and formulation will involve the definition of indicators - qualitative, short term and quantitative. So there has to be measures to capture, analyse and disseminate this data

related to the COVID-19 measures being taken by Government, which was expressed clearly today. It is in the Budget documents and it is in the Supplementary Budget.

Along with this is the time schedule. We have the 2020-2021 Budget and that is a 12 month period. How do you assess the outcomes over the 12 month period? What have they achieved at the end of the first month, second month, et cetera? So it is the achievement of milestones against timelines. When I brought up this motion, this is what I was thinking of, how do we formulate this COVID-19 Government measures as a nation into our project and how do we treat it as a project, so that will be the component, as I had mentioned.

To summarise, data concerning the COVID-19 responses obtained from key sources are used to define medical inquiry, data analysis disseminated, so the whole framework will be used by the committee when it is established. We can now easily take that framework and look at the measures taken, so I just picked out a few there - the monitoring and evaluation components which could be the indicators. For example, 2.9 in the economic impact of COVID-19 and measures:

- revive domestic demand by introducing tax cuts across the board;
- reduction in customs tariff;
- streamlining processes;
- temporary assistance; and
- concessionary loans.

All those are verifiable indicators which we can extract from this document and we have unemployment there.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you are supposed to be giving a Right of Reply, not introducing the motion.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- I apologise, Mr. Speaker. What I am saying is that, from what has been presented by the Government side, our Members have already replied to them, so I do not want to repeat that, but provide the rationale and logic of this motion and that is, to assess against clearly identifiable indicators what they are doing. That is the problem today in Fiji because governance and accountability is an issue. We are presenting a huge budgets, we have huge projects and in all the sectors of the economy - in government organisations, government statutory bodies, et cetera. But what I have seen is an issue is the monitoring and evaluation. It may probably be within the Ministries, but what about Parliament? How does Parliament link to that?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Well, you are speaking to me so I am talking to you.

That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the crux of this motion - how effective are these measures on COVID-19 and how well do we intervene as a Parliament? Where does our input come in? In order to work as a nation, to effectively implement the lessons learnt and formulate the way forward in terms of our socio-economic development and not only that, but resetting how we formulate economic development in the nation as mentioned by Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy. We need to look at the National Development Plan (NDP) so at the end of the day, it all will culminate on that. What society will Fiji be like in two to five years' time, given the changes brought about by COVID-19?

With those, Mr. Speaker, I support the motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote on the motion.

Question put.

Motion is defeated.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders, we respect the sitting times, I will allow the Suspension Motion to be moved. I now call upon the Leader of Government in Parliament to move his motion.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Now, I 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.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again as agreed to by the Business Committee and we have the agenda before us, we still have Schedule II to complete for the day, thus the request to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. Thank you Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Anyone wishing to take the floor?

There being no one wishing to take the floor, you have the floor, Honourable Leader of the House.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Sir, I have nothing further to add.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note we will suspend proceedings for refreshments in the Big Committee Room. Parliament will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.10 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.41 p.m.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Fiji Peacekeeping and Action Trustees Association Veterans
(Question No. 104/2020)

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management clarify whether there will be any special assistance during these COVID-19 times, to look after the 'Fiji Peacekeeping and Action Trustees Association' veterans?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU (Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

The simple answer from the Ministry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is 'no', there is no special assistance given to the Fiji Peacekeepers and Action Trustees Association during this COVID-19 times.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on to the next question. The question was supposed to be asked by the Honourable Nand, who unfortunately is sick today, so it will be asked by the Honourable Prakash. You have the floor, Sir.

17th Annual Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Committee Ministers Meeting
(Question No. 105/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries update Parliament on some priority issues that were discussed at the 17th Annual Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Committee Ministers Meeting?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, the major issues that were discussed by the Ministers was basically the impacts of COVID-19 and there were four specific areas, the:

- (1) impact on tuna fisheries;
- (2) impact of safety of the observers and crew on fishing vessels;
- (3) impact on fisheries subsidies; and
- (4) climate change impacts on Offshore Fisheries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Ministers also commended the Pacific Island Leaders on their pre-emptive decisive action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the Pacific region.

On international trade, Mr. Speaker, Ministers called on Foreign Fisheries Agency (FFA) to undertake regional study over the coming year. The study will centre around how FFA members

could harness their competitive advantage with respect to regional tuna resources and maximise benefits that flow within the region. This could also include greater processing capacity, value-adding, cross-border investment, increase in regional trade, improved transportation and improved labour mobility. This issue was mooted by Fiji as we tried to establish our position within the region.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of safety of observers and crew, the Ministers called for greater attention to be given to the issue of observer safety. The ongoing risks faced by observers in their work which leads to injury, unacceptable death of Pacific observers in their line of duty, calls for consolidated efforts. Such efforts would include; the strengthening of measures in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and renewed investigation of regional options to ensure observers are fully insured, and that their families are supported in the event of tragedy at sea.

