

# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

### DAILY HANSARD

**FRIDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY, 2021**

[CORRECTED COPY]

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## **FRIDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY, 2021**

The Parliament met at 9.35 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

### **PRESENT**

All Members were present except the Honourable Assistant Minister for Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations; the Honourable Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu; and the Honourable I. Kuridrani.

### **MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Thursday, 11th February, 2021, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

### **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

#### Welcome

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 homes, offices and electronic devices. Thank you for your continued interest in the deliberation of your Parliament.

#### New Appointments to Standing Committees

Honourable Members, for the purposes of Standing Orders 115(1) and (4), I advise that the Honourable Virendra Lal shall now be a Member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and also a substitute Member for the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Honourable Lal, I wish you well in your new appointments.

#### Birthday Wishes

Honourable Members, at this juncture, I invite all Honourable Members to join me in wishing the Honourable Alexander O'Connor, a Happy Birthday and many happy returns of the day.

Thank you, Honourable Members. I will not say anything else regarding this birthday.

**QUESTIONS**Oral QuestionsAccountability and Transparency Commission (ATC)  
(Question No. 39/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the Accountability and Transparency Commission, given that there is budgetary provisions for its establishment each year?

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

The answer is quite simple, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Code of Conduct Bill actually has not been approved by Parliament and if you read Section 121 of the Constitution, it says that the Accountability and Transparency Commission is established under Section 121 of the Fijian Constitution. It says also that the authority and functions and responsibility of the Commission shall be prescribed by written law.

Sections 121(8) and 121(9) state that a written law shall provide the Commission with the jurisdiction, authority and powers to receive and investigate complaints against permanent secretaries and all persons holding a public office.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Code of Conduct Bill which I hold up in my hand is with the Committee, so in the past couple of years we have been making budgetary allocations in the hope that the Committee will bring the Code of Conduct Bill to Parliament. And in the event it gets approved, then actually we will have the budgetary allocation for the Commission to start its work. The Committee has not brought up the Code of Conduct Bill before Parliament for debate, that is the problem. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Tikoduadua, your supplementary question?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We understand the reasons that the Honourable Attorney-General has given, but it cannot be established under the Constitution unless there is a code of conduct. He is also giving the excuse that the report of the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee has been sitting in Parliament since April 2019. This is an urgent matter and perhaps, the question would be, why is it taking so long for the Committee to deliberate on this, and it is already 2021?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, anyone with a pedestrian knowledge of the Standing Orders would know that this floor of Parliament does not have any authority over the Committees. The Committees have their own jurisdiction, if you like. They determine their own work schedule and it is upon them to determine what is deemed priority or not. This is why we sometimes bring things under Standing Order 51, it is precisely the reason, to get those things elevated on the order list.

This, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the first time we are going to have a Code of Conduct Bill. The 1997 Constitution actually made a reference to the code of conduct but no Government has put that in place. We have now put this in place, widespread consultations and it affects all of you also, and this is why it was put before the Committee.

We would assume that the Committee would give this priority because actually, it sets new benchmarks for transparency and accountability by ensuring, amongst other things, that Members of Parliament, members of the Executive, senior civil servants and civil servants must actually, on a yearly basis, provide their assets and liabilities, not in a manner that the NFP does – change it halfway through, but on a yearly basis and it rests with the Commission. The Commission, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, can do what is necessary, as stipulated under Section 121 of the Constitution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The concern is that, when you have something written in the Constitution, it is imperative and it must be done. As he says, he does not have any control over the Committee, so what option do we have? What option does the nation have to be waiting for seven years when you cannot control the Committee? We cannot be waiting and waiting and waiting. Where is the law that requires you even to formulate the law for transparency that should be tabled here already?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Honourable Nawaikula's pugnacious behaviour makes him look really obtuse. He is pugnacious and he is quite argumentative every time, without rhyme or reason.

I have just highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that even in the 1997 Constitution, there was a provision there for a Code of Conduct Bill but no-one did it! Now, in this 2013 Constitution, we have actually put a Code of Conduct Bill. It is there, have you read it? You have not read it.

(Hon. N. Nawaikula interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this was already tabled with the Committee. I do not know whether he understands it or not. We have already tabled it on the floor of this Parliament. Parliament has ceased this Bill.

(Hon. N. Nawaikula interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- That is a moronic behaviour. Do not accuse the Speaker of that! That means he is blaming you, Mr. Speaker.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Why are you blaming the Speaker? You got nothing to do with the Speaker. What has that got to do with the Speaker? Nothing!

It has already gone before the Committee and was ceased by the Committee as a Committee's work. You do not even know that, that was tabled in Parliament. What sort of imbecilic behaviour is that?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You have absolutely no idea of what you are talking about. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has been tabled on the floor of Parliament and the Committee has ceased the matter.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will leave it at that, we will move on to the second Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Nath. You have the floor, Sir.

Government Shipping Franchise Scheme – Progress of  
(Question No. 40/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament on the progress of the Government Shipping Franchise Scheme?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as a maritime economy, Fiji's shipping sector plays a critical and vital role in trade, economic development and sustaining everyday livelihood. Our re-export figures are evidence that a large majority of products actually go through Fiji and Fijian Ports to reach other parts of the region, especially in Pacific Island Countries.

Domestically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we actually rely on our inter-island shipping as our main transport in connecting outer islands to the main ports, towns and cities, to ensure that every Fijian has reasonable access to transportation which is well defined in our Constitution. This is where the Government Shipping Franchise Scheme actually takes a lead role. In recent years, the Scheme has evolved in terms of vessel capacity, scheduling and routes, meaning that we are connecting more islands and serving more Fijians.

The main objectives of the Scheme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is to:

- service uneconomical sea routes to maritime islands which would, otherwise, be un-serviced;
- promote private shipping operators and inter-island traders for movement of goods and cargo;
- encourage transport of the maritime public between outer islands and major urban centres;
- incentivise transport operators through the support of Government subsidy to service uneconomical route.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I updated this august House last year, we were serving about 70 ports and nine routes. Today, we actually are serving 80 ports with and without jetties for 10 routes with an average of about 15 trips a month. The routes which are serviced are: Lower Southern Lau, Rotuma, Lomaviti, Northern Lau, Kadavu, Upper Southern Lau, Yasayasa Moala, Yasawa, North-East Vanua Levu, Beqa, Yanuca and Vatulele. The newly introduced tenth route - Beqa, Yanuca and Vatulele, opened up opportunities for additional 10 ports to be serviced, following an assessment that was actually undertaken by the Ministry from 2017 to 2019.

The Beqa, Yanuca and Vatulele route franchise commenced its services around 11th January, 2021, Mr. Speaker Sir, and we will continue to provide the monthly service to 14 villages. That basically means that 2,050 Fijians in these island communities now have safer and more reliable access to transport services for movement of both, passengers and cargo.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we look back about five years or so under this Scheme, we have completed a total of 1,023 trips with the total of 84,004 travellers utilising the service. That is also a total of 36,255.89 tonnes of cargo transported to and from our main ports to the islands, including building materials, groceries, retail shops, supplies and fuel and oil whilst return trips actually carry copra, coconut, seafood, *dalo*, mats and personal belongings as the main cargo.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on average, we have had a 7 percent increase in both, passenger and cargo movement between 2015 and 2020, and that is about 13,743 passengers movement and 5,957.59 tonnes of cargo transported annually.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has conducted a comprehensive analysis of each of the routes from 2018 to 2020. I can confirm that the different types of ships moving to and from the islands, there is only an average of 40 percent capacity utilisation for both, passenger and cargo. For example, for a 200 tonne cargo capacity vessel, on average there is only 40 percent usage which is only about 80 tonnes of cargo.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in our analysis, we also identified ports that are maximising their services, for example, in the Northern Lau which includes; the ports of Yacata, Vanuabalavu, Cikobia, Tuvuca, and Cicia, maximising the use of vessels registering more than about 800 passengers and more than 300 tonnes of cargo annually. This can be attributed to the two villages having jetties.

