

PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DAILY HANSARD

TUESDAY, 23RD MARCH, 2021

[CORRECTED COPY]

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TUESDAY, 23RD MARCH, 2021

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

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

PRESENT

All Honourable Members were present, except the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications; the Honourable Minister for Forestry; and the Honourable Ratu N.T. Lalabalavu.

MINUTES

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 22nd March, 2021, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR

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 home, their offices and electronic devices. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

Responses to Written Questions

Honourable Members, please take note that I have received responses to Written Questions from the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management. These are: Written Question No. 9 of 2021 and Written Question No. 19 of 2021.

Honourable Members, I have also received responses to Written Questions from the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources for Written Question No. 10 of 2020, No. 43 of 2020, No. 52 of 2020, No. 112 of 2020, No. 125 of 2020, No. 146 of 2020 and No. 47 of 2021.

Honourable Members, please, take note that copies of these written responses will be provided to Honourable Members who asked the questions, and copies will also be uploaded on the Parliament website.

At this juncture, I would like to remind all Honourable Members that the Ministry of Health and Medical Services Officials will be stationed at Level 2 today, from the morning refreshments

break, onwards. They will assist Honourable Members who prefer to undertake face-to-face registrations for the COVID-19 vaccine. I encourage all Honourable Members who have not registered to register accordingly. Thank you, Honourable Members.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence to table his Report.

Review Report on the 2005 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum

HON. A.D. O'CONNOR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am pleased to present the Committee's Review Report on the 2005 Agreement establishing the Pacific Islands Forum.

The Forum was established pursuant to the Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2000). The purpose of the Forum is to strengthen regional cooperation and integration including the pooling of regional resources of governance and the alignment of policies in order to further Forum members' shared goals of economic growth, sustainable development, governance, and security.

Historically, the South Pacific Commission (SPC), dominated by the colonial masters, was the forum to discuss matters for small Pacific Island States. However, by 1965 at the Lae, Papua New Guinea (PNG) Meeting, the Leaders had become impatient with the paternalistic dominance by the colonial Commissioners at the annual conferences. The Pacific Leaders, led by Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Sir Michael Somare, walked out of the Meeting, precipitating a rethinking by the colonial powers. This gave birth to the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation (SPEC) in 1971. In 1991, another change occurred when the SPEC was renamed the South Pacific Forum and for the first time, it enjoyed immunities and privileges under a Fiji Ministerial Order in 1993.

In October 2000, the Forum met for the first time under its new name, "Pacific Islands Forum", in line with its decision at Palau in 1999. Leaders also agreed to adopt the new 2000 Agreement establishing the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat which was signed at Tarawa at the 31st Pacific Islands Forum.

Subsequently in 2005, a Working Group of Members, in consultation with the full Forum membership, developed a draft text updating the 2000 Agreement Establishing the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat in accordance with the Leaders' directions from the Leader's Retreat in April 2004. The text of the new Agreement was considered by the Forum Officials Committee and endorsed by Forum Leaders and opened for signature at their meeting in Port Moresby on 27th October, 2005.

The new Agreement establishes the PIF Forum as an intergovernmental organisation at international law. The Agreement also updates the Forum's purpose and functions to reflect the vision and directions taken under the Pacific Plan.

To facilitate regional cooperation and integration, the Leaders agreed to broaden the Forum's membership by establishing new associate and observer membership categories. Leaders also agreed to adopt a new policy regarding admission, criteria and entitlements for associate membership and observer status in the Forum to take effect from the 2005 Forum.

Although Fiji is currently in compliance with the articles under the 2005 Agreement, it has not formally ratified the Agreement. By ratifying the Agreement, Fiji will signal to other PIF member

countries that it has committed itself to accepting membership of the PIF and all the duties and obligations that flow from it.

Secondly, Fiji would be demonstrating its strong commitment to the PIF by making the 2005 PIF Agreement part of the statutory laws of Fiji. Without ratification by Parliament, this regional agreement is not legally binding on Fiji, notwithstanding Fiji's signature of it.

Thirdly, Fiji is the designated depository to the 2005 PIF Agreement, in accordance with its Article XI. Fiji cannot lawfully exercise this role, unless it has ratified the Agreement.

Through ratification of the Agreement, Fiji will perform its leadership role by extending its duty of care to the member countries of PIFS in strengthening regionalism and moving forward towards consensus and peace building in the Pacific way. This is aligning to the National Development Plan (NDP), Agenda on Good Governance and the Accountability of Parliament aligned to SDG 16; Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

The Committee recommends that Fiji ratifies the 2005 Agreement establishing the Pacific Islands Forum. I take this opportunity to thank Honourable Members of my Committee for compiling this bipartisan Report and also wish to thank Honourable Anare Jale for his contribution during his tenure as a Committee member.

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

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

(Reported handed to the Secretary-General)

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

I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, Honourable Sanjay Kirpal to table his Report.

REVIEW REPORT ON THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY 2014 AND 2015 ANNUAL REPORTS

HON. S. KIRPAL.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources on the consolidated annual review of the Department of Forestry 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports.

In accordance with its established Annual Report review process, the Committee examines Annual Reports of Ministries and Departments in order to investigate, inquire into, and make recommendations relating to the administration, legislative or proposed legislative programme, budget, restructuring, functions, structure and policy formulation. As part of this process, the Committee raised questions and received written responses from the Ministry of Forestry to gather additional information.

This review was made in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(c) which mandates the committee to look into issues related to forestry, agriculture, mining, environment, fisheries, water and marine services. The review looked at the Department's administration, structure, budgetary

allocation, programmes and activities, policies, challenges and achievements for 2014 and 2015 and its implementation.

It was noted that the Department's strategic priorities were aligned to the Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio – Economic Development (RSSD), Government's manifesto and the Constitution.

The Committee noted the Vision of the Department which states and I quote; "Our Future Generation will inherit a Prosperous and Enhanced Forestry Sector Leader in forest sustainability and innovation for small island economies".

In support of the above, the Committee noted that the Department of Forestry successfully implemented the Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) in 2014, now practised by the Fiji Pine and Tropic Woods to assist the SME in achieving a sustainable forest management in their plantations.

One of the major achievements of the Department of Forestry, as noted by the Committee in the 2014 Annual Report, was the introduction of the Maritime Pine Package assistance for Cicia and Gau to improve livelihoods and this project will be extended to other maritime islands in the future. Simultaneously, 2015 also marked another achievement for the Department when Fiji signed an agreement with the World Bank valued at US\$3.8 million for Fiji's readiness process for REDD Plus.

Furthermore, a key highlight for the Department during the period of review was its commitment to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Its commitment to the UNFCCC was achieved through the Fiji National REDD+ Programme which was the initiative targeted at reducing carbon emissions through the preservation, conservation and sustainable management of forests.

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the Permanent Secretary, Mr Pene Baleinabuli, and his staff, for their assistance during this review process. I also extend my gratitude to my Committee colleagues, namely; Honourable Jale Sigarara (Deputy Chairperson) and Honourable Alexander O'Connor.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I commend the Review of the Consolidated Annual Reports for the Department of Forestry 2014 and 2015 to Parliament.

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

(Reported handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to table his Report.

REVIEW REPORT - AUDIT REPORT ON PROVINCIAL COUNCILS - VOLUME 3

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Public Accounts Standing Committee Report on the Provincial Councils - Volume 3. The Report contains the results of the audit conducted by the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) on the Provincial Councils - Volume 3 for the period 2006 to 2010.

Provincial Councils are established under section 7 of the iTaukei Affairs Act 1944 and section 3 of the iTaukei Affairs (Provincial Council) Regulation 1996. Each Provincial Council is a body corporate. The functions of the Councils are to:

- formulate and implement policies for promoting the health, peace, order, welfare and good governance of iTaukei residing in the Province;
- formulate and implement policies for promoting the economic, cultural and social development of the Province; and
- carry out such other duties and functions, which the Minister for iTaukei Affairs or the Board may see fit to delegate to the Council.

The operations of the Councils are funded by the Government Subventions disbursed through the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and the iTaukei Affairs Board. Other operational costs not covered by Government Subvention are funded through the collection, on communal basis, of provincial rates.

From the outset, there are 14 Provincial Councils which the Auditor-General has the mandate to audit under section 33 of the iTaukei Affairs (Provincial Councils) Regulation 1996. This Report contains the audited financial statements for the 14 Provincial Councils for the years ranging from 2006 to 2010, namely:

- (1) Ba (2008 – 2010);
- (2) Bua (2008 – 2010);
- (3) Cakaudrove (2008 – 2010);
- (4) Kadavu (2008 – 2010);
- (5) Lau (2008 – 2010);
- (6) Lomaiviti (2006 – 2010);
- (7) Macuata (2008 – 2010);
- (8) Nadroga/Navosa (2008 – 2010);
- (9) Naitasiri (2008 – 2010);
- (10) Namosi (2008 – 2010);
- (11) Ra (2008 – 2010);
- (12) Rewa (2008 – 2010);
- (13) Serua (2008 – 2010); and
- (14) Tailevu (2008 – 2010);

The OAG confirmed that the 14 Provincial Councils are in backlog by nine years or more, and this was due to the non-submission of Annual Financial Statements for the Auditor-General to audit. The legislated date for the submission of the draft Financial Statement to the Audit Office is 1st April every year.

The Committee noted significant delays in the submission of the draft Financial Statement for audit. Lack of capacity has been identified as a contributing factor to preparing appropriate timely and accurate draft Financial Statements.

The Committee was informed of the following reasons which caused the delay in the submission of the draft Financial Statement:

- (1) Non-submission of the draft Financial Statements since 1999.
- (2) The then management of iTaukei Affairs Board failed to make timely submission of the Financial Statement which has resulted in the audit backlog.
- (3) The current iTaukei Affairs Board Management has put in some strategies which have resulted in the reduction of audit backlog from 19 years to nine years. Targets have been set to clear this backlog in this financial year.

Some of the strategies that are currently in place, include:

- (1) Periodic review of the business processes and the Standard Operating Procedures. This covers revenue and payment cycles, reconciliation and other accounting processes, including internal controls.
- (2) Improvements made in the filing system.
- (3) Quality assurance checks conducted on financial returns and queries flagged for immediate action.
- (4) In-house spot checks conducted.
- (5) Purchase of an integrated financial system.
- (6) Set up of a special taskforce to focus on the backlog.
- (7) Provincial Treasurer's KPIs have been set to clear backlog tasks and ensure timely submission of Financial Statements going forward.

Overall, out of the 151 draft Financial Statements received by the Auditor- General, the audit of 123 Financial Statements for the 14 Provincial Councils have been completed and the remaining 28 Financial Statements was to start from April 2020.

From the 123 Financial Statements that have been audited, the results of the audits for 79 Financial Statements have already been reported to Parliament in Volumes 1 and 2.

The Public Accounts Committee strongly encourages the 14 Provincial Councils to implement the following recommendations as a matter of priority:

- (1) The iTaukei Affairs Board Head of Finance should strengthen its monitoring on the 14 Provincial Councils for the timely closing of accounts and submission of Financial Statements to the OAG for audit. There should be a clear SOP in place to address this issue and ensure continuous scrutiny by Management.
- (2) The iTaukei Affairs Board Internal Audit Team to work with the OAG on a biannual basis, to ensure that it completes and submits the Financial Statements on time for audit, as well as for tabling at the Provincial Council meetings.
- (3) In accordance with the iTaukei Affairs Act 1944, iTaukei Affairs Provincial Council Regulation 1996 and the Audit Act 1969, the iTaukei Affairs Board designs an accounting manual for the 14 Provincial Councils to comply with proper accounting procedures as

stipulated under the FMA 2004, Finance Instructions 2010 and the Procurement Regulations 2010.

- (4) The Committee recommends that the Provincial Councils formulate strategic plans and corporate plans, including risk management plans for effective governance.
- (5) The iTaukei Affairs Board to improve its filing system and migrate to e-records documentations to avoid missing records and better management of the Councils assets.
- (6) All appointments to be carried out according to the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) to ensure that qualified personnel are recruited and selected.
- (7) In terms of internal controls, all staff are required to implement the trainings learnt to strengthen the processes in the workplace.
- (8) The iTaukei Affairs Board should ensure that a Succession Plan is in place for certain critical positions within the organisation for continuity of day- to- day operations.
- (9) Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change related planning and management in Provinces, focussing on vulnerable communities in line with SDG 13(b).
- (10) Encourage women and youth participation in Provincial Councils.
- (11) Responses provided by the Auditor-General and the Committee should ensure that the Provincial Councils are implementing the recommendations.

The Committee, in its scrutiny, also noted the iTaukei Affairs Board's contribution to Fiji's commitment towards the 17 SDGs Agenda and Fiji's National Development Plan. It is pleasing to note that the iTaukei Affairs Board, together with Provincial Councils, have inculcated these commitments into their Strategic Plan and Operational Plan in line with the Council's mandated functions as outlined under section 7 of the iTaukei Affairs Act 1994 and the iTaukei Affairs (Provincial Council) Regulation 1996.

In terms of the principles of gender equality, the iTaukei Affairs Board is aware of the importance of gender balance within its workforce. However, all recruitments that were conducted for Provincial Councils were based on merit as per the OMRS Process.

The Committee is seriously concerned with the disclaimer audit opinions issued to all the 44 Financial Statements of the 14 Provincial Councils that were audited. This is a negative reflection on the iTaukei Affairs Board and the respective Provincial Councils.

The Public Accounts Committee strongly encourages the 14 Provincial Councils to implement the recommendations as a matter of priority, as the Committee will monitor and visit the Councils in the near future to review the progress of its implementation.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the Chief Executive Officer of the iTaukei Affairs Board on their efforts in trying to improve its systems and processes with the respective 14 Councils, to address those audit issues that were identified. I also commend the work of the OAG in trying to complete its audit on all backlog.

I wish to extend my appreciation to all the Honourable Members of the Committee for their valuable contribution in the successful compilation of this bipartisan Report, namely; Honourable Joseph Nand (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Virendra Lal, Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa and Honourable Aseri Radrodro. Additionally, pursuant to Standing Order 115(5), I also acknowledge Honourable Mikaele Leawere who stood in as alternate Member for Honourable Aseri Radrodro.

With those words, I commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

ANNUAL REVIEW REPORT - CONSUMER COUNCIL OF FIJI

HON. V. PILLAY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present the Report of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the annual review of the Consumer Council of Fiji for the year ended 31st July, 2018.

This review was undertaken in accordance with Standing Order 109(2)(b) which mandates the Committee to look into issues relating to health, education, social services, labour, culture and media.

The review covered the period 1st August, 2017 to 31st July, 2018 and looked at nine key areas, namely the Consumer Council's administration, structure, budgetary allocation, programmes and activities, policies, challenges, highlights and priorities for the coming years and its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Committee first met on 2nd and 3rd September, 2020 to deliberate on and formulated questions pertaining to the 2017-2018 Annual Report of the Consumer Council of Fiji. We were unable to conduct a public hearing with the Council due to COVID-19 restrictions put in place. In order to comply with health directives and protocols on public gathering and social distancing, the Committee accepted a written response from the Consumer Council of Fiji in lieu of a face-to-face hearing.

Following our deliberations on the written responses, we wrote to the Council requesting for further clarification on other related matters. Upon receipt of all relevant information from the Consumer Council of Fiji on the Committee's queries, the Committee compiled its findings and subsequently endorsed its Report in February.

At this juncture, I wish to thank the Chief Executive Officer of the Consumer Council of Fiji, Ms. Seema Shandil, and her staff for their assistance in this review process. I also extend my gratitude

to my Committee colleagues, namely; Honourable George Vegnathan (Deputy Chairperson), Honourable Alipate Nagata, Honourable Salote Radrodro and Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu for their contributions during the Committee's deliberations.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this Report to Parliament and request all Honourable Members of this august House to take note of the Report. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I have been advised that there are no Ministerial Statements for today.

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

REVIEW REPORT ON THE EXAMINATION OF AUDIT REPORTS OF GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND DEPARTMENTS

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

That Parliament debates the Examination of Audit Reports of Government Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31st July, 2016 (Volumes 1–4), which was tabled on 14th May 2019.

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

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

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament; as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, I take this opportunity to speak on the motion to debate the Public Accounts Committee's Review Report on Government Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31st July, 2016 (Volumes 1-4).

The Report presents the findings of the audit made to the annual accounts of Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31st July, 2016. This represented a period of six months before the commencement of a new Government fiscal year from 1st August, 2016.

The Report comprised four Volumes and the Supplementary Report referred to the Public Accounts Committee on 11th July, 2017 and 15th September, 2017 respectively, were as follows:

- Volume 1 – Audit Report on the Whole of Government Financial Statements and Annual Appropriation Statements 2016 (Parliamentary Paper No. 99/2017);
- Volume 2 – Audit Report on the General Administration Sector 2016 (Parliamentary Paper No. 100/2017);
- Volume 3 – Audit Report on the Social Services Sector 2016 (Parliamentary Paper No. 101/2017);
- Volume 4 – Audit Report on Economic Service and Infrastructure Sector 2016 (Parliamentary Paper No. 102/2017); and
- Supplementary Report to the 2016 Audit Report (Parliamentary Paper No. 115 of 2017)

It is important to note that the audit of Financial Statements for the whole of Government for the period ending 31st July, 2016 includes an unqualified audit report. The Committee noted that a total of 36 Agencies' Financial Statements were audited and out of these, 23 Financial Statements were issued with an unqualified audit opinion and 13 Financial Statements were issued with qualified audit opinion, but not limited to the following grounds:

- (1) the closing account balances were not always properly reconciled or not reconciled at all, resulting in unexplained variances which were significant in some cases; and
- (2) financial transactions were not always properly supported or not supported at all by the relevant supporting documents.

The Committee also noted that large amounts of funds are held in Trust Fund Accounts and transactions of significant value were made from these accounts during the financial year. However, the Committee noted that proper book of records were not maintained for some accounts, while others were operated without documentation and approved Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). As a result, there was a high risk of funds held in the Trust being utilised for purposes which were intended.

Concerns were raised with respect to the Trust Fund Account balance amounting to \$26,739,044 not being supported with detailed listing of claimants of monies held in the Trust.

In relation to Trading and Manufacturing Accounts (TMA), it was noted that financial transactions of significant values are also effected through TMA operated by Ministries and Departments. Similarly, for the Trust Fund Account, it was noted that SOPs have not been documented and approved for the operation of some TMAs.

Furthermore, the operation of TMAs which was set up by the Government years ago have not been reviewed in view of their need in the current business environment. Hence, some TMAs seem to have outlived their purpose.

The Committee noted that reconciliations were not always prepared for trust funds and TMA accounts administered by Ministries and Departments. Variances were noted between general ledger and cash at bank balances for these accounts. The net error and omission for cash at bank balance totalled \$6.7 million.

The Committee also observed that the Ministries and Departments do not always provide relevant supporting documents, such as payment vouchers, acquittals and agreements to support the expenditure incurred.

Generally, it is pleasing to note that those Ministries and Departments have taken the Committee's recommendation positively and are working towards resolving each issue and gaps that were identified during the time of audit.

I shall now go through the set of recommendations by the Committee:

- (1) Strengthen the controls in the receipt and payment of trust monies and prepare Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for operational of all Trust Fund Accounts.
- (2) Properly plan their expenditures in order to avoid the accumulation of unrepresented cheques at year-end.
- (3) Conduct daily reconciliations and strengthen internal controls in terms of separation of duties and supervisory checks.
- (4) Ensure that all capital projects are properly planned and adequate arrangements are made to implement the projects as quickly as possible when funds are provided.
- (5) Ensure that assets with a value in excess of \$2,000 are recorded in the fixed asset register which must be maintained and kept up to date.
- (6) Ensure that all accountable advance accounts are cleared within the seven days deadline. Outstanding balances for which acquittals are not provided should be recovered from officers concerned through salary deduction.
- (7) Comply with the changing requirements of FRCS for provisional tax deductions for all contract payments and ensure that Accounts staff are conversant with the changes in VAT rates.
- (8) Carry out quarterly evaluations of internal control processes and take corrective action to address any weaknesses identified.
- (9) Closely monitor the timely submission of acquittal reports and audited financials by grant recipients, to ensure that the grant money is utilised for the purpose it was appropriated for.
- (10) Ensure that the funds are utilised for the purpose it has been approved for.
- (11) Ensure that prior approval is obtained from the Ministry of Economy for any variation or diversion of funds.

- (12) Carry out an annual Board of Survey in accordance with Section 49 of the Finance Instruction and Section 24 of the Procurement Regulations 2010, and make a copy available for audit verification.
- (13) Adhere to Procurement Regulations 2010, Finance Instructions and agency's Finance Manual for the procurement of goods, services and works.
- (14) Improve the quality of human resources by providing training to staff to perform monthly reconciliations in a timely manner.
- (15) Ministries and Department must ensure that they have a succession plan in place for all positions to avoid outsourcing costs. The Committee noted that Ministries and Departments continue to outsource technical work to consultants due to the absence of qualified personnel.
- (16) Complete implementation of valid recommendations of the Auditor-General.

The Committee further recommends that:

- (1) Due to the long outstanding submission of audited financial statements for Provincial Councils, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs should put in place policies, processes and framework, to ensure they submit their financial statements for audit in a timely manner.
- (2) Due to the inconsistent submission of annual financial statements by Municipal Councils, the Ministry of Local Government should enforce strict reporting compliance in accordance with the Local Government Act.
- (3) The Ministry of Economy should review and increase staffing resources in their Internal Audit Division in order to conduct regular and timely internal audit inspections to all Ministries and Departments.
- (4) The Ministry of Economy should provide a clear guideline and training on the operations of the Trading and Manufacturing Account across Government Departments.
- (5) The Ministry of Economy should increase staffing resources to perform and review the reconciliations of the Trust Fund Account.

Please note that this Report covers detailed responses provided by Agencies and Ministries. For all queries raised, the Report has a response.

Finally, I commend the effort of the Public Accounts Committee members in the compilation of this Report and most importantly, the Government Ministries and Department in taking the Committee's recommendations positively and working towards improving the issues raised by the Auditor-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with those few words, I as a member moving this motion, thank you for this opportunity. *Vinaka.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for his motion. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate and I give the floor to the Honourable Jale. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A. JALE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for allowing me to speak on this Report. Firstly, I wish to thank the Chairman and members of the Committee for this excellent Report and I will provide some comments on the Report, in my response this morning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the findings of the Committee reads and I would like to quote from the report which states, and I quote:

“The Committee notes that the root cause of the issues highlighted in *Volumes 1-4 of the 2016 Audit Reports* is attributed to the quality of human resources employed in Ministries and Departments which needs to be improved immediately. Permanent Secretaries, who have been assigned the responsibility for efficient, effective and economical management of Ministries and Departments by Section 127(3) of the Constitution, should use the authority provided to them by Section 127(8) of the Constitution to design policies, processes and procedures which hold staffs accountable for non-performance of assigned roles and responsibilities.”

There are 21 recommendations which, in my view, fall into three categories. The first category, from my assessment, is finance; the second one is administrative; and the third is a combination of the two, including training and planning.

I would like to comment on the three of these recommendations. First, strengthen the control in the receipts and payment of trust monies and prepare standard operating procedures for operation of all trust fund accounts.

The second recommendation – improve the quality of human resources by providing training to staff to perform monthly reconciliation in a timely manner.

The third recommendation that I would like to comment on is, ensure that all capital projects are properly planned and adequate arrangements are made to implement the projects, as quickly as possible, when funds are provided.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 2013 Constitution of the Republic of Fiji has devolved the powers and responsibilities vested in the Public Service Commission in the former Constitution (1990 Constitution) to Permanent Secretaries. I had touched on the powers vested under Section 127 to Permanent Secretaries earlier in my speech, as referred to in the Committee findings.

There are two significant areas that the Public Service Commission used to emphasise to improve the quality and level of performance in the Civil Service. First is training. Skills needs are normally identified early in the civil servants career and relevant trainings are made available and performance of the civil servants are closely monitored.

The second is that, civil servants are required to sit and pass Service Examinations. Those who failed Service Examinations have their provisional appointments terminated.

I understand that Service Examination, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have already been removed. This was to prepare civil servants to be able to perform the roles that they are appointed to do. They must have hands-on experience in order to be able to perform effectively and service the people of Fiji. This is one of the failures and findings that came up in the Report from this Committee.

I understand that the Civil Service has in place a Performance Management System (PMS). Work plans are normally part of the PMS, where outputs and performance indicators are clearly

stated. The monitoring of work plans will identify non-performers, who can be given opportunity to improve or to be disciplined.

Job satisfaction play an important role in the performance of one in the job. I do not know how that is factual for a person's attitude to influence the performance of the current civil servants.

However, I question why there has not been a Job Evaluation done in the Civil Service recently. The last Job Evaluation was in 2003, 18 years ago. The failure of the Government to commission a Job Evaluation in the Civil Service has denied the civil servants equitable salary levels, in comparison to comparable jobs in the employment market.

This matter was a subject of a question raised with the Honourable Attorney-General and the Minister for Civil Service at the Sitting of Parliament on Friday, 12th February, 2021. The question was asked by Honourable Ratu Navurelevu and I will quote from page 631 of the *Uncorrected Daily Hansard*, I quote:

“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?”

I will quote part of the reply from the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communication, which is on page 632, I quote:

“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.”

So, there were two things that were answered here; the Job Evaluation Exercise (JEE) when it is going to be done and the Police Reform.

Job Evaluation Exercise is very important to Civil Servants because it reviews existing qualifications, the grading, the salaries, skills, salary structures, Minimum Qualification Requirements (MQR) and work related allowance for the whole Civil Service. Now, let me say something about wages and salaries in the Civil Service.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2007, a 5 percent pay cut was implemented into the Civil Service. In 2013, pay increase upgrade of salaries for established officers to a minimum of \$10,000 per annum. Secondly, 10 percent rise for Government Wage Earners (GWEs) earning below \$10,000 per annum. The pay increase was not graded. In 2020, in the Budget announcement, reduced in meal allowance from \$20 to \$10 and time off in lieu of overtime.

As you will understand, Mr. Speaker, Sir, human resources is one of the most important component of an organisation. The success and effectiveness of an organisation depends on human

resources. Has the Fijian Government shown that it is a fair and considerate employer in the previous years?

The purchasing power of the Civil Service salary is much weaker than before the *coup* in 2006. A \$100 now cannot purchase the same basket of food that the \$100 was able to purchase before the *coup* in 2006.

The appointment of civil servants are now politicised, with the involvement of Ministers in the appointment and discipline in the Ministries.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- No, no!

HON. A. JALE.- This is under Section 127(7) of the Constitution.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. JALE.- The Minimum Qualification Requirement (MQR) in the past used to recognise hands-on experience. I do not know what is there at the moment because if it recognised hands-on experience, the problem that has been raised by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) would not have been there.

We have labour too much on academic qualification, Mr. Speaker, Sir. No wonder we are having poor quality performance in the Public Service. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Jale for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend proceedings for refreshment which will be served at the Big Committee Room. We will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.30 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.05 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I call on the Honourable Aseri Radrodro. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As a Member of the Public Accounts Committee, I rise to make my contribution on the motion for debate today - the Examination of Audits Reports of Government Ministries and Departments for the Year ended 31 July 2016 (Volumes 1-4) (Parliamentary Paper No. 78 of 2018) which was tabled on 14th May 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my contribution will be very short. Just to start off, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report as has been alluded to covered the period January to June to July 2016, a seven-months' period as compared to the normal audit report of one year, it used to be discussed by the Auditor-General. This period, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was when the change-over of the Government Financial Year occurred from what used to be January to December, now January to now August to July, and this is one of the period where it tries to finalise the period from January to July before we commenced with the new financial year.

In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in this Report, most of the issues that have been highlighted by the Office of the Auditor-General and also deliberated during the Committee sessions have been addressed by the Ministries and Departments or committed to have been addressed by the respective Ministries and Departments – maybe the Honourable Ministers from the various Ministries can also update this House on the status of commitments by their respective Permanent Secretaries and how far they have progressed from 2016 to now, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Also, Mr. Speaker, one other way that we have also noted that the Ministries can provide an update is through the provision of Annual Reports, but Annual Reports, as has already been alluded to, do not contain audit issues as has been highlighted in the Audit Reports. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would recommend that during the course of this debate, the Ministries can update through their Ministers the progress of the audit that has been done, commitments that have been made by their respective Ministries, through their Permanent Secretaries and Executive Officers, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

However, I would like to speak a little bit, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the noting of the Office of the Auditor-General - all these recommendations that the Committee have made emanated from the issues that have been highlighted by the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General has clearly highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the root cause of the problems highlighted during the audit is the issue of quality of human resources in the respective Ministries and Departments, and this is a very glaring statement, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

These are statements where, if Government had taken into consideration, it would clearly show the progress of Government reforms. They should clearly indicate to them how they have progressed in terms of the OMRS Reform that was conducted through the Civil Service, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I not only agree but along with this side of the House, this is what we have always been consistently raising in this House since 2014. There is a saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I quote, “your company is only as good as the people in it.” In that sense, we cannot ever, at any stage, undermine the importance of governance work that needs to be undertaken at the various levels of government.