Mr. Speaker, similarly the Ministers called for increased focus on the issue of labour standards for crew in fishing vessels. This is in light of ongoing evidence of human rights abuses at sea. The regional Ministers called for full implementation of the minimum conditions of crew employment that were adopted at their meeting in 2019. They welcomed the support from the New Zealand Government for a comprehensive multi-year project aimed at improving labour conditions at sea in the region.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the immediate focus on COVID-19 impacts, Ministers welcomed the ongoing priority that FFA is placing on work to respond to the impacts of climate change.

Climate Change remains the single greatest threat to livelihoods, security and wellbeing of our peoples in the Pacific. The Ministers emphasised the importance of not losing sight of this issue in the current environment. In this respect, Mr. Speaker, Ministers called for closer collaboration that responds to specific needs of the region that firmly places fisheries issues on the wider climate change agenda, including the context of the Pacific engagement in the UNFCCC.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministers concluded by strongly supporting key regional work. Areas identified by the Secretariat in responding to climate change include, the securing of baseline and associated maritime boundaries in the face of sea level rise and the transition to adaptive management regimes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response to the question, but I just need some clarification on the issue of those fisheries observers. In terms of insurance cover, who covers that, is it the respective governments or is it the FFA?

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for the supplementary question. Insurance for observers on board ships is our responsibility and the Government of Fiji ensures that every ship or the company that owns the ship that they serve on, have insurance coverage.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Tabuya?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; if he could tell us who the local tuna fishing licence holders are, and are they being assisted

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- That's a new question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- That is the question.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- It's a new question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- It is related to the Ministers Meeting and tuna fisheries is on the agenda, it is relevant. So I am asking the Honourable Minister, who are the local tuna fishing licence holders and how are they being helped during this time of COVID-19, seeing that we have foreign licence holders that are fishing in our waters for tuna? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, your supplementary question should be related to the question that was originally asked. This is not related to that, but I will give the floor to the Minister. You have the floor.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There are 68 fishing licences issued by the Fiji Government and 60 of them are local fishing vessels, and the eight that are issued in addition to the 60 are basically fishing vessels that fish outside of Fiji's EEZ.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the third Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Kepa to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

\$20 million Bus Fare Assistance
(Question No. 106/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts update Parliament on the \$20 million Bus Fare Assistance provided in the 2019-2020 Budget?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Travel Assistance Programme for students from low-income families started in 2009 where they were issued with bus fare vouchers. We knew that free tuition and textbooks were essential, but we also wanted to ensure that our young ones were able to travel to school daily. Since 2009 we have ensured that hundreds of thousands of Fijian children from low-income families were able to travel to school and get an education, of course, this being an unprecedented feat.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the \$20 million allocated for transport assistance in the 2019-2020 financial year provided transport assistance to 92,162 students. These include; 63,096 primary school students and 29,066 high school students. The two forms of transport assistance provided to students are through e-ticketing and rural vouchers which is for boats and RSL carriers.

Out of the \$20 million allocated, close to \$4 million was unutilised due to the school closure caused by COVID-19. The breakdown of students being assisted under this Scheme is as follows:

- 15,820 students in Suva area were assisted with 13,669 travelling to schools through e-ticketing and 1,856 travelling to school through rural vouchers.
- 16,057 students in Nausori area were assisted with travelling to school through e-ticketing and 8,016 travel to school through rural vouchers.
- Out of the 13,479 students in the Lautoka/Yasawa area, 11,624 travel to school through e-ticketing and 1,738 travel to school through rural vouchers.
- 12,093 students in Macuata and Bua were assisted with 7,400 travelling through e-ticketing and 4,618 through rural vouchers.
- 9,082 students in Ba/Tavua were assisted with e-ticketing.
- 4,081 students in Cakaudrove travel to school through e-ticketing assistance, with 3,725 travel to school through rural vouchers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the list goes on with 5,331 students assisted in Ra; 7,505 students in Nadroga/Navosa; and 4,235 students in the Eastern Division. In the Eastern Division all were assisted through the rural vouchers.

