

# PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI



## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

### DAILY HANSARD

**THURSDAY, 3RD JUNE, 2021**

[CORRECTED COPY]

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## Oral Questions

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**THURSDAY, 3RD JUNE, 2021**

The Parliament met at 9.52 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present.

**MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Wednesday, 2nd June, 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**

I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament. Those of you present in person and those who are joining us virtually from across Fiji.

I also welcome all those watching the live broadcast and live streaming of today's proceedings from the comfort of their homes, offices and electronic devices. Thank you for your continued interest in your Parliament.

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

Honourable Members, we will now proceed to the next item on the Order Paper.

**FIJI REVENUE AND CUSTOMS SERVICE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2021**

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

That the –

- (a) Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (Amendment) Bill 2021, be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament tomorrow, Friday, 4th June, 2021 and that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill (as the Members would see when the Bill is currently being distributed) is just seeking an amendment to a particular date to substitute the date at which the Fiji Revenue and Customs Service (FRCS) should give a half-yearly report to Government and that is what it is simply seeking to do. So, it is a very minor amendment but nonetheless important for us in particular in this pandemic time because we need to get all the latest figures from FRCS. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the Mover. Is there anyone wishing to take the floor?

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, a concern from SODELPA is that, even though we are operating at a time like this, we should be careful that we do not rush through Bills. Being introduced today and to be voted on tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, is very concerning to the Party and I believe also my colleagues from NFP.

Mr. Speaker, we know it has to be done but let us not take advantage of the current situation to pass through Bills and we deplore that. We wish that it could be done better; it could be given a few days to discuss this before it is voted upon like the way it is being proposed, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I stand to comment in support of what the Honourable Gavoka said. I think in our previous request in the Business Committee and the Standing Order Amendments Committee meeting Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had requested that such Bills that come through Standing Order be given to us at least three days to five days, to allow us to deliberate.

There is nothing so simple about changing of date because there are implications that will have follow-on effects in terms of changing the date. We note that the Honourable Minister has just mentioned about avoiding the submission of half-yearly report. Now, there is a reason why these reports are needed to be submitted and tabled so that we can know the status of the economy, status of collection of FRCS and these are the implications that will come together with such amendments to the Bill. So, we again reiterate our request that proper timeline, at least give us three days to five days for such important Bills using Standing Order 51, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Nawaikula. You have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. I wish to speak in support of my colleagues who have risen to oppose the tabling of this Bill under Standing Order 51. As a matter of principle, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have been opposing nearly all such motions that come under Standing Order 51.

In this case, it takes a different perspective for some of you who are sitting there and for us who are participating virtually because when I hear the Honourable Attorney-General said, it is simply to change the date. What date? What is the implication of this date? What effect will it have and we do not have the benefit of having those Bills distributed to us, and that exemplifies the need for wider consultation however small the amendment is.

We talk generally of the law making process and we want it to be inclusive. Inclusive meaning we participate in it and the wider community also participate in it, i.e. those who are

listening, those who are listening in, at the very least, would like to know what is the nature of the amendment. What is the implication of this date before they can agree that it is good and that we are correct in supporting it?

I wish that to be noted in my opposition to the motion that is at hand. One clear day, two clear days is all we need and that is the law making process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Nawaikula.

There being no one wishing to take the floor at this time, I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to speak on his right of reply.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- I had my hand up.

HON. SPEAKER.- Those who want to speak from there put your hand up so that I can see. You have the floor Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are using Standing Order 51 but I cannot understand why the Honourable Attorney-General and the government cannot provide the Bills a few days earlier and that will solve the problem.

If you are saying it is very simple, you just need one hour debate and for the Bill will be approved or passed then I am sure you have these Bills ready, at least a week before or a day before the Parliament. I do not see any reason why we need to just say, "Oh I am presenting the Bill today and we are going to have the debate tomorrow".

We have been saying this for a while and it seems that Government is just ignore this simple processes which will be transparent, open for everyone of us who want to speak on any Bill which might be simple as he put it. It could be just a matter of changing the dates, I agree and it is simple. But as my colleagues also said, there are always be implications of any small changes to Bills. Let us just get this sorted out as a matter of principle and then we have no issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, anyone else wishing to take the floor? I do not see any further hands. I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The comments that have been made had been noted. We have wherever possible always ambitious to provide all the details of the Business Committee and any other Bills that are actually ready on time or ready beforehand we do provide, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

But as you see, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Bill itself which is actually one line. In the Explanatory Notes, it does say that under section 43 of the Act, it requires the Service as in FRCS to furnish the Minister with the half yearly report on its activities, for the first half of each year financial by the end of August or such other later date as may be agreed between the Service and the Minister. That is the current provision.

However, due to an oversight section 43 of the Act was not amended to correlate with the change of financial year in 2016. You may recall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we changed the financial year from 1st August to 31st July and that particular provision where it says needed to provide a half-yearly report had not been amended. So, it said half-yearly report by August, obviously that does not make sense because the financial year begins in August.

All it simply does, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is substitute August with March and that is all its doing. It has no implications to the members of the public, it has no implication to the tax payer. All it simply does is that the implication is for the Fiji Revenue Customs Service Management to provide their report in the month of March.

The reason why we are doing this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to see where the current figures are so at least, we can get the latest one as of March then with the Budget we can also have some good data, good input into that, that is all it is, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we have given them 24 hours to debate a one-line amendment to the Bill.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

### **PUBLIC HEALTH (AMENDMENT) BILL 2021**

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

That the –

- (a) Public Health (Amendment) Bill 2021 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to a Standing Committee or other Committee of Parliament;
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament today, Thursday, 3rd June, 2021 and that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the right of reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this particular amendment to the Public Health Act is important and in fact, urgent.

As we know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that currently, there are certain health protocols and measures that need to be adhered to as issued by the Minister and Permanent Secretary for Health. We have, of course, tried to open up the economy as much as possible but also, at the same time, there are various cases, they are popping up but there has been also a number of infringements by members of the public. We need to highlight to them that things like wearing a mask when you are interacting with lots of people in crowded places, like having the careFIJI app on, is a must.

We have of course, had, Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently a lot of people who have turned up to courts for you know, various infringement breaches. It is a fairly laborious process. It is a very straight forward process. If you are actually not adhering to those processes, it is very clear-cut. Most countries have actually moved to a system of having a penalty through fines.

For example, in Singapore, they have what they call Social Distancing Ambassadors. These people are empowered by law to move around and see if people are not wearing masks, they actually

give on the spot fines. In Singapore, of course, because it is a fairly wealthy country, the fine is \$300. That is the kind of fines we are not going to impose but we nonetheless need fines.

If you look at, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this particular amendment, it would also allow the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Trade to put on penalties on businesses because at this point in time, we are seeing a lot of businesses sometimes do get away with non-adherence and there is no penalties for them, we need the private sector to bind.

For example, if a restaurant is allowed to be open and they allow for sitting of people or various other businesses allowed under various protocols, if they do not adhere to it, currently there is no necessary penalty for them. In this way, we will be able to have some penalties so if a supermarket, for example, does not adhere to a particular protocol and if the people enforcing this particular part of the law go in and they find that the supermarket has not adhered to for example, checking everybody for temperature or making sure that everybody that enters the supermarket is wearing a mask, the penalty should not only be on the person not wearing the mask but the penalty should also be on the business for ensuring that the person entering the premises has not worn the mask, so they should be penalised also.

It will also give the powers to the Permanent Secretary for Health to order the closure of businesses if, for example, they do not adhere to these various protocols two or three times and similarly, that is the practice that is adopted by many countries where they have in fact said, “You know like a three strikes and you are out, so if you breach it three times, you get fines, the third time you do it, we will shut down your business for one month because you need to adhere to it as this has been discussed.” This is the new norm, we need to be able to conduct our day-to-day lives, our business, but at the same time, we have to ensure that members of the public and private sector actually adhere to the health protocols and measures that have actually been put in place by the Ministry of Health.

This particular amendment is necessary because currently, the Minister for Health, the Permanent Secretary for Health do not have the powers through this particular Act to be able to give fines, and this is what we will do: we will empower them to do that. We already have the regulations drafted as soon as Parliament approves this, we need to be able to ensure that these regulations will be gazetted and we can start putting in place these new regulations. People need to adhere to it.

For Nadi and Lautoka, as announced by the Honourable Prime Minister, the borders will open up, of course, but we need to ensure that people, businesses still adhere to the protocols, so this is critically important to have this particular amendment and we hope that the Opposition will actually support this because this is particularly urgent as the three Bills that we will be presenting today.

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

Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have the right of reply from the mover. I give the floor to the Honourable Aseri Radrodro, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Honourable Minister, for the Bill that is presented before this august House. Again, we raise our concerns, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that following Standing Orders 51, it is a very important Bill and I think the way the Honourable Minister is explaining to the Members, we therefore ask him for more time as usual for Standing Order 51 to be given to the Opposition, to allow us to consult the members of the public. This is a very important Bill too, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the need to get clarification.

Yesterday, we were talking about the powers that were given to the *Turaga ni Koro* and the *Mata ni Tikina*, so in such instances where this Bill has been passed in terms of issuing infringement notices, will the *Turaga ni Koro* and *Mata ni Tikina* also be trained to be giving out infringement notices in their respective villages and settlements and also, will they be empowered? How will they be empowered to ensure that these powers on issuing of notices are not abused and because of the lack of knowledge, lack of understanding to the respective people and the delegation of authority, how will they be given delegation of authority if they are in charge of their respective settlements and villages that they are in charge of in terms of making sure that their respective villages and settlements are COVID-free?

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, again, the way this has been brought into Parliament, is deplorable. People were expecting this Bill, there was a lot of anticipation that something like this would come to Parliament. I was interviewed by Radio Australia two days ago about this Bill, and I told them that I have yet to see it, it will come through the proper way and then we will debate, consult and then we will debate and make it law.

Now, when I sit here today and I say this and the way it is being proposed as well, Mr. Speaker, I blame myself for believing that things could be different with the FijiFirst Government, I thought it was going to be done properly. Like I said, the anticipation on this Bill is very high, Mr. Speaker, and here he is going to introduce it this morning and pass it this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, the repercussions, the ramifications are huge, for our people. We expect to be consulted, they want their legislation to discuss this properly and take it to them, even under the circumstances. We can have conferences with our people. This, Mr. Speaker, is the height of irresponsibility on the part of FijiFirst Government.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu. You have the floor.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I also rise to contribute on the debate on this particular Bill that is before the august House. First of all I would like to ask the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy in bringing this Bill, has he studied the effects of the health reform that was done in the past?

I think come this COVID-19, we have seen the results of the frontline workers in the Health Ministry, people out there in the rural areas being tasked heavily to continue to carry out their work yet the house of the Health Ministry is not in order Mr. Speaker, Sir.

When I say not in order, the Director of Health is no longer there. Most of their roles have been transferred to the Ministry of Local Government and it is a wonder that when we go on this exercise through the app, it has not been producing good results because most of the people are confused. Now, they are trying to empower the people to look at ways to impose the strictness of wearing of masks et cetera but who will do that? Who will we empowered here because of the role of the Ministry of Health with the Director of Health no longer has overlapped quite a lot with other legislations that they brought in for the health reform. That is a concern that we have in SODELPA because we need to clean our house first before bringing in these kinds of Bills because at the end of the day, who is being empowered? The person out there in the Local Government or the Health official? Those are some of the concerns that we have, Sir.



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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I also wish to rise and just wanted a point of clarification. The Honourable Attorney-General mentioned that this Bill will be debated and passed today, is that correct? I did not quite get the first part of his presentation that it is being debated and passed today. Is that correct or is it being debated tomorrow, Honourable Attorney-General? Just a quick query.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- I apologise, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it does matter because, again, the time is short and even further under Standing Order 51. In fact, in my time in Parliament, I have not come across a Bill that has been debated upon and passed on the same day under Standing Order 51.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we protest the process because there are penalties that are being stated here. I get the point of this Bill, it is important that our people are wearing their masks, have their careFIJI app on as well as physical distancing requirements. We have been harping on about this and we need to comply with COVID measures when we are out and about in the public so we can help contain the virus.

However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are implications here. To start off with, if you enforcing that the careFIJI app on when one enters the supermarket then what about the members of the public who do not have a phone, let alone do not have a smart phone because it requires a smart phone. So, what are the alternatives available for the members of the public including those in social welfare, including the elderly, including the disabled who may not be able to operate a smart phone?

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- They may have old Nokia phones that is not a smart phone so they will not be able to have the careFIJI app. What about them? What are the alternatives that they can have to be able to enter a supermarket? This would be the highest discriminatory to disallow a person the right to go into a supermarket simply because they do not have the careFIJI app. There has got to be an alternative.

The other thing is the restrictions on businesses. Have the businesses been consulted? What kind of setup do they need to ensure that this happens? Do they have to store masks so that they can give it to their patrons when they come without one?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even the cost of masks for our people, do we factor that in, what kinds of assistance can we give to our people if they want to move along in terms of having a mask. I think the cheapest mask I have come across are \$1.50, which is affordable, the reusable ones, and that is great, we have to encourage that kind of business.

But really, Mr. Speaker, Sir, being on public service vehicles and public businesses including the Civil Service and Government Departments, if you have a member of the public going into Government Departments, then the Government Department has to ensure that they are complying. It is the service to the public by the Government Department, so I wonder how they feel about this, having to enforce this in a place where the service itself is for the public. What kinds of considerations are there?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think this Bill does need to be consulted, we need to be given certain more time to discuss this and see how we can come up with these alternatives, otherwise, it is just seen as more regulations and more control by the State. We still have the military officers who caused the original breach and we have not seen any action taken against them, and that of the Navy officers who breached COVID-19 at the borders and went through. So, the rules need to apply to everyone. We need to be seen that it is applying to everyone.

On the spot fines, it is going to cost people money and infringement notices, so we have to look at this in a more holistic and humanistic way. Can we please have more time to look at this Bill and consult and come up with ways that the regulations, consider the time that we are in now, the human factor and how we can altogether make this actually a community effort. We want to get rid of COVID-19. How can we do this where we come together united rather than issuing more fines, more infringement notices for something that some people may not be able to help it because they do not have the means to meet these requirements.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The motion that we have is under Standing Order 51 which is basically asking the Parliament not to consult and not to take this Bill as it should. I will reserve a lot of my comments in relation to the Bill proper.

There is a lot of shortcomings in relation to it, things like, infrastructure, how do you enforce this Bill? What about the right of that person to answer? It is a very dangerous piece of legislation, but so far as to say, we understand there is an urgency for this, and Parliament can invite views from the Consumer Council, Chamber of Commerce, *Roko*, et cetera, to bring in their views. For example, in villages where the nearest shop is about two miles or three miles away, where they do not sell, how do you enforce this? You still impose it because there is non-availability.

In relation to that, I oppose, because we need to consult and we do not need to submit it to the Committee, we can just invite very important stakeholders to come in and bring their views so we can make a consideration that is wider in relation to this Bill.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources. You have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We are at the moment just debating the motion, whether we are going to deal with it under Standing Order 51 or not. It is a matter that is urgent, and it is a matter that is critical, if we have been looking at the reports of COVID-19 so far, the numbers have gone up and the experts who have been behind the Ministry of Health and the taskforce have come up with these measures that they see that needs to be fast-tracked and it is on that ground.

Just speaking on the motion itself is something that needs to be addressed under Standing Order 51, that is why I fully support this motion.

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

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can see the need for having this done, but I think as the Honourable Minister had said that the regulations will come up in the

(technical glitch) I think to look at the factors, Mr. Speaker, it is in the Bill that we just received includes the failure to wear masks without the careFIJI app, failure to comply with mandatory curfews, physical distancing requirements, especially restrictions at gatherings, events, Public Service Vehicles and businesses.

Section 2.3 says that Clause 2 of the Bill sets out the penalties and some of the things that my colleague, Honourable Lynda Tabuya said will depend on the actual penalties. I heard the Honourable Attorney-General say that it will not be as big as what the other countries have. But the point is, that we could have had the regulations presented with this Bill because that is when we could see what is the level of penalty and what is the way in which this will affect the people and whether it is the most appropriate way, Mr. Speaker, to deal with this.

I think we need both in situations like this. We need the law but we also need a very good education process. We also need a facilitating environment. We also need to understand, for example, I have had so many calls as Honourable Tabuya has said where people trying to enter supermarkets are not allowed because they do have a smart phone, they just have the ordinary phone. These are some practical issues for people who are facing on a daily basis. I think when we bring this kind of law, we also need to look at the regulations, we also need to look at accompanying facilitating moves or processes to put in place so that it is effective otherwise it is no point, some people would just pay the fine depending on what the fine is and still may be able to cause harm and spread the virus by even paying the fines.

I think it is important that we put all these together and maybe I suggest to the Honourable Attorney-General that he takes this Bill, gets the regulations formulated as well and then bring them together on Monday. That would be my suggestion, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad. I give the floor to Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation. You have the floor.

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we are here to firstly debate whether this should be put through Standing Order 51. I think we can all agree that we need this piece of legislation. There is also a lot of misunderstanding about what this law before us talks about.

This is merely an empowering provision that we are debating here. We are not talking about offences or penalties in this law. We are talking about an empowering provision for the relevant authorities to be able to create offences and penalties.

Honourable Professor Prasad should know that for regulations, it is a Ministerial duty. It does not come to Parliament, and of course, Ministers it is their prerogative to do the proper consultations with key stakeholders....

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- The point I am making.....

HON. M.R. VUNIWAQA.- Parliament does not consider regulations, Ministers and Cabinet do.

Mr. Speaker, I think, we need this law to come into force as quickly as possible to give the relevant authorities the power to create offences and relevant penalties that is appropriate for the times that we are facing.

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

HON. O. NAIQAMU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to contribute to the motion before the august House. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I plead with the Honourable Opposition Members to consider and understand our current state of affairs. Fiji is facing a disaster. There is an enemy on our doorstep. We need to kill our enemy. I pray good sense will prevail. Let us think of our Motherland, Fiji, and its people.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I plead to Honourable Members of the House, let us be united and think of Fiji and our fellow Fijians. Government is just doing its job that it has been called upon to do for the people of Fiji. We need your support, Honourable Members, please, we need your support for the betterment of our people. The enemy is there, we need to work together to kill this enemy.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development. You have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill needs to be urgently passed. Some of the measures mentioned in the Bill are exactly what is happening on the ground now. There is no difference in terms of what is stated here and what is happening on the ground.

There are people who do not have smart phones but when they enter the premises, for example, business places or municipal markets for that matter, their names and other details are recorded, which will help in contact tracing. So, I do not understand what the fuss is when we are already utilising or using the measures clearly stated in the Bill.

By passing this Bill, it will only help in better enforcement. Hopefully, you will hear less number of people being charged because they will take all these measures very seriously. So I support the idea that this Bill must be passed urgently. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, why are we so rushing?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- You don't know? You have no idea of what is happening outside?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- I know there is a pandemic but who brought the pandemic here?

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Who brought it?

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- You brought it, it was your decision to open the border. You brought the pandemic here and now you are trying to amend things here. You brought the COVID-19 from India, Singapore, to here. Now you are trying to get these things here to amend it.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBERS.- Really! Come on!

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- It is important, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to make the right decisions at the right time. Now, we are meeting up with the consequences. I understand that we have to regularise it and make the regulations just to make sure, but it is important to make the right decisions

in the first place. Close the borders. Do not let the people who come from India or wherever they are travelling from to come to Fiji, so it is important to make the right decision.

Also, why can we not give three days, as usual for Section 51, to consult the business people? Maybe they already know, but perhaps they may need to say something else that we can say in the august House. It is important to give justice to people to be able to say something or contribute to the improvement of how we can cure. But as I see it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is alright we are trying to cure as sickness comes in. But it is important to prevent this in the first place by making the right decisions, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We need the whole of Fiji to go into more natural preventative ways of avoiding this kind of sickness. Someone has already mentioned yesterday and I urge us again, to drink hot water, breathe in the steam - if we do that for one or two weeks we can cure COVID-19. But at the same time we do not need this kind of thing. Do the right decision and the right thing. Do not compare us with Singapore, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because it is too developed - take us slowly, improve our education, our facilities, et cetera. Where we are rushing to? Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important to take preventative measures in our decisions and in whatever we do to improve our health in future. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I oppose the motion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Honourable Minister for Health.

HON. SPEAKER.- I beg your pardon? Honourable Minister for Health, you have the floor. I hope you can hear the discussion.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you. Mr. Speaker, public health and social measures are critical to limiting transmission of COVID-19. This is important and that is why this Bill is before the House under Standing Order 51. The motion is to be able to have this Bill pass through Parliament efficiently and quickly so that we can move on with the measures that are important in taking Fiji forward in this COVID-19 outbreak that we are having.

Mr. Speaker, it gives empowerment to those who are able to facilitate the measures that are in place, it gives guidance to our communities and to the public on what we need to do so that we can move forwards together in the new normal.

Mr. Speaker, there has been extensive consultations done around these measures ever since last year. When COVID-19 came there were extensive discussions that happened at ministry level, the Ministry of Health and other Government agencies, government ministries, including businesses and with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism in terms of businesses in the new normal.

Because of the differences in terms of our COVID-19 status last year, those measures were written, they were discussed, they were consulted but as we have come into a different measure of the transmission within our community now, these measures now have to be used. They have to be able to be facilitated so that we can be able to control the virus transmission but also move ahead in the new normal.

We have to accept that we have to move in the new normal. We cannot have lockdowns as just the central measure alone. We have to also ensure that COVID-safe measures become a part and parcel of our growth and that is why this Bill before the House is very important. It is very important

in terms of also moving us ahead together as a nation and I sincerely and absolutely support the motion that is before the august House brought up by the Honourable Attorney-General.

I ask all Parliamentarians to support this important measure because this is the way we can be able to move forward in the new normal, we can be able to support our communities and it is not only helpful for COVID-19, it is also helpful for reducing other respiratory tract infections that can be transmitted from person to person.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker and I support the motion before the House.

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

HON. S.R. RASOVA.- *Bula vinaka*, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank you for giving me time to contribute to this motion by the Honourable Attorney-General.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very crucial Bill to be passed under Standing Order 51 because COVID started in March of last year. They had one year to implement this clause here and then take it slowly, and the way it is done is as if COVID-19 is here to stay. We have the Ministry of Health to take COVID-19 away from this country and I see here that everything implemented now under Standing Order 51 is penalties; the penalty is for the people that go shopping, they go into business premises, what about the super spreaders. What about those people who make decisions for COVID-19 to get into this country? What penalties are going to be given to them? What penalties are going to be given to the army officers, the navy officers who are spreading the COVID-19?

This is a Bill for people to be penalised if they go to a supermarket, there is no careFIJI app or even a mask. What about the rest of the people, Mr. Speaker? Why are you using Standing Order 51 on this when we can debate it on Monday? Let the public, get their views for us to bring it back over here because this concerns the citizens of Fiji.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor to speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would just like refer to the Bill itself. The Bill very simply says that there will be an authorised officer which means a police officer or any other person authorised by the Minister which is Minister for Health for the purpose of this Division.

Now, obviously, if the Honourable Minister decides to appoint any group of people or individuals they may hire, they have to be trained. Honourable Radrodro simply jumped onto *turaga ni koro*; no-one ever said the *turaga ni koro*. It only says specifically police officers or any other person authorised by the Minister and it says a fixed penalty.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the next section talks about the actual infringement notice. What should be in the infringement notice? The name of the person, the particulars of the offence, the fixed penalty and any other information. This is exactly similar to the LTA Traffic Infringement Notice. You do not wear your seat belt, the police stop you, they fill out this form, they give it to you, you pay \$40. You want to dispute it, you go to the court, if you do not want to dispute it, you pay the fine.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, then it says in Clause 82C, and I quote:

“The Minister may make regulations prescribing matters that are required to be prescribed (or are necessary or convenient to be prescribed for the issuance of infringement notices) including –

- (a) the offences for which the infringement notices may be issued;
- (b) the fixed penalties (for prescribed offences);
- (c) the manner, form and timeframes for which the infringement notices are to be issued.”

It lays out specifically which highlights the rights and the level of transparency that must be given to the individual person against whom the infringement notice will be issued to. There is no breach of any rights. It has to be transparent.

Honourable Professor Prasad, in usual pedestrian manner jumped to the conclusion read the Explanatory Notes, Clause 2.2 and it says:

“These offences may include (the word “may” it does not mean “must”). That is the discretion of the Minister for Health. It lays out and says “It may include the failure to wear an appropriate face covering or present the careFIJI app on entering business premises, or the failure to comply with mandatory curfews ...”

The reason why this particular amendment has been brought about is because it enables the ability to issue penalty notice like fines as opposed to when someone does not do that, he could have done under the existing law, the law you have to go and queue up outside the court, long lines, miss work, social distancing breaches, that is what is happening, we are trying to avoid it. These are smart ways of dealing with it. That is why many countries have imposed fines. It acts as a deterrent, it is not trying to burden people.

Unfortunately, we do not have a very compliance society. People think that it is all right, we still have people going and drinking grog after curfew. The Honourable Prime Minister highlighted so many times in messages, “Please, don’t drink grog, please, wear your mask, please, don’t share the *bilu*, please, don’t share the cigarette.”

Obviously, as Honourable Rasova said, “Oh, they could have done it one year ago.” We did not anticipate the level of non-compliance. For one year, we had no cases, we did not anticipate the level of non-compliance. If you look at many of the breaches, these are people who have actually gone directly in opposition to what the Minister for Health said, what the Permanent Secretary for Health said, and what the Honourable Prime Minister has been saying since last year. So all that these particular amendments simply does is to provide the accommodation in the existing law to say, “You could institute fines”, that is all it does.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are saying, we must go and consult. The nature of the infection is such that they want everything to be brought to Parliament. If tomorrow, the Minister for Health and his Permanent Secretary decide to do a lock-down using the same logic, we all have to come run in to Parliament and say, “Can we lock down Muanikoso?” Then Honourable Tabuya or someone might say or might take it into consideration, “Oh my electorate is there, may be if we lock it down, you lock-down that street, do not lock-down the other half”. That is the reason why it is not brought to Parliament.

You do not come running in to Parliament and say, “Let’s have curfew, what hours do we put?” That is the decision made by the Executives. What we are seeking here for Parliament’s approval, is that we actually have a penalty provision and then the regulations will stipulate where

those penalty provisions will apply to, under which circumstances when there is non-compliance or failure to wear, for example, masks, et cetera, so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is very simple.

Mr. Speaker, the other Members had said, “the careFIJI app. is confusing”, nothing confusing, Honourable Lalabalavu. I think you are confused about careFIJI app. If in this Chamber, everyone has their careFIJI app. on, our phones will ping against each other within two metres but obviously, if only this side of Parliament has it on, and that side does not have it on, Honourable Tabuya and Honourable Salote Radrodro are next to each other, if they do not have it on, those Members there do not have it on, it will not register because they do not have it on.

The careFIJI success depends on the ability of more and more people to have it on as was found at the Extra Supermarket. Most of the people who went to the Extra Supermarket and the staff that were there all had it on, that is why the Ministry of Health was able to get in touch with all those people within a matter of hours when they identified it, so the success depends on that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that was also highlighted, I have got the figures here: 94.4 percent, Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the phones that are there or smartphones in circulation are Androids, 4.66 percent are iPhones and the other OS in circulation are 0.4 percent, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

With regards to careFIJI app compatibility are approximately 731,637 smart phones, 709,000 are compatible, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and high level of competency. Currently, as has been highlighted, the digital Fiji team are developing what we call QR codes and QR codes makes it very easy and a lot better ability for the Ministry of Health to lock down specific areas.

The other point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to highlight also which the Honourable Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation has already highlighted and Honourable Professor Prasad you do not bring regulations to Parliament. Regulations are dealt with by the Executives.

And he also argued, he said, “Oh you know, that means just because you want to give them penalties, they will still spread the virus”, well even if you continue with the current regime of the law, and if you do not have penalties, people will still have to go to court, they can still spread it if they breach it.

The issue is about the breach of the protocols that have been put in place. If someone says at the moment that if you are in a locked down area, please do not go outside the locked down area at the moment. If they go out in the locked down area, go and mix with the people at the local shop, we will drag him to the court. They will still spread it, right, according to your logic.

If you put the penalty on, it does not change it but the reality of the matter is that, when you put the penalty on, people are given an instantaneous deterrence.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point about Honourable Bulanauca talked about India, et cetera, please, you need to get real about these things.

The other point was about the business people. Most of the businesses now have agreed in particular the garment factories, et cetera and they have said because their various protocols that you need to adhere to, they have said that they will buy a smart phones for all their staff if they do not have a smart phone. But the figures that I just read out, Mr. Speaker, Sir, demonstrate that most people already have a smart phone. Vodafone has already brought down the price of smart phones, you can buy a smart phone for about \$100 or so.