In deploying Government's strategies and policies to address issues of poverty, unemployment, health, education and other social challenges, the benchmark has to be set above other entities, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In Government, we must have the best employees and in my opinion, the Civil Service must be better than those in the private sector because they serve the entire nation.

The Office of the Auditor-General has highlighted a lot of issues, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Out of the 36 agencies, 23 have unqualified audit opinions and 13 have qualified audit opinions, as has been alluded to by the Chairperson.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my experience with the Public Accounts Committee as already highlighted, these are ongoing issues that have confronted Fiji for as long as we can remember. Even the past Governments have passed on similar Auditor-General's findings and it is ludicrous that the Government now claims to have undertaken reforms, reduce contract of workers, non-renewal of expired contracts - this is supposed to make Government leaner and meaner and yet, the same symptoms of laxity and mismanagement are being discovered in the Office of the Auditor-General's Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

What makes it worse this time is that a lot of these Heads of Ministries and Departments are expatriates. I have always said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when leaders do not take ownership of issues there will be an "I do not care attitude". They will only concentrate on their brief terms of contract and thus the sustainability of government policies become vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot of expatriate Permanent Secretaries have, in fact, come through to the Committee and only to leave after a few months into their contract. In the Ministry of Health, we had the Permanent Secretary for Health, Mr. Philip Davis, who promised a lot of actions to be taken within the Ministry but sooner rather than later, he resigned from the Ministry. Also for the Permanent Secretary for Infrastructure, Mr. Paul Bailey, it was the same thing. After he appeared before the Committee, he resigned and both were due to personal reasons or for family commitment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, whatever is the real reason behind their leaving which is unknown and cannot be ascertained, but it is very disappointing when we play politics with Government resources and policy. The fact is, these reports contain the summary of what a lot of these Permanent Secretaries say in response to the issues raised by the Office of the Auditor-General.

The continuity of assessing and determining the actions of issues raised cannot be guaranteed. This was a report of 2016, came to the Committee in 2017, 2018, and now they are no longer in the Ministry. I am sure that the commitments made to the Committee which are now being debated and reflected in this Report, will become a reality and will be actioned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have through the OMRS reform taken on board a lot of graduates from various tertiary institutions and these are commendable, however, we need to retain our staff. We have also meritoriously gone through the system and these workers are often the backbone of government Ministries and Departments and we must allow the graduates to learn from them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I know and as alluded to by the Honourable Jale, there used to be cadetship training within the Ministry and within the Civil Service. This is to allow for leadership training within Government Ministries and Departments and we must retain this structure as it is designed to suit our small developing State.

The processes of Government must be taught to staff, for example, in the Civil Service. As we encountered during Committee sessions, most of the staff of the Ministry who come before the Committee, seemed to be confused or not aware of the processes identified by the Auditor-General, which is properly documented in the Ministry's and in Government's policies and procedures, Finance Manual and all other related manuals.

Previously, those who entered the Civil Service had to undertake Civil Service Exams, like the H1 and H2. These exams qualify them and made them more understandable of the Civil Service

systems and processes, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I understand that this system is no longer being practised today and I urge the Government to consider reviewing its stand and probably, re-introduce these types of exams to ensure that everyone in the Civil Service from the bottom rung right up to the top rung understand the processes as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will just refer to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport. A lot of issues is relating to the Trading and Manufacturing Accounts (TMAS) and this has been an ongoing issue. We thank the Ministry at the time for committing to ensuring that the issues highlighted will not be repeated, especially the proper accounting of sales and expenditures within the Trading and Manufacturing system.

In conclusion, if there is anything that the Government can take from this Audit Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is clearly highlighting that the OMRS reform is still a challenge to this day. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Aseri Radrodro. I have a list of speakers here, I am just trying to slot so I can balance things better.

I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Prasad.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Committee for its Report. I know it is quite a bit of work for the Committee to go through this Report, and I know my two Honourable colleagues from the Opposition have already spoken on the number of issues and I do not intend to repeat that.

As highlighted by Honourable Radrodro, audit reports of this nature, Mr. Speaker, Sir, always highlight issues of vouchers, acquittals, things not done properly, approvals not given and timely reports are not presented. These are normal audit issues that we see year-in year-out. Some Ministries do better than the others, so it is not surprising for us to see this.

But my interest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we look at the role of the Auditor-General and the Public Accounts Committee, is about how Government expenditure is done, whether it is creating effectiveness and efficiency, whether the input which is the expenditure, the output is not just annual reports, what has been done, inventory of who went where and how the civil servants did this and did that, but it is also about the outcomes.

I think there is a difference between the output and the outcomes because the outcomes actually determine whether a particular expenditure created a desired impact; if it is to help a particular group, if it is to improve the Government quarters, or health facilities, whether the expenditure expended on those activities produced the desired outcome and the quality of the outcome. That is why, as I have highlighted yesterday, it is very important for the Ministers and Parliament to look at that.

I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Ministers actually look forward to these reports because it is a benchmark. Governments look forward to the Auditor-General's Report, the Prime Minister looks forward to the Auditor-General's Report because they can actually assess what is happening in individual Ministries and Ministers see these reports as a positive thing because they can also have an idea of what is going on in the Ministry because the Permanent Secretary is in charge of finances. I would urge all of us, including the Ministers, to treat the discussion on these reports as a positive thing so that in the end, we all achieve the objective of making sure that the expenditure is efficient and effective.

Let me give you an example, Mr. Speaker. If you look at the Budgets for 2018 -2019, 2019-2020 and the last Budget which was 2020-2021, in fact, for the 2018-2019 Budget, the expenditure was almost 36 percent of the total GDP. For 2019-2020, it was about 31 percent of the GDP. In 2020-2021, it was 36 percent of the GDP. In many developing countries, that would be considered a very high percentage of Government expenditure as a percent of GDP.

I am not against big governments. Big expenditure is sometimes required to ensure that we address the issues affecting the people, to address infrastructure issues and there are reasons why the size of the Government goes up and down. But I think the question we need to ask is, is this the ideal size of the Government that we are running? Whether the expenditure coming out as a percentage of GDP is producing the desired outcomes?

My analysis, Mr. Speaker, and I think this is very important for the Government to do and maybe the Government to set up a Commission to look at Government expenditure over the last three, four or five budgets, is to see the level of wastage, the level of ineffectiveness arising out of the total expenditure. My calculation from going through the audit reports in the past, looking at what has happened over the last 10 to 15 years and in the last six years that I have been in Parliament and the budgets that have come into Parliament, my analysis shows that a wastage is somewhere between 15 percent to 20 percent and in some Ministries, it could be more than 20 percent but overall, it is somewhere between 15 percent to 20 percent.

I will give you an example, Mr. Speaker, to explain why it is very important for us to look at that wastage, look at that inefficiency. For example, if you look at the 2020-2021 Budget, the total expenditure budgeted is \$3.6 billion, out of a GDP of \$9.9 billion. If the wastage is 15 percent of that total of \$3.6 billion expenditure, then it amounts to about \$540 million a year, if you put that together. If you say that 15 percent of \$3.6 billion is going to be spent in the financial year, 2020-2021 is 15 percent, that means \$540 million of taxpayer's fund is being wasted.

Imagine what we could do with that \$540 million; how many free kidney dialysis we could provide; how much free medicine we could get; how many more students we could send to tertiary education; these are issues that tell us why the Public Accounts Committee, the Auditor-General's Report, we as Members of Parliament and the Ministers in Government need to be very, very careful.

Mr. Speaker, let us say that the wastage was 20 percent of the total expenditure. It would amount to, out of \$3.6 billion, \$720 million a year. Now, that is a lot of money in terms of the size of the country, the capacity of the economy to generate that revenue, so I think it is very important and I want to repeat this. My calculation or estimate shows that we are wasting about 15 percent to 20 percent of the total expenditure allocated in the Budget. I know this is not something which is political, this is about managing our finances for our people, for our taxpayers and it is the responsibility of this Parliament which is the people's Parliament. But I would, therefore, propose to the Government that we should have a commission of inquiry, to find out the level of wastage that happens in Government and why.

Maybe, the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) could do a special study itself. I am not saying we should have a parliamentary committee. The OAG should be provided funding to do that, to look at, hire people who can look at the wastages in Government and that, Mr. Speaker, I know the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee is smiling, I do not know why, maybe he likes the idea of the OAG actually doing that study. But I cannot labour that any more, Mr. Speaker, the importance of knowing where the leakages are, where the wastages are and as I have said, the OAG sometimes looks at the sample, you know those who understand audits.

The OAG does not look at every transaction. No auditor looks at every transaction for any organisation. They do not look at individuals, it is a sample of what they get from the information that is supplied by the Ministries and on the basis of that, they form an audit opinion and on the basis of that audit opinion, they make recommendations to the Government and this is what the OAG has done. But for us to get further than that, we need special audits or we need special studies, Mr. Speaker, for us to look at where and how the wastages can be stopped.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the fourth Recommendation which the Honourable Chairman highlighted, is to ensure that all capital projects are properly planned and adequate arrangements are made to implement the projects as quickly as possible when funds are provided. I highlighted that yesterday with respect to the FRA and with respect to other statutory organisations. I think a lot of the wastage can take place in capital projects. I mean, I highlighted in this Parliament about the FNU project which the Government provided grants to build a campus in Lautoka.

I also looked at the recommendation where we are saying that Ministries and Departments must ensure succession plans but also outsourcing technical work to consultants. Consultants invariably, Mr. Speaker, are not necessarily bad. Ministries need consultants at times. You need technical expertise but you need to build some of those capacities within the Ministry. For example, when we talked about the shortage of drugs in hospitals and I said we need to look at the logistics, is there a logistic person, a qualified logistic person within the Unit that looks after pharmaceuticals or do we need a consultant?

Sometimes we spend more money on outsourcing to consultants and there is a lot of evidence, Mr. Speaker, about outsourcing, about not maintaining Government assets, for example. Renting properties outside of Government and paying rent, this can create wastage because there is an invariable thinking that Governments have a lot of money and then they can do that, they can pay higher rent.

I look at the Government buildings around the country, it is probably one of the worst state I have ever seen, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Government quarters, whether it is a government school or hospital. I went to Savusavu Hospital, at least, from the outside, it was better than CWM Hospital. This is what I am saying when we look at capital expenditure. I think the Committee rightfully picked that up, that you need to do a proper assessment.

So, that recommendation where it is easy for civil servants to say that they need outside situation for consultants to do the report, pinpoint through a particular study on what is happening. But some of those need to be built in within the Civil Service. I know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you would know very well yourself that the National Planning Office was one of the most important offices in any country.

I know in some of the successful Asian countries, the planning office was where the Government ensured that they would send people to go and get the best degree from the best university around the world and come and work in the planning office. Look at South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and other successful countries where planning is the most important part of any country because that informs government, ministers and policy making based on hard evidence, so that there is no wastage of expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, my final suggestion or recommendation would be to ask the Auditor-General to have a special study and look at the level of wastage in government expenditure because that is what ought to be the outcome of all these exercise that we are doing. The Auditor-General's Report going through the Public Accounts Committee, coming into Parliament and discussing this, otherwise this will have no meaning, it will have no impact, it will not lead to the improvement in

the final outcome which is creating value for money and giving the best to our people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad. I now give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Committee for this very comprehensive report and I found it very useful in my reading and also in terms of liaising back with the Permanent Secretary and the Ministry of Health headquarters and Corporate team on how we have been able to look at the recommendations in the report, specifically around 22 on what we have done in that regard.

I can also reassure this august House that many things have been done in between from 2016 until now, taking into consideration the Auditor-General's recommendations in regards to the many areas that we need to improve on, including strengthening our systems that are in place in terms of our accounting practices.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, working with the Ministry of Economy around areas where we can be able to continue to improve but also more importantly, finding the right people to be able to take the important roles with regards to the Ministry of Health budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are two things that I just want to bring to your attention that might be useful for this august House to note today:

- (1) We no longer have the CRP Team visiting Fiji, so that Trust Fund is now closed.
- (2) Last year, we launched our new supply chain system for our Fiji Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Services which is a new digital format system that is in place. The training has happened in many of the facilities all across Fiji, including some areas where the system has been piloted and beginning to work. We have been assured by the Australians that they will help us in this regard and when they did this in Kiribati and the Solomon Islands, they were able to increase the efficiency in the system by up to 15 percent to 20 percent.

Mr. Speaker, when one comes to this august House and just as the Honourable Professor Prasad had said, evidence is so important. I find it quite interesting that he said 15 percent and 20 percent wastage without any significant evidence that he has been able to show.

The other thing is that majority of the Permanent Secretaries as we speak are local, they have been appointed on Open Merit System and they are very, very competent in their roles. Now whatever reason that the former PSs have left the Government service and they have gone back to wherever they came from, it is their own decision. One cannot dig in and ask for your personal decision. For example, I left the Service to enter FNU and I left it for my own reasons. I worked in FNU for four years before I came into this august House.

So if someone were to come to me and say why did you leave? It is my own reasons, my own reasons why I left. I think it is important that we must also protect the integrity of this very senior people that they have contributed to our society by noting that they have made their own personal reasons for living, wherever they have left, wherever they have gone and they have opened opportunities for even better people to come. I could say that at the Ministry of Health, we continue to grow with the Permanent Secretary that we now have in place. He is locally born, a Namuka boy,

who is now doing a very good job in where he is. I am trusting that the Open Merit System that exists is able to bring the right people to that post into that position.

One can also remember that in 2016 we were in the midst of the Civil Service Reform and Honourable Jale talked about his thoughts are that currently, civil servants are picked and appointed to position based on the Ministers' prerogative – they are not. As I have said before, with the appointment of the Australian Nephrologist that we have in place, it was an Open Merit System, a competitive merit based system in which the civil servants are appointed to their particular roles.

In 2016, 2017 and 2018 they did a re-evaluation of the roles in the Civil Service and the appropriate upscaling of the salaries to be able to meet those. So we now have, within the Civil Service, competent and qualified civil servants that have come through from the private sector. This morning I just went down to HR to say good morning to our HR staff and I met a young lady who had come from the ANZ bank (to be very precise) to join our HR Unit.

Our Principal Accounts Officer came from a very reputable organisation within Fiji. We are now beginning to see not only civil servants leaving the civil service and going to the private sector but competent qualified personnel within the private sector coming into the civil service because of the open merit system. It is not because of the old system that the Honourable Jale attested to but I think he is still locked in time, because that is how they used to do it in his time. It no longer happens now within the Civil Service.

In this time, they must meet the open merit competitive-based system. It is no longer based on just experience alone, but must have the qualification and the merit. During the time of the contract which will be three or five years, they are regularly assessed and if they meet it they can be re-engaged again and that is how the Civil Service now rolls.

I am actually very happy to say that being in the Civil Service before I came in, I now see a very competent, qualified civil service who are now helping to run this country at this difficult time on the decisions made by the Honourable Prime Minister in Cabinet on the way we want to go. And they have helped to contain this country from COVID-19 from the Ministry of Health and other disciplined forces and others that are working together in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, I thank again the Public Accounts Committee for this wonderful Report that they have before us. I want to assure us that from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, we have taken on board what we need to do I again remind this august House that we must come with evidence, we must not come and pluck out of thin air, 20 percent and 50 percent whatever it is and I must also remind us that the civil servants had been chosen into those positions based on merit and that is the reason why we did not cut their salaries, as suggested by NFP last year. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Kepa, you are next on the list. You have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank, first of all, the Chairman and Members of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), who deliberated on this motion that is before the House.

The 2016-2017 budget of the Ministry of Education was \$448.5 million, an increase of \$26.6 million from the 2016-2017 budget. This increase would come in handy in terms of *TC Winston* which ravaged the country and devastated many schools that year, so they would have had to begin rehabilitation works in many schools.

The audit findings of that Report, Mr. Speaker, were mostly on the shortcomings of the internal controls. This indicated the lack of training, monitoring, the supervision, lack of consultation, collaboration and co-operation from top to bottom in the Ministry, and this was their outcome in this Report.

What showed up in the audit findings, Mr. Speaker, was anomalies in the building grants, absence of signed agreements, the administration of free education grants - these keep on coming up in the Audit Reports as there were discrepancies in the utilisation of the grant and this is a longstanding issue with every audited report. There were also anomalies in accountable advances. There was a backlog of audited accounts for the grant recipients and stale cheques that were unrepresented.

Those are indicators, Mr. Speaker, of weaknesses in the internal controls within the Ministry. I hope that five years later, that is, in 2021, the Ministry of Education is better able to handle those shortcomings that caused the loss in revenue, as pointed out in the Report, and deprived students of quality teaching and learning through those wastages.

This Report makes very interesting reading, Mr. Speaker. Most new initiatives or reforms that were introduced in 2016 continued in 2016 and 2017. These included free tuition for preschool, the free milk programme for Year 1 students, free tuition for technical vocational education training, the Toppers Scheme Scholarship for the top 600 students leaving high school and the TELS to provide loans for university and technical colleges. I will just be looking at one of those initiatives or reforms because of the time, and that will be on the TVET Programme because this is part of the bigger picture, Mr. Speaker.

On TVET, in the Annual Report of the Ministry, there were 39 technical vocational centres listed. Today, those 39 schools are slowly being phased out as they have been replaced by the 15 Technical Colleges. Interestingly or maybe worryingly, part of the bigger picture is where those 39 technical vocational centres were because most of them were in rural and remote and maritime areas. These centres would have taught subjects, such as agriculture, industrial arts, woodwork, home economics, cooking and sewing, music, plumbing, carpentry and other subjects, depending on where these centres were.

With our very high unemployment level, these subjects would have set students up very nicely for self-employment, or if they were attached to APTEC later on, they could get certification or recognition in Australia and New Zealand, with the skills that they would have improved on. Most of these TVET or vocational centres were not in urban areas and so would have helped to address the high poverty levels in the rural areas especially.

Just exactly where were these 39 Technical Vocational Centres, Mr. Speaker. In the Central Division there were - 15, Eastern Division – 6, Western Division - 12 and the Northern Division - 6. In the Central Division, there were:

- (1) Chevalier Training College;
- (2) Ballantine Memorial School;
- (3) Kadavu Provincial Secondary;
- (4) Lomaivuna High School;
- (5) Lomary Secondary School;
- (6) Naitasiri Secondary School;
- (7) Naiyala High School;
- (8) Namosi Secondary School;
- (9) Navuso Methodist High School;

- (10) Ratu Kadavulevu School;
- (11) Ratu Latianara Secondary School;
- (12) Tailevu North College;
- (13) Waidina Secondary School;
- (14) Wainimakutu Secondary School; and
- (15) Wainimala Secondary School.

In the Eastern Division, Mr. Speaker, they were in:

- (1) Adi Maopa Secondary School;
- (2) Gau Secondary School;
- (3) Richmond High School;
- (4) Rotuma High School;
- (5) Vunisea Secondary School; and
- (6) Yasayasa Moala College.

In the Western Division, Mr. Speaker, there were 12 and these were in:

- (1) Ba Methodist High School;
- (2) Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute;
- (3) Drasa Secondary School;
- (4) Kamil Muslim College;
- (5) Nakauvadra High School;
- (6) Navosa Central;
- (7) Nukuloa College;
- (8) Ra High School;
- (9) Ratu Navula College;
- (10) Tavua College;
- (11) Veilomani Rehabilitation Vocational College; and
- (12) Yasawa High School.

In the Northern Division, Mr. Speaker, there were 6 and in:

- (1) Bucalevu Secondary;
- (2) Dreketi High School;
- (3) Naleba College;
- (4) Savusavu Secondary School;
- (5) Saqani High School; and
- (6) Seaqaqa Central College.

These students, Mr. Speaker, because the information that I am giving here is from the audited report which were based on their Annual Report....

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Maharaj.

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not discussing Annual Report over here and whatever the Honourable Member, is saying been a Public Accounts Committee Member she will know that this is not part of the Committee Report. Sir, stop this because it is not part of the Committee Audit Report that was scrutinised by the Committee.

HON. MEMBER.- Everyone does that.

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- Everyone gets time to debate on certain issues but this issue is not part of this particular Report, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Kepa, you have the floor. Just stick to the audited Report.

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I want to thank the Chairperson too because this is part of the Annual Report where this information came from.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- What is not clarified here, Mr. Speaker, is that studies done a few years ago is that less than 10 percent of all students starting from Year 1 progress to tertiary studies. This is in line with the Oral Question asked yesterday of the Honourable Minister on the survey on school dropouts that students start dropping out as early as Year 2. Therefore with the majority of students not going through to tertiary level the TVET Programme in schools is very, very important because it provides a timely and relevant safety network for students, Mr. Speaker.

With the 39 TVET Centres and this is in the report, Mr. Speaker. In the four Divisions and catering for many students, why would you want to fix it when it is not broken? Why would you close them? But that was what happened, Mr. Speaker.

Initiatives and reforms that were introduced in 2015 with hardly any feasibility study, hardly any studies at all, brought in technical colleges and started phasing out the TVET Centres and taking down the safety nets. The Technical Colleges, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which are being closed down are:

- (1) Nadroga/Navosa Provincial Campus
- (2) TISI Sangam Campus;
- (3) Tagitagi Campus;
- (4) Ratu Epeli Ravoka Campus;
- (5) Macuata I Cake Campus;
- (6) CP Singh Campus;
- (7) Suva Hospitality and Textile Training Campus;
- (8) Nabua Sanatan Campus;
- (9) Vanua Levu Arya Campus;
- (10) Dr. Shaukat Ali Sahib Campus;
- (11) Anjuman Hidayat Ul-Islam Campus.
- (12) Lautoka Sanatan Campus; and
- (13) Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara Campus.

I am naming only 13, Mr. Speaker, because at the time of this Report, there were only 13 such Campuses.

Mr. Speaker, last year, we heard that just five years after technical campuses were established that Government was closing them, and this was very, very interesting or may be horrifying because in this Report when you look at the background, the number of students that were attending these 13 Technical Campuses was 76,300 students. So, when you close the Campuses, this is what happens when you have these students and you can imagine, Mr. Speaker, what happens to them - communities, parents, students would be very concerned.

In November last year, Mr. Speaker, at the Tailevu Provincial Council Meeting, a *Mata ni Tikina* inquired with the Honourable Prime Minister as to what was going to happen with the impending closure of Technical Campuses, as they were already calculating the extra costs of sending those children to FNU because that is what they heard from the Ministry representative that was there on that day, that the FNU would offer the programme and curriculum undertaken at these Technical Colleges.

Mr. Speaker, what we are concerned about from this Report is that, these types of ill-conceived and ill-thought out policies contribute to the vicious cycle of poverty and taking them to a debt level which is very, very worrying, not only for us here in the House, but should also be very, very worrying for the Government, when they start closing down something that was only five years old, and these are the technical colleges, campuses, also TVET. Just imagine that, so part of the bigger picture

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A point of order, Mr. Speaker, Sir..

HON. SPEAKER.- There is a point of order.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate that this Report is for 2015-2016. The closing of technical colleges is this year so what has that to do with this particular Report? They need to actually stick to the Report.

Honourable Members from the other side need to stick to the Report that is tabled by the Committee before Parliament. They cannot be talking on current subjects because the debate is going on.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, there has been a point of order. It is regarding what is not in the Report, so stick to what is in the Report, forget about what is outside of those years.

HON. RO T.V. KEPHA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part of the bigger picture that I have been trying to paint here is that, this is a very sad time, according to this Report, for students, parents, stakeholders and teachers. More than 300 teachers lost their jobs after their contracts ended on 31st December.

For the country, what does it mean, Mr. Speaker? Loss of skills, lack of a trade for these young people, and you will be getting contributions to the vicious cycle of poverty and a debt trap, contributing to criminal activities because these kids have nothing to do. They have no skills and they could also be contributing to violence against women and children. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I am going by my list and next is Honourable Mikaele. You have the floor, Sir. Do not be surprised now, your name is on my list.

(Laughter)

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to make a brief contribution on the examination of Audit Reports of Government Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31 July, 2016, especially so, on the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations.

From the outset, I commend the Chairperson and members of the Public Accounts Committee for this Report. The Office of the Auditor-General had issued a qualified audit opinion on two items in the Report and I would like to comment on those issues further today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, excessive leave compensation totalling \$32,579.67 was paid to some staff in that financial year. This was quite substantial and in the absence of an excessive leave management, the issue of over payment and compensation would have been avoided. This could be the way forward for the Ministry and this also begs the question of a qualified human resources personnel, who would ensure that there is no anomalies of excessive leave balances and that should be minimised at all costs.

It is also pertinent to note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the comments made by the Standing Committee that there should be a Succession Plan in place to ensure continuity. Each section of any organisation is at times not utilised across the civil servants, especially of what happened here at the Ministry of Labour which is a testimony of not strengthening this section. So, it is important to strengthen its human resources to avoid issues that maybe raised later by the Office of the Auditor-General.

Before I conclude, the Ministry should ensure compliance, especially on item 1.5 on the Misallocation of Expenditure. The audit findings found instances where payments were incorrectly allocated in the general ledger. The Ministry should ensure that the right people be identified to sit in these positions and avoid incorrect allocation of payments. Again, as has been alluded to by previous speakers who had spoken before me, a strong HR section is the way forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Civil Service when the first government that came into power, we were part and parcel of the workforce, training and familiarising themselves with Government procedures and the machinery which is in place. This training, Mr. Speaker, Sir, complemented the existing experience and knowledge of these civil servants and each officer within a Ministry.

I am of the view that in order to ensure quality and raise the standards in this working environment, there is a great need, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to strengthen the HR Section, not only at the Ministry of Employment but across the Civil Service as a whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Leawere. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports. You have the floor.

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to commend the earlier speaker, the Honourable Leawere. But before that, much has been said about the wastage without any evidence and it is simply the wastage of Parliament's time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just going back to the comment made by Honourable Leawere, the leave compensation paid through the staff members was due to retirement and resignation. This was done within the ambit of the Employment Relations Act 2017, which you are very much aware of, to ensure that all dues are paid to the workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with continuous reforms within the Civil Service and strengthening of the systems and processes within the Ministry, the practice of leave compensation has stopped and that we have better leave management plans, which will ensure that staff members utilise their hard earned annual leave when it is due. I hope it is clear, Honourable Leawere.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on 1.3 – over-expenditure, this practice of prepayments for the next financial is a thing of the past and has been stopped. The Ministry as part of the process stipulated within the 2019 Financial Manual pays for goods and services as they fall due.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, he has also touched on 1.5 and I wish to respond that the Ministry has conducted its own assessment and has put in place measures as follows:

- (1) Correct budget is requested on each expenditure group;
- (2) If there is over expenditure, a virement, with the approval of the relevant authority, is prepared for the adjustment; and
- (3) All expenditures are properly monitored and controlled.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, furthermore, the Ministry makes 95 percent payment through the electronic funds transfer, where monies are paid directly into the bank accounts of workers and vendors. Cheques are only issued on certain cases where clients are not able to open the bank account.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Workmen's Compensation Trust Account will be closed soon due to the transfer to ACCF, as mentioned in the Report and, as I have mentioned yesterday in my Ministerial Statement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the pending cases will be cleared, and if any variances exist, these monies will be transferred to the Consolidated Funds Account, as the Worker's Compensation functions from 1st January, 2019 is taken over by the Accident Compensation Commission of Fiji. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. J.N. NAND.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just wish to contribute briefly to the debate that is before this august House and respond to Honourable Ro Kupa in regards to the mismanagement of funds in schools and audits, and those contractors who did not honour their part. Let me inform the august House, that the Ministry has its audit section in place and we have audit officers who go around and do regular scrutiny of mismanagement in schools.

In regards to those contractors who had defaulted, we have taken them to task and we have further strengthened our audit section. In regards to the technical colleges, we are aware of what has transpired there. We have our audit section in place and mismanagement of funds in schools and negligence, we have taken care of that. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Nand. I give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodoro. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. S.V. RADRODORO.- I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity to participate in the debate on these Audit Reports for various Ministries and Departments. My contribution, I would just like to focus on the Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and also on the Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation.

Looking at the Report on Page 93, we have audit queries on governance issues and there are three that have been highlighted:

- (1) The RFMF is yet to prepare and submit its Annual Report for 2014 and 2015 to the Minister;
- (2) Internal controls were generally found to be weak and deficient; and
- (3) Compliance Unit of the RFMF is understaffed, hence, unable to effectively cover the scope of the RFMF's activity.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will recall that this is one agency that has had increasing budget for the previous years. If we look back to 2009, I believe, we will see that the RFMF budget has consistently increased, and the fact that they have not, and I stand to be corrected, by the Minister responsible. I

have never come across, even though we on this side of the House, have continuously requested for the Annual Report, it still has not been tabled until to date.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having said that, the RFMF in their response to these queries, said that the reasons for the delay in producing the Annual Report was because there was change in the leadership command at the time of the audit. But, Mr. Speaker, it is now 2021, we still have not received any annual report.

They also said that they have adequate staffing in their Compliance Unit who are now qualified and able to carry out the duties and responsibilities effectively, but again that does not reflect in the submission of their annual report. The Auditor-General went on to recommend that the Fiji Military Forces must produce annual reports to the Minister in a timely manner; that the Compliance Unit is properly resourced and that management takes appropriate action to strengthen internal controls and improve compliance.

