

# **PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI**



## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**

### **DAILY HANSARD**

**TUESDAY, 17TH AUGUST, 2021**

**[CORRECTED COPY]**

# CONTENTS

	<u>Pages</u>
Administration of Oath/Affirmation of Allegiance ... .. Maiden Speech – Hon. Sachida Nand	2413-2415
Minutes ... ..	2415
Communications from the Chair ... ..	2415
Presentation of Reports of Committees ... ..	2415-2427
(1) Review Report of the 2018 Audit Report of the Office of the Auditor-General	
(2) Review Report of the Fiji Development Bank 2019 Annual Report	
(3) Review Report of the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Annual Reports	
(4) Review Report of the Ministry of Fisheries 2017-2018 Annual Reports	
(5) Report on the Review of the Designs Bill 2020	
Ministerial Statements ... ..	2427-2452
(1) Update on the Forestry Sector	
(2) Update on the New Programmes to Expand Agriculture	
(3) Update on the Walesi Service	
Income Tax (Budget Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2021 ... ..	2452-2453
Questions ... ..	2453-2468,2469-2474
<u>Oral Questions</u>	
(1) Study into Industrial Hemp (Q/No. 154/2021)	
(2) FPF's Routine Operations & COVID-19 (Q/No. 155/2021)	
(3) Aircraft Details, Loans & Lease Payments – Fiji Airways (Q/No. 156/2021)	
(4) Domestic Repatriation – Viti Levu, Vanua Levu & Maritime Islands (Q/No. 157/2021)	
(5) Plans to Harvest & Value-Add Mahogany (Q/No. 158/2021)	
(6) Women's Participation in Fisheries' Activities & Initiatives (Q/No. 159/2021)	
(7) Construction of Wainigadru & Koro Ice Plants (Q/No. 160/2021)	
(8) Household Pack Distribution - Lockdown Areas & Home Isolation (Q/No. 161/2021)	
<u>Written Questions</u>	
(1) Planned & Proposed Activities – Ministry of Health (Q/No. 162/2021)	
(2) Development of Navua Township – Update of (Q/No. 163/2021)	
Suspension of Standing Orders ... ..	2468

**TUESDAY, 17TH AUGUST, 2021**

The Parliament met at 9.48 a.m. pursuant to adjournment.

HONOURABLE SPEAKER took the Chair and read the Prayer.

**PRESENT**

All Honourable Members were present.

**ADMINISTRATION OF OATH/AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Honourable Sachida Nand subscribed to the Administration of Oath and Affirmation of Allegiance, and took his seat in the Chamber.

HON. SPEAKER.- Congratulations, Honourable Member, and welcome to Parliament.

Honourable Members, I now invite the Honourable Sachida Nand to deliver his maiden address. You have the floor, Sir.

Delivery of Maiden Speech

HON. S. NAND.- Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Attorney-General, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Assistant Ministers, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Honourable Members of Parliament and the people of Fiji; a very good morning to you all.

Firstly, I would like to thank the almighty, PERMAL, for giving me an opportunity to be part of the 51 members of this team. May his divine guidance and blessings be on the proceedings of this august Parliament.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family for their continued support in my endeavours: My wife, Sunita; son, Anirudh; and daughter, Shesta; have been my three main pillars on which my professional and political aspirations have been based upon. They have always actively supported me and continue to support me through my ups and downs. I am very grateful for their support and without them, I would not be where I am today. Thank you very much.

Thirdly, I would like to sincerely acknowledge and appreciate the support of my friends and well-wishers. They continued to believe in me and their support never dwindled. Thank you very much to them also.

It is an honour and a privilege to be part of this august Parliament and represent the people of Fiji. I am not a seasoned politician. I come humbly as a person who is not perfect but learns from his mistakes, a person who has had his fair share of ups and downs.

However, I am also a person who knows how to pick himself up and presses ahead, a person who has spent a considerable time with the people, be it in the agricultural sector or in the small and medium enterprises, through my association with other businesses or as a businessman myself.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the people, the business community and society at large, has been challenging. However, the FijiFirst Government is forging ahead by putting Fiji and its people first. Whilst I stand here supporting all the sectors in Fiji, these are two sectors that hold dear to my heart - the agricultural sector and small and medium enterprises.

On the agricultural sector, Fiji traditionally has been, is and will continue to depend on agriculture as a source of livelihood. Whilst due credit is given to all the other sectors, agriculture is what keeps us, especially the rural community, ticking. This sector plays an important role in developing and supporting the economy. All countries which are not industrialised countries have a major focus on the agricultural sector. Our Fiji is no exception.

Increased productivity and output in the agricultural sector will significantly contribute to the overall economy and prosperity of the country. The agricultural sector continues to provide food to the people, not all that we eat is imported. It continues to provide significant employment in the rural, peri-urban and to some extent, in the urban areas.

We have continued to earn valuable foreign exchange through our agricultural exports. We are far from being a perfect agricultural community. However, it does not mean that we cannot try to assist our farmers by heading in the right direction. It is an honour to be associated with a government that has continued to invest in the agricultural sector.

In the 2021-2022 Budget, the Ministry of Agriculture has been allocated \$61.9 million. All possible segments have been looked into, be it livestock, crops or extension. The Government, through its budget, continues to fund institutions, such as Agricultural Marketing Authority, to continue to create an agricultural business-enabling environment.

Our farmers should take full advantage of all these provisions and let us, altogether, move a notch up. The Government cannot do it alone, the agricultural officers and support staff cannot do it alone and the farmers cannot do it alone, it has to be a holistic approach and that is exactly what the FijiFirst Government is continuing to do.

On Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), they are the worst affected during this COVID-19 pandemic. This sector has been noted to provide a significant contribution to the GDP of the country. A number have either closed or have downsized. This sector needs support to rehabilitate and bounce back. They have done it before and they will do it again.

In recognising their steadfastness, the Government, in its 2021-2022 Budget, has allocated significant resources for the SMEs to rehabilitate. Let us make full use of this opportunity. Businesses are slowly but surely opening up, the economy is churning and if we all work together, we can hit the ground running hard in no time.

The 2021-2022 Budget proves that the Government continues to endeavour for Fiji's economic growth. Even in one of the most pressing times, it has dished out one of the best Budgets Fiji has ever seen. It has provided for all, across all sectors, so let us make full use of it.

I am new in Parliament and I do come with an open mind. This is the time we, in this august Parliament, should all work together in rebuilding the economy and give all Fijians the best possible opportunity for economic growth and prosperity.

Let us have constructive discussions. Let us not argue for the sake of arguing. Let us

not get into cheap political point-scoring. Let us put our people first. Let us put Fiji first and our country will prosper. Is that not what we all want?

It is time the Opposition needs to work with the Government in order to put our people of Fiji first. This is what I would like to work towards, and that is what I am looking forward to do in this august Parliament.

God bless Fiji. Thank you.

(Acclamation)

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Member. I wish you all the best for the remainder of this Parliamentary term. Once again, welcome to Parliament.

### **MINUTES**

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

That the Minutes of the sitting of Parliament held on Monday, 16th August, 2021, as previously circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to

### **COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

#### Welcome

HON. SPEAKER.- I welcome all Honourable Members to today's sitting of Parliament, those present in person and those joining virtually. I also welcome all those watching the live broadcast and the live streaming of today's proceedings from the comfort of their home, offices and electronic devices. Thank you for your continued interest in the workings of your Parliament.

#### Response to Written Questions

Honourable Members, at this juncture, I wish to advise that the Secretariat has received written responses from the Honourable Minister for Education, Heritage and Arts, to Written Questions No. 28/2021 and 117/2021, which were asked by the Honourable Ratu Navurelevu and Honourable Leawere respectively. These have been provided to the two Honourable Members and copies will also be uploaded on the Parliament website. Thank you, Honourable Members.

### **PRESENTATION OF REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**

#### Review Report - 2018 Audit Report of the Office of the Auditor-General On GCCs, CSAs and Other Entities

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Mr. Speaker, this Report provides the Committee's Review Findings on the 2018 Audit Report of the Office of the Auditor-General on Government Commercial

Companies (GCCs), Commercial Statutory Authorities (CSAs) and Other Entities.

Mr. Speaker, the Report contains analysis on the financial audits of 11 entities. The Auditor-General had issued 12 audit opinions, out of which eight were related to the 2018 Financial Statements, while four were for backlog of various entities. These 11 entities are:

- (1) Pacific Fishing Company Limited;
- (2) Airports Fiji Limited;
- (3) Copra Millers Fiji Limited;
- (4) Fiji Development Bank;
- (5) Fiji Development Nominees Partnership Limited;
- (6) Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited;
- (7) Post Fiji Limited;
- (8) Energy Fiji Limited;
- (9) Housing Authority of Fiji;
- (10) Fiji Rice Limited; and
- (11) Yaqara Pastoral Company Limited.

There was no modified opinion issued for the 2018 Financial Statements. However, three of the Financial Statements in the backlog for the various entities were issued with modified audit opinion.

The Auditor-General had issued an unmodified audit opinions on all of the 2018 Financial Statements that were audited for the various entities and one of the financial statements that was in the backlog for the various entities was issued with an unmodified audit opinion.

The Financial Statements of most entities audited for 2018 were timely and generally of good quality. However, further improvements can be made to enhance the quality and timeliness of submission of financial statements for the Office of the Auditor-General's audits. Also, there has been a delay in the audit of eight GCCs, CSAs and re-organised entities which were due to:

- (1) delay in the submission of draft accounts for audit or draft accounts submitted were incomplete;
- (2) entities decided to address issues that were raised in draft audit reports and resubmission of financial statements for audit; and
- (3) financial statements were not submitted for audit.

The Committee thoroughly scrutinised the audit report and formulated questions for the nine entities that were audited to provide their written responses on other significant matters and the financial anomalies that were highlighted by the Office of the Auditor-General.

Mr. Speaker, in this regard, it is important to note that the Novel Coronavirus Disease, renamed as COVID-19, was declared by the World Health Organisation as a global pandemic on 11th March, 2020. The Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, therefore, placed necessary health precautionary measures to control the spread of the new virus strand outbreak.

Standing Order 112(1)(b) provides powers to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to compel the production of documents or other materials or information as required for its proceedings and deliberations.

The Committee recommends:

- (1) All State-Owned Entities to adopt Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) to attract highly qualified accounting personnel.
- (2) Regular internal training for finance staff in terms of basic financial reporting;
- (3) That improvements to be made on a timely submission of financial statement be done on timely basis as required and the quality of the report.
- (4) That improvements on control weakness and deficiencies which can prevent severe destruction to achieve the audit objective and comply with relevant authorities;
- (5) That all relevant information records, check register are properly kept for timely submission for audit; and
- (6) That all financial statements be prepared in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) for Medium Size Entities (MSE)

The Committee noted in the responses received that some of the entities have resolved the audit queries while some are working towards resolving these control issues. The Committee strongly recommends that immediate action is required by the respective entities in order to improve financial accountability.

Mr Speaker, some of the highlights of these entities include:

- (1) Airports Fiji Limited (AFL) –
  - (a) AFL's Net Profit increased by 0.5 percent or \$300,814 in 2018, compared to 2017. This was mainly due to the increase in revenue generated mostly by landing and parking fees for international airport by 19 percent and domestic airports by 11 percent, domestic passenger service charge by 10 percent and rental from check-in-counter by 15 percent.
  - (b) Net Assets increased by \$185,342,915 or 84 percent in 2018, compared to 2017. This was attributed to an independent valuation carried out by a registered valuer for the buildings, infrastructure, plant and equipment and motor vehicle, thus increasing the value of property, plant and equipment.
  - (c) In addition, there was an increase in investment made with various financial institutions by \$21,000,000 in 2018, compared to 2017.
- (2) Copra Millers of Fiji Limited -
  - (a) Copra Millers of Fiji made a profit of \$67,222 in 2018 compared to a loss of \$162,393 recorded in 2017. The profit was mainly due to increase in revenue, which was the result of the Grant received from Government in the form of subsidy for whole coconut price in 2018 as added benefit to the farmers for the supply of whole coconut and raw copra.
  - (b) The Net Assets increased by \$67,722 or 1.4 per cent in 2018, compared to 2017. While there was an increase in total assets and total liabilities in 2018, the increase in total assets was slightly more than the increase in total liability.
- (3) Fiji Development Bank (FDB) - it was noted that FDB's net consolidated assets had increased by \$7,411,742 or by 5 percent in 2018, compared to 2017. The increase was mostly attributable to increase in cash and cash equivalents by \$20,116,529 or 82 percent, and Loans and Advance by \$42,708,845 or 12 percent.

- (4) Fiji Development Bank (FDB) Nominees Limited -
- (a) The Company in 2018 recorded an increase in its operating profit by 25 percent, compared to the profit of 2017.
  - (b) The Company also recorded an increase in net assets which increased by \$651 or by 4.6 percent in 2018.
- (5) Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited (FBCL) -
- (a) FBCL's net assets had increased by 31 percent or \$4,736,768 in 2018, compared to 2017. This was mainly attributed to the increase in investments made by the Company during the financial year and additions to property, plant and equipment.
  - (b) FBCL made a total of \$17.95 million of capital investment in the 2018 financial year. Total additions to plant and equipment amounted to \$16.11 million, stemming substantially from gifted assets from Japan International Cooperation Agency relating to the assets from the AM Transmission site in Naulu. Additions was also prevalent in other fixed asset categories, such as motor vehicle (\$282,000), computer (\$740,000), furniture and fittings (\$112,000) and WIP (\$702,000).
  - (c) The Company also made an additional investment of \$5.08 million in term deposits during the 2018 financial year.
- (6) Post Fiji Limited (PFL) -
- (a) Post Fiji Limited recorded a net profit of \$2.32 million in 2018, compared to a net profit of \$0.47million in 2017. This was attributed to reduction in administration and operating expenses by \$1.8million or 18 percent.
  - (b) The Company's total income in 2018 also increased which was largely due to increases in agency commissions from international parcels by \$1.9million (21 percent) and sales revenue from Post Shops by \$0.97million (11 percent).
  - (c) It was noted that net assets increased by \$2.32million or 22 percent in 2018, compared to 2017. This was mainly due to the increase in cash and cash equivalent by \$1.93 million (77 percent).
  - (d) Also noted that the Company's total liabilities remained fairly the same, compared to the previous year.
  - (e) Commendable work has been done by the management ensuring that company continues to make profit though losing a lot of sales as people tend to use e-mail rather than sending letters. So income through sale of postal stamps have drastically reduced over a number of years.
  - (f) The new venture of the sale of groceries especially to the outer islands has tuned out very profitably and at the same time providing access to quality groceries items to Fijians staying in maritime areas.
- (7) Energy Fiji Limited (EFL) - In 2018, there was an increase in EFL's Net Assets by 7 percent or \$53.802 million, compared to 2017. This was mainly attributed to the

increase in cash on hand and at bank; property, plant and equipment; and receivables and prepayments balance. In 2018, there was a reduction in EFL's total profit, which was 79.8 million dollars.

- (8) Housing Authority - Total comprehensive income increased by \$3.181million or 216 percent in 2017, compared to 2016 which was largely attributed to the increase in value of land and buildings from the revaluation the Authority carried out for the 2017 financial year.

Overall, the Committee appreciates the vast contributions made by these entities towards the economy in terms of employment, as well as the dividends paid to Government from the revenue generated through its operations.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend my appreciation to all the Committee Members who were part of the successful compilation of this bipartisan Report, namely: Hon. Joseph Nand (Deputy Chairperson); former Member of Parliament, Mr. Vijendra Prakash; Hon. Aseri Radrodro; and Hon. Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions from Hon. Virendra Lal and Hon. Ro Teimumu Kepa, the Substantive Members who have assisted the Committee in finalising this bipartisan Report. I would also like to thank my Secretariat Team for compiling this Report.

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

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

#### Review Report of the Fiji Development Bank 2019 Annual Report

HON. V. NATH.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs is pleased to submit to Parliament, the Review Report of the Fiji Development Bank 2019 Annual Report.

The Fiji Development Bank (FDB) plays a pivotal role towards Fiji's economic development. This was evident in its 2019 Report as the Bank's lending portfolio grew to \$539.75 million at the end of the financial year with the loan portfolio representing a customer base of 5,149 accounts.

The Committee welcomed and commended the recent initiatives and services, namely, Yau Bula Term Deposit Facility, FDB Agriculture Loan Facility, Strategic Partnership in FDB, Ministry of Agriculture and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) - Matching Grant Support Scheme for MSMEs to promote market oriented agricultural production for farmers in remote and rural areas.

The Committee extends its appreciation to the team at FDB for successfully executing its accreditation with the Green Climate Fund. This milestone brings potential for the Bank to increase foreign investment in local climate change mitigation and adaptation projects. Furthermore, the Committee was very pleased to note that the FDB dedicated a section of its report to include its progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals relevant to them. Such initiatives strongly reaffirm the Bank's commitment toward fulfilling its goals.

The Bank also plays an important role towards increasing financial knowledge through its financial literacy initiatives, as well as its community-based expositions and roadshows and this was evident through the outreach programmes conducted during the period under review.

Moving on, the Committee perused FDB's website and was very pleased to note how easy it was to access information about the various loan package offered. I would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to the Chief Executive Officer of FDB and his Team, for being prompt in answering the various queries and questions raised by the Committee.

Finally, I would like to thank our Committee Members who were part of the team that produced this Report: The Deputy Chairperson, Hon. Veena Bhatnagar; Hon. George Vagnathan; Hon. Inosi Kuridrani; and Hon. Ro Filipe Tuisawau. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Parliament staff, who had given us invaluable support.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs, I commend the Review of the Fiji Development Bank 2019 Annual Report to Parliament.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, for the purposes of tabling, I can confirm that I have received a copy of the Report by the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs. I now give the floor to the Chairperson.

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

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

Review Report on the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources  
2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Annual Reports

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- I am pleased to present to you the Review Report on the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 Annual Reports.

The Ministry is responsible for the effective and efficient administration, development and management of all State Land initiatives, including the facilitation of the country's mineral sector and groundwater resources. The Ministry of Lands administers approximately a total of 18,000 State Land leases, covering about 4 percent of the total land mass in Fiji.