We have had many cases of students losing their subsidised cards, which requires a procedure to be followed before it can be restored. While the first replacement of the card is free, subsequently lost cards cost \$5 to replace. Many cases of children using their blue cards to play truant for non-school related travel has also been identified.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also found out that many parents and adults try to cheat the system by using the blue cards themselves during school hours when these cards are meant to help students from low-income families to travel to school. We have even found adults painting the blue cards red to cheat the system. In response we have had to take measures to protect funds allocated to assist children from low-income families, and the ability to use the subsidised blue cards are now limited to school hours only. This not only prevents unscrupulous individuals from misusing the system but also ensured that children safely travel to school and safely back home.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all students whose parents combined income or salary of \$15,000 and below are eligible to apply for this assistance. All students who are eligible for Transport Assistance Allowance shall complete a Transport Assistance Application Form. In order for students to use the e-ticketing cards, students need to redeem their cards after it has been topped up. Students can redeem their cards at any Vodafone outlet, buses, District Offices of Ministry of Education and, of course, our Headquarters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is mandatory that every eligible student seeking transport assistance fills the Transport Application Form every year and submits it to their Heads of Schools for approval. The Head of School updates the eligible student's details in the Fiji Education Management Information System (FEMIS), and only those who have filled in the Transport Assistance Form are eligible to be assisted under that. For those students whose forms are not filled in and submitted to their Heads of Schools, their accounts are not updated and, of course, they have issues trying to get assistance through this initiative.

When a particular student loses the card, he or she needs to get a lost card letter from the school or the District Office or the Headquarters. This letter is then taken to Vodafone where students can get a replacement card. The student then needs to inform the Headquarters on their replacement card number so that the funds can then be topped up in the new card and transferred to the correct card number. When a particular student changes their card and obtains a new card, they have to inform the Ministry or their Head of School that their card has been lost and have now been issued with a new card.

It has come to our attention that students fail to inform the Ministry of Education of their recent card numbers and due to this, we have encountered many situations. Of course, parents and students have encountered many situations that the funds were loaded into the old card of the student. Therefore, it is necessary for students to ensure that they advise us of their recent card numbers, in order for us to assist them.

If the students does not advise the Ministry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the change in the card numbers, the funds are then topped up in the card for which we have the details and, as a result, many students are not able to utilise their cards due to money has been topped into their lost or stolen card. So if the card is lost, then that information must be submitted to us.

We have noted an increase in the number of transport assistance now being rendered to our students due to the impact of COVID-19. We now have more students who are eligible for transport assistance. There has been an increase of 9,435 students now assisted in Term 2 for e-ticketing cards, as compared to Term 1 of this year. A total of 10,538 more students have been eligible and assisted under this initiative after the impact of COVID-19.

The Ministry is urging parents and students who are now qualifying for this initiative that this is the combined household income of less than \$16,000 to fill in the Transport Assistance Form and submit their forms to their Heads of Schools so that they can qualify for this assistance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also would like to talk about two issues, one mentioned by the Honourable Radrodro which is the current issue at Ratu Kadavulevu School (RKS). The strike of the students at RKS, if I can quote, “are signs of negative impact brought about by COVID-19. They may have needed counselling and that is not available.” You could be true, Honourable Radrodro, but I do not know how you can ascertain the fact that what is happening at RKS now is the result of COVID-19 impact.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, please allow me to advise the House that it is a pressing issue. What happened at RKS started on Friday last week? We received a complaint that the students had decided to protest against the Assistant Principal of the School on Friday. So, a team from the Ministry of Education was deployed in the afternoon and, of course, there was Police presence as well.

When they spoke to the students who were protesting, the students revealed that they were not happy with the newly-appointed Assistant Principal. Actually, the newly-appointed Assistant Principal was appointed from within the School after the former Assistant Principal was transferred to the Education Office in Nausori.

So, we came to a resolve where we spoke to the students and we actually agreed with them when they said that it was an all-boys school. They felt that a male teacher should be appointed as the Head of School because the Assistant Principal of any school is responsible for looking after the interest of the boarders and the students in the dormitories. So we sorted that issue out and parents called us up requesting to take their children home for the weekend and we allowed that. Mainly, parents actually picked up their children and the students were allowed to go home, and they assured us that the children will be back in school by 8.00 a.m. on Monday.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, something transpired during the weekend and we were trying to ascertain what had happened. On Monday morning, those 109 plus students who were in the dormitory in the weekend put up a banner outside the dormitory saying, ‘Remove the Principal’. Again, we immediately deployed the team from Headquarters who were there on Friday and we tried to resolve that with the students.

Unfortunately, the students refused to give in. They kept putting the banners up when the Police advised them to put the banners down. They started passing remarks from the vicinity of the dormitories and they refused to talk. As a result, instead of letting the situation aggravate, we decided that we will allow the students to go back home because RKS, I think, in the past has had some records of students and the situation getting out of hand. So we decided to let them go home, we have advised the parents, they picked up their children and all the students who were in the dormitories were released.