Another example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, Kadavu has about 14 ports - Dravuni, Bulia, Naqara, Matasawalevu, Nukuvou, Lavidu, Kadavu Koro, Vukavu, Soso, Dravuwalu, Muani, Levuka, Vacalea and Daviqele. The people of Dravuni, Nukuvou, Bulia and Daviqele mainly travel using vessels under this particular Scheme, as well as for cargo movement through the ports of Daviqele, Levuka, Vacalea and Vukavu maximise the use of ships.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the role of Government Shipping Services (GSS) in the Franchise Scheme actually extends way beyond just the movement of persons and goods. When we connect these islands, we are actually providing them access to justice, health and education, right to economic participation and the opportunity to integrate into the supply chain by selling their crops and fish and trade in goods and services with the urban centres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, yesterday I spoke briefly about the work undertaken by GSS, so apart from ensuring safe and navigation assistance post-disaster, they are also a key part of the Scheme, providing services to communities in the Yasawas and North East Vanua Levu, Sir. These are highly uneconomical routes that private vessel operators are not able to service.

These services, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were not available in the past and it is this Government that has made it happen. Had it not been for the continued investment in the particular Scheme, it would be impossible for services to be provided to these islands. Even though servicing these routes make essentially no profit, for us, we will continue to serve them, as our obligation in our duty of care to our people. To further strengthen the capacity utilisation, the Ministry is actually working closely with other Government agencies, to ensure collaboration and increase in activities so as to maximise the provision of services to the islands.



I reiterate, Sir, the Fijian Government is actually committed in taking the services to the people of Fiji, ensuring their most basic needs such as food and medical supplies are consistently provided. Just to allay any fear from the other side of the House, please be reminded that I pay close attention to GSS at all times, so that we actually provide these services to our people in the maritime areas. I thank you, Sir. I hope that is a good answer.

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

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Can the Honourable Minister inform the House, how many vessel operators service the Scheme?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There are five vessel operators that service the GSS Scheme. We have Brighton Holdings Fiji Limited, Gounder Shipping, Valesasa Transportation Limited, Victoria Marine Limited and Miller Shipping Services. These operators provide franchise services to 80 ports for 10 routes with 15 trips conducted in one month and the routes service the Lower Southern Lau, Rotuma, Lomaiviti, Northern Lau, Kadavu, Upper Southern Lau, Yasayasa Moala, Yasawa, North-East Vanua Levu, Beqa, Yanuca and Vatulele. Thank you, Sir. I hope that answers your question.

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

HON. A. JALE.- A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. The length of time that the boat takes to travel to destinations and some of the routes under Franchise is a concern to the travelling public because it means a lot of costs to them and feeding time during the period they spend in travel.

There is a significant length of time from what it used to be in the past. For example, a boat that normally takes 18 hours or 24 hours to travel from Ono-i-Lau to Suva is taking 33 hours now. The boat that services the lower route to the Southern Lau is taking 33 hours to reach Suva. What is your Ministry doing, in terms of the franchise regarding the time that it takes to reach their destination?

HON. SPEAKER.- You better remember to order the takeaway lunch, that is the reminder.

(Laughter)

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I think he wants to sing happy birthday to the Honourable O'Connor. There is a request from the Honourable O'Connor that Honourable Professor Prasad sings Happy Birthday during the break, Sir.

Sir, I think this is a pertinent question and there are some common issues that we need to address, to improve those services. Basically, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has five Shipping Franchise Observers (SFO), to ensure the contracted vessels are fully serviced and, of course, safety is paramount. We all know when you are out at sea, at the end of the day, sometimes the trips may take a little longer and we must ensure that safety is paramount on board. These particular observers report on unidentified issues for actual improvement for the vessel operators, so we are actually doing something about it.

At the end of each particular trip, Mr. Speaker, Sir, those SFOs provide detailed reports, highlighting the passenger and cargo movement, including customer service survey. To name a few common issues that have been addressed to date, Sir, it is really to do with the vessel capacity:

- what improvements can be done in terms of the vessel quality;
- public information awareness;
- efficiency in service delivery through increased competition; and
- obviously, we have emergence of small business enterprises being developed in our islands, et cetera.

Lastly, Sir, one of the most important components in all of these is what the Honourable Member was referring to, the improvement in turnaround time. For example, Kadavu, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has now improved from five days to three days. Similarly, for Lomaiviti, Yasayasa Moala and Northern Lau. But we must remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the most important thing is that, this is travel by sea and safety is paramount.

Sometimes, we may think that we can do it in 24 hours but it is the sea, you do not play with the sea. Sometimes it takes longer but safety is paramount, that is what is important to us. However, we are doing something about it to ensure that we actually do have more regular trips in terms of the time but we do have SFOs on board who report back to us. I hope that suffices.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you Honourable Minister for those commitments and those of us from the maritime islands are, indeed, grateful for those franchise shipping routes.

You mentioned your commitment on duty of care and safety, so what kind of partnership do you have with the Ministry responsible for jetties and ship owners with regards to the safety of passengers, in the upgrading of jetties and passenger shelters? For example, it is chaotic at the Natovi Jetty, particularly for those midnight trips whereby I have to reverse into the boat. There is also very limited lighting. Also, at the Nabouwalu Jetty when we get off in the early hours of the morning. Even if it is not franchise, what about the others in Vanuabalavu, where there is no passenger shelter, Mr. Speaker, Sir? Thank you.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think if the Honourable Member have some issues down at Natovi, she has to call and tell me straightaway. Nevertheless, the opportunity is always there for you to call, instead of coming here and telling us six months later.

Nevertheless, Sir, MSAF has the safety issues under control with respect to every single jetty that is there. Sometimes, if something is lacking, I urge all members of the public and Honourable Members of this House, please, let us know because they get on top of it straightaway. We have had to reverse on to vehicles and we have not had an issue. I do not think reversing is actually a safety issue, Sir. There are people who actually guide you on to the boat very carefully.

I have travelled quite extensively on these boats. The Honourable Prime Minister only travels by boat and he will tell you first-hand, Sir, that they are safe and we do as much as we can in terms of safety at every single port and jetty.

Unfortunately, the Honourable Prime Minister does not want to fly, that is why he travels by boat. The collaboration that exists, it is a whole of Government approach when we look at these jetties and safety. It is not just one Ministry, it is to do with NDMO, the Ministry of Infrastructure and all of those. We do look at it holistically, so it is something that we take very seriously but I urge members of the public if there is an issue, please, let us know as quickly as possible. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- The last supplementary question, Honourable Rasova, you have the floor.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Minister for the update on the franchise all over Fiji. Last year, we approved a Bill whereby Government can extend the contract to all franchise companies to give a 20-year contract and I think it is now reduced to 15 years. Given that, to allow them confidence to the banks so that they can give a new boat. One year later, the boats are still the same. Can he update the people when will you bring new boats to these companies to franchise all over Fiji? *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we did think of this, they were good times and at the moment, I think the Honourable Member does know that the times are not very good and in terms of the banks dishing out money very quickly, it is a bit tough but I think we just need to ride the storm. I do not think it should be an issue at a later stage but most of the operators are doing the best that they can with what they have.

We must realise, Sir, that Government subsidises it. The travelling public actually pays for this. Also, there is a lesser number of the travelling public purely because of economic downturn, et cetera, so we have to put all of that into perspective. However, it is not something that is off the cards. I think the economic climate at the moment would tell you that that would probably be a little later rather than just now. I hope that suffices.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move to the third Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Navurelevu to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Fiji Corrections Service Job Evaluation Exercise  
(Question No. 41/2021)

HON. RATU T. NAVURELEVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament whether a Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) will be undertaken for the Fiji Corrections Service, given that the last JEE was undertaken in 2003 by Mercer Human Resource Consultancy (Mercer) NZ, through the Public Service Commission?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just by way of background, the PSC (I think Honourable Jale would be aware of this) had engaged the Mercer Human Resource Consulting Company, an Australian firm, to undertake a review of the existing qualifications, grading, salaries, scale structures, minimum qualification requirements and work related allowances for the whole of the Fijian Civil Service, including all the Disciplined Forces, not just the Corrections Service. It included the Police, the Corrections Service and Republic of the Fiji Military Forces.