The Ministry Headquarters is located at the iTaukei Trust Fund Building Complex, Nasova, in Suva. Its three Divisional Offices are each located at the Fiji Public Service Credit Union Building, Gladstone Road in Suva; Lands Department Building, Tavewa Avenue, Lautoka; and Macuata House on Siberia Road, Labasa. The Ministry, under the review period, had its activities and programmes directly linked and aligned to the People's Charter for Change, Peace and Progress.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to note, for the years 2016-2017, the Ministry recorded a few sound achievements for the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources through the two Departments on a range of activities. One of the major achievements was the alignment to the 2013 Republic of Fiji Constitution for conducting substantial consultation and progress to the determination of "Fair Share of Mineral Royalty" to the landowners, of which certain percentage of royalty has been paid out to the rightful landowners.

Additionally, some other Ministry achievements for the same period under review, included the following:

- Facilitated around 78 special prospecting licences for mineral exploration;
- Drilled a total of 31 boreholes of which 20 were successful with 11 boreholes being reticulated; and
- Relocation assessment of about 28 villages that were greatly affected by *TC Winston* and was prioritised by the National Disaster and Management Office.

Upon deliberations, the Committee noted that the Ministry had two major departments: the Department of Lands and Survey and the Department of Mineral Resources, which independently carried out their own responsibilities for the diverse communities they serve.

The Committee Members, during the period of review, noted the challenges faced by the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources. One of the challenges faced was the resignation of fully trained and experienced staff in the Ministry during the year of operation.

Nonetheless, the Committee commended the effort put forth by the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources to combat the challenges and impediments faced by the Ministry during the period under review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, at this juncture, I wish to thank both, the former Permanent Secretary, Mr Malakai Finau, and the current Permanent Secretary, Dr. Raijieli Taga, and staff for their assistance in this review process.

I also extend my gratitude to my Committee Colleagues, namely: Hon. Jale Sigarara (Deputy Chairperson); Hon. Alexander O'Connor; Hon. Mitieli Bulanauca; Hon. Jese Saukuru; and former Committee Member, Hon. Peceli Vosanibola.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I commend the Consolidated Annual Reports for the Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

HON. SPEAKER.- Parliament will now vote.

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note, we will suspend proceedings for morning tea and we will resume in half an hour.

The Parliament adjourned at 10.30 a.m.

The Parliament resumed at 11.03 a.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, I call on the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to table his report. You have the floor.

Review Report of the Ministry of Fisheries 2017-2018 Annual Reports

HON. S.S. KIRPAL.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am pleased to present to you the Review Report on the Ministry of Fisheries 2017-2018 Annual Report.

The Committee's oversight function is to scrutinise Government Departments with responsibility within the Committee's mandate and make recommendations relating to any aspect of functioning, administration, legislation or proposed legislative programme, budget rationalisation, restructuring and policy formulation as legislated under the Parliament Standing Orders.

In the deliberations stage, the Committee focused on the overall operations of the Ministry, including its functions and strategic objectives, for 2017-2018. The Committee wishes to commend the Ministry of Fisheries Officials for their hard work and support of the Committee during their site visit. Also, the Committee would like to thank the Ministry Officials for their timely written response to the Committee.

The Committee has conducted the review of the Ministry of Fisheries 2017-2018 Annual Report and recommends that Parliament takes note of the recommendations highlighted in the Committee's Report.

Last but not the least, I wish to extend my appreciation to all the Honourable Members of the Committee, who were part of the successful compilation of this bipartisan Report namely; Honourable Jale Sigarara (Deputy Chairperson); Honourable Alexander O'Connor; Honourable Mitieli Bulanauca; and Honourable Jese Saukuru.

On behalf of the Committee, I hereby commend this Report to Parliament.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

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

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

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

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- I now call upon the Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights to table his Report. You have the floor.

### Report on the Review of the Designs Bill 2020

HON. A.A. MAHARAJ.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. As a means of development of the laws in Fiji, the Government of Fiji has been reviewing laws that govern vital sectors of the country, including that which relates to the area of intellectual property.

Through this, there have been numerous prominent work carried out, including the identification of what is called “intellectual property theft”, majority of which relates to designs. It has been highlighted that today, people are more clever, in as far as the usage of designs are concerned, using internet and mobile phones.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it has also been identified that the only current law in Fiji that governs the registration and use of designs is the United Kingdom Designs (Protection) Act 1936, which provides that a registered owner of a design registered in the United Kingdom enjoys the same rights and privileges as though the certificate of registration in the United Kingdom had been issued with an extension to Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, therefore, the Fijian Government had introduced the Designs Bill 2020, which is intended to introduce a modern regulatory framework that encourages the development of intellectual property design, and at the same time, put in place protective measures for such designs. The Designs Bill 2020 had been referred by Parliament to the Standing Committee on Justice, Law and Human Rights, for review.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Designs Bill seeks to provide for and encourage the development of unique designs, and is not necessarily limited to traditional or indigenous designs, but also any design by young people designing various products. I would also like to highlight that this Bill is one of the three related Bills that were considered and reviewed by the Committee.

The Committee began its review by making preliminary deliberations on the Clauses of the Bill and identified that the Bill aims to provide for the registration and protection of designs in Fiji and makes provision for international arrangements that Fiji may be a party to, for the protection of registered designs in Fiji, that may be used in other countries and vice-versa.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Committee had extensive discussions on the provisions of the Bill and resolved that given the time provided to the Committee to review the Bill, that it be prudent to also hear the views of the public on this very important piece of proposed legislation. This public consultation would then allow the Committee to gauge the public’s perspective on the Bill before deliberating further, whilst also bearing in mind the requirements as set down by Parliament in referring the Bill to the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, similar to the other Bill already reviewed and reported on by the Committee, the Committee was committed to upholding public trust in Parliament by ensuring that there is public participation and that all such participation is given due consideration. The Committee was mindful of the provisions in Standing Order 111(1)(a) and ensured that its meetings were open to the public and the media, except during such deliberations and discussions to develop and finalise the Committee’s observations and this particular Report.

This participation by the public was realised through the conducting of public consultations by the Committee and was fortunate to have been able to hold one round of face-to-face public consultation at the beginning of the year, before the second wave of COVID-19 took its toll on Fiji. The Committee also relied on written submissions from interested individuals and entities.

The submissions included comments and highlighted numerous suggestions for changes to the provisions of the Bill, which the Committee placed reasonable emphasis on. The salient issues noted from the submissions included that the:

- (1) Bill should provide that transitional provisions also provide that UK registrations continue to be protected for a certain period;
- (2) Bill generally lacks enforcement provisions; and
- (3) provisions of the Bill regarding penalties for false representation be amended to mirror that of the penalties for conviction for commercial fraud in Fiji's criminal laws.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee was mindful of the Bill's impact on Fiji's efforts in achieving the targets set out in the National Development Plan which, in turn, contributes to Fiji's overall commitment and obligation towards the global agenda – the Sustainable Development Goals.

In considering this, the Committee noted that the objectives of the Bill aim to improve the designs protection regime in Fiji. This objective relates to the ambitious development plan and goal by the Government of Fiji in developing the businesses sector by making necessary changes to its regulatory framework. The Bill will bring about the necessary regulatory framework, which is envisioned to develop the business sector in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee was also mindful of the requirements of the Standing Orders of Parliament regarding gender, which is also a key goal in the Sustainable Development Goals. The Committee ensured that full consideration will be given to the principle of gender equality so as to ensure all matters are considered with regard to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally. The Committee identified from the review that the Clauses of the Bill are designed to impact all Fijians and the people living in Fiji, irrespective of gender.

Mr. Speaker, at the final stage of the review, the Committee placed reasonable emphasis on all the contentious issues highlighted from the submissions. The Committee weighed all options concerning the issues that had been identified and had extensive discussions on these.

The Committee sought clarification on the issues from the Office of the Solicitor-General and the Consultants from the World Trade Organisation and Intellectual Property Office from around the region. This process ensures that all relevant issues were appropriately addressed and that the objective of the Bill was preserved. Following this, the Committee, again, had an extensive deliberation, after which the Committee came to a consensus of its position on the key issues that had been identified from the review.

Mr. Speaker, in regards to the issues on the transitional provisions of the Bill to be applied to United Kingdom registrations, the Committee noted that section 2 of the United Kingdom Designs (Protection) Act 1936 (in this context also referred to as the Designs Act) essentially extends the rights and privileges of a registered proprietor of any design registered in the United Kingdom under the Patents and Designs Acts 1907 to 1932, or any Act amending or substituted for those Acts to Fiji.

Given that the Designs Act is an imperial law and an extended application to Fiji pre-independence, it was advisable that a transitional or savings provision is not necessary, given that protection for such designs are already provided for under the respective United Kingdom legislation. The Designs Bill 2020 provides for the registration of designs in order for registered owners to have their designs protected in Fiji and any such extension of rights and privileges or protection of registered designs can be made by way of agreement between Fiji and other countries, if participating countries allow so.

Mr. Speaker, also, Fiji is a member of the TRIPS Agreement. Under Article 26(3) of the TRIPS Agreement, the duration of protection available for an industrial design must amount to, at least, 10 years.

Article 26(3) also does not oblige WTO members to establish a continued, uninterrupted term of protection and so WTO members are free to provide the duration of protection in successive terms.

Clause 14 of the Designs Bill provides for such successive terms where the term of registration and, therefore, protection of a design is five years from the date of registration and can be extended for a further period of five years, leaving rightful holders the choice of renewing registration, in the event market demand for the goods bearing the designs persists.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the Committee also noted that there was recommendation for Fiji to join the Hague Agreement, which provides for a minimum of 10 years or 15 years protection and this is supported by International Trademark Association. However, given that Fiji is not a member of the Hague Agreement, the minimum term, however, does not apply to Fiji until such time Fiji joins the Hague Agreement.

In regards to the issue on the recommendation for the adoption of enforcement provisions, the Committee notes that currently, the Designs Bill provides general provisions for any legal proceedings in relation to infringement of a right in a registered design. Accordingly, we advise that in order to include additional provisions on enforcement, a review of the suggested inclusions is required before the same can be inserted to the Designs Bill.

In respect to the issue of amending the penalties relating to false representation, the Committee believed that there was merit in making changes, given that the provision in contention related to a serious offence and as such, should also carry a penalty commensurate to the offence. The Committee then noted that there are similar offences in the Criminal Law in Fiji which carry higher penalties. For example, Crimes Act 2009, Part 17 - Divisions 2, 3 and 5 provides for offences of fraudulent conduct and related matters and carries a higher penalty than that provided in the Bill. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that Clause 58(1) and (3) of the Designs Bill be amended, taking into consideration penalties for similar or related offences under the Crimes Act 2009, Patents Bill and Trademarks Bill.

Mr. Speaker, as I have noted already, the review did highlight a few issues on the Bill, and these were considered extensively by the Committee through internal deliberations and necessary consultations with the Legal Team from Solicitor-General's Office. The Committee, therefore, believes that all issues identified have been adequately addressed.

The Committee makes one substantive amendment to the Bill, which is the proposed amendment to Clause 58. As a consequence of the proposed amendment, there are also other amendments made to the Bill and these are grammatical or cross-referencing in nature, and these amendments are captured in the magenta coloured text in the copy of the Bill tabled with the Committee's Report.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee is also of the view that this piece of legislation needs to be reviewed periodically as the business environment relating to designs continuously change with time and circumstances. An up-to-date business environment is vital for the economy of the nation, therefore, the legal framework governing such business environments should be in par at all times to ensure economic development in Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee acknowledges Parliament for allowing public participation through public consultation as part of the legislative-making process, and supporting and encouraging the Committee to conduct extensive public consultation. Moreover, appreciation goes to the UNDP Fiji Parliament Support Project for its support, which enabled the Committee to conduct extensive awareness on its public consultations.

Furthermore, the Committee would also like to acknowledge the Parliament IT Team for its

support, which enabled the Committee to have virtual meetings and continue to carry out its constitutionally mandated functions, despite the impact of COVID-19.

Finally, I would like to thank the Honourable Members of the Committee: the Hon. Rohit Sharma (Deputy Chairperson); Hon. Ratu Suliano Matanitobua; Hon. Dr Salik Govind; and Hon. Moses Bulitavu, for their input. The Committee also acknowledges the public, key stakeholders and entities that provided their views on the Bill, and for taking an interest in the proceedings of the Committee and Parliament. I also extend my appreciation to the Secretariat Team for compiling this Report.

Mr. Speaker, the Committee, through this bipartisan Report and consensus, commends the Designs Bill 2020 and the proposed amendments, to Parliament. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

(Report handed to the Secretary-General)

Honourable Members, pursuant to the resolutions of Parliament on 11th December, 2020, and 16th August, 2021, the Standing Committee has now tabled its Report accordingly, and the Bill is now ready for debate and voted on by Parliament at a later sitting day.

Thank you, Honourable Members. We move on.

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

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

- (1) Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs;
- (2) Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment; and
- (3) Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications.

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

Honourable Members, on that note, I now call on the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs, to deliver his Statement. You have the floor.

#### Update on the Forestry Sector

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Forestry, with a budget of \$13.2 million in the 2021-2022 financial year, is focussed to achieve optimum results that will further assist our forestry industry to fulfil its increasingly important role in our economy by creating business opportunities, increase revenue for landowners and creating new and sustainable jobs based through a legal and administrative framework that is efficient and transparent.

Mr. Speaker, in just the first two weeks of the new financial year, the forestry sector has generated \$14 million in export earnings. Bulk of these earnings were from pine chips exported by the Fiji Pine Group of Companies. Other products included; sawn timber from mahogany, rain tree and native species exported by various companies in the sector.

The Ministry's role has been to improve the way it facilitates private-sector activity, like approving export licences within 24 hours, while also monitoring the companies' operations to ensure that our natural resources are being sustainably managed for the long term, with minimal impact on our environment.

These improvements in facilitation are in line with Government's belief that the private sector is the engine of economic growth and that Government agencies need to continue to improve the facilitation processes, including removing red tape and reducing bureaucracy. I am most glad that this is already happening with the Ministry of Forestry, as is evidenced with how the forestry sector is responding positively.

On the Fiji Pine Group, Mr. Speaker, in addition to improving our facilitation processes, the Ministry of Forestry is strengthening its working relationship with all the stakeholders in the forestry sector.

While there are a number of small, medium and large-sized businesses involved in the harvesting, processing and value-adding, I would like to highlight recent developments involving the Fiji Pine Group. The Group recorded an operational profit of \$35.6 million in the 2020 financial year, compared to \$24.9 million in 2019. Despite the fact that 2020 was a very challenging year due to COVID-19, the Group realigned its strategies and delivered a record profit that was \$10.7 million higher than in 2019.

Importantly, Mr. Speaker, the Pine Group is now debt-free. This followed a lump sum payment of \$2.2 million to Government in February this year, to fully settle one of the last loan accounts on the Group's books.

To put it into perspective, Mr. Speaker, in 2008, the Group had a debt stock of \$63 million in 2008 and in less than 14 years, they have cleared their debt stock through commercial discipline, focussed on removing corruption, transparency and investment in technology and its people.

On top of that, Mr. Speaker, despite the challenges of COVID-19, the Group continued to pay dividends to the pine landowners. Prior to 2013, landowners never received a single cent in dividend payouts. In 2013, the Group started with a modest payout of \$350,000. Since then and up until last year, the Group has paid out \$24.6 million in dividends.

This year, Mr. Speaker, the landowners will receive another \$6 million, making it a total of \$30.6 million. This \$6 million will be paid, despite the economic slowdown. This year's dividends will be paid in three instalments: the first instalment of \$2 million was made in April; the second instalment of another \$2 million will be made this week on Thursday, 19th August; and the final payment of \$2 million will be made in November. So, Mr. Speaker, Sir, from 2013 to this year, the total dividend payout equates to \$30.06 million, and every last cent of it has gone straight into the hands of the pine landowners.

Government did not take a single cent. Apart from those dividends, the landowners receive land lease payments and a stumpage rate of 12 percent. All those returns to the landowners are unprecedented, since Fiji started planting pine about 60 years ago.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the Group has already secured markets for its woodchips for next year. This gives the Group the kind of certainty that it needs, to plan and operate efficiently. What this means is that, the Group will continue to support the landowners, workers and the many contractors who rely on the industry. It also means that the industry will continue to generate economic activity and export earnings.

Pine restocking and sustainable forestry practices are the key focus areas of the Fiji Pine Group.

The Group targets to plant 2,000 hectares of pine every year, which equates to around two million trees a year. Recently, the Pine Group sets up a brand new nursery at Drasa in Lautoka with a capacity of one million seedlings. This has come with an investment of \$350,000.

The Group, Mr. Speaker, continues to look at ways to diversify its business. In accordance with its vision, the Group has embarked on setting a brand new sawmill at Drasa to process other species of logs, such as rain tree, mahogany and other native species. This will involve a total investment of \$15 million, and the Group expects to commence operations from the second quarter of next year. With this investment, the capacity to process and value-add resources domestically will increase substantially. This will also create economic activity and also generate export income.

From a business diversification perspective, Mr. Speaker, the Fiji Pine Group is also the largest independent power producer in Fiji. Through its biomass power plant, the Group has produced about 93.71 gigawatt hours of electricity to the national grid since 2018. There is potential, Sir, to contribute more to the national grid, and the Pine Group will continue to explore options with Energy Fiji Limited to realise this.

In terms of corporate social responsibility, the Group contributed \$1.3 million for *TC Yasa* rehabilitation works in Vanua Levu, including materials for house repairs for the pine landowners. The Ministry of Forestry and the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development are helping repair and rebuild damaged houses and more than 70 have been completed, as we speak.

The Pine Group aspires to serve its landowners better. Through open and regular consultations with the landowners, there is now unprecedented bonding between the industry and the pine landowners. The Group shares information in an open and transparent manner, something that was missing in the past.

Mr. Speaker, as part of new relationships, the Fiji Pine Group has embarked on the restructuring of landowner-based institutions, like the Fiji Pine Trust, forest-based companies and forest-based trusts, to bring about more accountability and transparency, and it is doing this with the help of the Ministry of Forestry.

Mr. Speaker, Fiji's mahogany plantation is considered to be one of the largest planted forest in the world. The Government intends to see that we capitalise on this reputation and realise the full potential of Fijian mahogany.

The Mahogany Industry Development Act 2010 was introduced to bring about a transparent, efficient and results-oriented arrangement for the mahogany industry. The mahogany sector has its governance structures which is critical to ensure transparency and ensure maximum returns for all stakeholders.