However, Mr. Speaker, I would like to request the Minister (when he takes up the opportunity and I hope he will) to respond to these queries and inform us as to why the Fiji Military Forces has failed to submit their annual reports according to the requirements of the Financial Management Act, because the audit query clearly reflects it and it is sad to see the failure on the part of the Minister responsible to get the annual report from the Fiji Military Forces. We would like to know when was the last time the Fiji Military Forces prepared and submitted its annual report, if it has ever prepared and submitted any. What action is he, as the Minister, taking to ensure that all these pending annual reports are tabled without further delay?

This is important, Mr. Speaker, because like I had already said, since 2009 or maybe beyond that, there is an increase in the budgetary component or provision for the Fiji Military Forces and also, how has the Compliance Unit been resourced? If they indeed have been resourced, why have they not been able to provide the report? Also if the Honourable Minister can inform us on how and what appropriate action management has taken to strengthen internal controls and improve compliance?

Mr. Speaker, those audit queries contained in this Report clearly indicate that the Minister responsible has failed in his responsibilities, according to the Financial Management Act to produce those reports. It requires all Government Ministries and Departments to provide their Ministers the annual report, I believe before May of the following year.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- It is in the Act, check!

Mr. Speaker, there are also other issues in the report but because there is a long list of speakers, I will now move onto the Naval Division. The audit highlighted that in 2003, more than \$2 million had been allocated annually for *RFNS Kiro* Patrol Boat Life Extension Programme. However, the funds were not utilised and was returned to the Ministry of Economy at the end of the financial year. Furthermore, even the Fiji Military Forces has spent a total of more than \$1.8 million from 2013 to July 2016 for the Life Expectancy Programme of vessels, *RFNS Kikau*, the vessel remains inoperative.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, and moving on to the incomplete work of Life Expectancy Programme of this boat, the audit finding stated that a sum of \$2 million was allocated in the 2013 budget for the Life Expectancy Programme for the maintenance and upgrading of the naval ship, *RFNS Kikau*.

Contrary to that payment schedule in the contract, the Commander of Fiji Navy approved the final payment of \$119,110 to the contractor following the recommendation from Officer No. 3089.

The audit noted that the Fiji Military Forces paid the contractor the contract amount of \$549,146, however 78 percent of the contractual scope of works valued at \$427,428 was not performed by the contractor. Looking at that, Mr. Speaker, we could say for the 22 percent of the work that had been covered, \$549,146 was paid out and for the 78 percent that remained, it was valued at \$427,428.

I highlighted those, Mr. Speaker, because it underpins the importance of the submission of the annual report by the RFMF and as alluded to by previous speakers that it is important for us to note the expenditure and how those expenditures have been carried out in accordance with the Financial Management Act of 2004, if I am correct.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- It is 2004. Go and check. It is correct, better for you to go and check it.

Mr. Speaker, those are the issues pertaining to the RFMF and the importance that prudent financial management is carried out by the organisation but that must be tabled in this House so that it could be taken to the relevant committee for proper scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, I will now move on to the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. Yesterday, we had a very lively debate in regards to the Ministry and particularly when I raised issues in regards to the *TC Winston* funds that were transferred to the Ministry for that programme.

On the *TC Winston* funds assistance to welfare beneficiaries, the OAG highlighted that the Ministry received an additional sum of \$20,246,790 from the Ministry of Economy to assist this Social Protection Programme recipients under *TC Winston*. But it is interesting to note the findings by the OAG:

- (1) Cabinet decision on the use of the grant was not provided to audit.
- (2) Ministry paid a sum of \$19.9 million to all the recipients of the Social Protection Programme regardless of whether they were affected by *TC Winston* while the balance of \$300,000 was returned to the Ministry of Economy.
- (3) The OAG highlighted the Ministry did not have standard operating procedures on the utilisation of the \$20.2 million provided by the Ministry of Economy.
- (4) The review payments made to recipients reveal that Poverty Benefit Scheme beneficiaries were paid an amount of \$600 while Social Pension Scheme and Care and Protection recipients were paid the amount of \$300.

Mr. Speaker, I remember in my contribution yesterday to the debate, I had highlighted, which was part of the Report, that the Ministry was not properly staffed neither equipped to carry out such a programme and this is again being picked up by the OAG. I hope the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation will get her act together and ensure that standard operating procedures are provided.

Mr. Speaker, there has been mention in regards to the Civil Service reforms and for any organisation, human resource is the most important resource. You can have money, you can have machinery but if you do not have the right number, the right equipped and qualified staff then it will be a challenge in achieving the objectives.

The Ministry of Civil Service, Mr. Speaker, we will recall that it was established in 2015 or 2016. It was a new ministry, established by this Government to specifically spearhead the civil service reform but as of to date, I recall only one annual report has been submitted by that ministry.

Also, we on this side of the House, had continuously queried and that was alluded to by the Honourable Minister for Health, the transfer of the allocation for the doctor's training and their salaries to the new Ministry of Civil Service - that is how it sort of boosted their budget, but the work really did not entail civil service reforms holistically.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, still on the Human Resource issue in the Civil Service Reform - this is not a new initiative but this Government tries to insinuate in this House that the civil service reform is new agenda by this Government. No, as a former career civil servant, civil service reforms have been part of the Civil Service agenda. Previous governments had undertaken civil service reforms but the beauty about previous governments was that the Ratu Mara Government, Rabuka Government, Qarase Government built on each other's successes rather than tearing it down, like this government is doing.

I will give this example Mr. Speaker, Sir, to support what I have just said. In the previous civil service reform which the Honourable Jale is very well aware of, there was a requirement for the inclusion of the Minimum Qualification Requirements (MQR) for all positions in the civil service. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the MQR included formal qualification which a good number of senior civil servants did not have.

HON. MEMBER.- Like you?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Excuse me, I hold better than that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, instead of eliminating the senior officers from the civil service, what the Public Service Commission did at that time was engage with the University of the South Pacific to create a special programme for the senior civil servants who wanted to undertake the programme, and it was called the Post-Graduate Diploma in Public Sector Reform. That was to give them the needed or mandated qualification requirement so that they could qualify for the positions when they were advertised.

That was a brilliant idea because we built up our capacity, we built up our human resources and we also allowed them because we knew they had the institutional knowledge and memory (despite a lot of those sitting on the other side) about how the government machinery works. That is a biggest plus Mr. Speaker, Sir, because these senior officers have got that institutional memory and knowledge about the civil service.

As part of the reform, instead of chucking them out, we did not leave anyone behind, but rather, we would create programmes that would uplift them and make them qualify under the MQR, so that they could apply for the positions, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, but now we will see that even though the government talks about local branding, let us start with our people - they talk about going local, but they very much go against it and do not honour their own words and they continued to recruit Permanent Secretaries from

overseas. These Permanent Secretaries did not even last. They are very well qualified people with very good standing in their own countries, but they come here with the genuine interest, I believe, to help our country (according to the advertisement of the position), but unfortunately, for some reason, as already mentioned, they suddenly resigned and a brand of this government is that, they resigned due to personal reasons.

That is questionable, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and then what is disturbing about this kind of engagement is that, when they leave prematurely, there is a contractual cost that the government has to pay them and that is wastage. Almost all of those overseas recruited Permanent Secretaries, I am not sure if anyone or two of them completed their full term.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know this government has continued to highlight on the Open Merit system. The Open Merit system may have its merit in the right context and may have its merit together with a holistic human resource management system.

For example, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as already been said, all the governments' standard examinations have been taken off. I recalled whilst on a programme with the Malaysian Civil Service, they engaged in the open merit recruitment but the only difference is that, , anyone joining the civil service, whether you are a lawyer or you are an accountant, doctor or whatever, you have to go through the Public Service Institutional Training because if you are going to be part of the civil service, you have to know how the government machinery works, how to compile a budget, how to read the budget and how to prepare and why should you prepare annual reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have already mentioned that human resource is the most vital resource that any organisation can have. If we want to have a vibrant, dynamic, effective, successful civil servant, then we must have workers that are happy with their work conditions, secure with their work conditions and their work tenure.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will end with this note - Civil Servants need to operate in a free atmosphere where they are not feared in doing their work. I will say that only a happy worker can be a productive worker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we still have a list of speakers for this agenda item and I will take them in this order. Make sure you are here when we resume:

- (1) Honourable Rosy Akbar;
- (2) Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi;
- (3) Honourable Viliame Gavoka;
- (4) Honourable Jone Usamate;
- (5) Honourable Inosi Kuridrani;
- (6) Honourable Niko Nawaikula;
- (7) Honourable Faiyaz Koya;
- (8) Honourable Inia Seruiratu;
- (9) Honourable Ratu Tevita Navurelevu;
- (10) Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua; and
- (11) Honourable Mahendra Reddy.

That is the order, make sure you are here. Have a good lunch and come back ready. We adjourn for lunch.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.24 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate on this agenda item and I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the examination of the Audit Reports of Government Ministries and Departments for the year ended 31st July, 2016. I will concentrate on the Ministry of Education's audit recommendations and findings.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the four main issues highlighted in the Report included:

- (1) Accountable Advance;
- (2) Utilisation of Building Grants;
- (3) Free Education Grants; and of course
- (4) The Fiji Higher Education Grant Agreement.

During the course of the earlier presentation, Honourable Members mentioned a few other things. There is a question coming on technical colleges as part of the Oral Question by Honourable Kupa and I will be responding to the issues that you raised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the report that highlighted the need for tightening up the accountable advance, currently our officers are reminded to retire their accountable advance immediately after an official tour and within seven days from the end of official work programme.

For any sea passage and hotel accommodation expenses is booked through LPO rather than providing cash to the travelling officer. Late retirement penalties are charge if retirement surpasses seven days from end of an official tour. We are recovering money through salary deductions and this is activated if accountable advance retirement lapses beyond seven days from end of the official tour. Accountable advances are also paid into requested officers bank accounts through electronic fund transfer. This will enable the officer to withdraw as and when cash is needed rather than carrying cash on hand.

Stale Cheques, printing of cheques has been discouraged therefore all supplies they provided the bank account details, payment of supplies is done through Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT). Payment to bank is now done through online transaction banking. Cheques are only printed for reimbursement of imprest account for Ministry and of course, so having all that controls within the issue of unrepresented cheques is no more of an issue to the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was also findings about the Fiji Higher Education Grant. The Audited Report found out that there was a lack of a grant agreement. So, currently the Ministry is now ensuring that all statutory bodies including the Fiji Higher Education Commission, Higher Education Institution, our cultural organisation under the Ministry, the grant agreements are vetted, signed prior to disbursement of any grant funds.

Acquittals for the previous quarter needs to be provided to the Ministry before we release any further grants. Without the signed agreements the grants funds to the Higher Education institutions, cultural organisations and the statutory bodies are not released. To ensure continuous compliance to this, the Ministry has also implemented a grant compliance checklist for release of grants to all these bodies that come under the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of its mandated function, the Higher Education Commission is also responsible for the disbursement and monitoring of the annual operational grants that we give to 10 Higher Education institutions. These institutions are the:

- (1) Centre for Appropriate Technology Development;
- (2) Corpus Christi Teachers College;
- (3) Fiji National University;
- (4) Fulton Adventist University College;
- (5) Montfort Boys Town;
- (6) Montfort Technical Institute;
- (7) Sangam Institute of Technology;
- (8) Vivekananda Technical College;
- (9) University of Fiji; and
- (10) University of the South Pacific.

The Ministry also now ensures that the grants to cultural organisations are disbursed after acquittals reports are properly verified and latest audited financial reports are submitted. Grants are withheld if acquittals are not in order or the audited financials are not submitted.

To ensure continuous compliance to this, the Ministry has also implemented a grant compliance checklist for release of grants to statutory bodies and other organisations. Currently, we give grants to four statutory bodies and four cultural organisations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was mention of the Free Education Grant. The Free Education Grant was initiated by the FijiFirst Government in 2014 and we continued to improve our processes in ensuring effective use of the grant management in schools and of course, we have just revised a school management handbook 2020 and this has been realigned to our FEMIS accordingly.

One of this processes when we talk about improvements in grant management was, we designed additional reports in our FEMIS finance module to enable closure monitoring of expenditure against each of the six allocations. The Ministry has also designed and is implementing a bank reconciliation process which will help ensure that all expenditures incurred by the school from the Free Education Grant are accounted for in FEMIS and of course, we very strictly centralised grants when there is an abuse reported to us by the audit team.

This year, we implemented the new school management handbook 2020, which clearly outlines the process of virement. The funds that we give to the schools come in many categories, 30 percent of the funds, the schools are to use for administration and office operations, 20 percent is for building and compound maintenance, 15 percent of the grant is used for IT computers and test materials, 10 percent is used for library and text books, 10 percent for physical education, arts, music and of course, 15 percent for teaching and learning material.

The schools and the Heads of Schools and the managements are to ensure that the grants are specifically used for their allocations. However, we have found out that schools accumulate funding under this SEG allocation and there is a virement process. If there is an extra funding and the schools need the funding for other building and infrastructure need, they write to the Permanent Secretary and get a virement approval. We have, over the years, seen that some of the schools have actually accumulated a lot of funding and we want them to utilise them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have also automated the payments of grants for FEMIS in early 2020. The grant payment schedule has been generated based on the FEMIS audited school rules. Now, we will also implement the grant agreement with the Heads of Schools.

One change that we make to the Management Handbook is now allowing the Heads of Schools to be the principal signatory of the funds. In the recent past, it was the managers of the school and their delegated reps who were the principal signatories for the use of this fund.

In order to hold a civil servant responsible for government funds, we have changed it and now the principal signatory for the usage of the fund with the school head but obviously, the school head and the school management decide on what the priorities of the schools are and how the money has been utilised.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of Building Grants, I would like to inform the House that out of the 910 schools, we only have 13 government schools which is mostly maintained by government funding. The rest of the schools are community-based schools, faith based and management owned schools. Regardless of that, Government contributes for building maintenance.

After *TC Winston* the report also highlights that the funds were redirected for rehabilitation purposes. Sir, *TC Winston* affected close to 295 schools with minor damages and total damages to them. Most of these were committee-run schools, faith-based organisations and management-run schools. As a Government, we do not own the building, but we came and invested \$220 million plus in ensuring that we rebuild those schools and for schools that needed rehabilitation, Government invested money into them.

In terms of building grants, additional cheques that we have, the funding is allocated to the Asset Management Unit (AMU) within the Ministry of Education under the leadership of a Director. We work with the Construction Implementation Unit (CIU) to ensure that all procurement processes are in order. The additional cheques, as highlighted by the audit report, we have put it in place, now we have signed agreements between the school managements, the contractors and the Ministry or the CIU. We thoroughly look at the scope of works and of course, the AMU monitors the different phases of the project and then finally, the issuing of a completion certificate by a qualified engineer to mark the closure of the project.

In terms of utilising the building grant, \$50,000 below, the Ministry and the AMU can work with the contractors and get the required three quotations and we allow construction to happen, but anything over \$50,000 goes to the Government Tender Board to ensure that all the procurement processes are fulfilled. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can assure the House that with tighter controls and more compliance, we are now in a better position to manage the funds in the Ministry of Education. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and its Members for their well-presented and outlined Report that has been presented to the House. It is a Report of all Government Ministries ending 31st July, 2016.

I note that 36 audited reports have been completed and included in this Report. Out of these reports, there are 23 reports that have clean audit opinions or unqualified opinions and that there are 13 reports that are qualified. A lot of speakers this morning have addressed the continuing problems or the findings of the Auditor-General's Report for all Government Ministries year in, year out.

However, I would like to comment the Chairperson of PAC in the fact that he included in the Report, just as I said yesterday, that they noted the serious considerations had been taken to

implement the recommendations in the audit findings. As such, there is an increasing number of audited accounts which are classified as unqualified, which means there is improvement in how ministries have undertaken to ensure that the findings and the weaknesses in the Auditor-General's accounts are implemented to improve the system.

Be that as it may, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to, in particular, speak on the Report in regards to the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. This is located on Page 37 of the PAC Report. I note the continuing concerns for the delay in the audit of the accounts of the Provincial Councils and the iTaukei Affairs Board. I note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the strategies that are outlined on that page.

I would like to just enlighten the House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that these strategies are the same strategies that were adopted and approved by the Fijian Affairs Board then in 2005 and 2006 in their effort to update the backlog of the audit of the Provincial Councils and the Fijian Affairs Board (now iTaukei Affairs Board) accounts, Mr. Speaker, Sir. All these strategies were implemented. The accounting system was overhauled, accounting policies, accounting manuals was recommended by the firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). That was implemented, Sir.

The Provincial Treasurers were undertaking training to ensure that they were able to prepare accounts and also prepare for the audit of accounts. The platform was set for all these outstanding audits to be completed, Sir, by 2008, but this did not see the light of the day because the legally elected government was removed in December 2006. The platform was set by the iTaukei Affairs Board Small Committee, audit committee, together with the OAG to ensure that all outstanding audits were completed by 2008.

It is unfortunate that those who came after us did not see it fit or proper to review the outstanding resolutions of the iTaukei Affairs Board. They would have noted the plan that was in place and if they had implemented that plan, Sir, we would not have this horrendous number of outstanding accounts, audited accounts, the un-submitted annual accounts from the Provincial Councils and the iTaukei Affairs Board. That work was not carried out. Instead there was this move to investigate Fijian institutions.

To date, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not aware that a report has been tabled in this august House - the results of investigations into Fijian institutions or for that matter, the cost that Government incurred to undertake that investigation. It is most unfortunate, Sir, and as some speakers had raised this morning, Government had changed the retirement years for civil servants which included Fijian Affairs Board. Those officials that had institutional memory, who were trained to prepare accounts, who understood the importance of maintaining the official records, investment records, et cetera, were retired.

The other problem, the Ministry of Fijian Affairs had to move from the iTLTB Building to the office complex in Draiba. I am not sure the people who were there at that time whether they understood the importance of ensuring that all key records were transferred from the iTLTB Building to the office of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga Complex, Sir. All these contributed to the continuing problem but nevertheless, Sir, I am happy to see that the strategies are there; done in 2005 and 2006.

We had to move from the manual accounting system to semi-automated to fully computerised system. We had the Winbiz system. Treasurers were trained, policies were prepared; the stage was set to ensure that all these outstanding work was completed in 2008 but it did not happen. I note that they are re-doing all that was done but for good reasons. I, myself, would like to see one day that all these remaining outstanding audited accounts for the Fijian administration are completed, given to the PAC for scrutiny and tabled in the House. I am looking forward to that, Sir.

The other section that I would like to raise a few points on, Mr. Speaker, is the Office of the Prime Minister's audit report. I would like to, in particular, raise paragraph 1.6 on page 23, Sir – Anomalies noted in the Mahogany Industry Council Trust Fund Account. I would like to begin my contribution this afternoon by saying that the Mahogany Industry Council was one of those councils that was put together by the Interim Government way back, beginning from 2007; the Mahogany Industry Council. It included the Land Bank which followed the Surfing Areas Decree in 2010.

All those proposed reforms by the Interim Government were not fully prepared and developed. By that I mean, Sir, for example, the Mahogany District Council. This Council was empowered, there was so much powers given to this council. It even had the power to direct the iTLTB in regards to issuance and renewal of leases including the rate of lease payments.

That Decree noted, Mr. Speaker, Sir, noted that one of the objectors of the council (I am talking about the Mahogany District Council), the aim was to achieve a fair return to landowners for the mahogany timber on the land. It is most unfortunate to read the anomalies that have been brought up in the Public Accounts Committee Report on the failure to reconcile the Mahogany Industry Council Trust Fund Account, Sir.

Some of the findings read where the Office of the Prime Minister does not have a Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on the use of the Trust Fund, monthly reconciliation was not performed, et cetera. It comes down to the fact that whilst these bodies were formed by the Interim Administration at that time, they did not ensure that all the processes, policies were likewise developed to ensure the proper administration, good governance of all these councils which had honourable objectives of ensuring a fair return to the landowners, Sir.

This is the issue that I would like to raise today and in this presentation, I would like to recommend too that Government considers reviewing the powers of the Mahogany Industry Council. It has been given too much powers, there is little benefit; I say little. Some benefits have trickled down to the mahogany landowners but there could be more, Sir. The work should begin with the review of the Mahogany Decree which is now an Act of 2014.

There are a lot more than I can speak on this topic, but I will end there, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Those are the two issues that I wanted to highlight this afternoon, the fact that work is now continuing to ensure that the backlog of audit is an inefficient administration. I applaud that and I am looking forward to the day when all audited accounts for the Fijian Administration will be completed.

The other issue I have just completed is the Mahogany Industry Council. The accounts is maintained with the Office of the Prime Minister, but even in reading through the report, I noted that the accounts was being juggled between the Office of the Prime Minister, Department of Enterprise, Ministry of Economy, et cetera. So I do not really know when it started, which Ministry was administering these important resource for native Fijians; the first people of this nation, mahogany, which people had high hopes would be able to benefit through the processing and value added processes for which the Government or this council was entrusted to do.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the opportunity given to me today.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. At the outset, I wish to thank the Committee for their report highlighting some very crucial and very important aspects of Civil Service and what is lacking.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Civil Service is the core permanent administrative arm of governments and I believe that all of us here would like to see a culture of excellence within the Civil Service. It is quite worrying that in this Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 13 of the ministries had qualified audit opinions. That is quite a worry, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

In the private sector, every Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or every General Manager would be fearful of the auditors and know that if their books are qualified, it could be curtains for them. You get fired if your books are qualified by the auditors in the private sector. This should be the kind of expectations we place before our people who run the Civil Service. They must have their books audited and unqualified each year, Mr. Speaker. That is the only way we can expect a culture of excellence.

Mr. Speaker, today we heard about the wastage in Government, according to my colleague, Honourable Professor Prasad, it could be 15 percent or 20 percent of the budget. When you talk about a budget of \$3 billion, that is a huge sum. Mr. Speaker, if we hold our leaders in the Civil Service to a higher standard and that their audit is unqualified, we can save on this wastage, we can save more money and to be used in other areas.

Mr. Speaker, it is also very worrying that the Auditor-General has questioned the quality of the human resources in the Ministries. I always admire the Auditors, Mr. Speaker, because they are fearless and they are supposed to be fearless. I like what he said here that the reason for all these is because of the quality of the human resources in the Ministries. And for me, Mr. Speaker, we are looking at 2016 here. By that statement, Mr. Speaker, it is a sad indictment on the FijiFirst Government. They have failed in providing and growing the quality of people that should be running the Civil Service.

For the Auditor-General to be saying that, there is cumulative of all that he is saying very emphatically, Mr. Speaker, that it is due to the quality of the human resources in the Civil Service. As we know, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister of this country has often said to our people, “If you can’t do it, I will bring someone else to come and do it”. He said that many times and that is why we saw so many expatriates in this country. For this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we said to our people, “If you can’t do it, we will train you to do it”.

We have heard, Honourable Speaker, what my colleagues from the Civil Service have said today, there have been capacity-building in the past where people are going for Diplomas in Universities to build on capacity, and why has that fallen by the wayside?

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON.V.R. GAVOKA.- We have a lot of these, we have heard from people across the aisle about this Open Merit System. We have to relook at the efficacy of this, Mr. Speaker. Is it being applied properly? Apparently, Mr. Speaker, it is not. I do not like talking about 2016 but if I ask my colleagues in here, have things changed in 2020 and 2021?

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- No.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- There you are, Mr. Speaker. We need to embed in our Civil Service a culture of excellence and part of that, I like what the Chairman of the Committee was saying today - succession planning. What we have today is that, anyone with the Degree can go straight to the top

of the organisation whereas in the past, succession planning was such that it will take you years to go through the hierarchy to get to the top.

The way FijiFirst runs things, Mr. Speaker, is very casual, just because they believe that their way is correct and they implement it that it will work, no, it work that way. You have to follow a structure. You have to know that human resources' skills are built block by block until it gets to where you aspire to be, and that is the way it is.

Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned that this continues to be the issue with the Civil Service today and things have not improved and I just hope that we can, from now onwards, expect every head of all Ministries and Departments to have their books unqualified on each audit. If we can do that, Mr. Speaker, we could be well on our way to creating that culture of excellence that we all need in this country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER. I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution, and I give the floor to the Minister, Honourable Jone Usamate. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you for the opportunity to talk on this. I think it is an excellent Report from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. It is an excellent Report for me as a Minister in particular, it gives me an opportunity to reflect on some of the things that had happened in my Ministry in the past.

I think that the quality of the Report shows that even when we have Members of Government in charge of the Public Accounts Committee that it still works well, that they can come up with an excellent Report like this as we have heard in this House time and time again. There was a Member that stood up and said that only when a Member of the Opposition is in place do we get really good reports. This is an example of what happens when we have a Government Member. It gives us detailed information, it gives us good and powerful information so that puts to rest that myth, puts to rest that particular myth because here on this side also, we have the best interest of the people of this country at heart.

The Members of the Opposition will go around as if they are the only ones who got the best interest of Fiji at heart, we also, FijiFirst puts Fiji first. That is what FijiFirst does.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- So, they seem to go on as if when we had governments back in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, as if all the Ministries had unqualified opinions in audit. Hogwash! Go back and read it - absolutely hogwash! Under the Rabuka Government, all these Governments always had qualified Reports. What are you trying to say? But since that time we continued to make improvements so let us not create this myth that everything has disappeared in this time.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. I think the Honourable Minister is totally misrepresenting. We actually acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, I said this kind of issues have been with all Governments, I think they have to be a bit honest about what they say and what we say from this side.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I did not name the Honourable Professor Prasad. Other Honourable Members have stood up and said, "Wow, look, qualified reports." As if it is something that has never happened before. These things have happened in the past and we continued

to work on that, and for me as a Minister, I appreciate the information in this Report. Thank you, Chairperson of the Committee for doing your job well for the people of this country.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. J. USAMATE.- As Ministers, we do not normally delve down into the nitty-gritty of the operations of what an accountant does, but for me, this Report is great because it gives me an opportunity to see some of the things that did not happen as they should, and we know, it happens in all organisations. There is no organisation in the world where everything is hunky-dory (100 percent) all the time, it never happens. You always have variations. There is normal variation and there is abnormal variation, there is always normal variation.

What we do not want with normal variation is to become a part of the way things are done all the time, but audit is a path of the process of improvement. We have an audit, it gives us information on how things have been done, and for me as a Minister, I hold up this Report to my Permanent Secretary who I hold responsible to manage my Ministry as the Chief Executive Officer, and I tell them “This is an indication of things that you need to fix in this Ministry.” That is how it is used, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Having this Report gives me an opportunity to raise some of the issues with my Permanent Secretary and the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources, as I alluded, they have given me a Report. I have looked at the various things that they have talked about here - the administrative and governance issues.

I have seen the Auditor-General’s recommendations and I have comments from my Permanent Secretary about what they have done about those things. So it shows that the system of Performance Management that we are talking about works, we have targets, we want constant efficiency improvements, effectiveness improvements and all of these things as I go through them, maintaining a register, that is now being done. Reconciliation to be done on a timely basis, now they are showing that it is done. So there is improvement, work is being done under all of these things.

Of the various audits, the trust funds and all of these things, I can see in the response from the Ministry that they have actually done something in addition to what was recorded when the Report was produced. I think this Report was discussed in probably 2018 or 2019. So from that time they have taken the work further. That is what performance management system does, to have your KPIs for your Permanent Secretary and when the audits come out, I, as a Minister expect that you will make an improvement - that is how it works. This is something that has happened in all previous governments, it is not something new. It is the way - this is how we always function in terms of government.

Just to highlight some particular ones that I wanted to highlight from the Ministry of Lands, there is one here in terms of arrears of revenue. The audit noted that the arrears of revenue for the Department of Lands which totalled to \$26 million at that time only included Crown land lease. The Department was not able to provide arrears figures for the other revenues. There were some recommendations done by the Auditor-General about what they need to do and I see the Minister’s response about what the Permanent Secretary and the team has been able to do.

The Ministry has vigorously implemented and instigated appropriate measures and strategies to strengthen the collection of revenue, and at the same time, he is working in reducing arrears of revenue. This includes the digitisation of our records, whether they introduce a new technology, which is what we expect from a Permanent Secretary.

We expect them to be effective, to come up with new strategies for improvement. We sit as Ministers, Members of Parliament and we expect civil servants to do their jobs. For several years, we have been requesting funding to support stabilising the digitisation of our land records and now that has been done. Now, they have developed the debt and revenue management policy, waiver of interest incentive skills, site visits to lessees, issuance of notices and flyers on rentals, accepting undertaking with lessees to clear rental areas with the respective periods. So this shows to me that this whole system is working because you are making improvements to what we have.

The other one that I wanted to mention from the Ministry of Lands is one recommendation which reads, and I quote, “All the legislations should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to accommodate changing developments.”

The Auditor-General’s recommendation was that, “the Department should consider making proposals to review legislations governing their Department to ensure that all different legislations are harmonised.” What have they done? After that, groundwater resource management and its development policy is currently being vetted at the Solicitor-General’s Office. They have taken action on these things:

- (1) Review of the Mining Act and Mineral Policy;
- (2) Cabinet has already endorsed the review of the corresponding policy and consultations are underway;
- (3) Review of the service regulations in the final stages of vetting by the Solicitor-General’s Office; and
- (4) Amendments to State Land, Regulations 10 and 12 were pursued.