It is not that expensive, it is a basic smart phone, it may not be a fancy Samsung or whatever,



but nonetheless it is a smart phone. So, the businesses have agreed to that, if there is a higher level of compliance and people know that there is a particular deterrent or regime, we expect greater level of compliance. If there is greater level of compliance, then we expect to be able to return life more to normal than usual.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just getting back to this Bill itself. I hope the Honourable Members do understand that the reason why we are putting in place, and if you read the actual provisions of the Bill, it simply just gives the Minister for Health the ability to be able to have penalties imposed by way of fine. Thank you.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

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

### **CUSTOMS TARIFF (AMENDMENT) BILL 2021**

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

That the -

- (a) Custom Tariff (Amendment) Bill, 2021 be considered by Parliament without delay;
- (b) Bill must pass through one stage at a single sitting of Parliament;
- (c) Bill must not be referred to any Standing Committee or other Committees of Parliament; and
- (d) Bill must be debated and voted upon by Parliament tomorrow, Friday, 4th June, 2021 and that one hour be given to debate the Bill, with the Right of Reply given to me as the Member moving this motion.

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

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This Bill seeks to amend the current provision or the timeframe that a vessel can remain in Fijian waters under Code 228, which essentially means they do not pay duty, et cetera. Currently, a lot of these vessels and some are already here and they would have potentially been in breach of the two year permit, these are already been here for two years and they want to stay on in Fiji.

As we saw, Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Blue Lane Initiative announced by the Honourable Prime Minister last year, we had over 100 yachts that actually came to Fiji under various safe measures, protocols, we have the Navy working with them and as a result of that, the 100 vessels came in here.

Honourable Qionibaravi just said I think about the Navy, I cannot understand, and Honourable Rasova earlier on, I do not know why they have this obsession with the RFMF, why they always want to have a go with the RFMF. I cannot understand that. These people....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- A Point of Order. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to object the statement just been made now by the Honourable Attorney-General regarding this side of the august House, objection or differences against the use of the Military Officers and the Navy Officers.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- What is your Point of Order?

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

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- He is misleading the House.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, if you have a Point of Order, make the Point of Order.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, in my address yesterday, I clearly referred to the frontline workers, I did not mention the Navy or the Military personnel.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, when I mentioned the name just now, someone from the other side, maybe one of your colleague said, 'the Navy', obviously referring to the new cases that have come about. But Honourable Rasova earlier on mentioned the RFMF.

I cannot understand the obsession with the RFMF. The RFMF, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has provided safety and security for us for the past one year manning our borders and people at the quarantine. I cannot understand the obsession. Whenever they find one thing going wrong or what they think has gone wrong, they have their go with the RFMF.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, under the Blue Lane Initiative, the Navy provided the various protocol enforcement. We had 100 vessels that came in, obviously they did not just come here, but they also spent money in Fiji. A lot of the resorts, and services that are provided to these yachts that come into Fiji, had some run on business. They had the bit of a turnover.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at what is happening around the world, many countries are also now opening up their borders, so to speak, and having a similar provision under what we call the 228 provision, to allow people to come into their countries. Because notwithstanding the fact that we got some increased number of cases, people still see countries like Fiji as being safe, it is still beautiful, it is still clean, it still got pristine environment and the people are friendly and they like to come to these places. So we need to, under the new norm, recognise the potential that we do have.

What this Bills seeks to do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is firstly, there is a transition provision to allow those people who may breach the two years or may be soon exceeding the two years, to allow them and to have people to be able to stay here for five years, if they want to park their vessels.

When I say to stay here for five years, meaning those vessels can stay here under 228, but of course they have to meet all the normal immigration regulatory requirements. Just as the yachts coming to Savusavu, they are given an initial period of four months or six months. If they want to continue to stay, they seek an extension. But from a Customs' perspective, as soon as they get the extensions we do not actually slap a duty on them, they have the various concessions available for them, which makes Fiji a lot more attractive.

The longer vessels stay in Fiji, they will not only require, for example, supplies for that vessel but they want maintenance, they want paint jobs, they want repairs. So it creates a whole new industry around that and this obviously is something we want to take advantage of. So the reason why we are actually bringing this particular amendment, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to Parliament is because there are some people who actually would be in breach of the law if we do not have this amendment. Secondly, by having this amendment, we are sending a message to the rest of the world and lot of people who actually in the sailing industry recognise Fiji as a destination and we want them to come to Fiji.

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

Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. At the end of the debate, we will have a right of reply from the Mover. Honourable Gavoka, you have floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, I know we are sounding like broken records here, but the consultation needs to be carried out. Yachts make up a very big segment of tourism in this country. Have we consulted the tourism industry on this, Mr. Speaker? This will have ramifications that we are not aware of right now and we cannot be debating these blind when it comes to a debate proper on this Bill.

So, again, we are Parliamentarians. We need to have the full briefing, full knowledge of an issue before we can debate it. I know in tourism, yacht was a developing segment and today is quite big now for Fiji. What will be the implications of this on the yachting community in Fiji, Mr. Speaker? I think the tourism industry should be consulted before it is brought into this Parliament.

Again, another example of the very callous and cavalier attitude by the FijiFirst Government on matters of importance like this, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to speak. I apologise about the raised hand.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Niko Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems to me very clearly that this Standing Order 51 motion has been sneaked it under the cover of the urgency of COVID-19. It is not urgent at all, Mr. Speaker. If we can remember the Honourable Minister for Economy saying that this is to extend the stay of some of the vessels that have come under the Blue Lane Initiative. And therefore it would have been earlier or even now, there is no urgency in having the wider consultation and being inclusive into the law making process.

As the Honourable Gavoka has stated, we need to get the views of the tourism industry. We need to get the views of others; that is my point. Standing Order 51 is limited to matters that are clearly urgent or are supplementary or ancillary to some amendments, so this is not a Standing Order 51 motion. That is the point that I wish to make.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member.

There being no one wishing to take the floor, Honourable Attorney-General, you may speak in reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Suffice to say when we debate this particular Bill, we can talk about some of the issues that have been raised but obviously, the yachting sector and those involved, generally the tourism sector are supportive of any provisions that will, in fact, enhance tourism arrivals into Fiji and spend by them.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will take a half-an-hour break for refreshments. We adjourn.

The Parliament adjourned at 11.12 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.45 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communication, to move his motion. You have the floor, Sir.

### **INVESTMENT BILL 2020**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament on Friday 11th December, 2020 and Thursday 27th May, 2021, I move:

That the Investment Bill 2020 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I call the Honourable Attorney-General, I remind that pursuant to the resolutions of Parliament, debate will be limited to one hour. I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak to his motion. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Investment Bill 2020 seeks to replace the Foreign Investment Act 1999 and aims to:

- (1) Contribute to an attractive investment climate in Fiji;
- (2) Increase both foreign and domestic investments;
- (3) Generate employment;
- (4) Contribute to sustainable and social development; and
- (5) Promote growth for the benefit of all Fijians

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill seeks to strengthen the following five fundamental principles important for the attraction, retention and expansion of investments in Fiji:

- (1) Clarity – the Bills provide key definitions and provisions that are in line with international standards. As a comprehensive investment law, it establishes one single source for the fundamental rights and obligations of investors;
- (2) Transparency – the Bill increases transparency of the legal framework for investment by combining all relevant rights and obligations under one umbrella law;
- (3) Openness and predictability – a fundamental change to the current Act is that the Foreign Investment Registration Certificate is removed and replaced by an automatic investor registration process. The Bill entails amongst other things:
  - (i) Investor permit for individual investors are to be managed by the Department of Immigration;
  - (ii) Foreign investor reporting through the Registrar of Companies in the time of business registration;
  - (iii) Annual reporting to Investment Fiji; and
  - (iv) Protection of national security interest.

This change, Mr. Speaker, Sir, allows foreign investors to establish a business in Fiji under the same conditions as domestic investors;

- (4) Basic investor rights – the core part of the Bill is the guarantee of investor rights in line

with the international best practice. Investors coming and investing in Fiji will have a legal pledge that basic rights are guaranteed according to international best practice. This includes the protection of property, for example, freedom from compulsory arbitrary requisition proprietary, as well as the right to transfer funds abroad or to be treated fairly. The Bills also includes the national treatment principle, the most favoured nation principles and a fair equitable treatment clause; and

- (5) Legal recourse and enforcement rights –the Bill includes a part on dispute settlements that provide investors with the option of national and international disputes settlement to help de-risk investments.

Widespread consultations, of course, Mr. Speaker, was held.

Clause 1 of the Bill provides for the short title and commencement. If passed by Parliament, the new legislation will come into force on a date or dates be appointed by the Minister by notice in the Gazette.

Clause 2 of the Bill provides for the definitions or the terms used throughout the Act.

Clause 3 of the Bill provides the objectives of the Act which are to:

- (1) Contribute to an attractive investment climate in the Fiji to increase investments;
- (2) Generate employment;
- (3) Contribute to sustainable and social development;
- (4) Promote growth for the benefit of all Fijians; and
- (5) Provide equity for investors with transparent, reliable, efficient and fair rules and procedures.

Clause 4 of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, provides that the Act is applicable to all direct investments made by a domestic or foreign investor in Fiji.

Clause 5 of the Bill empowers the Minister to prescribe by regulations a complete and exclusive list of reserved and restricted activities following consultations with the relevant stakeholders and approval of Cabinet.

Clause 6 of the Bill provides provisions relating to foreign investor establishment and its reporting obligations. The reporting and updating requirements by foreign investors under clause six is intended to be used for statistical and policy-making purposes.

Clause 7 of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, provides that the Minister may prohibit a foreign direct investment in Fiji for the protection of national security interests. A foreign investor must submit a proposal of the intention to invest to the Minister for an approval. The process of which is to be prescribed by regulations. If the investment has a potential effect inter-alia or amongst other things:

- (1) Critical infrastructure such as energy, transport, communications, data storage and financial infrastructure;
- (2) Critical technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, semi-conductors, technology with potential dual use of application, cyber security or nuclear technology;
- (3) The security of supply of critical inputs; or
- (4) Access to sensitive information or the ability to control sensitive information.

Clause 8 of the Bill provides for national treatment provisions, guaranteeing for investors the

same treatment when operating in Fiji as domestic investors.

Clause 9 of the Bill provides a guarantee to investors of fair and equitable treatment and full protection and security as a minimum standard of treatment.

Clause 10 of the Bill provides that subject to any written law, investors are free to invest in all sectors and regions in Fiji, of course, with the exceptions put in place by the Minister.

Clause 11 of the Bill provides that subject to any written law, investors are free to manage their own business.

Clause 12 of the Bill provides for provisions dealing with compulsory or arbitrary acquisition of property. It provides a guarantee that investors are afforded the freedom under Section 27 of the Fijian Constitution from compulsory or arbitrary acquisition of property.

Clause 13 of the Bill provides that with respect to all payments related to investments in Fiji, investors have the right to freely convert Fijian currency into foreign currency, in accordance with the Exchange Control Act 1950.

Clause 14 of the Bill provides that investors are entitled to transfer funds abroad. This clause protects the key part of international business operations and foreign investors particularly the larger and export-oriented investors who would assist on such a guarantee before starting a business in Fiji. Clause 14 of the Bill also gives the Fijian Government the right to suspend international transactions for specific reasons which is also in line with the international best practice.

Clause 15 of the Bill provides that investors have access to land in Fiji according to written law, however, a foreign investor may be subject to the Land Sales Act 1974 in relation to the sale, transfer or lease of land.

Clause 16 of the Bill provides that subject to any written law, investors have the right to employ foreign staff.

Clause 17 of the Bill provides that an investor must comply with the laws of Fiji and that in the event of non-compliance, are subject to any penalty or sanction specified under such law. Clause 17 of the Bill also provides certain duties and responsibilities of investors.

Clause 18 of the Bill provides that an investor has a right to arbitration if an investment dispute arises between an investor and the State.

Clause 19 of the Bill provides that the Fijian Government may provide fiscal or non-fiscal incentives for investors. It provides that these incentives may be granted by laws.

Clause 20 of the Bill opens the way to investor/State international dispute settlement and sets up the requirements as well as the applicable mechanisms.

Clause 21 of the Bill provides that the Act will prevail over other legislation in case of inconsistencies.

Clause 22 of the Bill empowers the Minister to make regulations.

Clause 23 of the Bill provides for the Repeal of the Foreign Investment Act 1999 and the Foreign Investment Regulations 2009;

Clause 24 of the Bill provides for the Transitional provisions for the rights, exemptions and foreign investment registration certificate under the Foreign Investment Act 1999.

Clause 25 of the Bill provides for Consequential Amendments made to other legislations.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I commend this Bill to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. I call on the first speaker, the Honourable Viliame Gavoka. You have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is a very important Bill but we are only allowed to speak on this, in my case, for no more than five minutes. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we spend more time on old reports and it is strange that we are limiting dialogue on this very important Bill in a manner like this, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we oppose the Bill, we want the Bill to go back to the Committee and do proper consultation. They should consult with the Fiji Law Society, to name a few, the Chamber of Commerce and all the municipalities, the Fiji Commerce and Employment Federation, TLTB and Investment Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Why was it not consulted? Why, by the way, that it has recently lost its CEO?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a lot is missing from this Bill. Fiji used to be ranked 58 in the ease of doing business in 2012. It is now ranked 102. This Bill does nothing to improve the ease of doing business in Fiji, Sir, and there are caveats by the Fiji Intelligence Unit, and is not factored in to the Bill. It should have led to the Amendment of some parts of this Bill. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is full of holes, and I wish that it would go back and the consultation be broader and more inclusive of the stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

But quickly, it gives more power to one person, it is not clear on the negative list on the list that is reserved for Fiji citizens. It does not adequately cover the interest of the resource owners and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is the danger of fly-by-night investors. There appears to be no provision there to guard against them, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and capital flight is also a concern, we had the currency provision in the Bill and, of course, the processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am only allowed three minutes or four minutes but we seriously question the way the consultation was conducted and we oppose it. We want the Committee to take it back and do a better job of consulting with the Fiji community. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Gavoka. I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Prasad. You have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The main problem with this Bill is that no one knows what it really means. The Bill is simply replacing one investment approval process to Investment Fiji with another one. The new approval process will now involve a government Minister but no one knows what the process will be because even the government does not know, it seems.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to understand the FijiFirst Party government's record of foreign investment regulation and we need to look at probably one month's statistics and the Honourable Gavoka referred to it, and that is the World Bank's well-known comprehensive annual survey of



investment facilitation. It is known around the world as the Doing Business Survey. The Doing Business Survey has been around for more than 20 years.

It covers more than 190 countries, a tool used internationally by many people, investors, investment advisers, international consultants. They use the survey to decide whether a country is a good place to invest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the international Investor Community looks for countries where investment can be done quickly and inexpensively. They want the country without excessive bureaucracy and time wasting. The higher the ranking, the more attractive the country is. To measure regulations directly affecting businesses is the ease of doing business index. This is the compilation of a number of sub-indices.

The other one I want to focus on is the ease of starting a business sub-index. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the main ease of doing business index, two countries stand out, they usually compete with each other for the number of ranking and the first one is Singapore. We are told by the Honourable Minister for Economy, that one day Fiji will be better than Singapore.

The other one is New Zealand, our neighbour, and we could learn a lot from New Zealand. Let us talk about Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. In 2006, Fiji's ranking on the ease of doing business index was 34 out of more than 180 countries, at that time this was not bad. Two years later, with the Military Government in charge that ranking had fallen to 43. Since then, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the ranking has gone rapidly down. Fiji's ranking since 2017 has been 101 and it fell to 102 last year.

Let us talk about the ease of starting a business, after all that is what we want investors to do. It is time they do their businesses here. In 2008, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji ranked at 87, this was not very good, we could definitely do better. By 2020, Fiji had fallen to 163 because there are only 190 countries in the whole survey.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to ask ourselves who the world believes? Does the world believe their smooth, QOVIS written speeches about Government Ministers and about how Fiji is a great place to invest, or do they believe the World Bank? Mr. Speaker, Sir, they will know that this Government is obsessed about those World Bank rankings. I remember a few years ago, the Honourable Minister for Commerce said that Fiji's ranking was bad because the World Bank had consulted, I quote "Anti-Government Agencies."

The Government is forever meeting, consulting and working on ways to lift its ranking, and it changes a law here or changes a law there. It is forever announcing that it is reforming the Fiji investment process and it still cannot lift its World Bank ranking. If it could make Fiji an attractive place to invest, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we might have a real economic boom, not the fake Bainimarama boom that we talked about before, not a fake boom, which means the Government must borrow to clear its economic activity.

If they are real investors, they would be creating economic activity, but the Government's fake boom has now led Fiji perilously in debt. What does that mean? Everyone in Fiji knows that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It means the Government has no money to help the tens of thousands of people who are suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic. It means that the Honourable Minister for Economy is actually jealous and condemning humanitarian organisations, like FRIEND and others. These are organisations who have the support and the confidence of the people. These organisations can channel public money to help our people who are suffering. They even have the confidence of foreign governments and all the Honourable Minister for Economy can do, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is stand up in this Parliament and criticise them for so-called politics. I do not know what that means.

What does the new Investment Bill do, Mr. Speaker, Sir? I have spoken to a number of professionals and people who advise foreign investors about this Bill. The first thing I asked them was whether they would make submissions to the Select Committee, and the answer was, ‘Why would we waste our time? We have long experience of making submissions to Parliamentary Committees, we can suggest changes but they will make the changes because the whole process is just for show’.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a feeling that the Bill has one good aspect. It removes the heavy-handed bureaucracy from Investment Fiji as the regulatory agency. Of course, if you have a business in Fiji, you still have to face all the usual bureaucracy. It seems that small investments may be made easier at least at the beginning, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there will now be a new process which no one seems to understand from the discussions I have had, there is a whole lot of betwixt which makes it impossible for a key or a critical investor to know whether or not its investment will be permitted. For example, if you look at Clause 7 of the Bill, it says:

*“Protection of national security interests*

- 7(2) A foreign investor intending to invest in a sector that may have potential effects on, *inter alia*:-
- (a) critical infrastructure such as energy, transport, communications, data storage or financial infrastructure;
  - (b) critical technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, semiconductors, technology with potential dual use application, cyber security or nuclear technology;
  - (c) the security of supply of critical inputs; or
  - (d) access to sensitive information or the ability to control sensitive information, must submit a proposal of the investment to the Minister for an approval to invest in that sector.
- (3) The process for an approval made under Subsection (2), may be prescribed by regulations.”

So, what will happen now? Investments which, and I quote: “may have potential effects on critical infrastructure, critical technical technologies, et cetera, now must be submitted to the Minister for approval”. Who is to know what investments qualify for these tests? What is critical infrastructure? What are the critical technologies? What are the critical inputs? It seems the answer, Mr. Speaker, we will get is “We will make regulations”.

Mr. Speaker, if you ask any serious private sector investor in Fiji about whether they have confidence in the process requiring approval by the Government Minister, many of them will tell you that the process is slow, cumbersome and unresponsive. When they do finally get a result, it is full of conditions, paperwork requirements and half the time they simply give up.

You know if you look at just the current Commerce Ministry protocols for essential business during the COVID-19 crisis, a lot of businesses are totally frustrated. The Honourable Minister for Commerce might want to address this. They cannot get through the 163 number. The decisions are inconsistent and full of unrealistic conditions. Why do we think that the Investment Regulation process will be any different?

I read the report prepared by the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, it is 17 pages long but it only starts actually talking about the submission made to it on Page 12. It seems that there was only one useful submission and this may prove the point I was already making. Serious investors could not be bothered wasting their time making submissions to the Committee because they believe nothing would change. And the so-called submitter who expressed concern about lack of clarity in Clause 7, the key submitted also expressed concern about what the process will be used to make the new investment approval process work and what was the Government answer to both question, Mr. Speaker? It was, and I quote: “We will make regulations”.

Mr. Speaker, if they are going to make regulations when they have not already been made, why are they not available in a draft so that we can see what will be there? In most Parliament contrary to what the Honourable Minister for Social Welfare and Honourable Minister for Economy said about regulations, yes, it is the Ministers propagative.

But in most Parliaments, Mr. Speaker, they actually submit the draft regulations to the Standing Committees for them to look at. There will be no clarity for investors comparing it to what the Honourable Attorney-General was saying in the beginning. There will be no certainty on how they can invest in Fiji. There will be no certainty on what processes they will have to follow. Regulations will be issued then they will chop, change and confuse everyone, in short - nothing new.

So, Mr. Speaker, no doubt Government will promote this Bill through with changes as usual, but I do not hold out any hope for the existing and future investors of this country, that they will be any less frustrated than they already are and our ability to raise our ranking on the World Bank ease of doing business.

The key issue, Mr. Speaker, is the bureaucratic distrustful control freak attitude of this Government, to investment and many other things. They can change the law if they want to, Mr. Speaker, but it appears, from the experience we have had over the last so many years, that their attitude will never change and that, Mr. Speaker, will always be a problem when we are seriously trying to attract investors into this country.

As Honourable Gavoka said, Mr. Speaker, we do not support this Bill in the form that it has been presented to Parliament and I think the Standing Committee should have come with some amendments and recommendations for amendments in its Report. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Biman Prasad. I give the floor to the Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. You have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. However, might I just quickly raise something with respect to what the Honourable Gavoka has actually raised. Before me, I actually have the Standing Committee Report on the review of the Investment Bill 2020. He just blindly goes ahead and says, “There is no consultations, et cetera.” Might I remind him that this particular Report, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was a bipartisan report that had been signed by his Members without any of the matters that he raised, being raised in this particular Report.

I think he needs to go back to his own people to say, “Why was it not raised?” Do not come to us and say, “There was no consultation and these things need to be done, et cetera.” There was proper consultation and it is his Members and might I quote, Sir, it is Honourable Bilitavu and Honourable Matanitobua, who were actually part of this particular Report. It is a bipartisan report, signed off by them and none of those issues that he is actually talking about was raised by them.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of what Honourable Professor Prasad actually raises, it is rather sad. He says that there are unrealistic conditions with respect to what we have done right now with respect to COVID-19 protocols. That is ridiculous, especially in terms of what we are actually doing and trying to do in terms of the health part of things to ensure that businesses are safe to operate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, 163 is inundated with calls at the moment. They are certain things that you must understand. It looks like he just comes to this particular House and wants to complain just for the sake of complaining. And just to remind him and his cohorts that sit outside of this august House, who do not want to take part in the consultation process, Sir, I am very sad that he would not encourage them to actually take part, whether it comes out as a negative or a positive, you actually take part. If they did not choose to do so, they are very not patriotic Fijians if you ask me, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I shudder when I hear such things from the Honourable Professor Prasad. Do not come and complain if you do not want to take part.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to contribute to this debate. This actually concerns my Ministry and I will go through this, just to tell you how much consultation has taken place. It is actually timely, Mr. Speaker, so if I may just go quickly and I go back to Honourable Professor Prasad. Will the investors actually believe if we tell them that the World Bank was actually part of this process? Let us now believe the World Bank, and they were part of this process.

We have received, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reform memo that the World Bank Doing Business Team that has been part of this particular process noted that Fiji has undertaken positive reforms in three indicators in 2021; a feat never achieved since Fiji has been part of that Doing Business Report.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, does that not provide the Opposition confidence now? He goes on about saying that we complained about before that there were anti-government institutions that actually took part in a process that came up with a negative Doing Business number for us. Let me realign him, Sir, that is the truth, and they acknowledge the fact that we actually complained. I have said it, the Honourable Attorney-General has said it on numerous occasions. Believe it, Honourable Professor Prasad! Believe it! That is the truth, you need to realise that.

I dispute the comments by Honourable Gavoka that there was not enough consultation. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we started this process in 2017. I even had numerous consultations with the private sector and the public sector and Investment Fiji. Where do they get off saying that Investment Fiji was not part of this process? Investment Fiji has been part of the technical committee, working on this draft, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Government agencies relevant to investment approvals have been consulted, Sir, and their comments and their feedback have been taken on board and most of all, Sir, the actual committee that was involved in this went through the entire country going through this.

How much more consultation is actually required? I am not sure. Again, Sir, these two Honourable Members of the House and I will name them - Honourable Gavoka and Honourable Professor Prasad love to mislead this House and they are at the top of the list of leaders for this country - come to this august House and mislead, especially after they signed this.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot afford to be unprepared. We need to start actively attracting new investments, Sir. The Bill will give a lot of assurance and confidence to the private sector and potential investors despite the doom and gloom (I call them doom and gloom merchants in Fiji), Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, doom is Honourable Professor Prasad, gloom is Honourable Gavoka. The Fijian Government has always implemented overseas laws which contributed to building.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Point of Order! I think the Honourable Minister obviously is getting frustrated and getting very personal but he also misleads ...;

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- What is your Point of Order?

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- The Point of Order is misleading...

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Stop misleading, stop being personal and getting frustrated when we actually point out that.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- You tell yourself that.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, there has been a Point of Order. You have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me remind him and I quote - he said that people called it a waste of time. I shudder to think that he actually thinks inside his head, Sir, when he has to come to Parliament and he called it 'a waste of time'. If there was an iota of intelligence they would come and consult and say what they needed to say and be part of this particular document. So do not tell me that I am not telling you the truth.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- This is the way you say this, people will listen to you.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Exactly, you come to Parliament and say things that are not even backed by facts.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have seen results of these proactive and pro-goal strategies with continued economic growth before this pandemic had actually struck the world and Fiji. For almost a decade our investment levels have been around 18 percent to 20 percent of the GDP. And as expected, investment growth has actually been driven by the private sector investments. It has also been noted that a significant portion of investment is actually attributed to domestic investments and those investors who are reinvesting in the country.

Essentially, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fijian Government's vision is to diversify economic sectors and also to expand the manufacturing base and in this regard, investments - especially foreign direct investments, can facilitate the entry of capital, technology, skills, knowledge transfer and diversification of the existing into new ...

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I will get you to stop there. We have a glitch in our system and we will take a break for 15 minutes while they fix the glitch.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Sir.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.19 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 12.34 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue from where we left off. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We have actually seen results of the proactive and pro-growth strategies of this Government with continued economic growth before the actual pandemic struck the world and Fiji in 2020, Sir. For almost a decade, Mr. Speaker, our investment levels have been around 18 to 20 percent of the GDP. Now, as expected investment growth has been driven by private sector investments, it has also been noted that a significant portion of their investment is attributed to domestic investments and those investors who are actually reinvesting in our country and I say our country, Sir.

Essentially, the Fijian Government's vision is to diversify economic sectors and to expand the manufacturing base and in this regard, investments, especially foreign direct investment can facilitate the entry of capital, the entry of technology, the skills and the knowledge transfer and diversification of the existing economic sectors and into new economic sectors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it was actually evident that the existing Foreign Investment Act 1999 was not able to respond to the needs of the modern investor and this was despite numerous amendments that were actually done to the Act because when it was initially developed, there was little or not much thought put into how the Act would deal with the fast-evolving business world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has actually run its course and its purpose and the existing legal framework needed modernisation to provide that overall policy direction of the Fijian Government and guidance to investors. The review of the Act was obviously, the main objective was to develop a modern investment law and regulation, Mr. Speaker, which is able to adapt to the changing investment environment and to provide a reform or an action plan and this Government believes in not just planning for today, but we actually look to the future.

The purpose of the Investment Bill was to implement that particular vision, the principles and the objective derived from the investment policy statement of the Government and the investment policy which links to the overall vision of transforming Fiji as set out in our five-year and 20-year National Development Plan.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill is not just mapped on international best practices but it is actually crafted in the manner to address the development needs of the country. There is nothing sinister about this as might have been suggested by some of the Opposition Members. They continuously have this sinister thing in their head. It is actually for Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and is for the benefit of Fijians for today and to build a stronger Fiji in the future.

We have actually managed, Mr. Speaker, to get the right policy mix in the Bill due to the technical advice and the support provided and I would really love for Mr. Doom and Mr. Gloom to actually hear this, due to the technical advice and support provided by some of the best people in the field of investment policy reform and legislation.

I want to thank, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the support that we have received from the World Bank Group and International Finance Corporation for working with the Ministry and the relevant agencies and I hope they actually listen before they come to Parliament and shoot off without thinking. In addition, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to say a special thank you to the Australia and New Zealand governments who actually continued to support this particular project through the Fiji partnership.

Now, coming back to the specificities of the Bill, the Bill covers all investments whether by foreign or domestic. It confirms protection and obligations to both foreign and to domestic investors. It will also review and revise the current reserved and restricted list to make it more practical and easier to implement and this is relative to an earlier question in the last Parliament session by Honourable Nawaikula.