As of now, this morning, I received an envelope from the Student Council with some allegations against their Principal. So, for the information of the House, we are looking into it and hopefully, we are able to hear both sides of the story and resolve the situation quickly so that students can return to school and schools can resume.

I would advise the Honourable Members of this House, please, do not to get involved in this and let the Ministry sort this out. Hopefully, by next week, we should resolve the situation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other issue mentioned by Honourable Radrodro was the fact that the Minister for Education will say, 'All is well in the Ministry,' because there are organisations that are providing lunches to students in schools and yet, the Ministry of Education will say that. Honourable Professor Prasad, this is of interest to you. You have issued releases on my statements regarding lunches for school students. We have met up with the heads of schools, we have got the data here and we are grateful for those institutions, organisations, corporate bodies, faith-based organisations and individuals who are providing lunches.

I recall, and if I read correctly your statement, Honourable Prasad, you called me a "misguided missile". I am happy that you called me a missile, but 'misguided', I think you are misguided in your misgiving thinking that I am a misguided missile. I am not! What I discussed with the Heads of Schools was on how it would impact the teachers and the Heads of Schools, should we provide lunches to the students.

That was a conversation that I was having with the Heads of Schools and, unfortunately, the recording got leaked to your favourite newspaper. There was no media presence there. Unfortunately, the recordings of our conversation with the Heads of School last week got leaked out to media and that is not an issue. But if you have been a teacher, if you have taught students in a secondary or a primary school, you would understand the logistics that goes into that preparation and planning, and that was my discussion.

Honourable Professor Prasad, I have asked my Heads of Schools to ensure that there are no children who are unfed in school. I have even told them that they have the Fiji Education Grant (FEG) money, they have savings in FEG and should they decide that they have genuine students who require lunches, they can go ahead. And we have not stopped any generous individual who is wanting to come on board with the Ministry of Education, so I have not lost the plot, I know what is happening on the ground.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- No, I have not! And I have never said, "All is well". When there are issues, I have accepted it. I had accepted it when there are issues in the Ministry of Education. I have not said, "All is well". I have never said, "All is well within the Ministry". Every Ministry has its issues and we address those issues. So Honourable Professor Prasad, I definitely do not agree with you and your statement. You can do that, it is my time, so you listen.

I have heard you going on and on. I do not know what is your obsession with me or the Ministry of Education, I do not know. So do not personalise it! Please, do not personalise it. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will take my seat.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, you have gone on and on about this. You have taken liberty in answering this question. I will put a stop to that now.

All Ministers, do not take such liberties. Just stick to the answers and let us sort that out. I will give you the opportunity to answer the other things at another time, but do not cut into the question time. Let us move on.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister advise the House what measure of discipline is she anticipating for the RKS students who break the law?

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, he answered that.

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

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think Honourable Nawaikula should know better than asking that question, he is a lawyer. We let the investigations go on and then we will look at the outcomes of it, and decide on what is going to happen.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next question. For the fourth Oral Question for today, I call on the Honourable Nagata to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

House Wiring for Grid Extensions
(Question No. 107/2020)

HON. A.T. NAGATA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources inform Parliament on the Ministry's plans on house wiring for grid extensions for this financial year?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

This year, the Ministry has been allocated \$9.38 million for rural electrification. Of that sum, \$7.89 million is allocated for house wiring of grid extensions. This means extending the grid from Energy Fiji Limited (EFL), then the Ministry pays for the wiring of those houses. That is, a total of around \$4.83 million of that \$7.89 million is to fund the rollover house wiring projects. So, the projects that were existing, and another around \$3.05 million is for new house wiring projects. So that means a total of up to around, as I have said, \$7.89 million for 9,617 households.

These rollover house wiring projects are all over the country. They have engaged around eight contractors to do that and some of the major projects includes; Nasaibitu, Nasau and Nalidi in Wainibuka; Tokaimalo and Burelevu in Ra; Waikubukubu in Tavua; Welagi and Qila in Taveuni; Vatumali Government Station up to Vatubalavu in Navosa; Naqarawai, Wainimakutu and Naraiyawa Villages in Namosi.

Out of the 135 projects that are involved in this, 76 percent of them have completed their internal house wiring up to the meter box, while the remaining 24 percent is awaiting EFL connections. We expect that most of these projects will be connected and electrified by the second quarter of the 2020-2021 financial year.

For the new house wiring projects, there are a total of 38 projects located in various parts of the country. Some of these include; Vatubalavu to Korolevu in Navosa; Navai Settlement in Seaqaqa; Namara Settlement, Naravouvou and Nasau Villages in Tailevu; and Nasoqo and Nasiriti in Naitasiri.