As has been highlighted in this Parliament on numerous previous occasions, the mahogany sector prior to the Act, was rife with corruption, undervaluing of mahogany assets and with only a selected few reaping the benefits. In fact, despite having this large valuable asset, the Fiji Hardwood Corporation (FHCL) did not make a single profit until after 2007. Not a single profit! It had a burdening debt stock, and unscrupulous business people and some landowners were creaming money on the side to the detriment of majority of the landowners and upright businesses. There was hardly any value-adding. There was no licensing regime.

The Act has led to the reorganisation of the mahogany sector with efficiencies being gained in FHCL, massive reduction in its debt stock and the setting up of the Mahogany Industry Council of which, I am the Chair. The Government's philosophy in managing natural resources, like mahogany, is to achieve a win-win, not zero sum outcome. That is, a win for the economy, including the landowners, the

licensees, the contractors, the value adders and a win for the environment. We already see this happening in the pine industry.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Mahogany Act also promotes the branding of Fijian mahogany in the international markets, and this is where our efforts to certify our mahogany forest will play a key role. Forest certification is currently in progress. It has been delayed because of international travel which has restricted visits by certifiers from abroad. But we are not just waiting for the borders to open, FHCL is liaising with the Fiji Pine Group, which is already sharing its forest certification experiences. The certification has given Fiji Pine access to niche markets in Japan, Australia, New Zealand, China and other markets.

While we are working towards forest certification for mahogany, we are also supporting the industry to grow. In 2020, the total mahogany log production was more than 21,000 cubic metres. Mr. Speaker, Sir, FHCL is working with its partners to double the harvesting and exports this year.

While all sectors have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, Investment Fiji reports that Fijian mahogany products, who were among the few of Fiji's top export commodities continue to find welcoming markets, especially in the United States of America, in the recent months.

Mahogany's main commodity right now is sawn timber. Value adding is also being done. This includes; production of interior and exterior flooring and decking, furniture, panel products and guitar components. There is also further potential in other mahogany value-added products, like interior and exterior furniture components, door components, cable drums and artefacts, which are more capital and labour intensive.

Government will continue to promote value adding opportunities in Fiji, to ensure greater returns from our mahogany and more employment opportunities for Fijians. The Government's tax initiatives and duty concessions are also intended to encourage the industry to import value adding machinery, while encouraging exports. This includes the export tax deduction as announced in the 2021-2022 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, FHCL is working with its stakeholders, not only to increase value-addition to our mahogany but importantly, to replant 1,250 hectares annually and to ensure that harvesting operations are conducted according to Fiji's harvesting standards, which guarantees the sustainability of the resources and protects the environment.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is not only working on improving its facilitation process for the private sector, it is also progressing in Fiji's efforts to enter into carbon trading. The REDD+ Readiness Project with the Ministry of Forestry is helping with this process, which will make Fiji become the first Small Island Developing State in the world to venture into carbon trade.

This follows the signing of the Emission Reductions Payment Agreement (ERPA) between Government and the World Bank in January this year. A \$2 million budget for this financial year will be devoted entirely to complete the preparatory work. It is programmed to support the development and enhancement of key systems and processes, to strengthen institutional arrangements that will ensure the full and effective implementation of Fiji's Emissions Reduction Programme (ERP).

These developments and improvements, Mr. Speaker, Sir, include the following:

- (1) \$480,000 for strengthening the forest governance and management system through the development of district level integrated land use plans for the 20 Districts targeted under the ERP area. Land use plans for 10 districts have been completed at the cost of \$220,000. The development of the remaining 10 plans will be pursued in this new fiscal year.

Work on this also include; the development of the Safeguard Information System, which is designed to monitor and report on the level of compliance with the mandatory safeguard standards required under the ERP.

- (2) \$1.1 million for updating and improving the forest information database and system which includes the continuation of the National Forest Inventory (NFI) and carbon stock assessment work. This work was suspended in April due to COVID-19 restrictions, and plans for this new fiscal year are to deploy and recommend work on Vanua Levu, if conditions allow.

This work also includes; the enhancement of the Ministry's capabilities through the National Forest Monitoring System, which will immensely improve the Ministry's monitoring, reporting and verification capabilities in preparation for reporting obligations under the ERP.

- (3) \$420,000 to roll out the ERP national awareness campaign. Given the current COVID-19 restrictions, the allocated budget will be used on digital media through the various virtual platforms, which are accessible to the general public.

Preparatory work also includes a National Awareness Campaign. To ensure COVID-19 safety, the awareness will be done largely via mainstream media and online platforms, including the Ministry's website. The Ministry will physically visit communities in areas where COVID-19 movement restrictions allow.

Under the ERPA, Fiji is expected to establish 37,282 hectares of forests as carbon pools for sequestering 2.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. In return, Mr. Speaker, the World Bank will make result-based carbon payments of US\$12.5 million (approximately FJ\$26 million). The Fijian Government is expected to report to the World Bank three times, with the final reporting period set for December 2024.

On Climate Change and Forest Bills, Mr. Speaker, since 1993, Fiji has recorded an increase of six millimetres in sea level annually. The rapid rise in sea levels and the resulting saltwater intrusion that stems from the increased ferocity of coastal floods have made portions of our island nation uninhabitable. The Fijian Government is ensuring that it embeds climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as resilient initiatives are embedded in all its national and sectoral plans and strategies.

The draft Climate Change Bill which has undergone about two years of public consultations (I hope the NFP has participated in that process) will be tabled this week and we aim to have it approved as an Act of Parliament before the next Conference of Parties (COP) in Glasgow. The Ministry will progress work on the Forestry Bill, to ensure it complements the soon-to-be Climate Change Act.

Sir, on the 30 Million Trees in 15 Years, the national tree planting initiative of 30 Million Trees in 15 Years is one of Fiji's main platforms towards addressing climate change because trees are scientifically proven to be among the best nature-based solution for capturing carbon.

Fiji's tree planting revolution started in January 2019 and we have planted over 7.6 million trees and mangroves in the past 31 months. This huge achievement, Mr. Speaker, is due largely to the public interest. Let me reiterate, over 7.6 million trees and mangroves in the past 31 months.

How have we done this, Mr. Speaker? It is not just Government which cares about this campaign, members of communities in rural areas and the outer islands, in peri-urban and even urban areas who have available land, no matter the size, are joining the campaign. And any Honourable Member of the

Opposition is welcome to join, double count those saplings for themselves, if they wish. Better yet, they are welcome to plant a tree themselves to join this campaign and help us make Fiji the greenest path of paradise anywhere in the world.

Mr. Speaker, there is the growing consciousness in the Fijian mind of the environment and of nature as a whole. Fijians are not only concerned about the impacts of climate change, but they are actively participating in finding solutions, and they know that planting trees - the right type of tree, at the right place, and at the right time, is crucial towards addressing climate change. The tree planting initiative is also part of Fiji's green recovery, following the devastation to our national economy caused by the recent series of natural disasters and COVID-19.

So, the 30 Million Trees in 15 Years initiative aims to address climate change, enhance ecosystem services and biodiversity, and help with our economic growth through carbon trade and conventional means. It is a holistic approach.

The Ministry keeps track of the trees planted through the use of technology, such as GPS, drones and ArcGIS software. It works closely with the Ministry of Communications in developing and tracking the tree planting programme.

The Ministry has also developed a dashboard that the public can access on the Ministry's website - [www.forestry.gov.fj](http://www.forestry.gov.fj). The dashboard currently shows 6.4 million trees and these are the figures that the Ministry has validated. The remaining 1.2 million trees constitute raw data that is currently being validated, and the figure will be updated as the numbers can be verified.

I wish to thank the members of the public, Mr. Speaker, as well as the various organisations that are planting trees, such as youth and women's groups, faith-based and Civil Society Organisations, and companies both, within and beyond the forestry sector.

Climate change is a real and present danger. Addressing climate change should continue to be a national and global priority. We have only one planet – Earth, and we all need to work together to protect it. A budget of \$1.9 million has been allocated to continue Fiji's tree planting campaign.

Mr. Speaker, our trees and forests are an important nature-based solution for mitigating climate change and reducing damage caused by natural disasters, like droughts and floods, so it is vital that we take stock of this natural resource.

The total cost of managing the National Forest Inventory (NFI) is approximately \$2.7 million. For the new fiscal year, \$1.05 million has been allocated to recommence work on Vanua Levu. The 2021 National Forest Inventory began in late February on Viti Levu and by April, 117 plots out of the target of 1,200 plots were assessed.

The immediate plan at that time, Mr. Speaker, was to deploy the work to Vanua Levu. This was not possible, of course, due to the growing number of COVID-19 cases reported and the suspension of the inter-island maritime ferry services.

The plan to deploy the NFI work to Vanua Levu is now being revisited and we expect to begin by October. On completing Vanua Levu, the work will move on to the maritime islands and at the end, the assessment of 51 percent of the targeted area will be completed.

The NFI assessment on Viti Levu will be conducted strategically and based on the COVID-19 situation. It is most likely to begin with the assessment of forests in the Western Division before

consideration is given to the forests in the Central and Eastern Divisions. We hope to complete the national inventory by September 2022.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we can be pleased with the progress the forest industry has made over the last several years and obviously, with the continuous improvements in policies, a sound legal framework, transparent and open processes, commercial discipline and engagement with all stakeholders including with our landowners, domestic and international businesses and partners, we will be able to do better for our economy and for the benefit of all Fijians. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Prime Minister for his Ministerial Statement.

Honourable Members, I now call upon the designate speaker for the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Bulanauca. You have the floor, Sir.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This was part of the motion that I applied for to revert Fiji Pine industry and plantations to the landowners and also for \$5 million to \$10 million assistance to the industry to increase their production, increase their export, increase their foreign exchange, et cetera, but unfortunately it was ruled out by the Business Committee, which I respect, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Now, they are giving 20 minutes for their Ministerial Statement but only five minutes to me. If the motion had been granted, I would have had 20 minutes and 5 minutes would have been given to the Minister concerned.

This is most unfair, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and it is required that fairness be at play in this House because when we put the motion in, we show out the weaknesses and the need to improve on those, to improve this Government's performance into the future. That is the whole purpose of the motion. But disallowing the motion, Sir, you are not allowing us to show the weaknesses so that we can find out solutions to improve the performances of the Government as a whole, into the future. So it is important that there is fairness in this House. You see, it is a smart move and may be bordering into deceitfulness.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister is saying that the forestry sector has performed very well, but statistics show that there is reduction in the forestry's contribution to GDP and its contribution to export. There is an increase in imports, so that is not a good record, Mr. Speaker, Sir. That is why we need improvements all over - in the forests, in the mills, in processing centres and exporting areas, so it is very important.

Talking about the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited's failure during that time, it is still a failure now under the Honourable Prime Minister's nose and under his office so with the 10 percent shares for the landowners, it has been taken away again. What is this? Is this part of the sunset clause? It is very bad, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Taking away 10 percent of FHCL's shares, and now they are talking about paying dividends to the landowners. What dividends? They are only paying commission to Fiji Pine landowners. Those are two different words – commission and dividends.

They should have been paid dividends which should have been 100 percent of the profit of Fiji Pine Limited Group as stated under the Reversion Capital Share Structure which was approved by the Fiji Pine Limited Board in 1991 and 1992 for Class A shares of 0.20 percent of \$100,000 value to Fiji Pine Commission voting rights and dividend rights and Class B of 0.2 percent value of \$100,000 of Government of Fiji voting rights and chairmanship right and Class C, 99.6 percent of the \$69 million to be paid to the Government by the landowners, through the profit of Fiji Pine Group Limited Government of Fiji as supporting right, dividends right, and redeemable and chairmanship right. So where has that all gone? I was there in the Board, I know!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You don't even know. Who wrote this for you?

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- In 1991 and 1996, I know and that is why I am telling you. They should be paying that.

Now, more than \$200 million has been paid to Government which is the profit from Fiji Pine Limited. Now, the landowners are supposed to pay to the Government just over \$69 million for the establishment cost of six stations in Fiji. So now, the whole industry should have reverted now to the landowners for their control, with Government support and with private sector involvement as well, Mr. Speaker. That is the way we should go.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is important that he must put things right in this august House. It is important that Fiji Pine Limited, although it is growing, yes - pine chips is going on very well as this was the performance of previous Governments through the Japanese agreement and now with the Chinese agreement to sell chips. That is alright, but we need improvement in value-adding for sawn timber and other areas for export because in the statistics, exports are reducing and imports are increasing, particularly for export of sawn timber which is increasing and is more than the export of value-adding. That is what I am pointing at. Also, on import, there are more imports of sawn timber. Why are we allowing that when we should be value-adding here in Fiji from our own products here and for import substitution? So it is very important, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, if you look at the record of the pine industry, it is all there. It is there in front of you so all the pine industry should revert to the landowners. The mahogany industry, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in 2011, 94,000 cubic metres production and in 2017, only 2,600 cubic metres production. Why? And now, only less than 20,000 cubic metres production? Why? That is why we wanted the motion to be approved here – so we could point out the weaknesses and provide solutions for improvement. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Bulanauca for his contribution to the debate and I now give the floor to the designated speaker of the Leader of the National Federation Party, the Honourable Lenora Qereqeretabua, you have the floor.

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my painful task this morning to respond to the Honourable Prime Minister's Ministerial Statement.

Mr. Speaker, as I do respond, butter will melt in my mouth because I do not have to justify that I am not evil, despite what the Honourable Prime Minister claims because, Mr. Speaker, I am not the Honourable Member that swore and assaulted another Member outside of this House; neither am I the Honourable Member that calls my own people 'uneducated', or that does not give a damn about the number of our people suffering under my failed COVID-19 responses and poverty and hardship; neither do I force civil servants to get jabbed just so they can feed, house and clothe their children; neither do I allow on my watch, a very competent and skilled legal mind and former female Minister of mine, to be repeatedly attacked and vilified by the *Fiji Sun* as it was once again done today. An utter shame!

So, Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to say to the Honourable Prime Minister, if you are concerned about those orange emojis, as you mentioned yesterday, they are your own fault. Those emojis are real time indication of the votes you lose every time you speak. In fact, he has my deepest sympathies because he is being made to say things that he does not even understand and people can see right through that. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I will not be shushed by anyone, except your good self, while in this august Chambers because that is what the voters pay me and send me here to do - to speak the truth and to reveal the Government's lies.

If we recall during the Budget debate where I asked the Honourable Prime Minister about the actual number of trees planted and whether there were indeed seven million, we all remember the less than satisfactory reply. He thought he was being smart, but it turned out that there were more questions and gaps that we know. That is why the Honourable Leader of the NFP directed the relevant questions straight to the World Bank and to the Office of the Auditor-General to make appropriate determinations in his media statement last Friday.

In my response today, Mr. Speaker, despite the not-very-clever footwork we have just heard, the facts remain: do we or do we not have 7.6 million real trees standing right now under the National Forestry Inventory? Do we or do we not have a missing drone that costs us taxpayers a lot of money sitting lost somewhere in Taveuni since last year - the drone that no one has been held responsible or has been surcharged for? Do we or do we not have a firm and tangible grip on the survival rate of the number of trees planted for the REDD+ initiative and how many trees they planted have died? Is this tree planting in vain? Are the forest wardens properly and quickly compensated? Is the staffing of the Ministry able to cater for all these work, given that over 100 staff and 40 vehicles are helping out with the COVID-19 responses, and that there are a number of staff also not working, given the stupidity of the 'No Jab No Job' idea? Do we or do we not replant native hardwood and timber species which is what the Ministry is supposed to do?

The pine and mahogany species are completely different. Does the Honourable Minister realise that with the impacts of COVID-19 and the fluid movement from urban to rural as has happened in my province of Kadavu and also in Vanua Levu, pine and mahogany is being felled at a rapid rate and is being used for housing rehabilitation? How much replanting of these two species has taken place from 2019 to date? Is the replanting happening at twice the rate if we are really concerned about climate change and the ability of our trees to absorb carbon? In this count of 7.6 million trees that is still under question, how many of them are fruit trees, and does this not duplicate the mandate of the Ministry of Agriculture?

Mr. Speaker, I would urge the Honourable Prime Minister as the Minister responsible for forestry, to ensure that all the late annual reports are tabled and to keep a closer eye on the little empires that are now being formed within this Ministry that is leading to him now facing up to all these difficult questions. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Qereqeretabua for her contribution to the debate.

Honourable Members, we will move on to the next Ministerial Statement for today and I call on the Honourable Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment to deliver his Statement. You have the floor.

#### Update on New Programmes to Expand Agriculture

HON. DR. M. REDDY.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and Honourable Members; I rise this morning to update this House on the new programmes that I had announced last Friday, to further expand commercial agriculture, increase exports, expand employment and livelihood opportunities, increase farm and household income and secure Fijian households with regard to food and nutrition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, over the last 10 years, agricultural output has been rapidly increasing. Over this period, non-sugar agriculture compound annual growth rate has been 6.3 percent. Our exports for fresh and chilled products have surpassed \$100 million last year, but that is not enough for us. If you look around and take stock of the critical resources to agricultural expansion, we can do much better than that.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, despite an established tourism sector, I strongly feel that we still have a strategic

advantage in agriculture. It is a sector which, if you agree with the famous trade economist, Heckscher-Ohlin, who argues that a country will produce and export that particular commodity which utilises the most abundantly available sector intensively, then it is agriculture. Hence, we want to further expand this sector and utilise the abundantly available resources wisely, strategically and for the betterment of all those who will be involved in an inclusive and sustainable growth model that we are now engaging in the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while converging and discussing on what new we had to do in line with our Ministry of Agriculture's strategic plan to further leverage Fiji's agriculture sector, we first listed down some of the critical binding constraints. While identifying the binding constraints, we wanted to ensure that we encourage an inclusive and sustainable agricultural growth model. An inclusive agricultural growth model is one where everyone will participate in the growth process and when the surplus is created, it will then cascade down to all those who are participating in this inclusive growth model. A sustainable growth model, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is an agriculture which grows on its own expense and is treated like a business.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, having listed the binding constraints for agricultural growth and expansion, we then set forth to fine-tune existing programmes, as well as develop new programmes so that these constraints can be unlocked and agricultural growth unleashed. So, in this round of resource allocation, we noted the following constraints that need immediate attention:

- Large tracts of quality land not under production;
- Low rate of farm mechanisation;
- Low levels of irrigated farms;
- Limited number of nurseries to support farmers;
- Low number of fruit tree orchards;
- Low infiltration of technology in Fiji's agriculture sector such as the use of hydroponics system;
- Poor equipment sets used by women farmers;
- Slow transition of subsistence livestock farmers to medium and large holdings; and
- Poor dairy breed stock and dairy farming system.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to address those constraints, please allow me to introduce and provide an overview of some of the programmes that the Ministry will be deploying in the coming weeks.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we wish to promote a hybrid system of dairy farming in Fiji. First of all, we are continuing to support the current model of pasture and dairy cattle management that we have around Fiji. That work will continue, so we are supporting the farmers to increase their pasture, while at the same time, clearing their farms from tuberculosis and brucellosis. However, Sir, we need to have a backup should there be a major outbreak in new diseases in drought, we will end up relying totally on imported milk. We cannot rely on imported milk such an important strategic consumption good, it is too risky.