So what I am trying to point out that in the aftermath of these audits, the Permanent Secretaries and their teams are working on them to make those improvements.

The same sorts of things I am also seeing from the other Ministries that I have, the Ministry of Infrastructure has summarised all of the things that are in the Report as there are a number of key issues.

In terms of reconciliation, the Ministry is now ensuring that reconciliations are done in a timely basis by meeting the Ministry of Economy’s timelines, and that is to be done on the 15th of every month.

As a Minister, when I meet with my Permanent Secretary which we normally do once a fortnight, these are some of the things that I talk to them about:

- (1) Undertaking that they will continue to carry out reconciliations (That is how Ministers operate with the Permanent Secretaries).
- (2) Checking system in place to ensure that reconciliations are accurate.
- (3) Variances are being rectified through closed collaboration with the Ministry of Economy through the Financial Management Information System (FMIS).
- (4) Checking system is in place by the respective accounts officer-in-charge to ensure proper recording.
- (5) Capacity-building is being conducted to strengthen the capacity of the Department.

- (6) The Ministry is in consultation with the Ministry of Economy and also has in place strategies for the plant hire, TMA entity.

So those are some of the things that I am glad to see. That is why I said I appreciate this particular Report and the work that has been done by the Public Accounts Committee.

One of the things that was highlighted and came out of the report earlier this week (I think it was done by the Honourable Professor Prasad) was the absolute criticality of human resources that we have - the quality of the civil service. If they do their jobs well, we as the Members of Parliament, who make legislations and policies are able to see that the things that we agree to in this House, are actually implemented on the ground for the benefit of our people in this country. I agree wholeheartedly with that. Your most important resource is your human resource. Not just your human resource, but I think the most important of that human resource is the leadership of the human resources.

The quality of our Permanent Secretaries is absolutely fundamental. The quality of leadership is always one of the most important things in any Ministry, and in any undertaking. You have to select the right people, and that is something that can be true right across the board in all kinds of organisations. I think all Governments have tried to do this - Governments before the Bainimarama Government and the FijiFirst Government - have always tried to do this. They have come up with reforms, and as one Member said, it is not new. That is true also.

The reform that our Government is doing is the reform where we saw the shortcomings of the reforms that had taken place before, and we moved it a notch further. We identified the deficiencies there, then we come up with a system to address the quality of the human resource in this country. We know that in the past we have always had issues of cronyism in terms of selection.

There has always been the old boys network of some schools - some schools have their old boy network; we know all the stories. There have been stories of people being selected into positions by ethnicity and by provincialism and we needed to get rid of that. If we know that the most critical resource in an organisation is human resource, we have to have a system that makes sure you identify a position and you identify the best person for that position. If you get the right person on the bus, leading the bus, the bus will get to its destination. That is what the OMRS tries to do. The OMRS and the Performance Management System work in tandem to move this forward.

We have heard Honourable Members here who have served as civil servants saying, “The way that we did it was the best.” When you look back at the past, you always look with the rose tinted glasses, everything looks so nice. You see the good parts and you do not see the bad parts. Everyone looking backward always feels that the way it was is always better. But the only reason that we developed the new system because when we come in we can see the shortcomings of the systems that we had in the past.

So what is OMRS trying to do? It is trying to say, for this particular position, it does not matter where you come from, who you are, what sex, what race and what religion, we are going to select the best person for the job. The Honourable Gavoka made a statement just now and I actually wrote down his statement. He said, “Anyone with a Degree can go straight to the top of the Department.” That is not merit. Merit is not just your qualification, merit includes knowledge ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- Maybe, when you come into Government (if you ever have the opportunity) that is what you will do, but we do not do that now.

Merit includes a number of components, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Merit includes knowledge, what you know, maybe your Degree, but it also includes what you can do, your skill, which is not necessary but what you can do. What you can do has to be shown by the things you have done in the past - how you have lead, how you have been able to achieve things, and thirdly it must come from inside, your attitude. So merit has these three components. It is your qualification, what you know, what you can do and what is inside here, your passion is what you want to do.

So when we select through the OMRS we look at all of these components so we can get the best person for the job. And then it is not just a matter of selecting a person, then you have system to manage that person's performance, that is why you have a Performance Management System. You identify your strategic plan, then you have a costed operation plan for the year, then you need individual targets for each person in that leadership. That is what the Performance Management System does. As part of that Performance Management System...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. J. USAMATE.- ... because you are not looking at performance in one year, you have to look at performance over the next 10 years.

You develop a Succession Management Plan. You have a Permanent Secretary, you look around who is the person with the best potential to become the next Permanent Secretary, you identify them, high potential, then you have a programme to develop them so that they can take over.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have come up with a solution that we see as working to address this issue. We will continue to work on it so we can develop the best group of people in this country to move Fiji forward.

The last thing that I would like to say, if you keep looking backwards in the rear-view mirror thinking whatever happened in the past is the best way, you will crash because when you are looking at that mirror, you do not see the trees that are in front of you. So please, let us look forward.

Once again, I say, "Thank you, Chairman of the PAC for this Report. It is absolutely a great Report." We will work on it to make sure that we can address these things (and the Members too from the other side) and make sure that we will put Fiji first and the best interest of our country first. *Vinaka vakalevu*, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister and I give the floor to the Honourable Kuridrani. You have the floor.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would just like to make a short contribution regarding the motion before the House. In fact, I agree with the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources that the Report is a good Report, Mr. Speaker, but they lack the recommendation on how to improve this. They need to put a recommendation to discipline the officers that are engaged.

I will focus on agriculture, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Looking at the Agriculture Report, to summarise their performance based on this Audit Report and the qualified opinion by the OAG, they are being

mismanaged - poor management and poor planning has resulted in some suspicious dealings. Is that not enough for the Committee to recommend to the higher authority for disciplinary action especially to the FICAC? They are good. They did a good job.

Maybe I agree with Honourable Professor Prasad when he mentioned yesterday that this PAC should have been chaired by the Opposition. Will all these findings by the OAG be investigated? It is 2016 and if you rely on the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources' argument today that we need to look at the trend for almost 10 years from 2016 to 2019, what have we got?

We have increased the debt to almost \$7b. We have increased the level of poverty to 39 percent. Look at the quality of roads, it is the infrastructure, look at the health system, these are all indicators of their performance which they are claiming that they have been doing well. No, on the ground there is a different story. People are suffering. Look at the Ministry of Education. They closed down the Fiji Technical College.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- You do not even know why?

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- That is your poor planning. That is poor planning.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- So if they claim that they have been doing well, I doubt it very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir and the people of Fiji will doubt it. Every system they implement, they do not know whether it will be successful or not because no evaluation is done whether they actually have the money to implement those programmes, that is another question as I said yesterday.

Look at the Ministry of Agriculture. According to the Audited Report, the funds of \$457,000 was returned to consolidated account with the Ministry of Economy. Why? These funds were not used because of the poor implementation programme that they use.

The Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports was talking about the wastage. He did not realise that when you spend one or two months drawing up a budget plan and it is not fully implemented, that is wastage of resources. You do not understand that - wastage of time and money in drawing up strategies and budgets which are not being implemented on the ground. That is wastage and you do not understand that.

I say that there is no improvement. The Ministry of Agriculture, again as I mentioned yesterday, in the 2019 last quarter appropriation report, they returned more than a quarter of their budget - why? There is a lot of bureaucracy. The government system is not helping to implement the programme for people to receive the government assistance. That is why the money has been returned to the Ministry of Economy. What improvements have they done? Nothing! People are getting poorer, suffering because (as I mentioned yesterday) of their policies.

The Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development is laughing because as I mentioned yesterday, and she does not even know, that for a guy to get a business licence in the village now, it costs almost \$500 but in 2019 it was only \$95. All these programmes are not working and they do not realise that.

They are promoting their open merit system on human resources but what we are getting now is not working. I better tell the Government to think again, please if you cannot do the job, as I have said yesterday, resign!

I will not touch on all the anomalies and all the lack of adherence to the system raised by the Auditor-General's Report, but we know that the Agriculture GDP cannot even reach 15 percent. Why? Because of all this mismanagement and poor planning. I do not know whether they have the qualified people to do this or not?

The Honourable Minister for Agriculture has been seen going around Fiji, promoting this agriculture extension, promoting subsistence farming to move from subsistence level to semi-commercial level. That is fine but a few weeks ago, he said to invest again in horses and bullocks. It is contradicting. We are already in the 21st century and he wants to take us back to the 18th century. How can you improve productivity when you mind is going back to the 18th century? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now give the floor to the Honourable Nawaikula. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to begin by correcting some of the statements and the errors made by the Government side.

The Honourable Minister for Health accused Honourable Jale of living in the old times, saying that they now have the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) to solve everything. The Government side should know that they have abused the OMRS. Everything being equal, OMRS will work, but no, they have used it by government personnel to select and pick their relatives. They are even being racist to remove

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order!

The Honourable Member has made an accusation of corruption against Ministers on this side of the House. If he has the guts to do that, take it outside and let us go and settle it in courts but if he has evidence of that, he has to provide that evidence and let us deal with it because this side of the House too does not want to have corruption. We do not want to have corruption in this House, to stand up in this House and make a statement like that. Put the evidence on the table!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, I have the evidence, the evidence is here. On the last report by the Auditor-General, he cited the Ministry of Education of abusing the OMRS by employing four individuals who were not qualified. The Auditor-General even supplied their EDP Numbers and they are asking the Honourable Minister, what have you done to these individuals? Have you taken them into account? They have abused, they were not qualified, they were related; I am not sure whether this Minister or whichever Minister for Education.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- A Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member has just said that the Ministers on this side have abused OMRS by picking their relatives and being racists.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Who? Name the Minister!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- The Minister for Education.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- You can explain yourself.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. DR. I. WAINABETE.- He makes an accusation as ..

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Auditor-General's Report.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Minister for Education.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! You have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member has just said recently and all of us heard it, that we, Ministers abuse the OMRS to appoint our relatives and are racists.

The Point of Order is that, he must submit that evidence into this august House. If not, please, take that statement outside so we can challenge that in a court of law. That is the Point of Order.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Do not talk amongst yourself, address the Speaker. You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, moving on, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Maharaj raised a Point of Order against Honourable Kepa whilst she was reading a list of schools or technical colleges that are going to be closed. Now, he should understand that those lists were directly related to his recommendation.

Recommendation 4 reads “ensure that all capital projects are properly planned and adequate arrangements are made to implement projects as quickly as possible when funds are provided”, so it relates to the need for planning, the need for proper assessment before you implement the project. These are examples of areas where there were no proper planning. And it is a wastage so it was totally wrong of him to do that. It implies that he does not even know the content of his report.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A Point of Order, Sir. He had just actually cast an allegation against me that I do not know about the report. This is the report that Honourable Ro Kepa was referring to which reads “2016-2017 Annual Report”, which has not been debated. Why do you have to bring that up?

HON. SPEAKER.- Do not discuss things amongst yourself. If you raise a point, raise it with me and everyone else. You have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I request Honourable Nawaikula to retract that statement, that I am not aware about my own report.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well it implies.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- When I say that Honourable Kepa was referring to this particular report, she was actually referring to this report and not the report that is actually before Parliament

and is being debated upon. I have the evidence here before Parliament, Sir, he needs to retract his statement.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports actually accused Honourable Professor Prasad of referring to wastages without evidence.

Honourable Professor Prasad was referring to estimates and if the Honourable Member cares to understand better what wastage is, there is good evidence there. He should look at the Lautoka Swimming Pool where he was responsible and their budget bloated from an estimate of \$2 million to \$12 million. That is an example of wastage.

HON. P.K. BALA.- A Point of Order!

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to bring it to your attention that the matter is before the Court, thank you.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Why! Why!

(Honourable Members interject)\

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, let us leave it there. It is before the Court.

The Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services and Lands and Mineral Resources said that this report proves that Government is doing a good job, even without the need from the Opposition. And he said that it proves the need that they lost everything is wrong. No, you have lost everything. You lost it. That is the truth. The truth of the matter is that, they have brought the economy to its knees. They have no more now.

(Honourable Government Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the other side do not ever, ever blame COVID-19. I have been telling them over and over again. The results that were here on the statistics of our poverty that has now gone up to 30 percent were taken before COVID-19.

The revenue that began falling down in 2019, 2017 from \$4 billion to \$3 billion, \$2 billion and now at \$1.6 billion were all before COVID-19. So, where is the boom? No boom.

He referred to the OMRS but I have said enough on the OMRS. Mr. Speaker, he referred to the \$26 million arrears reference in the report on the Lands Department, his Ministry.

If the Honourable Minister cares to look back, year after year on the Annual Reports this has been a consistent issue which means that he has paid in tackling the arrears, in reducing the arrears to acceptable level. It comes every year, year after year, the failure of the Lands Department to collect arrears of rent and other income, so it is stagnant.

The Honourable Minister said, he uses that to demand from his Ministry but that Ministry is not performing. It is not reducing the arrears. He failed to inform the House of the \$75 million that was noted by the auditors for the hire of an excavator also in his Ministry.

HON. J. USAMATE.- \$75 million.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- \$35 million.

HON. J. USAMATE.- You said \$75 million.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Alright, correct me, how much, \$35 million? I will tell you that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- But what we want to know is that, what have you done about it? Is the Government going to recover that sum? We do not care about the Minister or the Ministry taking people to FICAC. We want the money back. We want our \$35 million back. We want to tell the Honourable Minister for Education, we want our \$18.5 million wastage on bus fare scam back; to be returned.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Why?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, you should know, bus fare scam \$18.5 million.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Big talk!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is not a big talk. That is not your money, that is public money.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Prove it!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, the Honourable Minister is asking for me to prove it. In the last issue of the Auditor-Generals Report which was distributed to us in November, there is a citation there on the Ministry of Education of the sum of \$18.5 million on the Bus Fare Scam, so that is where it comes from. Yes. Well, I am sorry if the Honourable Minister does not know that.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Why not?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- .Then we are all at a loss

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Why not?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- How are we going to get this matter...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Scam! Sir, \$18.5 is the figure, we want that back, please. It is a scam. Now, let me talk on this.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a copy of the Committee Report and they have 21 recommendations but the one that I wish to emphasise on which I will come back to it later is No. 4; wastage arising from lack of planning, lack of feasibility studies and that is where wastage comes in and that is the area where annually, business people wait to feed on what the government will give them.

But before I come into that, I will just note on the revelation that they come up with, these are normal and it comes up time after time. For example, on the Financial Statements, the Committee finding is that, the closing account balances were not always properly reconciled.

On Trust Fund Accounts, the Committee noted that proper books of records were not maintained for some accounts while others were operated without documentation and approved standard.

On Trading and Manufacturing Account, the Committee noted that Standard Operating Procedures have not been documented, approved for the operations of many.

On Reconciliation, the Committee noted that it was always not prepared. What this boils down to is that, we can divide the areas of concern into lack of procedures, normal neglect, negligence which can be cured and which is a subject of human resources proper training. They said that, that has been resolved by the OMRS but we are saying no, you need to review. You need to give the employer security of employment and that has been totally taken away by the three year contract, such that civil servants are now working in fear and intimidation because they are not secured in their employment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to refer to two areas that I have chosen to comment on. Firstly, the independence commission grant. The report says and this appears on page 59 that the auditor noted that the last audit of the accounts of the Human Rights Commission was carried out in 2008 for the 2007 Accounts.

The Human Rights Commission has not been audited since 2008, even though quarterly reports have been provided and that as a way forward, it recommended for the Human Rights Commission to immediately attend to that but the concern and the comments that I wish to say is that, the contents of the Human Rights supposedly the annual accounts to cover that area is incorrect, is incomplete.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at all these, you will see that normally, in an Annual Report you will have the report on a department or institution and then at the back, you will have the audited finances. These Annual Reports do not have the finances but there is an explanation on the last page for example, this one here it says, there is a letter there acknowledgement from the Office of the Auditor-General which says this to the Human Rights Commission.

The Office confirms that the Commission's financial for the Year 2015-2016 are currently being audited on our behalf and after being appointed by the Auditor-General under Section 7(a). The Office will undertake the audit for year 2017 once the accounts are submitted by the Commission.

So, basically, this report does not contain the financials but a letter saying that those financials are currently being audited and they will do and send them later. So, the bottom line is that we cannot

call this an audited report because it does not contain the very essential part of an audited report, which is the audited accounts.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to briefly refer to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Meteorological Services and note some of the anomalies that are noted here, in relation to the special assessment after *TC Winston*. There are 13 citations altogether, and I will just read a few.

Firstly, on the anomalies in the procurement of goods and services, the Ministry acknowledged that there was no LPO issued for those. Next, on the variances of stock reports against LPO, reconciliation of tally cards with the records maintained by the Fiji Procurement Office (FPO) revealed some items are recorded at the FPO were not recorded in the tally cards maintained in the warehouse, et cetera.

I wish to add, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by saying this, all these citations does not mean anything unless we act on it. If there is training, training is conducted, especially in relation to the wastages. We want to ask the Ministers, what they will do in relation to those heavy losses. These are the list of concerns and I wish the Ministers responsible to tell us what they will do in relation to this.

On the Ministry of Education, the latest audit report cited those four employees, who breached the OMRS. So we are asking the Honourable Minister, please update us on what is happening. Have the people ...

(Hon. R.S. Akbar interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- It is your Ministry now, you are responsible. Whether you are responsible or whoever, now that you are the Minister responsible, this comes under your responsibility. You are accountable to us, to tell us what you have done.

Have those employees been terminated? Have the person responsible been taken into account? And also while on that, can you also account the House on what has happened to the \$18.5 million on the bus fare scam?

(Hon. R.S. Akbar interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Well, I am asking now.

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- No!

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- This is my time, I am asking. Please, come back and account to us, especially whether the officers responsible had been dealt with? What will your Ministry do to recover for us this sum of money - \$18.5 million?

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- On the Lautoka Swimming Pool, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want the Honourable Minister responsible to tell us what has happened there, whether that money will be recovered? It is a lot of money.

On the Ministry of Roads, \$30 million was lost because they did not follow the procurement procedure. Please, account to this House and tell this House whether they have dealt with the person responsible? But tell us especially whether we will be able to recover that \$30 million.

Finally, on the \$35 million, excavation scam; please account to us how or what have you done with the people responsible, but more importantly to know and be told whether that \$35 million will come back?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- No, you recover it for us.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, first of all, I wish to thank the Office of the Auditor-General and the staff there for doing a very thorough job.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with so much Ministries and the limited resources that they have, there is enormous pressure. I wish to put on record our thanks and appreciation for doing and going over thoroughly and meticulously the records of various Ministries and being able to get the reports on time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also want to thank all the civil servants in the country. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the country has been subjected to a lot of external shocks – *TC Winston, TC Keni, TC Josie, TC Geeta, TC Yasa, TC Ana* and COVID-19. Every challenge, every shock, Mr. Speaker, Sir, they stand up to the challenge whether they have to come to meetings on Saturdays, Sundays, in the night or during cyclones. Every Ministry staff do not ask whether they could go home, look after their children, et cetera, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I am a bit ashamed to hear the way the Members from the other side are running down our civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are a few staff who may be abusing the system and that is why we have internal audits and external audits to pick up something that we have missed out. There are some “smart alec” in the Ministry who may be doing those things and you have that in the private sector too. We need to identify that as soon as possible so that we fix it and there is no wastage, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again on record, on behalf of our Government, I wish to just thank the civil servants for doing the extra job. Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, we will try to assist them in upskilling, upgrading their knowledge, skills, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note that Honourable Professor Prasad yesterday talked about the size of Government. Today again he spoke about the size of Government. Honourable Professor Prasad did not say what should be the size of Government and what the benchmark is. It is quite disappointing to get that from him; give the guidance, what is it? Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me give the guidance and then put into perspective what was the size of Government in 2006 and whether it was appropriate or not.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at economic literature, it talks about that for developing countries. You will find that the size of Government using Government expenditure as a percent of GDP to be around 40 percent. That is the benchmark, Mr. Speaker, for developing countries and for developed countries, as a country develops, like you know, the plane takes off then there is an auto-pilot, then you would expect the size of Government to reduce.

The size of Government when you measure it in terms of Government expenditure to GDP, this basically means how much of Government money to utilise to generate a dollar of national income. That is what it means. So, how much of Government expenditure would you want to spend to generate a dollar of national income?

The literature says that for developing countries, you spend 40 cents to generate every dollar of national income as a benchmark. So if you are out of kilter, let us say if the developing country is spending 70 cents to generate a dollar of national income then we need to re-route inside. There is some problem, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I computed what was the size of Government was in 2016, it was 37 percent. We are below the benchmark meaning that we are spending 37 cents to generate a dollar of national income. Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is the issue there?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the next issue, Honourable Professor Prasad ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Listen! This is my time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the next issue Honourable Prasad talked about, he said Government wastage is from 15 percent to 20 percent. Where is the computation to show that there is a Government wastage of 15 percent?

No, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what the OAG raised is this, there may be anomalies in terms of virement, in terms of movement of funds and in terms of unutilised funds. It is erroneous and misleading to come to Parliament and say that we have got 15 percent wastage of Government resources. No, no. It did not happen, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Audit the report, audit the budget, audit the ...

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- This is what you do. You disturb others who speak.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- I do not know what literature he has read recently, but he is misleading. He is saying that I am misleading Parliament. I was very clear, Mr. Speaker, when I talked about the size of the Government. I did not say that it should be 36 percent, 40 percent or 50 percent. I said I have no issues about size of Government, it can be bigger but what I did say is my estimate on the basis of the expenditure, on the basis of the audit report the Government wastage.

In my estimate, it is between 15 percent and 20 percent, and it is their responsibility, as I said. I said that you can only establish that, whether that is true or not is by having it and for him to say that I was actually misleading the House by using that 15 percent to 20 percent is ridiculous. So he should correct what he is saying and listen carefully while I was talking.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is not a point of order. He should read the Standing Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Kuridrani spoke about unutilised funds of the Government. Sir, yes, there are years when the funds of the Ministry are not fully utilised. It is a budget. We had given this amount of money and we are given a plan to spend and the spending period is 12 months, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

There are years when certain procurement, because of the nature of supplier not within the country or when you tender out, you do not get any one tendering for that particular supply, so there are issues. There may be cash flow issues that payment was not made Mr. Speaker, Sir, and therefore the posting was not done and we have lost that money in that particular year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last financial year, the Ministry of Agriculture spent 99.7 percent of its budget. We are doing everything possible to ensure that what we had asked for, what we receive and the plan we provided in the budget, we deliver according to that. But there will be a time, for example, COVID-19 came. During the period of COVID-19, our entire activity and plan was affected on how to deliver. You cannot expect us to deliver in an abnormal period like a normal period. No way!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were virement of funds during COVID-19, during *TC Yasa*, *TC Ana*. You cannot expect the plan to deliver in this budget when *TC Ana* and *TC Yasa* came in January for that the same amount of money to go into the activity. Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because they do not understand the Government machinery, they come here and make those kinds of statements.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, now, I want to turn my attention to the issue said by Honourable Kuridrani about bullocks and horses, et cetera, and moving into commercial agriculture. He is saying that because he does not understand what commercial agriculture is. Nowhere in the world or no literature says that you cannot use bullocks and horses for commercial agriculture because in his mindset, he thinks....

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Please, my turn, you have had yours.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in his mind, he thinks that for commercial agriculture you need a thousand acres of land, therefore, bullocks and horses cannot be used. All our sugarcane farmers are commercial farmers, he does not understand the definition of a commercial farmer. A commercial farmer is a farmer who creates surplus, who targets the market and who re-invests part of the surplus into the farm to continuously expand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a commercial farmer is not about size of land owning. We have got a farming system in Fiji. The farming system is given to us and it includes small, medium, large farms. We rarely have plantations in the country, we used to have in the Colonial days, large coconut, coffee and cocoa plantations. But now mostly we have got large farms, medium farms and small farms.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in small farms, if you have horses and bullocks, you will save on the cost of hiring a tractor. A small farmer wanting to prepare a small plot cannot be waiting for a tractor to come. He cannot be hiring a tractor and I am saying that any farm in the country must have additional farm power. You have got manpower, women power on the farm, you can have animal power, you can have machinery power (tractor, excavator, bulldozer).

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have got manpower, women power on the farm, we can have machinery power such as tractor power, excavator power, bulldozer power. What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have got 80,000 farms in the country. Are we expecting Honourable Kuridrani's suggestion that 80,000 farmers should have a tractor each?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what I am saying is that if you can afford to have a horse power or animal power on your farm without any cost, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you can do small works using the animal power or additional power. Unfortunately, he has joined those bloggers on the social media who have no idea about agriculture to become an overnight expert on agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to respond to some of the issues raised in the Auditor-General's Report on environment. There were two issues raised on the Auditor-General's Report, one was about the Environment Trust Account.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the Environment Trust Account, the Auditor-General's Office picked up - the trust account was not reconciled. Anyone who understands accounting, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will tell you that at the end of the financial year or regularly, you do a bank reconciliation which basically means that the cash at bank should be reconciled with your ledger postings.

Interestingly, what the Auditor-General's Office found out that the cash at bank was more than what you are posting. The good thing is that, the trust account is not less than what you have shown, Mr. Speaker, Sir. What it demonstrates is that, the postings was not done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry of Environment at one time was under the Ministry of Lands, Housing, Local Government, now it is with the Ministry of Waterways. I can tell you, if you are going to do a bank reconciliation now of the trust account, it will reconcile because we have known and identified that there was a problem in the past and we have rectified it. That is why we have regular audits, whether it is internal or external, that tells us what kinds of problems (systemic problems) are there or every now and then you will see a problem or problems and our job is to rectify that. I want to assure this House that that is not an issue now. There was an issue of posting because sometimes it was the Ministry, sometimes it was the Department and people did not do the posting on time and records were lost and that is not an issue now.

The other issue raised on environment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was about Local Municipal Councils not paying to the Landfill. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2016 is done and clear. In the letter, it is written that there are some outstanding dues and we are working with the Municipal Councils. We understand the challenges faced by the Municipal Councils like Nasinu Town Council, 70 percent of their ratepayers are from squatter settlements. It is a nightmare collecting rates from them, and then you pay your expenses, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There is delay or quite a bit of delay and we are working with them and we would want to collect rate and if there is an issue of inability to pay because they are not able to collect, et cetera, if they are writing off then we will have to write it off.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I now want to turn to agriculture with regards to the issues raised by the Auditor-General's Office in the Annual Report. Yesterday, I think the Honourable Kuridrani raised the issue of Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Agriculture, I want to tell Honourable Kuridrani on record that we are targeting to get Annual Reports up till 2019 completed but end of this fiscal year - simple. I understand that Annual Reports should be done, uptodate, we will do it. I do not want to go into the past and say why it was not done, that is a different matter, a secondary matter, Mr. Speaker.

First, always in any institution you need to deal with the output that you have to deliver. I am saying this is a target we have set. The next step would be to go back and deal with the people who are not doing the job on time, et cetera. That is a separate matter and we will deal with them, and the same thing with Agro Marketing Authority.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to tell the House that we have completed from 2010 to 2016, signed off by the Board and we have submitted to the Auditor-General's Office for auditing. Now, we are doing the other years for Agro Marketing Authority, we are on it now - done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there were other issues of purchasing raised by the Auditor-General's Office and we are dealing with it. We have got a governance team set up with Standard Operating Procedures, we want to see an unqualified report going forward. I have told our finance team and my Permanent Secretary, "Look, we need to set up systems, processes and then monitor the systems and processes to ensure that we are on top of it and we do not want to be caught up when the Auditor-General's Report comes and then we see that there have been abuses, there was a breach of financial regulations".

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are several issues raised like that of the issue of trust account. We no longer have any trust account in the Ministry of Agriculture. We do not want to have it, simple as that. It does not apply, it is not relevant now unlike in the Department of Environment where we have got a TMA where bond moneys are placed. So in the Ministry of Agriculture, that is not an issue any more.

(Honourable Opposition Member interjects)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- You know it is a TMA account, not a trust account. That is different, my friend.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to assure the House that we are putting in measures to fix any potential anomalies that could arise in regards to financial practices, every confidence in our Permanent Secretary, Finance Manager, Director and Finance staff who are doing an excellent job, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This is a large Ministry that is under enormous pressure, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Yesterday, a very senior staff was not feeling well. I said "Go, take a week's break, get better and come back, we will manage it."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the Auditor-General's Office and I want assure you that we will do everything to ensure that taxpayers' money are put to good use, thank you.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will be very brief, so much has been said about the Report before the House. There are a few issues, however, that I wish to raise.

Again, let me assure this august House that Audit Reports are not new. The Government takes it seriously and I wish to acknowledge the Committee and all the comments from the other side of the House.

We are positive about it and, of course, we will ensure that we sit with the Permanent Secretaries and the key staff to ensure that the recommendations, the gaps (whatever we call that) are

addressed. We do take it seriously and it is good to be audited. It is good to know what the weaknesses are and, of course, strengths as well in the various organisations, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I think the whole focus is about improvement and most of the comments from the other side unfortunately seem to portray that we are not progressing, we are not moving forward but if we look at the unqualified reports and the qualified reports over the years, I can assure this august House that it gives us an indication that we are listening and, of course, Permanent Secretaries and officials are taking responsibilities seriously, as expected of them.