Sir, whilst the Bill looks at attracting investment, the key and the paramount focus is on a couple of things, Mr. Speaker and these are very important issues. It is on the protection of:

- (1) The national interest;
- (2) Our micro and small, medium enterprise;
- (3) The resource-based sectors; and
- (4) The domestic infant industries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these principles and these protections were actually lacking in the Foreign Investment Act 1999 and its regulations before. We need to realign our investment plans and priorities to what the NDP stated in terms of the creation of new industries, in terms of bolstering exports, in terms of creating jobs in new and innovative sectors.

So the focus, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is on efficiencies, seeking investments or export-oriented investments making Fiji the cost-effective and efficient destination choice of the investors. This is especially important for small island developing states like Fiji, Sir, which alone is not a big enough market to attract investment, so we need to capitalise and we need to solidify our hub status.

This is why Mr. Speaker, Sir, the review of the Act and the regulatory framework is part of the larger reforms of the Fijian Government and what the Government has been undertaking. That is the review, the revision and the digitalisation of our business processes, realigning roads and responsibilities of key agencies and strengthening other legislations that actually support the actual entire investment eco-system.

The new legal framework, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for Investment Fiji has a domino effect which will lead to a number of chain reactions and strengthening of roles of the actual implementing agency beginning with Investment Fiji. The role of Investment Fiji contrary to what Honourable Gavoka may say about non-consultation (completely wrong). The role of Investment Fiji is that of an investment promotion agency. They cannot continue on the current path where they play the role of facilitator, regulator, a police and border protector.

We will realign and strengthen the role of Investment Fiji. Investment Fiji will become the agency solely responsible for investment promotion at the same time, focusing on export promotion in line with international best practices. Investment Fiji's role will be attracting Foreign Direct Investments, Investment Generation including targeting foreign and domestic investment and after care and export promotion and policy and advocacy.

Essentially, Sir, like other successful IPAs like Singapore's economic development board, Investment Fiji will change its approach from becoming more proactive in pursuing desirable investors and multi-national companies that will bring countless benefits to Fiji.

The Department of Immigration, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has already undertaken a series of changes to monitor investments entering the nation whilst other implementing agencies who have actually strengthen their monitoring and enforcement role.

The Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, provides for enhanced transparency and information sharing between all the agencies and also investors. We will also be able to provide protection and it is such an important part of it, Sir, we will also be able to provide protection into our MSMEs and our sensitive sectors.

The Bill has provision for a new way of developing a reserve and restricted list for foreign investors which is called a negative list approach and for example a negative list will set out the minimum threshold that will exempt businesses that compete with small retail outlets but at the same time, allow for the high end design a retail outlets to setup business such as investments who will provide for example to the tourism sector.

The Standing Committee Report which I was waiving earlier on, Sir, states that there should be a clearer and a stronger process for vetting and accessing potential investors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Bill allows for specific regulations to be developed that will operationalised the Bill. You cannot, contrary to what Honourable Professor Prasad might be going on about, you cannot put operational details in the legislation, Sir, as it provides an overarching policy guidance.

These regulations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will include negative list, reserve and restricted activities foreign Direct Investment Reporting, national security and immigration requirements for investors linked to the Immigration Act on Investors.

Through these regulations, additional mechanisms will be established for continued protection of national interest, Sir. Now, hence investments by foreigners in sectors like industries and activities such as energy, transport, communication, data storage, financial infrastructure, technology to name a few, will go through a national interest test and this is the issue that was raised by Honourable Professor Prasad and I think he fails to understand it.

That test analysis will analyse the following:

- (1) It will analyse the impact on our national security.
- (2) It will analyse compliance with the Fijian Government policies and laws.
- (3) It will analyse the impact on the Fijian economy and community; impact on the environment and health and character of the investor and for state owned enterprises, the commercial orientation of the investment....

HON. SPEAKER.- You have gone over your time, Sir.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I might be just permitted to finish quickly, I wish to reiterate that with the current pandemic, the Bill could not come at a better time. Just a couple of things, I am not sure where Honourable Gavoka gets his rating from about 54, but I think he needs to check that and the actual business rating is about to come up soon. It is just a couple of things,

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in terms of the 163 line that they spoke about, we have managed 33,446 calls between 31st May and 2nd June and that is a big feat, all with 10 to 15 staff, there is consistent messaging despite what they may say.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the last things that I want to say that Honourable Professor Prasad raised and he talked about section 7 about the protection of national security interest. Sir, that is the provision that is in every developed country. It exists in all of the internal regulations, so maybe he should not come to this House and mislead it. I hope that this particular Bill will expedite our efforts



in recovering, and this Bill could not come at a better, while we try and contain this current outbreak and we must keep focused on economic recovery.

I want to say to the Honourable Members, this is a good thing for Fiji. You do not want to come and just be negative for the sake of being negative, it would have been nice if they came and became positive knowing full well, when I see him shaking his head, I know full well about the actual process. In fact, one of the biggest law firms in the country was actually part of this particular consultation. One specific one that he is referring to and the one he consults on a daily basis. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to make my contribution on the motion before the House. I must start to say that it is unfortunate that one of the most important Bill that come before this House has had not much consultations externally, outside of this House by the Members of the Business Community, regulatory authorities as well as the Committee itself. I must say that the Report by the Committee disappointed me. The depth of the analysis and in the manner in which they have failed to reflect from some crucial elements of the proposed Bill and the environment it will suggest for investment purposes in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I note that this Bill is now proposed to replace the Foreign Investment Act. Whilst, I acknowledge that there are certain processes of the current existing Act that needs to be modified, it does not, however, warrant an absolute overhaul. On that note, let me start with those whom I have expected to have contributed to the reviewing of the Act 1999. The Financial Intelligence Unit was the only entity to make submissions to the Committee. I did not see any submissions from the Reserve Bank of Fiji.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- A Point of Order. I think the Honourable Member is misled. This particular Bill will actually repeal the existing law, so that analysis you are carrying out will not be relevant because the existing law will be repealed. We are getting rid of it and this will completely replace that.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As I said, I did not see any submissions from the RBF. The Investment Act is an important Act, simply because investments from the basis upon which the GDP of the country is set. That was prudent for the RBF to have contributed their views at least for this august House to view.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RBF is required to hold Foreign Investment Boards. I am not sure, under this revised law, if it would still be mandated, I would have appreciated such a requirement been commented on by the Committee overseeing the review of this proposed Bill.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to know the role of the accountings firms and other regulatory entities like the Town and City Councils, the Ministry of Infrastructure, Energy Fiji Limited and Water Authority of Fiji, iTaukei Affairs Board and the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, when this Bill was being consulted where were they in these processes?

Surely, they understand the mammoth task ensuring the right investment environment is established. I am disappointed to see there is no mention of any submission from these entities and

if such is the case, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I call on Government to review and sack the whole board and executives of these crucial entities.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, investment is a catalyst of growth in any country whether foreign or domestic. They are the lifeline of a country. Through them economic activities are chunked and employment opportunities are weighed. Tax is derived from Government. Foreign dollars is earned through exports, et cetera.

It is shocking that this Bill has not had the attention it deserves, Mr. Speaker. In 2014 well before the current pandemic hit Fiji, I had consistently spoken about the need to encourage investments growth in Fiji and that meant we have to incentivise foreign and domestic investors but we also protect our resources for long term sustainability development purposes. Just look at the Freesoul Fiji development on Malolo Island and the Nawi Island Investment Project, Mr. Speaker, Sir. What I see today is a desperate act by the current Government to establish investment interest in Fiji. This is a sad and deplorable state of this Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is a little bit too late. The current regressive laws of business and employment can only be blamed on the current stagnation in investment interest in Fiji. But that will not be noted by this Government, Mr. Speaker, Sir, for they are used to a state of self-righteousness and believing they know what is in the best interest of our people.

If that is so, Mr. Speaker, why have they not been able to resolve a lot of disputes like that of the Monasavu landowners against the holding of their lease payments under an arrangement that should have been in the interest of Government to protect on the basis of what is equitable and fair in return on investments for the landowners.

On that note, right under their noses, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are ongoing grievances from the *Mataqali Valebure* from Colo-i-Suva regarding their request for compensation from Water Authority of Fiji on their portion of the Savura Water Sources. There are other similar cases around Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Major investments rely on basic infrastructure and resource owners will have to be equitably compensated.

It is fundamental to World Trade Organisation rules and prudent in the national best practices. Ignoring the players in the business environment can only mean substantial risks for investors in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I note that a substantial challenge will occur by way of this proposed Bill and that is to see the Department of Immigration now overseeing permits processing for individual foreign investors.

Previously a foreign investment certification did the job. There may be pros and cons of this fundamental chain, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My question will basically be whether the Department of Immigration has the resources and the manpower to oversight monitoring and managing of these foreign investments?

Investment Fiji's role used to be such that investors were granted implementation periods by which to implement their investments. These are monitored and failure to comply could mean a cancellation of the investment certificate. The processes was prudent for fly by night investors or those who wanted to circumvent the processes to gain citizenship into the country and I trust that the Immigration Department will be frugal with these processes, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

On that note, what sort of permits will be granted by the Immigration Department? Will there

be temporary permits awaiting confirmation of establishment of investments before proper investment permits are granted or how will that technical issue be resolved, Mr. Speaker, Sir? Where is the accountability in these processes? Where is the separation of powers?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the powers of the Minister under the current existing Investment Act remains in the current proposed Bill. My concern are that previously Ministers have been known to have abused their powers in the granting of investment activities to be undertaken by investors.

Corruption can arise because investors will want to engage in sectors that may be restricted for instance. Why does the Government not consider a special commission that considers or approves such restricted or restrict reserve activities?

It would be my recommendation for the Government to protect the political body in the form of the Minister and looks at the long term sustainability of our investments for these will have an impact on national security, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I took an interest in the submission of the Fiji Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). As we know, there had been a lot of attempts in the past for bogus foreign investors to invest in Fiji, and certain individuals in Fiji supported those bogus investors. We still recall the investor who said that he was a billionaire and had his offices in China. A check with FIU and FTIB (at that time) revealed that the addresses he gave was a vacant land in China. Yet, top real estate officials and indigenous Fijian chiefs and people flocked to the Civic Centre here in Suva to await money coming from abroad from this bogus investor.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have to be careful about money and resources that is not ours – resources belonging to the people of Fiji. Majority of land is owned by native landowners and any government funding is really taxpayers' dollars.

The FIU has commented that foreign investment is critical. Infrastructure must be carefully weighed and monitored. I have to agree because this is what I have been consistently raising in this House since my term in Parliament – seven years now.

National assets such as electricity grid, water resources and networks and ports around Fiji are traditionally-owned and controlled by the State for the purposes of not being held to ransom at any point because the services that are crucial for our people are actually owned by foreign companies whose interest will be, first, for the benefactors, boards and decision-makers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as it is we know how disastrous it has been for the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA) and Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) to be privatised. Rehabilitation and maintenance of now badly-delayed post-natural disasters, even during normal times, with the maintenance that used to be given by PWD is now a luxury for commuters.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will end by simply saying that this Bill is a disappointment. If, indeed, it needs to be more robust and transparent, an investment environment that we hope to create, then we need to ensure that we put in relevant mechanisms to supervise, manage an efficient business environment conducive for investors' confidence and accountability.

This Bill should have been properly discussed with the Provincial Councils and Tikina Councils. Landowners are a crucial part of investment, afterall, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The late Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna had said that you can have capital and manpower for development purposes, but if you do not have land, then your development is useless. Likewise for the landowners, land without capital and manpower is of little productive use.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, anything that involves the use of resources will need the consultation of resource-owners. This Bill makes me very wary, it does not assure me that private public partnerships will engage, if at all, will be on or mutually beneficial terms, where there are previously an equitable responsibility sharing of say, 60 percent by the investor and 40 percent of equity land by landowners, for instance, is under this proposed Bill not at all clear. Will it still be there or have those been totally removed for the benefit of luring investors, forgetting that landowners also need to be equitable participants in investments that concern their resources?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity and I join my colleague, Honourable Gavoka and those on this side in not supporting this Bill. However, we request for more consultations.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Tuisawau. You have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, my apologies. I rise to contribute to the motion on the Investment Bill 2021, in particular I would like to respond to the Honourable Koya who stated that what we are contributing is a waste of time, it is negative. I would like to remind the Honourable Koya that this is Parliament. You are elected and we are elected and we are here to debate, and he should respect that, that whatever the Government brings up, we will also contribute and debate on it.

On the particular issue about the consultations, I note in the Report and as mentioned by my colleagues, there is only one substantial one there by the Financial Intelligent Unit. If others had contributed that should have been listed clearly for our information but unfortunately that was not listed which is why we are concerned about the consultations regarding this particular Bill.

I particularly express reservations about the definitions in the Bill. If one looks at the definition of a “domestic investor”, this narrow definition from our perspective seeks in foreign companies incentivised by FRCS to move their headquarters to Fiji to be suddenly designators as domestic investors and to benefit from this designation. This is one of the provisions in the tax legislation that led to Fiji being designated as a rogue state by EU in its annual tax black list for two years running.

Our view is that this provision must be removed as it fails to protect our citizens and companies and allows foreigners to gain benefits there are not entitled to. So that particular definition we are recommending that there is an amendment to remove Part B.

The other concern as mentioned by my colleagues is on clause 5 – “reserved and restricted activities”. As mentioned, that gives the Minister too much power and discretion on deciding on the restricted and reserved activities. I note that there are currently about 17 reserved activities and eight restricted activities. We know that these have not been adhered to strictly and there needs to be a review. It gives the Minister too much power, it appears to require businesses in various locations to plight for their activity to be declared as reserved and there is insufficient protection from our perspective for local businesses.

We feel that the Bill needs to go back to the drafters to set out the required consultation list. I heard the Minister saying that this is a regulation, it does not come before Parliament but it can come before our Standing Committees to look at it, and also share their views and the public’s views so that it can come to Parliament. The reserved and restricted list remains for five to 10 years rather than being reviewed every two years. I believe the last review was done in 2013 with those 17 reserved activities and eight restricted activities.

There are various other concerns regarding the provisions of the Bill. My colleague has mentioned that we should note that domestic investors are also very important. The private investors and the institutional investors such as FNPF, ATH, Fijian Holdings and again we are concerned that, have they been consulted because there is no indication of that in the report, they should have been listed there if they had been consulted.

The issue with the particular role of Investment Fiji and that has been highlighted by the Honourable Minister that it will be, I suppose, reviewed so that it focusses more on promotional rather than the regulatory role. That is something which we will need to monitor, I suppose as we move forward. When doing that, there is a concern regarding the monitoring. I know that that has been mentioned because there has always been a discrepancy when you look at the data in terms of the FIRC registered projects, the dollar amount of investment and the proposed employment they registered and the actual implementation, and there has always been a discrepancy in those figures when it is always high in terms of those registered but the actual implementation in terms of the number of projects, actual investment and actual employment, there is always a huge discrepancy there while the actual implementation is much lower than that proposed.

The other concerns, as already raised, this particular legislation if you look at it, the concern is, I understand that the removal of the investment registration certificate is proposed there and investor permits to be issued by the Department of Immigration and the Registrar of Companies to deal with the registration, the question, of course, is whether the Department of Immigration is equipped for this, what are the resources they have for screening, what are the plans? Not only that, but also the other competent authorities or implementing agencies of Environment, Minister for Lands, iTLTB, Fisheries and Tourism.

Those are the concerns which I thought I would raise. The others have been raised by our Members of the Opposition, and I support them in not supporting this motion.

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

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to actually thank you for giving me this opportunity as the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights and being the Chairperson in the Committee that was responsible to scrutinise this particular Bill, especially Investment Bill 2020 (Bill No. 49 of 2020).

Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I would like to actually ask a question to all the Members: What is the Opposition trying to prove over here? Just this morning, they were actually saying that the Bills are not going to the public for consultation, they opposed the Bill. Now we have a Bill that went to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, proper consultation was done, we scrutinised the Bill, the Bill was given to us in December last year. We actually requested for an extension of time, we received an extension from the Parliament, we called for submissions, we called for written submissions, we called for oral submissions, after that, Mr. Speaker, once you allowed us, we went around Fiji, we went around Viti Levu twice.

Just to name some places, we had public consultation in Suva, Namosi, Navua, Sigatoka, rural areas of Sigatoka, Nadi, rural Nadi, Lautoka, rural areas of Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Rakiraki and Korovou. We went twice on the same route in Viti Levu.

After that, Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, we had public consultation in the following places in Vanua Levu: Seaqaqa, Labasa, Bulileka, Basoga, Visoqo, Wvuwavu, Wainikoro, Dreketi, Bua, Savusavu, all the way to Taveuni, Sir.

What are they saying that we did not have proper public consultation? At the beginning, Mr. Speaker, when we started scrutinising the Report, people that came up and told us that there was excessive consultation done with the stakeholders by the Ministry of Trade and Tourism. When they were actually formulating the draft legislation, they had excessive public consultation. Majority of the people told us that whatever is in the Bill, it is their views.

I do not know who calls up Mr. Prasad and tells him, right, that there was no submission, no public consultation to this particular Bill. What are they trying to prove in this? Now they want the legislation to be brought into the Parliament, now they want the legislation to be brought into the Parliament, very soon they will actually start asking for the strategic plans and the operational plans to be presented in the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, each country's parliament(s) operate(s) differently. In Fiji, we have a hybrid system. Some Parliaments overseas, the reports of committees of Parliaments or annual reports are not even debated in Parliament. Some of the Parliaments even annual reports are just tabled, they are not even scrutinised by the committees. Over here, we are giving the opportunity. When the reports are tabled ...

(Hon. S.V. Radrodro interjects)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- ... they go to the Committees. Committees actually scrutinise and bring that back and after that we also have a debate on that. What are they trying to oppose? Are they trying to penalise their own Member for speaking on behalf of the government in the last motion, because he is one of our Membership in the Justice, Law and Human Rights Committee, or they are trying to penalise all the Parliament Committee Members? If they do not know about the Bill, I propose that NFP should have one of its Members sitting in the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights. Everyone here knows that all the Bills are going to this Committee.

When we called for public submissions, Mr. Speaker, Sir, where was the Opposition? Why can they not come and do the submission before the Committee? And Honourable Tuisawau, we went to your village, you came for the public consultation, you were there submitting on the Electoral Bill but you did not even mention or utter a word with regards to the Investment Bill.

(Honourable Members inject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- We took all the Bills, he was the one who opted to have a submission on the Electoral Bill.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- I know that is a different Bill, we spoke on the Elections.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Is he trying to grandstand himself in front of his people in the village talking about the Electoral Bill because that is the place where he is going to get the votes from?

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Don't be personal.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- What are you trying to do?

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, they are so frustrated that things are getting personal. Just speak on the issue.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- It is not about getting personal.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Sit down!

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order! Stick to the Bill, Honourable Member.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- You're getting into the habit of being personal.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- A Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Who has got a Point of Order this time?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- The Honourable Member is referring, Sir, to my presentation during one of their visits. It is on a different Bill, not on this one. That was on the Electoral Bill. The Point of Order is that the House should not be misled. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Maharaj, you have the floor, speak on this Bill.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- What a way to justify himself. We were collecting submissions and do not even know what you were going to submit on, and what the submission is all about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, coming back to the Bill itself, as mentioned in previous occasions by the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications and then when tabling the Committee Report on the Bill, there is need for reform of the investment environment and this starts with the existing laws which had become somewhat insufficient and that is why we are repealing it.

There are a lot of loopholes and there is lack of transparency for the investors. The current law does not necessary give the right of the resources to the government in certain instances, and there is no specific focus on the national security interest.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, reform of the investment environment has been seen as the introduction of the Investment Bill 2020, and the Committee, Mr. Speaker, Sir, has reviewed the Bill and has reported back to this august House.

Briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from the review, it was noted that a lot of work has been carried out with regards to the reform of the investment environment, including close collaboration with the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.

The Investment Bill 2020 aims to introduce and promote internationally-recognised investment practice in Fiji. It aims to increase and improve investment opportunities for both domestic and foreign investors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have learnt through this pandemic that we need more investments in Fiji, not just in the tourism sector but in other sectors as well. Once the pandemic is over, Fiji needs to be ready to market itself to foreign investors. It is very important that we, through our domestic law, provide conducive environment for investors to get attracted towards Fiji. This law comes at a very good time that will set a pace for the line ministry to do the ground work and be ready when the pandemic is over. We need investment in all sectors post-pandemic and this Bill will set the platform right for these investors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill seeks to strengthen the fundamental principle important for attraction, retention and expansion of investors in Fiji, and the five principles have been clearly stated by the Honourable Attorney-General.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would also like to emphasise that during the review, there was a lot of support on the introduction of the Bill from the public and those who participated in the public consultation.

With those words, just came to my mind, the Investment Bill was actually discussed in one of the rural villages in Lautoka, our Members can confirm that. We had Members who were present in that particular public consultation asking us questions on this Investment Bill. The Members here, being in Suva, they could have at least come and do the presentation before the Committee. Consideration was also given to the impact of the Bills on Fiji's efforts in meeting its targets on Sustainable Development Goals and National Development Plan. It was encouraging to note that the Bill was introduced for the purpose of improving the economy by promoting best investment practice.

Additionally, the objective of the Bill as such is that it applies equally to all persons, irrespective of gender. Mr. Speaker, Sir, given the immense work already carried out in improving the investment environment, I would like to inform Members of this august House as we start implementing this law, this would then provide a good opportunity to gauge the implication of the Bill on Fijian Business sector.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the Honourable Members of this august House to show support for the motion before the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Attorney-General to speak in reply. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As highlighted that this particular Bill seeks to repeal the existing law that is in place, the existing law is highly bureaucratic and it is quite cumbersome.



As we have done in many other laws, for example, this Bill, with the removal of foreign investment certificate, it means that a lot of lawyers will not necessary get to build the fee. With a lot of lawyers and accounting firms actually used to charge investors large amounts of money, simply to get a foreign investment certificate, perhaps, some of the people whom Honourable Professor Prasad is speaking about, are the ones who are aggrieved by this. Let me also tell you, some of these law firm practitioners actually participated in the World Bank Workshops that were held in the lead up to the formulation of this Bill.

I think the Honourable Members of the Opposition need to understand that consultation with the public does not only begin when it goes to the Committee. Many of these Bills, Mr. Speaker, Sir, even before the Bill is formulated, we have consultations before that. A lot of these Bills, whether it is to do with disaster, for example, we have the Japanese Government working together with the NDMO, the World Bank IFC working with us, we have international organisations, for example, to do with Trade Marks Law, all of these actually had been carried out for two to three years.

Similarly, with this particular Bill, the World Bank had various workshops that were held. The members of different organisations, including umbrella organisations and representatives of the umbrella organisations, all participated in the various consultations, TLTB, for example, participated and Honourable Radrodro talked about landowner participation.

A vast array of people had participated because that is one of the requirements of the World Bank. The reason why the World Bank actually participated is because obviously we are working together with them to get them to help us, to get rid of this old bureaucratic law. I can point out many problems with the existing law at the moment. There are many people, even though they received or obtained, I should say, foreign investment certificate, they still came in to Fiji and actually got in to areas of business which they are prohibited from but because the law was lacking in its applicability, they could get away with it. There is no recourse, for example, in getting assets that were illegally obtained because they did not have the permit in the first place. So this Bill actually makes the law a lot more simpler.

There has been a lot of talk about the Minister unilaterally making decisions regarding the restricted areas. Mr. Speaker, Sir, as highlighted in my introduction, the Minister makes that through the approval of Cabinet. He has to go or she has to go to Cabinet to get the approval of Cabinet. It is the Government of the day that decides on a policy in which areas there should be a restriction. Now, there are a lot of contradictory type of comments being made and one Honourable Prasad talked about that people will not know what is happening. The regulations are there. They will not be able to invest – that was the kind of perfunctory type of analysis that took place.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point of the matter is this; now modern day investment laws are put in place and there has to be a particular level of national interest put into focus. I will give you an example. Recently the Australian Federal Government stopped investments or investment deals by various States and Territories in Australia which were made with foreign entities. They decided as a Federal Government that it was in the interest of Australia for those does not to go ahead because it affected national security.

Artificial intelligence is critically important; 5G which is not in Fiji as yet, is very important. Who do we use as a supplier? Will they have the capacity to eavesdrop in Parliament, your office, the Prime Minister's Office, the Minister's office? All of those things need to be taken into consideration. For example, we have seen various countries in South Asia have come in and now have 99 year leases of critical port areas where the state has lost complete control of it. That is not the case in Fiji because notwithstanding the fact that we made some divestments, we still have the laws to protect us.

We also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, did something clever - we never let the real estate pass on to this company in which you have foreign investors. The real estate still belongs to the Fijian people and the Fijian Government, owned through Assets Fiji Limited. These are the critical points that we need to understand. I think the Honourable Members – I expected better contributions from them; a lot more sophisticated and nuance type of analysis.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point is that as I said, the consultation started back in 2017. We have, as a case in point, the Climate Change Bill. It has been going through consultations for the past two years. So, by the time it comes to this Parliament you would have had so many people, hundreds, if not thousands of people who have contributed online or directly come to see people in the Ministry and make formal submissions.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think Honourable Radrodro made a lot of conjectures - what will happen? The land will go away - none of that will happen. He is really into conjecture, Mr. Speaker, Sir. And as highlighted - bogus investors will be allowed. I can tell you the bogus investors. There was a bogus investor at Natadola. He was an undischarged bankrupt from Europe and he is now in prison. There was a bogus investor in Momi - he is in prison in NZ. So, how will this law actually stop that from happening? This law in fact has got higher accountability provisions. The previous law allowed those people to slip through the cracks.

Does the Immigration Department have the capacity? Of course it has the capacity. Of course they have already invested in the technology. We now have, for example, the passport systems in Fiji is far more advanced. In fact I was informed that with the passport system that we have, in order to be able to catch up with the technology, the Australian authorities actually had to invest furthermore and unfortunately because of COVID-19, we are not able to fully utilise the full potential of the passport systems that we do have, but very soon we will be doing so.

Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, there seems to be a lot of misunderstanding about outsourcing and privatisation. FRA is not privatised. Privatised means that you sell everything to the private sector. FRA is not owned by a private company. WAF is not owned by a private company. Investment Fiji is not owned by a private company. Outsourcing makes a lot of sense. Outsourcing actually creates a lot of jobs as we have highlighted previously.

A lot of companies in Fiji, Mr. Speaker, Sir, construction companies, road making companies; there are far more local Fijian companies making roads now - they have newer technology now, they have the knowledge and the information to do so and very soon we will be able to build the full capacity, but it creates jobs. When you have a civil servant or someone in the statutory organisation they get paid a salary. If they do two or three other things they still get paid that salary but if you outsource it, then that money actually goes out to more companies and they actually employ more people. I gave a very simple example, the other day when we had these food ration packs. We outsourced it and Punjas actually had to hire over 100 people in Lautoka. Those hundred people had not been employed for a while. Suddenly, they had jobs for two or three days, and they were paid money for it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also want to highlight was the issue about the rogue State that the Honourable Tuisawau referred to. We are not a rogue State! We have explained in Parliament so many times that the EU's blacklisting is not just for Fiji, but many other countries where EU is essentially saying that we, as a country, do not have the right to offer incentives to companies to entice them to come to Fiji. And our argument is that, as a developing country and as a post-colonised State, we need to play catch-up.

If we, as a small economy, are able to say to someone, “Please, come to Fiji, invest in Fiji, create jobs and we give you a 13-year tax free holiday, or invest in Vanua Levu and we will give a seven-year holiday, or invest in biofuel and we will give you a seven-year holiday, or invest in ICT and we will give you 13 years”, they do not want that. They will say, “You must be on a level playing field.” But we are not starting from a level playing field, we are a colonised State. We just gained independence in 1970.