Noting this, we are now inviting expression of interest from dairy farmers to set up two dairy intensive farms in Fiji. A dairy farmer will need to construct the intensive dairy shed while we, the Ministry, will provide:

- high-yielding Brown Swiss dairy cows;
- establish pasture and corn;
- provide and set up supplementary feed for a year;
- establish fencing to ensure no intrusion of infected animals which could infect the new breeds with tuberculosis and brucellosis;

- provide milking equipment; and
- provide shredders and other gadgets used to make bales of hay to store pasture for later use.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to migrate from micro livestock holding to large holding, farmers will need to construct paddocks. We will assist 340 livestock farmers in phase 1 with full set of fencing materials. We are also writing proposals to seek external grants under the climate change funding, to assist farmers in protecting their biodiversity and water sources, so that we support the farmers to look after their animals, so that they can then enhance and expand their biodiversity, protect their water sources, while at the same time confining their animals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to ensure quality pest-free and consistent vegetable supply to restaurants, supermarkets and hotels, we have announced two programmes - the establishment of hydroponic and greenhouse agriculture systems. We intend to set up 20 400-plant sites hydroponic system in farms and fields and we intend to provide 20 covered greenhouses to farms and fields.

Noting drier period every year and its impacts on vegetable supply and price, we intend to provide full irrigation sets to 150 farmers in drier zones in Fiji for agricultural growth and expansion. Each package will be inclusive of irrigation assistance - drip-irrigation, filtrations, sprinklers, pumps, hose, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to improve farm mechanisation and farm capital development, we have announced two new programmes. Firstly, we will support around 15 farmers to acquire small machinery by making one-third contribution, while the Ministry will pick up the two-thirds cost of acquisition. Secondly, for the first time, we will support farmers who wish to seek loan from the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) for buying larger plant or machinery or capital construction. We will provide a grant of upto 20 percent of the full loan amount as equity contribution for a maximum of about \$250,000 loan and a minimum of about \$10,000 loan. Of this loan, whatever the amount is from \$10,000 to \$250,000, the 20 percent equity contribution would be paid to FDB by the Ministry. We intend to assist around 30 such investors.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Permanent Secretary for Agriculture met with the senior staff of FDB yesterday to discuss the rolling out of this programme. In attendance was the new Head of FDB and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Saud Minam. We, at the Ministry, are looking forward to the new leadership of the Bank. We are, indeed, blessed to have a highly educated American graduate, a seasoned and reputable banker to lead our only Development Bank. He has 20 years of international banking experience across Asia, before he moved to Fiji to lead ANZ operations. It is, indeed, a grab.

Unfortunately, some Honourable Members on the other side question his appointment on the basis that he was born in Pakistan. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want the best and the most efficient service to be provided to our people, but they would rather compromise on that just because he was not born in Fiji. It is sad, to say the least.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, time and again, I have urged Fijians to put idle land under production. Time and again, Honourable Members on the other side argued for more support to landowning units. Here you go! The commercial agriculture idle land preparation and land clearing programme is designed to lead idle land development.

With half a million dollar allocation, we would identify up to 10 acres of tract of idle land, take a bulldozer and clear the land, take a digger and do the required drainage works and prepare the land, take a tractor and do all the necessary land preparation, provide the planting materials, and I am challenging Honourable Members on the other side. Hear you go!

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have never seen Honourable Members on the other side encouraging landowners to utilise their idle land for the development of their community - the members of the *mataqali*; never! We are targeting about 150 acres to 160 acres of land to be brought under cultivation under this programme. We are targeting up to 10 acres for each *mataqali* and we are looking at about 15 to 16 *mataqali* to be assisted in this category, of up to 10 acres. We will do everything. We will take the machine, clear the land, take your tractor, do the land preparation and provide planting materials.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also targeting individuals in settlements to apply, to have land development for up to two acres. Again, we will take the bulldozer, clear the land, take the tractor, do land preparation and provide all the planting materials, all at our cost. We are looking at about 20 such individuals to be assisted in this round - Phase 1. Sir, what we envisage from this programme is a maximum return of investment as we are bringing idle land under cultivation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I had alluded to earlier on about an inclusive agriculture growth model. We want to take agricultural growth and development to the farmers, the landowning units and to the interior. Rather than just having development in the centre or at the core, we are looking at a holistic development, including the centre and the periphery.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in our attempts to help ensure food and nutritional security for all Fijians, we are strengthening our orchards development programme and are earmarking the establishment of another 40 orchards at farmers' fields. The Ministry will be providing seedlings and assist in the establishment of the orchards and also conduct regular monitoring of the programme, while the farmer will be responsible for land preparation, establishment and regular management of the orchard.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are looking at in this round, two breadfruits, two drinking coconut orchard, two jackfruit orchard, one avocado orchard, one banana orchard, one citrus, one mangosteen, one *rambutan* and one mango. In this round, we have got two additional new fruit tree orchards which is mangosteen and *rambutan*.

As I have said in this House that every year, we will be bringing in new fruit tree orchards. Farmers will be selected after field verification and suitability of study, and we want to ensure that this investment is not wasted. Last year, when we established the first round of orchards, 30 percent of it did not take-off because farmers did not look after it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, one of the initiatives which we had announced last year with regards to food security was the home gardening programme whereby we provided seed packages to households in urban and peri-urban areas around Fiji. I am pleased to announce that as of last Friday, 77,888 households have been assisted thus far. This financial year, we are targeting 47,350 more households to receive their packages and this will be the third phase of this particular programme.

Sir, you may note that in the second round of COVID-19, we had embarked on this programme, taking into account all the precautions and protocols to be observed, to ensure that our households who were under lockdown were able to utilise their free time and also secure themselves with vegetables. Mr. Speaker, Sir, whenever we have a scenario, whether it is a COVID situation or a cyclone or drought, prices of vegetables shoot up because there is shortage of supply. We want to make sure that we do not get into that situation again.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, you have seen that we were able to very quickly normalise prices and supply after last year's *TC Yasa* and *TC Ana*, and we did the same thing in the second round of COVID-19. We are very thankful to the households for participating in this programme. Sir, if you go around, you will see how households take pride in establishing home garden and how they are exchanging photos about how they are producing their own vegetables to a large extent.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will now begin with the fourth phase of the Farm Support Package which aims to boost production of crops by providing seeds and planting material to farmers. We had launched this programme early last year in terms of providing all the planting material requirements of any farmer, which is additional to the Home Gardening Package. I know of a farmer who wrote to me and said that he went to collect some seeds and was given a small packet but that was not meant for the farmer, it was meant for the home gardeners. For the farmers, we have got a different package.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are launching that again and, of course, we are utilising the resources from our budget. I also want to thank the Government of India for providing us with seven tonnes of dry seeds – a selection of 12 types of vegetables/horticultural crops. In addition to that, we are also providing green planting material, like *dalo* suckers, cassava cuttings, yam cuttings, *duruka* cuttings, et cetera, to farmers - whatever their requirement is. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we will provide with the proviso that they will progressively return the planting material to us over a three-year period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we also wish to strengthen our women entrepreneurs to engage in agriculture, horticulture, crops and floriculture. We wish to provide them with small leverage, such as basic tools, small greenhouse kits, cartage bags, et cetera. The floriculture industry is now taking its place gradually in the tourism sector, as well as in the formal, commercial and industrial sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want to support our women entrepreneurs and strengthen their footing in this sector. We are looking forward to assisting approximately 500 individuals or clusters, who would want to get a backup in terms of establishing a small nursery or get basic tools/equipment for floriculture, cut flowers or *voivoi* work. We have got these basic packages done and now these groups and individuals can apply to get this basic leverage, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our 50/50 Village Nutritional Security Programme will continue to expand. This Programme was launched last year on Independence Day where on a particular day, mostly on a Saturday, staff from the Ministry are at 50 villages with 50 seedlings of fruit trees. We plant it around the village to secure the village with respect to nutrition. Food security may not be an issue but nutritional security is an issue – a balanced nutrition. So, while we are expanding agriculture, we also want to ensure that our own population, our own households, have balanced nutrition.

With this particular programme, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we were able to complete 150 villages upto last year but our speed has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that we have. We expect that in this financial year, we will target four rounds, so we will be looking at 400 villagers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this programme that was announced on last Friday will be delivered concurrently with all of the Ministry of Agriculture's ongoing programmes, together with other programmes that commenced in the last financial year. Through these new programmes, we are setting brick by brick the foundation to expand commercial agriculture to:

- - help develop more youth and women household farmers and landowners as successful agriculture entrepreneurs;
- further increase exports;
- increase household livelihoods income and quality of life; and
- expand employment opportunity.

I would like to assure you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that it is not business as usual at the Ministry. We are not here to roll the Ministry. It will not happen, status quo is not an option. We need to think big and we need to set ourselves in the local and international markets. We will involve all key stakeholders and explain to them that a growing agriculture will benefit all of them.

As I have always said, when the agriculture sector expands, everyone will benefit, but they need to participate. Whether they are landowners or labourers or input suppliers, all of them must participate and they will share the surplus that is created by the growing agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we continue to hear from the other side about agriculture being confined to a, sort of, geographical space. They, unfortunately, do not know the reality. I am challenging them now to go and motivate our landowners and encourage them to get into commercial farming.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you very much and I look forward to an exciting year of agricultural growth and development expansion. Thank you.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister for his Ministerial Statement.

I now give the floor to the designated speaker for the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Kuridrani. You have five minutes. You have the floor.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I understand that the Honourable Minister for Agriculture said that new programmes are to be introduced to further expand export, employment opportunities, household income, food security and nutrition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is stupidity at the highest degree. I cannot see the logic in introducing more programmes when the Honourable Minister is incompetent of providing proper management practices on the current programmes that hold the same value and objectives, like these new proposed programmes. First, he needs to clear up his backlog of the Ministry annual reports. Where is accountability, transparency and good governance?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, look at the Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA). They have not submitted any annual reports since they came into being several years ago. Initially, after the pandemic over our nation, AMA was involved in buying at the borders, but at the second outbreak, they were nowhere to be seen. Are they still in existence?

Have they done an evaluation of the Ministry's five-year strategic plan, from 2018-2023? What has happened to the sheep and meat production, following the distribution of the F1 Sheep Crossbreed to farmers in the Western Division and Northern Division in 2019? How can you expand commercial agriculture if you are reluctant to provide machines, diggers, bulldozers and tractors, especially to the villages and communities?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I recall that I had mentioned this several times in this august House, including Hon. Adi Litia Qionibaravi, that the Ministry needs to provide machines for villages at district level, to enable them to cultivate their *mataqali* land, but this has been falling on deaf ears.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was disturbed to hear the Honourable Minister mention idle lands in one of his recent speeches. I want to make it clear to the Honourable Minister, that these lands are vacant for some reason, and they are waiting for your intervention and feasibility plans. Landowners need to be convinced that whatever development they need to undertake, that it is the best option, providing higher returns, it is sustainable and environmental friendly. Do not blame the people if good agricultural land is turned into residential and commercial development!

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Honourable Minister lacks honesty, and this is a quality that I have seen in other Government Ministers – they lack honesty. He needs to be honest. Now he wants to expand export and income to households, but where is the cold storage facility that was supposed to be constructed in Kavanagasau, Sigatoka Valley and Nukulua in Ba, that was budgeted since 2019, 2020 and

2021? This budget allocation has been completely wiped out in the 2021-2022 budget. If he would have had that small degree of honesty, that piece of infrastructure would have been very handy today and in line with the goals and objectives of these new programmes.

There are many other programmes promised by the Honourable Minister that did not see the light of the day. I believe that the Honourable Minister should sit still in his office, make a personal review of his performance and stop doing the job of Field Officers and Extension Officers in distributing planting and fencing materials.

The Ministry needs to undertake a substantial research into critical policy areas that would address non-performing sectors and help during this crisis. They should ensure that traditional knowledge be considered and shared among farming communities. That is organic and sustainable.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I request the Honourable Minister for Agriculture to stop the introduction of his new programmes and review his staffing structure and resources, and upgrade rural and urban agriculture offices and staff quarters. This is very important to ensure that we have adequate resources prior to introducing new programmes, since the success and failure of those programmes will depend on the people on the ground. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his statement. I now give the floor to the Leader of the National Federation Party. You have the floor.

HON. PROFESSOR B.C. PRASAD.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I received the ministerial statement this morning, I thought it was a very good description and I also thought that it was a statement for a very, very good essay. But after hearing the Honourable Minister, I can say that if I were to give him a grade, I would probably give him 'C' or a 'C+', because if I was looking for a policy platform weaved into the programmes that he outlined to promote the agricultural sector, then I did not find that, unfortunately.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to the recent Agriculture Census. I think it is a very good document and I want to thank the Honourable Minister and his Ministry for doing that Agriculture Census. I think it is quite a rich document, and it could be used to plan a lot of things. For example, out of the 71,163 farming households, 93 percent (65,948) are really subsistence farmers. Out of that, only 2 percent (1,546) are commercial farmers and about 3,369 are semi-commercial farmers, so I think we have to start from there.

I like what the Honourable Minister said with respect to the binding constraints. I think it is very important to always identify that, and I think he did identify one of them. I also think that he rightfully described agriculture as the backbone of Fiji's economy and if we include sugar, it was always the backbone of Fiji's economy in this country for a very, very long time.

Unfortunately, the Honourable Minister ought to also realise that under the FijiFirst Government and the one before that, agriculture and the sugar industry, in my view, has been on the backburner and I think they need to admit that because it is very clear. You might have increase in production but we have not been giving or paying that kind of attention that we should have paid to the agriculture sector, to the sugar industry, weaving them together and moving more towards an export-based agriculture because that, in itself, can sustain the livelihood and income of the farmers since that is what you are also trying to do.

You also need to understand, if you look at the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) and the Poverty Report, Mr. Speaker, more than 60 percent of the poor actually reside in the rural areas. What we have seen in the last several years, and if I had time I could just list a long list of projects,

such as the goat initiative, sheep initiative, juncao grass, et cetera. We had the former Minister for Agriculture who brought in some potatoes, so we have tried this piecemeal strategy to promote agriculture.

Unfortunately, what I heard from the Honourable Minister for Agriculture today in terms of the update on the programmes, Mr. Speaker, is that, any piecemeal way to look at the agriculture sector and I think he has enough people within his Ministry, who are qualified to look at a much better plan of action and then put up a national strategy to increase the production in the agriculture sector. I mean, all I have heard is, it might help a few commercial farmers who are already established, people who might have additional income, who are already running businesses, but a large bulk of the farmers in this country on bulk of the land are subsistence farmers. I would say to the Honourable Minister, to begin with, you have this good census data now and it is a credit to the Ministry and all those people who did that. I have looked at it, Mr. Speaker, it is a good document. Now, now use that. Look at what we are going to do in the future.

In the post-COVID world, I think our survival as an economy, no matter how much we rescue the tourism industry, it will be a totally different tourism industry in the post-COVID world. We need to look at the agriculture sector and let me suggest to the Honourable Minister that we need a very thorough study or a commission to look at it and I think he did say that, to identify all the binding constraints. If it is about land, you are not going to promote land by coming into Parliament and saying that the Opposition Members are not interested in the landowners and they should encourage them to give land because you are not going to get anything out of that. That is not the kind of language to use. When you come into Parliament, you as a Minister or as a Government ought to put up a plan, have a study, have a commission and identify all the vacant land in this country.

There are large tracts of land in Vanua Levu. Identify, maybe Vanua Levu, if not Viti Levu, as an area where you are going to concentrate in promoting agriculture for the next five or six years, so that we can increase commercial agriculture and thus, exports. So that kind of planning, Honourable Minister, you have to come up with and a document in Parliament and beyond Parliament to be able to convince, not only the landowners but all kinds of landowners.

There are large tracts of freehold land in Vanua Levu, for example, lying idle, so unless you have a good well thought-out national plan of action, then you do that, but not electioneering, going around and doing this piecemeal thing - distributing this, distributing that, saying you could apply loan here, we will give you grant, we will take the tractor, we will take the machine and prepare, et cetera. That is all fine. You keep doing that, but if you want to see agriculture come back to a point where you can remove all those binding constraints, where you can put agriculture on the front banner where it is supporting people and you talked about inclusive and sustainable agriculture, that is fine. But to have an inclusive agriculture, you have to have a stable level of flow of income and livelihood for the people who are engaged in it.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister ought to get back and I think the Government should allow the Ministry of Agriculture some independence. I like what he said when he said that we need to go directly to the World Bank. Now, the Honourable Minister and the Ministry of Agriculture, the Honourable Attorney-General can come up with some respectable plan. That is what, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest to the Government. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Member for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, on that note, we will take a break and suspend proceedings for lunch. We will resume at 2.30 p.m. when we will have the third Ministerial Statement, and we will proceed from there. We are adjourned.

The Parliament adjourned at 12.36 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 2.32 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, please be seated. We will resume the next Agenda Item and I call on the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications to deliver his Statement. You have the floor, Sir.

#### Update on the Walesi Service

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I wish to update Parliament on the important work that *Walesi* is doing with regard to ensuring that *Walesi* services are accessible to all Fijians.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our steadfast commitment has been that every Fijian, no matter where they live, are to have meaningful access to *Walesi* services, whether it is crystal clear picture and increase content choices on free-to-air digital television.

We have made extraordinary progress with increasing *Walesi*'s coverage nationwide, through terrestrial and satellite network. This is together with the mobile phone connectivity both, voice and data, and I would like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to just correct some of the misinformation that Honourable Qereqeretabua had referred to.