In terms of Annual Reports and, of course, Audited Reports as well, I know that there has been discussions in Cabinet and most Ministers have relayed this to the Permanent Secretaries that this becomes a key issue in their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) so that we can be current and, of course, ensure that we address the issues as well.

But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I always said this in this House, when you are posted or when you become Ministers, you inherit the organisation. Unfortunately, you do not have much choice but to work with what is already in existence, and we are making contributions to speak within the context of the realities on the ground. Of course, we want to have professional, effective and efficient organisations but it does take time, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Not only time but we need to have knowledge and skills and we need to have the right resources as well so that we can perform to the level of our expectations.

I always see this in most of my Ministries, it is an injustice when we demand high standards from public officials but, we, at the same time, are not even training them to the level of expectation, and not only that, equipping them, Mr. Speaker. You come in as a Minister with your vision, manifesto and the will of the people and there is work there to be delivered. That is the reality of the matter, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and you love to have the best of people but you inherit the organisation, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and how do you deal with it?

The Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources has stated very clearly that the role of the Permanent Secretary, therefore, becomes very, very critical and let me assure this august House, the Honourable Jale, particularly, there is no political influence in appointments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a check and balance system. You carry the will of the people and as I have said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is good because there are processes in place.

On the Open Merit Recruitment System, we have healthy discussions with the Permanent Secretaries and the officials but, of course, the bottom line is, if we want to achieve then we have to ensure that we have the right people in the organisation.

As I have always stated, that is why we need good Permanent Secretaries. In my experience in government as a public official, and then as a Minister, there are three key appointments that are very, very critical in all organisations: one is the Permanent Secretary, the buck stops with the Permanent Secretary and we need the best out of them, but what do you do with them?

I have had a situation where I have to write a report that “this Permanent Secretary is incompetent” and through the process, now he is out of Government because we have that level of expectation, because we only have a short time period to deliver and we have to deliver, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Permanent Secretary's role is very, very critical when it comes to Annual Reports because they are responsible. If you read the Constitution, the Permanent Secretary of a Ministry is responsible to the Minister concerned for the efficient, effective and economical management of the Ministry or any Department under the Minister. That is why the role of the Permanent Secretaries is very, very important.

Secondly, our Human Resource Managers, unfortunately, I have been saying this in Cabinet meetings and, of course, in my Ministries as well. We inherit government processes. Most on the other side have served in government, most of those that are responsible and now that is why through the OMRS and the reform, most of these jobs have been re-classified, so that we can have proper Human Resource Managers rather than clerks or clerical officers because the system before is, you go through clerical officer, attempt service exams such as H1, H2 and S (all these exams) and then you become a Senior Administration Officer, and then you become a Principal Administrative Officer, you become Director.

Unfortunately, I will come later to the training aspects, you still have that clerical officer mentality. I say this with respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but that is it why you cannot rely on experience. Experience has its limits, people need to be trained and I will come to the next appointment which is very very critical in government. We need to have qualified training officers so that training officers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the competency of the job but this is the level of performance. This is a gap, and that is where they need training needs analysis.

There are so many trainers in this House. The Honourable Tikoduadua is smiling, that is the job of properly qualified training officers, and they must work with the Human Resource Manager and the Permanent Secretary so that we can have a much more effective, efficient and economical ministry.

It takes time, ladies and gentlemen and Honourable Members of the House, it does take time. We want efficiency, professionalism but, of course, we as responsible leaders cannot fire but we need to train them and that is why in organisations. I have always stressed this to my Ministry, particularly the Permanent Secretary, "You look at three things, one is the recruitment policy, recruit the best person for the job. Do not recruit for the sake of recruiting. And that has been the trend for a while, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Recruit the best person.

We give guidance to the Permanent Secretaries, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because we are answerable to the people who voted us to be on this side of the House. Secondly, we look at training and development. Training is ensuring that they are competent for the current job that they are performing, and development is about setting them for the next level up. All trainers in this House know that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

If that does not work, then we have to look at the exit policy and its strategy. Do not retain people who are not contributing to the organisation and those who do not live by the values of the institution. It takes courage to do that – that is the challenge and that is the reality - we need to work on this. Let me just highlight some of the Annual Reports.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, there are processes in place. Definitely, the Honourable Dr. Reddy has assured this House that he is working with his Permanent Secretary, same thing with the RFMF, they have appeared before the Committee I have said that in this House. The Commander himself is taking responsibility over the Reports. I am clarifying the RFMF and it is not with Chief of Staff, it is not with the Deputy Commander, it is the Commander himself because he has made that commitment and he will be accountable for that because he has made that decision, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But let the process take its place. I know it has been long overdue, but it will come.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to focus on the Navy. Unfortunately, Honourable Salote Radrodro was very selective. I am quite surprised with her contribution, because the same Report that talks about the audit findings, also talks about the agency response. She, as a former civil servant, knows that we have to go through these meetings with the auditors so that we can clarify the decisions that took place and also the commitments, Mr. Speaker, Sir. She talked about the...

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I talked about the recommendations.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- No, wait - let me get to it. Let me read out what the Honourable Radrodro decided to tell the Fijian public. ‘The state of Naval Vessels, moreover, since 2003 a budget of \$2 million has been allocated annually for *Kiro* patrol boat Life Extension Programme, however the funds were not utilised and were returned to the Ministry of Economy at the end of each financial year.’

And then she went down to talk about the contract to the payment schedule that is on the RFNS *Kikau*. ‘The Fiji Navy approved the final payment of \$419,110 to the contractor following the recommendations from Officer No. 3089. The audit noted that the RFMF pay the contractor the contract amount of \$549,146’. She went on with this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but just directly beneath it, were the responses from the Fiji Navy. I would like to read that out to the Honourable Member, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Talk about the recommendations because that is what matters.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- She talked about the \$2 million that was given back, unutilised and was returned to the Ministry of Economy. But put very simply, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we look at page 95, Honourable Member, turn to page 95, the agency response was this:

‘‘The Committee was made aware that in 2010 the Pacific Patrol Boats plus *RFNS Kiro* was due for its Life Extension Programme, refit works. The progress of the LEP Project was however greatly hampered by:

- (1) The departure from the Project in late 2012 of the Australian Project Consultant who had vast experience in the Pacific Patrol LEP; and
- (2) The sanctions by the Australian Government on all assistance rendered to the LEP Project by all the Australian commercial companies that the Fiji Navy was engaging, given that the vessel was built in Australia and had to have all the spare and maintenance parts for the projects.’’

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Navy has indicated to the Committee and of course to the OAG that the unfortunate thing was the consultant; the Australian project consultant who was posted to Fiji had to be recalled to Australia. We are again working with the Australian Navy now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the consultant holds the appointment of the Forward Support Agency (FOSA) and he is the one who ensures that this work is carried out by competent companies.

Patrol boats, for the information of the Honourable Member, these are the Pacific-class patrol boats, classed for classification. You cannot just get an engineer from somewhere and fix the *RFNS Kiro* because it is made to classification and that is the job of the FOSA to ensure that whoever does work on *RFNS Kiro* must abide by the classifications on all Pacific-class patrol boats.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Hear, hear!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- The same thing now, we have shifted to guardian-class patrol boats. So, we will have to ensure that any work that is done on the *RFNS Savenaca*, the guardian-class patrol boat, that is why we are again encouraging and discussing with Australia, please bring back the FOSA because the FOSA brings a lot of benefits to Fiji.

When we have the FOSA in Fiji, the Tongan boat is serviced here in Fiji, the Tuvaluan boat is serviced here in Fiji, the Samoan boat is serviced here in Fiji. All the boats in the region come here and that is why the FOSA is so important. When the FOSA was recalled, that is why that allocation was returned, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that has been clearly highlighted in this Report.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- With a waiver of tender? Read that and then the recommendation.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- I am focusing on the response that has been clarified, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by the agency.

Secondly, was the contracts. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the difficult thing about boats is, they will make estimations about the costs but they do not know until it is on the slipway and usually because of the variations and the decisions taken and that again has been justified, they will have a 20 percent contingency cost because when it is on the slipway then you would be able to tell how much does it really cost to fix the boat. You can only come up with those figures when the boat is on the slipway and that is why there are variations in the costing, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Again, the Fiji Navy has already given their response but unfortunately the Honourable Member was just selectively looking at the negative aspects of that Report to again portray an image that we are not progressing and we are not moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, let me make this commitment before this august House, we take audit reports seriously and of course, we are committed to ensuring that that the civil service, under our respective portfolios do work towards effectiveness, efficiency, economical management for the good and the betterment of the services and of course the benefits that it brings to the people that we are called to serve. I thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to Honourable Saukuru. You have the floor.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the report before the House today.

First of all, I wish to thank the Committee for doing a good task in deliberating on the Auditor-General's Report and pointing out the weaknesses identified by the Auditor-General's Report that has been discussed today.

My contribution Sir, will focus on a special audit for *TC Winston*. A lot has been said and I thank all the speakers. I thank the Ministers contributing to the debates. Hopefully, the ministries will take on board most of the points that have been raised and recommended by the Committee as part of the improvement for service delivery.

But for the special audit for *TC Winston*, the finding of the Auditor-General was that a huge quantity of condemned goods was found at the bulk storage in Nabouwalu, Savusavu and Taveuni equivalent to a total cost of wastage amounting to \$19,410. If you break it down, it is as follows:

| Location of Bulk Storage | Cost (\$) |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Savusavu | 5,098 |
| Taveuni | 10,435 |
| Nabouwalu | 3,877 |
| Total | 19,410 |

It was noted that the items had been damaged mainly during the loading, unloading process due to improper handling of goods and during the shipment of these items from Suva by sea. However, intentional denting damaging of items cannot be also ruled out.

On diversion of rations procured for the Northern Division. The rations were temporarily stored at the Mechanical FPO and Nausori Airport Hangar bulk before they were to be shipped to the Northern Division. The diversion of the rations would have resulted in areas earmarked for distribution in the Northern Division not being covered for ration distribution as intended. There were items that were supposed to be shipped out to Vanua Levu but were diverted to the Central-Eastern Division.

The Auditor-General had recommended that disciplinary actions should be instigated against the officers responsible for diverting rations as rations distributions should be improved in the future. On considerable delay in the shipment of rations to the Northern Division, that is something that the Auditor-General has pointed out in his report.

The Auditor noted that items were kept in stores for almost a month and were yet to be shipped to the Northern Division as intended for one month food ration distribution. Moreover, due to the extended storage period, and constant moving and re-stacking of these items to make way for other incoming items, some of these items were damaged, dented, hence escalating cost wastage due to damaged goods.

Insufficient food ration for distribution, the Audit findings for the Northern Division, their discussions with the Provincial Administrator Bua revealed that the food ration - items in stock were not sufficient to cater for the population in these areas: Korokadi Indian School, Vakale, Kavula Village, Banikea Village, Waibunabuna, Vakadrudru Government Station, Viseiseivula, Cobue, Bua District School, Bua Indian School, Bua Nursing Station, Vatubogi Primary School and Logani.

The non-distribution of food rations to the above areas is a direct result and the diversion of the Northern Division rations to the Eastern and Central Divisions. Again, the Auditor-General have recommended that management should ensure that diversion of food rations procured for divisions seized with immediate effect. As per the actions as well should be instigated against the officers responsible for the diversion of the food rations.

There were findings too, on unaccounted rations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Audit noted that a total of nine cartoons of corned beef transported from Suva, Nabouwalu, Savusavu via Vatulawa was unaccounted for upon uploading of goods at the Nabouwalu and Savusavu Jetties. The total quantity shipped as per the Government Shipping Service's receipt noted that thousands of corned beef cartoons were in the consignment as released from the stores and loaded on board. However, the actual total quantity received by the Provincial Administrator Bua was 491 cartoons and Provincial Administrator Caukadrove was 500 cartoons. It was only 991 cartoons. A waybill document was also prepared for the consignment but this was not signed by the relevant officers releasing the items from stores, transporting officers and receiving officers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, other findings of the Auditor-General Report is on the weakness in procurement process. The Audit review identified weaknesses in the procurement process and the

failure to address that may result in goods ordered not being receiving, hence resulting in overpayments. There were improper storage of goods as well.

What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that there were a lot of findings from the last tropical cyclone by the Auditor-General. I am thankful that the Honourable Minister has spoken earlier today and taking on board some points that we have been raising. I think there is a good point that we can improve in the system and process of delivering to our people during natural disasters that has happened during *TC Winston*.

I wish to end my contribution, Mr. Speaker, Sir, by saying that keeping policies and procedures up to date is an essential part of protecting the organisation and ensuring operational excellence. But policy management largely happens behind the scenes, so it can get pushed aside in favour of more urgent priorities. It may be hard to convince leaders to invest in a policy and procedure management system, especially when budgets are tight.

It is true, policy management systems can be expensive but the cost of policy negligence can be far higher. A good policy, procedure management system is like an insurance policy, you may not be able to see the benefit of home owners' insurance everyday but if your house burns down, you will be glad that you have it. Neglecting the organisation's policies for example, letting your insurance coverage lapse.

The truth is even fairly small lawsuit can significantly harm your organisation, good policy management is the first line of defence, developing, regularly updating policy. Policies helps the organisation reduce litigation risks, properly trained staff and maintain a culture of excellence, policy negligence neglecting to update policies and ensure they make it to employees is simply not an option for well-run department.

Mr. Speaker, doing nothing to secure actively manage policies leads to organisation to expose to liability, policy, negligence leaves you at risk for financial loses, security breaches and ruined reputations. It is therefore important to review policies and procedures outdated policies will hurt our day to day operations resulting in inconsistencies, inefficient training, little accountability and waste time, implementing a policy management system can be a significant remedy to these issues.

A cost of a policy management solutions, Sir, are nothing compared with the cost of doing nothing. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I will allow a suspension motion to be moved and I now call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

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

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Leader of the Government to speak on his motion.

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Very briefly, under Schedule 1, we still have an outstanding motion and, of course, under Schedule 2 the eight Oral Questions and the Written Question. Thus, the request to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion.

There being no one wishing to take the floor, Honourable Leader of Government in Parliament, do you have anything further to say? You have the floor.

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

Thank you, Honourable Members.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.33 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON THE REVIEW REPORT ON THE EXAMINATION OF AUDIT REPORTS OF GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND DEPARTMENTS

The Parliament resumed at 5.00 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please be seated. We will continue with our debate on this motion. I give the floor to the Honourable Ro Filipe Tuisawau. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to the motion relating to the audit reports of government ministries and departments for the year ended 31st July, 2016. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Committee and also the Committee members who began the work as stated there on page 4. The Honourable Ashneel Sudhankar, Honourable Mohammed Dean, Honourable Alex O'Connor, Honourable Aseri Radrodro and Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu and the current members.

I rise also to start off by raising an issue raised by one of the government side members. I think he is not here but particularly, the comment that the issues highlighted in this report, the various discrepancies, breach of procedure, et cetera is normal. He used the word “normal” and is it normal for mismanagement to occur? I do not think it is normal and I do support the Honourable Professor Prasad that what has been raised here needs to be properly analysed and assessed.

Noting that he has stated the amount of maybe, 15 percent to 20 percent. So, we are talking about a huge sum here which is about maybe, \$500 million to \$700 million loss, resulting from lack of procedure, et cetera, which is highlighted in this report.

Yesterday, we spoke about the issue of poverty, in terms of the Household Income Expenditure Survey 2019-2020, which has risen from 28.1 percent to 29.9 percent or 258,058 individuals at that poverty level or below. Some are asking why am I raising this but it is related to this report on the losses arising out from here, which do impact on the government finances which could have gone to poverty alleviation and such programmes leading to that.

I also would like to comment on the issue that Honourable Vuniwaqa raised yesterday about the methodology of that census, this is only a sample. The comment I would like to make is results and analysis provided by the Bureau are normally based on samples, except for census and that was a survey. In whatever study or analysis, any sample there is always a margin of error that is acceptable in any such survey since it is only a proportion of the population.

On the issue raised by Honourable Seruiratu, yes, we cannot compare oranges with apples and you cannot compare the 2002-2003 poverty study with the 2019-2020 survey because the base is different, and that we need to take into account factors such as inflation. So if you use the same base, then the results of the 2019-2020 survey will be much higher because of the inflator. Basically, this means that the poverty level will be much higher in 2019-2020 survey, compared to 2002-2003.

The other issue raised by the other side of the House is the role of the Opposition in terms of PAC and, I believe it is very important that we relook at the Standing Orders in terms of how parliamentary democracies operate in terms of PAC. That is an issue we have raised. I remember that when we came in at the beginning of this term, we had a workshop for the new MPs and that was one of the issues raised; the review of the Parliamentary Standing Orders. To-date, we have not been able to do that. My understanding from this PAC in parliamentary democracies, Commonwealth et cetera, the Opposition leads in terms of most of these Standing Committees.

The comment on Open Merit Based Recruitment and Selection. The Honourable Minister commented that there is no nepotism in the OMRS. It prevents nepotism. Mr. Speaker, Sir, you cannot guarantee that the recruitment system is 100 percent nepotism free, there is no guarantee because even if you have procedures in place, there is always that chance and risk that even individuals within those recruitment committees can be biased. So nepotism he raised, it is the practice amongst those with power and influence of favouring relatives and friends, especially in giving them jobs.

Honourable Nawaikula had raised that issue and we need to ask the question whether we gotten rid of that or not. Of course, it is impossible but it is something which have been discussed, which is a concern, not only in this House, but also throughout the nation, the civil service and amongst the professionals and even graduates.

The Public Sector Reform was mentioned by the various contributors. So the question is, whether it has worked or not? The public sector reform, as mentioned, started from SVT, under the SDL and continued under the FijiFirst Government, which they have stated has improved compared to the other two governments before it, which we do not agree with. From my perspective, in terms of public sector reforms, there are two key components, the finance and the human resources which need to work in tandem.

Looking back, I see a lot of disconnect there in terms of the public sector reform since 2006 up to now. Of course, the environment was not normal after 2006 due to the overthrow of the Government, but even after that, there are disconnects happening. Even if we look at the 21 recommendations in this Report, there are overall, as mentioned by the contributors, 13 qualified opinions. So from my understanding is, there could be several reasons, some have been mentioned, also I would like to mention today the lack of knowledge, lack of training and even lack of ethics and commitment.

Again, that is something which we can train but it needs to be something inculcated in a person, a person's sight rather than through formal training. So that also comes, I suppose, through your belief in the leadership and your commitment to that leadership. The other issue was the state of overall human resources management within the Civil Service and I believe that just hearing out from some of our civil servants and some of the experiences which had been experienced throughout the reform, the overall Human Resource Management Framework of Government, I believe, needs to be relooked at within the Civil Service, including the overall planning.

Even within each Ministry, they need to have a human resources plan which is linked to the overall strategic plan. I suppose that can be cascaded upward to the National Development Plan. I am not sure whether the reform reached that stage and again that needs to be broken down into strategic plans for each Ministry, particularly what types of human resources you need in order to achieve that strategic plan and you can do that through training, succession planning, recruitment and of course to have proper remuneration policies, frameworks and retention strategies in place. High turnover is one of the issues mentioned by the Government side, so what are you doing about retaining quality staff?

The other issue I noted from some of the Ministries is the human resources information system which is a problem because in some Ministries they are not aware of contracts coming to an end or contracts which are about to end and the timelines you need to follow in order to either advertise or renew contracts, et cetera. So again, there is a disconnect there and I believe the reform was done back to front. You produce the reform documents, the plans, et cetera but the resources which were needed to implement the plan were not in place in the Ministries. This is from 2016, so

probably today I understand that it is being worked on and we look forward to those disconnects and overall lack of resources and anomalies to be rectified.

On the Report itself, I know that there has been various comments on it and I would just like to go through a few which I believe need to be mentioned, particularly, the mention of cost analysis when referring to some of leased vehicles. I note the budget which we approved on leased vehicles amounted to approximately \$21 million so it would be good for the Government to have a cost benefit analysis on that before renewing the contract.

In terms of the Public Accounts Committee, it also would be useful for them to make specific recommendations on that. The Provincial Councils as mentioned under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, in terms of budget, I note in some of the Provincial Council Committees and also in the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, there is an income stream through Fijian Holdings Ltd dividends, but those are being used for operational expenditure and I hope that the operational budget of Provincial Councils and the iTaukei Affairs Board is not diverted FHL dividends.

The FHL dividends are not diverted to those, but is allocated through the normal process of the budget. Some specific recommendations I sort of picked out with concern, if you look at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Audit review (1.6) of overseas travel made by the Honourable Minister revealed unauthorised claim of per diem allowance and overpayment of per diem daily allowances on a number instances. Similar question was raised by audit in previous audits and no documentary evidence was provided to justify the overpayments totalling \$39,451.

Further, Cabinet approvals were not provided for the travels made and the recommendation there is ensure per diem allowance is paid in accordance with Cabinet approval and investigate the recurring anomalies. I was wondering what actions the Public Accounts Committee would take in terms of that kind of follow up because it seems to be a serious case and I am not sure whether the Minister is still in Government.

There was also issues raised regarding supporting documents for overseas foreign missions where personal files of Diplomats engaged in foreign missions revealed the records such as marriage and birth certificates were missing from their files. This is a concern because the allowances, et cetera sometimes are based on whether you are married or the date of birth. For example, child allowance does not apply in a lot of organisations when you are 21 years old. Those are some of the issues I thought I would raise.

In addition to that, I also raise the issue about the Fiji Human Rights Commission, that is on page 59, has not been audited since 2008 but I believe that has been updated. If that has been, then we are happy with that. However, I would like to raise the issue of the Director of the Human Rights Director. They have mentioned performance management and he has not provided these reports on time. What performance management systems are in place to measure his performance? That is something which needs to be looked at in terms of overall performance management of the heads of these organisations.

Recently, I am not sure about his performance too because he did not comment on the deportation of the USP Vice-Chancellor nor on the Police Bill, et cetera. It is a concern given his role in terms of the protection and support of human rights in this country. Lately, he has made a political comment which neutralises his role as a neutral Human Rights Director.

If you look at Fiji Corrections Service on page 68, there have been various funds managed there in terms of the prisoners - the Prisoner Trust Fund, et cetera. They have also benefitted from a

few programmes, job placement, sugar cane harvesting, so the Corrections Service has initiated those to help them when they come out.

Lately, there has been an increase (I am not sure of the statistics) but in the last two weeks, there have been home invasions where there have been serious injuries to the occupants. This is a concern, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because what I am suggesting here in terms of the overall system which works in terms of income for prisoners. Why can this not be also looked at as a compensation reconciliation for victims that when they are working, they can also, I suppose, there could be reconciliation and also compensate the victims through what is earned given their crimes.

The operation of self-help projects: I was interested in this because it mentions self-help projects set up in the various provinces and audit findings, lack of Standard Operating Procedures, monitoring reports not provided, completion certificates not sighted. In Rewa and Serua, out of 16, seven were unsuccessful so, yes, the issue of monitoring and evaluation of projects, especially grassroots projects which need to be improved.

Department of Housing: the other interesting one is the Lagilagi Housing Project. I believe this was resulted in a lot of issues, not only with grant being given but also the person who was collecting funds from those who wanted to benefit from the project and that is the case before the courts. I am not sure whether that is completed. Again, proper planning to ensure that funds are available for development projects for the intended purpose and monitoring, that is recurring theme again through this Report.

Ministry of Youth and Sports: Regarding some of the sports facilities and grounds, we have concerns but we would like to ask where that hose have reached, for example, the Vunidawa Sports Complex. Last year, we went up to Vunidawa with our Rugby Team, we still played in Naluwai Ground. I am not sure this year, may be they would have completed it and this was initiated in 2015 with the North-East Agriculture Architectural Design, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those are some of the issues we would like to raise and I do thank the Committee for their work and for compiling a comprehensive Report for the discussion of Parliament. *Vinaka.*

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to Honourable Koya, you have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Sir, my contribution is actually three-fold and I have been asked for some comments, et cetera, that need to be put to the House on behalf of the Honourable Minister for Women and also on behalf of the Prime Minister's Office.

The Honourable Minister for Women actually wanted to clarify something, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with respect to an issue that was raised by Honourable Salote Radrodoro, on Page 145 of the Report. Honourable Salote Radrodoro uses the Audit findings to say that the Auditor-General had said that the Ministry is not well-staffed or equipped to do the job at hand.

As a matter of fact, Sir, nowhere does the Auditor-General talked about staffing of the Ministry. The Auditor actually made one recommendation in relation to *TC Winston* farming assistance and that basically read that the Ministry shall prepare SOPs for any such programmes implemented in the future and that the Ministry for Women have actually prepared SOPs since then, so that needs to be clarified, Sir. This forum is being used to make statements that are not verified and not factual, Sir, it should not happen.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again as I said, there are other issues that have been raised by the Honourable Prime Minister's Office that I have been asked to respond to. The findings of the Report have shown best practices in financial controls and can be shared across Government, Sir.

Before we get into what we have done to make that happen, it was also the Honourable Prime Minister's contention, Sir, that he wants to acknowledge the Auditor-General's work and the team's work and this is exactly why we have a competent and independent Auditor-General's Office.

To date, we have addressed or we are addressing the important issues that they have actually highlighted and since the publication of the Audit Reports, Sir, the Ministry of Economy has led Fiji's programme of Public Financial Management Reforms, and that includes the implementation of the Public Financial Management Improvement Plan, the review of the Financial Management Act 2004 and Financial Instructions 2010 and the Review of the Financial Management Information System (FMIS), to name a few.

This major financial reforms, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were critical to actually improving Government's prudent fiscal policies and practices and as a direct result, to strengthening financial and macro-economic stability. But the greatest benefit, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of this reform has been the more efficient delivery of public goods and services to the Fijian people, and on that foundation, today Fiji has recorded its unprecedented nine years of economic growth, the longest stretch actually achieved by any Government because these reforms were implemented.

We have been able to adapt Government expenditure to the harsh economic reality of COVID-19 pandemic, while ensuring that Fijians still receive the key services that they actually count on. As the Ministry responsible for the promotion of sound Financial Management policies amongst the various Government Ministries and Departments, the Ministry of Economy, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has continued to provide training and advisory support to agencies on a periodic basis in order to build the capacity of accounting personnel to carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot has been said about the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS). Now the OMRS ensures that the best qualified and experienced individuals are recruited in the finance cadre of most Government agencies.

The Ministry of Economy, Sir, has continued to provide support to the various Permanent Secretaries and their Ministries to address issues in relation to the prudent management of their accounts and finances.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Ministries and Departments are actually required to address audit issues and provide progressive status on the audit report prior to approval of any related transactions by the Ministry of Economy.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Sir, has been established and it is actually fully operational and under the guidance of the Ministry of Economy to focus on strengthening and observing evaluation across Government agencies, and that they do not just sit idly by like they actually pretend. The Unit regularly analyses reconciliation of issues between Government agencies, essentially, that is the process of ensuring our records of Cash Receipts and Cash Payments are aligned with the debit and credit entries in the bank statement. If, Mr. Speaker, Sir, significant issues arise, they are raised as a matter of priority with the relevant Ministries and Departments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, additionally, reconciliation issues highlighted in the actual audit report have also been addressed through the issuance of Memorandum to the Heads of Accounting Divisions and to the Permanent Secretaries.

Various agencies of Government are also given a stream of constant reminders on the importance of monthly reconciliations and accounting heads are regularly advised of the importance of actually understanding the audit process and addressing the audit issues. This is important because it is how we actually engrained a financial accountability culture.

The Report further highlights the needs for Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to be developed for the operation of all trust funds, accounts administered by the various Ministries and Departments. The development of these SOPs, Sir, are pre-requisites to the opening up of trust accounts, hence this issue has been adequately addressed by the various Ministries.

Accounting personnel of the various agencies have regularly attended to specific trainings facilitated by the Ministry of Economy. These trainings have actually focused on the range of issues such as payments and receipts, procurements, salaries and Financial Management Information System. The objective of this particular training is to familiarise staff with the processes to ensure that Ministries can work independently while complying with all the financial regulations, Sir. Any changes to finance and tax regulations are actually communicated through finance circulars and accounting heads' meetings organised by the Ministry of Economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Government has taken significant steps to eliminate fraud across government. Of course, these grants are reported to authorities where their rights are under the Fijian Constitution, Sir. The Permanent Secretaries have the authority to appoint, remove and institute disciplinary action against any of their Ministry's staff with the agreement of their respective Ministers.

Thus the staff that are implicated in any fraud cases in their respective agencies are liable for termination by their respective Permanent Secretaries but also taking proactive steps to stop fraud before it happens, Sir. Duties in accounting departments are separated, duties are actually regularly rotated to minimise the risk of fraud occurring in ministries and the various agencies have developed and implemented tailor-made finance manuals, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was an issue raised regarding the Mahogany Trust. With regards to the Mahogany Trust as raised by the Honourable Qionibaravi and raised in the Report, the Office of the Prime Minister has addressed the issues relating to reconciliation, SOPs, et cetera, to ensure proper accountability and management of the particular Trust, Sir.