They colonised people and they have been doing that for the past hundred years. Their economies are far more advanced. We do not even have one million people, they have millions of people. We do not even have millions of people around the corner from us. So, we need to be able to invest and entice people and for that particular reason, if we were to be blacklisted, then so be it. At the moment, it has not affected our ability, we have made our case and we will fight our case.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point, of course, is that the Honourable Minister makes regulations and, again, those regulations are subject to policy directions by Cabinet. Once the regulations are actually gazetted, any investor reliant on those regulations, obviously, can depend on those regulations. Should there be any departure from the regulation that will adversely affect the investor who made the decision in the first place based on that regulation, obviously the investor has the right of recourse and obviously, the Government will be at fault. So to come here and pontificate and say, “Well, there is no uncertainty for these investors”, it is completely wrong, it is disingenuous!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Chugoku Electric Power Company, which is a Japanese company (at least, we know the credibility of Japanese companies), together with JBIC (Japanese Bank for International Cooperation) has, as we all know now, made a successful bid and have acquired 44 percent of Energy Fiji Limited (EFL). They have paid around FJ\$440 million for 44 percent of EFL. The Fijian Government still owns 51 percent of EFL and 5 percent are held by Fijian citizens. Anyone who is watching and has an EFL domestic account can become a shareholder if you have not yet become one.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the situation in Fiji was so bad, as the Opposition tries to portray, in particular Honourable Professor Prasad, Chugoku and JBIC would not invest in Fiji. And we know the standards that Japanese companies follow. We know the environmental standards that the Japanese companies follow - they willingly invested in Fiji. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is something we need to be proud of. This is the first time, apart from Mana Island where there is some Japanese interest, that a large Japanese company has invested in Fiji. They are already excited about their prospects of being in Fiji. They are already recognising the changes we are bringing about. The Japanese Ambassador has spoken to us about new opportunities for Japanese investors in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am sure everyone in this Chamber would agree that if you want to get foreign investors like the Japanese, that is something we would want. Things are happening, so let us not make false representations of what is happening or not happening.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like everyone to, please, support this Bill. I know the Opposition is going to say, “We do not support it”, but the reality of the matter is that it has made things a lot more simple.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was going to comment on FRIEND but I will not. I will take another opportunity later. It is actually quite superfluous to comment on things by Honourable Professor Prasad. I know that he has been caught out, therefore, he keeps on going on about FRIEND. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- It gets very personal that is the problem.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[Investment Bill 2020 (Bill No. 49 of 2020) moved under Standing Order 51, passed and enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. ... of 2020)]

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, time moves on. We will now take a lunch break and we will resume at 3.00 p.m. instead of 2.30 p.m. since we have gone over time.

The Parliament adjourned at 1.32 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 3.02 p.m.

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

### **COVID-19 SUPPORT AID FUNDS**

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, I move that:

This Parliament approves a sum of \$50 million from the COVID-19 support aid funds provided by the Governments of New Zealand and Australia to be disbursed as income support to the unemployed and affected small and medium businesses as a result of the outbreak of the pandemic.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, I second the motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now invite the Honourable Tikoduadua to speak on his motion. You have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will inform Parliament about how calls for help are being treated to show why it is important for government to provide assistance because a huge pleas for assistance have been rubbished by a couple of Honourable Members in a quite dishonourable manner and this is highly relevant to why the motion seeks realistic help for the people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last hour of Parliament yesterday evening, we heard the Honourable Assistant Minister Alvick Maharaj takes strong exception to NFP Leader the Honourable Professor Prasad's comment about the role of Assistant Ministers including two factual statements about utterances by two of Honourable Maharaj's colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can tell him that what the NFP Leader said was 100 percent correct. The Honourable Maharaj would like to know with Honourable members of his FijiFirst government or Assistant Ministers...

HON. GOVT. MEMBER.- On the motion, please!

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, 50 requests for help from the less fortunate and others calling on behalf of the people living in the areas in which they reside together. What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the calls, pleas and cries for real assistance have reached a point and government must act. It must have a clear definite plan and practical solutions to meet its social and moral obligations to the people in their hours of need. We cannot leave it to individuals or politicians of the likes of two particular Assistant Ministers to treat calls for help with disdain or a joke.

As the party Leader stated last evening, one of Honourable Maharaj's colleagues remarked to his fellow government MP that he was giving the number of a person. A sacked teacher facing charges to grow as he considered as being notorious when they asked him about the fourth cane payment.

The second case quoted by the Leader was that of a Nausori resident calling an Assistant Minister from the same district about food rations last weekend. The Assistant Minister said that if there were 30 people to 40 people, the government could help but when the gentleman

replied 200 people were affected, the Assistant Minister told him to ask in his words “Biman Prasad and NFP for rations”. Needless to say Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we have proof of what I just stated, let alone the tirade and false campaign against the NFP on social media but...

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Point of Order!

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Sir, my Point of Order is why Honourable Pio Tikoduadua is referring to Honourable Maharaj’s colleagues. If he has the name, he should give the name and he should abstain from using Honourable Maharaj’s colleagues. Why am I been targeted in this particular debate? I have nothing to do with the statement that was released by Honourable Professor Prasad yesterday nor am I that particular Minister. So, why is my name popping up in his debate? He should refrain from doing that, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Tikoduadua, just stick to your motion. You have the floor.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, needless to say we have proof of what I have just stated, let alone the tirade and false campaign against the NFP on social media by persons we know, to be the ardent supporters of FijiFirst.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- A Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- There is a Point of Order by the Honourable Koroilavesau.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- A Point of order, Sir. We are talking on a motion that has been raised by the Honourable Member on the \$50 million COVID-19. He is swaying far away from the subject that is being discussed and put on the floor, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Tikoduadua, you have the floor and stick to your motion.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the Government would listen, they will understand that what I am saying is relating and it is building up to the reason why we are asking for this \$50million to be given to the people. It is expressing the very need of the people which they are trying to stop. I am not saying anything that is deviating so far away from what I am trying to prove to the House. So maybe if they listen they will learn something.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is not the time for free bees assistance like the \$90 per family, one of payment that the Honourable Minister for Economy clarified in his first conference during Parliament’s lunch break yesterday, or un-suspending the help line for people to apply for the \$50 per person. It requires a far greater commitment and decisiveness on the part of the Government to help bring some relief to families, the less fortunate, small and medium enterprises, until something more substantial in the 2021-2022 National Budget next month. That is why, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motion for Parliament to approve the sum of \$50 million from assistance provided by the Governments of New Zealand and Australia is the most logical way forward.

Some might say that this matter is a budgetary issue and needs to be raised during the budget process. I am not, but the Honourable Prime Minister in his response against Honourable Kuridrani’s motion yesterday. But they must know the budgetary process when help was rolled out in a big way following the moderate winds and flooding *TC Keni* and *TC Josie* in April 2018. Apart from normal Government programmes, like, SME grants and other benefits, that are described as social wages and I stand to be corrected, there were various schemes under the care initiative announced by the

Honourable Prime Minister. The final quarter Appropriation Statement, of course provided much later to Parliament by the Honourable Minister for Economy, shows redeployment of funds from various Heads to disaster relief.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a total of \$110 million was deployed from other parts of the 2017/2018 Budget towards this from 1st May to 31st July in 2018. If the \$50 million cannot be allocated for relief, now from funds given by Australia and New Zealand, for sure what was done at the drop of a hat in 2018, can surely be labelled as a vote buying exercise through freebees and other bonanza, because 2018 was an election year. If it can happen in 2018, it can be repeated in 2021, when several thousand people are unemployed and hundreds of small and medium enterprises are closed and suffering. This piecemeal approach to overcome the economic effect of a pandemic will not work.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the FBC news reported that Australia's economy had recovered and bounced back to pre-COVID-19 levels faster than expected. The reason:

- (i) Blueprint for COVID containment; and
- (ii) Stimulus.

A country predicted to be in recession for the first time in 30 years is now growing by 1.8 percent in the first quarter and that country pouring aid here like New Zealand is the main source of our tourists for recent decades.

Mr. Speaker, we had been inundated with calls for help. We can only do so much with our \$40,000 per annum Parliamentary salary. We have been asking our ardent supporters to help, of course, they are also constrained. We request the Civil Society Organisations to provide food upon verification of reports that we get. They do so, in most instances, of course, without any help from Government.

At a time when we need every able person with expertise and security know-how to be in the frontline to protect us from this pandemic, we can certainly use extra help to assist our people meaningfully. We need a coordinated and unified approach. A whole of nation approach, Mr. Speaker, including Government, Opposition, Civil Society Organisations, religious and cultural bodies, provincial administration, village elders and advisory councils to work together. Collectively this will result in the best data and footprint on the ground and help will be meaningful, proactive and without much wastage and duplication of resources.

Mr. Speaker, our people need help and they need it pretty fast. Last Saturday night's announcement by the Honourable Prime Minister is of little comfort to the several thousands in need; \$50 million can help 100,000 families with \$500 each including operators of small and medium businesses at least to meet their basic needs until the announcement of a more comprehensive policy in the next budget. We already missed out on stimulating the economy in the cane belts in the eight cane growing districts last week by failing to ensure that growers received \$20 per tonne of cane as first cane payment.

The Government lost the opportunity to ensure the injection of \$34 million into the economy. And this failure may result in the delay of start of the new harvesting and crushing season, of course, combined with the pandemic and ultimately hurt the economy.

Mr. Speaker, Fiji Sugar Corporation's statistics shows 70 percent of the growers being average or below producers. This means they produce 143 tonnes of cane or less in a season. Even at 143 tonnes, growers would have received \$1,474.33 in their fourth cane payment. Now, how can this paltry sum of money help them prepare for harvest by hiring cane cutters? Sir, 70 percent of cane

is harvested manually and how can they sustain their livelihood on this meagre amount? So how will farm labourers and cane cutters survive if growers are not able to provide for their basic needs, let alone survive him or herself? The emphasis here, Mr. Speaker, cane cutters and farm labourers are also part of the rural poverty statistics and this would have risen following the outbreak of the pandemic.

This is just an example of why Government should disburse \$50 million from the aid it received from Australia and New Zealand to Fijian families and Small and Medium Enterprises. This is only an example of what the reality is on the ground and it is weak, Mr. Speaker. That is why they desperately need help.

People with numbers rising daily are now hearing the worst. There is no money, no help, no work and no opening of SMEs. The future is enveloped in dark clouds of uncertainty. Mr. Speaker, that is precisely why Government needs to come up with an immediate plan to not only alleviate the plight of the people but to resuscitate our economy without further endangering lives that only see fragility and nothing else. We can and we must help, there is no time to waste.

Mr. Speaker, before I commend the motion to Parliament, the frontline health workers have been the subject of scrutiny by some Members. As we all know, they are risking their lives to keep us safe. Mr. Speaker, they deserve more than our praise, they deserve all the morale support they can get and most importantly they deserve just financial reward for their work 24/7. I would like to ask, are they paid overtime; do they get meal allowance or do they get time-off and rest in lieu of the long hours they put either under the hot sun or driving rain?

Mr. Speaker, I have been told by some police officers that they do not receive meal allowance, they contribute \$30 each at the end of the week to buy their meals. I have been told that health workers are now stranded at CWM Hospital, where as of last night the COVID-19 positive cases numbers has risen to 19. They are reportedly on long shifts and while we are told they are billeted at hotels, the Health staff were not told where they will stay or what they will eat. These uncertainties must be put to rest, Mr. Speaker, only then will our praise for the frontline warriors be genuine.

Mr. Speaker, I commend the motion to Parliament and I thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on this motion. I give the floor to the Honourable Salote Radrodoro, you have the floor, Ma'am.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the motion before the House. I rise to support the motion, Mr. Speaker, that Parliament approves the sum of \$50 million from the COVID-19 support funds provided by the Australia and New Zealand Governments to be disbursed as income support to the unemployed and affected small and medium businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I support the motion in the view that the assistance that have been given out is insufficient and is not enough. One just has to read what the mainstream media is reporting everyday and also I believe all of us in this House do peep in to social media and the cries of our people are well documented in the social media as they put out their plight of the problems that they face everyday.

I will speak on the food ration because I believe a lot of people are struggling everyday to put food on the table. We have already alluded to that continuously from this side of the House. But also I acknowledge the assistance that had been given by Government in regards to the food ration that has been



distributed; the \$90 that has been given out and also the recent \$50, Mr. Speaker. But these are just one-off assistance and that is why I am saying that that is not enough.

We can only look into mainstream media reporting on social problems that will come up or are already with us. There is the continuous crime rate, there is domestic violence and I read somewhere that people will even steal to be able to help their families with food or to feed their families, Mr. Speaker. Having said that, I know a lot has been said in this House in regards to one of the organisations called "FRIEND" and how the other side of the House has politicised the help that FRIEND does contribute to our community.

One will recall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we in this House, in one of the workshops that we had undertaken in the West, we had paid a visit to the FRIEND facility, it was both sides of the House and we saw firsthand the kinds of projects or programmes that they run to be able to assist members of the communities in regards to food security and we also enjoyed a lunch there which was very organic.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Lunch!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- The lunch was paid for by this august House, it was a parliamentary programme, Honourable Minister; that was part of the training.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that because we continue to hear from the other side of the House in regards to the important role that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) play in any government and in that same breath whereby they say that they work with CSOs and NGOs, they undermine a very well-established organisation that does community outreach in regards to food ration distribution, Mr. Speaker.

For those of us, as alluded to by Honourable Tikoduadua, who try and reach out to members of our community by assisting in food distribution, we can only go as far with supporters from some willing helping hearts around Fiji. We are able to reach out to certain communities that have been missed out, Mr. Speaker and we do that in our efforts to assist Government because we recognise the bad situation that Fiji is faced with in regards to helping our people during this time where we are faced with a high rate of unemployment.

In saying that, I would like to echo the issues that were brought out by the Fiji CSO Alliance in regards to their humanitarian response. They had brought this up in 2020 when we were faced with COVID. They had highlighted that there was a need for a well-coordinated plan that Government must have to be able to address the needs of our people. It is now 2021 and again, they have come up with that same call that there is a growing humanitarian crisis in Fiji. I know that was debated in the House and we on this side of the House had highlighted that but then the Honourable Prime Minister himself said that they do not give a damn. So, Mr. Speaker, with that kind of attitude, we must only be thankful to organisations like FRIEND and all those under the Fiji CSO Alliance that have their humanitarian response towards COVID-19.

What they have said is true that our people are in need. For example, Mr. Speaker, people that have contacted me, I mentioned to them the process or where they could go to as according to Government like call 161 or ...

HON. R.S. AKBAR.- You should help too.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... these numbers, Mr. Speaker, but they say that they have tried the number and there was no response. Also, it was mentioned in this House that those who are in lockdown areas, if they needed help, they can provide their cards and be given to those at the border like the police officers or the frontline officers in there but also when they call, I advised them to do that. They said that they have been calling them but help does not come. It is over a day and these are the real situations that our people are facing and which organisations like FRIEND and CSO Alliance are very much aware of because they do a lot of work on the ground. They work with our very communities that the government is trying to reach.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they also said that they have reached out to the government and highlighting their willingness to help but they said it has fallen on deaf ears, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They have also highlighted the problems, the trauma that our people are faced with and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the CSO Alliance mainly consists of organisations that advocate for women's rights.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- They advocate for women's rights so when they say that they are aware of our people's need because it is the women that have come for their assistance and we know it is the women that will look for food, desperately look for assistance when it comes to having to feed their children, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

So, this call by the CSO Alliance is a very genuine call but the government has decided to turn a deaf ear to that.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- That is not true.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Dr. Reddy had accused this side of the House yesterday that we are racists and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that what we are bringing up now, is even from the CSO Alliance, and it comprises of these seven organisations that are very multi-ethnic, and the call is from them.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- ... all they said ...

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, further to that, because they recognise the dire situation or the bad situation that Fiji is faced with right now, they called for the resignation of the Attorney-General and even yesterday, the Honourable Dr. Reddy accused us ...

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Very poor, very poor.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- ... on this side of the House ...

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA.- There is something wrong with you and them.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to remind all of us in this House that we are all serving the same people, our communities. It is not about you, it is not about us, this is about the whole of Fiji, and particularly those that are vulnerable.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- We know that ....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- You know it but you say otherwise. What you have been saying inside the House today and even in previous days does not echo that you really care or want to listen to the plights of our people.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are at this cross point where we really need to look at whether what the government is doing for the people is good enough or not, and not playing politics. What we should be looking at is, we should be listening to our people. We should be listening to the powers of the community. Mr. Speaker, Sir, when the CSO Alliance called for the resignation of the Honourable Minister for Economy, they have very good reasons in doing that.

They have very good reasons, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and this is what they said that the Honourable Khaiyum had displayed a profound lack of economic knowledge necessary for this mandate and that the direction of Fiji's economy in the COVID-19 era would be better served under a new and more competent Minister.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is what those in CSO Alliance are saying and because they are so defensive, they do not want to listen to what we are bringing out in the House with regards to the people's need, then maybe they should listen to the CSO which are representative of CSOs and NGOs in the country.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, they also went on and said the fear that the Honourable Minister needed to reflect on his multiple portfolios and leave the economy to qualified people (economists) and a bipartisan group who will deliver Fiji with a much better response and recovery plan.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- I am only ....

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Maharaj, you have a point of order.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, my point of order is, what is the relevance of that particular statement to this debate? Why are we bringing the statement from CSOs in this Parliament and putting it in this debate? What relevance it has with regards to the debate that is on hand? Nothing, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Salote Radrodoro, you have heard the point of order.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It just goes to show that maybe we should educate ourselves more about the role of CSOs and NGOs in the country.

For your information, Honourable Maharaj, the Government of Australia and New Zealand support these CSOs. That goes to show the trust and confidence this Government has on the CSOs. They recognise them and the important roles they play in our country, and yet, the Government side is questioning and belittling the roles that the CSOs play.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to implore on the Government that we engage with these CSOs and NGOs and also give them grants so that they can help the Government in the work that it is trying to do. The CSOs and NGOs are the hands and legs of any Government in regards to carrying out the Government's mandate.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to request the Government that it recognises the roles of the CSOs and NGOs in Fiji by engaging with them in regards to food distribution and for small and medium businesses, like FRIEND (I know the Government side really do not want to hear about it), but they are very well established and they do offer training programmes, and community-based programmes that could really help small and medium businesses in trying to revive the businesses in this difficult time that we are faced with, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you, very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. I give the floor to the Honourable Minister Koroilavesau.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will make a very short contribution. Basically, I just wanted to say that I take great exception to the statement by Honourable Tikoduadua in saying that I should shut up so that I can learn something. I understand that he is a smart Honourable Member, but I take great exception to that statement. Mr. Speaker, let me say at the outset that this motion is technically-flawed. As Honourable Tikoduadua is trying to say that there is \$50 million set aside for this august House to debate on where to allocate it.

I think the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy has clearly explained the motions and actions that have been taken on the money that had been donated by Australia and New Zealand. If the Honourable Member comes in to Parliament and says that he wants \$50 million and this is to be disbursed according to his own interpretation that there is a huge task to try and find a \$50 million that is lying around that can be provided for and utilised in the manner that he suggested here in this House as his motion.

Mr. Speaker, you know I am quite disappointed with the Opposition in the way that they stand up and talked on the various motions and Bills that have been presented to this House. Even in the last Session you had stated that the Members had been talking out of context, they continued to basically go against the ruling that you have already made before that.

The Opposition seems to be on a drive that they will basically oppose every motion or any Bill that is presented to the House, as part of their grandstanding and electioneering to please their electorates. It is very common to hear them when there is a debate that there is continuous repetitions and contradictions, especially within their own parties.

It is very common that when our Members rebuff their statements, they raised Points of Orders that we have gone outside the subject of discussions. They were the ones who brought in the subject that has been discussed, out of context.

I think in this precious time that we have and the situation that we are in, we better come to this honourable House and present well-researched information and data so that that can be valuable contribution towards what we are trying to achieve, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Prasad, you have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the outset, I wish to say that we support this motion and we hope that the Government will also support this.

I was just listening to Honourable Koroilavesau, he is talking about how the Opposition has never supported these Government Bills and motions. In fact, it is the other way around. In my seven years in Parliament, there has been many instances where we in the Opposition have supported Government motions and Bills where we felt that it was appropriate to do so.

I am quite disappointed, Mr. Speaker, with the response from the Government side, for example, Honourable Faiyaz Koya this morning, instead of talking about the Bill and responding to the Bill, he started with name calling. He called Honourable Gavoka “doom” and “be doomed” and even went to the extent of talking about what is in our head. I mean you know the tone and the way in which he attacked us personally shows the narcissistic and egoistic arrogance. The way they are attacking the Opposition on important issues. We do not consider anyone of you on the Government side as our enemies, we have nothing personal against anyone of you.

I would urge Government Members when they debate on this motion let us not get upset, let us not get angry, let us show a bit of humility - just listen to what people are saying and what the Opposition is saying because this is a crisis. There is no point-scoring here because there is nothing to score points on; I mean the people are suffering, we are going through an exponential rise in COVID-19 cases in the last week. When we bring in something here, just like Government Ministers they say a lot of darnedest and irrelevant things; that is accepted. But, Mr. Speaker, for Honourable Members on the other side to get very personal and start name-calling and all that, is actually quite disgraceful and shameful.

Let me come back to the basis of this motion. Honourable Tikoduadua, I think quite eloquently with examples, related to us in Parliament what is happening on the ground. I know my colleagues on the Government side and personally, I know they are helping - people are telling me. They also get these calls from people and we are all inundated with calls 24 hours. I am sure the same is with the Honourable Minister for Economy, the Prime Minister and everyone is getting calls and there are people doing this so when we come to Parliament, when we say things we may not be saying it in the same way as you guys on the other side want to hear and understand, but the issues are the same.

Let me say this again, Mr. Speaker, this motion is really part of what I have said before. I have to say this - that the Government has actually failed in its last two budgets, starting from the COVID Response Budget and the 2020-2021 Budget because we did not think through carefully and plan our strategy in terms of health, education and income support for our people. I have said this before; this is not repeating and if it is repetition so be it, but in a crisis, Mr. Speaker, any Government, any Parliament will do three things, you look after the health of the people, you will look after the education and you look after the income support of the people.

In the last two budgets all we did (and I have to say this) I think the business lobby in this country is having too much say in the formulation of projects. I think there was enough evidence for example, reducing duty on land cruisers for people who can already afford \$200,000 landcruisers; why would you want to give them another \$60,000 or \$30,000 or \$40,000 whatever the reduction in duty amounts to.

Mr. Speaker, on top of that we actually asked our workers, those who had lost jobs to actually help themselves. We got them to take out their own FNPF, we actually got them to help our employers because all the employees in this country took a 5 percent reduction in the employer contribution. So in fact the employees, Mr. Speaker, helped the employers, and the employees who remained employed also

helped themselves by taking that 3 percent of their 8 percent to cushion the impact of the reduction in hours, or whatever they might have. We have the employees in this country, the workers in this country who have actually taken on the burden of not only helping themselves, their families but also helping the employers.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to understand that when we have an economic crisis or a health crisis like this, you have got to ensure that you help the people and by doing so, you know you actually help contribute to the demand in the economy.

As Honourable Tikoduadua said, putting money into the hands of the people, into the hands of farmers, will help the economy in the end, but it will also help cushion the economic and social pain that many families are going through at the moment, Mr. Speaker. I think there is a tendency in Government to hope too much. We call it hope and pray strategy - we are going to deal with this for a while but this is what we are going to see very soon. Let us have a long-term plan and I am hoping that in our next budget, we will be laying the foundation, you know apart from the one year's budget, expenditure, revenue, debt, deficit, we will also be providing a foundation, a plan for the next five years as to how we are going to revive our economy.

I think that is very important, Mr. Speaker, for the Government to do and I think there are enough people out there in the Ministry of Economy, you know, some maybe my former students who understand economic strategies better than probably many of the politicians on the Government side, so maybe they need to use those planners, those strategies more and then come into Parliament and talk about some of these things. But, Mr. Speaker, I urge Government Members, this is one opportunity, I mean we are talking about the budget and I explained to the Members of Parliament yesterday about the budget support.

The Honourable Attorney-General told us this morning that we sold EFL shares and got \$400 million and I know that \$200 million might go to FNPF because they had 20 percent shares. The Government would have \$200 million in its coffers probably now. I think it is important to use some of that money - if you cannot use the \$115 million which has already gone into the budget support, we have not had a very clear idea of how that \$115 million fits into the current budget. Whether it is because we do not have the revenue or whether because we cannot borrow that net deficit that we provisioned in the budget but we need, Mr. Speaker, this immediate injection into the pockets of our people.

I think it will also help the Ministry of Health or those who are in-charge of containing COVID, to freely have health protocols, engage in localised lockdowns if not bigger lockdowns so that people are looked after, and the health professionals and those who are involved in undertaking the protocols, can have a free rein. They do not have to be bothered by people calling them and saying "You know I do not have food, I do not have this, I do not have that" so there has to be a very clear synergy, a very clear coordinated approach in dealing with that.

In that context this \$50 million allocation to help the people directly through cash is, in my view best way right now to give ourselves that space, give ourselves that room to concentrate on the health emergencies and the health protocols. I think the health ministry should be given that support from all the different ministries. If we have to cut down on certain operational expenditures, let us do that now, let us do that for the next six months; we are not asking for the next 10 years.

All those little things, Mr. Speaker, can be done, to look for this \$50 million so that we can move on in a decisive way and that is why Mr. Speaker, I would urge Government to consider this. It is not about playing politics which happens to be the usual response from the government whenever the Opposition says something - "oh you know you are politicising it" - that is not true. As I said,

we on the Opposition side we do not have anything personal against any of you there. So, let us not become personal and start name calling and all the rest of it, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let us look at the substance of the motion. Why we are doing this and let us all show some humility and understanding of where we are going in this crisis. With those words Mr. Speaker, Sir, I support the motion and I urge everyone to support this. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Professor Prasad. The Honourable Prime Minister you have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I make response in not supporting the motion by Honourable Pio Tikoduadua. I would like to state that the words that Honourable Professor Prasad did not want to use - the gloom and doom - is actually the same as the boom he has been using the whole day. So, I do not see what is wrong with you Honourable Prasad; try and accept the same standard.

I want to tell Honourable Tikoduadua that I never said anything in that statement in response to Honourable Kuridrani yesterday about moving things to the budget session. Never. Not in Honourable Kuridrani's speech but I want to tell Honourable Salote Radrodoro, she is always harping about FRIEND and CSOs. We all know that FRIEND and CSOs are the proxies of the Opposition, we know that. You do not have to tell us. We know that.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Where is the evidence?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Someone had highlighted and sent a screenshot around and he talked about the CEO of FRIEND and said that maybe it is better that she pays her employees first before she goes out and harps about payment for the poor people on the street.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, first and foremost let me acknowledge our frontline workers including the police, navy and the RFMF for their dedications, their sacrifices and hard work in the continued fight to contain the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are many untold sacrifices made by our frontline warriors. They have forgone their precious family time coupled with disruptions to their normal routine. They have had to sit through uncomfortable swab tests for COVID-19, some as many as six times since the outbreak of the second wave. I therefore salute all our frontline workers for their noble contribution and I have total confidence in them in their fight to help return the country to normalcy.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must reiterate that all Fijians must support our frontlines by strictly adhering to the advice issued by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the motion by the Honourable Member that is before this august Parliament, all the Honourable Members of this Parliament will agree with me that the only way businesses can mitigate the current economic downturn brought about by the pandemic is to return to some form of normalcy as soon as possible. We need to regenerate economic activity and get our economy back on track.

We cannot sit back, stay down or for that matter close for too long; it is just not feasible. The only way to do that is to open up businesses and ensure they abide by the strict health protocols in place. Honourable Professor Prasad talked about a strategy that we have a strategy of hope and prayer. That is wrong, Honourable Member, your mentor Richard Naidu has said their strategy is hope and prayer, not hope and pray. That is the hope and pray that you mentioned. So always follow your mentor's line, please.

We understand now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the businesses are adamant about reopening, they will do everything within their powers to adhere to the strict protocols. Last Saturday, I not only announced the easing of restrictions in Vanua Levu, and some part of Viti Levu and controlled travel to and from maritime areas, but I also announced the opening of the essential businesses to operate subject to strict protocols. Mr. Speaker, Sir, opening up ensures that those who are unemployed due to restrictions, return to work and earn income to support their families.

In addition, this will allow micro, small and medium sized businesses that have felt the full brunt of the pandemic, to get back on their feet. The decision made by the Government was not an easy one to reinvigorate our economy on one hand, while battling to contain the pandemic with the other. It is a fine intricate balance that we simply cannot mess up. This is expected to have a domino effect on our economy, as the businesses I have alluded to earlier, will directly contribute to rejuvenating our economy. As any responsible government would do, we have made sure that the adverse impact of the pandemic on the unemployed and our vulnerable groups are mitigated through the direct support and social net interventions.

In case Honourable Members on the other side of the House have forgotten, or should I say they regularly choose to forget, this is what we on this side, refer to as selective memory by the Opposition. Government has done a lot and will continue to do so in assisting all Fijians, especially, the unemployed, vulnerable groups and small and medium sized businesses during this difficult time. Government has continued to provide top-ups to the Fiji National Provident Fund to assist members with the low general account balances who have been affected during this pandemic. Government provided top-ups amounting to \$260 million while the Fund has released more than \$151 million from member funds.

Just recently, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also announced that \$440 will be paid in two instalments to eligible Fijians through the FNPF. Government will further top-up \$3.9 million with the FNPF, releasing approximately \$9.1 million. Government provided \$90 cash distribution to all Fijians three weeks ago to support them in buying groceries and essential supplies. A total of more than \$10.6 million was paid out to more than 118,000 households. Government has continued with the payments of social benefit schemes to all vulnerable populations such as the elderly, people with disabilities and low income households and food ration distributions were provided to households that faced difficulties during the lockdown periods.