I refer to page 43 of the 2020 GSMA – The State of Mobile Internet Connectivity Report which states, and I quote: “Fiji has achieved 3G and 4G coverage of more than 95 percent.” Therefore, it is not merely a claim, as the Honourable Member said because Fiji has, in fact, reached 95 percent mobile internet connectivity coverage. Again, if the Honourable Member had listened to my Statement, she would have grasped this.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that once these devices have connectivity, they also have access to data, you get *Viber*, internet, et cetera. I think the Honourable Member is confused and does not understand the two distinguishing terms - ‘coverage’ and ‘usage’, when looking at Digital 2020 by Hootsuite, which she quoted.

Hootsuite is a social media management firm, Mr. Speaker, Sir, which looks at social media engagement. On the other hand, the GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, uniting more than 750 operators with nearly 400 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and internet companies. So it gets global data from its members and assesses connectivity coverage and usage across all countries.

The difference between the two Reports, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is that, Hootsuite did not state the 95 percent mobile internet connectivity coverage. It only stated the internet usage, and Honourable Qereqeretabua very conveniently used that. The fact is, a lot of people in Fiji who may have access to a mobile phone, do not necessarily use it for *Facebook*, or do not necessarily use it for internet, they only use it for voice. Therefore, they will not get caught in the report that she was quoting.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the other point that I also want to make, just to fact-check her on, she said that people do not necessarily need VitiKart but they need internet connectivity. To use VitiKart, one actually needs internet connectivity, so she does not know what she is talking about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, she also said that we do not allow for competition, that there are only two mobile phone companies. We had stated in the statement on Monday, 16th August, 2021, the Honourable Prime Minister had said, “let us deregulate the mobile telephone market in Fiji.” We deregulated it. Companies had 20-year exclusive licences, and that is how Digicel came in. She thinks that for a country of less than

900,000 people, all the mobile phone companies in the world will want to come to Fiji. They do not! They look at population numbers, they look at how much investment they have to make.

To put up a tower, I have said, it will cost half a million dollars just for one tower. So, again, it shows a huge lack of understanding and commercial understanding of how the internet space works, how mobile phone companies work and, indeed, the commercial understanding that is required to be able to even comment on it in a very rudimentary manner.

She said, “There is no wi-fi at the Suva Bus Stand”. We never said *wi-fi* will be at the Suva Bus Stand, we said Sukuna Park and My Suva Park, and I will read out a list of the wi-fi locations.

She then assumed and said, “Oh, this 158 number must have gone to Vodafone.” Again, a major goof-up. This is the problem, when people come to this Parliament with derisive and pugnacious attitude, they get their facts wrong. Mr. Speaker, Sir, 158 is not with Vodafone, it is with a company called Pacific Centrecom (Fiji) Pte Limited which was engaged for this. So, again, she is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, she went on to say, “The e-ticketing, we understand, the question is, is it \$3?” Well, it is not! If she checked - this is, kind of, a speculation. Pensioners get \$10 a month and they always have \$10 at the beginning of the month. If they use \$7 in a month, the following month it will be topped up by another \$7, to make sure they have \$10 at the beginning of the month.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, again, she referred to the World Bank - \$3.5 million. Again, she failed to tell Parliament, or probably does not understand, that actually it was a loan. It is a World Bank loan for connecting Vanua Levu to Viti Levu as part of what they call, ‘Tui-Samoa’ connection. And because we utilised the funds in a very properly managed transparent manner, there were some leftover funds, so the World Bank then said, “You could use it for a Northern connectivity project”, which is precisely what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I want to very quickly talk about digital television. In December 2017, the digital television platform through Walesi was launched with 10 transmissions sites across Fiji. To-date, Walesi, through budgetary allocation from a number of budgets, has invested a total CAPEX of about \$45 million in over 21 sites.

Furthermore, in adopting the infrastructure sharing or co-location model, Walesi now operates on 21 transmission sites, including: three terrestrial sites on Kadavu, Ovalau and Taveuni, 15 sites on Viti Levu and three in Vanua Levu.

Very quickly, I want to highlight, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and Honourable Members need to understand this:

- (1) The ITC Container which is used as the linking site in Walesi, is owned by Walesi and co-located with Digicel.
- (2) Nakobalevu covers Suva Central, Nasinu, Nausori, Tailevu, Navua and Korovou - FBC is transferring their site to Walesi exclusively.
- (3) Monasavu: Monasavu Dam and nearby areas - FINTEL co-locating with Walesi.
- (4) Koro-O: Tavua and Vatukoula - Walesi has got their own site.
- (5) Lololo: Parts of Lautoka and Ba - FBC is transferring their site to Walesi.
- (6) Sabeto: Covers Nadi and Lautoka.
- (7) Kavukavu: Nabou and Lomawai area - Digicel co-locating with Walesi.
- (8) Gusunataga: Sigatoka Town and suburbs - Walesi site.
- (9) Bucona Bay: Sigatoka Coastal areas - Vodafone with Walesi.
- (10) Dogowale: Parts of Navua, Matanipusi Hill and Serua - Digicel with Walesi.

- (11) Taunovo: Pacific Harbour - Vodafone with Walesi.
- (12) Naiyala: Wainibuka area - Digicel with Walesi.
- (13) Matawailevu: Barotu, Madhuvani - Walesi with Vodafone.
- (14) Rakiraki: Rakiraki Town and nearby areas - FBC with Walesi.
- (15) Tuidreki: Tavua and Rakiraki - Digicel with Walesi.
- (16) Delaikoro: Seaqqa, Labasa and coastal areas further North - FBC transferring to Walesi.
- (17) Uluivuya: Nabouwalu and surrounding areas - TFL with Walesi.
- (18) Naveria: Savusavu Town and nearby areas - Digicel with Walesi.
- (19) Des Voeux Peak: Tavuki, Lovonivonu, Somosomo, Lamini and parts of Welagi - TFL with Walesi.
- (20) Korosalusalu, Kadavu: Vunisea and surrounding areas - Vodafone with Walesi.
- (21) Levuka, Ovalau - Walesi has got its own site;

Mr. Speaker, Sir, digital television offers a myriad of benefits for both, the broadcasters and all Fijians. These benefits include the following:

- (a) A common platform for all broadcasters.
- (b) Spectrum efficiency gains and increased transmission capacity, in that, more data can be transmitted per unit bandwidth.
- (c) Improved signal quality and robustness.
- (d) Lower energy consumption and maintenance costs (we have to be mindful of energy cost).
- (e) Flexibility and more efficient use of infrastructure - allows implementation of Single Frequency Networks (SFNs), instead of independent parallel analogue networks. SFNs is a broadcast network where several transmitters simultaneously send the same signal over the same frequency channel.

What are the consumer benefits, Mr. Speaker, Sir?

- (a) Wider choice of programming and services, including additional channels, HD offerings and pay programmes.
- (b) Better quality, in that, it is less likely to experience signal interference and picture quality issues.
- (c) Convenience, in that, video-on-demand/catch up service allows viewers to watch programmes at a time of their choosing.
- (d) Parental lock setting where parents can actually lock programmes. It gives parents and guardians greater control of what their children watch on television, be it classification programmes or full channels. If you are not home you, know that they are not going to watch anything that they should not be watching.

With the advancement of digital broadcast technologies, Walesi's broadcast signals are far more reaching than the traditional analogue signals. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, Sir, a number of maritime islands are now able to receive digital television signals from Walesi's 21 transmission sites. These include:

- (1) Beqa - 85 percent coverage;
- (2) Vatulele - 100 percent;
- (3) Yasawa Group - 80 percent;
- (4) Kadavu - 15 percent (I will come to Kadavu later);
- (5) Ovalau - 80 percent;
- (6) Lomaiviti Group - 60 percent;
- (7) Rabi Island - 85 percent;

- (8) Kioa Island - 50 percent;
- (9) Kia Island - 50 percent;
- (10) Mali Island - 50 percent; and
- (11) Yaqaga - 30 percent.

Walesi has also made good progress in deploying what we call additional in-fill transmission sites, as follows:

- (1) Muani in Kadavu (50 percent completed);
- (2) Naiyala Digicel site;
- (3) Bucona Bay;
- (4) Rotuma;
- (5) Lakeba;
- (6) Levuka; and
- (7) Taunovo.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to point out that while Kadavu already has an in-fill site at Vunisea, Walesi is actually deploying another site at Muani, which will ensure 100 percent digital terrestrial coverage to Kadavu. Works had been temporarily halted due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, however, works will resume as soon as travel restrictions are relaxed. Similarly, works at Mount Kugai site in Rotuma and on Lakeba in the Lau Group will also resume as soon as the travel restrictions are relaxed.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, where the 21 terrestrial transmission networks were not suitable, particularly deep in the interiors of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu and in remote maritime islands, we have used satellite technology.

The Walesi satellite-based Direct-to-Home service provides 100 percent coverage. This means that the Walesi Digital Television Platform is available to every island in Fiji. Walesi now has 3,738 satellite-based Direct-to-Home connections in the maritime islands, including far-flung islands such as; Rotuma with 57 connections, Lau Group with 143 connections and Lomaiviti with 1,487 connections, to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with the current work that has been undertaken in expanding coverage to the maritime islands, a student, for example, attending school at the Mavana District School in Lau, can access the same high-quality and dedicated educational content on the Walesi platform as a student at QVS in Tailevu.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Walesi has also carried out nationwide roadshows, for example, Walesi carried out two roadshows in Rotuma - one from 17th October, 2020 for two weeks, connecting 18 households and another one from 24th November, 2020 for three weeks, connecting 20 households with Direct-to-Home satellite connections. The team also connected five community halls on Rotuma and these are in Losa Village Hall, Itu'ti'u Village Hall, Hapmak Village Hall, Noa'tau Village Hall and Lopta Village Hall.

The other roadshows, Mr. Speaker, Sir, were in Nataleira Village in Tailevu, Naivorati in Naitasiri, Cuvu, Nadi Roadshow, Nasauvakarua in Monasavu, Urata Roadshow (which included the area around Monfort Boys Town), Daku in Labasa (I am not going to read out all of them), Taveuni Roadshow, Nadawa Roadshow, Nadera Roadshow, Viseisei Roadshow and Ovalau Roadshow.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to point out that at the time of the recent COVID-19 outbreak, Walesi, through its digital television platform, rapidly deployed supplementary educational content from 20th April, 2021.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to also outline the type of digital television coverage that is applicable to the maritime islands - Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) and the Direct-to-Home (DTH) satellite-based digital television. Sir, just to give you a quick update on it, in:

- Taveuni, for example, we have 1,296 DTT and 63 DTH satellite dishes in individual homes or halls;
- Kioa - 5 DTT;
- Kadavu - 225 DTT and 186 DTH satellite connections;
- Rotuma - 57 DTH satellite connections;
- Ovalau – 1,115 DTT and 295 DTH satellite connections;
- Koro - 26 DTT and 5 DTH satellite connections;
- Gau - 15 DTT and 21 DTH satellite connections;
- Moturiki - 2 DTT and 8 DTH satellite connections;
- Lakeba - 30 DTH satellite connections;
- Ono-i-Lau - 10 DTH satellite connections;
- Moce - 17 DTH satellite connections;
- Kabara - 12 DTH satellite connections;
- Cicia - 8 DTH satellite connections;
- Nayau - 12 DTH satellite connections;
- Totoya - 11 DTH satellite connections;
- Matuku - 6 DTH satellite connections;
- Namuka-i-Lau - 4 DTH satellite connections;
- Ono - 5 DTH satellite connections;
- Moala - 21 DTH satellite connections;
- Vanua Balavu - 7 DTH satellite connections;
- Vatulele Island - 3 DTT and 1 DTH satellite connection;
- Viwa, Tailevu - 2 DTT;
- Yasawa Island - 263 DTT and 7 DTH satellite connections.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as part of Government's initiative, Walesi will continue to provide Free Set-Top Boxes to every household that has a combined annual income of up to \$30,000 and UHF Antennas at a subsidised cost. To-date, Walesi has distributed 143,401 digital terrestrial television set-top boxes and 3,738 digital satellite receivers. Mr. Speaker, Sir, of course, upon proof of that, you will be able to access these Set-Top Boxes.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are also cognisant that there are limitations in terms of access to grid power and affordability in some communities. Therefore, Government has funded the facilitation of a TV set and Walesi equipment in community halls, Government centres and schools in 711 communities that provide 127,980 Fijians with equitable access to information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many countries in America, Europe and parts of Asia have completed the digital television migration process. A growing concern is that countries that are still on analogue technology will eventually find difficulty in buying television receivers as the technology becomes obsolete.

Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, Sir, Walesi is now focussed on ensuring that all eligible households have the prospect to obtain the Walesi equipment. This is to prepare for the Analogue to Digital Television Switchover which should progressively be carried out nationwide, beginning from Navua-Korovou and Lautoka-Nadi corridors by 1st December this year. The next phase will be the remaining areas across Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and the maritime islands.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Analogue Switchover date means that all broadcasters will cease to transmit on the analogue platform. It will regularise the current practice and mandate that all television broadcasters (free-to-air and pay-per-view) become tenants of the Walesi platform and Walesi will offer all tenants, through the Walesi platform, equitable access and geographical reach. This also means that all the infrastructure costs of the transmission will now be borne by Walesi. In other words, television companies no longer have to invest in expensive upfront infrastructure cost – Walesi will do that because our objective is to ensure that every Fijian gets connectivity.

The staggered approach of the switchover is to also ensure that all broadcasters have sufficient time to transition from the analogue to digital television platform and the administrative measures are also being put in place. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we intend to complete the National Digital Switchover Exercise by June 2022.

The launch of the Walesi mobile app in 2018 further empowers Fijians to watch live and on-demand television channels, including the dedicated educational content and, indeed, these parliamentary proceedings, right on their fingertips. This service has become tremendously popular amongst viewers in Fiji and abroad.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during the recent 2020 Olympic Games that ended on 8th August, 2021, we were informed that there was an uptake of 100,000 new subscribers to the Walesi app, making a total of 600,000 individual subscribers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Walesi is committed to ensuring excellent service delivery and is consistently elevating the Walesi app on both, the Play Store and Apple App Store. Walesi had also upgraded their Over-The-Top (OTT) servers to cater for increased demand and to improve user experience and resiliency. This also provides for Pay-Per-View live events, such as Uprising Sevens, Triple N Zone, Suva Zone 1, South Pacific Boxing Promotion, Marist Sevens, Farebrother Rugby, Diwali Dhoom Dandiyā and Skipper Cup.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, talking about upgrades, very soon Walesi app users will also be able to access radio services on the Walesi app which we expect to complete by November of this year.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to date Walesi has 610,083 registered users on its platform. With Sky Pacific coming on board with the Walesi app, Walesi will soon be able to offer users access to more channels.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Walesi has established 16 free wi-fi hotspots across the country that provides one-hour free internet access daily. These sites are:

- Suva - Ratu Sukuna Park and MySuva Park (as I had mentioned);
- Savusavu – the foreshore area and Market area;
- Sigatoka – riverside and Market area;
- Nadi – Koroivolu Park and Bus Stand area;
- Lautoka – Shirley Park, Lautoka Bus Stand and Market;
- Ba – Bus Stand and Market;
- Labasa – Civic Centre, Market and Bus Stand;
- Nausori – Syria Park;
- Navua – Bus Stand and Market;
- Tavua – Bus Stand and Market;
- Rakiraki – Bus Stand and Market;
- Lami – Tikaram Park;
- Valelevu - Rajendra Ground and Market; and

- Korovou – Market and Bus Stand.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this wi-fi hotspot initiative is also available to the 26 Fiji National University Campuses which can be utilised by both, the students and teachers.

Walesi has increased accessibility to high-speed internet services to rural and maritime areas through its VSAT Satellite Programme and areas that are currently covered are:

- Rotuma Government Centre in Rotuma;
- Beqa Yanuca Secondary School in Beqa; and
- Noikoro District School in the interior of Nadroga-Navosa.

More areas are also being identified by the Walesi Team in consultation with the various Ministries.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as we all know, radio is the most readily and easily available form of communications. In fact, radio is the most accessible form of communications during times of disasters and crisis. While out at sea or while travelling across islands, most of us are switched onto the radio channels for entertainment and access to critical information.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with a budgetary allocation of \$4.5 million in the 2021-2022 National Budget, Walesi is well-placed for the deployment of FM radio networks. The \$4.5 million allocation to Walesi will fund the construction of four key transmission sites. The initial two sites - Nakobalevu in Suva and Sabeto in Nadi, are expected to be commissioned by November this year. The remaining sites - Koro-O in Tavua and Delaikoro in Labasa, are scheduled to be completed by March of next year.

The deployment of new FM radio transmission sites will result in much improved and deeper coverage. This is due to the advanced technologies and higher transmission power gear that will be deployed by Walesi. The brown-out or blackout zones that are currently experienced while travelling in areas, such as Pacific Harbour and Coral Coast in Viti Levu, or areas like Bua and Savusavu in Vanua Levu, will be a thing of the past.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the new FM network will also use what we call Single Frequency Network (SFN). This is also being used for the Walesi digital television platform. What SFN means for the FM network is that, you will be able to listen to your favourite radio station on the same frequency anywhere in Fiji. There is no need to change stations while travelling across the islands and listeners will continue to receive the same quality signal for the whole journey.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the SFN technology will also free up the much-needed radio frequencies, which I called the other day, “limited real estate”, for other purposes such as telecommunications networks. This is a more efficient use of our technology and resources. By building a common shared network will give other smaller broadcasters such as community and faith-based radio stations the same competitive advantage as other commercial radio stations. As we have seen, for example, some of the faith-based organisations that are currently on Walesi, we could allow more of them to come in through this platform. Therefore, the intention is for Walesi’s services to expand to look after all broadcasting transmission - television and FM services.

Another advantage of such a consolidation is that, it will provide economies of scale and ensure all national linking and transmission sites are well serviced by utilities and connectivity. This will also mean that all broadcasters will not only enjoy enhanced reach and better technical support, in other words, getting more exposure to members of the public, but also reduce high operating costs, especially in terms of maintaining sites that had poor or no utility services and connectivity.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Sir, *Walesi* has, without a doubt, revolutionised television in Fiji because our citizens are already experiencing the benefits of crystal-clear picture quality with more programming options. Our children are readily accessing the educational content both, on digital television platform and the *Walesi* app, while in the safety of their homes. With the deployment of initiatives, like the FM network and the wi-fi Hotspots, this will further ensure that investments in *Walesi* will provide much better returns to all Fijians. Therefore, it will achieve the Government's objectives that every Fijian, regardless of where they are, who they are, how much they earn, whatever the socio-economic status is, will have a meaningful access to *Walesi* services and information in itself. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Attorney-General. I now give the floor to the designated speaker of the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Tuisawau. You have the floor.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement on *Walesi* Fiji Limited. Just to start off, I would like to emphasise, in the Ministerial Statement, there is absolutely no accountability and transparency in the presentation. We do acknowledge all of the developments which had been mentioned, but there is just no accountability and transparency. Because, if you look at the Budget Supplementary documents, for the last year and this year *Walesi* is not listed there, in the State Owned Entities, tables 5 and 9, and there is another list, not listed as public enterprises. So, all the 100 percent owned Government entities are listed there, FBC, Fiji Hardwood Limited and the others partly owned, ATS, EFL et cetera. So the question is: What kind of company is this? Is it a ghost company or what, because it is not officially listed in the Budget Documents?