Government has also improved the planning and implementation of capital projects administered by the various agencies and Government capital projects are now run through the Construction and Implementation Unit in the Ministry of Economy to ensure that the highest standards that are set are constantly met. The Ministries have also worked closely in collaboration with the implementation agencies to ensure that projects are carried within the set timelines on budget and required standards.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in light of the climate-driven cyclones that have struck us with such frightening frequency, we have ingrained the principle of 'building back better' in the implementation of capital projects to ensure that we deliver resilient infrastructure to the Fijian people. That is the only way that we can actually emerged stronger from these storms which have struck us and by adapting through the enforcement of climate resilient standards.

Most of the issues raised, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for 2016 audit have been adequately addressed and government will continue to work on improving our service to ensure the nation has an efficient engine of service delivery and that will see Fijians through the present accounting crisis on to our recovery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also wanted to raised certain issues that were raised outside the ambit of the Report, Sir, which obviously need addressing. This is addressed to the Honourable Anare Jale regarding the issues he raised in the morning, on some of the issues raised in the Report and this needs to be clarified.

Over the course of the last five years, the Honourable Attorney-General time and time again has actually informed the House on the reforms that we have undertaken in modernising the Fijian Civil Service.

What we have seen here today on that side of the House, Sir, is a massive amount of Civil Service bashing that is going on and, Sir, to put it into perspective, we would absolutely not have achieved the near decade of consecutive economic growth with unqualified people, Sir. We would not have done that with unqualified people, Sir, as Honourable Jale and the others might have us believe, Sir.

In reality, and what I can gather from what they are saying now, is the Opposition saying that our civil servants are unqualified? Are they saying that they are incompetent? It is a shame on them, Sir. This is the very Civil Service that has carried us to where we have been pre-COVID-19 for almost 10 years, Sir, and 10 years of straight growth.

In fact, the unqualified people that they are actually talking about, Sir, are probably the remnants of what is left over from when they were in Government. Mr. Speaker, Sir, everything has to be put in perspective. Honourable Professor Prasad was actually talking about wastage and he stood up, interjected and actually tried to qualify his statement again by saying that it is his calculation. But let me tell him something, Sir, his calculation is his calculation, he has no substantive factual basis for it, nothing at all.

But what has happened now, is that he is actually going out in this space and letting the public know that there has been so much wastage. Honourable Gavoka turned around and used his figures. Honourable Tuisawau actually did the same thing. We see what happens, Sir, it is actually false. You need to come to this House and be very factual.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what he is actually saying to counter that, what I am saying is that, if there was a kind of wastage that he is talking about, would we have had that positive economic growth? No, we would not, Sir. He is talking about losing \$700 million, \$800 million, 15 percent, 50 percent, one day it is 15 percent. Where does he get these figures from, I honestly do not know. Those comments are not to be believed, but the gullible believed it. Thank you, Sir. If we did not, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have this young, efficient and modern Government machinery, and I say that again, it is a young, efficient and modern Government machinery, we would not have been able to achieve this particular goal.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, what is really important for us to note is that despite these very extraordinary difficult times, when there is no income from tourism, we still manage to avoid any cuts to the salaries and wages of civil servants, despite Honourable Professor Prasad's protestations.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. F.S. KOYA.- I will say it outside, I have no fear. Despite their protestations and despite the believers from that side who believe that maybe we should cut the wages of the civil servants.

That is what they are inferring. Today has been civil service bashing day from that side of the House. No one in the civil

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Point of order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Minister is misrepresenting some of the statements we made in what he is saying. In particular, he said that we are bashing the civil servants, we are running them down. Of course not, we are referring to the Report and why human resources need to be rectified as explained in the Report. He is saying a different thing. Thank you.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am flabbergasted at how they actually interpret things. This is the reality - no one in the civil service today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is paid less than \$10,000. We have actually raised the minimum income tax threshold from \$8000 to \$30,000, which technically means, no one earning below \$30,000 is paying taxes, yet we still manage to grow in 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under this FijiFirst Government, led by the Honourable Prime Minister, civil servants have received the highest pay increases over the years from 2006 until to date. In 2006, the civil servants wage bill was around \$630 million. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are now paying around \$1 billion, which is about 60 percent increase in wages and salaries.

Might I add, Sir, that these salaries were not willy-nilly increases but they are based on merit, and that is what this Government lives by. At that particular point in time, Sir, civil servants were paid a lot lower than what the private sector used to pay. Today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the civil servants pay is comparative and in line with what the private sector pays, Sir. That is how we attracted good people in the civil service.

Mr Speaker, Sir, by saying that there is no job evaluation exercise in no way means that no reforms were undertaken. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have done much more than that and much more than any other government and this is the fact. These are the cold hard facts that they should learn from.

The Fijian Civil Service underwent a massive job evaluation exercise. Through this exercise the new civil service salary bands were developed and benchmarked against the private sector as I just said. This led to salary increases for 28,000 civil servants, including our wage earners. Under this Government, we now have around 37,000 civil servants. All civil service recruitments are now done in accordance with the OMRS System as I mentioned earlier which was developed might I add, in consultation with the World Bank, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

All recruitments are now done on merit as opposed to what they were doing before where it was whom you know practice. The OMRS Guidelines aim to ensure that entry into the civil service at all levels is open with selection based on the requirements of the job and an applicant's knowledge and I must repeat this, Sir. This was spelt out very succinctly and clearly by Honourable Usamate on the requirements of the job and the applicant's knowledge, their experience, their skills and their abilities relative to the job, Sir. We do not just choose them willy-nilly.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, insofar as training goes we have moved on from the old training manuals based on General Orders to a modern Learning and Development Guideline which was approved in 2017. This Guideline has strengthened our processes for learning and capacity-building for all civil servants. As part of the capacity-building under the Learning and Development Guidelines, the skills that were referred to by Honourable Jale is actually redundant.

What we need is a modern civil service, Sir, that is on par with the private sector and has the capabilities to provide service to all Fijians. These skills in civil service are being assessed and nurtured through a comprehensive Whole of Government Induction Programme. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is in line with the Fijian Government's commitment to open, merit and inclusiveness. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Member was actually once a part of the civil service. Why did he not suggest all of these actions then?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, regarding the wastage issue that was raised by Honourable Professor Prasad. I wonder what he is actually trying to do, Sir. Is it fear-mongering? Is it? Is it really fear-mongering? Is he trying to scare Fijians without any iota of evidence to say that there is a significant wastage within the Ministries and Departments?

The culture of wastage is something of the past but we as a Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, have strengthened, we have fortified our processes significantly especially finances, to ensure that wastage of resources does not take place. There are various measures that we have taken, Honourable Prasad which we can provide to you out of this particular session. I have no problem at all.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our reforms are actually working. Of course, there will be some issues but in his own words, the OAG will come up naturally and have some issues that may come up, it is only natural, he said it himself. I am disappointed, Sir, that we have actually gone off the rails with respect to the actual Report, from what is in the actual Report, I would like to comment now on some of the issues that were raised earlier and undertaken specifically with respect to the recommendation.

The Ministry of Economy also in providing advisory support to ministries and departments, again with respect to reconciliations, we have been advocating electronic funds transfer as a mode of payment and currently about 90 percent of all payments across the Government is undertaken through online, reducing a significant chunk of unrepresented cheques at the end of the financial year.

Again, Sir, also on 8th of December, 2016, Cabinet had approved the adoption and implementation of a National Asset Management Framework across the whole of Government, which focuses on recording and management of assets and trainings and assistance have been undertaken with the support of our development partners, the Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility and Asian Development Bank. All Ministries and Departments now are required to maintain an updated asset register.

We also have within the Ministry of Economy, a Budget Division which also reviews the acquittals provided for grants and to ensure that they are utilised efficiently and effectively. Any redeployment or virement of funds are undertaken within the proper legislative framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to finish off here by saying that the Permanent Secretary of each agency have to ensure also with respect to procurement of goods and services, that they are in line with the Procurement Regulations and other financial guidelines. Just in short Sir, I hope that clarifies all the misinformation that was passed on this morning. I thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister Koya for his contribution to the debate and I now call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts for his Right of Reply. You have the floor, Sir.

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my Right of Reply, I would like to clarify some of the things that have been said in this Parliament since this morning with regards to this particular audit report that is

before us.

The first thing that I would like to start off with is that there were 36 financial statements that were part of this particular report, for whole of government. Out of the 36, I do not know how many times Opposition Members actually mentioned that there were 13 qualified reports. Not one of them mentioned the fact that there were 23 unqualified reports. None of them! They just do not want to appreciate the fact that the government of the day, the ministries are actually working to ensure that they do actually give unqualified reports.

Honourable Aseri Radrodro, this morning, noted that most of the comments in this particular report that is before us are dated back to 2016. We have the 2017 and 2018 report before us which the Committee is currently scrutinising and a majority of issues raised in this report, I would say at least 80 to 90 percent, do not appear in either of the 2017 or 2018 audit reports. That means, the Committee's recommendations are taken seriously by the government ministries and agencies.

The independence of the Public Accounts Committee is always questioned. The Chairperson is always questioned. Our decisions are always questioned. If the independence of the PAC Committee was not there, we would not have actually come up with such a comprehensive report.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- The Ministers actually acknowledged the work of Public Accounts Committee under my leadership. If we were biased, we would not have actually come out so openly stating what the issues are.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Unfortunately, members from the Opposition side cannot just appreciate what others do. It is a political gimmick for them, it is a political points-scoring time, they gain air time and they can actually stand up and say whatever they want to.

For ministries and government agencies, it is the Chief Executive Officers or Permanent Secretaries who are actually responsible for the day-to-day operations. At Public Accounts Committee, we do not hold Ministers responsible - it is the Permanent Secretaries who actually appear before the Committee to provide a response because anything that is mentioned in the audit report has to do with operations.

One needs to understand that, it is not the Ministers. Ministers are policy makers, civil servants are the ones who actually implement the policies. The whole Ministry's responsibility actually lies on the Permanent Secretaries.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Those kind of statements should be coming with facts and figures. You cannot just be standing here and just saying those kind of things in the Parliament.

If you have evidence, please go and report. There is FICAC, there is the Public Service Commission - if you have an issue, go and report to them with facts and figures, why can you not do

that? Because there is none. That is actually brings me to Honourable Nawaikula, he is not here. Live in Parliament and ran away because he knew this was coming.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 2018 the Auditor-General's Report, Ministry of Education, \$18 million that he was talking about, there is no evidence of abuse or mismanagement of that \$18 million. I will read out actually what the reports says. The Ministry paid a total of \$18.522 million to a company during the financial year ended 31st July, 2018.

Then they went on to actually put a recommendation to ensure that an agreement is drawn between the Ministry and the company for the facilitation of transport assistance scheme for school students through electronic ticketing wherein this report is saying that the money was abused, where it says in this particular report that there was a scam. He then went on to accuse the Honourable Minister of four appointments without any files. There is no evidence of that. The Honourable Member, stood up in Parliament, live, and he actually call Ministers corrupt and racists.

Honourable Nawaikula should actually face the Privileges Committee by saying that Honourable Ministers are racists, based on no evidence. This should not go on in this particular Chamber, we should not actually tolerate or condone those kind of behaviour in the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Opposition Members need to actually understand how Public Accounts Committee work. I stated this earlier in the Chamber as well we are not like any other Committee. There is a different procedure that we actually follow in Public Accounts Committee. I again urge members to please come and seek an audience in the Public Accounts Committee and learn what is happening in Public Accounts Committee.

I am very sorry to say that the Honourable Ro Kepa who is a member of my Committee and knows what is going in the Committee but still stand up in Parliament and talks about the Annual Report. And then the Honourable Member, asked her colleague to justify that I do not know my work, I do not know about my report and the Honourable Member is right. When the evidence is very much there that she was actually speaking from the Annual Report. I am sorry, Madam, you people have decided to bring this kind of thing to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order.

HON. RO T.V. KEP A.- Mr. Speaker, this particular report that the Honourable Member is pointing to Volumes 1 to 4, under Volume 3 which is social services, Ministry of Education - that particular report that is in here is based on the 2016-2017 Ministry of Education Report, which I was quoting from. So these figures that are here are based on the 2016-2017 Report. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, going further on to Provincial Council Report, I sincerely hoped that Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi had actually did not bring this up but she did. I need to response to this.

The Honourable Member is still stuck with 2006. The Honourable Member known well that the issue with Provincial Council does not end in 2006, it is there since independence, ever since independence the Provincial Councils have not been...

HON. SPEAKER.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- My Point of Order, Sir, is the statement he just made that the backlog has been there since 1970s. No one said that, I did not say that it is misleading, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- I am clarifying.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, he did not say that. He only referred it from 2006 but he said that this is being going on since, it was that. He did not say that you said that, I heard that. You have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the problem they do not listen. The problem has been ongoing ever since independence. This is nothing new, this is not an issue of 2006. She was the CEO since 2000 to 2006.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- A Point of Order, Sir. I am trying to know where the Honourable Maharaj get his information from that the backlog has been there since independence. You are lying to the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor, Honourable Maharaj.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not saying that there is a backlog since 1970s.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- You have said that.

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- I am saying there has been a delay ever since our independence of Provincial Council actually handling their financial statements for audit. That is what I am saying. It is not since 1999, 2000 or 2015. It has been the case all along and we need to ratify the system. We have actually provided reports on Volume 1, 2, 3 and everywhere our recommendation is the same, we need to improve the system of Provincial Councils.

We cannot just actually stand up and just say that it has been happening since 2006. When the system was not fixed from 2000 until 2006, how could it have been fixed from 2006 to 2008; in two years' time?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I am just amazing of what we are hearing today. All I was trying to say in my presentation that there was a plan to ensure that all the backlog are completed by 2008. If the coup did not happen, it would have all been taken care of.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- Raising the voice in this Parliament, Sir, will not change the fact that it took five years to come up with this policy that everything would be alright in two years' time. I do not think so.

A lot has been said about the OMRS. We believe the OMRS system is working and is working perfectly fine. I have a typical example that I would like to give. The appointment of Honourable Gavoka was done on the OMRS system. He applied on merit, he got the position of the Leader of the SODELPA Party but maybe, because of nepotism and favouritism, someone else is sitting as the Opposition Leader. Simple clarification.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is an example. Mr. Speaker, it was also uttered in this Chamber this afternoon about the revenue, that the revenue is going down. No one talked about the nine to ten years of consecutive growth in the economy. No one is saying that the revenue is going down because of COVID-19.

People have actually set their mind to just blame the Government of the day for what is actually happening in Fiji. It is not just Fiji. Every country on this planet is suffering at the moment but people have set their mind to blame the Government of the day and that is it and they do not want to see beyond that.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- You should have told that to Opposition Members when they were actually asking this thing.

(Laughter)

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- I am just giving the Right of Reply to what was actually uttered this morning.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Members, one thing for sure nothing is perfect. There is always flaws in the system. That is why we need the Public Accounts Committee to oversee this; to learn from the mistakes, to recommend for the agencies to take it on board and to improve on this and the system continues.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, it might only be in Fiji that a Committee Report signed by the Members that actually standing in this chambers and speak about the same report which they have actually signed in a bipartisan approach.

Only in Fiji, this might be happening. It is a Committee report that is presented. As Committee members, we are supposed to stand and talk on behalf of that particular report that we are presenting to the Parliament.

(Honourable Members interject)

We get all the time to actually scrutinise the report that comes before the Committee.

HON. RO F.TUISAWAU.- Where does it say in the Standing Order?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is a bipartisan approach. Please learn the system, learn how it is done. We cannot be going against our own report. We cannot be standing up and saying words that we have not agreed to.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- This is Parliament.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Yes, I know this is Parliament. You people should learn that first, that this is Parliament. Anyway, Sir, thank you very much for your time.

(Honourable Members interject)

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, time moves on but we have work to do and we will continue.

I call on the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to move his motion.

REVIEW REPORT - DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATURE 2014-2015 ANNUAL REPORT

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

That Parliament debates the Review of the Department of Legislature Annual Report 2014-2015 which was tabled on 15th May, 2019.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights to speak to his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to thank my colleague, Honourable Bulitavu for seconding the motion. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I take this opportunity, as the member moving the motion, to make my contribution on the Committee's Report on the Review of the Department of Legislature Annual Report 2014-2015, as a way of a brief background.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Department of Legislature is the administrative arm of Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. It is responsible for providing administrative and supporting services, including administering funds entitlement for parliamentary purposes.

During the reported period, the Department of the Legislature had a challenging task of reinstating a Parliament back in September 2014. Despite this, the department overcame numerous obstacles to provide the best effective and efficient secretariat support to the newly elected members of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Department of Legislature Annual Report 2014-2015 was referred to the Justice Law and Human Rights Committee during the last term of Parliament and then reinstated in this new Parliament and referred to the current Standing Committee on Justice Law and Human Rights.

The Committee deliberated on the Annual Report and review findings by the previous Committee and noted a few pertinent matters which was then discussed with the Department

representatives. Some of these pertinent matters include the department's position on the number of staff and whether the current number was sufficient to handle the workload.

This query came about since the Committee acknowledged a notable achievement by the Department for the year 2014-2015 and also noted that there was substantial increase in duties carried out and to be carried out by the department. The work of certain units such as the Assets Management Unit specifically with regards to fit-out and refurbishment of the Parliament precincts and how vital aspects of infrastructure refurbishment had been missed out, such as having the person that was disability friendly.

The role of certain unit and how it contributes to the work of Parliament and the Committees. Certain administrative processes which directly impact the work of all Members of Parliament, such as selection process of those who attend training and trips from Parliament and the Department. The work of certain Units within the Department specifically with regards to statistics pertaining to this Unit which are directly related to the business of Parliament and its Committees and certain financial anomalies such as lack of specifics in reporting of the operating expense which were incurred in 2015. My Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir, reviewed the discussion between the previous Committee and the representatives of the Department and noted tremendous progress achieved by the Department.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to briefly go through some of these. To begin with, Mr. Speaker, Sir, at the time of tabling the report, the Department had been undergoing institutional monitoring and review of the progress achieved since the reported period which was 2014 and 2015. The Committee commended the work carried out by the Department and appreciate the candour of the representatives in highlighting that there are still rooms for improvement.

The Committee noted the discussion on the work carried out with regards to the infrastructure refurbishment of Parliament precincts and the plans for future infrastructural development. It was also noted that there were certain considerations to be made when it comes to the Government Building Complex. These considerations includes heritage issues and implication, technical and engineering issues and also financial implication of such infrastructural development.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee noted the discussion on the financial anomalies which were identified from the Annual Report and noted that these anomalies were the results of the type of allocation of funds that was given to the Department. The allocation was through only one segment, thus, all necessary reporting had to be in line with and recorded on that segment.

The Committee also noted the deliberation on the principles of gender equality and it was encouraging to note the endeavours by the Department in trying to ensure that the principle of gender equality is captured in every activity carried out at Parliament. These efforts are realised in the Department's human resource policies that incorporate gender equality principles.

At the conclusion of the review, my Committee acknowledges the progress that the Department has achieved and the plans put in place for future endeavours. It also believes that it would be prudent to make few recommendations to assist the Department in its way forward, which the Committee believes will also contribute to the improvement of the Department. These recommendations include:

- (1) That efforts should be made in ensuring the timely submission of annual reports.
- (2) That there should be closer collaboration between the Media and Civic Education Unit and the Parliamentary Committees.

- (3) That there be upgrading of equipment that will assist the Department and Members of Parliament in carrying out its function, the key focus areas are the Hansard Unit, IT Unit and equipment for the Parliament Committee Secretariat and support staff.
- (4) That there be development upskilling of existing staff and also recruitment of additional qualified staff.
- (5) That there should be clear guidelines and policies in place with respect to the administrative processes that impact parliamentary work such as Committees, overseas trips, training and welfare. This policy should be guided on the principles of promoting the parliamentary work.
- (6) That there be proper consideration of the needs of a person with a disability when looking into the infrastructural development of the Parliament precincts.

With those few remarks, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity in making this contribution towards the debate. *Vinaka*.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Chairperson. The floor is open for debate and I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Prasad. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Before I provide my contribution to the Report, I just wanted to correct Honourable Maharaj because I think it is important that we do that. I know he got very excited and said that the Ministers are not responsible, but under the Constitution if we read Section 127(8) which clearly says that the Permanent Secretary will do (a), (b) and (c) which means, determine the terms and conditions of employment, qualification requirement, obviously based on merit, salaries, benefits, allowances payable in accordance with its budget as approved by Parliament, total establishment, et cetera.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, in case he does not know, the Public Accounts Committee Chairman should know that ultimately if the Auditor-General talks about any issues with respect to employment, allowances, salaries, benefits of employees, it is with the agreement of the Minister, not in consultation. So the Ministers ultimately would be responsible, so I just wanted to correct him on that and hope that when the Public Accounts Committee needs to summon a Minister to appear before the Committee, they would do so.

While, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Chairman and Members of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights for their recommendations on the Department of Legislature's 2014 and 2015 Annual Report, I wish to point out the absence of a key recommendation based on the findings of the Office of the Auditor-General while examining the financial statements for 2014 and 2015. This is clearly stated in the annual report of the Department of Legislature and that finding was in the Auditor-General's opinion that it was misleading to put all funds given to the Department of Legislature or Parliament under just operating grants and transfers, and the OAG is absolutely correct, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let us just turn back and look at these things in a common sense way. In the year ended, 31st December, 2015, Parliament spent \$7.6 million but Parliament has not told us how it spent the money. Normally you will see a breakdown of how the money is spent, for example, in wages, travel, maintenance, operations, et cetera but not in 2015. All the expenditure is shown on one line. Operating grants and transfers – there is no explanation for this. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, you were not in the Chair at that time. The Auditor-General has commented on this and this is what the OAG has said, and I quote:

“The Office (Parliament) did not provide any grant to other agencies and the grant was used for the operating expenses of Parliament. The operating expenses incurred were not recorded into respective SEGs 1 to 13 and hence provides misleading information to the users of the special purpose statements.”

So, Mr. Speaker, this is where we are. Parliament itself has been criticised by the Auditor-General for misleading financial statements. Parliament itself will not tell the people how it spent \$7.6 million of taxpayers money, so the question naturally, Mr. Speaker, is what is going on here? How do we explain that?

On one hand we have political parties, you know we are required to break down and report the raising and use of every single cent that political parties collect, on the other hand the people’s Parliament, who belong to the political parties are not told how money is allocated for each activity and segment of Parliament’s financial requirements.

I want to suggest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason, I think this is very important that we say this, what happened in 2015. It is because that is the year in 2015, we got a new Parliament elected in 2014 and in 2015, the FijiFirst Party which had the majority changed the formula for how political parties are funded in Parliament. The result of that, Mr. Speaker, is that millions of dollars of taxpayers’ money has gone into the FijiFirst Party’s bank account while small parties like us are starved off money to do our parliamentary work.

Mr. Speaker, less than three months into the resumption of Parliamentary democracy in 2014, the FijiFirst Government through the Attorney-General and Minister responsible for Parliament changed the formula to fund officers of parties in Parliament and I know why it was done. It was done to weaken the Opposition and deny it public funds.

As was the practice, Mr. Speaker, you would know throughout the history of this country, instead of Parliament paying salaries of political party staff everything changed from 1st January, 2015. Instead, Parties would be given a grant of \$10,000 for every Parliamentarian they had. This was later increased to \$15,000. We disagreed with this, raised our strong objections and even tried for Parliament to make public a letter by way of a question, the then Speaker disallowed it on the grounds of it being confidential, because we were told by the Secretary-General at that time, that the instruction came from the Minister for Parliament.

Imagine Mr. Speaker, Sir, we could not ask a question about how the people’s representatives are funded in Parliament, and of course, we have seen the continuation of that many ridiculous ways in which questions have been ruled for us. All NFP has received since 2015 is \$45,000 per annum to pay our staff based on \$15,000 per MP. We do not even have an office as a party in Parliament. It is the generosity of our SODELPA colleagues that we have a cubicle in the Opposition office where we huddle; three MPs and staff members to work when Parliament is on. From 2015 until the 2018 elections, FijiFirst Party received \$480,000 per year because it had 32 MPs, naturally, you multiply that by \$15,000. Since 2018, FijiFirst gets \$405,000 for 27 MPs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 23 of those 27 MPs, as we know, are either Cabinet Ministers or Assistant Ministers. They have their own offices and staff, so what does the FijiFirst Party do with that amount of money, the millions of Parliamentary money that they have received? We can do the math, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from January 2015 to 30th September, 2018, FijiFirst would have received \$1.5 million in Parliamentary grants. Since the November elections, they would have received more than \$1.1 million, so more than \$2.6 million in taxpayers’ money has been paid to the FijiFirst Party even while the taxpayers paid 23 of their MPs to sit in the taxpayer-funded ministerial offices.

This formula, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point I am making by giving these figures is that this formula was deliberately designed to fill the pockets of the governing party while crushing the Opposition and no wonder FijiFirst has millions in its bank account.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- It is not just rich businessmen and FijiFirst cronies, but it is the poor taxpayers of this country which are also filling the pockets of the FijiFirst Party because of this change in formula.

While we have to make our parliamentary operations work with \$45,000, and as I said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you are aware in the previous Parliament, no matter how many Members you had, you had fixed minimum resources given to political parties. Over and above that, it was based on the number of members they had.

But, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we can do our work with \$45,000 because we have a fantastic, dedicated support team who work hard for us for little or no pay. But imagine what we could do if we had proper funding? It is that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that these guys are worried about and they do not want to imagine that if we had the proper parliamentary resources, what sort of accountability or what sort of hold we are going to have on them with respect to accountability and transparency.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us turn to what else happened in 2015. This is important because we are talking about the Legislature. The current leader of the Opposition was suspended by Parliament for two years, again, a first for our parliamentary democracy since 1972. Then the NFP's President was suspended and then the SODELPA Whip.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reasons for the suspension in our view, a trivial. In the case of NFP President, it was because she called a Government Minister an ““idiot””; two years suspension. In all three cases the Inter-Parliamentary Union that we are a member of, which is the international body of Parliamentarians recommended that they be re-instated but this was ignored. Yet we are a member of the International Parliamentary Union, yet, we are a member of the International Parliamentary Union. All these entities, of course, Mr. Speaker, were driven by the FijiFirst Party.

Mr. Speaker, the 2015 culture has led to all the changes in the Parliament that we see today, the sooner the FijiFirst gets out of its own rules, it just goes to change the rules. I will give you an example, in 2015: it was easy for petitions to go to Standing Committees but the petitions actually embarrassed the Government.

In 2017 the rules of presentation of petitions were changed, 40 percent of Parliamentarians had to support petitions going to the relevant Standing Committee. Why? Because at that time the Opposition was less than 40 percent of Parliament. Now, Mr. Speaker, petitions are rejected under new strange rules of interpretation.

In 2015, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition (and we had this earlier), was chairing the Public Accounts Committee and, of course, that Standing Order which required the Opposition to be the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, got changed and Government is now chairing that.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for us to understand that the FijiFirst Party used its vote to manipulate Parliamentary procedures till this day. It is interesting to read Page 8 of the Annual Report and the so-called organisational structure of Parliament. It has a research team and a protocol

team and an Inter Parliamentary Relations team, and so on. But, Mr. Speaker, nowhere does our Parliament have independent lawyers to advise it.

We keep hearing, for example, that our questions are disallowed because of the so-called separation of powers. I mean, that is really got to be the biggest irony, Mr. Speaker, because the Attorney-General's Office is part of the Executive branch of Government, advising the Legislative branch.

We have to understand that the Executive comes out of Parliament. The Prime Minister and the Ministers are selected from the Honourable Members of Parliament. They become Members of Parliament first, Mr. Speaker, before they become the Executive. The Executive runs on the Commission of the Parliament and it is accountable to the Parliament under the doctrine of the Ministerial responsibility.

This is why I keep saying that the Parliament is a supreme oversight institution, and that is why it is very important, Mr. Speaker, that we have an independent Parliamentary Council so that you, Mr. Speaker, as an independent arbiter of this Parliament, get the best advice from an Independent Parliamentary Council because that would mean a proper separation of powers, as I said, otherwise the Executive is not separated from Parliament which it is accountable to. Those actions ought to be reported and understood by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, what I want to say is that, we need an Independent Parliamentary Council. In this Parliament, we are supposed to scrutinise annual reports, the Auditor-General's reports. I think the Parliament should set an example on the way in which we present our Financial Reports and the way in which we adhere to the separation of powers.

In a Westminster system, the Executive is responsible to Parliament, responsible to you, Mr. Speaker, to the way in which the Parliament will hold the Executive to account.

It is very important, Mr. Speaker, for us as a Parliament to relook at all these processes and procedures so that we set the example as the people's Parliament. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. M.D. BULITAVU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is not always easy to scrutinise Parliament given that Parliament is our employer, given that when it appears, we know each other, those that are submitting and also the Honourable Members.

I wish to quickly address the issues that was raised by the Honourable Leader for National Federation Party (NFP). I think it is all recorded in the Verbatim Report of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights (JLHR) when the Committee had its public hearing on Wednesday, 6th June, 2018, and let me read that, and I quote:

“The Chairperson of the Committee had asked the Parliament Office in its Special Purpose Financial Statements recorded Total Expenses incurred in 2015 amounting to \$7.612 million as Operating Grant and transferred under SEG 6. The Office did not provide any grant to other agencies and funds were used for the operating expenses of the Parliament Office. The operating expenses incurred were not recorded in the respective SEGs 1-13 and hence provides misleading information to the users of the Special Purpose Financial Statements. What is the explanation on that?”