It was decided by the then SDL Government at that time via a Cabinet decision made on 13th December, 2004, that the implementation of the recommendation by the Mercer Report with respect to the three Disciplined Services will be implemented in five phases, given budgetary concerns at that point in time. So rather than giving them a lump sum increment, they said they will spread it over five phases.

By 2008, Phases 1 to 3 of the implementation process had been completed and from 2009, Government embarked on Phases 4 and 5 of the implementation process. Since then, Phases 4 and 5 have been completed whereby officers from all the three Disciplined Services received their recommendation for the remuneration under the Mercer Report. So any future assessments would not be done only for Correction Services, it has to be done for all the three Disciplined Forces across the board. Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it will have to be done, taking into account the new changes, et cetera.

One of the issues the Honourable Member may be seized of is that, currently a number of legislation reviews is taking place, one is for the Police Act and also for the RFMF. So it is more prudent to actually have those laws approved by Parliament, once they implement it. Some of them have actually budgetary implications, some of them actually have structural implications in terms of the position requirements, the job descriptions that will be required under the new law. So once the new laws have been implemented and put in place, then we can do a review and it will be a lot more prudent to do so and obviously it makes a lot more sense to do so. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the fourth Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Assistant Minister for Environment and Rural Development to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Youth Initiative Farming Programme - Progress of  
(Question No. 42/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports update Parliament on the progress of the Youth Initiative Farming Programme?

HON. P.K. BALA (Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Viam Pillay. Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the outset, let me re-state that these initiatives which we have embarked on as a Ministry is known as Youth Farm Programme which was launched at Nasau Youth Training Centre in Sigatoka in July last year (2020). Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Programme is meant to deal with unutilised land which is given to youths for agricultural purposes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Programme focuses on improving the livelihood in the community, strengthen food security and providing employment. This is an area of challenge but as an all-government approach, we are turning into areas of opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, till today we have assisted 2,416 youths throughout the country and at this juncture, I wish to thank the staff from the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Forests and the Ministry of Fisheries and, of course, staff of my Ministry for the success and progress of this Programme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also started our monitoring and evaluation to ascertain the benefits of these programmes. In this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have witnessed firsthand the impact of these projects in terms of improving livelihood, increasing food security and commitment of youths to sustaining their respective projects. This Programme is a partnership between the landowners, youth clubs and my Ministry. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister.

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Minister for the brief on the Youth Initiative Farming Programme. I would like to thank the Ministry for supporting the 1,273 youths all over Fiji and I thank the assistance for Kadavu - 159 youths.

I would just like to ask the Minister, since the inception of youth farming initiative, has the Ministry monitored the success of the farms of various youths and youth groups who have received this assistance since July last year?

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- This is the problem when you come to this House with prepared questions. Mr. Speaker, Sir, my last statement was based on monitoring and I will read it out again. I said, Mr. Speaker, we have also started our monitoring and evaluation to ascertain the benefit of these projects. Not only that, I never ever said 1,000, Mr. Speaker, I said that 2,416 youths have benefitted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

Payment of Obligatory Contribution (Grant) to USP  
(Question No. 43/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the status of payment of Fiji's obligatory contribution (Grant) to USP?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think in the discussions we had yesterday afternoon, this matter had already been addressed.

As highlighted yesterday, the allocation of \$27.7 million in this year's Budget (2020-2021) has not been given to USP because of the governance issues that had been raised. We had requested an independent investigation into allegations raised by the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Audit Risk Committee and we said that upon the independent investigations, we would then release the funds, which of course has not happened.

As I also highlighted yesterday, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of the Pacific Island Countries said that they would talk to us bilaterally but that has not happened either.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the sixth Oral Question for today and I call upon the Honourable Assistant Minister for Health and Medical Services. You have the floor, Sir.

International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation (INBAR)  
(Question No. 44/2021)

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I take this opportunity firstly to thank you for acknowledging my coming of age.

My question is:

Given that Fiji is now a member of the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation (INBAR), can the Honourable Minister for Forestry advise Parliament on what this means for the Ministry, industry and country?

HON. O. NAIQAMU (Minister for Forestry).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question raised by Honourable Member and I am grateful to provide an update to this august House on Fiji's membership to the INBAR and its contribution to the Ministry, industry and the country.

The INBAR is an inter-governmental organisation with a total membership of 47 countries dedicated to the promotion of bamboo and rattan for sustainable development. Fiji became a member of INBAR on 1st September, 2020, immediately following Cabinet's approval to explore the benefits of bamboo as an ecological conducive high value and short rotation crop. In other words, a crop that is both environmentally friendly and can generate economic activity within a shorter period of time compared to the traditional timber trees.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, civil engineers around the world consider bamboo to be the new steel of the 21st Century. Many countries, especially those in Asia that have developed bamboo over decades use this non-timber forest product for multi-storey buildings, inartistically-enhanced structures and home decorations. They are in addition to all manner of high quality furniture and even for food where bamboo shoots are a healthy ingredient to sumptuous meals.

Importantly, bamboo is known to have a remarkable ability to absorb high amounts of carbon from the air than many other trees. It could very easily be part of the nature based solution to climate change. Research and development on bamboo and rattan in Fiji started as a project in the late 1970s in Vunidawa, Naitasiri and in Somosomo, Taveuni with funding from the Government of the People's Republic of China. This was small scale with the occasional publication, international collaboration with China and Indonesia for capacity building as well as joint workshops for bamboo research and training.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with this membership with International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation (INBAR), we now have a solid framework for systematic collaboration that has potential to lead to more concrete results. This strengthens collaboration with the Ministry of Forestry as Fiji's designated focal point. It will strengthen local capacity on the uses of bamboo, landscape restoration, income generation, protecting biodiversity and eco-system and addressing climate change. Today, bamboo and rattan are already amongst the world's most valuable non-timber forest products with an estimated market value of USD\$60 billion or more than FJD\$120 billion.

In 2017, the total import and export value of bamboo and rattan quotas for Fiji amounted to USD\$397,925 of which imports occupied over 99 percent. This suggests that bamboo and rattan have the potential to contribute more to Fiji's economic development and the intent is to support interested persons at communities to effectively develop their resources, including investments in appropriate technologies.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Ministry recognises the potential of bamboo in terms of economic gain and improving livelihoods for the rural communities, and is currently in talks with potential partners such as the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) and INBAR, to establish a bamboo centre in Fiji to help develop the bamboo industry in the Pacific. The project is estimated to cost US\$2million and will be based at the Ministry of Forestry facility in Nasinu.

The Fiji Bamboo Centre will serve as a national focal point for bamboo related activities including scientific research, mapping of bamboo habitats, advocacy work, research and innovative application such as paper making and cloth making for example, training in propagation and also in

the skills required in its many applications and establishing policy that is conducive to the growth of the industry.

In the past, a number of training workshops have been provided in bamboo propagation and utilisation. These trainings are important and can be strengthened with training in business principles and financial management. The trainees will also require a support system to provide assistance when they are faced with challenges in their endeavours. The Bamboo Centre will undertake this task by supporting the efforts of individuals that want to take this work seriously.

Having said that, my Ministry is not just waiting for the completion of the bamboo centre, but has already started the groundwork by including bamboo in the list of species to be covered in the National Forest Inventory (NFI) that will commence later this month. This will help us in identifying and mapping allocation of bamboo across the country including identifying the species by location. In terms of research, my Ministry has completed a test to determine the best treatment for local bamboo species. The result which will be published by the Fiji Agriculture Journal under the Ministry of Agriculture.