I cannot find any listing anywhere and when you look at the Facebook site, it says it is a State owned commercial enterprise, but it is not listed here, and that is a major concern regarding the operations of *Walesi*. It states, it started in 2017, with key Principal Robert Khan, there was a Chairman Sharvada Sharma, but all these details have not been presented to Parliament. Again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, with that, if it is listed as a public enterprise, then it must be run under the Public Enterprises Act, and if you look at the Public Enterprises Act 2019, let me read some of the requirements, "it must have written financial records, correct records, enable financial statements to be prepared." Number one, we have not seen that. Under Financial Statements, section 57, "the Board must ensure there is prepared for each financial year, financial statements together with information necessary, section 57(1)(2) – not done. Financial statements must consist of balance sheet, not done nor financial statements according to financial standards. Declaration by directors, we do not even know who the board is and all these requirements have not been adhered to.

Section 58 of the Public Enterprises Act, "must prepare and submit an annual report in accordance with the Financial Management Act 2004" and that has not been adhered to. Of course, this indicates that there is a breach of the Financial Management Act, in terms of public funding; public funds which is being used. Nothing has been done, no annual report has come to this House since this was established in 2015. I move on to the Minister's oversight, that is clear in section 60 of the Public Enterprise Act and that is the role of the Minister, he has failed in ensuring that the reports are provided to this House. In section 62, the Minister should require in writing a direct disclosed specified information, et cetera.

My point here, Sir, in all these, the Minister has failed to provide that. In one of my motions which went to the Business Committee, I asked for an inquiry into FBC and *Walesi* because these two receive substantial funds. *Walesi*'s funding increased from \$10.3 million to \$15.5 million in this budget. Yet, there is no financial report, no accountability and we have not seen anything. What is happening to *Walesi*? That is what I am trying to get here. Again, that boils down to the Honourable Minister, what is he doing about *Walesi*? He has not chased them to provide reports, et cetera.

I ask the Honourable Prime Minister, what are you doing about your Ministers, in terms of him

I ask the Honourable Prime Minister, what are you doing about your Ministers, in terms of him providing reports and also accountability to this Parliament? In terms of that, Sir, I ask how is the performance of the Minister measured by their Chief Executive, the Honourable Prime Minister? This is a clear breach; the operations of *Walesi*.

In one of the media reports a few years back, let me read it out, the audit report states that “the project is managed by the Ministry of Communications, this is the digital TV project through *Walesi* which also takes over all transmission works at all broadcasters including FBC for an annual management fee”. How much is this? How much from the FBC - \$11.2 million is paid to *Walesi*? What is their annual management fee? All these needs to be provided to this House, Sir, because these are public funds and it has increased to \$15 million this year.

Again, in the audit report, it states and I quote, “all equipment as mentioned by Honourable Minister for Economy will be transferred to FBC at an agreed price that has been presented to the board of the FBC and the project management team hired by *Walesi Limited*”, again this is not clear. And the project management team hired by *Walesi Limited*, who are these people, how are they selected, how much was paid to them; again all these accountability issues that I like to raise today, bringing into question the performance of the Honourable Minister for Economy, in terms of the running of our public enterprises and the breach of the Public Enterprise Act and the Financial Management Act and that needs to be taken on account by the Honourable Prime Minister.

To end, Honourable Mereseini Vuniwaqa was taken into account for not adhering to a directive to support Bill No. 17. What about this situation? Please, take into account the performance of your team.

(Chorus of interjections)

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

I thank the Honourable Member for his statement. I now give the floor to the designate of the National Federation Party Leader, the Honourable Tikoduadua.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to the Ministerial Statement on *Walesi*. May I, through you, Mr. Speaker, just say that there is no Minister so interested in promoting *Walesi*, like this Minister. Now, he is the only Minister that gets over excited about the number of people using *Walesi* and the number of people who have downloaded the *Walesi* app and he clears his schedule to even open customer care offices for *Walesi*.

Let us look at another angle, that the Honourable Minister should also be excited about where *Walesi* is concerned. From his formation, Mr. Speaker, this entity has continued to get and enjoy lavish injections of public funds towards its activities. In the Budget that the Government passed just weeks ago, *Walesi* has been given \$15.5 million under Head 16. To draw on similar comments made by my esteemed colleague, Honourable Qereqeretabua, yesterday in relation to monopolising mobile telephone services by Vodafone, the exact pattern can be identified here with *Walesi* and we know why.

We all remember how *Walesi* distributed free decoders prior to the Elections. We all remember how the Government during its freebies prior to the 2018 Elections, gave out free televisions (TVs) for village halls already set up to receive *Walesi* signals. We know that the Government wants to manipulate a captive audience that takes their personal data and only receives their point of view using the digital FIJI infrastructure, which includes; Digital Television, Apps, free wireless and internet hotspots access across 16 public areas throughout all towns and cities, as well as 26 sites on all Fiji National University Campuses.

Now, *Walesi* is involved with free-to-air education and yet, we have not heard a single recent whisper from the Honourable Minister for Education on how this is going on during the second wave of COVID-19. We have not heard a single word about the 16 Telecentres and Tele-health centres that they have launched. Is it because the mechanics are too difficult, causing schools and health units to do their thing, such as interactive online learning that even include zoom?

Unfortunately, for the Government, all these efforts prior to the 2018 Election only offered them a 0.02 percent leading in the polls. All the taxpayers' money been funnelled towards ensuring people only listen to the Government would be far better use in actual poverty reduction and redeployment of our skilled workforce towards income generation under this current COVID-19 crisis.

What should concern the Minister, Mr. Speaker, most of all is that *Walesi* is sitting under the umbrella of the Digital Government Transformation Programme which fall under Head 16. The 2019 Auditor-General's Report highlights very worrying issues, such as the Ministry budgeting for the consultants to develop the Computer Emergency Response Team for Fiji when negotiations were delayed. What happened? Early this year, the Government had a whole of Government cyber-attack that hacked online Government services and nothing was ever heard about that instant ever again.

Another finding in the 2019 Auditor-General's Report was that, there were savings because the satellite-based concept for schools' internet connectivity did not happen because there was insufficient staff in the department. More savings occurred because the commercial agreement between the satellite providers and local service providers could not be finalised and the project was supposed to then commence in 2020. Worst still, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Communications did not receive any subsidy request from the public and, therefore, no payment was made on the subsidies for local movies and literacy productions.

That year, 2019, the Auditor-General's Report states that the Department was allocated a budget of \$14.6 million but it only used \$8.5 million during that year. Also in that year, the Digital Government Transformation Programme did not use the money due to all the delays for implementation. All these, Mr. Speaker, is what the Honourable Minister should be detailing to us, not just the 'bells and whistles' that get so much money in figures but with so little output bearing meaningful change to our people. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Tikoduadua for his contribution to the debate. Honourable Members, we move on.

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

### **INCOME TAX (BUDGET AMENDMENT) (NO. 2) BILL 2021**

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

That the -

- (a) Income Tax (Amendment) Bill (No. 2) 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 on Thursday, 19th August, 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 relates, in fact, to the Budget and the philosophy behind the Budget. Unfortunately, these two provisions were inadvertently left out in the Income Tax (Budget Amendment) Bill 2021 and they are quite simple amendments.

One of them as you would recall, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Budget announcement, we had said that we will increase the income export tax deductions to 90 percent for those businesses in the primary industries. We currently have Fisheries but Forestry was actually missed out, so we are just simply including Forestry in this particular amendment.

The other one, Mr. Speaker, Sir, was in respect of Capital Gains Tax (CGT) on shares. This has been an outstanding issue. As we know that we have currently capital gains, assessing capital gains on physical real estate. For example, it is very easy to do if I bought a house for \$1,000 and I then improve it by \$50 and I sell it for \$1,200, I pay the difference in CGT.

Shares is quite different. We basically want to go down the path of what they have done in Australia that any shares that were issued or procured prior to CGT being implemented will not be subject to CGT but post-CGT it will be applicable. So that is the gist of the amendments that have been sought, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I hope the Honourable Members see it within that light and that is essentially an extension of the Budget announcement that was made. 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. Anyone wishing to take the floor at this time?

There being no one wishing to take the floor, Honourable Attorney-General, you have the floor.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Sir, I have nothing further to add. Thank you.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

## QUESTIONS

### Oral Questions

#### Study into Industrial Hemp (Question No. 154/2021)

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

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications inform Parliament as to who will carry out the study into industrial hemp as outlined under Head 50 of the 2021-2022 Budget Estimates?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to answer who will do it, one has to understand what industrial hemp is all about.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, industrial hemp is different to what we call medicinal hemp. Industrial hemp is in fact at the moment hailed as the wonder plant due to its estimated 25,000 different uses. These include food, fibre, ropes, textiles, paper, building material and other bi-products, even for clothing too, Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned textiles.

Currently, more than 30 countries in Europe, Asia and North and South America permit farmers to grow industrial hemp as an agricultural commodity which is sold in the world market. The European countries produce about 80,000 acres, that is, about 40 percent of the total world production that are centred in France, Netherlands, Lithuania and Romania. China is another major producer of hemp on about 20,000 hectares of land. Apart from China, Japan, Iran, North and South Korea, Pakistan, Syria and Turkey are also major hemp-producing countries.

A report on cultivation of hemp in 2016 by the United Nations states that worldwide industrial hemp are grown in the total land area of about 225,000 acres with a total value of US\$437 million. Canada is a major industrial hemp-producing country with a total of 130,000 hectares in 2017. The country exported 5,400 metric tonnes of hemp seed, at a total value of \$50 million.

Some of these countries, of course, Mr. Speaker, Sir, produce what we call canabidiol processed hemp oil which is slightly different to what we want to do. These are used for medicinal purposes and have what we call high levels of THC or tetrahydrocannabinol, is basically the measures that gives you the high. So, the lower the content, the more of an industrial hemp it is. Therefore, that is the space that we want to get into. Some countries, of course, are producing hemp which is for medicinal purposes, which actually has high levels of THC. Our focus, of course, is on the industrial hemp with low levels of THC.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to be able to look at the full benefits of it and interestingly enough actually, there was an ADB Report in 2004 (Honourable Lalabalavu, I do not know whether you were in Government then or not) that talked about how industrial hemp could be an alternative form of agricultural produce from Fiji.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in order to actually assess that, in fact, I was just talking yesterday and today too on some matters with the Head of UN here in the Pacific and he had also mentioned to me about how they have the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), which actually does help countries, for example, to develop laws around it. The FAO also has some guidelines around industrial hemp or related to that.

In order to be able to look at where is the best place to plant industrial hemp, when we should plant it, we need to look at, for example, the markets - who will buy it, where we can sell it, you have to look at the climate and soil requirement. So, you have to liaise with the Ministry of Agriculture, we have to look at whether it is going to not interfere with other agricultural produce at the moment. Of course, we want it to replace the illicit agriculture sector but we also have to look at, for example, the laws because currently, our legislative framework - the Illicit Drugs Control Act, has a very wide coverage of cannabis, so it will get caught. If you want to even grow hemp that has got very low levels of THC, it will still be illegal. In fact, last night, I was also looking at the regulations in Canada. Unfortunately, I left it in the office, I did not bring it here with me, but Canada, for example, has a very good legislation in respect of this and specific regulations around it.

To answer the Honourable Member's question, you have to have a wide understanding of how

To answer the Honourable Member's question, you have to have a wide understanding of how this hemp can be grown. Simply, you do not pluck it out of the air, you have to ensure that you also comply with international standards. We do not want, for example, the banks in USA saying, "Fiji is now growing hemp, therefore, let us cut off their credit rating for their banks because they are engaged in illicit areas of agriculture." So, we have to be very mindful of that. We will be working with the UNODC regarding this, we will be working with the Ministry of Agriculture and various other international agencies, including local agencies and, of course, talking to the private sector to see the appetite in respect of manufacturing.

One of the things that we do want, that if we do get into this space, we would like the manufacturing to actually take place in Fiji, not necessarily just grow it, bundle it and send it off as a raw material. If we are going to make ropes from Fijian hemp, it should be made here. If we are going to make textiles, it should be made here. So, we have to look at the private sector appetite, the ability to invest. We need to look at the amount of volume we can actually produce to be able to make a viable commercial sense from it, so it is a whole range of people who will need to be consulted. Thank you.

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

HON. L.S. QEREQERETABUA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. May I ask the Honourable Minister then, when will the study start, be completed and made public? *Vinaka*.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Work has already commenced, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

FPF's Routine Operations & COVID-19  
(Question No. 155/2021)

HON. S.S. KIRPAL asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Defence, National Security and Policing, Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management inform Parliament of the measures taken by the Fiji Police Force to maintain its routine operations whilst handling COVID-19?

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

Let me first again acknowledge the great work done by our frontliners, including our members of the Fiji Police Force. I wish to congratulate the Commissioner and his senior offices, men and women of all ranks in the Fiji Police Force for their dedication and commitment to duty throughout this very challenging period.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Fiji Police Force is not exempted from the challenges, as we are all aware we are in a time of crisis and the challenge it brought about, has also led us to relook at the way we do things and, of course, learn from it as well and as we go along. Sir, let me emphasise this as we go along, efforts are being made to try and continue and improve service delivery and at the same time, responding to all the expectations, particularly from our communities right throughout the country. In doing their work, let me say that the members of the Force are not even spared from the pandemic itself.

Let me say that as of to-date, a total of about 672 personnel from the Fiji Police Force got infected as well. But the good news, Mr. Speaker, Sir, out of that number of 672, 544 have recovered and we still have a few cases on home isolation or in the other facilities that are provided by the Government. As we

speaking, about 128 active cases are still in the Force. Let me assure the general public that we are conscious of the fact that while performing the work, we are also can be categorised as a carrier and, of course, the possibility of spreading the disease, but that is for everyone, particularly in the red zone of our containment areas. All of us are possible spreaders, given the fact that we are in an exposed environment.

I also wish to say, Mr. Speaker, Sir, that because members of the Force were affected, most of them had their family members affected as well and that is logical and it is consistent with all the other cases as well. Once a member of the family and in this instance, a member of the Force gets infected then the members of their families as well do get affected but we follow that closely and I am also thankful that most of them have recovered as well.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the normal functions of the Fiji Police Force has to continue and we all in this august House do very well understand the functions of the Fiji Police Force. But because of the extra responsibilities and like I said, for other organisations as well, it really helps us or even forces us to relook at the way we do things and the need for us to work smarter, the need for the Force to re-prioritise, the need for the Force to have the need to concentrate on where it is needed and economise in other areas as well. A lot of flexibility within the Force itself, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I remember very early, during the pandemic, visiting Lami and I saw members of the Fiji Police Force Band in the checkpoint in Lami, so most of the people who were in office duties or other functions, because of the extra work have to undertake most of the work that needs to be undertaken.

As I have said, the normative functions, investigations and the work of the Drug Unit, Traffic Unit, et cetera continues, but in terms of COVID responses, we all understand the huge role that the Fiji Police Force undertakes, particularly in the control of movement. With that control of movement, comes the enforcement of the laws and the regulations that were put into place most recently as well, Mr. Speaker. It is unfortunate that some members of the community still choose to disregard the laws and, of course, as a result, most of them have to be brought before the courts as well. I will not go into the data, Mr. Speaker, Sir, but I think on the other hand and thankful as well to Government for the imposition of the curfew most of the crime rates have decreased.

If I may mention, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the overall crime recorded during the period as compared to previous years, particularly the year before, recorded a decrease of about 13 percent crime against women. I am talking overall, Sir, but there are some indications that in some places, some crime against women increased but overall, it decreased by around 11 percent and of course, illicit drug cases significant reduction, by 56 percent. I will not go into the other details but again, Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I have stated, let us not only focus on the negatives that this pandemic brought about but I think it gives us as an organisation and as a community, individuals and of course, as the Government as well, to learn from this crisis.

And for the Fiji Police Force as I have stated, Mr. Speaker, Sir, we need to work smarter within the resources that we have including financial and of course, the personnel capabilities that we have. The reprioritisation that is also very, very critical. The need for good technology and the equipment which will assist us in economising that becomes very critical as well and I am thankful that the Fiji Police Force is not excluded from most of the assistance by our partners and of course, I will be having a virtual meeting with an organisation in Australia on Wednesday next week at 1000 hours because they are interested in assisting particularly security forces personnel and with particular emphasis on the Fiji Police Force on how they can help in training and equipping them better for challenges as such. Sir, I look forward to that conversation next week and, of course, the use of technology and new equipment particularly.

That very briefly is the initial response and I will be happy to take further questions if needed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The Honourable Minister has just said that the Fiji Police Force has done a great work during this COVID-19 crisis. Unfortunately, what we have noticed that the Police has been biased and discriminatory in the enforcement of the law during this crisis, especially for the public that breach COVID protocols.

I ask the Honourable Minister if he can enlighten the House as to why the Police did not investigate the Honourable Attorney-General and the businessman that came from India that alleged to have brought the virus that has caused this outbreak, as well as the army officer and the naval officer who breached COVID protocols.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister, I let you deal with that one.

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, that question is not worth answering because it is not a statement of fact.

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Mr. Speaker, can I add?

HON. SPEAKER.- I give the floor to the Honourable Tikoduadua for his supplementary question.

HON. LT. COL. P. TIKODUADUA.- Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for the answer to the question that was posed to him.

I notice from his answer that he made a statement with regards to curfew and that it was not so much about COVID but about security. So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to understand because these were all COVID measures that were put in place. So, why is the restriction still there in terms of the COVID containment strategy? As the Honourable Minister had said that it was for another purpose, and that was for maintaining law and order and crimes

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, the containment strategy, as all Members of this august House fully understand, this is a Ministry of Health led response because I think I have stated it already in this august House that the key or leading document in this is the Public Health Act of 1965. So, any discussions about containment areas, Mr. Speaker, Sir, will depend on the recommendations and the plans that the Ministry of Health has.