Through the COVID-19 concessional loan package facility, more than 5,000 micro, small and medium enterprises were assisted with approximately \$30 million to support their business operations. As part of the COVID-19 unemployment assistance, the hiring subsidy called 'Stronger together Employers' was introduced to incentivise businesses to create employment for out of work Fijians.

Employers were grounded a way its subsidy equivalent to the minimum wage rate for a three months period when they employed eligible Fijians. Fijians above the age of 18 years on Viti Levu will receive a payment of \$50 from Government if they are not receiving any kind of benefits. The initiative will cost Government \$10 million and target about 200,000 Fijians.

For food security, seedlings were provided to encourage backup farming and for Fijians to be self-dependent and grow their own food.

The gist of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that Government will go above and beyond to ensure the good people for the long term on a sustainable basis.



Even though severe blow has been inflicted on a revenue string to our tourism sector and the globally economic slowdown, we will do everything within our powers and means to support every Fijian.

The motion, Mr. Speaker, kindly before the House is simply uncalled for. This is another gimmick .from the Opposition to politicise the typical situation we are going through for political gain.

I urge the Members of the other side to open your eyes and recognise Government efforts. Support our frontline workers including the navy and the military to participate constructively in this fight against the pandemic. Show some patriotism fighting for the unemployed, the vulnerable population of course, to businesses that are susceptible to the economic crisis will continue in a sustained manner and strategically.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this motion to simply put is a clear waste of our time and I urge every Member of this Parliament not to support this motion. Based on this remarks, I do not support this motion.

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you for the opportunity to talk on this particular motion, the motion by the Honourable Pio Tikoduadua.

I think there are number of things that we all agree. Firstly, is that we are in the midst of perhaps the greatest crisis that any of us will live to see unless of course, climate change and all of its clematis probably the greatest crisis that we ever had in this world ever since a great depression back in the late 30s.

And we all agree also that the cost that this had on all of our people has been immense. The cost in terms of peoples' livelihoods. People have lost their jobs. One time they are talking more than a hundred thousand people have lost their jobs. There has been a greater cost in terms of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

Just this past week, we have heard in the news that the number of them were talking about the fact that some of them might have to close. There are some that have closed. There was a possibility that if the general lockdown continued could have a greater impact on much larger number of MSMEs.

We all know that a lot of our people are facing crisis now in terms of getting food and everyone in this House all of us we have received calls. I think every Member of Parliament has been helping people out with food and with other sort of assistance and all of us have been doing that.

We have also been helping others to do this but at the same time, one thing that for me to my mind that is when you look at Governments per se at how they have been operated in the past this particular Government since we have the Bainimarama Government, since we had the FijiFirst Government, if they had been one whole lot of Government emphasised on helping the most marginalised and the poorest society.

That has been something that is evident from what this Government is done. It started with giving equality across ethnicity, made everyone a Fijian, it took a lot of guts and gumption and a lot of heart and

encourage to be able to do that. That is the kind of thing that the Prime Minister did. He treated everyone equally.

At the same time, and ever since that time, we look at what Government has done, the national minimum wage, bringing in all these components of social welfare, lifting the amount of money that we are putting to social welfare over the years and this was during the times when we had good times. This is where all this so-called Bainimarama Boom went, as we grew the economy with the amount of money that we are able to generate, we threw it into the things that helped the most marginalised. We made sure that kids will not have an excuse for not going to school, we made sure that they had something to eat, we make sure that they could get to school.

The Ministry of Women has never had a kind of assistance that you had ever since when the Honourable Bainimarama became the Prime Minister through the Bainimarama Government and they are FijiFirst Government. So this is what I am saying since the Bainimarama Government and the FijiFirst Government, there has been there constant thrust and make sure that we look after the people that really need that assistance.

It became much more apparent when everything was transparent when we had the 2013 Constitution. All those socio- economic crisis, huge challenges that we set ourselves in the country and then we are beholden to be able to address those targets and putting it into a National Development Plans and we have that focus. So during the good times, during the times that we had the economic growth a lot of the money were able to get from the Bainimarama Boom with the FijiFirst boom has been thrown back into making sure that we help the most marginalised.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Hear, hear!

HON. J. USAMATE.- That is the culture that is the way that this Government thinks, that is the way the Prime Minister thinks. We have seen it again, when the Honourable Minister for Economy was talking about during question time by the Honourable Qereqeretabua, he showed the amount of money that the Government has already put into assisting those that have been most marginalised. \$200 million plus the \$100 million that is being used for Ministry of Health and RFMF and so forth. This is money that we did not have upfront but we have to find ways because there is a constant attempt to make sure that we look after those that really need it.

During this time for COVID, there is always the balance of making sure that you maintain your economy or keeping growing, you need the economy to keep going so that you can have some finance to assist you in your attempt to get the COVID away or to address the issue to find this thing that we need to do for COVID. I think to my mind if you look at the past history of the Bainimarama Government now the FijiFirst Government, there has been constant attempt that focus on looking after those that really need that assistance, so bear that in mind.

I was listening this morning, I was going through the comments that was made by the Minister for Economy in how he has approached and look at the budget if there is one thing that the people of Fiji know even though things are difficult Government will find the way to try its best within the resource that it has and the assistance that we have from our development partners to make those that really needed to the best of our ability. That has been shown in the past and Government will continue to do to that in its whole history what has been done points to that.

On that point Mr. Speaker, Sir, I believe it is not necessary for us while we need it in terms of rations, assistance and so forth, there is no need for us to agree to this motion because Government will do it anyway because that has been the history and the category of this Government and this leadership. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank Honourable Minister. I give the floor to Honourable Qionibaravi, you have the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to support the motion before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the nation faces extraordinary times with COVID-19, hitting our shores in March 2020 and in recent weeks since 17th April. The grim Delta Plus mutation, formerly known as the Indian Variant, WHO I think in recent days has put out the name Delta Plus to replace the Indian Variant name that was coined before that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we acknowledge the various forms of assistance provided by Government for our people, however, the people of Fiji are still crying out for more assistance. The Honourable Attorney-General said yesterday that the Opposition does not understand public finances. He said that direct budget support is for specific allocations and cannot be used for emergency needs. Yet, he also found funds, according to what he said yesterday, to finance the emergency needs like the \$5 million for hotel accommodation for the front-liners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I urge the Honourable Attorney-General to look at our capacity to raise revenue and to use the allocated expenditure. The Attorney-General is very much relying on budget support from developing partners during crises rather than a proactive approach to manage the Government finances, Mr. Speaker, Sir. He should stop relying on development assistance or budget support to make good his poor budget planning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the figures from the 2019 Household Income & Expenditure Survey are sobering but that was conducted before the onset of the pandemic which put thousands of our people out of work. It is these marginalised families that need immediate assistance, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from Government with their immediate needs for survival in terms of food, shelter and their basic needs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Fiji needs a plan of action that will enable the people to fully understand what is available for them and more importantly how these forms of assistance can be accessed. One only needs to talk to struggling citizens who seek assistance regarding their application of assistance which Government has announced. I refer in particular to a call from the people in the Nakasi area for assistance. They have been waiting for rations but these have not been supplied.

The motion before the House would meet the needs of such groups as this and others, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This morning motions were tabled before the House to fast-track our law-making and oversight functions for a number of Bills under Standing Order 51. A niche and piecemeal approach adopted by Government to combat the COVID Delta Plus mutation is a huge disappointment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government had one year to draft laws to enforce physical distancing and COVID safe measures, yet Parliament is again being treated as a rubberstamp rather than as a co-equal partner branch of Government, the legislative branch is being treated as a rubberstamp. A clearly laid out plan of action should have been prepared by Government and tabled before the House for debate in the recent April 2021 sitting which was two weeks after the first case of Delta Plus came to light. Even last week's May meeting was an opportunity for Government to act and present its plan to the people.

The Opposition had been calling, consulting to work with civil societies with a tried and proven record in helping those in need. Mr. Speaker, Sir, a bipartisan approach would have been a boost for our people to see that their leaders are working together and cooperating, coming together

in the national interest to combat our common enemy, this COVID virus which poses a threat to the lives of especially our vulnerable population, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

This morning, Honourable Naiqamu pleaded for both sides of the House to come together. I wish his leaders would listen to his plea because the people of Fiji would have been heartened to see us working together. Yet we have a regime that thinks, it alone has the ideas and solutions.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Government! Thank you, Professor.

We have a Government that thinks that it alone has the ideas and solutions when clearly it has been flailing around, now resorting to opening containment zones and putting our people at risk for the virus. At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to respond to the Minister of Health on the worrying trend of increasing cases of front-liners infected with the COVID-19 virus.

According to the Honourable Minister's perception that my comment was made without any factual basis, I wish to point out that analysis of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic since 17th April reveals that the number front-liners tested positive for the virus is trending alarmingly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in high comparison to the rest of the population. For example the 403 new cases as at 1<sup>st</sup> June, two days ago, in the second wave, the total number of front-liners is 123, that represents 30 percent of the new cases since the second wave began on 16th April, 2021.

So as a percentage of total cases in the second wave, 30 percent of front-liners is over representative, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Are there nearly 300,000 front-liners in Fiji? Do they really represent 30 percent of our population? In the cases reported to midnight 1st June, 2021, the Permanent Secretary for Health announced that 25 out of the 37 cases are front-liners, that is, 67 percent of that day's new cases.

Yesterday, 2nd June, 2021, of the 35 new cases, 25 were front-liners. Being seven from the RFMF - QEB cluster, 17 from the CWM Hospital cluster, 1 from the Navy cluster which that means 71 percent of the total cases run by the Ministry yesterday are front-liners.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- It seems to me to be an alarming trend that front-liners appear to be over represented....

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

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- She heard it.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order. Talking about the \$50 million that has been proposed by the Honourable Tikoduadua to be directed to those needy. We are not talking about who the super spreaders are. The Honourable Member is going on about something that is completely out of what we are discussing. We are just talking about those that need, whether we should give this \$50 million set aside or not. So, she needs to get back on track and focus on what we are talking about.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Hear, hear!

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, take note of that Point of Order.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. With your approval, I would just like to end this explanation because I think it has been taken out of context. We support the front-liners, we do. The concern, Mr. Speaker, Sir, ....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Yes, let us clap together.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You said they are super spreaders.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- We support the front-liners.

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

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- We support the Ministry of Health Officials. We support the Military – the Commander and his Officers.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You said they are super spreaders.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You are now changing tune.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I am sorry, you have got it wrong. This is why....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You are changing tune now.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- What I was trying to explain, Mr. Speaker, yesterday the alarming trend....

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

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- The alarming trend Mr. Speaker, Sir...

HON. SPEAKER.- Do not talk amongst yourselves.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I am sorry, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Through me, thank you. You have the floor.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- What I wanted to impress yesterday was the alarming trend of the increase of the front-liners being tested positive and the concern was addressed to the Honourable Minister for Health to advise us what are they doing to ensure that the front-liners are protected, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- They should be protected, because they are the front-liners.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You said they are super spreaders.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- They are facing the public, they are face of Government during this pandemic, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This has been taken out of context.

Last week when I spoke, I first expressed my appreciation to the front-liners. So, this has been largely misconstrued, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I would like to straighten this fact.

My concern is the alarmingly increasing trend, the percentage of the front-liners getting positive. It is no fault of theirs, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that they are being tested positive. It is the Ministry of Health that should ensure that they fully understand, they fully comply with the COVID-19 safety measures.

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

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- This is the concern, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There seem to be a ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- ... disjointed effort in the Ministry between the policy and the implementation action on the ground.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Point of Order!

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I can hear you but I cannot ....

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- What is the Point of Order?

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- I can hear you, but I cannot ....

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Where are you?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- What is the Point of Order?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- It is me here, Dr. Waqainabete.

The Point of Order is, the Honourable Member is digressing from what is being discussed. We are discussing about the Bill, but when she enters into the discussion about the front-liners, this is what she said yesterday, she said the front-liners are super spreaders of the disease. She is now trying to qualify her statement, which was a statement that she made yesterday saying it is a super spreader. She must have gone home and she thought about the consequences of what she said and she is trying to qualify it.

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Very poor.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor. Thank you for your Point of Order.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Minister of Health may have forgotten that my question was, what is the Ministry of Health doing to ensure that the front-liners are protected, are using the same COVID safety measures?

HON. J. USAMATE.- That's not what this motion is about.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- I was saying, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that they should be held responsible for being tested positive, it is the Ministry of Health. They should relook at how they are treating the front-liners, the protocols, how often are they being tested, et cetera. It is the responsibility of the policy-makers to ensure that there is a connection between policy and action with systems in place to educate the front-liners, protect the front-liners and facilitate their actions. We need these hardworking and dedicated people to continue their work in vaccination, policing, nursing and administering our national COVID-response. We need them to do it safely for their own safety, for their own family and for the people whom they serve. That is the responsibility of the FijiFirst Party as the current administration in Government.

If the law were to be applied equally then the Police would have to arrest all the front-liners spotted without a full face covering mask, engaging in mass gatherings or *yaqona* sessions outside the bubble, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Therefore, the onus is clearly on the Honourable Minister to take urgent action to ensure that all front-liners are kept safe by observing the COVID-safety protocols which are being enforced by the public. The front-liners need to be supported in their work whether they are in a district office, a check point or a medical setting, the core business of front-liners is to be the public facing.

I, therefore, ask the Honourable Minister to elaborate on the systems in place to ensure the safety of front-liners and the safety of the Fijians whom they serve. As front-liners they face the public daily and following COVID-safe protocols is an act of love and respect for the nation.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Point of Order again.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, you are going off the motion now. I have given you my instruction so stick to the motion so that we can finish this motion. You have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- She has spoken for ten minutes on something else.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to now to just go on the role of the Opposition. We have been bombarded in the last few days that we are seen to be opposing every Government policy, every Government statement. Yes, because this is our role. Our role is an oversight role to speak ....

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Have you finished?

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Just two pages, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We are raising issues on policies, budgets, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because this is our main role as Opposition. We are expected to raise these questions. We are not doing it just for the sake of doing it, we are doing it because it is our role as Opposition to do it.

HON. OPPOSITION MEMBER.- Hear, hear!

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- The wisdom of Fiji does not reside exclusively in the FijiFirst, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. J. USAMATE.- You did it in the context of the motion.

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- There are occasions when the Oppositions agrees with the Government, if the solutions proposed by Government is widely supported, is soundly based then it is only natural for the Opposition to agree and we have done so on a number of occasions, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Our plea is for the Government to acknowledge our role as the Opposition. This is what democracy is, it is a battle of ideas.

We, on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, Sir, trust that Government will acknowledge our role. The piecemeal approaches will not work for Fiji. I again say that the Plan of Action should be tabled in order to have a full and open discussion and to debate on the pandemic, particularly the plan and strategy Government has in place to fight and contain the virus, including the rehabilitation programme to take care of the huge numbers of people displaced from their jobs, the disadvantaged, vulnerable, poor, sick members in communities who are struggling and suffering to pay their rent, bills and put food on the table.

The absence of Government plans in the continuing cry of the people, I support the motion before the House today by Honourable Tikoduadua, Sir. *Vinaka saka vakalevu.*

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for the purposes of complying with Standing Orders with respect to sitting times, I will allow the suspension motion to be moved.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

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

That under Standing Order 6, that so much of Standing 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.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I second the motion.

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, very briefly we are yet to complete Schedule 1 which is the motion for debate and Schedule 2 and we will come back to this as has been agreed to earlier this morning, that is the request for us to sit beyond 4.30 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate. Anyone wishing to take the floor?

Since no one wishes to take the floor, I call on the Leader of the Government in Parliament to speak prior or add anything further.



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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I still have three more speakers before the right of reply, but on that note, we will take an adjournment for half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.33 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.04 p.m.

### **COVID-19 SUPPORT AID FUNDS**

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue with the debate, I give the floor to the Honourable Nawaikula, you have the floor.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- We are debating here the allocation of \$50 million from the money that has been donated by Australia and New Zealand. I think the total amount would run into about \$150 million, and for this sum to be allocated to the unemployed and the small businesses.

Whilst on aid money, Mr. Speaker, let me just say this, the real economists told me that before, and this is unprecedented, aid was only applied to professional and technical support, whilst overseas loans were directed specifically to capital projects, like the building of roads. But now the reason why I call it 'unprecedented', loans and aids are being used for general budgetary support, which means that we are getting this money (loan and aid) to feed ourselves, for our daily lives. That is the sad situation that our economy is at this moment and it is unprecedented.

Mr. Speaker, going back to the motion, Honourable Koroilavesau stated that this motion is flawed and I beg to differ with him, Mr. Speaker, because I think there is a lot of merit in this motion. You see, this Government or the Honourable Minister for Economy specifically, does not have a plan and he has been reactive such that when COVID first came, he found that there was no money so there was a bit of money that was applied to help the tourism sector. And he looked around, he could not find any money so he gave to themselves their own money from FNPF, and we waited one whole year and we had been crying and crying, 'What about these people, what about the people who are unemployed, what about the people in the other sectors?' He could not get any money, now as soon as money was found which was donated by New Zealand, he called a press conference.

Yesterday, distributing \$20 million, he called a press conference and he did not acknowledge that. That is not Government money, that money is coming from donation. Please, Honourable Minister for Economy, acknowledge those that are giving the money. Government does not have any money, we all know that but you must do that every time, do not call a press conference without acknowledging the people who give that. I say, Mr. Speaker, that there is a lot of merit in this motion because these are the people taking into account all that the Honourable Minister for Economy sadly remembered are still forgotten - the unemployed and the small businesses. When talking about unemployed, I am calling upon Government to remember the 160,000 individuals who live and occupy our villages, as according to the figures that the Honourable Prime Minister said yesterday, there is about 160,000 poor villagers, can a portion of this money be allocated to them?

I have done a small calculation and under the calculation, I think, there would be \$7 million that should be directed to the villagers. I hope or I am advising the Honourable Minister not to rely on the poor villagers to text because you cannot expect them to be texting from Lau or from elsewhere. Allocate this money, give it to the FAB and distribute it through their provinces. They know where the villagers are and they can allocate this money to them.

Moving forward, Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Honourable Dr. Reddy attacked me very badly or calling upon the Honourable Minister for Economy to resign and calling upon the Prime Minister to resign as Minister for Sugar. Honourable Dr. Reddy said 'Look, he is the most qualified, best suited for the position'. I think in his mind, inside Dr. Reddy's mind, he does not believe that, that was only his lips saying that. That is my thinking, that was his lips talking but his mind was not with him, he does not believe what he is saying.

Let me just share, Mr. Speaker, why I said that, and I am not the only person on record now calling on the Honourable Minister for Economy to resign, the CSO Alliance have also called on the same, and if I just visit what they said, allow me to quote, Mr. Speaker, what the CSO Alliance said:

“The Honourable Minister for Economy has a profound lack of economic knowledge. He must leave the economy to qualified people.”

And they are calling upon a bipartisan group to take the nation forward. It is not only me who is calling on the Honourable Minister for Economy to resign, there are many other people there, and it is not only me that is calling out on the Minister for Sugar to resign.

If Honourable Dr. Reddy is listening, please, let me just outline to him and to you, Honourable Members of the House, the reason why I called on them to resign. It was based specifically and objectively on outcome, and I called on the Prime Minister to resign from the Ministry of Sugar because of his results, and the results speak for themselves.

I would like to outline to you, Mr. Speaker, what the result has been in relation for him, for the Ministry of Sugar, and if you can listen closely, the Honourable Prime Minister’s record is this ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- A Point of Order, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- A Point of Order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motion is about the allocation of \$50 million, not about why the Prime Minister should resign as Minister for Sugar. I do not know where the Honourable Member is going with this.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula, just stick to the subject matter.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I thank him for that but because this was raised yesterday and it is probably good for him to know why, basically the outcome for the Prime Minister was that, in the totality of his time as Minister, that is from 2007 ...

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think he and the NFP leader - all of them, have said enough things about outside the motion or outside the issues that are from the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if they want to talk about anyone resigning, et cetera, they should move a motion, a vote of no confidence, et cetera, but this is not the way to hijack a particular motion, debate on that particular content of the motion, to hijack that and then there is a Point of Order now.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to hijack the time allocated to debate on that particular motion and then you go on with your personal diatribe, attacking people that you do not like for reasons known to them only, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I have already reminded him and I am reminding you, again, stick to the subject.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- I understand that now. I have been reminded, but let me tell the Honourable Member that yesterday he spent about 15 minutes raising this issue against me, at least

he is entitled to know the reason. If you could just sit down and listen, please.

The totality is that, I called upon that, the reason was this, \$481 million loss by FSC in those many years, and that is unprecedented and for anyone achieving that, would have called for his resignation, and for the Honourable Minister for Economy, he knows that he has brought the nation to a ...

HON. J. USAMATE.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- ... and he is entitled to do that and he does not want to hear because you cannot handle the truth, that is what you are. You are raising a Point of Order because you cannot face this.

HON. J. USAMATE.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Put your hand up so I can see, who is it? Honourable Minister Usamate, you have the floor.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite your instructions, the Honourable Member continues to go down that path.

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

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, before I continue, let me just say this - Honourable Usamate should resign too for wasting money.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Is that a joke?

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated before, just look at the status of the roads and you want to raise an objection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have stated before that the Minister of Economy is reactionary. He does not have a plan and therefore like always he is addressing things on an ad hoc basis and having done that, there are so many things that he should have addressed that he failed to do. This is an example, unemployment and people who have small businesses. These people have not been remembered and one of the big reasons for that is because he does not have any money. He does not have any money.

All the money that he has been distributing now, standing up and calling for a press conference is coming from overseas donors and aid. I am telling you Mr. Speaker, Sir, that after now that we have raised these issues, suddenly he will call another press conference to distribute money for the unemployed and for the small businesses. This is an area Mr. Speaker, Sir, that we should have addressed in the very first place, the very people who are in need. I am talking about the 160,000 individuals who live in the villages and I am hoping that they will have access to or be looked after by some of these donations that are coming from overseas. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Nawaikula and I give the floor to the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport. You have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you for allowing me to contribute to the motion before the House. Let me say right at the outset Mr. Speaker, Sir, that I categorically oppose this particular motion. I only hope that Honourable Tikoduadua was paying close attention to the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy's explanation when he was given

countless updates inside and outside this particular House. In fact Mr. Speaker, Sir, every time we introduce a new scheme or continue with ongoing programmes, it is actually publicly announced so this motion is actually superfluous.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Tikoduadua should know that such ad hoc motions or suggestions will actually disrupt the actual budgetary process which has already been disrupted because of COVID-19 and this may or may not upset our donor partners. Whilst the budget support is given, there are conditions that are attached to it. There are conditions tied to policy reforms and accountability, and it is signed in the legal agreement that is actually endorsed by Cabinet. Now, these things they need to understand - I shudder to think what they would do if they ever came into Government.

This aid Mr. Speaker, Sir, does not just get handed over willy-nilly. There are governance mechanisms and priority areas of the donor that need to be followed and this has actually been explained and told to the Opposition time and time again by the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy. And rightfully so Sir, as the Honourable Prime Minister has said, this has actually been raised very correctly all the time. It has even been raised correctly by Honourable Usamate just a little while ago when he was speaking; the programmes that we are actually undertaking, that forms a critical core component of the FijiFirst Government are, with respect, to do with the elderly and the vulnerable and they are actually at the core of this Government.

There is a systematic planned manner in which FijiFirst Government works and it is definitely not the way the Opposition would like to. Their philosophy, and it is quite simple Sir, seems to be the scattergun philosophy - have a shoot and let us see where it sticks today.

On a daily basis it is a scattergun philosophy; fire away and somewhere or something might stick - it is actually hilarious, Mr. Speaker, Sir. And all Fijians to us on this side of the House, being the Honourable Prime Minister's side of the House, are treated equally, and where people need assistance, we make sure and we ensure that it is provided.

Earlier on, there were claims by Honourable Salote Radrodro that the plea for assistance and the people's request had been rubbish by us. Let me say this back to her, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That concept of hers is actually rubbish and it is a complete lie. It is quite dishonourable of her to do that. Let me tell her quite categorically that from the Prime Minister below, in the FijiFirst Government, everyone on a daily basis receives phone calls for assistance, right throughout the night sometimes, Mr. Speaker, Sir - from the Prime Minister to all of the MPs, all of which are addressed and forwarded to the relevant agencies...

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Point of order, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would like to raise a point of order to straighten out the insinuation that the Honourable Koya is saying. The point of order is Standing Order 60 on relevance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had raised that people were complaining. I did not say anything about the Government not standing up to their requests. I was just saying that the people continued to complain, which suggests that the Government needs to look at the system and processes engaged to do the food distribution.

That is all that I was trying to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Not that I was saying that what the Government assistance was doing was not good - no. I acknowledge that, in that instance, but I said that it was not enough and I also said that people were complaining about the systems and processes. You should take that on board and try and improve that so that the assistance reaches the people in a timely manner. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I beg to differ about what she said, maybe she should check the *Daily Hansard* tomorrow.

Again, another one that actually joined this bandwagon of people that we have of unsubstantiated claims was the Honourable Professor Prasad. He said that we do not have any plans or clear strategies. We do have plans, Government's plans and Government's clear strategies have actually been able to bring us thus far. We have been able to weather the first wave of COVID-19 for 365 days. That is some feat when you think about it. That is some feat that is actually quite amazing when you think about it, when the rest of the world was not able to do that – 365 days, so let us give credit where credit is due. We were able to get through this outbreak and we will be able to get through this outbreak better and stronger.

Let me assure all Fijians that we will continue our support, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as mentioned by the Honourable Prime Minister. He just released some information about the new things that are available and the Honourable Minister of Economy actually told us what we are getting, what the vulnerable are getting in terms of the benefits that are being handed out.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, earlier on they spoke about freebies, et cetera being given out. It is actually quite ridiculous. Nothing has ever been this way with this Government. Our response to anything has always been targeted, and so was our assistance, especially with respect to MSMEs. One part of the motion talks about MSMEs and also talks about unemployment benefits, et cetera. This, Mr. Speaker, Sir, again as rightfully pointed out by Honourable Usamate, has been a critical component of this Government, this FijiFirst Government. It has been a critical component of our growth. Look at what is happening today, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

We actually have a middle-income society that never existed. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition fails to realise and I think that is not a right statement.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Point of Order. Mr. Speaker, you have reminded every speaker to be relevant when speaking on a motion. There is a separate rule for the Opposition and a separate rule for the Government.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- You did not even talk on the motion.

HO. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister. We have heard the point of order. You have the floor.

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Thank you, Sir. My comments are that I am talking about MSMEs and I think one of the critical component in the motion is about MSMEs. I thank the Honourable Nawaikula but I think you need to read that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Opposition fails to realise that the MSMEs today are a part of our formal sector because we, the FijiFirst Government, have made it so. So do not tell us that we are not doing anything for them. Do not tell us that we do not think that they exist. Do not tell us that there is actually nothing available to them because as rightfully pointed out by the Honourable Prime Minister, \$30 million worth of loans was actually given to them. And if they have suddenly forgotten, Mr. Speaker, Sir, just yesterday or the day before the Reserve Bank of Fiji has actually lowered interest rates to make loans more accessible to them. This is actually floated down to the banks and it will be available for MSMEs to access, and this is the kind of assistance that has been given.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we as the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Tourism we actually work daily on trying to make sure that we commence with COVID safe operations so that all businesses are allowed to operate, so that they can earn a living. They earn a living in the way they want to earn a living with their blood, sweat and tears. We are focussing on these particular businesses on a daily basis so that they can continue to operate, whilst being mindful of all that we are told by the Ministry of Health, Sir.

We must understand that in the times that we are living in, the goalposts change daily. They move on a daily basis so our work and our response actually moves on a daily basis. But, no, we are going to get scattergun philosophy. Let us try and shoot somewhere, where it is going to stick. They make it sound like we are not doing anything at all and this is such a wrong picture that the Opposition actually paints, Sir. They come to the House and say on the first day that we are not even talking about COVID and we are not doing this. But when we do, all they can do is pour scorn on it. All they can do is say “No, you are not doing anything at all.” They will not move when they are told the truth.

You cannot compare Fiji to Australian and New Zealand. It is actually quite ludicrous to even think that. It is a different economy. It is a different size. Any basic school of Economics 101, go and read it, it will tell you; you cannot compare Australia and New Zealand to Fiji. That is a clear apples and oranges situation, Sir.

I think Honourable Radrodro also, Mr. Speaker, Sir, said that the governments of Australia and New Zealand were supporting CSO, of course they are. That is what they do. They actually do some good. We actually support them too, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They failed to say that but that does not give the CSO a right to turn around and say to us that you should fire the Attorney-General and send him home as the Minister for Economy because he is incompetent.