As we speak, my Ministry is also working with the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Fiji National University to test the properties of bamboo for use by the local building industry. The development of bamboo is crucial for our fight against Climate Change by reducing emission from deforestation and forest degradation, protection of soil and water sheds and land restoration due to its rapid growth and strong root system. Realising the full potential of bamboo will move Fiji closer to achieving its ambitious development, climate and environmental aims including the Sustainable Development Goals, REDD+ targets, Paris Agreement commitments and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

In summary bamboo and rattan are among the fastest growing plant species that have the unique potential to contribute to livelihood support, carbon sequestration, land restoration and the provision of sustainable bioenergy. Bamboo can be regarded as a kind of cash tree with a great return on investment such as for food, fibre, fuel and fine arts. I am hopeful that this cooperation through our membership with INBAR will also leverage additional partnership in bamboo, including the private sector to contribute fully to better production, better utilisation, a cleaner environment and a reaffirmation of our commitment to renewable, nature-based solution for sustainable development.

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

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, thank you. I just wish to ask the Honourable Minister on how the Nasinu Forestry Training School is contributing to training, particularly the importance of its contribution to the economy; what volume can we export and how much value can we expect?

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

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Mr. Speaker, may I request the Honourable Member to repeat his question, please.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Loudly!

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Loudly.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Yes, I will repeat the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. How the Nasinu Forestry Training School does contribute to the increased production particularly how much export can we expect from here and what is the value of that export, foreign exchange?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Bamboo?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Yes, exactly.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Mr. Speaker, I think I have clearly articulated in this august House that the planning that will be carried out, we will try to increase the production of bamboo in our country.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- When can we expect the Ministry to identify the areas to plant this product? When can we expect planting and when can we expect harvesting?

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

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Mr. Speaker, I think the Honourable Member is not listening. I have clearly mentioned that this year, next month, we will have our National Forestry Inventory and bamboo is included to cover specifically all issues of bamboo.

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

Appointment of Provincial Council Chairpersons  
(Question No. 45/2021)

HON. A. JALE asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs inform Parliament if there is any reconsideration for the provincial councils to appoint respective Chairpersons?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- (Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to respond to the question posed by Honourable Jale.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to remind the Honourable Member that the Chairpersons of Fiji's 14 Provincial Councils are appointed based on law, as dictated by amendments to the iTaukei Affairs Regulations 1996. The Honourable Member can refer to Legal Notice No. 35/2012 of the iTaukei Affairs Provincial Council Regulations, if he cares to read the Fijian law.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we appoint a chairperson based on their ties to the Province, their ability to navigate today's economic landscape and their potential to bring prosperity and accountability to the community they preside over. These appointments have helped bring new leadership styles to Provincial Council Meetings throughout the country. The proven leadership skills of those who now serve as chairpersons has brought fresh blood and new energy to the way these Meetings are conducted.



Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that Honourable Jale may still be bitter over his own lost bid to become the Chairperson of the Lau Provincial Council, but we are seeking out fresh new ideas and visionary leadership. We know we certainly will not find it with him, or with any other Member of his Party.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue to fill the role of Provincial Council Chairpersons with candidates who will act not with self-interest, but in the interest of the iTaukei people and the communities they serve. I want to note, Mr. Speaker, that this question would have already been answered last year, had the Opposition not walked out of that session back in February as well. That is what they chose to do - they drag us back into old business while we should be looking ahead.

Mr. Speaker, this week, the people have heard from my Government serious strategies to confront the gravest challenges we have faced as a country. Rather than listen to how we plan to act, the Honourable Members on the other side started the week, as you know, Mr. Speaker, by walking out of Parliament yet again at the behest of one man, I must say. And they stumbled back in, just as ignorant as they left. It reminded me of the three stooges when they walked into a closet and they found out that they were in the wrong place, and they quickly ran out. But the person that took them into the closet is standing in the passage, clapping his hands and laughing as they brought themselves back into the House, I mean, the SODELPA, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have tried to educate them before. Year after year, we have invited them to join us at Budget workshops to explain Fiji's fiscal situation. And do you know how many times they have actually showed up, Mr. Speaker? One time, I think, Mr. Speaker, one time with perhaps, five of them. In all those years, they have never showed up once to actually learn anything and when we hear the pathetic quality of their contributions throughout this week, Mr. Speaker, it shows.

Mr. Speaker, I still do not know who is leading SODELPA right now, seriously. I was once asked by the former Leader of the Opposition (Hon. T.V. Kupa) to always keep a close watch on what Honourable Bulanauca says because he is a liar through and through. The former Leader of the Opposition told me that she cannot even understand Honourable Bulanauca because it seems like he has got five marbles in his mouth when he speaks.

(Honourable Opposition Members interject)

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, what is your Point of Order?

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I just want to find out what is the relevant of this banter from the Honourable Prime Minister and if he can just answer the question.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- We are talking about leadership here.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- But Provincial Councils that is the relevance of the question. He is going off topic and he needs to stick to the question. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, it is all part of the leadership of the Provincial Council.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Abuse of Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But as I said, I still do not know who is leading SODELPA right now. But they should be embarrassed to allow Honourable Nawaikula, to talk about things he clearly does not understand. As the Honourable Koya said yesterday, he is one man who spews garbage on this floor. He even wants to bring in the military to remove the Government from this House. That is very embarrassing for everyone.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, there is a Point of Order.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- May I ask you, Honourable Prime Minister to read the *Daily Hansard*, instead of misrepresenting statements here.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he said “we need a new Minister for Economy”. Who is Honourable Nawaikula to tell me who my Minister for Economy should be? Who is he?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- If our economy was running like SODELPA that runs its own party, we would not have won anymore.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Fijians would be left exposed to the full brunt of this pandemic and the climate crisis while they backstab each other who does what and burn every bridge of friendship we have built around the world. I have said it before, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I say it again my Attorney-General and Minister for Economy has my total support and the support of everyone on this side of the House.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I would like to tell him that they should not forget who we are. My Government set the record for the longest period of growth for our economy ever.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- In nine straight years. We dropped unemployment (they should know that), we reduced inequality, we expanded social protections...

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- ...which they have never heard before in their lives. We set our nation on the path to modernisation and it is that same strong and united leadership that will guide Fiji through the crisis we face today.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Again, I saw Honourable Professor Prasad in the *Fiji Times* saying “The Bainimarama Boom is no more” that is the Bainimarama Boom I have just talked to you about.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Not the fake unity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we see across the room. Honourable Nawaikula said this week “we do not listen to the experts” you have said it, we have heard about it and everyone heard about it. Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on his own *Facebook* he calls the United Nations and World Bank “useless”.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- That is a direct quote. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the same organisations that are staffed by thousands of the world’s leading economic experts and trusted by countries around the globe to cultivate prosperity are in the eyes of Honourable Nawaikula , useless.

And you said “we do not listen to experts around the world’. The bodies that uplift 100 million from poverty and steer the world’s sustainable development are, to Honourable Nawaikula, useless. He said Australia and New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States should not work with Fiji.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, right now Australia and New Zealand are giving direct budgetary support to Fiji. You know what that means, Honourable Niko Nawaikula, for your information and your ears only that means they are giving money to the Government directly and nations only do that when they have trust in how we managed our financial system.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- They only do that when they trust our measures of financial accountability and transparency and those measures meet high international standards.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Hear, hear!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- These nations, Mr. Speaker, I have never done this before for Fiji. They are doing it now. They are doing it because they have confidence in how we managed the economy.

And these nations, Mr. Speaker, are not useless but Honourable Nawaikula is. His contribution certainly are useless and he needs to shut his mouth and open his eyes to the facts and to what our nation is up against.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition only attacks multilateral organisations like the World Bank when it suits them.

HON. SPEAKER.- There is a Point of Order. Yes, you have the floor, Honourable Tuisawau.