On the other side of the page, the Manager Finance of Legislature, Ms. Miriama Vereivalu, had answered that as follows:

“Thank you, Sir. When the Department prepared the Annual Financial Statement for 2015, it was reflected under one allocation, SEG 6. The money was given through SEG 6 so all the payment through the Financial Management Information System was reflected only in one allocation. So the figures that are reflected in the 2016 Annual Financial Statement is extracted straight from the FMIS under SEG 6 but then we revised because we maintained the manual ledger so what we did, we were maintaining a manual expenditure statement on a monthly basis so when we revised the figures, we had to distribute it from SEGs 1-13.”

And that was the current practice and I think the Manager Finance had clarified that issue, and also assured the Committee that that would not happen again.

I was listening today to the previous Report debate, Sir, and I did not contribute but I was thinking in terms of what improvements can be done. First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the current mandate that the Committee is doing around the country and also the success of the live Parliamentary coverage, especially the virtual mode taking Parliamentary hearing sessions, public consultations to villagers and also rural communities.

You can see the amount of reach online of viewers and also it has changed the attendance of people. We, for many years, are facing challenges in terms of putting out advertisements in the papers and also online but people do not come.

When we had gone on line I think people are more aware and also participate in some of the sessions that you have watched and see the interest of people, especially in the law-making process giving their opinions and views to the Committee that the Committee will elaborate before submitting those reports back to Parliament.

Back to the issue, Sir, probably a recommendation for the future, especially for the Standing Orders Committee given the mandate to Committees are specified in the Standing Orders. For the Public Accounts Committee like we have heard, they have the mandate to scrutinise public money.

After the recommendations have been made, given the debate is only focussed to note the recommendation and when the Government accepts those recommendation and says that they will work on that to improve or give a proper reflection, they probably put out the other improvements in our Standing Orders in terms of how Committees can keep track on the implementation of the recommendations that the Committees are making. That will lessen the debates and also when we are not on the same page.

Sir, the other improvements that can be made is the Annual Reports in the next year to help the Committees. When the Annual Report comes in, they have to also put forth how they have addressed the recommendation that was put forward by the Committee and whether some were rejected and the grounds for why some of the messages were taken progressively to address some of the recommendations that had been addressed or have been raised by the Committee. Those are a few things, Sir, that probably could help our Committees.

Again, there is another Department of Legislature Report 2016-2017 which is with the Committee. What the previous Speaker has talked about, it is now being addressed in that Report in terms of independent legal advice and also the space, with due respect, Sir, given the assurance by the former Secretary-General that it is a subject of discussion between the Legislature and the

Judiciary, given the Parliament precincts and the space, and we leave it at that. I just want to bring that to your attention and that we will see as it comes when we come to that Report. But basically, Sir, that is our view on this.

There is significant improvement in terms of Legislature given from 2015 right to 2021 now, and also the introduction of SDGs audit into account. Also we are looking into how laws are made through SDG lenses and the role of the Committee to see how those targets are met: these are some of the improvements.

The equipment, as I have said, we are more equipped now in terms of technology as well as our technicians who are more equipped and skilled. We thank our Secretariat too, they are getting used to the various report writing and various information that the Honourable Members would enquire, especially during deliberation stages.

I would also like to thank UNDP for their Parliament Support Project for coming on board in terms of partnering with our Parliament on funding in terms of effectiveness and efficiency of our Committees, in carrying out their duties as mandated by you, Sir. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Committee for the Report and I note that this is the Report from 2014-2015. I was not there then but I must say that I have been quite impressed with the growth that has happened within the Parliament and the way that the Parliament holds itself with professionalism and the support that we are given as Parliamentarians.

I would like to thank the former late Speaker and also the former Secretary-General for the way that they have carried through with the work done during that time. I note the recommendations that are here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to touch a bit on the things that I have seen and I would just like to bring to the fore, especially for those that may be listening tonight and may not be aware of.

But it is nice to see the collaboration that has happened, especially with the development partners such as UNDP, the trainings that have happened over the years and the way that growth has happened, not only with the Parliamentarians and the support that we knew Parliamentarians have received, but also the growth that has happened with working with the Parliamentary staff and the way that they have been able to support us.

The growth that has happened in the ICT services and also with the social media platforms that are now available. We are all aware that recently, as of last year, we went and see the commissioning of the IT Units that are there and also the fact that it is in keeping in contemporary with what the media formats are being used now.

Also the workings of the Committee, many at times I would pop into the Honourable Assistant Minister's Office and he would be on a zoom Meeting in this new normal Committee Meeting in one of the Committees of Parliament. So, I have seen that there has been significant growth since 2014-2015. It would be interesting to see that being brought to the fore in the next 2016-2017 Reports but I would like to make my contribution by saying that I have been impressed with the way that Parliament has supported us as Parliamentarians, and also the work that the Parliamentary staff have been doing and the growth that has happened, not only with the support given through the government appropriation but also with development partners. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Firstly, I would like to commend the work of the former Secretary-General, Viniana Namosimalua, and the late Speaker, Dr. Luveni, for their massive efforts to re-establish the Department's eight years after the 2006 *coup*, and putting in the structure to be able to provide the necessary support for Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was part of the new parliamentarians then and I remembered the work that was done by the people at that time. For most of us, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there was the opportunity to travel to other Parliaments with the support from the other development partners around the world. Some of our people went to the House of Commons in the UK to see how they do it. I went with a group, with Honourable Viam Pillay and others to Toronto, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, others went to New Zealand and Australia, so it was a great time to learn the ropes so to speak, and to also see how other systems could be adopted in Fiji.

The support from the people who came here, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was quite significant and for us, it was like a brave new world and it was one of those very interesting times. We learnt a lot, Mr. Speaker, Sir. But some of the disappointments was that a lot of what was normal or ordinary in other Parliaments and in Fiji in the past, were indeed missing from this Parliament.

My colleague Honourable Professor Prasad has spoken about the Parliamentary Counsel. That used to be a part of the Fiji Parliament in the past according to the people I have spoken with, and it was also the standard in other Parliaments that we visited. I say this Mr. Speaker, Sir, because whatever we bring to Parliament is from the people. Whatever we bring to Parliament must come into Parliament.

I remember in 2015, I was part of a team that drafted some private Bills and it was for the repeal of the Surfing Act at that time, and my colleague Honourable Kiliraki was trying to repeal the Mahogany Decree. It went through the first reading and went through the second reading, but at the second reading someone from the other side pointed out that the Bill did not have a short title - it became flawed and that was the end of that Bill.

You can imagine our disappointment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, especially after the work we had done to get the support of the people to sign and agree that we could take this to Parliament on their behalf. The sad part of it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was that if there had been a Parliamentary Counsel whom we could have consulted prior to bringing it to Parliament, they would have said that we need to have a short title. It could have been corrected to make it come into Parliament.

There is also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the cases here with our petitions. We go around gathering petitions, signatures from all over the communities, sometimes a thousand signatories, sometimes five, and then when it comes here, it is flawed and it gets rejected. Our motions from the people - most of them do not make it to Parliament because of certain technical issues.

But as I said, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what we bring here are from the people, and this is their House, they want their voices to be heard. This is what we call representative democracy. We represent them. We should make every effort that what they bring from outside must be heard in these Chambers, Mr. Speaker. That is why I agreed totally with Honourable Professor Prasad that we must bring back the Parliamentary Counsel.

Mr. Speaker, also as parliamentarians, I have brought this up once in this Parliament that we need an integrity commissioner to help us parliamentarians. We are very vulnerable people. Today, Mr. Speaker, if it is checked with the Fiji Intelligence Unit (FIU), there are people on the watch list,

the people who are most likely to be corrupted, to be involved in money laundering or in other illegal transactions. The parliamentarians are top in the watch list. This is from the FIU.

My colleagues in the Economic Affairs Unit will testify to this because every year we speak with the FIU as part of their annual report and this is what they say. You are at the top of the watch list of people we watch and Mr. Speaker, in this complex world, we need to go through a commissioner who can advise us on what we should do if we are not sure.

I met this commissioner in New Brunswick in Canada, a retired judge and everyone went to him - parliamentarians, government ministers and senior civil servants. If they were not sure about anything, about their personal affairs, they went to see this person. I believe, Mr. Speaker, we need it in Fiji. If Canada, a very highly-sophisticated country has an Integrity Commissioner, Fiji should have its own, Mr. Speaker, and I believe they have it in Australia too.

Mr. Speaker, it is also sad that the Standing Orders should be cast in stone. They should not be changed in the way Standing Orders in Fiji have been changed over the years. I was quoting an example yesterday about the PAC which was originally chaired by the Opposition and it was changed by the FijiFirst. They decided that they could not take the heat that was coming from the Chair of the Committee and they decided to change the Standing Orders. I asked people in the previous parliaments and they said no, Standing Orders are sacrosanct. You do not change Standing Orders unless only in extreme cases, so these are issues that we need to respect and for the integrity of this Parliament, let us keep the Standing Orders intact and do not play with them.

Mr. Speaker, my fear is that if we do not look after our parliaments, if we compromise the standards of this Parliament, our people will lose interest. I know people in the past, in the first Parliament, a sitting of Parliament would have an audience on television - that was unequal in any other time. It was the event of the week for people. Today, that has changed. Today, television only covers sittings up to midday. It used to go whole day in the past, Mr. Speaker, and I believe it is because of the lack of interest now from the people and that worries me.

We had 90,000 people who did not vote in 2014. It had increased to 171,000 in 2018. Yes, the weather was inclement. There were a few other factors but my fear is that people are also now saying it is pointless and it is not what they expected. That, Mr. Speaker, I believe is something that we really should be on the lookout for - we should not compromise the standards, we should be fair, the government with their numbers in this Parliament, should not behave in a tyrannical manner. I think the way they changed the Standing Orders in 2014, 2015 and 2016 was quite sad. They were drunk with power because they had 32 seats in Parliament and whatever they wanted to do, they did it, but not realising that it was affecting the people on how they view their Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me just close by sharing the sentiments expressed by Honourable Professor Prasad about the grants to the parties. That is very true - when we go to other countries and indeed in the past here in Fiji, people had constituency allowances for Parliamentarians. We do not have that anymore.

With SODELPA, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with that \$15,000, we used to set aside a sum which we used for advocacy for our people to go out and connect with the people in the constituencies and bring back what they wanted into Parliament. Now, there is a ruling saying that we cannot do that anymore and we just hope Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we could look at that. I know that it came from a resolution that was a decision that was made last year but I was just asked Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we can revisit that and allow us to use the grants as it deems fit in the way we did it in the past.

Because Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Honourable Prasad was saying, we are only getting a grant of \$315,000 a year but FijiFirst is getting a lot, lot more and we do not know what they do with their funds but I think if we can relook at that and allow us to use the funds to run Parliaments, we have done it properly well in the past but the elements of it as we deemed fit.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is my contribution and I thank the Committee for their reports and my plea to the House and to Government as to make this Parliament relevant to our people and ensure that they become part of the process because it is the people's House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee had two members from the Opposition; Honourable Ratu Suliano Matanitobua and Honourable Mosese Bulitavu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the two political parties had every opportunity to raise or make presentations or attend the committee meetings or send written submissions through their rep to the Committee so that it is captured in this report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the recommendations there on page 8, there are six recommendations. I am one of those members from this side who have been here since 2014 and I want to share our experience with regards to that six recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with recommendation 1, I believe that there is some delay that needs to be fast-tracked. I believe that given the improvements on other aspects that this will be fast tracked.

On the issue of collaboration of Media, Civic Education Unit and Parliament Committees, some of the members have said that there is a vast improvement in this area.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen how Hansard reports are being submitted to us on a timely manner. Whenever we have a sitting, at least during the night, we get a soft copy of the Hansard report. This was not happening in 2014 or early 2015.

From the Committees, we have noted that staff skill sets have improved substantially and significantly. Of course it does not happen without good leadership in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we do note from our backbenchers about how the welfare of Members of Parliament have been looked after by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the last one, I note that Parliament is very much in compliance with how we could ensure that it is accessible to people with special needs. This is the boundary of discussion that should happen. We cannot be having Committees to go and get submissions, spend time and money and resources, and the same members then come again and talk about other matters outside the boundary of their recommendations.

I do hope that they understand otherwise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, you would probably know but I do not know exactly the year, the Committee was not there. There were debates in Parliament in those days where they want to establish this Committee, whether it is a waste of Government resources. At that particular point in time, it was decided that there is a need to have a thorough submission, the need to open up submissions to the public and it cannot be done in Parliament, therefore there is a need to establish Committees. It will save Parliamentary time but more so, allow

us to get good feedback from people outside, explore opinions, analysis to be done so that when it comes to Parliament and then we digest the recommendations.

I do hope that the Honourable Members from the other side understand why we have Committees, thank you. *Vinaka*.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I just like to make a short contribution to the debate that we are having at the moment. First of all, let me say that I completely agree with the sentiments that was echoed earlier on by the Leader of the National Federation Party, Honourable Professor Prasad and also Honourable Gavoka on some of the challenges that we could possibly change in this Parliament, to make it a House that is more friendly to the people.

Mr. Speaker, like the Honourable Dr. Reddy, I have witnessed how the Parliament has evolved from the very first day back in 2014 and what is it today and I would like to speak about that. A lot has been aired from the side of Government about the capacity building on how Parliament has developed, how it has evolved over time, the involvement of the UNDP, the dedication of this task and everyone that has put their hands into it, to try and make Parliament the institution that we can all be proud of and to be effective in conducting the work that it does.

I would like to acknowledge that. I would like to also note that because of the changes that have occurred, one of the most significant change that has occurred to this Parliament is the Standing Orders and that was mentioned earlier by the Honourable Gavoka. Of course, the financing particularly the Opposition side of the House, we have a small Party and the current arrangement does not necessarily served well the interest of those that we do represent. Mr. Speaker, how it works within and how the Members of Parliament were resourced a little bit more, to be able to help the very people that they represented. So those are some of the things perhaps, changed for the worse, in my view.

I would like to perhaps, concentrate today, Mr. Speaker, on a more recent issue that I would like to bring to your attention and the attention of the House and that is the difficulty that we encounter as the Opposition to bring to the floor of Parliament the very issues that people that voted for us, want us to present to the House. Because of the impediments, as we call it and the perceptions that we have, with regards to how Parliament deals with the matters that we present to it.

Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with this because we had raised it with you in the last Business Committee and this is particularly to the work of Tables in the House. The group within the House that helps you with the decision that you would make with regards to matters that are brought to the Committee.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that not many Members of the House understand how the process of the Business Committee works. Let alone the people outside understand what we do, because many questions are asked, what has happened to this issue? Why have this not reach Parliament? Why had we not talked about this because this is such an important matter? But of course, there are rules to be followed. These rules many of them never really existed back in 2014 the report of which that we are discussing today.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to refer you again with one of the notes that we had from the last Business Committee, particularly in one of the motions that was rejected on the part of the NFP

whereby the responsibility of Tables now according to their note is that, they have a vetting responsibility.

In this report of the Committee that is before the House, this was not included as part of their responsibilities back then. It was a much more open forum, a much more flexibility to the issue that we could bring into the House for discussion.

At the moment, there seems to be a perception of a greater restriction through the Standing Orders and of course, we are constrained more in the way that we can bring matters to the House, in terms of how the people expect us to raise these issues through the House itself.

One of our biggest concerns, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in your capacity as a chair of the Business Committee is the difficulties that we have in the Opposition, to be able to understand the consistency of the decisions that were made that are being made against the issues that we want to raise.

Sir, some of things as we have noted this to you earlier. It was agreed before and now it does not because of certain reasons. So, there is no consistency in that regard, which means that we do not know what we bring to the floor of the Business Committee and what we have in the Table, whether it is going to be accepted or not even though it has been accepted before.

I know that you already have made a ruling last Friday with regards to matters that have been tabled or that we have presented to Tables but through their recommendations and vetting to you, they have deciding not to put that on the agenda of the next sitting of the House. We have the flexibility in the past where we could still raise it because the Business Committee is the only Committee where we as representatives of the Parties, get to present our issues to you as Speaker and of course, to Tables.

Now, in the past when matters were caused to be sidelined they are not been put in the agenda we had the flexibility of raising it again in the Committee. Now we do not have that because the ruling that you have made.

Now, I just want to implore on your office again particularly as we dealing with Parliament, Parliament of the people. We are not as we are, that there are things we do that may not be worded correctly. Like what Honourable Gavoka said, there was no short title to a Bill and it got thrown out, in some very technical matters.

It also reinforces the point. We believe there should be an independent Legal Counsel to the Office of the Speaker, to have a look at this. I had a lot of respect for the Secretary-General and all the staff but the independent office in our view, will give us greater confidence in order that our issues have been heard correctly and independently that we will be able to raise it with you and then you would have considered our matters appropriately. Even if you decided that it should not be in the Agenda, at least then we would understand that it has been considered well. So, my contribution perhaps at the end is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is we would like to ask for some consistency with regards to rulings that are made.

When we went to the Victoria Parliament last year, I think the whips. I came back and then I recommended to the House that perhaps and let the business committee that there should be a handbook a booklet of all the decisions that were reached by the Office of the Speaker with regards to Point of Orders and other decisions that were made because when the precedence is created, we would rely on that when we prepare our submissions for the next sitting of Parliament. So, I would like to strongly recommend that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be able to assist Parliament particularly your

office in the way that it deals with the matters that are required not only the Opposition but of course, the Government as well.

On that note, I would like to implore the Office of the Speaker and wish to reconsider that decision. Of course, it has been made using one of the favourite words of table, it has evolved, do evolved things do change because of need and the need now and I respectfully submit to your office to please reconsider the fact that and where there are issues and questions about matters submitted to Parliament by the Opposition and have been rejected and have been omitted from the Agenda of the Business Committee that we should be given the flexibility to be able to raise it with you again. And if the Opposition remains then so be it remains but not to be disregarded completely just because Tables has vetted it for the Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa. You have the floor.

HON. RO T.V. KEPA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Committee Chairperson and the Members of this Committee for this report that has come before the House which is the first such report from this Parliament in this building, after the remodelling to becoming Parliamentary chambers once again.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I go into my very brief presentation. Can I just make a comment to the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we are criticising the report, we are not making a personal criticism of him but what is contained in the report. What he has to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is just to learn to relax. When we have virtual meetings, we miss him, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but when we have the face to face meetings particularly in the compiling of the reports, we look forward to that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, I would just like to tell him just relax, Honourable Maharaj. Just relax and chill. Sometimes, you chill very nicely.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, going back to my brief presentation. We appreciate very much coming back to Parliament, we appreciate very much the work of the previous late Speaker, Dr. Jiko Luveni for serving us well from 2014 to 2018. I also would like at this point to thank the former Secretary-General, Ms. Viniana Namosimalua for setting a high standard in her Parliament is conducted from the beginning when we sat here in 2014 and I wish her the best in her retirement.

Going through the list, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to thank the Honourable Speaker, yourself, Sir, Acting Secretary-General where seamlessly you have come in to take up the position of Mr. Speaker, Sir, I know that this is not a new position for you and so having Acting Secretary-General and the Manager Tables and Committee, this reflects positively on the quality of the skills training that have been provided.

This skills training is used to re-educate and retrain the workers and the staff whenever new technology, processes or systems debut. We saw this during the COVID-19 pandemic. We had to have virtual meetings, and how good our ICT people were, it was clear when we had a virtual meeting at 2 a.m. Fiji time of the IPU Annual Parliamentary hearing on 18th February, this year. Although are few of the 44 Parliaments represented at that meeting could not make the connection. At the two early morning meetings, we were able to wait patiently for them because we were connected and I thank the ICT staff for that, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to thank the Parliament staff for the way they look after us, especially during COVID-19 pandemic, where they made things seem very normal. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are very grateful to the Fiji Parliament support staff, support project 1 and 2 in providing support to the Fiji Parliament to become a more effective and efficient

Parliament, and I support what has been articulated well from our side of the House on this particular Report. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Ro Teimumu Kepa. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Before I commence with my contribution towards the motion on Parliament, just to clarify something that Honourable Tuisawau and Honourable Nawaikula had raised, with your permission, Sir, with respect to the Human Rights Commission, this is for purposes of their information. The Director at the Human Rights Commission had made a commitment to the Public Accounts Committee, with respect to providing the necessary accounts.

I am told, Sir, the Commission had actually concurred with the Auditor-General that the financials must be audited within two months from the conclusion of each financial year. However, this is only possible if all institutional audits are current. In case of the Commission, Sir, they said remained pending for eight years, it was part of the report due to the absence of senior management and Board, and now inherited by the current management which has been able to expedite the audit process and deliver the financials for an independent audit by OAG in 18 months. That is being clarified. The Commission under the leadership of the Director was able to expedite this particular process and submitted its financials for an audit by OAG in 2019. It is just for the purpose of clarification.

I want to thank the Standing Committee for this particular review and subsequent findings and recommendations. May I also take this opportunity, Sir, to commend you, the former Secretary-General and the current Acting Secretary -General and also the late Speaker, Dr. Jiko Luveni, Sir, on the steady hand of leadership that has overseen the actual improvements with respect of the Department of Legislature since the reinstatement of Parliament in 2014. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Department has consistently provided a high level of support to the newly elected Members of Parliament so they can actually focus on the duty that they owe to the people and make constructive contributions in this august House.

The Department of Legislature has actually vastly improved its human resource services despite most staff being recent additions to the Legislature back in 2014. Within the last six years, the Department has actually implemented a system for institutional monitoring and has reviewed its progress towards what an ideal Legislature staff should be, through opportunities for professional training and workshops and the Department staff are actually improving themselves and by extension the services they offer to the Members of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the Members of Parliament can agree on anything, we can all recognise that Parliament has come a long way and it is a continually modernising facility, with an IT capacity also that is backed by reliable support by the staff of the Legislature. There are ways that it can keep improving, Sir, the Standing Committee in its report highlighted that there is lack of appropriate policies and guidelines to administrative processes that impact appropriate policies and guidelines to administrative processes that impact parliamentary work such as Committees, overseas trips and training and welfare. We should always be guided by the principle of promoting the work of Parliament. This has been adequately addressed by the Department of Legislature through the development of appropriate administrative guidelines to guide Parliamentary Committees' work.

The Department has actually introduced procedures also covering administrative services such as the selection process of those who attend trainings and trips from Parliament and the Department and these procedures have been implemented with the goal of ensuring equal opportunity

for all, Sir. In the long run, these particular services, Sir, will benefit the Department and the Parliament as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Report also highlighted the need for a Civic Education and Media Unit to work closely with Parliamentary Committees. This is actually crucial as the Unit is responsible for public awareness on the work on Parliament and ensuring high visibility of its work. The Committees are currently working in close collaboration with the Civic Education and Media Unit. The Unit is achieving its objective of bringing visibility to parliamentary work and the broadcast of course of live Parliamentary Committee meetings in the television stations and parliamentary *Facebook* page and website.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Parliament Committees are not only confined to the precincts of Parliament but have actually visited communities and raised awareness on their roles as Parliamentary Committee Members and to also obtain public views on certain reports, Bills and issues of national interest and I think we all see that, Sir. The general public also through social media platforms are able to actually provide comments on the reports and deliberations of live Parliamentary Committee Meetings and their comments are noted and taken into consideration by parliamentary staff.

Also, Sir, to ensure that the general public are actually aware of parliamentary proceedings, a Parliamentary Broadcast Studio was established through the assistance of UNDP and the studio broadcasts Parliament sessions through the *Walesi* platform which has wide coverage around the country. I can also very proudly say that no other Government has actually ensured that Fijians have such access to the proceedings of Parliament and this has been made possible in large parts, thanks to the massive investments this Government has made in extending the reach of telecommunications even to the most remote parts of the country. It is that level of opportunity for participation that makes this a truly national proceeding and this is why I always say, Sir, the people of Fiji are watching and we need to be mindful of what we are actually saying in this House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee further recommended that proper consideration be given to the needs of persons with disabilities. With regards to development and accessibility to the parliamentary precinct, the Department of Legislature has actually invested in the installation of disability ramps within the premises to promote accessibility to wheelchair users, designated parking spaces for people with those special needs also being allocated in the parking area.

In addition, an MOU was also signed with the Fiji Association of the Deaf which has ensured the engagement of sign language interpreters in Parliament session broadcast and listeners with hearing disabilities are able to follow all parliamentary proceedings through social media, website and television broadcast. As a responsible institution, Sir, the Department of Legislature upholds the principle of gender equality and this is evident by the diverse backgrounds of senior management and the human resources arena though as we all know the work must continue within this Department and throughout the whole of Fijian society.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to commend the work of the Department of Legislature in ensuring excellent service delivery to the Members of Parliament and I also thank the Standing Committee on thoroughly scrutinising their annual report and providing valid recommendations to be considered in Parliament. The specific recommendations that were actually mentioned, I will just briefly go through some of them, Sir, the efforts made with respect to the timely submission of annual reports, the delays in those submissions of annual reports were largely due to the delay in the consolidation of Parliament data specifically for Parliament sittings, the Standing Committees proceedings, civic engagement data and SDG-related data. Additionally over the years, the Department has identified the need to build up on its data for comparative analysis so as to measure the impact of its outputs and activities.

The Department has actually pursued with establishing a statistical framework which has actually been envisaged to assist greatly in the finalisation of all the remaining pending annual reports and it is also further envisaged that through this framework, the Department will complete the pending reports in the coming months.

Also with respect to data collection, Sir, the Department has implemented a collection strategy where all its output and activity data are being centralised with a Monitoring Evaluation and Compliance Unit for analysis and reporting. This will ensure that data is readily available, Sir.

The second issue that was raised was closer collaboration between Media and Civic Education Unit and Parliamentary Committees. I have mentioned that already, Sir, with respect to the third one.

With respect to the upgrading of all equipment that will assist the Department and Members of Parliament in carrying out its function. The Department has continuously upgraded its IT support for MPs since 2015 and this has been done through various activities, Sir.

Also, Sir, one of the key initiatives undertaken by the Department in 2020 was the upgrade of Parliamentary Broadcasting System as I mentioned to hybrid broadcasting system which allowed the Department to not only broadcast live Parliament and Committee sittings but also live stream these proceedings on its website and social media platforms expanding the reach and engagement of the Fijian Parliament and its Committees, Sir.

Earlier this year also, we secured a two-year licence for Microsoft Office 365. It is actually a cloud-based online system to enhance its ICT capabilities in terms of information accessibility and information security through improved communication for MPs and their stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other one was also regarding, one of the issues raised was the development and upskilling of existing staff in order to enhance the Secretariat capabilities in supporting MPs also to carrying out legislative and oversight functions, including skills to ensure that SDG goals development issues and gender are mainstreamed across Parliament's work.

The Department has actually facilitated 33 overseas work attachments and 26 overseas trainings, seminars and 161 local trainings between 2016 and 2020. It is a phenomenal amount of training, Sir. The overseas trainings again, we are more focussed on technical competencies and Parliamentary research whereas local trainings focussed on general competencies such as communications, policies and management.

The last one that was raised was that should be a clear guidelines in place with respect to administrative processes that impact Parliamentary work and that I had actually mentioned earlier, the Department has actually continued to improve its processes, so far has reviewed 17 of its existing 31 policies and implemented 12 new policies and in addition, the Department has actually adopted best practises and principles from the Fiji Business Excellence Awards Framework (FBEA) and took advantage of quality tools such as Quality Circles, Green Initiative practises and 5s principles to actually improve its processes and reduce cost and achieve key outcomes on climate change.

With the last one, there was also, I have actually already mentioned that regarding the disability issue. Just lastly, Sir, on a small note, Honourable Professor Biman Prasad actually mentioned about the disparity in the funds that were received by political parties, so he chooses to take a swipe at FijiFirst but he forgets that FijiFirst has a larger number, that is why they actually received more funds. It is quite simple, if we have 26, they have 24, it is not about us. He did not for a second turn around and said, "Well, it is not just FijiFirst, they received 21." Sir, 21 is their number. They actually get that, but no Sir, he seems to think that there are some skulduggery going

on, something sinister behind the scene. It is not Sir, it is just the way it is and might I just say this before I sit down on a lighter note that the old original NFP filled up that side of the House with far little money than what they receive right now. Thank you very much Sir, we endorse the Report, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his contribution to the debate. I now give the floor to the Chairperson of this Standing Committee for his Right of Reply. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, through you, Honourable Ro Kupa, I do take note of what you actually stated, thank you very much for the advice, nevertheless, before Honourable Professor Prasad gave the response from this particular Report, he actually did some clarification reading from the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to clarify that my statement was very clear. The operational matters of any Ministry is the responsibility of the Permanent Secretary. He does not have to go on through the Constitution, reading the clause and trying to tell me that I am wrong, it was very simple. The operational matters are dealt with by Permanent Secretaries and they are the ones that are responsible for doing so.

Mr. Speaker, in my right of reply, we noted that there is a change in leadership. I would like to highlight some of the current plans and strategies under the new leadership. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I humbly advise that the Department is continuing with the efforts of perceiving the vision that was laid down, and at the same time, the Department is now continuing to identify existing gaps and also explore other areas that can successfully help us in this journey.