Out of the total of 38 projects, a total of 27 projects have all been awarded and the electrical contractors are finalising their contract arrangements and obligations before commencing with the project. The remaining 11 projects are currently with the Government Tender Board for approval. That is the update on the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to ask a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; his listing for house wiring, I did not hear about Korovou Village and Narokorokoyawa Village in Naitasiri, that have had their house wiring done over the last two years and are still waiting to be reconnected. Is that part of the house wiring plans that has been alluded to by the Honourable Minister?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you for the supplementary question. I did not name all the settlements and all the areas. I have the total list that is here with me and I invite the Honourable Member perhaps, to see me after this and I can confirm those Villages.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on to the next Oral Question for today. For the fifth Oral Question, and I now call on the Honourable Nawaikula to ask his question. You have the floor Sir.

Traffic Congestion in the Suva-Nausori Corridor
(Question No. 108/2020)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament as to the action taken by the Ministry to ease traffic congestion in the Suva-Nausori corridor?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, we do understand that traffic congestion is a problem but this is not something that has actually happened overnight. What is happening is that, this Government is actually rectifying the lack of foresight from many, many years ago.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, traffic congestion is actually a global phenomenon and is closely related to social economic growth. This decade of unbroken positive economic growth has led to increase in economic activities and increase in disposable income of Fijians, so never before was it so easily affordable for working Fijians to become car owners. This has led to a better quality of life. It also actually mean more congestion on the roads and overuse of our road infrastructure. Basically there are more cars on the road.

The Suva-Nausori corridor has a road length of about 20 odd kilometres, connecting travellers between Suva and the fast growing town of Nausori. There was a time that we may have had only about 600 cars but today, we are talking probably over 60,000. The corridor accommodates a third of Fiji's population who travel along that particular corridor.

Every country in the world, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where the development has to deal with congestion, many systems have been put in place. In advanced nations, like Singapore, they have actually introduced odd and even rule and actually on alternate days, and some jurisdictions even have limitations on the number of cars that one can actually own.

We are fortunate, Sir, that the Fijian Government has a 5 Year and 20 Year National Development Plan which looks forward holistically and we have in place a comprehensive strategy that is guided by the NDP in the direction to address this traffic congestion.

The merger, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the Department of Transport with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism has helped us to better understand the development and the growth needs, which strengthened the coordination with other transport agencies, such as the Land Transport Authority (LTA), Fiji Roads Authority, Fiji Police Force and the Ministry of Lands to address the traffic congestion in the Suva-Nausori corridor, Kings Road, Princess Road and Lami Corridor.

Our Ministry and the Ministry of Lands have begun a traffic congestion survey using drones and the objective of this survey is to identify the actual choke points that exist and to ascertain whether the current traffic management, such as urban clearways, police traffic directions are actually effective. It will also identify illegal traffic activities in the ways to actually manage this traffic congestion, Sir.

The Ministry has also undertaken a household travel survey. The survey results give us the busiest days of travel in the urban centres which are Thursdays and Fridays; Thursdays for rural areas; Sundays and Mondays are the busiest days of travel in the maritime islands. That survey also actually shows us that buses and cars are the preferred mode of travel for more than 5 kilometres, whilst walking is preferred for 2 kilometres or less. The result of this survey has actually been used for better planning.

The FRA also has ensured that the main arterial roads between Suva and Nausori are in a free flowing manner and long term serviceable condition. They are actually in a preliminary stage of implementing the Park and Ride Scheme to move commuters from cars to actual dedicated express buses.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are school buses servicing peak periods of the Suva-Nausori corridor. The corridor is serviced by intensive bus service provided by, at least, 15 bus operators.

In order to regulate bus traffic during this period the LTA is actually also implementing a reliability test, Sir, for the active monitoring of the services along all the bus routes in Fiji, particularly the bunching of buses and this occurs daily which opens up gaps in service and diminishes the reliability for bus passengers.

The LTA has in place, at the moment, the Traffic Management and Enforcement Strategy which is actually focused on overloading and illegal public transport operations, bus service monitoring and e-transport revenue protection, Sir.

The transport agencies, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2019 also through the transport Technical Working Group headed by the Ministry introduced and enforced (and some of you would have seen that probably on a daily basis) the urban clearway project between McGregor Street to Rewa Street at Samabula. The Ministry, Sir, and the LTA are working on a review of the LTA legislations to enhance traffic management strategies and review other legislations for the introduction of these alternate transport systems, Sir.

Sir, to ensure the free flow of traffic, police officers are also strategically placed in locations during peak periods. I am sure you would have all seen that in the mornings when you are actually coming through. It has made the traffic a little easier and these are actually conducted at the major road intersections to enhance safety and the security of road users. The traffic congestion operations in the morning are from 0600 hours to about 0845 hours and, of course, afternoon from 1630 hours to 1900 hours.