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- A Point of Order. The Honourable Member should not refer to other Honourable Members in a derogatory and demeaning manner.

(Hon. Government Members interject)

HON. RO. F. TUISAWAU.- As the Honourable Prime Minister has referred to Honourable Nawaikula useless and those kinds of words should not be used on another Honourable Member in this august House, thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- He says I am useless. I think I have some views, Mr. Speaker.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, the Opposition only attacks multilateral organisations, like the World Bank, when it suits them and that of course, includes Honourable Professor Prasad. When the World Bank endorsed Fiji's economic growth rate, they dismissed it. But when they report anything remotely critical about Fiji they cannot shut up about it.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Beside that you are the liar, you know that.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Standing Order 45(4), it says very clearly that " the Minister must reply to a question unless it would be inconsistent with the public interest to do so. A reply must be relevant, concise and confined to the subject-matter of the question asked. It must not contain: (a) statements of facts and names of any persons unless they are strictly ...."

For the Honourable Prime Minister for the last minutes has fade away from the question. This is gross abuse of Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker, and I think you should remind the Honourable Prime Minister to stick to the question.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Ask him about the leadership..

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

Honourable Member, the question is when they are asked and they are answered by the Honourable Minister, the answers are so extensive. You all know that. This is not the first time it has taken place and is to do with leadership. It is leadership that was the question asked by Honourable Jale. It is all part of that. You have the floor, Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, I said it is opportunism and nothing more. One day the World Bank is credible, the next it is not. It reminded me of a taxi driver called Munsami but that story is a bit uncouth, I cannot mention it, unlike the Honourable Qereqeretabua who mentioned uncouth words on this floor.

One day the World Bank is credible the next it is not, because it will settle for any chance it can to attack the government. It is intellectual dishonesty, it lacks principles and he does it to cover its ignorance of economic fundamentals we have been told because he does not really understand how budgets work and how they sparked growth for the economy. He does not see day-to-day commercial and financial realities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he does not even understand how the private sector operates, it is clear the professor has never left the classroom to learn how the real world actually works.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my Government does. We understand how our policies impact businesses. We understand how it affects families, we have talks with the experts they expect that Honourable Nawaikula runs down and we have a plan comprised alongside some of our nation's top health and economic minds to a secure Fiji's place in the most important global economic recovery of our lifetime.

That plan, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is backed by the whole of Government's effort, by every Ministry and Department I lead, but at the end of the day, it is my plan because this is my duty as the Leader of this Government. I support it and so does every member of my Party and I have every confidence in our vision in the Honourable Attorney-General, as the Minister for Economy and the team that I lead to see it done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Prime Minister change the law, to allow Provincial Council to select their own Chairman instead of the Government treating them like children and electing it for them?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- That is not going to happen, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is similar to what the Honourable Nawaikula was asking because in his statement, the Honourable Prime Minister said, "we appoint". We believe the vast majority of the *iTaukei* want to be empowered. When can the Honourable Prime Minister make up his mind to hear the wishes of the *iTaukei* and say "we empower you to do what you need to do, not we appoint". When can you do that, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- What is your question? I never heard your question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- In his statement he said, "we appoint". What we want to hear is for him to say one day, "we empower you" that is what the people want. So, when can he empower the *iTaukei* to run their own Provincial Administration? Thank you.

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I really do not see why I have to say "empower" just for his sake, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- The Honourable Bulanauca, you have the floor.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is good to hear that the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa are gossiping about me. The question is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regards to the reconsideration of Provincial Council to appoint respective Chairperson.

My question is, where is the FijiFirst Government Party's policy on empowering the People or *itaukei*? Empowering the people means giving them the opportunity to decide which is correlated to the dictatorial attitude they have just to appoint a Chairperson. Even though the Honourable Prime Minister have explained that there are laws and processes to follow but they just dictate.

HON. SPEAKER.- Do not make a statement!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- The question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is how do you correlate the policy on empowering people with dictator ruling?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister.

(Honourable Members interject)

(Laughter)

HON. SPEAKER.- I have to look after Lau connection here, so please, you have the floor, Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let us go down to the basics, empowering the *iTaukei* means not lying to the people, especially in this House. He does not realise the man sitting in front of him, the Honourable Niko Nawaikula has a bad record in iTLTB for not empowering the *iTaukei*.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order. Can I ask, Mr. Speaker, to direct the Honourable Prime Minister to retract that because it is demeaning, it is unparliamentary, it is not based on any fact and it is not based on any substance and can he just please answer the question, and not drag me into it. I am here, I am not part of the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will move on now to the eighth Oral Question for today, and I give the floor to Honourable Lal. You have the floor, Sir.

I beg your pardon, I have been told that this question has been withdrawn.

(Question No. 46/2021 withdrawn)

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to Written Questions. I give the floor to the Honourable Bulanauca.

#### Written Question

Rehabilitation Programme for Roads and Bridges  
(Question No. 47/2021)

HON. M. BULANAUCA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the Ministry's programme to rehabilitate and maintain roads and bridges damaged by *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana*?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I did address some of these issues in an earlier response, but I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, that is the end of Question time.

We will take a break for refreshments and resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.54 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.32 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, each Member may speak for up to 10 minutes and with a 10-minute response by the Minister or Ministers responsible for the subject matter of the Member's speech. No seconder is required and there will be no other debate. I now call on the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua to deliver her End of Week Statement.

## END OF WEEK STATEMENTS

### New Subsidised Rates for Kidney Dialysis

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2020, the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services, through an extraordinary gazette, legislated new subsidised rates for kidney dialysis by amending the Public Hospitals and Dispensaries Regulations. Is this a fact providing real benefit to our kidney patients requiring dialysis or is it a fallacy designed to hoodwink the people, especially our dialysis patients.

The new prescribed rates were \$137.62 for Fijians and \$68.81 for those below the income tax threshold. These would be patients from families earning a combined income of less than \$30,000 per annum. Now Fijians are being asked to pay \$275.24 for each session.

Mr. Speaker, the question that I am asking today is, how beneficial has this reduction been, and the answer is this - negligible. Apart from the Colonial War Memorial Hospital which is limited and I have cited documentary evidence of this in the form of receipts for payments to the Kidney Foundation of even patients admitted at the CWM and Labasa Hospitals, I do not know of any other public medical facility that provides this essential service.

We want to know who actually operates the Dialysis Centre at Labasa Hospital, is it the Ministry of Health or someone else? In every Parliamentary sitting period, we are subjected, Mr. Speaker, to what the reality of the matter is, but, Mr. Speaker, the harsh reality and facts speak for themselves. Our kidney patients are suffering, struggling to get dialysis treatment at private centres in Suva and Lautoka. Those with kidney ailments in the Eastern Division hope for a miracle because of the exorbitantly high charges of between \$200 and \$250 per session.

A kidney patient on dialysis, as we all know, needs three treatments per week. It would cost him or her between \$600 and \$750 per week. This cost is beyond the reach of a decent salary earner. It is beyond the reach of us ordinary Members of Parliament. So the patients cut back on the treatment to one or two treatments a week until they and their families as well as assistance from Good Samaritans come to an end.

The financial inability to meet dialysis is quite literally the final nail in their coffins. Why has it come to this painful and tragic end? The fact and reality of the matter is the FijiFirst Government's repeated broken promises about subsidised dialysis. A cardinal sin as far as we are concerned. How have we come to his point?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 29th July, 2017, following the Government's continued rejection of NFP's motions from years 2015 to 2017, to please increase dialysis subsidy to at least \$3 million, my party announced that an NFP Government would provide free dialysis for patients from families whose annual family income was less than \$30,000 as well as subsidised treatment for those earning more than the income tax threshold.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Next life.



HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- This was, is and will continue to be the correct way forward. A year later in 2018, Mr. Speaker, less than five months from the general elections, the FijiFirst Government having early announced the establishment of a National Kidney Dialysis and Research Centre allocated \$3.5 million for subsidised dialysis saying that patients below the income tax threshold of families would only pay \$75 per session.