Of course, I do admit the fact that we have all other stakeholders involved in the discussions as well and then we come to the final decisions but again, let me emphasise that containment zones are based on what is in the Public Health Act of 1965 (I think it is in section 69), Mr. Speaker, Sir. I would advise all Honourable Members of the House if we can read section 69 of the Health Act of 1965. It talks about the powers that are vested upon the Minister and, of course, the Permanent Secretary as well.

It is worth reading because I find it surprising, Sir, that even as we are talking about this vaccination, even the Act of 1965 authorises the Permanent Secretary for Health to order vaccination if it is required, so it is worth reading. Mr. Speaker, Sir, but containment, the Ministry of Health and then the other agencies contribute in the discussion because it has a lot to do with our isolation protocols, quarantine and, of course, the need for us to control the movement of the virus. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Radrodro, a supplementary question, you have the floor.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister; we note the answers that have been given and we hope that the incident at Raiwaqa Police Station would not be repeated because someone went into the Station and pretended to be a police officer, as a result of the resource availability in the Police Force.

Just a supplementary question to the Honourable Minister, given the demand that is required of the police officers to man the checkpoints and all the other borders around Fiji, is there a possibility that Fiji will lead up to be declared an ‘emergency State’, given the stretching of resources in the Police Force and also the transfer of diseases of COVID 19 responses? Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to ask the Honourable Minister whether this will lead to Fiji being declared an ‘emergency State’, given the increasing number of COVID 19 cases.

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

HON. LT. COL. I.B. SERUIRATU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is a COVID Response Framework that was put together by the Ministry of Health and WHO and other key stakeholders last year, and that exactly is what the Government is following. Of course, in that document, we have what we call ‘the proportionate response’ based on the threats, particularly posed by COVID, so we cannot rule out all the possibilities. But, of course, that is how Government is responding, Honourable Salote Radrodru, in terms of its fight against COVID.

While I still have the floor, Mr. Speaker, Sir, this is section 69 that I have referred to on the Public Health Act - Powers of the Permanent Secretary.

“(3) The Permanent Secretary shall have power –

(a) subject to the approval of the Minister –

- (i) to take temporary possession of and allow to be used such premises, vehicles and local vessels as in his opinion may be necessary for the accommodation, treatment and disinfection of persons and goods subject to isolation;
- (v) to prohibit, order and regulate conditionally or unconditionally the movements of persons, animals, goods, vehicles and vessels on sea or on land, including the assembling together, whether habitual or occasional, of either adults or children;...”

Let me read out the one on the vaccination, Mr. Speaker, Sir, because this is a 1965 Act. There is a lot of discussions now about the vaccination. Section 69(3)(d) states, and I quote:

“to order, when in the opinion of the Permanent Secretary the necessity arises, the vaccination or inoculation of unprotected persons;”

There are a lot of other interesting things in this document so I think it is good for all the Honourable Members of the august House to familiarise themselves with this because most of it is still relevant.

HON. SPEAKER.- We move on to the third Oral Question for today.

Aircraft Details, Loans & Lease Payments – Fiji Airways  
(Question No. 156/2021)

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the details regarding aircraft leased by Fiji Airways, including loans and lease payments?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM (Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have answered this question now quite a few times but, of course, looks like the Honourable Member cannot move away from his conspiratorial theory about the Russian Mafia being involved.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as discussed extensively in the May Sitting of Parliament, Fiji Airways took immediate steps from March 2020 to reduce costs and preserve cash which included stopping all non-critical projects, putting all aircrafts into storage programme. Like all airlines in the world, Fiji Airways approached aircraft lessors to negotiate payment deferrals.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, just before I continue, I wanted to highlight, *Walesi* accounts have actually been from 2015 to 2017. The accounts have been audited. The 2018 to 2020 are with the Auditor-General's Office. You will need to get your facts right before you speak.

Fiji Airways was successfully able to negotiate with existing financiers to defer principal payments for two to four years, re-profiling debt repayments for seven years and with the aircraft lessors for six to nine months rental payment deferrals. All these actions reduced our monthly recurring fixed cost down from FJ\$39 million to FJ\$25 million. This was a key measure to preserve cash.

The Fijian Government supported these moves from the outset and provided the necessary Government guarantees to achieve this financing, of course, which Parliament approved. Parliament approved it in May of this year, an amendment to the guarantee for the Fiji Airways borrowings to be valid until the guaranteed facilities are discharged by the lender or fully settled and that Fiji Airways pay a one-off fee of 15 percent on the FJ\$455 million Government guarantee.

This financing programme to tie the airline through the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and resulting crisis for aviation was a gargantuan task. It is still continuing now, that is, clear borders will remain shut through the end of 2021, much later than what Fiji Airways had envisaged and hoped. The airline has 28 versions of a seven-year monthly financial forecast and actions to take for each which is the only way that financiers were confident and approved the various financing actions, like re-profiling loans and lease repayment terms. It is imperative that the new loans added to the airline due to COVID-19 enforced border closures, that the maximum possible repayment period ideally between 10 years to 15 years with low interest rates and only interest rates in the first two to four years, in other words no principal payments.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Government is proud to confirm that Fiji Airways obtained new loans ranging from seven years to fifteen years at interest rates ranging from 3 percent to 5 percent. In addition, it is the only airline who uniquely negotiated nine months aircraft rental payment deferrals with aircraft lessors where the total deferral amounts are repaid over six years as a new loan.

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

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Just a supplementary question; in July

2021, there was a headline regarding Fiji Airways returning two leased aircrafts. Can the Honourable Minister advise this House how much was the savings from the return of these two leased aircrafts?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. The details are that Fiji Airways overall debt repayment profiles has improved from five years to 10 years to seven years to 17 years. In late July, Fiji Airways received a slight reprieve as the owner of the two aircraft on short-term lease. Etihad agreed to take back the two A3-3200 aircrafts a few months ahead at the end of the lease. They were supposed to go back in this year in any case. This was only possible because it was returned a few months ahead of expiry and does not apply to a situation with the aircraft of 12-year leases, like the A350 and the Boeing 737 MAX, it is just a few months ahead of time.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Tuisawau.

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, supplementary question. In any stage of the negotiations with Airbus in terms of the lease, et cetera, was an intermediary used in those negotiations and up to now?

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I do not understand the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat the question?

HON. RO F. TUISAWAU.- In the negotiations regarding the leasing of the aircraft and dealings with Airbus, did the Honourable Minister or any of his colleagues in Fiji Airways utilise the services of an intermediary? Intermediary meaning a person who acts as a link to bring together an agreement between Fiji Airways and Airbus including the Government.

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

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I do not know how many times I have to repeat in this Parliament that Government does not negotiate aircraft leases. The Government does not have the expertise to do so. Aircraft leasing is a highly sophisticated and it is a very unique skill set. All airlines in the world engage people who are experts in this area, including airlines, like Qantas, et cetera. They engage people who know the market, who specialise in those areas, and likewise, Fiji Airways did so too. They, of course, had direct negotiations with the developers of the aircraft or the manufacturers of the aircraft.

Buying an aircraft is not, again it goes to show the ignorance of the Honourable Member. When you buy an aircraft or you do not buy, it is not like buying a car in a showroom. Aircraft, you can buy what we call the “shell” from Airbus. Another company comes and supplies the seats, you have multiple suppliers of seats, you then have the sound system, there are multiple suppliers of sound systems, then someone puts the engine, there are at least Rolls Royce and a couple of other companies in the world that actually supply the engines. So there is a multiple number of vendors that are actually involved in the final product which rolls out of the aircraft hangar.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the fourth Oral Question for today.

(Question No. 157/2021 – No appearance from the Honourable Minister)

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next Oral Question, and we will come back to that question.

The fifth Oral Question for today, I call on the Honourable Viliame Gavoka to ask his question.

You have the floor, Honourable Member.

Plans to Harvest & Value-Add Mahogany  
(Question No. 158/2021)

HON. V.R. GAVOKA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs update Parliament if there are plans to harvest and value-add mahogany in Fiji?

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA (Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I thought I had made myself clear with my statement this morning, but I will re-read my statement for the sake of Honourable Gavoka but before that, I want to make some quick response to the comments made by Honourable Qereqeretabua and Honourable Bulanauca with regards to my statement this morning.

To Honourable Qereqeretabua, I note that she keeps reminding everyone in Parliament about the incident with the Honourable Tikoduadua about two or three years ago. It is good that she has taken up the fight because I understand and someone had informed me that Honourable Tikoduadua goes on *Facebook* everyday, complaining about the lack of knowledge and the public's fear about what transpired about two years ago. He is crying consistently over the *Facebook* pages, informing everyone but now it is good that Honourable Qereqeretabua has taken up his fight. On that note, I hope that Honourable Qereqeretabua now sits in this honourable chair, there will be no fight from her.

She talks about a missing drone in Taveuni, that no one has been held accountable for or even surcharged. I want to make it quite clear, Mr. Speaker, that the drone had malfunctioned during the Taveuni Reserve Survey Operation and this was reported to the manufacturer and as the drone was insured, it was replaced by the manufacturer. So there is really no big deal about that.

HON. GOVERNMENT MEMBER.- Drama, drama!

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- The survival rate for the 7.6 million trees and mangroves planted under the REDD+ campaign, the survival rate is up to 85 percent. This, Mr. Speaker, is a significant improvement from the previously accepted 50 percent to 60 percent.

Honourable Qereqeretabua must be speaking with people who are so used to accepting the very low survival rate, that must have been some decades ago. The civil servants under this Government have a totally different psyche. If we invest a hundred percent, we try to get visible returns. The nature of trees is such that the Ministry has to re-visit the planted areas after every three to four months as part of the beat-up system. This is when they replace the trees that have not grown for some reason. It is advisable, Mr. Speaker, for Honourable Qereqeretabua to respect ...

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, plans to harvest value add mahogany industry. Now, he is going to another topic that is irrelevant. So, he should stick to the question.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I have already said that I will come to that.

HON. SPEAKER.- I have already given him the floor, so do not interrupt. You have the floor.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I said, Mr. Speaker, that it is advisable for Honourable Qereqeretabua to respect the Government workers for trying their best to ensure maximum returns on the investment of their labour.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- She does not.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- When they talked Forest Wardens getting quickly and properly compensated, Forest Wardens are paid a monthly allowance of \$200 which is based on the submission of a monthly report. The Ministry has no records of any warden not being paid for the reports they submit.

The tree planting programme involves fruit trees which complement the Ministry of Agriculture - specifically the fruit trees are native to Fiji, such as *dawa*, *kavika*, *vutu* and *tarawau*.

The Ministry of Forestry still has pending Annual Reports. The Ministry will be tabling the three outstanding Annual Reports at the end of the year. It has cleared outstanding reports from 2014.

The Tree Planting Dashboard on the Ministry of Forestry's website, I have explained this in my statement, Mr. Speaker, which just goes to show that Honourable Qereqeretabua was not listening.

Housing rehabilitation involves repurposing of pine trees that were blown over by the tropical cyclones. This is especially so for her island of Kadavu, and Vanua Levu where Government has prepared timber for more than 500 houses. Honourable Qereqeretabua seems to think that we should not help the communities to rebuild their homes. Another baseless comment from her.

Out of the 7.6 million trees planted, 5.1 million are pine trees and almost one million are mahogany trees. The balance of 1.5 million are a combination of native trees, fruit trees and other high-value commercial trees. Again, I have responded to the question and I strongly urge the Opposition Members to, please, listen and understand.

The Civil Servants understand the importance of both, respective Ministerial duties and the collective efforts to control the spread of COVID-19. It is a sacrifice they are making for the sake of the country and the people. They see this as a moral obligation, and I hope that the Opposition are not going to belittle their efforts and intentions.

I want to make a few comments about what Honourable Bulanauca said, and he seems to be stuck in the 1990s when the factory asset was falling apart under his directorship. We now have a modern setup at the Pine Group. Mr. Speaker, there is now greater collaboration now than before between the Fiji Pine Group and the Fiji Hardwood Corporation Limited (FHCL). We are trying to see if we can avoid duplication of effort which only leads to wasted resources. We are trying to see if they can share resources, such as the state-of-the art sawmills and machineries.

Honourable Bulanauca was referring to dividends as commission, which only reflects his lack of knowledge and understanding of the Group and how commercial corporate entities operate. During his time as Director for Fiji Pine Group, they could not even pay commission, let alone dividends, to the pine landowners. He is absolutely out of touch.

In addition to dividends, the Pine Group provides the following returns to the landowners' stumpage at the rate of 12.5 percent when the trees are harvested:

- Lease rentals which is paid six monthly, lease premium at the time when leases are renewed;
- 2.5 percent contribution towards Landowner Community Development Fund;
- 3.0 percent contribution towards Landowner Business Development; and
- engagement into various operations within the Pine Group.

Forestry exports in the last fiscal year 2020-2021, had increased significantly to \$95 million. In the previous year, 2019-2020, exports was \$52 million, so there is something wrong with his reporting.

On the other hand, imports in 2020p-2021 was only \$12.5 million, much lower than exports, and a much-improved trade balance. This, of course, is contrary to what Honourable Bulanauca is claiming. He does not provide figures, it is a 'pie in the sky' claim, like he always does. Value-adding will depend on the market demand.

Honourable Bulanauca is, again, out of touch. He simply does not understand the supply and demand model. Just as well he is not in Government, he would have made Government bankrupt. Honourable Bulanauca has no understanding about shareholding structure and how different classes of shares work, despite him being a Board member of Fiji Pine Limited back in the 1990s, when the Pine Group was on its knees, and that is where he is getting his facts from. Simply, Government shares are B and C, plus redeemable preference shares which has no dividend rights. The landowners have Class A shares, which is the only class that has dividend rights.

To redeem shares, Fiji Pine Limited will need to pay to Government whenever it makes profits and decides to redeem. There is a total of \$61 million B and C Class Redeemable Preference Shares that the Fijian Government owns. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, what Honourable Bulanauca is proposing for is that, landowners are not to be paid dividends now and these funds be diverted to redeem its shares.

It will take around 20 to 30 years to redeem 100 percent shares, if Fiji Pine Group continues to make profits. What will the landowners get after the shares have been fully redeemed? Nothing! That is what he wants. Only wait for 30 years without any dividends and at the end of the 30th year, they still have the same 100 percent dividend rights as they have now. Mr. Speaker, Sir, we want landowners to get their returns now. This is the reason why we are paying dividends based on Fiji Pine profits and not diverting the funds towards redemption of shares. This is what Government gives to the pine landowners.

Chips, Mr. Speaker, are not processed from logs that can be converted to sawn timber or other value-added products. When a tree is harvested, the first cut from the bottom is sawn log which gets processed into sawn timber. The top-end portion of the tree is used to produce wood chips. This is because the top end does not meet the diameter requirement and has many defects. Therefore, the comment from Honourable Bulanauca only shows his lack of understanding of the entire business process.

Honourable Bulanauca has forgotten that Fiji was at the receiving end of the most severe tropical cyclone to hit the Southern Hemisphere. In any case, FHCL's log production from 2017 to 2021 shows an increase in production, as follows:

- 2017 - 1,914 cubic metres;
- 2018 - 15,560 cubic metres;
- 2019 - 19,676 cubic metres;
- 2020 - 21,572 cubic metres; and
- 2021 - forecast is 42,000 cubic metres.

Mr. Speaker, I need to make those statements to correct the misinformation that Honourable Members on the other side of the House have been informing Parliament and, of course, the public. However, going back to the question, I have made a statement this morning that just about covers

everything with regards to plans to harvest and value-add mahogany in Fiji. But if Honourable Gavoka wants me to re-read the statement to him, most welcome. Thank you, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Bulanauca, you have the floor for your supplementary question.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Just before I ask my supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, I just want to comment on certain points that the Honourable Prime Minister has mentioned. The figures that I have quoted are all from Annual Reports. You must also ensure that all exports are more sawn timber than value-adding, you need to have more value-adding to export. Also, the import that we are having are more import of sawn timber. We should be making a lot of import substitution here in Fiji. That is the problem.

HON. SPEAKER.- Ask your question.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- There should be more export than imports, I mean, now it is more import than lesser export. That is why we need more value-adding in order to increase the value-adding component of our export.

(Honourable Government Member interjects)

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- You are not the Speaker, you shut up.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order!

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- The Speaker is there.

HON. SPEAKER.- Ask your question.

HON. M. BULANAUCA.- Yes, I just want to correct some of the figures there, those are from Annual Reports and the export and import. The annual reports showed that, Mr. Speaker, Sir. You do not mix the report on the whole timber industry - mahogany is separate, Fiji Pine Commission is separate and native timber is separate. He is confusing all that. You must separate all that and come to the real truth, Mr. Speaker, Sir. So, it is important that you must speak the truth and tell the truth here in this House.

My supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is in regards to the plans to harvest and value-add the mahogany industry. Has there been any study or assistance towards the establishment of cottage industries to value-add waste timber in Fiji? That is the supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, Sir. It was not in the statement this morning. I can repeat the question because the Honourable Prime Minister is not listening. Has there been any study or assistance towards the establishment of cottage industries for value-adding of the waste timber?

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

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I have already made the statement on value-adding, Mr. Speaker. I do not know what he is talking about.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on to the next supplementary question. Honourable Gavoka, you have the floor.

HON. V.R. GAVOKA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have mature mahogany stock valued at about \$4 billion or \$5 billion dollars, sufficient to generate economic activities to make up the slack in

tourism. We are looking at something more gigantic, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the Honourable Prime Minister is talking about piecemeal efforts - efforts that are very tentative. Can I ask him, can he up the ante and really develop mahogany, given the stock that we have, to really make a difference in the economy of the country? He is too feeble, he is too tentative - too piecemeal in the way he is looking at these at a time like this. Can he up the ante? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Prime Minister.

HON. J.V. BAINIMARAMA.- I really do not understand what he is talking about, Mr. Speaker. The mahogany industry is on its way, it is not feeble, it is strong and is making money for everyone. Thank you very much.

HON. SPEAKER.-. We will go back to the fourth Oral Question and I give the floor to the Hon. Veqnathan.

Domestic Repatriation – Viti Levu, Vanua Levu & Maritime Islands  
(Question No. 157/2021)

HON. G. VEGNATHAN asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport update Parliament on how the domestic repatriation of Fijians between Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and maritime islands is being facilitated?