We need to be mindful, Sir, also that we are a country who, in the last 10 years, has had to fork out billions of dollars for rehabilitation post-natural disaster, so let us not forget how much time and resource we needed to build back better each particular time, Sir. At the moment, what we do is, we prioritise. We have had to put certain plans on hold to fight the new challenges and also COVID-19 has been no exception, Sir. I hope that answer suffices. Thank you very much.

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

HON. RO T.V. KEPK.- Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question. I thank the Honourable Minister for his response. My question is based on the performance audit by the Office of the Auditor-General on traffic congestion. How and when will the LTA review be carried out? What they state there is that a lot of the issues that you are having that leads to traffic congestion is that the agencies and the stakeholders are not consulting with one another. So, how and when are you going to carry out the LTA review?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- It is already being done, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are in the process of

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Aseri Radrodoro?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; in March of 2019, the CEO of FRA had suggested ferry or boat services between Lami to Suva and Suva to Nausori. Is the Ministry considering that option? If it is, when will it become a reality?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Ferry boat.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Ferry boat services.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I think that is outside the ambit of Nausori to Suva traffic congestion, you are actually talking about water taxis and ferries. It is actually a new question but if he wants to write to me, Sir, I will endeavour to answer that for him.

HON. SPEAKER.- I think the Minister for Fisheries can answer that question.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- One of the things we must realise also with respect to ferries is that, it is not an easy task. There are so many things that need to be done but, please, if you put that in writing to me and I will answer it.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. I think that is all for that, we will move on to the next question. The sixth Oral Question for today, I call on the Honourable Nath to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Low Cost Irrigation Facility Plan
(Question No. 109/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the Ministry's plans to provide low cost irrigation facility for agriculture development and expansion?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I see a lot of excitement on the other side when I get up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the Honourable Member for asking me this question. Just earlier this morning, Honourable Aseri Radrodoro said that there is nothing happening in the Ministry, except for seed distribution. Well, I am going to say that seed distribution is a very important activity for agriculture growth and development.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not think he reads the print media, I do not think he watches TV news and does not listens to the radio.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Yes, because there are too many activities happening that is why I give too many statements. It is important that you read, to be well-informed ...

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- No, no! You should read, you should watch news, you should listen to radio news so that you are well-informed and you do not come and waste time here in this Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am going to talk about irrigation support for agriculture development. In a normal season, if you provide irrigation support, it could result in about 30 percent to 40 percent increase in output. But during off season, it can raise the output by 80 percent to 90 percent, when we do not have enough rainfall.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got numerous schemes for irrigation support, given the importance of irrigation in crop agriculture. The first one, is we maintain certain existing irrigation facilities and

there are three in particular. The Dreketi Irrigation Facility is a massive gravity-fed irrigation facility and the Ministry of Waterways and Environment maintains the entire irrigation facility. It is totally operational and every year, we spend money to repair and do maintenance of the canals, the floodgates and ensure that farmers are able to get water at zero cost, so that is fully functional.

The second large scale gravity- fed irrigation facility is in Naruwai and that is, again, fully operational with no issues. Every year, we spend money to maintain that facility so that farmers are able to grow and both of these cases, rice.