Of course, we know this was hogwash, to quote the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources, because this promise did not apply to private facilities providing dialysis. The Government had promised in 2017 to equip our hospitals with dialysis machines. A Kidney and Research Centre is gathering dust in Nadera; no research, no dialysis despite the assurance in Parliament during the 2020/2021 budget deliberations in July last year that it would be operational by November 2020. If this is not a broken promise, Mr. Speaker, than what is?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, COVID-19 cannot be blamed because the Honourable Minister for Health provided a very comprehensive answer as to the timeline of the arrival of these dialysis machines. In response to my motion during the debate on the 2020/2021 Budget in July of last year to have the subsidised dialysis allocation significantly increased, the Honourable Minister said the Centre would be operational by the end of November last year. The *Hansard Report* of 29 July, 2020 would prove what I am saying.

He also scoffed at the suggestion of providing subsidies to the overwhelming majority of our people visiting privately-owned centres, saying the Government was going to ease the burden as the new dialysis machines had been purchased and the nephrologist had already identified 40 patients who needed dialysis treatment urgently. We wonder now, Mr. Speaker, what has become of those 40 patients who were identified? Was this a pre-election gimmick? Mr. Speaker, Sir, we believe it was because the allocation fell from their pre-election promise of \$3.5 million to \$200,000 in 2019 and further reduced to \$100,000 in 2020.

Going back in time so to speak, the Honourable Minister for Economy on 29th June, 2017 while delivering the 2017/2018 Budget announced as follows, and I quote:

“We will allocate, Madam Speaker, \$1 million to establish and equip the National Kidney Research and Treatment Centre in Suva to be directed by Dr. Amrish Krishna, the only Fijian nephrologist in Fiji. This Treatment and Research Centre will advocate the treatment of kidney diseases in Fiji by operating 10 new kidney dialysis machines and offering a range of other therapies as well as diagnostics and counselling to its patients. Four new kidney dialysis machines will also become operational at the Lautoka Hospital in the next few months.”

These next few months are still coming. Patients are being denied subsidised dialysis in hospitals. I repeat, the so-called Dialysis and Research Centre is gathering dust. None of the promises and assurances made in Parliament by both the Honourable Economy Minister in 2017 and the Honourable Health Minister in 2020 has come to fruition. It reminds me, Mr. Speaker, of a song that I am sure you will be familiar with from Fleetwood Mac, “Tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies” - the pain and suffering of dialysis patients, struggling to make ends meet and to survive.

The FijiFirst Government’s broken promises is tragically captured by the death of a man early yesterday morning at the Lautoka Hospital. This gentleman will be accorded his final rites on the date of his birthday (tomorrow). He did all he could to be able to have two dialysis sessions per week instead of three at a private facility in Lautoka. He could not even afford to rest because he had to

operate a stall at the Lautoka Market until recently to earn enough money to meet his dialysis cost of \$400 per week plus other medical costs.

I am told today of another case that happened this week where a patient went to receive treatment at the Lautoka Hospital only to be told that the dialysis treatment is available only for emergency cases. Why are people being restricted from receiving lifesaving treatment, Mr. Speaker, Sir? Again, I ask, why? Is it because:

- of this Government's lack of empathy and support for those receiving dialysis at privately-operated facilities due to the inability of hospitals to provide dialysis;
- 10 new dialysis machines did not become operational within a few months as announced by the Honourable Minister of Economy in June, 2017; and
- the late patient was denied the right to subsidise dialysis of \$75 per session and \$68.81 per treatment post-December 2020, instead paying \$200 per session.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, throughout this week, the Honourable Leader of the National Federation Party has emphasised that politics is not about winning elections and arguments, it is about doing good to the people that we serve. Government must now come to grips with the reality. The reality of the matter is, it has failed to equip public hospitals with the dialysis machines as promised both in 2017 and 2020. It has failed to even remotely make operational the National Kidney Dialysis and Research Centre.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, Government should extend such subsidised dialysis to patient predominantly using private facilities. Our people need compassion and the compliance of Government's social responsibility to the population especially during these very difficult times. If Government can hire overseas consultants and recruit Permanent Secretaries from abroad saying it needs expertise, there is simply no reason why it should deny our citizens their fundamental Constitutional right to health and without any hesitation whatsoever provide subsidised dialysis to patients receiving treatment privately due to the acute lack of dialysis in hospitals. This is all we are asking for, Mr. Speaker, fairness and adherence to the Constitutional rights of our people. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua for her End of the Week Statement. I now give the floor to the Minister for Health and Medical Services. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- *Vinaka vakalevu* Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I would like to respond to the statement.

First of all, she has lied. The Nadera Dialysis Centre is not gathering dust, it is actually open as we speak, to do the clinic.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Shame!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Shame on you! The person doing the clinic there, look at me, Honourable Member, is an Australian trained nephrologist and is doing the clinic now.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Say it again.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- It is open. Shameful. This is like the tinned fish you lied about.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Why would you lie to the people of Fiji on camera when it is not gathering dust, it is actually working. Clinics are being done there.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Do not sing to me. The reason why we made the amendments to the Regulations is because we are bound to make dialysis cheap to every Fijian who can.

And Honourable Member, you must differentiate between acute dialysis from chronic dialysis. Any person who is very sick, and I have had patients who have been very sick, you would know that, when they come to the hospital and they need dialysis, Government pays for 14 sessions...

HON. MEMBER.- Not a promise.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Not a promise, it happens.

... in the Intensive Care Unit. As we speak, there are some receiving dialysis now in the Intensive Care Units in CWM, Lautoka and Labasa. That is paid for by Government and that is not reflected on the chronic dialysis. You must demarcate it, please do not talk about medicine and what is happening in health in Fiji if you do not get it properly.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Tell them!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Acute Dialysis which saves many, many lives are paid for by Government; they are paid completely by Government. And I have had personally some patients you have needed more than 14 sessions. Some of them had needed 28 sessions paid for by Government. Every day as we speak, there are many receiving dialysis in Government institutions paid for by Government (free). Those are what we call acute dialysis.

Kidney Foundation of Fiji is different and you know that Honourable Member. Please, do not say that it is part of Government, it is not. Please, do not say that. The Kidney Foundation of Fiji runs its own dialysis centre.

If you look at the numbers around the world and at some Small Islands Development States, some of the countries around the Pacific, some of the small island nations, they are putting about 30 percent to 50 percent of the Ministry of Health budget, just looking after dialysis and the treatment of chronic diseases; dialysis alone. There are a lot of people from Tuvalu who are in Fiji at the moment, receiving dialysis.

When we talk about nephrology care in this country, we are interested in both primary prevention and secondary prevention. We are interested in making sure that we reduce the blood pressure that causes this, that we make sure that we reduce the diabetes that causes this. We want to make sure that we have the ability to be able to test their kidney functions wherever they are and we have laboratories all over the country. We have just recently recruited even more laboratory scientists so that we have laboratory facilities in some small subdivision hospitals. I talked about radiology recently, these are being able to have Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in these places.

I would like to begin by that, Mr. Speaker and also say that Dr. Amrish Krishnan was sent across, he was trained on a Fiji Government scholarship and he got his Masters. I was Medical Superintendent when we supported him to go for training in Taranaki. This Government supported his training. He went to Taranaki with us. He came back and indicated he wanted to go into private practice. We sent Dr. Yogeshni who now works in Labasa - she was trained in Christchurch, and Dr. Anish, the nephrologist who is also Australian-trained, who looks after our dialysis centre here in Suva.

Mr. Speaker, the construction of the centre in Nadera is now nearly \$800,000. Due to the supply chain challenges that we faced and the fact that the German company that actually sold us this dialysis machine, they indicated to us that they will only allow a biomedical engineer which they certified, so we had to wait. When we were finally able to bring across a biomedical engineer through Fiji Airways into the country, served quarantine and as we speak again, that place is open. You can go after this and check. He is there installing the machines.