I am sure that neither the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison nor the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern were actually thinking of that when they gave the grants to the CSOs. Absolutely, not, Sir. They put these measures in place because they believe in our economy. They believe in the fact that we will be able to manage these things. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are economically in a very different stake. At the moment, the Honourable Minister for Economy and the Ministry of Economy are doing everything possible to ensure that we maintain our cheques and balances, Sir. And again, these cheques and balances are put into the place in consultation with Health because that is paramount to us right now.

Everyone’s life is actually at stake. We must think of that, Sir. We cannot think the way the Opposition wants us to think at the moment. The issue of health someone say, “Oh, health is not being given a support”. This general statement that health has not been given a support, that is the furthest from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Professor Prasad again is not telling the truth. I know for a fact that my Ministry is giving full support, I know for a fact that the NDMO is giving its full support, I know for a fact that the Office of the Prime Minister is giving its full support, I know for a fact that the Ministry of Economy is giving its full support, the Ministry of Agriculture is giving its full support. It is not too late for a statement to generalise that, “Oh the Ministry of Health needs to get its full support” just ask the Honourable Minister for Health the kind of support he is actually getting, Sir.

The MOH, Sir, has been working on countless days and nights, every person in Government has been working countless days and nights in assessing application. My Ministry and everyone is assessing

application like manning the 163 Helpline and I wish to reiterate, Sir, in the last three days, we have received 33,000 calls and all are being attended to.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I said the Ministries such as Infrastructure, Rural Development, Agriculture, Economy, Communications everyone is giving their support. It is a simple fact, it is a whole of Government approach, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I think Honourable Professor Prasad also calls it "oh, you must have some humanity and some understanding" let me remind him, Sir, that before you even get the humanity and understanding, you need a platform and that platform is trust. Mr. Speaker, Sir, that platform, is honesty and this Government or the FijiFirst Government is actually the platform that exist at the moment and that is the platform of trust. It would seem that right now, that the Opposition is intellectually bankrupt and void of any truth in what they are actually saying.

The Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi actually tried to correct her statement from yesterday, let me tell you, Sir, it blurted out without any thought and now she is trying to correct it. She called our front-liners 'Super-Spreader', the whole of Parliament heard it, the whole of Fiji heard it and we know what she was talking about, she was pouring score on them. Today, she is saying 'she was trying to protect them'. Our efforts, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to protect our front-liners is actually either same as anyone else. The Ministry of Health is trying to protect everyone from this particular virus. There is no difference in the level of protection, the Ministry of Health is trying to give every single Fijian citizens that exist, Sir, and we must realise that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also need to point out that not all NGOs that are actually talking about are part of CSOs. At the end of the day, the Government is actually working with many other faith based organisations who today work alongside us. This was actually said the other day, so do not harp on one of them.

The motion, as I said, Mr. Speaker, is superfluous and this is the same motion we go through every day and honestly speaking it's kind of fed-up because they are bringing up the same thing, they are not actually listening. Just realising the intellectually that is just completely off track, they are bringing nothing new and replaying the same record over and over again and with no actual solution. There is not a single iota of an alternative that has been given by any Honourable Member of the Opposition until today, Sir.

The motion, in my opinion, belittle the intelligence of the Fijian people if you are actually going to come up to this on a daily basis, Sir. It is not even thought about properly, so it is a continuation of existing programmes, Sir, that we have.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are not getting this particular \$50 million that Honourable Tikoduadua is talking about, we are not getting an aid as a lump sum. They had given in stages, in phases and they are attached with KPIs that we need to meet. We cannot, Mr. Speaker, go against the agreement and our commitments, we cannot cause any mistrust or disrupt all the good work the Fijian Government and the Ministry of Economy has been doing.

The Fijian Government received this aid contrary to what was actually happening in the previous years and because our partners have the confidence, we receive this aid because our partners have the confidence in our ability to operate it in a transparent manner, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This ad hoc approach has been proposed by the Honourable Member will undo the good work of Government and actually undo the budgetary process. It would go against all the aid principles that we have already established over the years. The very same principles that have given our development partners the assurances that this aid will serve its intended purpose, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It needs to come through this particular



parliamentary process so we can ensure there is a strategy in place and a target approach of national value. It is a very myopic approach that this is the only way to actually help the MSMEs in our country, Mr. Speaker.

We recently, as I mentioned earlier, paid out \$30 million to our MSMEs in concessional loans as confirmed by the Honourable Prime Minister, Sir. This is part of the \$90 million assistance, we have helped MSMEs grow in Fiji over the past years. We have paid \$200 million in unemployment benefits to the FNPF and that is still ongoing, Mr. Speaker, as point out. So, this applies to the formal and the informal sectors. There are other ways to assist the unemployed and the MSMEs such as quickly obtaining our COVID-contained status which creates some economic activity, job creation and sustainable income so we need to find the balance, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, unlike the Opposition, the Ministry of Economy needs to consider all the priorities through the national budget whether it is for health or fighting this pandemic or whether it is for education or whether it is for supporting the MSMEs and of course, I am sure once the \$50 million is inputted through the budget, there will be full accountability as has always been the case.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the motion is misplaced and highly irresponsible and I do not support it, Sir. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development. You have the floor.

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to contribute to this discussion. At the outset, I do not support this motion and the reason why I do not support this motion is simply because Fijians are better off with the assistance being provided by the Government now as compared to what is being proposed. If you do your cost benefit analysis of the \$50 million that you are proposing and work it against what Government is offering right now, people are better off with the Government assistance and the other point that I want to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that we do not know for how long this pandemic is going to continue which means that we need to continue our assistance to the people until we are able to deal with this pandemic. That does not mean that for now, we just roll out \$50 million and give it willy-nilly without taking into consideration for how long this pandemic will last.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, another point, we often hear that Honourable Prasad talks about the poverty and he says that you know, that 30 percent of our people are living below the poverty line and this is according to the Bureau of Statistics. Mr. Speaker, Sir, if we take 30 percent of people living below poverty and if we work it against \$50 million, a person will barely get around \$194, so against that when you compare what the Government is giving, the Government is giving far more and let me just reiterate what the Prime Minister has said. There is assistance to SMEs, we have already given \$200 million which the Minister for Trade has highlighted. We are providing assistance through FNPF, we are giving rations, we have given \$90, we are giving \$50 per person in a household, if you add all this together, the assistance is far bigger than what is being proposed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I do not support this motion.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Again, I do not support the motion before the House, as alluded to by the Honourable Minister. We have enough already and let us admit the fact, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it is quite hard to satisfy all the expectations and the needs of everyone when we do have such crisis, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

As alluded to by the Honourable Minister for Trade as well, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we on this side of the House do receive calls for assistance as well and that has been challenged to the right authorities as well. Mr. Speaker, Sir, and of course that is the responsibility for all of us. If you do get a call for assistance, just channel it to the authorities that are already in place to look after these needs Mr. Speaker, Sir, so that it can be addressed accordingly.

I also wish to perhaps shed some light, Mr. Speaker, Sir, on the issue about NGOs and CSOs. It is unfortunate that this has been brought up often in this House but when it comes to humanitarian work, Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the few principle of humanitarian works is it has to be apolitical. Everyone that wants to be involved in humanitarian work, that is a basic principle that they must abide to. It is apolitical, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Secondly, in the arrangement within government, all CSOs and NGOs in Fiji that want to be part of humanitarian work, their point of contact and their coordination point is the Fiji Council of Social Services. But, unfortunately, most of the NGOs and civil societies that have just come in lately into the country, do not want to align themselves to the Fiji Council of Social Services. It is the Fiji Council of Social Services that is the representative of NGOs and civil societies into government's mechanisms and of course, in the machinery of government and through the various clusters that are already in place, Mr. Speaker, Sir. However, if you ask the Fiji Council of Social Services, they have a seat in the Disaster Council of the country. Those are the two NGOs that are in the Disaster Council, one is the Fiji Council for Social Services and, of course, Fiji Red Cross.

Every NGO and civil society that wants to be involved in humanitarian work that is their coordination point, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we welcome all civil societies and NGOs that want to be involved in the humanitarian work has to come through the Fiji Council of Social Services. We can sort that matter out, probably after this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have been around for quite a while in the disaster work because some of these NGOs that are making a lot of noises, I have never seen in one disaster out there in the field. We only hear them from their offices. They hardly come to the communities and do humanitarian work. Let us demarcate between rights and humanitarian work. I challenge these organisations, come, let us discuss these issues but through the Fiji Council of Social Services. That needs to be highlighted, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Again, I do not support the motion before the House. Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Let me start off with by some of the fundamentals. Funding allocations are actually made during the budget process. There is a legal constitution process to that. We have the Financial Management Act. You cannot move simply a motion to appropriate money. When the budget is set at the beginning of the financial year which Parliament approves, you work within that framework.

If you want to expand the expenditure, if you want to go out and borrow more, you have to come back to Parliament. Now, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have of course, for example, we do however, reallocate funds within that particular framework so, in this year's budget we had allocated \$100,000 for Unemployment Benefits, \$95 million for Unemployment Benefit directly, \$5 million for Training.

However, we have spent about \$161 million, Mr. Speaker, Sir, some from the previous financial year and some of course in this year. What we have done, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is we have vired funds from other Heads to be able to fund that but it is still within that particular framework.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course funding can be from different sources, as we have said we have borrowed money, raised revenue through taxes which we are still doing, people still do pay VAT. You can also raise revenue through non-tax revenue measures and of course, you can get direct budget support.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to highlight is that, whenever you develop these budgets, you need to be strategic and competitive. As highlighted by Honourable Nawaikula and obviously he has got the wrong end of the stick, as usual, when the pandemic actually hit Fiji, when the borders shut down, we immediately did a revised budget - the COVID-19 Budget Response. We came back to Parliament, we knew that revenue would be affected, revenue actually would fall, we re-jigged the budget to ensure that our expenditure and revenue would actually be aligned realistically and then we rolled that out. It was strategic. It was a response, like all other governments in the world. Honourable Nawaikula is off on some tangent and I do not mean to respond to him, he normally does not make much sense when it comes to finance.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the reality of the matter is that, all governments actually have had to make adjustments; revenue has dropped significantly. Large and small economies have had to borrow. He is saying that we actually had to borrow for operational matters, previous governments have also borrowed for operational matters. But in this particular instance, we had to obviously because of the fact that revenue was affected significantly. It is unprecedented. The tourism sector in Fiji has never shut down for such a long period, it has shut down before after cyclones, but probably for one or two weeks then it rebounds; properties are rebuilt, roads are opened and then tourists start coming over, but at the moment we have not had any tourist coming to Fiji for over one year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these are some of the fundamental issues that need to be addressed. It was interesting yesterday, they talked about the GDP rate for agriculture, but they did not actually talk about the ICT contribution, manufacturing contribution, financial services which were practically non-existent about 10 years ago. This is what we talked about in respect of how the economy actually is diversifying.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think it was Honourable Professor Prasad who said that there is no game plan, there is nothing there. Social welfare has not been decreased at all, free education still continues, medical services still continues, civil servants have had not a pay cut, we have additional resources to the Police, the Health, Water Authority of Fiji, Fiji Roads Authority, TELS and Toppers are still continuing. Yes, some of the numbers have decreased, but we are still continuing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have removed STT, we have decreased ECAL, we have removed Stamp Duties, reduction in Customs Duties and other taxes have been abolished, business licences are no longer required, there is a high foreign reserve, despite the fact that our largest foreign earner, tourism and our national airline not carrying any scheduled flights, the largest two income foreign earners, despite them not earning anything, our foreign reserves are still buoyant. There has been no devaluation, liquidity is flush, there has been no interest rate increase.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the RBF just announced yesterday, as I mentioned, they are lending at 0.5 percent to FDB, Housing Authority, lending at 1 percent to the commercial banks, saying that if you use this facility, when you lend money to the customers, it should be no more than 3.9 percent. There is a strategy in place. Why is this being done? So people can take advantage of these opportunities. As we have said, we need to look beyond our noses, we need to strategically place ourselves, and that is precisely what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our public purse has been managed well, there has been no defaults in our loan repayments. There is macro fiscal stability. Because of these reasons, we now have the

Australian and New Zealand Governments giving us direct budget support. If these fundamental principles of financial management and economic management were not met, if they did not have the level of confidence, they would not have actually given direct budget support. Mr. Speaker, Sir, these points need to be remembered.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also want to highlight, we need to have income support policies, there needs to be a sustainable and targeted basis, we need to maintain fiscal prudence. What the Opposition is saying they want the here and now. We need to address some of the issues of the here and, but we need to also think about the future. In same way, Mr. Speaker, Sir, only six months ago, no one thought there would be these many cases. But the fact of the matter is, that we had enough flexibility in the budget to be able to respond to that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are continuing, for example, with some of the strategic areas, we are continuing with iTaukei land development. A lot of those projects, the subdivisions actually commence very soon. We have to streamline our processes which we are doing. The Investment Bill today that got passed is an Act of Parliament today, has streamlined processes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to highlight is that we need to be able to build confidence. Confidence is critical. Confidence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, comes about not just through Government but through the private sector. Confidence comes about, Mr. Speaker, Sir, through other arms of the State. Your Judiciary is functioning, your Executive is functioning, the Legislature is functioning; that is critically important. The monetary policy side of things is being maintained well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, vaccine was seen as panacea to this problem. The Honourable Leader of SODELPA has said, "Go and get vaccinated." But his very Member sitting one row behind him is today saying, "Do not get the vaccine." He said before, "do not get the vaccine, drink hot water or herbal medicine" and saying that we have brought about COVID-19 to Fiji. That does not inspire confidence, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to put the right laws in place. The Bill that we are going to debate now about the fines is to give certainty to people, is to ensure we change our behaviour. That gives certainty to businesses, gives certainty to other parties. We have deferred taxes for companies.

Honourable Professor Prasad tried to turn this into a class issue saying businesses in Fiji have a huge influence. What nonsense! Go and see what other economies have done. They have actually tried to accommodate as many businesses as possible because businesses actually have the investment capacity. They also create jobs and sustain jobs. This is why the FNPF contribution was reduced, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We have offered \$2.68 an hour to any company that starts a new position. We will pay \$2.68 an hour and as a result of that about a thousand jobs were created, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make was, having this particular motion does not actually talk about who will get it. How will they get it? What will be the criteria?

Last year we disbursed \$30 million to the MSMEs. We used the private sector. We used the Fiji Institute of Accountants, Fiji Commerce and Employees Federation, Fiji Chamber of Commerce, Women in Business to process applications, help people with their applications, have a targeted amount to that and \$30 million was disbursed. We also have assisted as highlighted by the Honourable Prime Minister about \$161 million for those in the formal sector, targeted assistance. We are continuing with that. It is over one year, people are getting \$220 a fortnight.

With the launch of the \$90 and \$50, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have augmented that to the whole of Viti Levu because we have said as announced yesterday, there are people, even though they are not in the containment areas in Viti Levu, they still get affected because someone who lives in Ba but their business or their trade or their selling of fish and vegetables may be in Lautoka or someone in Sigatoka, may be in Nadi, people living in Navua, working in Suva or doing small business. They are getting affected because of the lockdown. Not enough traffic coming through, not selling the vegetables. But how do we actually ensure that it is targeted?

In the last \$90 disbursed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, 20,000 people applied who were not eligible. They were already getting their FNPF payments but they wanted to double dip. Our team actually has to check that against FNPF. As of 4.00 p.m. today, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the \$50 that we announced, 242,941 Fijians have already applied within a span of 24 hours. It closes tomorrow. We expect the numbers to go up. What it is doing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is giving us good data. So, we know where these people who are in the informal sector who need the assistance. It can be more and more refined and more and more targeted. That is what is required. Mr. Speaker, Sir, this motion does not take into account those nuance approaches as to how we assist people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also wanted to make was about giving people the right assistance in particular businesses at the right time. If we are going to give a business money when they have no opportunity to make any sales, what will happen? They do not have any revenue coming in. If they have the potential to generate revenue then you pump in money obviously it makes a lot of sense. But if you are going to pump money to a small business or a medium-sized business and they cannot trade, what will happen then? If they cannot employ people what will happen then? That money is going to go to waste. You need to be able to have targeted assistance, you need to be able to know that that business can actually operate and it will generate revenue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there has been a lot of digression about the sugarcane sector, et cetera which I just want to very quickly highlight. I just want to say to Honourable Professor Prasad, whenever we talk about these things, he said, "do not make it personal" although he does do it, "please, let us be open about it." He can have a go at us, we will tell you what you need to do and how you need to shape up. Stop trying to pussyfoot around the whole issue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just wanted to demonstrate the level of cloak and dagger stuff that is going on. In *fijivillage*, is obviously is now a favourite of NFP and the others and they have lost all credibility. Mr. Speaker, Sir, they said that, this is a statement through NFP's General Secretary- Seini Nabou saying that, "Honourable Prasad ability to highlight the sugar issue was after the sudden removal of the pending agenda items." Those of us who are copied on that email all know, Honourable Lynda Tabuya said, "let us not have the Friday agenda, let us focus on the Monday, Tuesday agendas which is a lot more important, which is the original Monday and Tuesday agenda. Yet this article here is made up by NFP as if it was some clandestine approach by Government to try and sabotage the Friday agenda.

The first person who responded (Honourable Qereqeretabua is on that email, I think Honourable Professor Prasad is on that email) was Honourable Tabuya and she said, "let us not have the Friday agenda". Why is this article not saying that if they felt the need to go to the media? Why is this contribution not talked about by Honourable Tikoduadua about cane cutters; why did he not mention the fact that the Commissioner of Corrections Service, we have now approved two temporary Corrections Service facilities to be setup in Tavua and Rakiraki to provide cane cutting services to the cane farmers in those areas. Those things are continuing to be done, Government is continuing to fund those processes but they have not highlighted that. They have not highlighted the fact that there has been a lot of technological advances in the sense they have actually mechanised cane cutting now too.

We have, of course, and again to bring into the context about Honourable Kuridrani's motion yesterday is that here is the cane cutting of the sugarcane industry being politicised. Honourable Professor Prasad is saying, "pay \$20", going out to the cane farmers, "we are going to make sure you get \$20." And then on the same hand over here they come and talk about non-agriculture sector saying "do not trying and make this into a political issue". But they are the ones who politicised the sugarcane industry, they are ones who are going to make false promises to the cane farmers - if we were there, we would pay you \$20. He is on the record for saying, "I will pay you \$100 a tonne." There needs to be some level of continuity in the argument, logic and economic rationale. We cannot simply be responding to the here and now and I think what is actually developing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is this culture of instant gratification. Unfortunately the Opposition is actually inculcating that culture of self-gratification. If we are going to be driven by emojis and emoticons, of course, instant gratification – that is what is happening. People eating planes, all of these things.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Let me read out, as she puts her thumbs up, Honourable Gavoka, what great personalities you have behind you.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Let me also tell you, I received a phone call, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this morning, someone from the Coral Coast telling me, "you know one of the SODELPA Members is in a very clandestine way going around and getting signatures for Sitiveni Rabuka, do you know that? Please do not give my name but that is what is happening and Honourable Gavoka needs to know about it." I said, "Well that is not my job." These are the kinds of things that are happening, Mr. Speaker.

(Honourable Members interject)

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- But talking about confidence, Mr. Speaker, Sir, let me read out two posts, maybe it was a *Twitter* or *Facebook* post, I think: this one says, "Oh, well, who are we little folk to complain, com-plane." The next one says, "May be it could do a fly-past of the Minister of Economy to symbolise their strategy which, as far as I can see, is hope and prayer."

Both of these posts are from Jon Apted and Richard Naidu respectively from a law firm that supposedly specialises in commercial law. If we have principals of these types of law firms who Honourable Prasad and them get the advice from, they used to be the former lawyers of NFP on record, what is the hope of instilling confidence in the private sector?

I think, I was told that they may have pulled this down after that, we got screenshots of it but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is the kind of culture that has been created. We need to be able to refocus, if you really are concerned about the future, to be able to ensure that we are focused on the future, be able to provide the assistance to the people who require it now, but only God knows what is going to happen in six months' time. Is there going to be another fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth variant? What are you going to do then? So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we cannot just simply think about the here and now.

Yes, of course, we understand that there are people who have been affected. Everyone knows that but we are here for the long haul. The Honourable Minister for Defence spoke about these seven NGOs:

(1) FRIEND;

- (2) Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (which currently gets paid by the Fijian Government to man and woman the Call Centre for child and domestic violence abuse;
- (3) Citizens Constitutional Forum;
- (4) Social Empowerment and Education Programme (SEEP);
- (5) femLINKPacific;
- (6) Rainbow Pride Foundation; and
- (7) Fiji Women's Rights Movement

As the Honourable Minister pointed out, many of these organisations do not actually get out on the field. If you have these types of organisations making political statements, their credibility as NGOs, civil society actually goes down the gurgler. There are so many NGOs at the moment as we speak, that are helping people. They are working with the different ministries, they go out and do their work. They do not issue these kinds of statements. They simply just want to do the right thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Honourable Prasad said, "Do not ever go to FRIEND blah, blah" but he raised it so I am going to raise it too. He made the statement in the *Fiji Times* saying that students at Fiji National University had not eaten for days or do not have food, et cetera, and then when the President of the FNU Students' Association came out and said that this is completely untrue, he threw Sashi Singh under the bus, he said, "I was informed by the CEO of FRIEND but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the point of the matter is this, I have also received text messages in my phone here, I can show it to the Members of Opposition, I have had advisory councillors sending me text messages saying that the FRIEND people are using Bala Dass, a NFP person, to go and give food and not giving it to us because we support FijiFirst. There are those kinds of allegations too and this is the problem.

When you have an NGO that is going to have political proclivities and are not actually upfront in terms of what they want to do, these are the kinds of problems we will have so, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the Honourable Seruiratu said, there are many NGOs that work with us formally, informally, quite happy to do that, and I have got nothing against NGOs, nothing against civil society groups, but let us not use them as proxies for your own political advancement, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I do not support this motion.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I now give the floor to the Honourable Tikoduadua to speak in reply.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Yes, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the response from the Government to my motion today, a motion that seeks to put small amounts of income support to 100,000 families or people until something more substantial is planned and announced in the next budget only 'adds salt to the injury' of our people and the rant by the government today in reply, their batting started by the Honourable Koroilavesau who took a familiar line not supporting the motion as they all did, and saying that I told him to him to shut up when I said, "Listen and learn."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a familiar ring tone was also adopted by the Honourable Prime Minister. Now, I would like to say to the Honourable Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that the reality of the matter is, the nine years of the Bainimarama Boom that has been paraded by his Government trashed in the words of the Honourable Koya truly resulted in doom and gloom.

But before I continue, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to reply very briefly to some of the comments by the Honourable Members from the Government that had spoken against the motion that is before the House today, and I notice this trend in all of their responses and that is to talk about what government has been doing in the past. It started with the Honourable Usamate talking about

all those achievements that he alleged that the government had achieved over the time before COVID-19.

I would just like to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it is all bad and good. The people hear what he is saying but when times are good that is when the government should be preparing for the worst. The familiar story from the *Bible* with regards to Joseph, preparing for the seven years of famine. A similar situation as that because the going will not always be good so you cannot always harp about the good things that you have done to the people when they are actually living at a sticky point such as this, and they have immediate needs which is why the Opposition, and in this case the National Federation Party, through the motion that has been brought to the House today, it needs to respond to the needs of the people.

Now, the Honourable Premila Kumar says that government is already doing enough. What the people have already received to-date is more than enough than what we are proposing. But, I am not sure whether the Honourable Minister goes around, and I am sure as has already been alluded to the House by the Honourable Prof. Biman Prasad earlier that the Minister .....

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- A Point of Order.

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

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Member is basically lying. I did not say that. What I said was, that we are doing what we can, taking into consideration the situation we have. We do not know how long this pandemic will last, it was all about sustainability that I was talking about. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to disagree. I am sure the *Daily Hansard* is going to show that the Honourable Minister said, that whatever I am proposing is significantly lower than the packages that government has already given to the people. Now, my point is, above all this and I am going to kind of emphasise this later in what I am going to say, that the government needs to do more. The government needs to do more, that is the point.

Yes, we are arguing about whether it is a budgetary issue, the budget processes, this funds have been given for certain purposes but, Mr. Speaker, Sir, what are you doing to the cries of the people that are coming now? Yes, what will be tomorrow if the needs of today cannot be met. Earlier on also, the Honourable Koya similarly was arguing the line as spoken earlier in the week by the Honourable Attorney-General and the Honourable Attorney-General repeated that today about budget processes and where he suggests that the Opposition is intellectually bankrupt. I would like to .....

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- I would just like to draw Parliament's attention that we had decided some time back, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that when in Parliament, we are not to put up *Facebook* posts. Honourable Tabuya is doing that, as we speak. Someone has just sent me a screenshot of what you just posted at 18.07, where you were saying, and may be if you are doing it, please, clarify. It says, 'And for the Opposition, I quote the PM, 'the CSOs are proxies for the Opposition, why', thank you.' It is your photograph, here.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, yes, I am not doing that myself, just like the Honourable Attorney-General, he has the Department of Information putting up his live Parliament



presentations while he is presenting, so there is no difference. He has people working for him, I have people working for me, respect that.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is different. If videos of what a person has spoken in Parliament is posted, that is fine. Her people can post up what she is saying, but this a personal post under her name whilst Parliament is going on. You will never find under our names anything being posted whilst Parliament is in session. This is by passing, it is true. Honourable Tabuya has a fantastic record of being disingenuous, and it is true.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- A Point of order.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have not finished.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- But I have a point of order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- There is a point of order going on here.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is a fact, no one over here puts a post whilst Parliament is going on.

Videos of Members of Parliament when speaking, go up, or recorded version of that go up, and which I have just said, any Member from the Opposition is entitled to have their team members put their own speeches up on *Facebook*, no problem, because that is what you have already spoken about. That is what you have just said, plus, it is live but this is actually a comment. It is giving a commentary and there is a world of difference because she did not make that comment. On the Chamber floor, she has made that comment on a social media platform and there needs to be rules around this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and we had agreed on these rules and she is breaching those rules.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Tabuya, you have the floor for your point of order now.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Like I was responding to the Honourable Attorney- General that there are people who are doing social media posts, there is no difference. He is actually on his feet on the floor right throughout last week and this week while presenting, snippets are being posted by his own people. There is no difference, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

The Standing Order 29(a) refers to media or pictures taken within Chambers or outside whilst sitting by the Member, and he knows that very well, Mr. Speaker. He is being a hypocrite to say that he can do that and I or no other Member of this House can. The National Federation Party does the same too, and that is fine, and the Parties, they are allowed to do that, it is the same for me and our Party SODELPA, there is no difference. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I will deal with this later on. After we finish all these, I will look into this about mobile phones and such things. In the meantime, Honourable Tikoduadua, finish your reply.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It seems that I will not be able to give my right of reply given the point of order that was raised. I am going to try and get back on track but before I digress, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was referring to the Honourable Koya when he branded the Opposition as being intellectually bankrupt. Mr. Speaker, I do not know what he means by that, but whatever at the lowest end of our intellectual he might think we are, there is nothing non-

intellectual or nothing smart about the motion that is being raised about what the people are feeling right now. The issue is immediate and now.

Mr. Speaker, you would be familiar with this and I would just like to point out to you some analogy and an example of the exchange and depth of the need that the people are facing, that required or really motivated the need to raise this motion before the House. You are talking about an immediate situation of need, where you need support.

Mr. Speaker, I think during your time when you were the Commander and during your studies in Military College, and of course you may have had some experience in the Middle East operational area of the 1st battalion having a mortar platoon in support of the whole battalion, so you will understand this story and this analogy very well. When the front line unit or whatever that may be (and I am referring here particularly to a rifle section, a rifle platoon or a rifle company or an infantry battalion), when it is at the frontline under heavy fire from the enemy and needing immediate support, at that time you would have your MFCs or Mortar Fire Controllers, or your forward observers with the artillery units, artillery brigade, and later on the joint offensive support team that integrates all of the joint fires, the Platoon Commander, Company Commander or Battalion Commander - when he is under threat, when he is the life of his men and when his mission is under threat and depends on the support of the gun line at the back of the joint offensive support teams, all he wants to know is when those rounds land on the enemies, so that it frees him up and his soldiers or his men do not get killed, he gets in that line of fire. He does not care whether it is coming from a naval boat, naval fire or air bombardment, whether it is coming from a gun line or self-propelled guns 20 kilometres behind.

We have a similar situation here, Mr. Speaker. The people are crying. The Government is saying, "Wait." I am saying today, Mr. Speaker, hearing everything that has been said that the Government ....

HON. J. USAMATE.- Action is being taken right now, nobody is waiting.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- You should listen, Honourable Usamate. You will hear this. I am going on my right of reply.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Without telling them to wait we are taking action right now.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Well, it seems to be not enough and that is what I am saying, you should do more now, Honourable Usamate.