HON. F.S. KOYA (Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. My apologies, it was a technological glitch on the last occasion. Believe me, I had been present all day, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for the question and in order to address the urgent repatriation needs of Fijians, the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport has been working tirelessly with our Health Officials and people on the ground to facilitate the safe movement within Fiji. Domestic repatriation is a whole of Government approach. Whilst registration is actually done by the MCTTT, the issuance of passes are done by the Divisional Medical Officers, in consultation with the Divisional Commissioners.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the task is actually nothing short of challenging and for some, after months of being away from their families, it has not been easy telling people that they actually have to wait longer and they need to quarantine. Those are Fijians who have been stranded and have been away from home and away from their loved ones; there are those who live in one place and have their farms and their sources of livelihood in another and desperately wanting to return; and then there are those who actually need urgent medical attention.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, following the announcement by the Honourable Prime Minister on 29th May, 2021, the Ministry began registering these Fijians, and we have registered more than 20,000 Fijians for domestic repatriation to-date. Of those, 57 percent are from the Central Division, 5 percent from the Eastern Division, 13 percent from the Northern Division and 25 percent from the Western Division. The repatriation is only for those Fijians who are permanently relocating and not for short-term business.

Briefly, Mr. Speaker, Sir, if I could just elaborate on how this domestic repatriation is actually being facilitated and this is good for all the Members of this House so that we can relay the message to those who still are not in the know, first, we register them by the 163 number and option 2 is the phone line, or email which is [domesticrepatriation@gmail.com](mailto:domesticrepatriation@gmail.com). Once they are registered, the number provided

to them is used as a reference when liaising with the Commissioner's Office or the Provincial Administrator or the District Officer within the Division that they are in, and that is their current location. Alternatively, registered individuals can further dial 163 which is option 3 on the step by step process for the issuance of passes.

Prior to the issuance of these passes, Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Divisional Commissioners with the Divisional Medical Officers will conduct verification to confirm that the persons or the person registered are permanently relocating and not just visiting. Passes are issued by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services upon the satisfaction of the adherence to health protocols and quarantine arrangements. Whilst you can see it is not haphazard and I apologise for the lengthy answer to this, but as of to date, it is important that everyone knows what is going on, especially Honourable Members of the Opposition, because it is not an easy task.

We have managed to re-unite 5,647 Fijians or 28.3 percent of those who are registered with their families. Contrary to what the Opposition may think and contrary specifically to what Honourable Professor Prasad may think, the Government is actually working in a structured and systematic manner and applies stringent measures to stop the virus from spreading. Not every single application is approved. What we do is, assess how genuine the application is in terms of the request because we need to look at the bigger picture, we need to take care of all Fijians.

One way of doing this is ensuring that more and more Fijians are vaccinated against COVID-19. Until more Fijians are vaccinated, the requirements for cross border movement and repatriation will remain controlled and that is, Fijians who want to travel to the North and maritime islands, are required to have a negative swab result and quarantined for 14 days before each departure and upon arrival at their destination. All those who are travelling need to be fully vaccinated, and this is how we can maintain a green zone status of the North and the maritime islands. I think every single citizen will appreciate the fact that we are trying to keep the North still green and our maritime islands need special attention and protection.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, by now, we know how different and how much more transmissible the Delta variant is and those on the other side of the House may argue that mandating vaccination is not right. But Sir, we must remember that while the risk of severe illness or death is significantly reduced through vaccination, the risk of transmission and infection also reduce significantly and this is backed by science and CDC reports.

Some Honourable Members of the House may also think that being vaccinated gives people the freedom to go anywhere and not to follow the protocols; not so. You must continue to adhere and follow all the protocols. Being vaccinated, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is just one of the requirements, vaccination plus social distancing plus wearing a mask and following the set protocols is actually important, which is additional to the 14-day quarantine, when moving from red to green zone as it will reduce the risk of spreading the virus significantly, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, we are doing all of this because there are Fijians who are critically in need to return to their homes, their loved ones, their farms and businesses. The national vaccination target is also to ensure that our green zones, the population on Vanua Levu and the maritime islands are protected before travel can resume as normal and that is of utmost importance to us at the moment. Today, we have about 36.8 percent of the eligible population fully vaccinated and 91.3 percent have received their first dose. We are very proud that Fijians are taking on the vaccination, not only to save their lives but also the lives of their loved ones and that, Sir, is not a statement that is made lightly - we must protect ourselves, our loved ones and our neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the numbers speak for themselves for Fiji. Not a single, fully vaccinated person has actually passed away because of COVID-19. According to the CDC in the United States, of the 166 million fully vaccinated persons, only 0.001 percent have actually died from COVID-19 and 0.005 percent have actually been hospitalised. Australia's Chief Medical Officer stated that death rates in the third wave of the pandemic are lower due to the vaccination, so you can see how important it is for us to all get vaccinated.

We have to understand that these are lifesaving policies, contrary to what Honourable Professor Prasad may think, that we are doing these haphazard activities and no one knows what is going on. Completely wrong! And it could be considered as utter nonsense when he actually says things like we are being irresponsible.

Decisions such as, "No Jab, No Job" are critical to make your workplace and travel safe. We have to remember, Mr. Speaker, Sir, vessels are workplaces, our ports are workplaces and our buses are workplaces, so we do not only owe it to ourselves but others in their places of work. We want to ensure that when you return home, your family is safe.

Similarly, vaccination is very important if we will leave the containment zones, Sir, to go to a safe zone. We want that zone to remain safe. There are many parts to the whole equation. We will continue putting in all the necessary efforts to safely repatriate our Fijians and our target will remain, to move all genuine repatriations as safely as possible. I thank you and I hope that answers the question, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- I thank the Honourable Minister. I give the floor to the Honourable Dr. Lalabalavu on a supplementary question. You have the floor.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. I thank the Honourable Minister for answering the question. Just a point of observation. Some who have been allowed to travel only found out in the last minute that they did not have all the essential documents at the wharf - is there a checklist of essential documents that one needs to have before boarding? Are all relevant Government agencies, transportation and public aware of this essential checklist?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- All they have to do is call the Ministry and they will let you know, but if you are carrying your vaccination card, that is one of the most important documents that you should have. It is really just the vaccination card which will say that you have been vaccinated or not. If you do not have it, then obviously there is a quarantine procedure that needs to take place but when travelling within Fiji, the most important piece of document that you can carry is your vaccination card.

All they need to do, Honourable Member, is just to call the Ministry before they depart, to find out if there are any other documents that they require and what their current status is in terms of health - if they have been tested or not tested, swabbed or not swabbed, et cetera. All of those things need to be present before a decision can be made. It is very strict, Sir, and I am sure everyone will understand why we are so strict with the North and the maritime islands. I hope that is appreciated, Sir.

HON. DR. RATU A.R. LALABALAVU.- Very much appreciated, *vinaka*.

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

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wish to ask the Honourable Minister, who will be looking after our people when they come into the isolation centres in the maritime areas?

HON. F.S. KOYA.- When they come in to a quarantine area, it is like any other quarantine in Fiji - it is actually being looked after by us.

HON. J. SAUKURU.- Thank you.

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

Honourable Members, for the purposes of complying with the Standing Orders with respect to sitting times I now call upon the Leader of the Government in Parliament to move his suspension motion.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Mr. Speaker, 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 listed on today's Order Paper.

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

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

HON. LEADER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. We have a few remaining items under the schedule - three Oral Questions and two Written Questions hence the request to sit beyond 4.30 p.m. today.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate on the motion. If anyone wishing to take the floor? There being no one wishing to take the floor, Honourable Leader of Government, if you can speak in reply.

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

Question put.

Motion agreed to.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, on that note we will take a break and resume later.

The Parliament adjourned at 4.23 p.m.

The Parliament resumed at 5.02 p.m.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, we will continue and I give the floor for the sixth Oral Question for today to the Honourable Adimaitoga to ask her question. You have the floor.

### QUESTIONS

#### Women's Participation in Fisheries' Activities & Initiatives (Question No. 150/2021)

HON. S. ADIMAITOGA asked Government, upon notice:

Can the Minister update Parliament on how the Ministry will further increase women's participation through its activities and initiatives in the 2021-2022 Budget year?

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

Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I wish to highlight that women have high participation with the now inshore and coastal fisheries, especially for subsistence and small scale commercial fishing. This is obvious in the number of women participating in fishing, and those we see within our roadside and municipal markets.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this year, Oyster and Mabe Development Project is designed to address equality and complementing gender participation. The main activities include; Spats Collection Programme, Mabe Production and Jewellery and Handicraft-Making. The Project provides employment, income opportunities and sustainable livelihoods for coastal and maritime communities and simultaneously, maintaining the marine ecosystem balance.

A total of 23 community-based farms exist and are currently engaged in pearl farming. Of these active farmers, seven are women's group, five youth groups and eight communities, inclusive of women's groups make up of 35 percent of the community group that are currently engaged in spat farming in Fiji, comprising more than 3,000 women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, of the 23 pearl oyster farmers engaged, five community-based farms have scaled up to undertake Mabe pearl farming with two women's groups, two youth groups and one community group. These farms are established through the technical support provided by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

Additionally, a total of seven community groups have been trained for Mabe pearl production, with four successfully produced Mabe pearls and generated income ranges from \$800 to \$20,000 per crop. Women's groups make up 50 percent of the community groups currently engaged in Mabe pearl farming in Fiji, comprising more than 300 women.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while this addresses gender equality, the focus on this project in this financial year is to:

- (1) Support the existing Mabe community farms to increase the production of pearl jewellery;
- (2) diversify and create a new commodity – edible oyster meat, to maximise economic return and create more opportunities for our coastal and maritime communities; and
- (3) encourage community entrepreneurship and the use of digital marketing platforms to improve earnings and simultaneously, contribute to economic growth through export.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, throughout our fisheries activities for the 2021-2022 Budget, the Ministry of Fisheries is determined to assist women in areas of issuance of fishing licence, skilled training and knowledge sharing. The Ministry of Fisheries will continue to engage women in activities such as seaweed in which women are involved in the value-adding process and bookkeeping.

Mr. Speaker, we value the participation of women and we will ensure that we continue to establish platforms for their effective involvement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister. Honourable Tabuya, you have the floor for a supplementary question.

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Minister for his response. Honourable Minister, a supplementary question regarding the issue of the safety of women at sea when they are going about their activities; what kinds of equipment or safety measures are taken to protect our women involved in such activities?

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. Honourable Minister.

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank the Honourable Member for the question. There is no differentiation on the safety aspects for women and men. They are all the same and they operate under the same guidelines.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank the Honourable Minister for the empowerment of women in the fisheries sector. My question is, when and how has an audit performance been carried out in regards to the existing programmes and how have the new programmes been determined? Is it based on those existing programmes or it is based on the demand by the community of women, or how has the Ministry determined the new programmes? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. It is a multi-faceted exercise that involves the request from women organisations and also by looking at possible partnership with our partners both, local and overseas. When this is established, then we can define a way forward and then we will coordinate and involve women in a specific project. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. I. KURIDRANI.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister for Fisheries. I understand the Honourable Minister mentioned that women diversify into other source of business in the marine resources and encourage more communities and provide training skills. My question is; how will this plan be implemented and rolled out during this crisis when movement is restricted? How would maritime communities be consulted? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. The request now is basically on virtual platform. The communities can make an application or request through our Divisional Offices or Stations around the coastal areas and on the

islands. But as you know, we will have to await the completion of this COVID-19 before we can actively go out and carry out our work in the rural and maritime areas.

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

HON. M.R. LEAWERE.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Apart from the pearl farming, as alluded to by the Honourable Minister, women are also participating in fishing activities and some of them are appointed as Fish Wardens. My supplementary question is; how are these Fish Wardens appointed, for example, in Votua in Ba two women are appointed as Fishing Wardens? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Member for the question. Upon consultations, we normally ask the Fishermen Association within a specific area that there must be participation of women. So when there are discussions, women's names come up and basically, they are fitted into the list of trainees which are needed and our officials will train them as part of the warden programme.

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you. We will move on to the seventh Oral Question for today.

Construction of Wainigadru & Koro Ice Plants  
(Question No. 160/2021)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Fisheries explain why there is a long delay in the construction of the Wainigadru and Koro Ice Plants?

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU (Minister for Fisheries).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, and I thank the Honourable Salote Radrodoro for the question. I would like to state at the outset, that there is no delay in the construction of Wainigadru and Koro Ice Plants. They are on programme. The programme has five stages before the ice plant is established and then allowed to operate.

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

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. A supplementary question to the Honourable Minister. Can he explain because Wainigadru had been budgeted for from 2017, so, what has been the challenge, is it the budgetary resource or what are the challenges that the Ministry is facing? Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir.

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

HON. CDR. S.T. KOROILAVESAU.- I could not hear the question, Sir.

HON. SPEAKER.- Could you repeat the question, Honourable Member?

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Honourable Minister for Fisheries, the supplementary question is that they have been listed in the Budgetary Estimate from 2017, there have been budgetary provisions so can you explain the reason for the delay? What kind of delay, is it the budgetary provision, is there a cash flow problem or is it human resource – what are the challenges? I hope that is clear, Honourable Minister for Fisheries.

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

HON. MEMBER.- He cannot hear you.

HON. SPEAKER.- We will move on.

(Laughter)

Household Pack Distribution - Lockdown & Home Isolation  
(Question No. 161/2021)

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

Can the Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, Civil Service and Communications update Parliament on the distribution of household packs to those in lockdown and in home isolation?

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

Mr. Speaker, Sir, currently the Fijian Government is distributing rations in the following areas: Lami, Suva/Nausori, Nasinu, Naitasiri and Tailevu, Navua and Serua, Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua and Ra. So far, we have spent more than \$5 million in the supply and distribution of household packs. This, of course, is in addition to the \$350 million already spent by Government on COVID-related expenditure to assist Fijians. These include, of course, unemployment benefits - \$75 million, \$30 million for concessionary loans, \$32 million on the \$90 payout, two rounds of \$50 over \$100 million, Fiji Police Force, RFMF and all the other different agencies. We have, of course, spent about \$182 million through the FNPF Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the 2021-2022 financial year, \$12 million is allocated for the Supply and Distribution of Household Packs Programme. On 22nd June, 2021, the Government selected New World and Shop n Save Supermarkets to supply and distribute household packs containing groceries and other essential household items to cover the basic needs of Fijians in lockdown areas and home isolation.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the selection, of course, was done through a rigid process of assessment and subsequently, two other suppliers because of the growth in the demand for household packs have been selected which is, Consumers Stores and P Meghi Trading Pte Limited, for the supply of these ration packs.

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

HON. L.D. TABUYA.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Honourable Minister for that information. Sir, the number one complaint from families that are in home isolation, especially in the Nasinu area that I serve is that, the packs get to them too late. It is too slow, they are receiving it towards the end of their isolation or even after their isolation and so three weeks after isolation. So, my question to the Honourable Minister is; what are they doing to improve this delivery to those that are in home-isolation that are receiving it too late? Can they look into improving that so that they get it on time - as soon as they report that they are in isolation, they receive those pack? Thank you.

HON.SPEAKER.- Honourable Minister.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.-Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. Time and time again, we have said to the Opposition that there is nothing stopping them if they have any issues with any members of the public in terms of accessing any services of Government, whether it is the Lands Department or Ministry of Health - you have the ability to reach out to your fellow Members of Parliament. We are all Members of Parliament. Unfortunately, most of you choose not to do so but simply just come and pontificate here and complain on the floor of Parliament. Some have from time to time reached out individually - I know some of you have. I said, "Look, this person is in trouble, can you please address it", and we have done it so immediately.

No one is going to say it has been perfect. There have been some lapses, in particular when the cases increased significantly, there was some time lag between the time persons were put in isolation, or asked to be in isolation and between the time the food was delivered. People have the Honourable Prime Minister's number, the Minister's number, my number and most of the Ministers numbers are available. As soon as people complain, we obviously then put it through the system. We have got a group of people who address it significantly. I think, Honourable Tabuya, you may perhaps have a particular proclivity in only highlighting those people who did have some problems which you should, but I would also suggest to you that there are many thousands of Fijians who have also received their packages on time.

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, that is the end of Oral Questions for today. We will move on to Written Questions and for the first Written Question, I call on the Honourable Salote Radrodro to ask her question. You have the floor, Madam.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Sir. There has been an oversight and the first part of the question has been overlooked and I seek leave that I read what we had submitted to the Business Committee.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- The Business Committee decided against it.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Mr. Speaker, when the first part of the question is left out, the second part does not make sense at all because the question is on COVID-19 and that is important right now for Fiji.

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- It still does.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- It is my question, Honourable Attorney-General.

#### Written Questions

#### Planned & Proposed Activities – Ministry of Health (Question No. 162/2021)

HON. S.V. RADRODRO asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Health and Medical Services update Parliament on the COVID-19 activities allocated funds under Head 22-Programme 1-Activity 1, SEGS 7 and 10 and Programme 2-Activity 1-SEG 10 in the 2021-2022 Budget and like so for the planned or proposed activities funded in the allocation of the same in the 2021-2022 Budget?

HON. SPEAKER.- Honourable Members, the Business Committee had decided on this question and you know that but I will give the floor to the Honourable Minister.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE (Minister for Health and Medical Services).- Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will table my response to the question agreed by the Business Committee at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Stop running away, Honourable Minister, you should provide the information.

HON. DR. I. WAQAINABETE.- I have nothing to run away from.

HON. S.V. RADRODRO.- Shame on you, Honourable Minister!

HON. A. SAYED-KHAIYUM.- You need to be more articulate.

HON. SPEAKER.- Order, order! We will move on to the second Written Question.

Development of Navua Township – Update of  
(Question No. 163/2021)

HON. RATU S. MATANITOBUA asked the Government, upon notice:

Can the Honourable Minister for Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development update Parliament on the development of Navua Township, in particular -

- (a) whether a Master Plan for the development of the Navua township is currently being or will be developed;
- (b) how and when will the Ministry consult the people of Navua and stakeholders in the process of devising such a Master Plan; and
- (c) whether a Master Plan for the development of Navua township is already in place and what is its current status?

HON. P.D. KUMAR (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Community Development).- Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will table my response at a later sitting date as permitted under Standing Order 45(3).

HON. SPEAKER.- Thank you, Honourable Minister and Honourable Members.

Question time is now over. Honourable Members, we have had a long day. That brings us to the end of today's sitting. Parliament is now adjourned until tomorrow at 9.30 a.m.

The Parliament adjourned at 5.26 p.m.