(Honourable Professor B.C. Prasad interjects)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- No, no, I am not talking to you, Honourable Prasad. Stop bringing lies into this august House.

There are 15 dialysis machines which arrived in April - 10 machines are now at that centre and the others we have distributed because we want to be able to support our ICU facilities for COVID-19. So they are in Suva, Lautoka and Labasa and they are looking after patients on a daily basis. The state of the art human dialysis machine made by the German company, Fresenius will greatly improve the quality of care currently provided to end-stage kidney disease. Once commissioned into service, the machine will add to the number of dialysis machines that will be accessible to kidney disease.

Honourable Member, you have to understand that we have gone away from people just falling into end-stage renal disease. We now have capable doctors available both in the public system, in Suva and Lautoka and teams under them including Dr. Amrish in private, who are now able to rescue them in chronic renal failure. And the ideal setting, we do not want them to have dialysis and if the Honourable Member, Mr. Speaker, does not know that to have dialysis you just do not take the dialysis and stick them into somebody's body, they need an operation to create an arteriovenous fistula. Guess, who does it? The public system does it.

Our surgeons, trained locally and in Australia and New Zealand, they do it. They do it because you are talking about what is the investment. There has been a lot of investment, Honourable Member. There has been a lot of investment and these are people that Government has supported for their training. So, we have the Kidney Foundation of Fiji which charges \$250; the Kidney Hub, Dr. Amrish - \$200; Ba Medical Centre – Dr. Dur Sami - \$200; Pasifika Care - \$200; Northern Dialysis - \$115.

Mr. Speaker, we fully subsidise those 15 to 20 Fijians in Labasa and the one in Suva, once it is open, we will begin that at a \$150 and the subsidy kicks in. We are also in negotiation with the dialysis centre in the west. There is one who is willing to come to us but we do not want (and this is what we have had before), is that they will then add on to their cost. We want them to actually bring down their cost. We do not want a provider to actually say "look if you are going to give \$75 subsidy we are going to make the amount now to \$175". That is something that one of the providers indicated to us that they want to up their price a little bit. We do not want that, we want to actually bring it down and that is the whole nature of the legislation that was put in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in Labasa alone it cost us \$9,300 every month just to provide the actual subsidy. We started registering in the centre to make sure that we actually have the right patients who meet certain criteria. We have actually registered 19 patients and we made it very clear that these patients have to go and be seen by our designated nephrologist and they register them because we want to be sure that the consultant and the specialist in this area actually agrees and concurs that they need dialysis. Dialysis is not for everyone, it is not like a panadol that you just give for everyone. It is a treatment that has its effects, that can save a life and it can also have its side effects.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the specialist clinics have been working there for more than two months now. They open on Thursdays and Fridays specifically to see 60 kidney dialysis patients. Quite a large number of them in Nadera have been seen and managed without the use of dialysis at the moment; our doctors and nurses have been able to rescue them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to finish my statement by saying the Honourable Professor Prasad mislead Parliament on Monday. He said, “There was no panadol and diabetic medications around the country.”

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- There was't - I have got evidence.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I have information here from the Director of Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services and in it he says ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Honourable Member, listen you mislead Parliament, I am correcting you today.

We have it available. We actually have more than 87 percent of stock that is needed over three month period available. It is important to understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that these types of statements actually have an effect on our people not coming to institutions, not coming to the health centre and not coming to the facility. If you just say things like that bluntly then, what happens?

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Then our people will say, “ why should I go to the hospital?” Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is an irresponsible statement and please, do not mislead Parliament. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Health. Honourable Members, we will move on. I now call on the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi to deliver her End of the Week Statement.

#### Importance of Evacuation Centres

HON. ADIL. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank you for the opportunity to make this End of Week Statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most of us sitting in this honourable House sometimes in our lives, have experienced a sense of insecurity or fear, in case the rooftop on top of our heads fall down, Sir; fear for our loved ones, the fear of our safety and the fear of death during natural disasters. If there was a safe place to get quickly to we would within seconds round up our loved ones and get to that safe place where we can be with other family members, community members, our leaders, other women, youths and children.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that safe place or the house of hope in other words evacuation centres, cum-community hall, churches, places of worship which is our only hope for safety for our survival when natural disasters happen and there is no existing evacuation centre in our community. There is a need, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to strengthen existing community halls, churches, et cetera which have been used as evacuation centres or build new community centres or repair churches, to ensure that everyone and every citizen has an evacuation centre to relocate to when disasters happen.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Minister for Defence and Disaster Management for his update yesterday on the two recent cyclones. As we know, this the new norm especially for us in the Pacific. We know that cyclones are now more frequent and more severe.

We have been informed in details, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of Government's effort to ensure the safety of our people, provide relief supplies to ensure the restoration of electricity, to ensure that damaged roads are promptly repaired so that food supplies not only for those in dire need but also for trading purposes reach the people or are available to the people, to ease the needs of travellers as well as civil servants and volunteers involved in damage assessments and distribution of relief supplies and the members of civil societies involved in relief work and the business community in supplying the basic needs to our people.

We are grateful for the efforts of the Government and civil societies to bring about relief to the members of those communities that were affected. We are also grateful to the volunteers, Mr, Speaker, Sir, who have sacrificed both their time to assist in the voluntary work that has been provided by Government to ensure prompt relief to those that were affected during the recent cyclone or in all previous cyclones.

Whilst we are grateful for Government's effort to ensure speedy recovery, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we equally need to look beyond the structures that we have now. We need to ensure that we have evacuation centres readily available to every community both rural and urban for the safety of our people when natural disasters happen.

Almost every village has a *vale ni bose va koro* or village hall or a village church which had been used as evacuation centres, for other communities their places of worships or gathering halls. These are the buildings which Government can assist to ensure that they are cyclone proof or have engineering certificates to provide safety houses for members of the village or community when natural disasters do happen.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, since independence, the Alliance Government led by the late *Turaga Bale na Tui* Nayau, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara have assisted communities to construct halls as evacuation centres. This was continued by the SVT government under Major-General Rabuka, the SDL government under the late Mr. Laisenia Qarase.

It is unfortunate, Sir, that this initiative and allocation is no longer available. Without evacuation centres schools are used and where schools are far away, there is risk of death or injury for members of communities in the path of severe cyclones. This is a cause for anxiety and fear in the community and has a cost for affected families, communities and the nation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the education centre was also severely impacted by the recent cyclone as alluded to by the Honourable Minister for Disaster Management, with more than 90 schools damaged across the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as in the past, schools have been used as evacuation centres. There are risks involved in damages being caused due to cooking and for other reasons.

All schools in Fiji have to take another extra week in order to be able to re-begin the new school year. We can avoid further absences from school if evacuation centres are located in all communities, Sir.

I also refer to the information provided by the Honourable Minister for Disaster Management in his Ministerial Statement yesterday where he confirmed that immediately after the storm (*TC Yasa*) had past, close to 23,000 Fijians were temporary relocated to 456 evacuation centres. Some of those evacuation centres were schools.

We express our appreciation to the Australian Defence Force and the Republic of Fiji Military Forces for their work to repair 32 schools to open in time for the new school year (19<sup>th</sup> January) and this ensured that more than 8,000 students returned to school.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we would like to propose that Government considers changing its policies to ensure that all villages and communities have engineered proof, approved community hall as evacuation centres or churches which can be used as evacuation centres.

We need to comply with our own Constitution as well as our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations. On that note I would like to ask Government through the Honourable Minister Maritime Development and Disaster Management to consider what we are proposing today to ensure the availability of Evacuation Centres for all communities.

Their earlier response to one of our questions to provide a number of evacuation centres in provinces will not work, Mr. Speaker, Sir. For Tailevu North, an evacuation centre to be built in Matacula. If there is a cyclone affecting the people of Dawasamu, how are they expected to get to Matacula for safety during the cyclone season?