HON. J. USAMATE.- Action has been taken.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Mr. Speaker, with all the initiatives that they are currently doing, I have an article here from business people in Rakiraki, a Mr. Kamlesh Sharma, saying that they are facing all these problems. They are stuck. Their business is down. They need something to prop them up.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is what I am saying, with a similar help like this, it will be able to at least ease their burden from the situation that is now before them to be able to survive. They are saying that it is very hard for them. Similarly, a case from a vendor in Rakiraki. She needs to pay \$3.50 in market fees and then she is only making \$5 out of her day sales. I mean what would she be taking home? There are similar stories like that, that I had alluded to earlier.

In one of my videos, I talked about the plight of women who go to the market and take their crop back home, their sales and their produce. These are the people that need help and I am

suggesting this because much of these incentives that the Government has been harping about today is not going down to the people. The plan is not there and it is not reaching them.

Mr. Speaker, to top it all off, today I was completely shocked again. Last week, in reply to the Honourable Qereqeretabua, the Honourable Prime Minister says 'No one gives a damn.' Today in reply to Honourable Professor Prasad he says "Go jump in the pool" and in his direct reply to me he says 'It is a waste of time'. Mr. Speaker, this is not a waste of time. The people need this. We have been asking for a co-ordinated approach, a whole of nation approach, to look at this, to involve everyone. Yes, we have been told that the Honourable Attorney-General has told Parliament that he is unable to work with us, he said that last week but there are others that he can speak to.

Mr. Speaker, the Government cannot see the reality on the ground for themselves. The pain and suffering of the people for that to happen, they have to get that out of their dark tinted Prados - they have to do that first, take it home so that they can see what is on the ground. The people want to hear the Honourable Prime Minister say something substantial not just for businesses to open and for some sense of normality to return. That can only happen when we completely arrest the spread of COVID-19 and unfortunately it is not happening anytime soon, as we would have liked and hoped would happen.

In the absence of any firm answers, the Honourable Prime Minister as usual talked about the Honourable Professor Prasad and they have all been doing that today. I am not sure how many times they have repeated that name this week and I am sure he is saying something right that they do not quite like. He talked about the Honourable Professor Prasad and well known lawyer Richard Naidu. He then talked about the top-ups through FNPF not mentioning the fact that Government owes FNPF almost \$3.4 billion and that FNPF's primary role as a social security fund, is in danger because it was treated as a cash-cow by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, the gist of the matter and to use the Honourable Prime Minister's own words 'the piecemeal solutions do not work', and political gain for the Honourable Prime Minister was the redeployment of \$110 million in 2010 because it was an election year. I am asking, why not now?

Mr. Speaker, allow me to read a message put on social media by someone in the Education Department which reads as follows: "Dear colleagues, *yadra vinaka*, let us join our hands for this worthy venture towards the affected families in Viti Levu. As stated above Madam Minister and HHR is spearheading this drive and we need to show our support. The cost of each food is \$50 and the money collected will be receipted and full account will be provided. Naomi will be in the office to receive the assistance. If you are not in the district please liaise with me or Naomi for TMO, bank deposits as we will round up the drive by tomorrow. *Vinaka*. SEA Cakaudrove"

Mr. Speaker, a public servant and our teachers already have their hands full. I am not going to talk about all the issues there, human resource and their working conditions. But for an information like this or a letter like this coming from the people that work for the Education Department that the Minister wants it, indirectly is a compulsion. Who would not want to give?

I urge the Honourable Minister, today, please you should rescind this. I am sure the Honourable Minister has many other influences that will be able to affect this. I am sure there are so many things happening in other schools where teachers are already helping within the communities, members of the Education Department - that in itself is goodwill enough to help the people in the many things that they are doing for themselves. So, in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, to have this put down again on the members of the Ministry of Education, through some letter by someone that works there, as being an initiative by the Minister, is completely not right. You should not use it.

This is another, in my view, Mr. Speaker, a piecemeal approach. Nonetheless you know, we are glad that people are trying to help and in this situation here but I think they are going about it the wrong way. They should not be demanding or asking for \$50 from the teachers or from people that work within the Ministry of Education when they have enough burden already at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, I honestly believe we do not need this kind of response coming from the Government. That is why I say again to Parliament today that this motion is important. It is not driven by any political intent. Government needs to do more. We can be here today, talking about what they could have done, what could have been, we can only talk about the here and now, if you think that it is already doing enough, I am saying Mr. Speaker, they need to do more.

Government could give \$1,000 to a person in 2018, even for rain damaged furniture or water seeping through louvre windows, I am asking the Government, please why can you not do it now. The people are watching and listening in pain and waiting, Mr. Speaker, it is our moral obligation to help them realistically and I urge all Honourable Members especially the Government to have a heart, show compassion and support the motion and show that you actually do care for the people. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua for his reply. Honourable Members, Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion lost.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, time moves on. On that note, we will take a break before we deal with two more agenda items that are still on our Order Paper. We take a break and you will be summoned by the Secretary-General.

The Parliament adjourned at 6.30 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 6.59 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we move on to the next Agenda Item. For the first Oral Question for today, I call on the Honourable Qereqeretabua to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

#### COVID-19 Safety Measures for Children (Question No. 137/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services inform Parliament what measures has the Ministry planned for the COVID-safety of our children post-lockdown when school resumes?

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, a considerable component of the answer to this question that are better directed too and answered by the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts. Nevertheless, I will give some framework around what is happening at the moment.

The safety of children, Mr. Speaker, Sir, their families and the teachers and the families of teachers and the families in general, are the utmost concern to this government. Currently, as we speak some of the schools have been used as quarantine and isolation facilities and these schools have been used because of their boarding facilities that they have.

These facilities are been supervised by our Health Quarantine Officers and they are regularly disinfected and cleaned as per the Infection Control Procedures. Upon completion of their containment, the thorough cleaning, sanitizing and disinfection and decontamination process is used and the Education liaison officers with Health officials determine if the school is ready to be returned. Now, we have noted in this current outbreak that a few of the schools have been cleaned and left empty and then only to be reused again.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, a measured approach using a risk assessment approach is been done together with Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. The COVID-19 safe or public health measures are constantly been reviewed and HR decisions making is implemented. This benefit analysis and understanding the transmission and containment measures and also bearing the health systems ability to respond together with economic, social, education and security, to name a few.

Both our Ministries have had extensive experience of the last year in managing and restarting schooling process after COVID-19 outbreak and we agree that this is a different outbreak and we are observing but nevertheless, there have been ongoing discussions with awareness packages designed for teachers, school management and boarding schools which were prepared by the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts with guidance from Ministry of Health.

Teachers were trained to undertake basic temperature checks for example, recognition of symptoms and working with the UNICEF 10 recommendations. I will briefly list them and they are:

- (1) Community level measures;

- (2) Policy practice and infrastructure;
- (3) Behavioral aspects;
- (4) Safety and security;
- (5) Hygiene and daily practices at the school and classroom level;
- (6) Screening and care of sick students, teachers and staff;
- (7) Protection of individuals at high risk;
- (8) Communication with parents, peers and students;
- (9) Additional school related measures such as ensuring that the immunization programme is up to speed in terms of catching up; and
- (10) Physical distancing in the classroom and outside the classroom

Mr. Speaker, Sir, that is very briefly what the framework is and I have alluded to the risk and assessment that have been done at the moment, to determine when exactly are these schools going to open and also the processes that will be done. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Supplementary question by Honourable Nawaikula.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Honourable Minister, with the relaxing of movement and the continue in the increase of numbers but more so the continue increase of new clusters, CWM Hospital is now a new cluster and Caubati. Could you tell us honestly that you are in control of the spread or not, and your reasons please?

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

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would be very brief by saying that at the moment, with the risk assessments, risk mitigation, the measured approach that we have in place, as I have said in my earlier response, it is agile decision making that is important at this moment in time. From the experts opinions that have been given to me and also to the Government and Cabinet, the decisions have been made, that have been made.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we must understand and this is very briefly just to fill in this part of the answer. If you look at the pattern that is coming, we have seen more cases are locally transmitted cases than they are community cases, and this gives us some relief. Though the clusters may, in terms of the numbers maybe big, but we must remember, that these are within the clusters. That is more important to us than having more cases widespread being picked up from the community. So, as you can see there are some families, someone has a public contact that become positive, he has the family of about seven members, and ultimately all those seven will become positive.

We must not be really alarmed when there is a huge number, what we must be looking at is the numbers in which they are coming from. As long as they are coming from within the clusters and as long as we are not getting many new community cases, then we know that the programmes that are in place are working. And the subsequent Bill that the Honourable Attorney-General will bring to Parliament hopefully tomorrow, in the Public Health Bill, we will address some of the issues in which we can really take out a whole nation approach to eliminating the transmission of the virus. It has to be a whole of nation approach, it cannot just be a Ministry of Health approach, Honourable Nawaikula and I hope that as a leader, you will be able to share those messages with people that it is a whole of nation approach. We must all participate in COVID-safe measures and we must all accept the vaccine. We cannot have some Members of Parliament not accepting vaccination. We all must be vaccinated.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Tikoduadua, you have a supplementary question.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I cannot hear his question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Tikoduadua you have the floor on the supplementary question. However, we are unable to communicate with him. We will move on to the second Oral Question for today.

Progress - Nature Based Seawalls  
(Question No. 138/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament on the progress of new Nature Based Seawalls constructed to protect coastal communities?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to thank the Honourable Member for asking this question, giving me an opportunity to update the House on the progress of this particular project that Ministry of Waterways, a flagship project by the Ministry of Waterways that has been undertaking throughout Fiji.

The Nature Based Seawall is one of our flagship programmes that have been earning brownie points throughout the world, in terms of how we have contributed to not only protecting the coastal communities, but also restoring the coastal environment, the ecosystem which plays a very important role in supporting the livelihood of the coastal communities. It also contributes towards improving our natural ecosystem, the environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this financial year from June, we were planning to undertake 18 sea wall projects but we were hampered by the pandemic last year and this year. So, we undertook and engaged nine sites. Out of the nine sites, we completed six sites. The completed sites are at Daliconi Village in Vanuabalavu, where 200 metres of seawall was constructed and 200 people will benefit from the particular project.

In Malomalo in Sigatoka, 70 metres of this nature-based sea wall was constructed and 300 people will benefit.

In Nabukadra Village in Ra, 300 metres of this Nature Based Seawall was constructed and 200 people will benefit.

In Waidoko Village in Ra, 100 metres of seawall was constructed. Just completed about a month ago, about 250 people in the village will benefit.

Then we have got Virami Village in the Northern Division, 160 metres. About 300 people will benefit and completed 100 percent. Naividamu Village just next to Raviravi, 150 metres of seawall was constructed and 200 people will benefit.

The three sites where work is in progress at the moment, is Nananu Village where we were able to complete 20 percent of the entire project, 500 metres we have to construct in total, about 500 people are supposed to benefit.

We have Vatuvoqi Village in Bua, 80 percent completed, about 400 people will benefit. It is about 200 metres in length of seawall that we are undertaking construction, as we speak.

Drekeniwai Village, the third one, past Savusavu, 200 metres of seawall, about 350 people will benefit from this and 60 percent were completed there.

Mr. Speaker, so we are planning to complete this Nananu, probably it will take another three to five months but the others, we should be able to finish in about two to three months' time. Hopefully, we will not be hampered by this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is just a short list. There is probably closed to another 50 sites that we need to do.

We had a discussion with the Ministry of Economy who probably has assured that they are talking to donors and development partners and probably will be making an announcement in the Budget, so that we can speed up and do more sites next year so that we can quickly protect some of these communities who are very vulnerable and are worried about their basic survival, given the rate at which their coastal area, village foreground has been eroded and their livelihood has been threatened. So may be in the Budget that the Honourable Minister for Economy will be announcing, so that we can protect these communities, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. P.W. VOSANIBOLA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I really thank the Honourable Minister for his report on the progress on the construction of such Nature Based Seawall.

My supplementary question is, in the Eastern Division, we have a problem of coastal erosion, especially along the roads on Ovalau Island. Is there any possibility of carrying out the construction at Natokalau Village? It is having a severe problem during tidal waves because of the seawalls that was constructed years ago.

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

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr, Speaker, Sir, earlier this year, I had suggested to all Members of this House to make submission to our Ministry on what are the sites that are being under severe threat by the coastal seawater, erosion of the coastal area and villagers that are being threatened, road or infrastructure we need to talk to FRA as well.

What we need is a comprehensive list of the sites because we need to make a submission to the Ministry of Economy. As of now, these are the exhaustive sites that require urgent attentions. We also need that to be graded; "A" grade is very urgent and these are the number of houses, these are the infrastructure that were threatened, and then "B" and "C". So we would want to probably pick up all the A's.

As the Honourable Minister of Economy is working on the budget and talking to donors, we need the list. So I suggest to all Honourable Members who catch up with me during tea and say, "my village, my island" please just make a one page submission and from there we will take it over. Our officers will go and do the scoping, do the required screening for environmental assessment and get the things ready so that once the budget is out, we do not waste time and doing all those things and we are ready with that.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on, the third Oral Question for today. I call on the Honourable Qionibaravi to ask her question.



Government's Plan for Ineligible Social Welfare and FNPF Assistance  
(Question No. 139/2021)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament on the Government's plan to feed and assist families whose breadwinners have been laid off or terminated due to the pandemic but who are ineligible for social welfare payments or FNPF assistance?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I think we have been down this path quite a few times now (today and yesterday), but just to reiterate, I think there is a general level of misunderstanding by the Honourable Members of the Opposition when they say that those who are ineligible for social welfare payments, that is understandable or FNPF assistance.

A lot of the people who are receiving their assistance through what we call "FNPF framework", in fact, their monies are not coming from the FNPF account. It is actually coming from Government because a lot of the people who are receiving through the FNPF framework they no longer have any more funds in their general account. So Government has now funded up to the tune of \$161 million through the FNPF framework.

I think that really needs to be understood by the Honourable Member that Government is funding it directly and this includes, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, those who have been receiving \$220 a fortnight since June of last year, those who are receiving what we call "on reduced hours" or some people instead of working five days a week, they are working two days or one day or three days, they are also getting funds for the days that they are not working.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we had one-off payments of \$220 if they were in the containment area because they could not go to work. As announced by the Honourable Prime Minister that they would now get two more rounds of \$220, in other words \$440. Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that will also be funded by Government because some of them do not actually have the \$440 so that is the assistance through that particular FNPF framework which Government is funding.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, we had the food ration that were given to those people who were in the strict 24-hour curfew for about four days in the Suva area. Then, of course, we had the \$90 where 118,000 households were assisted, about \$10.6 million have been disbursed through that and as also mentioned today, just a few hours ago we already have about 242,000 applicants for the \$50 and of course they will be more in that. We have already announced that yesterday that once we get the data and see how many people are on that scheme, it does not mean that it is just a simple one-off, we simply wait and see how the situation pans out, if borders open more people are going back to work or something adverse happens, and of course, we can rollout more programmes with that particular scheme.

The last category are those people who are on specific lockdown areas as the Honourable Minister for Health talked about the clusters. So we have, for example Muanikoso and various other places where those people who cannot leave their homes, they are given food rations also specifically because they cannot leave their homes.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. We will move on to the fourth Oral Question for today. I call on the Honourable Lal to ask his question. You have the floor.

Licensing Process - River Gravel Extraction  
(Question No. 140/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources update Parliament on the licensing process of river gravel extraction?

HON. J. USAMATE (Minister for Infrastructure, Meteorological Services, Lands and Mineral Resources).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank Honourable Lal for his question. The issuing of river gravel extraction licence on State lands and also from river beds is administered by the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources. (Technical glitch) of legislations such as that they are State Lands Act, rivers and streams and also the result of the things that we have in the Constitution.

The Ministry has a checklist which outlines all the requirements that is required for those who are applying for this river gravel extraction licence. In this checklist includes the need for them, for people to actually send an application to the Director of Lands which they have to provide a locality map of the proposed extraction site. There is a fee that has to be paid of around \$32.70. They have to organise the waiver of fishing rights, owner's consent with not less than 60 percent of the owners to be 18 years and above and that is also stamped and endorsed by the Roko Tui.

There needs to be:

- an agreement between the landowner and the licensee so that he can have access into the river that has to be in place;
- an approval from the Department of Environment on the EIA or the EMP - the Environmental Management Plan;
- there is also a need for a resources assessment report basically to look at what the quality of the resource is, what the quantity of the resource;
- an identification card of the TIN or driver's licence; and
- details also of the company including its registration certificate, the schedule of directors and the shareholders.

All of these things have to be provided by the applicant. Once it is provided, this is lodged with our divisional officers and (technical glitch) staff to make sure that all the requirements and applicants will also then need to pay a fee, as I mentioned, that fee of \$32.70. If the application is not complete, it will be returned and the applicant will be advised of what else they need to provide.

In addition to this, there is also a field inspection that is undertaken. (Technical glitch) papers but also making sure that whatever is in the application is consistent with what is on the ground. In their field report, they look at the environmental condition of the area in which extraction has to take place. They will check out the access to the river and ideally when these inspections take place, it is ideal that the member of the landowning unit or the *mataqali* heads are also present on site during discussions. We have resource officers who will then go through and make the recommendations for the Director of Lands to approve this and the Director of Lands has the power to approve it and if there is anything that is lacking then that notification will be given to the persons that apply. Once it is all signed off, it is also then forwarded to the Registrar of Titles.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have a total of around 31 active licences in total although we do have an issue sometimes of illegal extraction of river gravel.

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Tuisawau for a supplementary question.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question. Honourable Minister, what are the monitoring and evaluation frameworks and mechanisms in place after the operation starts, given the current issues on river bank erosion, not only for gravel extraction but also in areas that has sand extraction?

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

HON. J. USAMATE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That particular aspect when the operation takes place, any issues to do with the environment then the Ministry works with the Director of Environment. For instance, things that you have talked about. If there is anything to do with the rate at which the river gravel is being extracted, that is looked after by our own resource officers. They will look and make sure also that the licensee does not encroach, that they do not go outside the boundary that they have been given. That they adhere to the conditions of the licence and we also monitor a legal river gravel extraction occurring within the various divisions that we have. So, these sorts of monitoring occurs on a monthly basis. We expect our officers to visit each of these sites once a month to make sure that environmental issues are in order and also the condition of the licence are being met.

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- A supplementary question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Nawaikula you have the floor

HON. N. NAWAIKULA.- Can the Honourable Minister explain please the reason why Government has stopped the payment of royalty to the landowners?

HON. J. USAMATE.- I am not aware of this. The information that I have given here is the table of the royalties that have been made. Since 2018, I can see royalties at a tune of \$1.445 million. If there are specific cases that the Honourable Member has of places where he feels that royalty has not been paid, he can raise that issue with me and I will follow it up.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi you have the floor.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. ADI L. QIONIBARAVI.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Minister has already answered the question that I wanted to raise.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you Honourable Minister. The waiver that we obtain from the resource owners has monetary considerations. Who determines that? Who helps them determine the value of that waiver?

HON. J. USAMATE.- For the right to access that area, I believe that there is a professional assessment by those that have the expertise in this area which I believe and I stand to be corrected by my staff, it will have to be the people in the Department of Fisheries because it is basically to compensate you for the loss of what you could have caught from that river for your daily sustenance.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move to the fifth Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Tabuya to ask Question No. 141/2021. You have the floor.

FNPF Members One-Off Payment for COVID-19  
(Question No. 141/2021)

HON. L.D. TABUYA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament the possibility of those over 50 years to get \$10,000-\$20,000 out of their FNPF as a one-off payment for COVID-19 as was done in 1987 where members were allowed to take out funds from FNPF for house, loan payments or other needs?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the premise of this question is incorrect because the Honourable Member says that in 1987 people were allowed to take out \$10,000 or \$20,000. In fact we went through the FNPF Annual Report of 1988 which states and I quote:

“A new scheme called the \$500 Scheme was implemented in October 1987 to March 1988 to provide relief for members who lost their employment in the wake of the two military *coups*.”

So, there was no \$10,000 or \$20,000 given to those over the age of 50 years; 14,830 members were assisted with a total payout of \$6.92 million.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Very poor.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Tabuya, a supplementary question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I think the Honourable Attorney-General misunderstood my question. It was a similar kind of payout. Obviously, that was a short period of time but we are looking at a pandemic here which we do not even know when it will end and that is why the question is relevant.

My supplementary question to the Honourable Minister is whether the FNPF can look at the possibility of members to withdraw funds in order to start their businesses. When they are close to retirement age or they have lost their jobs, they would like to have some meaningful income because they still support families, could they consider the retirement plan which is to start their businesses and will they be allowed to withdraw for those purposes, apart from housing and education? Thank you.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just would like to correct the Honourable Member. She actually did not ask that question and she said, “Well it is similar”, well, it is not similar, the question is quite specific. It says, “Can the Honourable Minister inform Parliament on the possibility of those over 50 years to get \$10,000-\$20,000 out of their FNPF as a one-off payment for COVID as was done in 1987 ...?”

What I have said it that it was not done in 1987. In 1987, they only had \$500 they were able to take out, for the two military *coups*, a one-off payment, that is all. But Mr. Speaker, Sir, then she has just asked the question about withdrawing funds for business purposes. The question here does not say that, it says ‘where members were allowed to take out funds from FNPF for house, loan payments or other needs.’

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Parliament last year approved this particular Bill we had tabled where we said that those people who actually have home mortgages could in fact access their FNPF funds even though they would have already withdrawn 50 percent previously, they can again have another bite of the cherry by withdrawing another 50 percent, not just from their general account, everything from their general account, plus from their preserved account. So there is the provision to be able to protect your homes. We have also had a provision in the law that does say that the banks must try their utmost to make sure that the mortgages are actually protected, there is no mortgagee sale, et cetera, and in the event that the payments need to be made, then they can access their FNPF funds.

As I have highlighted in the question on the response to Honourable Qionibaravi, that people have been able to access the general account and Government actually has been topping up to the tune of \$161 million for unemployment benefits.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, we will move to the sixth Oral Question for today.

Measures for Second Wave of COVID-19  
(Question No. 142/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development inform Parliament what measures have the Municipal Councils put in place during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the safe operations in our Towns and Cities?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also like to thank the Honourable Kirpal for his question. Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the greatest challenges arising from the global pandemic has been the growing importance of health and safety, food security and ensuring livelihood of our citizens, and this is precisely what we have been discussing in the last couple of days.

The Municipal Councils are very important service providers in our towns and cities to address some of these challenges. The Council ensures that the towns and cities are kept clean, markets are operational and they maintain health and welfare of its people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic affected our country, the municipal councils have come on board in different ways to assist and continue to work in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Fiji Police Force, Divisional Commissioners and relevant authorities to safeguard Fijians, especially, in public spaces.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, municipal councils as the administrators of our towns and cities as such play a critical role in bringing balance to the operations of the municipalities and in maintaining the safety of the public, market vendors and municipal council workers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, since experiencing the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic, the Fijian Government immediately implemented heightened measures including establishing containment zones to restrict movement. This resulted in Nadi, Lautoka, Lami, Suva and Nausori containment zone. Rakiraki was also declared a containment zone for three weeks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, even during hard lockdown, we still need to maintain cities' and towns' cleanliness. The Ministry of Local Government, through the municipal councils, has ensured that the essential services such as solid waste collection, grass cutting, drain cleaning, processing of

building and rezoning applications and other essential services continue with minimal disruption during this difficult time.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite 24 hours of curfew in place for four days for Lami, Suva and Nausori last month, Suva City Council, Lami, Nasinu and Nausori Town Councils continued to provide garbage collections services from Lami to Nausori.

In addition, grass cutting and drain cleaning around the municipalities are continuing on normal schedules. It should be understood that these are essential services that will have to be provided during lockdowns and in containment areas.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we attempt to combat this dreadful virus led by our dedicated Health and Medical personnel and our frontliners the municipal councils too have developed and implemented a number of safety strategies to ensure that our towns and cities are safe to provide essential services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, these strategies support the Ministry of Health and Medical Services COVID Containment Measures. The councils have been asked to ensure that public usage of municipal markets, bus stands and other public spaces, including council offices are in compliance with these protocols.

These strategies have been implemented in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the councils ensure that all businesses classified as high risk remain closed in Viti Levu until it is safe to reopen.

Not only that, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the recent announcement of high risk businesses continuing in Vanua Levu, we will ensure the same compliance and cares observed in the North.

In the market, council enforces restriction on mixing and drinking of kava and selling of juice.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the councils continue to disinfect prime areas in towns and cities such as markets, bus stands, carriers and tax stands. We have also closed off recreational centres, civic halls and other council facilities that draw large crowds.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, markets are at the centre of all economic activities and usually draw large crowds. This is where the supplies of vegetables and root crops interact with the buyers. The council realises the importance of controlling the entry and exist points of the main municipal markets and therefore they have implemented this particular procedure and they have opened up two gates for entry and exist and they record each customer that enters the market, and this record is kept in case of any transmission. In fact, this information is then forwarded to the Commissioners and then from there to the Ministry of Health.

The vendors and customers entering the markets undergo temperature screening and are required to wear their masks at all times. They are required to have the careFIJI app downloaded and Bluetooth switch on. In cases where they do not have a careFIJI app. because they do not have a smartphone then the details are recorded.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the second wave of pandemic, the municipal councils have waived the market stall fees for those market vendors who are unable to sell their produce due to lockdown or for safety reasons. The councils adopted the user-pay method.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the market workers and vendors have been provided with masks, gloves and sanitation supplies. It is worth noting that the UN Women have also provided market vendors with PPE and basic supplies so that the farmers and market vendors do not have to fork out money to buy these essentials.

The first batch of PPE and WASH supplies have been delivered to the Municipal Councils in Viti Levu and at the lockdown borders for Suva City Council, Lautoka City Council, Lami Town Council, Nasinu Town Council, Nausori Town Council, Nadi Town Council and Ba Town Council.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the municipal councils acknowledge the importance of awareness raising to educate the vendors and farmers on the symptoms and impacts of virus and the COVID safe measures, as such, regular awareness raising is conducted by the councils in the markets to prompt the vendors and consumers to adhere to COVID-19 protocol.

The council officers regularly visit the bus terminals to conduct awareness on COVID safe measures to the public who are waiting for their buses. Health Inspectors with NFA staff conducted awareness on COVID safe practices to the residents of municipalities and informal settlements in Lautoka and Nadi.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the operating hours for the markets in Viti Levu have been changed in light of the new curfew hours. The municipal markets are now closing at either 3.30 p.m. or 4.00 p.m. from Monday to Friday because of the current 6.00 p.m. curfew. The changes in the opening hours were necessary to allow market vendors, farmers and the customers to return to their homes before curfew, and for the council workers to disinfect the area before business starts next morning.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in addition with the assistance of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the municipal councils facilitated vaccination of market vendors and council workers as frontliners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, most municipal councils provided the facilities for fever clinics, isolation centres and then use for vaccination. Council starts assisting with contact tracing and have provided council's vehicles for these purposes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the financial impact of COVID-19 on our cities and towns across the country and lives and livelihood are going to be serious in long term. Councils' revenue streams such as rates, garbage collection fees or fees, hiring of sports and event venue and parking meter fees are affected.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, going forward, the Ministry of Local Government and Municipal Council despite the financial impacts, will continue to work with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport to ensure safe opening of businesses, public facilities and markets while ensuring the safety for our ratepayers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. You have the floor, Honourable Tabuya, with our supplementary question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, a supplementary question: Speaking about safety, Honourable Minister, just very recently, the construction of 4G towers in residential areas and the safety of residents who have complained that they were not consulted on this, one in Pilling Road and another one apparently being erected in Cunningham. I do not know how many more across Suva and Nausori Highway. The question to the Honourable Minister is, have they considered the safety as well as the consultation with the residents, ratepayers before these towers have gone up for the safety of the residents? Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, I hope you have got that right? Honourable Minister, I hope you got that right too?

HON. P.D. KUMAR.- Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. This supplementary question is not related to the main question and therefore I do not want to respond to it.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the seventh Oral Question for today. I give the floor to the Honourable Gavoka to ask Question No. 143/2021.

Soft Loan Facilities  
(Question No. 143/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport inform Parliament whether soft loan facilities are being offered to those in need of finance for business during this lockdown?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the Honourable Gavoka for the question. I assume that Honourable Gavoka is referring to the MSME concessional loan packages that were offered last year and to keep the answer short, the answer is no because that one actually ceased last year.

But just to add on to that, Mr. Speaker, so that he can get some idea of what is actually happening if he has not done so already, conversations had today and earlier on, I think we have canvassed this before but we had given out close to \$30 million and supported about 5,000 businesses on the last occasion which I just mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, there are other livelihood assistance programmes that are open to assistance and this includes Young Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES), et cetera, the Northern Development Programme that I had mentioned, the Integrated Rural Development Project (IRDPP), these are all open to our MSMEs. I think the Honourable Attorney-General also had given a comprehensive update on the various types of assistance that Government has given during this particular period and I am sure a lot of MSMEs have actually applied for it.