The Department has recently implemented a data collection strategy where all its output and activity data are being centralised with the monitoring, evaluation and compliance unit for analysis and reporting. This process will ensure that data is readily available and accessible for our reporting requirements. Since the outbreak of the pandemic in Fiji, the Department has migrated civic education outreach programme to its online platform, and this can be seen through the live streaming of Parliament sittings and Committee public hearings on the social media platform.

Not only this makes Parliament open, transparent and accessible, the strategy allowed the Department to increase its online presence and proactively raise interest and awareness on Parliament and its Committees as it considers draft laws and review conventions and annual reports. Hearing directly from the public enables the Committee to gather impact analysis, lessons and opportunity for improvement from key stakeholders such as CSOs, academic institution experts, communities and other members of the public.

There is an ongoing consultation with recognised ICT suppliers for the upgrade of Parliament broadcasting equipment, upgrade of Hansard recording software and hardware to ensure accurate record of proceedings in Parliament. To enhance the Secretariat's capabilities in supporting Members of Parliament carry out their legislative and oversight functions, including skills to ensure that the sustainable development goals are mainstream across Parliament work, the Department is currently participating in its specialised Parliamentary virtual training, organised by the Inter Parliamentary Union, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, United Nations Development Programme and other remote training organised by the twinning Parliament.

In line with the Fijian Government's efforts to enhance the public service delivery, the Department has aligned to the best practice and principles of the Fiji Business Excellence Award, and the quality framework of the Fiji National University (FNU). These initiatives are targetted at improving the service delivery of the Secretariat.

Lastly, the Department is negotiating a contract with an overseas company for the repair and the maintenance of the Parliament elevator to assist accessibility for the disabled. Once finalised, the contract ensures that the elevator undergoes consistent maintenance and repair is undertaken on a timely basis in case of any damage.

With these words, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the former Secretary-General and the late Speaker, Dr. Jiko Luveni, for their contribution towards Fijian Parliament. Thank you and *vinaka vakalevu*.

HON. SPEAKER- I thank the Honourable Chairperson for his right of reply.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have the last segment of our work for today and we will move straight into that.

QUESTIONS

Oral Questions

Disposal of Amputated Limbs (Question No. 56/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament how and where body parts, especially amputated limbs from patients at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital, are disposed of?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for that question. The body parts are incinerated in the incinerator.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary question; Does the Honourable Minister deny that body parts had been dumped at the Naboro Landfill?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, I just said that the body parts are incinerated. I do not know what that question is about. I have never ever said before that body parts have been put anywhere else. You can bring it to the floor of Parliament. That supplementary question has obviously left blind side.

Mr. Speaker, when the boiler services, the incinerator and that whole building on the West Wing burned down, the incinerator was also damaged. As I had alluded to in the reply that I gave yesterday, there was asbestos that was all cleared out hygienically and from Korovou all the way to Navua, the incinerator in CWM was to be used. During that period, we then put in incinerators at Korovou and Navua and we have also used the incinerator in Lautoka Hospital to an extent.

That incinerator was so important because as you are unaware, we had the isolation facility in Navua. So, because of COVID requirement, we had to make sure that isolation facilities had their own incineration so that we are able to use it for the body parts.

We have made arrangements in procuring another incinerator, especially for the CWM Hospital. We have had the Ministry of Environment work with us on that. We have been told that there are some issues, maybe around the smoke, so we are doing an environmental evaluation on that.

We have also had development partners' support that have come to us, looking at ways of incineration, maybe at the CWM Hospital or at another location that may be different.

Some of the things that are being discussed are obviously also with the use of microwave as a mechanism, instead of just open-fire incineration.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move on.

Economic Benefits- First Home Ownership Grant Assistance
(Question No. 57/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on the economic benefits generated through the increased First Home Ownership Grant Assistance announced in the 2020-2021 Budget?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

The Ministry of Housing and Community Development was set up in 2018 to be a separate Ministry so that it can achieve the Government's vision of increasing home ownership across the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the First Home Ownership Initiative was introduced in 2014 with an aim of providing affordable and quality housing to all Fijians in low and middle income category. Since the inception of the First Home Ownership Programme, the Ministry has assisted a total of 2,978 Fijian households with the total pay-out in excess of \$28.6 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry is continuing with its Home Ownership Programme through the First Home Purchase and First Land Purchase and providing interest rates subsidy to assist Fijians to purchase or construct their first home. There is a good news - this Programme is going to continue in the next financial year and it will benefit a number of Fijians and to realise their dream of owning their first home.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government made a huge commitment by increasing the grant amount for construction from \$15,000 to \$30,000 in this financial year for those with an annual household income of \$50,000 and below. The assistance for Purchase of First Home for this category was also increased from \$10,000 to \$15,000.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those earning above \$50,000 annually were granted \$20,000 to build their first home and \$5,000 to buy their first home. This bold decision was made by the Government to encourage more Fijians to invest in their first home construction, as this would contribute towards

greater economic activities in the construction and financial sectors of the economy, considering the current challenging economic conditions as a result of COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to inform that a total of 334 families have been assisted under this Programme so far. A total of 184 families received the grant to construct their first home, 110 families received the grant to purchase their first home and 40 families received the grant to purchase their first land. The total pay-out is over \$5 million. What is more important is the level of economic activity this particular Programme has created.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the assistance provided under this Programme helped Fijians to borrow from financial institutions in access of \$42 million. It simply means that we gave \$5 million but they borrowed \$42 million and by borrowing \$42 million from the various financial institutions, it definitely creates opportunities for economic activities. It simply means more employment in the construction sector and the related supply chain, such as building materials, et cetera. This, in turn, circulates money in the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to note that the real benefit to the economy from this Programme is almost eight-fold, compared to the investment made. The funding allocated for the First Home Grant Assistance Programme for the current financial year has been fully utilised, however, the demand for the grant has been overwhelming. The Ministry has received a further 152 applications and this will require just over \$3 million to service those applications.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, those additional applicants have had their loans already approved to a sum of \$20 million. Given the overall positive impact of this Programme on the Fijian economy, the good news is that, the Honourable Minister for Economy will be redirecting additional funds to support those applicants who will be supported within this financial year. The Honourable Minister for Economy has assured this to the Fijian public during his online budget consultation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am very pleased with this particular Programme. It is not only helping Fijians to build and own a home, but it is also contributing to our financial sector, as well as our construction industry and the supply chain. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on. Is there a supplementary question or are you wishing to take the floor on your question?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I would like to ask the Honourable Minister as to how many families have benefited, particularly in villages under this Scheme, given that the land in the villages are communally-owned and people would find it difficult to get a loan? Thank you.

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is very important for us to understand that there is no one-size fits all solution in the housing sector and the reason being, people come from different socioeconomic backgrounds. They live on different types of land titles, for example, freehold, State land, *iTaukei* land. Again, under the iTLTB land, there are various other categories, like *vakavanua* arrangement, then they have just a tenancy at will lease agreement, et cetera. So in that situation, we have different programmes for different situations.

This particular Programme is meant for people who can take loan. Here, anyone who wants to buy or build, they must take loan because this money is going to act as a deposit to borrow. For the rural and maritime areas, there are other programmes that we have, but we cannot extend this programme to the rural and maritime areas because of the land ownership style or what you call the

title. There is no clear-cut title so we cannot apply this because when someone applies for this loan, they have to go through the financial institution.

But if it is their first land, again, the applications can come from the Housing Authority and from the Lands Department, it can also come from iTLTB, but the whole idea is that we need to protect this investment.

If you cannot have a title on that land and it is not under your name, then we cannot pour this money or give you a grant, knowing that it is not really your investment. Just imagine, if we give this grant to someone who has tenancy at will and they make a house, then what happens if they are evicted? That investment is lost. So it is for this reason that we have different programmes for different purposes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Regarding this, you mentioned about the loans of \$14 million and \$20 million. My understanding is, because this housing loan normally takes 15 years to 20 years or more and the contract of a civil servant is only for three years to five years, what does the Ministry do so that it can bridge that gap for approval by the financial institutions?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- I thank the Honourable Member for his supplementary question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I fail to understand why he is picking on civil servants. Similarly, in the private sector, people are on contract, how do they own a house? How do they buy their land? It is the same thinking that should apply to civil servants. Again, being on a contract does not mean that your contract ends every three years, it is also based on your performance, whether you are in a private sector environment or you are in a public sector environment. Thank you.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a quick question to the Honourable Minister.

HON. SPEAKER.- I only normally give two supplementary questions, but I will give it this time. You have the floor.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In response to the Budget discussions last year in 2020, the Honourable Attorney-General in this House specifically mentioned that those who live in the village, who have native title would be entitled to this loan and that through their *mataqali*, they could apply for this.

Can the Honourable Minister confirm here that this is not the case with what she is stating today? Is that what she is saying contrary that 44 percent of the people who live in rural areas cannot access this home loan now because of the communal title, because the Honourable Attorney-General said otherwise last year? Thank you.

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Again, as I have said, it is an investment made using taxpayers' money and we had to be sure that the person owns the land and the bank is willing to give the loan and the application comes through the financial institution. I am also making

it clear that the name must be on the title. That is the criteria for this particular Programme. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Alternative Arrangements - Closure of Technical Colleges
(Question No. 58/2021)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts update Parliament on the alternative arrangements to support students affected by the closure of the technical colleges?

HON. R.S. AKBAR (Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In response to the question from Honourable Qionibaravi, the Ministry currently offers vocational programmes at 35 secondary schools across Fiji and these programmes include; Certificate I and II Level Courses in Automotive Engineering, Carpentry and Joinery, Fashion and Design, Hospitality Operations, Office Technology, Vocational Agriculture, Welding and Marine Studies.

The list of schools currently offering vocational education - TVET Programme, I have a whole list here. In the Eastern Division, they are:

- (1) Adi Moapa Secondary School;
- (2) Kadavu Provincial Secondary School;
- (3) Richmond Methodist High School;
- (4) Rotuma High School;
- (5) Vunisea Secondary School; and
- (6) Yasayasa Moala College.

In the Central Division, we have:

- (1) Ballantine Memorial School;
- (2) Lomaivuna Secondary School;
- (3) Lomary Secondary School;
- (4) Naitasiri Secondary School;
- (5) Namosi Secondary School;
- (6) Navuso Methodist High School;
- (7) Ratu Kadavulevu School;
- (8) Ratu Latianara Secondary School;
- (9) Waidina Secondary School;
- (10) Wainimakutu Secondary School; and
- (11) Wainimala Secondary School.

In the Western Division, we have vocational studies at:

- (1) Ba Methodist High School;
- (2) Ba Provincial Free Bird Institute;
- (3) Drasa Secondary School;
- (4) Kamil Muslim College;
- (5) Nakauvadra High School;
- (6) Navosa Central College;
- (7) Ra High School;
- (8) Ratu Navula College;

- (9) Tavua College;
- (10) Veilomani Rehabilitation and Vocational College;
- (11) Yasawa High School; and
- (12) Votualevu College.

There are five schools in the Northern Division:

- (1) Bucalevu Secondary School;
- (2) Dreketi High School;
- (3) Nasavusavu Secondary School;
- (4) Saqani High School; and
- (5) Seaqaqa Central College.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you.

HON. T. WAQANIKA.- A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. T. WAQANNIKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for what you have stated, Honourable Minister. My question to you is, these Technical Colleges and the courses they offer, are they accredited because last year there was an article in the *Fiji Times* of 16th November, 2020, where the Honourable Attorney-General stated that some of these schools had to close because the qualification of the teachers was not right?

In a *Fiji Sun* article on 27th January, 2021, it indicated that the Fiji National University (FNU) said there was a low number of applications. So my question is, do you have the right people and are the courses accredited in line with what is overseas, therefore, drawing the students to the courses? I understand last year, I mean, in this year's financial budget alone, FNU was given a budget of \$49 million. Obviously it would have gone to operating expenses and also some would have gone to those vocational schools. Thank you.

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

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Technical College of Fiji was established in terms of the Cabinet Decision of 1502. In January 2015, Cabinet approved the establishment of 13 campuses and in 2019, again, with the Cabinet decision, the Technical Colleges were transferred to FNU. The whole idea was to improve on the quality of the courses and, of course, to give our technical students more exposure to the courses that were offered by FNU.

When these colleges were transferred to FNU, they realised that the student numbers were really low. In the year 2020, if I can just go through that, the University enrolled a total of 198 new students and no new enrolments were made in Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 of the 2020 academic year. So in order to utilise taxpayers' funding and to, sort of, avoid wastages that we are looking at, FNU decided to take an independent review.

Based on the review, a decision was made to close the Technical Colleges because the Ministry had in 2019, transferred the assets, liabilities, campuses, students and staff to FNU. When these staff left the Ministry of Education, they entered into new terms of contract with FNU so the Ministry of Education actually had nothing to do with the staff when they were laid off by FNU.

The FNU is run by a Council under the leadership of the Chancellor and a Vice-Chancellor.

However, what we have done, those staff who have been, sort of, laid off by FNU are slowly being absorbed by the Ministry of Education - those who have required teacher qualifications. We are doing that as and when a vacancy arises, so those staff who joined FNU are now slowly being absorbed within the Ministry of Education as and when a vacancy arises.

In terms of the courses being accredited, those 33 schools that are still offering and run under the FNU courses for Certificate 1 and Certificate II. When they complete Certificate II in the secondary education, they are absorbed by FNU to move on to Level 3 courses, et cetera. So FNU is yet to come to us with a proposal as to how the review is going to be impacted into them offering more TVET courses to those students who actually want to attend university from now on.

Until then for the time being, while they are re-looking at the restructure of the FNU Campuses, the Campuses belong to FNU now and some Campuses need maintenance and because of the low level in enrolment this year, it was not a wise decision to keep it in operation. Hopefully, in the near year or so, FNU will realign their courses with what we are offering and more and more students will be given the opportunity to join FNU in the TVET programmes.

While we are discussing Technical College of Fiji here, Honourable Kepa, I think I heard you correctly when you were saying that the Technical Colleges were a pathway for those students who actually dropped out of schools. I disagree, we cannot, sort of, make Technical Colleges just for dropouts. Every student should be given the opportunity to follow the pathway. By making Technical Colleges, sort of, second class institutions, we are not promoting students to take up technical - engineers, automobile, et cetera. The Trade Certificate courses allow these graduates to enter the job market and if you look at the industry needs of Fiji right now, we need this. So let us not say that Technical Colleges are only for dropouts.

Students coming out now from FNU with FNU accredited courses which is going to allow them to enter any job market in the region, here or overseas, so quality education for those students who actually want to enter TVET is what we were thinking of when we decided to close the Colleges.

There were some talks about not having enough funding. I met up with the FNU Chancellor and the new Vice-Chancellor, and funding was never an issue. They are trying to see how best, with the available resources, they can upgrade the qualification for those students who actually want to be part of University and make a career into TVET education.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Vegnathan, your fourth Oral Question for today. You have the floor.

Effects of COVID-19 - Building Permit Applications & Approvals
(Question No. 59/2021)

HON. G. VEGNATHAN asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament on how the building permit applications and approvals in the Municipalities have been affected during the pandemic?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I also thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during pre-COVID-19, there was a high number of building permit applications received, approved and issued by the Municipal Councils. In 2019, a total of 1,602

building permits were issued with the value of construction works at around \$340 million. Based on 2019 performance, it was expected that the growth in the building and construction sector will continue at the same pace in 2020.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the narrative is different. In 2020, the total number of building permits issued declined to 1,061, with the total value of construction works worth \$237.5 million. This represents a 33 percent decline in the issuance of building permits for 2020, when compared with 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Municipal Councils and developers had to adapt to the new normal with COVID-19, starting to grip the building and construction industry and, indeed, other sectors as well from March last year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in relation to the number of building applications submitted for the period January to June 2020, the total number of building applications received for all three Divisions was 946, of which 805 were approved. Compared to the same period in 2019, the total number of applications received were 908, with 795 approved. From this statistics, it is clear that the first six months of 2020, the Department of Town and Country Planning received more building applications when compared to the first six months of 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reason behind the steady increase in the lodgement of the building application was that, most of the building plans were drawn by the architects/draftsmen during the pre-COVID and lodged at the height of the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the impacts of the pandemic being felt since March 2020, investor confidence in the building and construction industry did not completely plummet. The Fiji Bureau of Statistics indicated that for the first three months of 2020, a total of 408 building permits were issued by Municipal Councils with the value of construction works being \$81.1 million.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the slight decline in the issuance of building permits was expected, given the pandemic's impact on issues, such as bank loan not being approved and constructions being temporarily halted. The shortage of building materials due to delayed shipments ultimately meant incomplete buildings, which also resulted in the non-issuance of the Completion Certificate by the Municipal Councils.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during this period, Municipal Council services were deemed to be essential and all 13 Offices were opened to accept development applications. The use of mediums, such as zoom meetings, emails and telephone allowed Municipal Councils and developers to communicate and resolve issues arising from building applications at that time.

During this pandemic, my Ministry, through the Department of Town and Country Planning, instituted a process in conjunction with the Municipal Councils to fast-track building applications with the value of \$1 million and above. This meant that major building applications received by Municipal Councils were forwarded to the Department of Town and Country Planning within 24 hours and the team at the Ministry liaised with the referral agencies, such as Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), National Fire Authority (NFA), Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and other utility bodies, for comments to allow decisions to be made within five working days. As a result, a total of 24 building applications worth \$167.1 million were approved between September and December 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to complement the fast-track initiative, we have commenced a fortnightly out-of-station processing programme to assist Municipal Councils' staff in processing building

applications that were lodged in their respective jurisdiction. This has greatly reduced the turnaround time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we remain committed to continue these initiatives to support developers who intend to invest, despite the current climate of global uncertainty. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on to the next question, the fifth Oral Question for today.

Legislation to Guide FBDA Members
(Question No. 60/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources inform Parliament whether the Ministry will prepare legislation to guide the work of members of the Fiji Building Designers Association (FBDA)?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for

Currently, the Ministry of Infrastructure oversees activities undertaken by architects and engineers and their activities are governed by the Architect and Engineers Registration Act. Both these legislations specify education experience requirements in order for one to become a registered professional architect and similarly for the engineers.

I have also had the opportunity of meeting with the Fiji Building Designers Association (FBDA). This is the Association of people who are Draftsman, who normally work under an architect. They have done some work on their own towards the development of the methodology where they might be formally registered.

At the moment, these drafts people are only registered by the Association itself, there is no legislative backing to what they are doing. So, in that discussion that we had, because we are currently now working on the review of the Architects Bill and the Registrations Bill, that work is being undertaken in coordination with the Solicitor-General, who also discussed with the FBDA have been willing to work with them to have a look at how they can also be formally registered.

In doing that, the Ministry staff are looking at possible policies to regulate them. And we also looking at learning at what the other countries are doing, to see how Draftsman are regulated in their own countries. So that discussion is currently taking place and we will see where it leads to in terms of the registration of people who currently operate as drafts people.

RFMF Peacekeeping Personnel and COVID-19
(Question No. 61/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management explain how the Republic of Fiji Military Forces personnel within Fiji's contingents to Peacekeeping Missions are coping during the pandemic?

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

thank the Honourable Member for this question.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have about 489 personnel serving in six mission fields located in Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, Lebanon and Israel respectively. Sir, like every other returning citizen, our soldiers serving in Peacekeeping Missions pose a risk of being carriers of the virus and, of course, we need to be careful with the observance of the protocols that are in place to ensure that this does not happen. The fact that no Fijian peacekeeper has contracted the virus in the course of duty is a testament of the strict adherence to the protocols that are in place, of course, the professional conduct of the troops as well, together with the authorities that are in place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when it comes to soldiers deployed, I will come back to the protocols that the RFMF has in consistent with what is being laid out by the Ministry of Health. But in the mission fields, firstly, the organisations themselves whether it is UNDOF, UNSO or MFO Missions, they have their own protocols in place. Of course, that is a key criteria for our troops to ensure that to help in the containment and minimising the spread of the virus in the mission fields that they adhere to the protocols that are in place.

Very briefly, with UN Missions, trainings were conducted in all Missions. With the training package, with materials that was prepared by the United Nations, particularly under the WHO, to educate them on what COVID-19 was and how to identify symptoms, how it was transmitted and how to protect themselves individually and collectively, this was undertaken by the medical experts and professionals through doctors and nurses in the mission fields.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are also host countries that also impose additional restrictions on the troops and they do not have much choice but, of course, to adhere to the national priorities, as well according to the host country's priorities and protocols.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, for that reason, we have seen that there have been instances where troops on deployment have to be extended, not the usual 12 months but now most of the troops who are serving abroad have to be extended for an additional six months. So, in total, they are serving 18 months abroad because of these restrictions and what is being imposed by the host countries. Of course, the UN is also trying to come up with rotational plans in order to accommodate the requirements under the WHO protocols with reference to the pandemic.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to acknowledge the troops for their commitment and, of course, their families particularly, as you very well know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that to be extended in the mission areas is not that easy, particularly in foreign land as such. But our troops have been able to extend for an additional six months because of the COVID-19 protocols that are in place.

The RFMF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have protocols before departure but, of course, based on the question, I will focus more on the returning troops. The protocols that are in place:

- (1) They must provide a negative COVID-19 test 72 hours before boarding the aircraft on the return flight.
- (2) They must be provided with COVID-19 personal protection equipment.
- (3) It is a mandatory 14 days quarantine on arrival at the Ministry of Health managed isolation facility and, of course, prior to being released, they must, again, provide a negative COVID-19 test before they are finally released to get home.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to also acknowledge the Australian Government, particularly for their

assistance, in the transportation of troops to most of these Missions. This arrangement works very well for the Fijians with the strategic lifts by the Australian Government to visit their troops as well, at the same time Fijian troops are also included in those flights and we wish to acknowledge the Australian Government for that kind assistance

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RFMF takes the pandemic threats seriously and, of course, there is also a directive by the Commander whereby any RFMF personnel found to breach that directive and the protocols in place, there will be disciplinary actions, including being discharged from the Force as well. So, I wish to assure this august House of the Government's commitment, particularly the RFMF, to ensure the safety of our troops when they do return to Fiji. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I now give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Matanitobua to ask the seventh Oral Question for today.

Role of NEC – Selection of Workers for Overseas Labour Scheme
(Question No. 62/2021)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations, Youth and Sports inform Parliament on the role of the National Employment Centre (NEC) on the selection of workers for the overseas labour schemes?

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

The National Employment Centre (NEC) was established in 2010. Within NEC, there are three employment services, namely: the Formal Employment Service which caters for those looking for employment and work attachments in the local sector; the Fiji Volunteer Service which looks after the graduates and retirees; and thirdly, the Foreign Employment Service which looks after the Labour Mobility Programme in the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the role of NEC in facilitating Fiji's Labour Mobility Programmes, I sincerely thank the Fijian Government and the Australian Government in strengthening our bilateral relations through the signing of the Vuvale Partnership in April 2019, together with the New Zealand Government's bilateral arrangement in 2015.

The strengthening of our bilateral relations with Australia has enabled more than 500 Fijian workers, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to be mobilised from 25th November, 2020 to this month alone, even when our borders are still closed, to work in the meat industry, agriculture and recently the hospital sector in rural and regional Australia.

In addition, post-COVID-19, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had mobilised a total of 70 returning workers to New Zealand in February 2021, to work in the horticulture and viticulture for the employment period of seven months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the selection of Fijian workers to participate under the Labour Mobility Programme, NEC has been working very closely with all approved employers to meet employer requirement and also ensure that our best workers are selected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me make it very clear that these Labour Mobility Programmes are employer-driven programmes. There are requirements for selection that everyone has to go through,

such as medical fitness and later face to face interviews with the Ministry of Employment. For the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) meat workers, the selection also includes testings for drugs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, all workers must have a clear medical and police clearance to allow for selection. It is very important to note that whoever wants to be considered under the scheme should first take the first step and, that is, to register with the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, allow me to thank the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the team for stepping up to provide free COVID-19 testing for all Fijian workers who are being deployed from March 2021 onwards. This follows the new changes in border requirements and also noting the positive economic contribution that these workers will provide through the remittance back home. This is what you were actually talking about, Honourable Gavoka, yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to-date, we have 684 Fijians under the PLS. There has been deep acknowledgement from approved employers on Fiji's ability to fast turnaround on the selection and deployment of workers, together with the containment of the pandemic in Fiji through its vibrant medical facilities and professional staff.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I take my seat, I wish to reiterate that the Fijian Government will continue to do its best to mobilise Fijians under the PLS and NZ Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE), to ensure that more employment opportunities are available for more Fijians to participate in during these challenging times. I thank you, Mr. Speaker Sir.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Minister has stated or outlined about the Programme with the NEC and specifically, professions or specialities like butchers and meat workers who have gone abroad. My question relates to what the Honourable Minister for Education had stated earlier about the programmes available that might cover for this. What is his Ministry doing with the Ministry of Education about filling the void for our butchers or meat workers and others who are leaving the country? What is their plan to fill the void of locals who are departing to go overseas so that we too can ensure that we have our meat handled properly so that when it is available to the public, it is handled to professional standards? Thank you.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This was the first thing we had discussed when this idea of the PLS came about, as to what will happen if all our meat workers go. We all know, last year was COVID-19, we had to send our people because most who were working with the meat industry were unemployed.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are working very closely with the Fiji Meat Industry and just two weeks ago, we trained 40 Fijians under this Fiji Meat Industry ...

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. P.K. BALA.- Let me finish, *yaar*.

(Laughter)

...so that we do not want to see a time where there is a shortage of meat workers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Is this another supplementary question?

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Yes.

HON. SPEAKER.- You can ask your question.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a question to the Honourable Minister, when it comes to quarantine over there and upon return, could you please explain as to who pays for the quarantine, does that come out of the workers' pay? Thank you.

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

HON. P.K. BALA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Very simple, the employers from Australia and the employers from New Zealand pay for the quarantine charges, not the workers.

HON. SPEAKER.- Are you satisfied with that? We will move on to the eighth Oral Question for today.

Building and Permit Evaluation Committee
(Question No. 63/2021)

HON. J. SIGARARA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport explain as to how effective the Building and Permit Evaluation Committee has been on fast-tracking building permit approvals?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think the Honourable Minister for Employment, Productivity, Industrial Relations and Youth and Sports is attracting the questions from all the females today because he is wearing pink.

(Laughter)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. It is a very important one and allow me to share with this House and everyone else in Fiji about the improvements that the FijiFirst Government has actually done in the realm of doing business, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the construction sector is actually a key contributor to the Fijian economy and this industry not only provides direct employment to a vast range of skilled and unskilled labour, but it is actually linked to many other sectors, such as transport, electrical, finance and even food.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the building and construction sector has continued to maintain consistency. In order to improve this, it is important that certain legislative and regulatory processes are relooked at and improved. As you can see, Sir, two Ministries have actually answered the questions with respect to building permits today.

Now, the establishment of the Building Permits Evaluation Committee is one of the pioneering reforms in the area of building permits. This is actually vital to allow for a fast-tracked and streamlined approvals process for building permits. The Regulation of Building Permits Act 2017 allows for a fast-track approach for applications of permits for commercial and industrial

projects that can be made through what we commonly know now as BPEC, which is the Building Permits Evaluation Committee.

What must be noted, Sir, is that this is actually a parallel approach to the normal process and does not supersede any of the other processes. The BPEC actually has a mandate to process an application within 60 days, as well as the authority to get an approvals agency to provide endorsement, should an application already received the Committee's endorsement.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the first ever Committee that brings together all the approval agencies and technical experts from the private sector, and the Committee is actually chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport, Mr. Shaheen Ali.

What the Committee does effectively, it provides a fast-track process for these particular permits. The application is actually received in a harmonised form which incorporates all the approval agency's requirements. This has been a cause for complaints, there have been repetitive requirements whilst maintaining the agency's specific requirements.

What it essentially means, a person does not actually have to run from one place to another. I think we have all come up against this and it has been a constant cause of concern where people have had to go to 20 different agencies to actually submit the same documents or fill about 20 or 30 different forms. So, basically what we do is, we submit the required documents once, unless there are any specific requirements by a particular agency. The application form for the particular fast-track can be found on bizFiji.com and the application is actually lodged at one single point, that is, at the Doing Business Reform Unit at the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. Whoever is the sub-developer, Sir, does not have to go from one place to another. It is literally a one-stop shop.

At the moment, Sir, the process is, we have to still deal with it manually but that is only because what we have done is, probably in about 24 months' time, COVID actually has delayed it slightly, the entire applications and approvals process will be done online. The digitalisation of the building process is part of the larger Government's digitalisation plan which has already received great positive results. I hope that that actually answers the Honourable Member's question. I thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, that brings to an end the Oral Questions for today.

We move on to Written Questions. There is only one Written Question for today and I call on the Honourable Dr. Ratu Lalabalavu to ask his question. You have the floor, Sir.

Written Question

Update on Provincial Health Infrastructure (Question No. 64/2021)

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament on the following, the:

- (a) full list of nursing stations and their individual coverage area per Province;
- (b) full list of health centres and their individual coverage area per Province; and

(c) full list of subdivisional hospitals and their individual coverage area per Province?

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Health will table his response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3). Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Members, that brings us to the end of today's Sitting. Thank you for your cooperation.

We adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.30.

The Parliament adjourned at 8.22 p.m.