I thank you, Sir for the opportunity to participate in this End of Week Statement and I wish all Honourable Members a safe journey back to their homes after this session. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi for her statement. I now give the floor to the Minister responsible for the response, the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me, from the very outset say that no doubt there is no element of doubt whatsoever that evacuation centres are important for the good and for the safety of our people and, of course, the Government does agree and let me also assure this honourable House that Government is also committed to the construction and retrofitting of evacuation centres.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member talked about our fear and feeling insecure whenever we have disasters but I must also ask the question of, what are we doing about our responsibilities as well? Because if we are in the state of fear or insecure, of course, the question that we also need to ask is, how will we eliminate and get rid of this feeling of fear and insecurity?

It comes with responsibility, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we have often said in this august House that development is partnership. There must be partnership between the government, people and the communities. That is something that we need to take seriously, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We appreciate the work done by previous governments; the Alliance Government, SVT Government and SDL Government, but it is not correct to state in this House that this Government no longer constructs evacuation centres.

Let me go back to 2015, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government completed retrofitting three evacuation centres; Nacokoni in Burebasaga, Wasavulu in Labasa, Navakaka Village in Navatu.

In 2017, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government completed retrofitting works for the following evacuation centres in Sabeto in Ba, Narakorokoyawa Village at a cost of \$40,000, Koroiyaco Village at a cost of \$40,000 and Naboutini Village at a cost of \$20,000.

In 2018, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government built four evacuation centres in Cakaudrove, Navakavou Village in Taveuni at a cost of \$65,000, at Tavuki Village at a cost of \$100,000, at Nukubolu Village at a cost of \$47,000 and Tabia Village at a cost of \$75,000.

In 2019 there were already evacuation centres to be constructed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that includes Matacula and Maumi in Tailevu. Saliadrau in Namosi and, of course, Narikoso and Rokovuaka in Ba but we all understand the situation that we are in and the communities have been advised accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to say that this Government is no longer making available this facility to assist our rural communities is an outright lie. That is not correct, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let me say, that the concept of evacuation centres is a proactive measure put in place by Government to ensure that Fijians in affected communities are protected and provided with basic human needs such as water, food and accommodation during disasters. It is important to note that due to climate change, larger and more damaging disasters are the new norm and we need to be prepared year-round, rather than just in the predicted cyclone season.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the will of the people is reflected in the Government and this is why they chose this Government. That will of Government and the people are reflected in the policies of the Government.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the Disaster Risk Reduction Policy of Government for the years 2018 to 2030. It talks about preparedness, we need to prepare now to minimise the damages and of course the loss of unnecessary lives as well when there is a disaster. It talks about key structural measures, Sir, and I will refer on a few: safer schools, safer hospitals, evacuation centre and multi-purpose community centre.

I have already in this House answered a question by the Honourable Member about the difference between a community hall and a properly constructed built for a purpose evacuation centre and we have gone further in this document, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to say that we also need to build multi-purpose community centre. Because of the community halls in the villages are just waiting for the next *bose va koro* or for the ....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- However, we need to fully utilise that, instead of properly building another kindergarten, it can be better used, that is why it needs to be a multi-purpose



centre, and of course we have started building purpose-built evacuation centres as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Let me go to the schools. We understand the economic disparity in our communities; that is a fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I have talked about responsibility, but of course in the absence of these facilities in the communities, there are alternatives, but people need to move quickly. This week I have been talking to the media, they have been asking me, “Why did the siren not come up?” There is a difference between alert and warning. When the alerts are given, that is the time for you to start moving. Do not leave it too late, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

This is why the unfortunate case in Taveuni, I personally made the effort to go to that *Mandir* in Taveuni and apologise to the *Mandir* Committee, but this is the fact about that situation. That was not a Government designated evacuation centre, but the advisory councillor, who was worried about the safety of the people, who did not adhere to the alert that was given earlier left it too late. When the wind was at its peak, then they wanted to start moving. Unfortunately, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhary did not state this fact, the next Evacuation Centre is six kilometres down.

If you have been to Taveuni, he was referring to South Taveuni Secondary School; six kilometres down the road to get to that place. So it was on the initiative of the advisory councillor that she asked the *Mandir* Committee and the priest if those people can be sheltered but, of course, people need to take responsibility and respect the place.

Government does not have to be blamed, because it was not a designated evacuation centre but on the initiative and in the interest of safety that I have already stated, the advisory councillor asked if they could be sheltered there. I have apologised on behalf of the Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I have assured the chairman of the *Mandir*, “You have every right to close this facility.” But if people come here, they have to respect this place.

On schools, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government already has about 1,033 registered evacuation centres throughout Fiji and the majority of these are schools: 443 in the Central Division, 86 in the Eastern Division, 198 in the Northern Division and 306 in the Western Division. We have come up lately with a new App that you need to use in order to find out where your nearest evacuation centre is.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me also say that through the Build Back Better Programme of Government, after *TC Winston*, we reconstructed or retrofitted resilient infrastructure with a total of 118. Sir, 33 of those were schools and most of the schools, I would proudly say here, withstood Category 5 *TC Yasa* in the recent calamity that we went through. Let me share some ideas to the Honourable Members of the House, maybe we can go back now to our communities.

Government has a long list of priorities that cannot be addressed all at once. I have spoken to the *Roko* and District Officers (DOs). There are smarter ways in which we can short-circuit the Government development programmes so that they can have evacuation centres, Mr. Speaker, Sir. All that they need to do is go to the Ministry of Agriculture or go to the Ministry of Rural Development through the self-help projects or through programmes in here - 100,000 *dalo* suckers at one dollar per *dalo*, that is one evacuation centre, cashed within a period of nine months, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Sawaieke in Gau has done that, they did not have to run back to Government and ask for money because through their yaqona planting programme, they have managed to construct their new evacuation centre. Nasolo in Bua, they do not have to come to Government to ask for money. There are ways - we just need to organise and let us get these ideas across to the people to make sure that retrofitting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is continuing.

Let me assure this august House, Government values and takes seriously the safety and wellbeing of our people and we will continue when we have the resources, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will continue with the building of evacuation centres and retrofitting, according to this document, purpose-build evacuation centres and multi-purpose centres so that our people can be safe. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management for his reply.

Honourable Members, at this juncture, I have been asked from the floor for a point of clarification and I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. What I would like to clarify is the issue on the question that Honourable Tikoduadua had asked on the Accountability and Transparency Commission in which I had mentioned that the Bill had been sent to the Committee. The Committee has actually finished its work, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the Bill now needs to go into the floor of Parliament for the Committee Stage where we go clause by clause. We hope to obviously, get that done soon.

I just want to clarify that the actual Committee has done its work, has come back to Parliament now for the Third Reading and before that, we need to go into the Committee Stage of Parliament to go clause by clause and hopefully, with the time given and the new extra week of sitting, once we have finished all of that then we can probably go into this Committee Stage to look at this Bill. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. We will leave it at that.

Honourable Members, I just want to make one other point clear before we adjourn. This week, the Speaker has been thumped from right, from left, from the front in this House and outside of this House. People think that they know my job better than I do. I can do this job better than anyone and that is what I have done and I will keep on doing that.

When it comes to Statements in the House, there are two persons in the House that I give leeway to; the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition. I give them the licence. Some of you have strayed all over the place when you speak and then you start to blame me. I can take it on the chin, you ask yourselves if you can take it on the chin. I just want to make that point clear.

I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament, you have the floor, Sir.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

That Parliament adjourns until Monday, 22nd March, 2021 at 9.30 a.m.

HON. R.R. SHARMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to second the motion.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I thank you all for your participation and contributions during the parliamentary proceedings in the course of this sitting week.

Honourable Members, I look forward to the next meeting in March and I now declare that Parliament adjourns until Monday, 22nd March, 2021 at 9.30 a.m. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.17 p.m.