Now, what also must be realised, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that the assistance goes beyond just providing monetary assistance. The Department of Cooperatives does a lot of work with our MSMEs and those who want to start a business or want to expand or adapt, so it is not just about financial assistance. I would like to just point out and take a moment, Sir, if I may, that in light of the constantly changing business environment especially where lockdowns (because Honourable Gavoka referred to lockdowns and local borders have become the new norm), the Ministry has actually adapted accordingly, especially in the Lami – Nausori containment area. The businesses that want to open, during our consultations with the private sector, are happy to adapt to the COVID safe protocols and as you will have noticed, Sir, there are MSMEs that are open now in the west and in the north. They are continuing with their business and I fear that the question might somewhat be a little stale already.

With respect to Nausori and Suva–Lami corridor, we have established some protocols that will allow these businesses to reopen, re-employ our fellow Fijians and following the announcement by the Honourable Prime Minister, we have exporters, construction industry, manufacturers in the TCF sector, who have actually started to operate again. We trust all our businesses to operate in a COVID-safe manner. We make sure we guide them properly, Sir, and should they breach their protocols as we all know, as of today, there will be repercussions. They are mindful of the health



risks and on a case by case basis, Sir and after careful assessment, we are recommending for, and looking at non-essential businesses to operate again. Of course, I am only referring, Mr. Speaker, to the Lami–Nausori area specifically with respect to the lockdown. We have had businesses that are open in the west and in the north even those that are high risk have committed to operate with specific COVID guidelines in conjunction with the Ministry of Health. I hope that answers his question, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Gavoka, your supplementary question.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you for the answer, Honourable Minister. But we keep getting comments from the business community that enough is still not being done in terms of accessing finance. How do you consult with them? Who do you consult with and how do you do it?

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

HON. F.S. KOYA.- Sir, I think we have canvassed this time and time again throughout the week. With the MSMEs and all the businesses around the place, it is the umbrella organisations that have been in consultation with us and we are just about maybe a hour ago, we mentioned about the things that may be made available and about the Reserve Bank facility, et cetera, what we have actually done and I have just mentioned some more. So the consultations that occur with the singular businesses with us and also through the umbrella organisations that are the Chamber of Commerce, et cetera that exist around the country, so you know it is vast and it could be a singular consultation with a larger company or it could be quite a few of them, but definitely in consultation with them and the reason that we do that is because they specifically come to us to say that they are prepared to operate within these particular guidelines that have been given. So, that is how we do it Sir. It is not like we have a forum where we put 500 people into one room but we do have a list of all the businesses that are around, because his specific question was with respect to containment zones.

HON. SPEAKER.- To the eighth Oral Question for today and I call on the Honourable Adimaitoga to ask Question No. 144/2021. You have the floor.

Cash for Cultivation Programme  
(Question No. 144/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment update Parliament of the progress on the implementation of its ‘Cash for Cultivation Programme’?

HON. DR. M. REDDY (Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to thank the Honourable Member for asking this question gives an opportunity to update the House of the progress of this Programme that we launched (Phase 1) earlier this year, when we were able to secure \$200,000 funding through ADRA.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Ministry has got a very good partnership with ADRA and NGO and they are very committed to assisting farmers in the rural and maritime areas. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the primary objective of this particular Programme is to assist and improve the livelihood of the rural farming households and when we do that we are, at the same, securing the households with respect to food. Thirdly, households will be spending their money in the rural areas and the rural economy will stimulate and fourthly, we will be able to expand agriculture, they would be able to sell those produce and some of those produce will also end up in other countries through our export channels.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were able to register thousand farmers, some of them basically are in

the process of closing off their payments this week. So, thousand farmers in Phase 1 received \$200 each. That \$200 was paid in two parts the first part was \$75 when the prepared land was inspected or they needed money to buy tools or fertilizers et cetera and the remaining \$125 was paid after the cultivation was done.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are very thankful to the government of Australia who has provided us AUS\$500,000 around F\$800,000 where we signed the Agreement again through ADRA about two weeks ago and we launched this program earlier this week on Tuesday. We are now registering farmers, we are looking at paying 3,000 farmers \$200 cash so that they can engage in bringing new land under agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are very excited to see the response, actually yesterday or this morning, Honourable Minister Seruiratu was showing me photos of people crowded up at the Nausori Agriculture office whom we dispersed saying that they did not have to come to the office, but our officers will come down and register them into this particular programme. We do not want farmers to turn up to our office in the containment area. You just need to call the office and our officers will turn up at the farm to register them. So, there is a massive response throughout Fiji, in fact based on the population data on the number of farmers that we have, we have divided that so that farmers in every area gets an opportunity. For example in the Central Division - 825 farmers will be benefiting from this scheme, Western Division - 925 farmers, Northern Division - 970 farmers and Eastern Division - 280 farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are looking at making the first tranche payment to the farmers in two to three weeks' time. As soon as our officers visit their farms and inspect it, the final payment should be done probably within four to six weeks' time. So, in five weeks to six weeks' time, we are going to push this \$800,000 to the rural areas through these rural households which will be a big help in terms of boosting their livelihood, assisting them to secure their households fresh produce, stimulating the rural economy and also raising the volume of supply of agricultural produce. Thank you Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. Honourable Members, that brings to an end of the Oral Questions for today. There are no written questions, so we will move on.

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

### **PUBLIC HEALTH (AMENDMENT) BILL 2021**

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, pursuant to the resolution of Parliament earlier today I move:

That the Public Health (Amendment) Bill 2021 be debated, voted upon and be passed.

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, before I call on the Honourable Attorney-General, may I remind that pursuant to resolution of Parliament earlier today, debate will be limited to one hour. Honourable Members, that means that your time for speaking are limited, so keep to those times. I now call on the Honourable Attorney-General to speak to his motion. You have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Earlier on, in the introduction of the actual motion itself under Standing Order 51, I think, in fact we have talked about a number of those issues that would probably have been discussed in this particular session.

However, just to reiterate, essentially what this amendment does is to give the ability to the Honourable Minister of Health and Medical Services and his Permanent Secretary the ability to impose fines as opposed to people going through the process of going to court. They of course, can still go to the court system if they want to challenge the actual imposition of the fine itself. Mr. Speaker, Sir, it brings about lot of lot of efficiency, it brings about immediate deterrence and it is a form of deterrence that is now used by many countries in the world, where people are able to get these fines so that they change behaviour.

The only reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that we are proposing these amendments because the current law does not provide the Minister for Health and the Permanent Secretary to actually impose fines. The law at the moment allows people who have been allegedly in breach to actually directly go to the court system. What this does is very simply like we have the LTA where people are given the traffic infringement notice, they will be given an infringement notice under this particular provision and then of course, they can challenge them. However, many people if they are in breach, would like to pay the penalty as opposed to having to attend the court on a number of occasions. This could be part of the arsenal of attack if you like, in our fight against COVID-19.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney- General. Honourable Members the floor is now open for debate and I call on the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services. You have the floor.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I wish to give my contribution to the debate on the Bill that is before the House and I fully support the motion.

The Bill, as we see it, seeks to amend Part 7 of the Public Act Health and by doing so, it streamlines the enforcement of COVID-safe measures and orders that can be given by the Minister and the Permanent Secretary. It allows the ability under the regulation to look at things such as fines, so that we are able to support the COVID-safe measures that we have in place.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking earlier today about the importance of the Public Health measures and they have been proven to be critical in limiting the transmission of COVID-19 and reducing deaths. The decision to introduce adapt on these measures are based on situation assessment of the intensity of transmission and the capacity of the health system to respond to it.

And also as I have alluded to earlier today, the outbreak that we are having at the moment is different from what we faced at the same time last year. So, this must be considered, Mr. Speaker. Indicators suggested thresholds are provided to gauge both the intensity of the transmission, the capacity to be able to respond and the public health measures must continue to be tested to the intensity of the transmission.

Mr. Speaker, our strategy from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services working as a whole of Government has been in the areas of communities screening and surveillance and we have seen this in action and then in the containment zones the screening and surveillance exercise is now up to four times during that 14 days of containment.

Contact tracing and Containment: In the contact tracing when the case is positive the person is taken to a COVID isolation facility and they are managed in that facility. Primary contacts those who have come into contact with face to face or within at least 15 minutes. A direct physical contact that become primary contact will also be tested. Secondary contact are isolated.

Treatment: This has been done at the discretion of our provisions and there are four levels of sickness with the severe intensive care admission and ventilation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, number four is Vaccination and number five which is the most important is Public Health Safe Measures: Mr. Speaker, this is known and proven means to stop the transmission of virus. This essentially is the domain by which the amendment of the Public Health Act will strengthen. These measures such as face masking and social distancing has been the most effective means so far of breaking the transmission of the virus.

Contact tracing, been able to find the contacts and that is where the careFIJI app is so important. A mask with layers that stop droplets from getting through and escaping.

Mr. Speaker, what the evidence is shown when more and more people are wearing mask and the masks are of a relatively good quality meaning if it is a cotton mask or several for at least two layers then the likelihood of spread of transmission of the virus is actually lower. This has been seen by studies done by Leon and his group and they find that high use of face mask in public could lead to COVID-19 elimination and combine in face mask with social distancing is more effective in COVID-19 control and the physical distancing should be at least one to two metres in the midst of community.

Mr. Speaker, the necessary legislative changes regulations that are going to be put through Parliament is contemporary and this legislation the policies and the actual practice on the ground is design to respond appropriately as a whole of nation approach to the outbreak.

Mr. Speaker, our current Public Health Act was enacted in 1935 and throughout its history it has several amendments today. This amendment that has been brought in terms of ensuring that we can be able to provide fines as a deterrent is one of the most important as we seek to stop the transmission of the virus and to bring this country to be a COVID Containment measures.

We have countries, Mr. Speaker, that have the precedence and they share common law. Beginners such as us, countries in the United Kingdom, England such as Wales, Scotland and also Northern Island and our two neighbours Australia and New Zealand have also stepped up to vaccinate its people. Even New Zealand have an Act but it is called a COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 with the primary principle to prevent and limit the risk of the outbreak and the spread of COVID-19.

And in that Act, Mr. Speaker, there are provisions for relating to infringement offences. A similar to what has been designed in this Amendment that is before us.

Mr. Speaker, with this our Public Health Act of 1935 which is in place, it needs to be strengthened so that we can able to have it as a deterrent but also empower the enforcers on the ground in wearing of appropriate face covering, masking, physical distancing, failure to comply with curfews, presentation of careFIJI app, capacity restriction that are in place and having this legislated amendment to the Act, will ensure that Fiji enforcement on containment efforts in aligned to the current and emerging challenge that we have in place.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Vosanibola on the other side, being a former Health Inspector, will agree with me, that having deterrent is a great way or efficient way of ensuring the public health measures are taking into account and they bring about a behaviour that is normal.

Mr. Speaker, before I finish, I just like to again thank and appreciate our front-liners including the health workers, the RFMF and other senior civil servants in other agencies. They are not 'Super-Spreaders', they work in bubbles and sadly, if one is positive, the rest are at risk. They are Fijians, sons and daughters, all very young men and women, call upon this most extraordinary time to be able to do

these roles which are high risks. They go to work so that all of us, including Honourable Adi Litia Qionibaravi can go home and I continue to urge us, Mr. Speaker, to register and be vaccinated.

I am disappointed and I want to voice my disappointment by the obsession by some about spreading COVID-19 and vaccination conspiracy theories. I am even more disappointed that some are so-called learned people and they are what I term 'Super-Spreaders' of false news. Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is real and it kills. But vaccination is real, it prevents serious illness from the disease and prevents death.

Mr. Speaker, public health safe measures are also real and effective in cutting the curve of the transmission of the disease. Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support the Bill before the House. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Ratu Atonio Lalabalavu. You have the floor.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on the motion before the House this afternoon.

First of all, the Honourable Minister for Health has explained in details about the preventative and the treatment aspect of COVID-19 we are facing at the moment. I believe wholeheartedly with the preventative part that is essential that the deterrent part of prevention of COVID is essential that is face mask wearing and also social distancing, careFIJI app downloading. These are essential in deterrent of COVID-19, especially during the time when our cases are rising.

I also agree with my colleagues who have spoken this morning with regards to the time. We are now facing, as I can say, difficult times for unknown time and I also agree that the changes in this Act will bring about what the Honourable Minister of Health had said.

I just have a suggestion or two, Mr. Speaker, to the Honourable Attorney-General, in regards to what we were concerned about this morning and that is the time. A similar Bill like the Companies Act, Adoption Act after passing in Parliament, we gave a grace period of six months for awareness before the enforcement. I am not saying that we need six months for the enforcement of this Bill, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but rather we need sometime so that our people can register. I know from the beginning, it has been an ongoing message from our COVID frontlines, especially Dr. Fong, Dr. Jemesa and Dr. Alisha on mask wearing, social distancing, et cetera and you know, I mean information is power and knowledge and that at this given time, not you can say a week or maybe a few days, just for our citizens to register. I believe that it is workable, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

And another thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is on the mask. What is the definition of the mask? Anyone going out there wearing a cloth around, is that also defined as a mask? That needs to be defined also by the Honourable Attorney-General and to me personally, I am alright with the Bill as a measure and a deterrent but it is the implementation measures, my concern, we are in the middle of a crisis and our people are suffering, one way or the other. So, also a suggestion would be some positive reinforcements done that those that will be dealing with enforcing this change in the law, if they can also carry some spare masks with them instead of penalising them on the spot, they can hand them the mask. Those are some means of positive reinforcement, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

I believe most of the things have been said by my colleagues this morning and for me personally, I believe I am alright with the Bill as it is and hopefully, we can work with that with regards to the time as I have mentioned and that is my contribution to the motion that we have now, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member and I give the floor to the Honourable Professor Prasad. You have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My contribution on this Bill will be brief but before talking on the Bill before us, I will respond to the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Mr. Speaker, who made some wild and unsubstantiated allegations regarding NFP and people who are not in Parliament to defend themselves and by doing so, he has actually lowered the dignity and decorum of Parliament.

Firstly, he said I was on a chain of emails that agreed to remove last Friday's agenda from the Order Paper when Parliament resumed yesterday. Last Friday's Order Paper listed my End of Week Statement. Mr. Speaker, to set the record straight, at 11.45 p.m. on Monday, in fact just before midnight, I, together with other Members of the Business Committee received an email from Parliament from Manager Tables. It had the flying minutes of the Business Committee and the draft Order Paper for six days.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Speak on the topic!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Listen! The Wednesday Order Paper was last Friday's Order Paper with my End of Week Statement listed on it. Was that email correspondence? That is the SODELPA Party's position, that is their prerogative, we never suggested for the removal of last Friday's agenda. The final flying minutes will confirm that NFP communicated verbally to Tables to say the Party had no objection to the draft agenda.

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

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- However, the minutes stated ...

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. Stick to the motion, Honourable Prasad.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- To clarify this, Mr. Speaker, if the Attorney-General can go ahead and make people ...

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

HON. SPEAKER.- There is a Point of Order. You have the floor.

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, when Honourable Attorney-General was moving this Bill this morning, I never heard anything he said about NFP, about statements, about going to media, so I request Honourable Prasad to stick to the Bill please. This is about public health. It is about the safety of the people. Please, come back to the debate, come back to the Bill and debate on the Bill itself, not justifying yourself in the Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Professor Prasad, you have the floor. You heard the Point of Order. You have the floor.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Admit yourself *yaar*. You are beating around the bush, Honourable Prasad.

HON. SPEAKER.- You have the floor.

HON. V. NATH.- Honourable Prasad, you unmute yourself.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Following the Minutes and circulation of the final Order Paper on Tuesday afternoon, the Party Whip wrote to the Honourable Speaker raising concerns and pointing out the need for the Agenda to be reinstated. Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Secretariat can confirm this. We have yet to receive a reply. In that letter...

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

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- ... the Honourable Tikoduadua pointed out that the Party was unhappy with the decision. The press statement was made by the General-Secretary, the letter to the Honourable Speaker was confidential, so was the Minute. So, why make a big song and dance about it? We did not blame the Government at all in the press statement. Get your facts right.

The Honourable Speaker is the Chair of the Business Committee and we communicated to him our concerns. What is wrong if *fjivillage* reported the statement? There is no untruth in it. The statement even says the growers were denied the opportunity to meet the Prime Minister.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Member, just stick to the debate

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- I am coming to the debate, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but you have to give me an....

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Listen to the Speaker!

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- I need to clarify some of these things.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Go to the media, go to *fjivillage* and clarify.

HON. PROF. B.C. PRASAD.- He talked about Mr. Bala Dass having some kind of collusion. Mr. Bala Dass actually got the ratio from the General-Secretary itself, so, all these gouging that he is ...

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, Point of Order.

HON. SPEAKER.- Speak to the point.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, again the Honourable Member is digressing. We have only one hour for this Bill to debate and it is specifically on the Bill itself. The issues that I raised was actually on the general comments that we did make on the economy and we talked about the NGOs and Civil Society Groups, that is why I raised it. But this is specifically about a motion in respect to the Public Health Act. Mr. Bala Dass has got nothing to do with Public Health Act.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Anyway Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have other opportunities to correct his lies but let me....

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, ....

HON. SPEAKER.- Just take your seat. Honourable Biman Prasad you have the floor but stick to the agenda.

(Honourable Member interjects)

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I hope I will have time later to clarify some more. Mr. Speaker, Sir, perhaps the issuing of infringement notices, at least from a positive point of view will mean that the police will stop arresting people and keeping them in custody for two days as their own unique form of punishment.

In circumstances where COVID-19 is high obviously, people should not be put in cells or get into contact with others. It is difficult to, from that point of view to oppose the general intent of the Bill. However, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the infringement notices for tax, LTA, et cetera, we have seen heavy handedness and abuse by the authority in the past. Of course, will hand the reports to the legal officers and if they do not agree with the infringement notice, they can turn up to court as mentioned by the Honourable Attorney-General. But again the burden of time and money for doing that, and in many cases, their lack of understanding of the legal rights, they would be simply burdened with further expenses. In many cases they may have a good reason not to follow some of these protocols and end up being fined.

In the absence of what the actual fines are going to be, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would urge the Honourable Minister for Health who would be implementing these laws and the authorities that would be out there to impose these fines to keep in mind, as mentioned by Government Members and Ministers and I agree with them, the intent of this Bill and this fine is to deter people from breaking those protocols. That is fine Mr. Speaker, Sir, but there will be many people out there and I am not sure what the fine will be, because we do not know.

So, even if we were talking about a \$50 fine, (I hope it is not \$50), even if it is \$50 fine, a lot of people out there at this point in time would be hard-pressed to fork that out. Perhaps, those who would be in charge of making sure that these protocols are followed and the people do not, that there would be some way in which the people would be encouraged, there will be corresponding education efforts about what people should do and what they should not do in particular circumstances, so that we can avoid putting the burden on the people at this very difficult times, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would urge those who would be looking at issuing these infringement notices to take into account what the situation of many out there would be, in terms of their affordability or their ability to actually pay the fine.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I will be very brief as well, but thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the motion before the House and I wholeheartedly support this motion for the obvious reasons that are before us. The debate to the motion this morning, I am quite disappointed with the remarks from the Honourable Tabuya and the Honourable Rasova, particularly referring again to the military and the navy and alleging the military officers who caused the original breach, and of course, the Naval Officers, and again referring to them as super spreaders. As the Minister responsible for Defence, I find this unacceptable. It is nonsensical, disrespectful, and irresponsible to say the least, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Let me say this, unfortunately, the RFMF has been blamed for the initial outbreak. We welcome further investigations to that. I think the Commander RFMF has already pleaded with the Ministry for Health to conduct a thorough investigation. Because they have done their investigations, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and the evidence that they have tells a different story. But I have stated to the media when I was interviewed on this, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that let us be positive. It is not about naming, shaming and blaming. We want to bring efficiency into the system.



There are systematic issues that needs to be addressed and I welcome the commitment by the Honourable Minister for Health that there be an investigation and I am sure that they are already in the process of this investigation. We need to get to the bottom of this, but let us be positive about this. As I have said, it is not about blaming people, because anyone in the frontline is vulnerable and equally exposed, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is a risk that the front-liners all face. Why the military, why the navy? We have got doctors and health workers who have been affected as well, but they are not put under this category of super spreaders. That is unfair and unacceptable, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Honourable Rasova talked about penalties, people who go shopping, but he does not go? When this Bill comes into force it equally applies to everyone in this country, including the military personnel, Honourable Rasova and including the Honourable Tabuya; the law applies to everyone, but why specifically picking on the Military and the Navy?

You do not understand the environment that they operate in, Mr. Speaker, Sir. They operate in teams. When one is down, it is the whole team that has the higher chances of getting infected, because they operate in teams. They do not operate individually. The basic formation of a soldiering unit is 10-men a section. Ships, they have ship crews, they are in a unit. So when a sailor is affected, the whole crew is affected. The chances of them being affected because they operate in teams.

Let us be fair when we want to make accusations about how this virus is spreading particularly with the front-liners, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It is totally unfair and unacceptable and again the military also has demanded that a thorough investigation be done because the military soldier that was involved initially became scapegoat in all these. The evidence is there that it otherwise. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as Minister responsible, I do not take that lightly and I wish to speak on behalf of the Commander and the Chief of the Navy and the Police that it is unacceptable. They are doing a lot of sacrifice probably more than some of us here in this honourable House to ensure that this country is free from this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Bill is a about collective security. Let me say that again. This Bill is about collective security. It is about the protection of everyone because it is the core responsibility of Government to save lives. I say that again. This is about saving lives and that is why we need to support this Bill.

That is the bottom line, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That has always been. I know that a lot of people jumped about the Police Bill and whatever that has been taken away, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because there is always a contradiction and the conflict and it is always hard to balance between individual rights and collective security when it comes to issues as such.

Honourable Members of this House must understand that this Bill is about the collective security and it is about protecting the lives of the people because citizens becomes the first priority. It is their lives that matter over their rights when it comes to situations as such, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and that is why we need to support this Bill.

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

HON. V. LAL.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to give a short contribution in support of this motion.

The number of COVID cases are increasing daily and the Government needs to put in stringent measures to curb this. If everyone follows the restrictions in place, we will be able to contain the virus, but it hurts to hear that everyday people are breaching these restrictions. If we do

not change our attitude, worse is awaiting. The sacrifice of our frontline workers - police, military, navy and medical staff should be an eye-opener and lessons should be learnt.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the amendment to the Bill will help the Government contain the virus and at the same time, we will move towards opening businesses so that people can go to work and earn an income to support their families. Businesses also need to adhere to COVID safe protocols to ensure there is no outbreak at their place of work.

COVID infections and the continued closure of international borders are weighing heavily on Fiji's economy. This type of tourism activity is central to economic recovery. It is predicted that an economic contraction is likely for 2021 while the outlook for 2022 remains uncertain. Economic recovery depends on how soon COVID cases are contained locally and restart our international tourism.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the challenge we have today is how we bottle up the ability to act quickly in a crisis to adhere to what is put in front of us and do the right thing in our everyday acts. Despite the increase in COVID cases, some of our people failed to adhere to the protocols set out by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. We cannot be complacent as some of the cases have no links, a number of people being charged for various breaches of protocols is a matter of concern. We should realise that COVID is amongst us and we all should work together to contain it. It is high time we change our attitude, be responsible and do the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, once again I am humbly requesting the people of Fiji to, please, follow the restrictions in place and act responsibly.

With those words, Sir, I support the motion before this House.

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

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our concern is that it is not a practical Bill. It will be very hard to enforce this. The restrictions we are going to pass will be difficult, especially in the rural areas.

As we know, Fiji is 52 percent urban, 48 percent in the rural areas and 48 percent (a significant part of the number) will be in the villages. That is why my colleague, Honourable Radrodro was saying this morning the involvement of the Turaga-ni-Koros and all that - the structure in the *vanua* to help with the enforcement of these restrictions.

Mr. Speaker, we will need to have more dialogue on this, it is here, but we see some difficulties in enforcing the requirements of this law. An example was given to us, there was a law that says that you cannot sell cigarette rolls in the villages, you cannot enforce that, people are doing it willy-nilly in the villages.

Mr. Speaker, that was why we were insisting that that there should have been more consultations, that it can be all inclusive and easy to enforce. That is why, Mr. Speaker, we are against this amendment - it is not practical.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member. Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor for your right of reply.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be very brief. Mr. Speaker,

Sir, as we highlighted this intent to enable the granting or giving of fines to those people who breach various provisions, Honourable Prasad was correct that one of the intentions of having these penalties or fines is that, it does not drag people through the cell system. At the moment, any of the infringements, if the police officer say you breach something, and because they have to take you to court, they have to take you to the police station, and then they lock you up in the cell, if need be.

One of the Honourable Opposition Members rang me up over the weekend and said that some group of people had been arrested by the police. They wanted to know what happened, et cetera. In fact, we arranged Legal Aid for them and this is what none of the Honourable Members have actually mentioned. I think Honourable Prasad said 'Oh, what about the legal rights?' Legal Aid is available there, Legal Aid responds to anyone that requires legal aid assistance even on weekends.

Unfortunately, the private bar does not participate in that even though they will be invited on several occasions, but Legal Aid Commission receives over \$5 million a year in providing assistance, it is the largest law firm and those people actually were attended to. The first hour is critically important.

Anyone that actually comes into the cell system has a right to a lawyer. Now what this fine does is that, no one gets dragged off to the cell. If someone, for example, if you are using mask or any other requirement, if seen not wearing a mask like when you are driving your car and you are speeding, when the LTA or the police officers stop you and show you the gun and it says '80 kilometres an hour' and it is a 60-kilometre zone, they actually give you infringement notice and they give it to you to pay within x number of days and you drive off.

What it does now is that, at the moment the law is, if I am not wearing a mask and they see me not wearing a mask, they will arrest me or they will take me to the cell and lock me up. The difference now would be, once we have this penalty, they see you not wearing the mask, they will write the infringement notice, they will give it to you, you need to go and pay the fine, that is how the system is going to work. People will not get locked up in the cell, people will not have to go into crowded spaces and we find that in the weekends, for example, that does happen, that is one of the advantages of it.

The second advantage, of course, is that they can get legal representation and, Mr. Speaker, Sir, other countries have done it too. I mean some countries, in New Zealand, people have actually been sent to prison or they get fined.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point about the actual penalty unit itself or the number of dollars, I remember quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, post-2007 when the Bainimarama Government was there, the LTA in those days, because they borrowed the Act from Queensland, hook, line and sinker, including the actual penalty provisions, in those days you had to pay \$80 for not wearing a seat belt and, we, at that point in time through Cabinet actually changed the penalty from \$80 to \$40 because \$80 was too much for Fiji, it was brought down to \$40.

The Honourable Prime Minister actually had said that we need to make sure that the fines are actually realistic. Similarly, of course, we are not going to slap a \$50 fine. It will be a realistic fine but it also needs to be something that can cause deterrence.

The reason why we are doing all of these, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is because we need to inculcate a pattern of behaviour, we need to ensure compliance, we need to ensure that there is deterrence without actually causing or affecting efficiency and productivity.

We need a productive legal system, we need an efficient legal system, we need to minimise the amount of time a person spends in the cell before they appear in court, so the fine system is good.

To use the argument and to say, “Well, this will not be enforceable in the rural areas” is a superfluous argument.”

In the same way, at the moment you can argue and say, “Well, how is the curfew being monitored in the rural areas?” The provision is still there and they do find people breaching it in the rural areas also and it gets imposed. I think the superfluous argument to say that in rural areas that will not happen therefore we should not have this. In fact, it is quite preposterous to say that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the idea is to ensure that we have efficiency within the system, we inculcate a particular behaviour of people adhering to the new standards where this is going to be the norm, and hopefully will also ensure that we do not have people locked up in the cells, affects productivity, you know they cause distress, we get crowded up cells, there is simply a penalty, you pay your fine, you go away, please, do not do it again.

Of course, things like, I think Honourable Lalabalavu raised the issue about what kind of mask, that it has already been determined, of course, the regulations can further stipulate that to ensure that there is no ambiguity surrounding those kinds of matters. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General for his right of reply. Honourable Members, the Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

[A Bill for an Act to amend the Public Health Act 1935, enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji. (Act No. of 2021)]

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we have had a long day today. I thank you for your cooperation and forbearance.

Honourable Members, there was a Point of Order raised today, and I said I will consider it, and I will give my ruling on the Point of Order tomorrow. I will not hold you back because it takes about eight pages.

We are adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9.30.

The Parliament adjourned at 8.41 p.m.