The third irrigation facility, again, for rice, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is in Korokadi. It is fully functional, totally gravity-fed and provided water for rice crop at Korokadi at zero cost to farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fourth one which is at Nasarawaqa, Bua, in the Northern Division, last year the intake pipe collapsed and, therefore, that system is damaged. We are looking at this year by December to repair that, once we are able to deploy our contractors. Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are the major gravity-fed irrigation system that we are maintaining which are basically to support rice farming.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Western Division, we are basically promoting rain-fed rice expansion growth and that is the crop we are supporting there which is upland rice three months variety. So we are able to, at least, get two crops per year and if weather permitting, we could go to three or four crops.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, then the second form of irrigation system is whereby we are setting up gravity-fed irrigation for a cluster of farmers. Those of you who have read the article in the print media and also on television, we have just commissioned a gravity-fed irrigation multi-system in Tavua where 80 farmers are benefitting from that. We spent \$30,000 which will provide water to 80 farmers in Tavua. Of course, they will also utilise it for water for consumption in the house as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, water support for household will also contribute indirectly to agricultural growth and development. So you need the household to function before they can support agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for this gravity fed cluster farmer irrigation system, we construct the catchment and from there, we bring the water down to the reservoir and from the reservoir, the farmers then do their own pipes to their farms. So it a kind of cost sharing system, so we spent \$30,000 there through the Ministry of Waterways.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the third irrigation system that we have now begun is where the Ministry of Agriculture is establishing cluster of farmers consisting of about 15 or 20 farmers where we are drilling the borehole and from there, they do their own pipes, then take it to the reservoir and from there, they pump it to their own farms. So we just completed one in Nadi and the second one may be completed at the end of this week. The machine has gone to Batiri where there is a second cluster of 18 farmers who are ready with their own pump, pipe and tank. As we speaker, the machine would have started the borehole two days ago. We just do the borehole, they do their piping and reservoir, so this is another scheme that we have just started this in financial year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the third one is where we have got an allocation with the Ministry of Waterways to provide a small irrigation system to farmers. So, we are looking at this year, providing a small irrigation system which includes pump, sprinklers and some pipes at the cost of \$1,500 to individual farmers. So, we are looking at providing this to about 100 farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture is now getting the list of farmers who will be eligible to get that and the Ministry of Waterways will raise the requisition to incur the expenditure. So, this is the fourth one which will be implemented maybe in about two to three months' time where about 100 farmers will get this set worth about \$1,500 which includes pump, sprinklers and pipes. So, they can draw the water from a nearby source, whether it is a river or well, and then take it to a tank and from there, they will use it for irrigation on their farms. These are the four irrigation systems that we are currently supporting to boost crop agriculture. Thank you.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Will the Honourable Minister in the same process also repair the damaged floodgates that exist in the Navua and Rewa Irrigation Schemes?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, absolutely! One of the key work that the Ministry of Waterways is doing is that every month, there is a table and there is a checklist that every area, a technical officer should submit to the Operations Director, who will certify that in his area, he has visited all the floodgates and they should sign off that it is all in order. The moment they raise that a floodgate is broken or there is some problem and the water is leaking, then the Ministry deploys a contractor or the staff themselves will go and repair it. So, if there is any floodgate that the Honourable Member knows that is not functioning, they should raise it with us at the Ministry or the operational staff and we will get it done.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister, can he inform the House the impacts of drainage and irrigation has had on the overall production of agriculture in percentage? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- That is an entirely new question, but I will give you the floor, Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, to answer generally, drainage and irrigation during a normal season, you can raise the crop output by about 40 percent to 50 percent by providing drip irrigation or a sprinkler irrigation but during off season when there is very minimal rainfall, you can really double the output by providing irrigation. So, that is the impact irrigation can have on crop output. The drainage is basically to improve the soil condition when you have boggy land, et cetera, where it is very difficult to grow crops.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, our arable land is mostly found closer to coastal areas, so those land are at times not in a suitable condition and requires drainage work. That is why about four years ago when the Honourable Minister for Economy made the change from Land and Water Resource Management (LWRM) to the establishment of the Ministry of Waterways, the drainage levy was removed so that farmers do not have to pay any single cent for drainage work. The Government took over, provided the budget and we are providing the service to ensure that farmers are not burdened with paying the drainage levy and we, at the Ministry of Waterways, will maintain all the public drains, and that is what we are doing.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, on irrigation, on 19th June, 2020 in the *Fiji Times*, the Honourable Minister stated that the Ministry does not have any specific budgetary allocation for farming and irrigation. He made the remarks in response to a villager who requested the Ministry's assistance in terms of irrigation. Can you explain how you are funding your initiative when there is no budget?

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- I do not know under what context I have said that, but the irrigation allocation is under the Ministry of Waterways for the provision of small equipment that I said, the \$1,500 equipment that we are giving for 100 farmers.

Secondly, I just said that the three irrigation schemes, plus the one that we need to repair in Nasarawaqa has a specific allocation to maintain that irrigation system. I do not know whether you have seen this irrigation system, it is a massive system in Dreketi and this is the largest irrigation system that we have. There is massive amount of money every year that we are deploying to maintain that system. Similarly, in Korokadi, I suggest that you do visit and if you are aspiring to be a leader, you should know what is happening in agriculture throughout Fiji when you raise this kind of question. Thank you.

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

Honourable Members, before we move on, there are three Honourable Members who have been sick over the last couple of days - Honourable Navurelevu, Honourable Nand and Honourable Kumar. Honourable Navurelevu has risen from the dead and has joined us this afternoon and we welcome him back.

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- The other two are still indisposed, but it relates to the next question where Honourable Vosanibola is supposed to ask the question to the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development. Since she is not here, we will carry your question over to a future session and you can ask the question when the Honourable Minister meets with better dreams.

We move on to the eighth question and I now call on the Honourable Adimaitoga to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

Repayment Relief – Financial Institutions
(Question No. 111/2020)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications provide an update to Parliament on the repayment relief provided so far by the Financial Institutions?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As part of the COVID-19 Response Budget, but also prior to that with all our consultations with various stakeholders, we had met up with the Association of Banks (these are all commercial banks) and some of the other lending institutions and we had reached an agreement with them, that they will actually extend their support for repayment relief until December of this year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those financial institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the repayment relief is provided both, to individuals with personal loans and mortgages and also businesses and other commercial customers. Relief is provided for principal repayments where specifically needed and in certain cases, both the principal and interest have been deferred.

Banks have also increased their loan provisioning to account for potential default and losses. For example, there are people who may have very small amounts of loan, some personal loans, they may have been working in a hotel and may have borrowed \$2,000 from the bank. They actually cannot make any payments whatsoever, principal or interest, so the banks have actually made a provisioning for them. For some of them, they have actually deferred it, some, of course, by making provisioning, they know that they will not ever be paid again, they have made a provisioning of over \$100 million in that respect.

The Honourable Member has asked this question, and when we talk about financial institutions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we actually talk about two broad categories of financial institutions. She talked about commercial banks which include; ANZ, BSP, Bank of Baroda, HFC, Westpac Banking Corporation and Bred Bank. Licensed credit institutions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, include; the Credit Corporation Fiji Limited, BSP Finance, Kontiki Finance and Merchant Finance. Fiji Development Bank (FDB) also has been providing debt relief.

While both categories of institutions are in the business of lending, the main difference is that, the commercial banks accepts savings and term deposits and operate demand or cheque accounts. Licensed credit institutions on the other hand can only accept term deposits. Commercial banks and licensed credit institutions have been providing repayment relief to their customers in the past for short periods following events, such as natural disasters.

However, the downside of COVID-19 repayment relief has been unprecedented, given the amount of loans that have actually been affected and the extended period of relief which is really the critical issue here, because we do not know when things will normalise or go back to some form of a new norm.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of July, 2020, the total value of loans provided repayment relief by licensed financial institutions stood at \$3billion for 17,194 customers. This include the relief package offered by commercial banks, licensed credit institutions and, of course, FDB.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as of June, the total value of loans provided for repayment relief was \$3.6 billion, around 18,422. The reduction in July period reflects a notable number of 1,228 business individuals, who no longer need the relief in their repayment as cash per income has improved. Some have picked up, so less people now require that relief.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the financial institutions, of course, are foregoing around \$40.3 million in loan repayments a month. This is, of course, has been a trend throughout the world. One of the things we also have to be careful about is that, if there is a provisioning for loans that are in doubt, and also if you have repayments, what the bank does is it closely monitors the situation of the financial institutions that are providing debt relief. We need to look at how they are managing the funds and also to look at the stability of the financial system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the trend of the non-performing loans have been increasing from 3 percent of total gross loans in December 2019 to 4.3 percent as at end of July, 2020, the capital positions of these institutions have remained satisfactory for some at strong levels. So what the Reserve Bank is doing Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are regularly conducting what we call “stress tests” to forecast what would be the expected level of loss, and accordingly liaising with individual institution,

ensuring that provisioning levels are adequate and capital buffers are in place to mitigate the potential losses arising from the impact of the pandemic.

Earlier today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we talked about confidence, et cetera, and I just pulled out the figures of new lending. From April to July of this year, \$668 million has actually been given out by banks in new lending. The current liquidity stands at \$1.077 billion and the foreign reserves stand at \$2.3 billion, equivalent of about 8.7 months of retained imports.

With this injection of liquidity and the foreign reserves going higher, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is really interesting, even till today, we have seen that the yields on the Government securities and the bonds have actually come down, which means because of liquidity, we pay less interest rate in that perspective. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, we now move on to the first Written Question for today.

Written Questions

Update – Rewa Vutia Road
(Question No. 112/2020)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Rewa Vutia Road, including expected milestones and timelines?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Proposed Drainage Programme in the Maritime Areas
(Question No. 113/2020)

HON. S.R. RASOVA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the proposed drainage programme for the fiscal year 2019-2020 in the maritime areas?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to the third Written Question.

Land Schedules ‘A’ and ‘B’ Reverted to iTLTB
(Question No. 114/2020)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources identify the land parcels that the Ministry will revert to iTLTB that are currently under Land Schedule “A” and “B” in the current financial year?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

List of Beneficiaries of Goods and Services
(Question No. 115/2020)

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

Can the Attorney-General and the Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications provide Parliament with the list of beneficiaries of goods and services granted remission or refund of duty under section 10(d) of the Customs Tariff Act from 2018 to-date?

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 the question. I will provide my written answers at a later sitting date that is provided under the Standing Orders.

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

I thank all Honourable Members for your contribution to today’s sitting. I trust that by tomorrow, the two Honourable Members who were indisposed will be able to join us. We wish them well.

Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.42 p.m.